

WEEK 09

ISAIAH 39

Pride, self-centeredness, and forgetfulness of God's mercy could result in God's judgment on a much greater scale

Preface

In the previous weeks, we learned about God's sovereignty in how He judges, protects, and redeems His people, and the reasons for His actions. **Last week**, we learned about God's grace in His answer to Hezekiah's prayer and his worshipful response upon receiving it.

This week, we will read about how Hezekiah became prideful and how it contributed to the reasons for the judgment proclaimed on the kingdom of Judah.

Context and History: The story in Isaiah 39 likely happened in 701 BC, right after Hezekiah recovered from his illness (Isa. 38), but before the Assyrian attack on Jerusalem (Isa. 36-37). The order of these chapters was likely swapped by the author.

Marduk-Baladan was the first king of Babylon but was defeated by Assyria in 702 BC. He sought to build a good relationship with Hezekiah, such that the kingdom of Judah could be on Babylon's side against Assyria. It was in this context that the king of Babylon sent letters and a gift to Hezekiah, and Hezekiah welcomed his envoys (cf. 2 Kgs. 20:12-20 and 2 Chr. 32:31).

Observation

1. How did Hezekiah welcome the envoys from Babylon, and what was his motive? (Isa. 39:1-2)

Leaders' note: It was a show-off, or a gesture to impress and ally with Babylon through sharing resources to fight against Assyria. Either way, Hezekiah put his trust in his own wealth and Babylon, rather than God.

2. What were the long-term and immediate consequences of Hezekiah's actions? (Isa. 38:6-8)

3. How did Hezekiah respond to Isaiah's prophecy (Isa. 39:8)? How was it different from His *previous* reaction in Isa. 38:1-2, and His *future* reaction in Isa. 37:1-2?

Interpretation

1. The envoys' visit was said to be a test from God for Hezekiah (2 Chr. 32:31). What was God testing Hezekiah for, and did he pass or fail the test?

Leaders' note: Despite God's merciful response to Hezekiah in Isa. 38, Hezekiah neither consulted God before receiving the envoys nor acknowledged God's provision when showing his treasures.

2. Why did Hezekiah say the LORD's word was "good" (Isa. 39:8)?

Leaders' note: Some scholars argued that Hezekiah simply acknowledged that Judah deserved divine judgment, and was thankful for the mentioning of "descendants" (Isa. 39:7) because he didn't have an heir yet. However, some scholars argued that Hezekiah lacked concern for the future generations, and simply focused on his own peace during his lifetime.

3. What was the impact of Hezekiah's behaviors on the kingdom of Judah? What does that tell us about the consequences of our sins?

Leaders' note: After more than 100 years (in 586 BC), King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon conquered Jerusalem and removed all treasures, and the Israelites went into exile (2 Kgs. 24:10-13). The prophecy was fulfilled. A king's pride contributed to the nation's downfall.

Application

1. If you were Hezekiah who received gifts and visitors from Babylon, how would you respond? What is a godly way to respond to compliments and flatters?

2. "Humility is not thinking less of yourself; it is thinking of yourself less." (C. S. Lewis) What are some practical ways to prevent yourself from being prideful or self-centered?

3. Knowing that your pride or your sinful act could have an impact on others, are there any habits, attitudes, or thoughts that you would want to confess and change now?

Optional Follow-Up Exercise: Time capsule - remembering God's mercy

There were past instances when Hezekiah was very faithful to God and God responded with blessings, but he seemed to have quickly forgotten about it and blinded by his own pride. We too are susceptible to sins like pride and self-centeredness if we do not remember God's mercy and blessing.

Practical Instructions:

1. Think of 3 instances in the past where God responded to your prayer, plea, or concern
2. Write them down on a piece of paper and seal it in an envelope
3. Pray together as a group to praise and thank God for His mercies
4. Re-open it in 3 months' time (or let your group leader keep your envelopes and re-distribute them after 3 months), and be reminded of God's mercy and blessing for you