

3 PROBLEMS + 2 PRAYERS = SOMETHING MISSING

Isaiah Chapter 37

What's your first reaction when challenges or problems arise? Are you inclined, as the saying goes, to see your cup half-empty or half-full? That saying merely reminds us that there is more than one way to view most situations. We can consider problems to be either obstacles or opportunities. We can look at our past and bring the lessons learned there to assist us in the present, or we can unreflectively make the same mistakes over and over.

The past should be an important part of today's actions and tomorrow's plans. The people of Judah had a rich past filled with God's actions, guidance, and commands. But with each passing generation, they also had a growing list of tragedies resulting from disobedience when the people forgot their God, who had cared for them in the past and also cared about their present and future as well as demanding their continued obedience. **King Hezekiah** was one of the few kings who was aware of God's acts in the past and His interest in the events of each and every day in the present and future. **The Bible describes him as a king who had a close relationship with God.**

Please keep in mind as we study the Old Testament that the Word of God given through the prophets, such as Isaiah applies as much today as it did in 700 B.C. As a matter of fact, you could change the names by plugging in today's leaders in the middle East, such as Sharon (Israel), Bin Laden (terrorist), Yasser Arafat (Palestine), and Saddam Hussein (Iraq), and find that almost the exact same conditions exist today as existed in 700 B.C. Even the countries are the same, they just have different names. In Isaiah's time the countries trying to wipe Israel off the map were Assyria, Egypt, Philistia, Moab, and Edom. Today, the same geographical areas are referred to as Syria, Palestine, Iraq, and Iran. The countries may be identified by different names, but the peoples' ancestries are the same. This hatred of the Jews and subsequently the Christians has been going on from generation to generation for over 3,000 years.

Hezekiah saw the need for change and went about the work of accomplishing it. He destroyed all idols, altars, and pagan temples throughout Judah. The Temple in Jerusalem that was closed by his father was reopened. The Passover was re-instituted as a national holiday, and **revival came to Judah.**

During Hezekiah's reign as both co-regent and king from **729 B.C. to 686 B.C.**, **Assyria**, the most powerful nation in the world was conquering land all around Israel and Judah and in **722 B.C.** captured the northern kingdom of Israel (also referred to as Samaria). This single event may have been the trigger that caused Hezekiah to reform his own nation of Judah. All during his reign as king up until the actual invasion of Judah by Assyria which finally ended in **701 B.C.**, Judah was under threat by the Assyrians.

This threat led Hezekiah to make a great mistake by forming an alliance with Egypt against Assyria rather than depending solely on the protection of God. You may remember from last time that God had strictly forbidden Israel from any further alliances with Egypt after the exodus (Deuteronomy 17:15,16). This disobedience led God to punish Judah by allowing the Assyrians to conquer most of the cities of Judah and prepare for an invasion of **Jerusalem** itself. **Sennacherib**, the king of Assyria, boldly threatened Hezekiah warning him that Judah would be much better off if it surrendered, and that is where we again pick up the story in Isaiah chapter 37.¹

Isaiah 37:1-14:

1 When King Hezekiah heard their report, he tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and went into the Temple of the Lord to pray.

*2 And he sent **Eliakim** the palace administrator, **Shebna** the court secretary, and the leading priests, all dressed in sackcloth, **to the prophet Isaiah son of Amoz.***

*3 They told him, "**This is what King Hezekiah says:***

This is a day of trouble, insult, and disgrace. It is like when a child is ready to be born, but the mother has no strength to deliver it.

4 But perhaps the Lord your God has heard the Assyrian representative defying the living God and will punish him for his words. Oh, pray for those of us who are left!"

*5 After King Hezekiah's officials delivered the king's message to Isaiah, **6 the prophet replied,***

*"Say to your master, 'This is what the Lord says: **Do not be disturbed** by this blasphemous speech against me from the Assyrian king's messengers.*

7 Listen! I myself will make sure that the king will receive a report from Assyria telling him that he is needed at home. Then I will make him want to return to his land, where I will have him killed with a sword.' "

8 Meanwhile, the Assyrian representative left Jerusalem and went to consult his king, who had left Lachish and was attacking Libnah.

