

Hezekiah's Sickness, Recovery, Mistake and Consequences

Isaiah 38-39

Isaiah 38:1-8 - *"In those days Hezekiah was sick and near death. And Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz, went to him and said to him, "Thus says the Lord: 'Set your house in order, for you shall die and not live.'"*

² Then Hezekiah turned his face toward the wall, and prayed to the Lord, ³ and said, "Remember now, O Lord, I pray, how I have walked before You in truth and with a loyal heart, and have done what is good in Your sight." And Hezekiah wept bitterly.

⁴ And the word of the Lord came to Isaiah, saying, ⁵ "Go and tell Hezekiah, 'Thus says the Lord, the God of David your father: "I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears; surely I will add to your days fifteen years. ⁶ I will deliver you and this city from the hand of the king of Assyria, and I will defend this city.'" ⁷ And this is the sign to you from the Lord, that the Lord will do this thing which He has spoken: ⁸ "Behold, I will bring the shadow on the sundial, which has gone down with the sun on the sundial of Ahaz, ten degrees backward." So the sun returned ten degrees on the dial by which it had gone down."

Isaiah 38:21-22 - *"Isaiah had said, "Prepare a poultice of figs and apply it to the boil, and he will recover." Hezekiah had asked, "What will be the sign that I will go up to the temple of the Lord?"*

Background Notes

The account of Jerusalem's deliverance from the attack of the Assyrians is recorded in Isaiah 36 and 37. In 701 BC Sennacherib, king of Assyria, invaded the kingdom of Judah and conquered all the outlying fortified cities that surrounded Jerusalem. Then he besieged Jerusalem and sent threatening messages and letters, urging King Hezekiah to surrender. But Hezekiah put his trust in the Lord, and with the godly counsel of the prophet Isaiah, Hezekiah refused to surrender to Sennacherib.

Then one of the great miracles of the Bible took place. In one night, the angel of the Lord struck down 185,000 Assyrian soldiers and delivered Jerusalem. This great miracle is recorded three times in the Bible – 2 Kings 19, 2 Chronicles 32, and Isaiah 37.

The events of Isaiah 38 and 39 took place *before* the miraculous deliverance of Judah, but it was prophesied in Isaiah 38:6, where the Lord promised Hezekiah that He would deliver Jerusalem from the threat of Assyria.

Doctrinal Points

1. God's miraculous signs are not without meaning.

In the first half of chapter 38 the Lord told Hezekiah, through the prophet Isaiah to “set his house in order,” for he was going to die. Ecclesiastes says that there is “a time to die.” It is helpful if the Lord gives you the opportunity to set your house in order before you die, so you don't leave a lot of red tape and unanswered questions and hard decisions to those you leave behind.

If you were Hezekiah, and the Lord told you that it was time for you to die, what would you have done? Would you have accepted the will of God - or would you have wept bitterly and bargained with God for a longer life, as Hezekiah did? Well, in spite of the selfish nature of Hezekiah's pleas, God graciously allowed him to live fifteen more years. And to confirm the healing, God gave him a miraculous sign.

Notice that God didn't exclude medical treatment in healing Hezekiah. God may heal spontaneously, without medical treatment, or God may choose to heal through the use of medical treatment. Isaiah directed Hezekiah's caregivers to apply a poultice of figs to the boil in order to relieve the infection. *“Now Isaiah had said, “Let them take a lump of figs, and apply it as a poultice on the boil, and he shall recover” (v21).*

“And Hezekiah had said, “What is the sign that I shall go up to the house of the Lord?”(v22). Hezekiah asked God to give him a sign that he would be healed, as God had promised. Notice - Hezekiah didn't tell God what sign to give him, as Gideon did. However, as in the story of Gideon, the Bible is **not** teaching here that it's good to ask for signs from God. You see, just because a Bible character says or does something, that doesn't mean it was right - or that it's right for us to do today! For example, Hebrews 11 doesn't say, “by faith Hezekiah bargained with God for a longer life” - and it doesn't say “by faith Hezekiah asked God for a sign”! Whether the actions of people in biblical accounts is right or wrong should be determined by the straight **teaching** passages of Scripture - passages that teach believers how to live a life that pleases God.

So be careful about asking God for signs. God may choose to give believers confirming signs, but **we should let God decide** whether and when and what kind of sign to give. And God's signs usually are not shooting stars or claps of thunder! God's signs usually have a specific meaning. His sign may be a wake-up call, confirming God's presence and power to an individual or nation. It may be a financial gift that arrives at just the right time, as confirmation that God will provide. It could be a sermon or letter, giving specific guidance just when it's needed to confirm an important decision. God can give many kinds of confirming signs.

In Hezekiah's case, God gave him a sign confirming that his life would be extended. If God could give additional daylight to make the sun's shadow go backwards on the sundial, then God could give additional life to Hezekiah and delay the sunset

of his life! How God did this miracle? Did He use natural means? Was it just a localized miracle? We don't know. The important point is that God's miraculous signs are not without meaning.

