

ISAIAH: Prophet in Perilous Times
WHEN THE RIGHTEOUS FAIL

Saturday, August 8
Reading: Isaiah 38-39

Isaiah 38:5 *"This is what the LORD, the God of your father David, says: I have heard your prayer and seen your tears; I will add fifteen years to your life. 6 And I will deliver you and this city from the hand of the king of Assyria. I will defend this city."*

The events in these chapters are out of chronological order. They take place before Sennacherib's invasion recorded in the previous two chapters. The reason for this is most likely thematic. The destruction of the Assyrian army (36-37) effectively ends that nation's influence. Isaiah never mentions them again. Babylon now becomes the focus of Isaiah's world outlook. Thus chapters 38-39 introduce Babylon into Judah's history.

About the time the Assyrian army begins its assault on the borders of Judah, Hezekiah suddenly gets sick and is told he will die. The king knows of the threat to his nation and pleads that he has been wholly devoted to the Lord. In response, God sends Isaiah back with a message that he will be granted 15 more years of life. God also promises to defend Jerusalem from the coming Assyrian invasion. To confirm this promise, God moves time backward on the palace "sundial stairs." Isaiah orders the medical treatment of the day (a poultice of figs) be applied to the king's boil and he recovers, as God promised. His prayer (recorded only in Isaiah) goes from Hezekiah's grieving over being "robbed of the rest of my years" to praise for God's love and forgiveness.

Soon after this, Hezekiah receives a visit of envoys from the king of Babylon. History records that this king tried to make alliances with many nations to oppose Assyria and was successful for a short time in this endeavor. The news of Hezekiah's miraculous recovery prompts Merodach-Baladan to send envoys and gifts in hopes of bringing him into the rebellion against Assyria who is poised to invade Judah.

In an act of pride, Hezekiah shows these Babylonians all his treasures. Hearing of this visit, Isaiah confronts the king for his foolishness. Having seen the wealth of Judah, the Babylonians would return and take everything back to Babylon. Even some of Hezekiah's own descendants will become slaves in the Babylonians courts. Humbled by this turn of events, Hezekiah submits to the Lord's will and is at least encouraged that this disaster will not happen in his lifetime. With his heart back in a proper relationship with the Lord, Hezekiah is now ready to face the crisis we read about in chapters 36-37.

POINTS TO PONDER:

1. 2 Chronicles 32:24-26 tell us that pride was a problem for Hezekiah. It brought God's wrath on him and the nation until they repented. How does pride ruin our relationship with God?
What does it mean to humble ourselves before Him? (read James 4:6-10 and 1 Peter 5:5-9)
2. Sometimes I wonder if it would not have been better for Judah if God had not lengthened Hezekiah's life. If he had died, the Babylonian incident would not have happened. Also, Manasseh, whose evil reign led Judah so deep into sin they could not recover, was born during these 15 years (see 2 Chronicles 33:1). Sometimes God answers our prayers even when that answer may not be what is best for us. How do we balance what we want and God's will for us?
How might your prayers have a positive or negative outcome for future generations?