*9 Soon afterward **King Sennacherib** received word that King Tirhakah of Ethiopia was leading an army to fight against him. Before leaving to meet the attack, **he sent this message back to Hezekiah in Jerusalem:***

10 "This message is for King Hezekiah of Judah. Don't let this God you trust deceive you with promises that Jerusalem will not be captured by the king of Assyria.

11 You know perfectly well what the kings of Assyria have done wherever they have gone. They have crushed everyone who stood in their way! Why should you be any different?

12 Have the gods of other nations rescued them—such nations as Gozan, Haran, Rezeph, and the people of Eden who were in Tel-assar? The former kings of Assyria destroyed them all!

¹ A similar account of this event is found in 2 Kings 19:1-19 and 2 Chronicles 32:9-19.

13 What happened to the king of Hamath and the king of Arpad? What happened to the kings of Sepharvaim, Hena, and Ivvah?"

14 After Hezekiah received the letter and read it, he went up to the Lord's Temple and spread it out before the Lord.

The first fourteen verses of this chapter are just basically the same thing we covered in chapter 36. King Sennacherib of Assyria continued boasting how undefeatable the army of Assyria is and that it's futile to try and fight against them. He goes on to boast that not even their God could help them against such a powerful army. When **Hezekiah** heard this message, he **went to the Temple and held out the message for God to see**. Now God could see it and knew what was in it even without Hezekiah physically laying it before Him. But the important thing to note here is what Hezekiah did. His first reaction was to bring the message and the problem before the Lord in prayer. Is that our first reaction to a problem?

Isaiah 37:15-20:

*15 And **Hezekiah prayed this prayer before the Lord:***

16 "O Lord Almighty, God of Israel, you are enthroned between the mighty cherubim! You alone are God of all the kingdoms of the earth. You alone created the heavens and the earth.

17 Listen to me, O Lord, and hear! Open your eyes, O Lord, and see! Listen to Sennacherib's words of defiance against the living God.

18 "It is true, Lord, that the kings of Assyria have destroyed all these nations, just as the message says.

19 And they have thrown the gods of these nations into the fire and burned them. But of course the Assyrians could destroy them! They were not gods at all—only idols of wood and stone shaped by human hands.

20 Now, O Lord our God, rescue us from his power; then all the kingdoms of the earth will know that you alone, O Lord, are God."

Hezekiah's prayer has some guidelines for us. He had a major problem. It was weighing on him heavily, but what is the first thing in Hezekiah's prayer? Worship. He acknowledges who God is and what His position is as Creator of the universe and praises Him. Then he states the problem and makes his request. Note too that the request is not just for what Hezekiah and the people can get, but also a desire to bring glory to God: *"then all the kingdoms of the earth will know that you alone, O Lord, are God."*

We are not to pray according to "formulas" so we are not to just unthinkingly copy this prayer. But the pattern of Hezekiah's prayer indicates his relationship with God. So it is probably safe to say that the pattern of our prayers also indicates our relationship with God. Do we only pray in crises? Do we rush in with our requests? Do we forget the thank-yous? Hezekiah took this letter to the Temple as an indication that he was consciously going into God's presence. Do we have a great sense of awareness when we pray that we also are entering into God's presence?

Now let's see what the answer was. Isaiah 37:21,22:

*21 Then Isaiah son of Amoz sent this message to Hezekiah: **“This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says:***

This is my answer to your prayer concerning King Sennacherib of Assyria.

*22 This is the message that the Lord has spoken against him: **‘The virgin daughter of Zion despises you and laughs at you. The daughter of Jerusalem scoffs and shakes her head as you flee.***

The “daughter of Zion,” Jerusalem, was still a virgin; she had not been ravaged by the enemy. She could look at the Assyrians and shake her head in scorn, for they could not touch her. God would spare His remnant and plant them once more in the land.²

Isaiah 37:23-29:

*23 ‘Whom do you think you have been insulting and ridiculing? Against whom did you raise your voice? At whom did you look in such proud condescension? It was the **Holy One of Israel!***

24 By your messengers you have mocked the Lord. You have said, “With my many chariots I have conquered the highest mountains— yes, the remotest peaks of Lebanon. I have cut down its tallest cedars and its choicest cypress trees. I have reached its farthest corners and explored its deepest forests.

