

Title: “Hezekiah, Man of metal OR Man of mush - Part 2 of 3”

Purpose: For us to see how we should and should not respond to those occasions when God allows some ILLNESS to intrude into and potentially threaten our lives.

INTRODUCTION

There is, I believe, a sense in which we are all, at least potentially, only ever a sentence away from COMPLETE / ABJECT / INNER => TURMOIL.

Allow me to explain:

There are words that we all dread – and when my children were growing up (and if they were here, I’m sure they would readily bear me out) if they heard me say: “**go to my room**” it was the worst thing ever because they knew what that meant. (Thankfully that sort of thing only happened on a very few occasions).

Perhaps for you it was something else, perhaps:

- “**wait till your father gets home**” – we all knew that that spelled disaster and a long lingering wait until the expected doom arrived.

For us as adults there are other words that have the potential to place us into a state of horrendous inner turmoil – perhaps:

- **in a work setting** – “**your services are no longer required – you can clear your desk...**”
- **in a domestic setting** – when one spouse says “**I’m leaving you...**”
- **OR in a medical setting** – when a doctor says “**I’m afraid the news isn’t very good...**”

Today - ILLNESS

Today our topic is going to be ILLNESS and the person who is going to get ILL is King Hezekiah.

Last week

Now since last week Hezekiah has been a name that we have been getting acquainted with.

We began to ask the question:

Q. Is Hezekiah – a man of metal OR a man of mush?

And the first challenge of three that he was facing was the INVASION of the Assyrians – it was the year 701BC and Sennacherib was now finally knocking on the doors of Jerusalem and preparing to lay siege to it.

As far as Judah was concerned – **Jerusalem was the “last man standing”** – all the other various cities of the Southern Kingdom of Israel – 46 in total according to Sennacherib’s own account – had fallen.

It was an **11th hour situation** and we saw that **Hezekiah had seen this coming** and that:

- he was **FIRSTLY** a man of **“active ACTION”** – taking the steps that he humanly could – building a tunnel, building a wall and put a sound leadership structure in place
- he was a man **ALSO** of **“passive ACTION”** – he really knew how to use all the “means of grace” that were available to him – the **PLACE OF GOD**, the **PREACHING OF GOD** and **PRAYER TO GOD**
- the **ONLY DOWNSIDE** with relation to Hezekiah was that he also was a man of **“reactive ACTION”** – whereby he allowed himself to cave in to other suggestions that placed his trust other than in God – unwise alliances with Egypt for example, and trying to pay off Sennacherib – all of these came to nothing as Hezekiah should have known.

Ok that was a brief recap and for any that weren’t around last week that will help position in the sweep of things because this is message #2 of 3 which together take us from Isaiah 36 thru to Isaiah 39 and will let us see how Hezekiah faced up to 3 major INCIDENTS in his life.

So today’s INCIDENT is ***NOT* INVASION *BUT* ILLNESS.**

Background

Before I crash straight into the text of **Isaiah 38**, which was read for us earlier on, there are 4 brief things that I want to get out the way, but which are worth observing:

- **FIRST** – we need to realise that the chapters, these 4 purely historical chapters, are **chronologically out of sequence.**

It would seem rather odd, to be honest.

Q. Why change things around like that when you’ve only got 4 chapters anyway?

I guess one question I should address is Q. How do you actually know that they are out of date/time sequence?

Well a few reasons:

1) you get a hint of it because the opening words are suitably vague – **Verse 1**

“In those days – Hezekiah became ill and was at the point of death...”

2) **Verses 5&6** point to the Assyrian INVASION of Jerusalem as something still future – **Verses 5&6**

“Go and tell Hezekiah, ‘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. And **I will** deliver you and this city from the hand of the king of Assyria. **I will** defend this city.”

- **SECOND** – we now need to try and see WHY Isaiah would choose, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, to put them this way around.

We'll remember that the book of Isaiah basically divides into 2 parts Isaiah chs 1-35 and then Isaiah 40-66 and the 4 chapters that we are doing at this time act as a little buffer in between the two parts.

Now the first part very much focusses around Assyria and the threat that they represent to Israel (both the Northern and the Southern Kingdom) and how God's people respond to this threat – do they choose to trust in their own power to save themselves OR will they trust in God, in the Holy One of Israel.

Now in the second part, from chapter 40 thru to 66 – the focus is no longer Assyria but is instead Babylon – they are the new superpower that is going to be God's rod to administer His divine discipline on His generally wayward and stubborn people.

And so with this understanding it is much more natural that we get chapters 38&39 where they are because chapter 39 is the sequel to chapter 38 and it gives us our first historical glimpse of a people that come from far away, a people that are the Babylonians.

