

PRAYER AND PRAYERLESSNESS
Isaiah 38, 39

Intro: Cf. also 2 Kings 20; 2 Chron. 32:22-33. Actually 2 Chr. gives us the most complete record of Hezekiah's reign: chs. 29-32. In 2 Kings there are just 3 chapters: chs. 18-20. The record in Isaiah (chs. 36-39) has to do mainly with the deliverance from Assyria and the prophecy of the Babylonian captivity--in line with the purpose of the prophecy.

Hezekiah became king when he was 25. He reigned for 29 years. This means that he was 39 years old when he got sick and was told that he was going to die! (His life was extended for 15 years, and he died at 54.)

Isaiah 38 tells us about Hezekiah's prayer; chapter 39 shows his prayerlessness in that one particular instance. Let us survey the two chapters.

I. HEZEKIAH'S PRAYER (Isa. 38).

- A. The occasion: his illness and the announcement by Isaiah that he would die (Isa. 38:1).
- B. His prayer: a remembrance before God (38:2, 3). But obviously it was a prayer for healing.

Hezekiah pleaded two things:

1) That he had been faithful.

2) That his heart had been right.

Both of these are borne out by 2 Chronicles.

1) He restored temple worship.

2) He observed the greatest Passover since the days of Solomon.

3) He destroyed the idols of the people.

4) He restored the offerings.

The summary is given in 2 Chron. 31:20, 21:

And thus did Hezekiah throughout all Judah, and wrought that which was good and right and truth before the Lord his God. And in every work that he began in the service of the house of God, and in the law, and in the commandments, to seek his God, he did it with all his heart, and prospered.

So his prayer was a true prayer!

C. God's answer (38:4-8).

- 1. That he would live for 15 more years (38:4, 5).
- 2. A second promise (38:6).

God usually goes beyond our prayers in giving us more than we ask.

3. The sign (38:7, 8a).

2 Kings 20:8-11 indicates that Hezekiah had an opportunity to choose whether the sun would go down or move back.

4. The sign fulfilled (38:8b).

5. Hezekiah's praise--recorded only here (38:9-20).

6. The healing--which took place prior to the praise (38:21, 22).

Thus we have here two wonderful answers to prayer.

But here we need to read about what happened after this, but prior to the coming of the ambassadors from Babylong. Cf. 2 Chron. 32:24-31.

Now we are ready to notice what happened when the Babylonians came.

II. HEZEKIAH'S PRAYERLESSNESS (Isa. 39).

A. Hezekiah and the Babylonians (39:1, 2).

B. Isaiah's questions, and revelation from God (39:3-7).

C. Hezekiah's response (39:8).

Concl: We are amazed at Hezekiah's words, the selfishness which he manifested, the lack of concern for his family in the coming days. (One great failure in Hezekiah's life is seen in the character of his son, the next king, Manasseh. They probably reigned together for some time.)

How could a king like Hezekiah fail so miserably at such a crucial time? What are the lessons for us?

1) Special times of danger:

- a) After times of great blessing from the Lord. The sickness of Isaiah was God at work calling Hezekiah back to himself.
- b) The danger of pride when prayer is answered. Cf. 2 Chr. 32:25, 26.
- c) Our problem with material prosperity. Cf. 2 Chr. 32:27-29.
- d) The danger when we are successful in our work. Cf. 2 Chr. 32:30.

- e) Those unknown and mysterious times of what the Puritans called, God's desertions. Cf. 2 Chron. 32:31. Both the NASB and the NIV say that it was the Lord seeking to find out what was in Hezekiah's heart. It does not mean that God was ignorant of Hezekiah's heart condition, but He was trying him to humble him again (so in Keil's commentary on Chronicles, p. 479).

These desertions can take place at any time, and they are always for a specific, divine purpose.

What is the solution?

Let me take you to a verse in the NT: Eph. 6:18.

"Praying always" means (according to Gurnall, Vol. II, pp. 356 ff.),

- 1) To pray about everything.
- 2) To pray in all conditions, i.e., when we are prospering, when we are seeing the blessing of God, when the Enemy is being turned back, as well as at other times. No one usually has to teach us to pray when things are going wrong, especially if we get sick.
- 3) To pray daily.

But notice the rest of the verse (Eph. 6:18). Oh, how the Lord delights in our prayers, and in that humility of heart and simple dependence upon Him at all times, such as is the case when we are praying in the Holy Spirit, and when we are praying all kinds of prayer. Hezekiah petitioned God for his need, but he failed to praise the Lord afterward. Cf. 2 Chron 32:25.

Finally, notice the faithfulness of God. Cf. 2 Chron. 32:26. God gave this promise before the Babylonian ambassadors came. After they came, and after Hezekiah had shown them all of his treasures, the Lord still promised that He would stay by His Word.

Let us be careful about pride. Let us be careful about being lulled to sleep spiritually when the blessing of the Lord is upon us. There is not a day nor any circumstance in any day but what we need to pray.

How significant are Paul's words in Phil. 4:10-14! There are many Christians, perhaps many of us, who do not know how to be either--abased or abounding. May God show us our own hearts and teach us how much we need Him ALWAYS!