25 I have dug wells in many a foreign land and refreshed myself with their water. I even stopped up the rivers of Egypt so that my armies could go across!”

26 ‘But have you not heard? It was I, the Lord, who decided this long ago. Long ago I planned what I am now causing to happen, that you should crush fortified cities into heaps of rubble.

27 That is why their people have so little power and are such easy prey for you. They are as helpless as the grass, as easily trampled as tender green shoots. They are like grass sprouting on a housetop, easily scorched by the sun.

28 ‘But I know you well— your comings and goings and all you do. I know the way you have raged against me.

29 And because of your arrogance against me, which I have heard for myself, I will put my hook in your nose and my bridle in your mouth. I will make you return by the road on which you came.

It's not a real good idea to boast before the Lord God, especially when you claim that your abilities far exceed His. Sennacherib was about to pay the ultimate penalty for blasphemy.

² Wiersbe, W. W. 1996, c1992. Be comforted. An Old Testament study. Victor Books: Wheaton, Ill.

Isaiah 37:30:

30 **Then Isaiah said to Hezekiah**, *“Here is the proof that the Lord will protect this city from Assyria’s king. This year you will eat only what grows up by itself, and next year you will eat what springs up from that. But in the third year you will plant crops and harvest them; you will tend vineyards and eat their fruit.*

God’s response to Hezekiah’s prayer (see pages 6-8) was to send him another threefold message of assurance: (1) **Jerusalem would not be taken** (verses 22, 31–35); (2) **the Assyrians would depart** (verses. 23–29); and (3) **the Jews would not starve** (verse 30).³ God provided for Jerusalem during the 2 years they were under attack by the Assyrians. When Sennacherib gave up and headed home in the third year, the people were able to plant crops again. God will provide the same kind of protection to those that trust in Him for their every need.

Isaiah 37:31,32:

31 *And you who are left in Judah, who have escaped the ravages of the siege, will take root again in your own soil, and you will flourish and multiply.*

32 *For a remnant of my people will spread out from Jerusalem, a group of survivors from Mount Zion. The passion of the Lord Almighty will make this happen!*

Those who survived this attack soon produced many offspring who populated the land once again.

Isaiah 37:33-38:

33 **“And this is what the Lord says about the king of Assyria:**

*His armies will not enter Jerusalem to shoot their arrows. They will not march outside its gates with their shields and build banks of earth against its walls.*⁴

34 *The king will return to his own country by the road on which he came. He will not enter this city, says the Lord.*

35 *For my own honor*⁵ *and for the sake of my servant David*⁶, *I will defend*

³ Wiersbe, W. W. 1996, c1992. Be comforted. An Old Testament study. Victor Books: Wheaton, Ill.

⁴ The Assyrians came near Jerusalem but never engaged in a real siege (*the military tactic of surrounding a community, cutting off its supplies and rescue aid, and reducing its resistance to the point of surrender or destruction. It can also refer to any prolonged distress or suffering.*) of the city.

⁵ Since Sennacherib had directly challenged God’s faithfulness to His Word (verse 10), the faithfulness of God was at stake in this contest with the Assyrians.

⁶ God promised to continue David’s line on the throne of Israel.

it.” 36 That night the angel of the Lord⁷ went out to the Assyrian camp and killed 185,000 Assyrian troops. When the surviving Assyrians woke up the next morning, they found corpses everywhere.

37 Then King Sennacherib of Assyria broke camp and returned to his own land⁸. He went home to his capital of Nineveh⁹ and stayed there.

*38 One day while he was worshipping in the temple of his god Nisroch, his sons Adrammelech and Sharezer killed him with their swords. They then escaped to the land of Ararat, and another son, **Esarhaddon**, became the next king of Assyria.*

God Himself defeated the enemy and protected the people of Jerusalem. Think of how the remaining soldiers must have felt when they awakened in the morning and there were so many dead bodies around them. Think also of how the people of God must have felt as they watched the army who had sworn to conquer them just pick up and walk away. That’s the kind of God we have. But now Hezekiah is faced with another challenge.