Chapter 39 Verse 1 thus reads: "At that time Merodach-Baladan son of Baladan king of Babylon sent Hezekiah letters and a gift, because he had heard of his illness and recovery."

- **THIRD** – as we come to **Chapters 38&39** – and recognising these now point us forward and pave the way for all that is to follow in Isaiah PART 2 – we see that this is not merely in a HISTORICAL SENSE.

Hezekiah was a great King – he did what was right in the eyes of the LORD as his father David had done – he was a remarkable reformer – **2 Chronicles** likens him to great King Solomon because Hezekiah amassed great amounts of treasure.

HOWEVER – as we get into **Isaiah 38&39** we start to see that **Hezekiah is deeply flawed** and is truly just a man like us – he has weaknesses, vulnerabilities and Achilles heels that leave us with the sense of disappointment that this one does not, is one more who **does not seem to fill the shoes of a MESSIAH FIGURE.**

And thus, once again, Hezekiah is forcing us to look beyond him to find this one who really is THE MESSIAH – that One who will *NOT* DISAPPOINT – and this is precisely what we will be seeing more and more of as we go into Isaiah PART 2.

Remember what we read in **Isaiah 40** familiar words for us who have come across them in the NT:

Verse 3 “A voice of one calling: In the desert prepare the way for the LORD; make straight in the wilderness a highway for **our God.**”

Verse 9 “You who bring good tidings to Zion, go up on a high mountain. You who bring good tidings to Jerusalem, lift up your voice with a shout, lift it up, do not be afraid; say to the towns of Judah, **Here is your God!**”

- **FOURTHLY** and lastly – the story from Isaiah 38 is that at an individual level Hezekiah is going to experience a REPRIEVE for a limited period (in his case 15 years).

Now this acts as an acted preview of what is going to happen to the nation of Israel as a whole – they too will get a REPRIEVE

In their case it will last from **701BC**, (when the Assyrians gave up and went away), through to **586BC** when Jerusalem will finally give way and be flattened by King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon – so in all ***not* just 15 YEARS *but* 115 YEARS.**

The rubber is hitting the road

Ok, then, without any further ado – we can hopefully hit the road running – and I want to break the passage up in two parts:

1. **FIRST** Verses 1-8 – **When God works outside the operating theatre**
2. **SECOND** Verses 9-22 – **When God puts us on His operating table**

#1 then:

1] When God works outside the operating theatre –Verses 1-8

Just as with the Assyrian INVASION this is an 11th hour situation – we find ourselves introduced in **Verse 1** into a **LIFE & DEATH CRISIS:**

Isaiah 38 Verses 1-3 “In those days Hezekiah became ill and was at the point of death. The prophet Isaiah son of Amoz went to him and said, “This is what the LORD says: Put your house in order, because you are going to die; you will not recover.”

Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed to the Lord, “Remember, O LORD, how I have walked before you faithfully and with wholehearted devotion and have done what is good in your eyes.” **And Hezekiah wept bitterly.**”

Hezekiah devastated

And we can see that Hezekiah is truly devastated – for him the situation, the news that Isaiah has brought

to him from the LORD is truly disastrous.

What Hezekiah says to the LORD is really a lot like what we read last week from 2 Chronicles 32 and the opening verse where the INVASION hits the horizon:

2 Chronicles 32 Verse 1 “After all that Hezekiah had so faithfully done, - **BLAM!!** - Sennacherib king of Assyria came and invaded Judah...”

A John McEnroe moment

Do you remember John McEnroe – that former Wimbledon tennis champion and his somewhat famous catchphrase “YOU CANNOT BE SERIOUS!!”.

And this is such a typical response when God deigns to introduce something painful and unexpected into our lives.

And maybe you would have responded similarly – “How can this be happening to me???”

But nevertheless Hezekiah cries out to God (and at least on the surface it does seem a bit of a pathetic prayer) and he weeps profusely and bitterly before the LORD.

A rapid chain of events

Now the chain of events in these opening 8 verses are actually very rapid (and that’s a good thing because he is truly at death’s door).

As with the details of the Assyrian INVASION, this occasion of Hezekiah’s ILLNESS is recorded in **2 Kings**, in **2 Chronicles** and also here in **Isaiah** and one of the details that **2 Chronicles** adds for us is that Isaiah, having delivered his first message of Hezekiah’s imminent death – gets only as far as the middle court before God gives him another message that will dramatically reverse the course of things.

And so, probably within the very same hour, as we read in:

Verse 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.”

There is to be:

- a **15 YEAR REPRIEVE** and that’s not all
- God is going to **DELIVER JERUSALEM** from the hand of Assyria (God Himself will be their defender)
- (and if that wasn’t enough) God is also going to give Hezekiah a really **DRAMATIC SIGN** – he is going to literally move the heavens and the earth in some way so that the shadow of the Sun goes in reverse

And that is what we read there in **Verses 7&8**.