2. God's miraculous healings are not without lessons.

Isaiah 38:9-13 - *"This is the writing of Hezekiah king of Judah, when he had been sick and had recovered from his sickness: ¹⁰I said, "In the prime of my life I shall go to the gates of Sheol; I am deprived of the remainder of my years."
¹¹I said, "I shall not see Yah, the Lord, in the land of the living; I shall observe man no more among the inhabitants of the world. ¹²My life span is gone, taken from me like a shepherd's tent. I have cut off my life like a weaver. He cuts me off from the loom; from day until night You make an end of me. ¹³I have considered until morning - like a lion, so He breaks all my bones; from day until night You make an end of me. ¹⁴Like a crane or a swallow, so I chattered; I mourned like a dove; my eyes fail from looking upward. O Lord, I am oppressed; undertake for me!
¹⁵"What shall I say? He has both spoken to me, and He Himself has done it. I shall walk carefully all my years in the bitterness of my soul. ¹⁶O Lord, by these things men live; and in all these things is the life of my spirit. So You will restore me and make me live.
¹⁷Indeed it was for my own peace that I had great bitterness; but You have lovingly delivered my soul from the pit of corruption, for You have cast all my sins behind Your back. ¹⁸For Sheol cannot thank You. Death cannot praise You. Those who go down to the pit cannot hope for Your truth. ¹⁹The living, the living man, he shall praise You, as I do this day. The father shall make known Your truth to the children.
²⁰"The Lord was ready to save me; therefore we will sing my songs with stringed instruments all the days of our life, in the house of the Lord."*

This section of the chapter is the personal lamentation on the prospect of his death, and then a psalm of thanksgiving that was composed by Hezekiah after his recovery.

God used Hezekiah's illness and healing to humble Hezekiah, and to teach him some valuable lessons. In verses 10-14, Hezekiah used a number of illustrations to convey how he felt when he first learned that it was time for him to die – like a folded-up tent, like cloth cut off from the weaver's loom, like suddenly being attacked by a lion. But then in verses 15-16 Hezekiah realized that God was speaking to him through this experience, and he vowed that he would never forget it.

In verses 17 -20, Hezekiah was confident that the Lord would raise him up as He had promised. He was no longer bitter or thinking that God didn't care. He realized that God loved him and had forgiven him.

But had he learned all the lessons that God had for him? Did he really "walk carefully" all the rest of his life? When God raises us up from a bed of sickness, maybe even with miraculous healing, have we learned the lessons that God wants to teach us? Do we spend the rest of our days walking carefully with God, seeking to please Him in all we do? God's miraculous healings are not without lessons.

Practical Application

Don't assume that maturity will preserve you from making stupid decisions!

Isaiah 39 - *“At that time Merodach-Baladan the son of Baladan, king of Babylon, sent letters and a present to Hezekiah, for he heard that he had been sick and had recovered. ² And Hezekiah was pleased with them, and showed them the house of his treasures—the silver and gold, the spices and precious ointment, and all his armory—all that was found among his treasures. There was nothing in his house or in all his dominion that Hezekiah did not show them.*

³ Then Isaiah the prophet went to King Hezekiah, and said to him, “What did these men say, and from where did they come to you?” So Hezekiah said, “They came to me from a far country, from Babylon.” ⁴ And he said, “What have they seen in your house?” So Hezekiah answered, “They have seen all that is in my house; there is nothing among my treasures that I have not shown them.”⁵ Then Isaiah said to Hezekiah, “Hear the word of the Lord of hosts: ⁶ ‘Behold, the days are coming when all that is in your house, and what your fathers have accumulated until this day, shall be carried to Babylon; nothing shall be left,’ says the Lord. ⁷ ‘And they shall take away some of your sons who will descend from you, whom you will beget; and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon.’” ⁸ So Hezekiah said to Isaiah, “The word of the Lord which you have spoken is good!” For he said, “At least there will be peace and truth in my days.”

King Hezekiah made at least one major mistake in the fifteen years of extended life that God gave him. Some diplomats from Babylon came on an official visit to the kingdom of Judah. Their purpose was to build a coalition with Judah against their common enemy, Assyria. They also came to congratulate Hezekiah on his recovery from his near-fatal illness (v1). And we learn from the parallel account in 2 Chronicles 32:31 that they came to inquire about the miracle of prolonged daylight – God's sign on the sundial!

Hezekiah made the foolish mistake of showing off all the treasures of Judah to the officials from pagan Babylon. This was like throwing pearls before swine. We might wonder, “Hezekiah, how could you have done that? You were a mature king! Why didn't you have more wisdom and discretion?” This foolish action was probably prompted by Hezekiah's pride that he possessed such treasures.

God rebuked Hezekiah through the prophet Isaiah. Because of this unwise decision, the Babylonians would eventually return to conquer the kingdom of Judah - and carry off all those treasures of Judah to Babylon, including some of Hezekiah's descendants. And verse 8 seems to indicate that Hezekiah's reaction was purely selfish: “Well, at least *I'll* be safe. This disaster won't happen during my lifetime!” This verse certainly was not a positive commentary on the closing years of Hezekiah's life.

Will we all learn the lesson and warning here? We should never assume that maturity will preserve us from making foolish decisions!