Isaiah Chapter 38

Isaiah 38:1-6:

*1 About that time Hezekiah became deathly ill, and the prophet **Isaiah** son of Amoz went to visit him. He **gave the king this message:** “
This is what the Lord says: Set your affairs in order, for you are going to die. You will not recover from this illness.”*

*2 When **Hezekiah** heard this, he turned his face to the wall and **prayed to the Lord,***

3 “Remember, O Lord, how I have always tried to be faithful to you and do what is pleasing in your sight.” Then he broke down and wept bitterly.

*4 Then **this message came to Isaiah from the Lord:***

*5 “Go back to Hezekiah and tell him, ‘This is what the Lord, the God of your ancestor David, says: I have heard your prayer and seen your tears. **I will add fifteen years to your life,***

*6 and **I will rescue you and this city from the king of Assyria. Yes, I will defend this city.**”*

⁷ In the Old Testament the term *Angel of the Lord* refers to Jesus.

⁸ **ARARAT** — [sacred land or high land, the name of a country on one of the mountains of which the ark rested after the Flood subsided (Gen. 8:4). The “mountains” mentioned were probably the Kurdish range of South Armenia. In 2 Kings 19:37, Isa. 37:38, the word is rendered “Armenia” in the Authorized Version, but in the Revised Version, “Land of Ararat.” In Jer. 51:27, the name denotes the central or southern portion of Armenia, (southeast Turkey, extending into northwest Iran). It is, however, generally applied to a high and almost inaccessible mountain which rises majestically from the plain of the Araxes. It has two conical peaks, about 7 miles apart, the one 14,300 feet and the other 10,300 feet above the level of the plain.]

⁹ The capital of Assyria.

Sweet words in verse 5: “*I have heard your prayer and seen your tears.*” God hears every prayer His children utter. He not only sees our tears, He collects them and makes note of them (Psalm 56:8). He remembers them. So if the enemy tries to convince you that God doesn’t care about your prayers and your needs and your feelings, remember that God says, “*I have heard your prayer and seen your tears.*” But also remember that God’s timing and purposes are not always the same as ours. Remember that His timing is perfect and His ways are perfect (Psalm 31:15; 2 Samuel 22:31-33; Isaiah 55:8, 9).

For whatever reason, Isaiah chose to place God’s cure for Hezekiah’s disease at the end of this chapter. But in the sequence of events, verses 21 and 22 should be included here.

Isaiah 38:21,22:

21 **Isaiah had said to Hezekiah’s servants,**

“Make an ointment from figs and spread it over the boil, and Hezekiah will recover.”

22 And **Hezekiah had asked,** “

What sign will prove that I will go to the Temple of the Lord three days from now?

In the parallel account in 2 Kings these two verses in Isaiah precede the giving of the sign (see 2 Kings 20:7-9). An ointment of dried figs, a common treatment for boils and ulcers in those days, applied **to the boil** (possibly an inflamed ulceration or cancer), was used by God medicinally to promote the healing. This is an example of healing occurring because of a combination of prayer, medicine, and God’s work. God does not scoff at medicine; He often chooses to work through it, but it is still God who heals. Hezekiah’s question, “*What will be the sign . . . ?*” didn’t suggest a lack of faith. In fact it was the opposite. Believing that he would be healed, he asked God to give him a sign as a confirmation of His word.¹⁰

Isaiah 38:7,8:

7 “*‘And this is the sign that the Lord will give you to prove he will do as he promised:*

*8 I will cause the sun’s shadow to move ten steps backward on the sundial of Ahaz!’ ” So the shadow on the sundial moved backward ten steps.*¹⁰

God confirmed His Promise to Hezekiah by a **sign**. Apparently a special stairway had been built as a time device, a kind of sundial. As **the sun** went down in the west, a **shadow** would move upward on the staircase so that people could ascertain the time of the day. Interestingly Hezekiah’s father, **Ahaz**, had rejected a sign from **the LORD** (Isaiah 7:10-12) but now on a staircase named for him his son Hezekiah was given a sign. How this miracle of the reversal of the sun’s shadow occurred isn’t known. Perhaps the earth’s

¹⁰ Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B. & Dallas Theological Seminary. 1983-c1985. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: an Exposition of the Scriptures*. Victor Books: Wheaton, IL.

