

"Behold, the days are coming, when all that is in your house, and that which your fathers have stored up till this day, shall be carried to Babylon! Nothing shall be left, says the Lord!" (Isaiah 39:6)

Last week's lesson on Isaiah 38 records the dramatic events leading up to the threat from Sennacherib and the Assyrian army outside the walls of Jerusalem--and the grim news that King Hezekiah received from the Lord through Isaiah that he needed to "set his house in order" because he was about to die (not from war but from a serious disease)! It was shocking news for Hezekiah who, with great bitterness "turned his face to the wall, weeping and praying, questioning why God would allow this to happen! After all, he had "walked before the Lord in truth and with his whole heart had done good in His sight"! He was too young to die and had no heir! "Why God?" Then, amazingly, God sent Isaiah to tell him that He had "heard his prayer and seen his tears," and would "add 15 years to his life" and, not only that but, "deliver the city of Jerusalem from the hand of the king of Assyria"! Wow!

(Interestingly, the Scriptures confirm Hezekiah's claim to being a great king, as recorded in II Kings 18:1-8 and II Chronicles 29-33! And, as Rod Turk noted last night, some even thought that he might be the promised Messiah!)

How did Hezekiah respond? He asked for a "sign" that God would do what He said (not trusting His word alone)! And God, surprisingly, gave him one! Causing the shadow of the sun on the stairway of the palace (which Hezekiah could see from his deathbed) to go backward ten steps, lengthening the day and symbolizing the restoration of Hezekiah's life! Hezekiah then proceeded to write about his feelings, and the bitterness of his soul, about facing death--picturing himself "entering the gates of Sheol," likening it to a shepherd "having his tent being pulled up and removed from him," or a weaver's "rolled-up life cut off from the loom"! But then, turning his "lament" to joy and gratefulness to the Lord for having "cast all his sins behind His back," restoring his health, and "keeping his soul from pit of destruction"! Which led him to expressing a new determination and personal commitment to spending "all the rest of his days honoring the Lord"!

Setting us (and, more specifically, him!) up for a "big fall" in Isaiah 39! Which Wiersbe calls "the third of three crises Hezekiah faced in short order"! (First, the "international crisis," with the Assyrian siege of Jerusalem, in chapters 36-37), then the "illness crisis" in chapter 38; and, finally, what Wierbe calls the "investigative crisis" in chapter 39!)

Isaiah 39:1 says that "at that time, Merodach-baladan, king of Babylon, sent letters and a present to Hezekiah, for he heard that he had been sick and had recovered"!

"At that time"? According to Isaiah 36 and II Kings 18, it all began "in the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah's reign" with the seizure of "all the fortified cities of Judah by Sennacherib and the Assyrian army--and then, Sennacherib "sending Rabshakeh and a large army" to Jerusalem, where he stood by the conduit of the upper pool outside the walls of Jerusalem to challenge Hezekiah and all the people of Jerusalem to submit to the "great king of Assyria"! It was about that time, apparently, that Hezekiah was also stricken with a mortal disease--and (at some point) told by God that "He would add 15 years to his life, and (also) deliver the city from the hand of the king of Assyria"! Wow!

II Chronicles 32:22-23 says, "So the Lord saved Hezekiah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem from the hand of Sennacherib the king of Assyria and from the hand of all others, and guided them on every side! And many were bringing gifts to the Lord at Jerusalem and choice presents to Hezekiah, king of Judah, so that he was exalted in the sight of all nations thereafter!"

And so the timeline, and (seeming) setting, for Merodach-baladan's "letters and present to Hezekiah" (and visit by his envoys, and perhaps by Merodach-baladan himself)!

You know the rest of the story! How "pleased"--and proud--Hezekiah was with all the honor and glory that he received! And just to think (as he "boasted" to Isaiah) "that they have come to me from a far country, (all the way!) from Babylon"! Yea! When their real motive was to make an alliance with him against the Assyrians, and check out their military and financial status, for future billing! (Proverbs 16:18 says, "Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before stumbling!")

Isaiah (based on his "investigation") wasn't impressed, to say the least! In fact, confronted him, up close and personal, and compelled him to "hear the word of the Lord of hosts"! And what a devastating prophecy it was! "Behold, the days are coming when all that is in your house and all that your fathers have laid up in store to this day will be carried to Babylon; nothing will be left," says the Lord! And some of your sons who will issue from you, whom you will beget, will be taken away, and they will become officials in the palace of the king of Babylon!" Wow! (This would all happen, as prophesied, in God's own timing, close to 100 years later!)

You can't help but cringe at Hezekiah's response! Thinking only, it would appear, about his own welfare and legacy: that, despite the doom that would be coming to all the people of Jerusalem, the words from Isaiah to him were somehow "good"! In that "there would be peace and truth in his day"! And as Rod noted, "a short view of God"! Wow!

Motyer writes: "When pride replaces humility, self-satisfaction replaces concern for others, and works replace faith, then the die is cast and the kingdom is doomed! When the word of God is met with smugness instead of tears and prayers, the word proves its obduracy and accomplishes its purpose!" (I checked the dictionary on "obduracy," and it says, "the state or quality of being obdurate"--with didn't help! So looked up "obdurate," which says, "stubbornly resistant to moral influence, and persistently impenitent"! Which fits the bill!)

I Corinthians 10:12-13 says, "Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall! No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it!"

What an ending to our study of Isaiah 1-39! Rod theorized that the last two chapters (38-39) are placed where they are "to demonstrate that Hezekiah was a mere man, and not the promised Messiah, as some may have conjectured! Setting the scene for Isaiah 40 and Isaiah's prophecies to come about the coming of the real Messiah!

Stay tuned! "Days are coming!"

And as Jesus reminded His disciples, in Matthew 26:41, "Watch and pray, that you enter not into temptation!"

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