¹⁰ See also 2 Chronicles 32:24-31.

rotation was reversed or perhaps the sun's rays were somehow refracted.¹¹

Isaiah 38:9-14:

9 When **King Hezekiah** was well again, he **wrote this poem about his experience:**

10 I said, "In the prime of my life, must I now enter the place of the dead? Am I to be robbed of my normal years?"

11 I said, "Never again will I see the Lord God while still in the land of the living. Never again will I see my friends or laugh with those who live in this world.

12 My life has been blown away like a shepherd's tent in a storm. It has been cut short, as when a weaver cuts cloth from a loom. Suddenly, my life was over.

13 I waited patiently all night, but I was torn apart as though by lions. Suddenly, my life was over.

14 Delirious, I chattered like a swallow or a crane, and then I moaned like a mourning dove. My eyes grew tired of looking to heaven for help. I am in trouble, Lord. Help me!"

King Hezekiah tells us how he felt during his experience of illness and recovery. He had some new experiences that made him a better person.

For one thing, God gave him a new appreciation of life. We take life for granted till it is about to be taken from us, and then we cling to it as long as we can. Hezekiah pictured death as the end of a journey, a tent taken down, and a weaving cut from the loom. Life was hanging by a thread!

He also had a new appreciation of prayer. Were it not for prayer, Hezekiah could not have made it.

At night, the king felt like a frail animal being attacked by a fierce lion; and in the daytime, he felt like a helpless bird. **During this time of suffering, Hezekiah examined his own heart and confessed his sins; and God forgave him.** Hezekiah continues:

Isaiah 38:15-20:

15 But what could I say? For he himself had sent this sickness. Now I will walk humbly throughout my years because of this anguish I have felt.

16 **Lord, your discipline is good, for it leads to life and health.** You have restored my health and have allowed me to live!

17 Yes, **it was good for me to suffer this anguish,** for you have rescued me from death and have forgiven all my sins.

¹¹ the change in the apparent position of a celestial body due to bending of the light rays emanating from it as they pass through the atmosphere.

18 For the dead cannot praise you; they cannot raise their voices in praise. Those who go down to destruction can no longer hope in your faithfulness.

Hezekiah, like Job, developed an appreciation for the purpose of suffering and the personal realization that “*all things work together for good for those who love God*” (Romans 8:28). He says that it was good for him to have suffered this anguish, which is definitely a spiritual perspective, not human.

19 Only the living can praise you as I do today. Each generation can make known your faithfulness to the next.

20 Think of it—the Lord has healed me! I will sing his praises with instruments every day of my life in the Temple of the Lord.

The king ended with a new appreciation of opportunities for service. There was a new humility in his walk, a deeper love for the Lord in his heart, and a new song of praise on his lips. He had a new determination to praise God all the days of his life, for now those days were very important to him. This attitude reminds us of Psalm 90:12: “*So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.*”

Isaiah Chapter 39

Isaiah 39:1-8 NLT:

*1 Soon after this, **Merodach-baladan** son of Baladan, king of Babylon, sent Hezekiah his best wishes and a gift. He had heard that Hezekiah had been very sick and that he had recovered.*

*2 **Hezekiah** welcomed the Babylonian envoys and showed them everything in his treasure-houses—the silver, the gold, the spices, and the aromatic oils. He also took them to see his armory and showed them all his other treasures—everything! There was nothing in his palace or kingdom that Hezekiah did not show them.*

*3 Then **Isaiah** the prophet **went to King Hezekiah and asked him,***

“What did those men want? Where were they from?” Hezekiah replied, “They came from the distant land of Babylon.”

*4 “**What did they see in your palace?**” asked **Isaiah.***

“They saw everything,” Hezekiah replied. “I showed them everything I own—all my treasures.”

*5 Then **Isaiah said to Hezekiah,** “*

Listen to this message from the Lord Almighty:

6 The time is coming when everything you have—all the treasures stored up by your ancestors—will be carried off to Babylon. Nothing will be left, says the Lord.

7 Some of your own descendants will be taken away into exile. They will become eunuchs who will serve in the palace of Babylon's king."

8 Then Hezekiah said to Isaiah, "This message you have given me from the Lord is good." But the king was thinking, "At least there will be peace and security during my lifetime."

The news about Hezekiah's sickness and recovery had spread widely so that even people in Babylon knew about it (2 Chronicles 32:23). Hezekiah was a famous man, and other nations would be concerned about him and want to win his favor. The stability of Judah was important to the balance of power in that day. And isn't it remarkable that it still is today almost 3,000 years later? At this time, Babylon was not a great world power; and few people would have thought that Assyria would one day collapse and be replaced by Babylon. Of course, God knew, but Hezekiah did not seek His guidance.

The stated reason for the diplomatic mission was to honor Hezekiah and officially rejoice at his recovery. But the real reason was to obtain information about the financial resources of the nation of Judah. After all, Babylon might need some of that wealth in their future negotiations or battles. **It is also likely that Hezekiah was seeking Babylon's assistance against Assyria.**

When Satan cannot defeat us as the "roaring lion" (1 Peter 5:8-9), he comes as the deceiving serpent (2 Corinthians 11:3). What Assyria could not do with weapons, Babylon did with gifts. God permitted the enemy to test Hezekiah so that the proud king might learn what was really in his own heart (2 Chronicles 32:31).

It was certainly a mistake for Hezekiah to show his visitors all his wealth, but **pride** made him do it. After a time of severe suffering, sometimes it feels so good just to feel good that we get off guard and fail to watch and pray. The king was basking in fame and wealth and apparently neglecting his spiritual life. Hezekiah was safer as a sick man in bed than as a healthy man on the throne. Had he consulted first with Isaiah, the king would have avoided blundering as he did.

The prophet reminded Hezekiah that, as king, he was only the steward of Judah's wealth and not the owner. Some of that wealth had come from previous kings, and Hezekiah could claim no credit for it. All of us are mere stewards of what God has given to us, and we have no right to boast about anything. 1 Corinthians 4:7, NKJV:

For who makes you differ from another? And what do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you glory as if you had not received it?"

John 3:27, NKJV:

A man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from heaven.

Isaiah 39:7 is Isaiah's first explicit announcement of the future Babylonian Captivity of Judah. In spite of Hezekiah's reforms, the nation decayed spiritually during the next century; and in 586 B.C., Babylon destroyed Jerusalem and took the people captive. Hezekiah's sin was not the cause of this judgment, for the sins of rulers, priests, and false prophets mounted up from year to year till God could take it no longer (2 Chronicles 36:13–16).

Is Hezekiah's response in Isaiah 39:8 an expression of relief that *he* has escaped trouble? If so, it would certainly be heartless on his part to rejoice that future generations would suffer what he should have suffered! His statement is more likely an expression of his humble acceptance of God's will, and 2 Chronicles 32:26 bears this out. The king did humble himself before God, and God forgave him.

Even the greatest and most godly of the Lord's servants can become proud and disobey God, so we must pray for Christian leaders that they will stay humble before their Master. We must also pray for ourselves to maintain an attitude of humility, that sense that all we have comes from God because of His grace.

But if any of His servants do sin, the Lord is willing to forgive when they sincerely repent and confess to Him (1 John 1:9). Psalm 51:17 tells us: "*A broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise*"¹²

Next week we begin the second half of the book of Isaiah in chapter 40. Chapters 1–35 emphasized judgment and looked ahead to invasion and the ultimate destruction of Judah. The prophecies (predictions) of chapters 40–66 occur after these tragic events, and Isaiah looks even further ahead to **God's ultimate triumph through the first and second comings of Jesus Christ** in the future. While both judgment and comfort are found in each half of Isaiah, the emphasis of the first half is on **judgment** and that of the second on **comfort**.¹³ You won't want to miss it.

¹² Wiersbe, W. W. 1996, c1992. Be comforted. An Old Testament study. Victor Books: Wheaton, Ill.

¹³ Richards, L. 1991. The Bible reader's companion. Includes index. Victor Books: Wheaton, Ill.