A question that might be in your mind as you mull over these things is:

Q. What does it mean that God seems to change His mind? (One moment He says you're *NOT* going to get better – the next moment you *ARE* going to get better)

Q. Is God somewhat fickle and changeable?

Well – the rule of good bible interpretation is always that if one passage seems in some regard a little obscure we should allow other passages of the bible which are clearer to shine their light.

Numbers 23 verse 19 says “God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?”

So we know from Scripture that God does not change his mind. And if you think about it for a moment you will realise the implications if He did.

If God starts off saying that he will do one thing and then a moment later revises His plans – does that not suggest that God either does not know the future and therefore is forced to revise His perfect plans as He goes along OR that His first plan was a bit wonky and His plan B is now something better. But God is not one who creates or devises something which is imperfect, that has errors in it.

All along God knows what He is planning to do, but He couches these things in human terms – He accommodates His omniscience and His total perfection in human language and experience.

Q. So why does God act so quickly? Well simply because what he is now going to do externally shows that He has already completed and accomplished the more crucial internal work.

So let's move across to that because this is where we get the deeper insights:

(#1 – When God works outside the operating theatre)

#2 -

2] When God puts us on His operating table –Verses 9-22

Now I should say that the picture of God putting us on His operating table is slightly adrift from the point of view that we are *NOT* under anaesthetic – we are aware of things – we are aware of the pain of our situation.

And Verses 10-14 show Hezekiah going down and down into this devastating experience:

- there's **NUMBED SHOCK** – (Verse 10) “In the prime of my life must I go through the gates of death and be robbed of the rest of my years?” – THIS CAN'T BE HAPPENING – I'm way to young
- then there's **SELF-PITY** which starts to kick in – (Verse 11) ***READ***

Just the sheer finality of things – yes, I will NEVER again see people I know.

- then a sense of **VIOLATION** – perhaps of **DEMOLITION** – (Verse 12) ***READ***

His life is being pulled apart – he is being demolished piece by piece. Having our lives taken is the ultimate violation of our human rights of our personal sense of dignity.

- then (and you can see that there is a progressive slide down and down) – then there is a sense of **ACCUSATION** and perhaps direct **ANGER** at and toward God – (the end of **Verse 12** and the end of **Verse 13**) ***READ*** “...you made an end of me.”

All his hope seems to be focussed on the next day bringing some turn around. Tomorrow will be better – but no – tomorrow is worse UNTIL he comes to see that perhaps there will not necessarily be any tomorrow.

Q. What is God doing to Hezekiah?

And maybe you absolutely echo these sentiments – Q. Why? Q. How can you do this to me? Maybe even

Q. Surely you own me better than this?

Well God is working in and on Hezekiah and He is bringing him:

- to a place of SURRENDER
- to a place where he is SUBDUED
- to a place where he will NO LONGER STRUGGLE

You can see this point being reached in:

Verse 14 “My eyes grew weak as I looked to the heavens. I am troubled; **O Lord, come to my aid!**”

And here this writing of Hezekiah (as **Verse 9** calls it) starts to turn around and become more positive.

When we **are at an end of ourselves** then and only then are we **still enough** and **receptive enough** to hear clearly what God is saying and to see what God is doing.

So now in **Verses 15-20** we see Hezekiah coming up and up as he beholds God’s doing:

- This is the first and really the key realisation – **Verse 15** “...**He** has spoken to me, and **He Himself** has done this...”

This is so very key when we face some very great crisis in our lives to know whether God is in the design of the trial.

- From **Verses 15-17** we see that Hezekiah is understanding that these things are actually very good for him.

He is confessing that God is actually doing him a great kindness by taking him onto His operating table.

See [Verse 17](#) "Surely it was for my benefit that I suffered such anguish..."

- Hezekiah's now starts to experience a complete transformation of his vocabulary.

He speaks of God's love

He speaks of God's forgiveness – that God has been pleased to put all of his sins behind His back

He speaks of singing God's praises

He speaks of the faithfulness of God

He speaks of testimony – the need to pass onto our children this record of God's faithfulness

He speaks of worship, of singing with stringed instruments all of our days in the temple of the LORD.

I think you will agree Hezekiah has gone through a pretty root and branch transformation.

It is precisely because God has already done this INTERNAL WORK, this OPERATING THEATRE work in Hezekiah that He can so rapidly proceed without any undue delay to answer his heartfelt cry and his pleading tears.

CONCLUSION

Now that's the 2nd test that God brought to bear on Hezekiah: the test of CRITICAL or SEVERE ILLNESS.

But if we simply left it there I suspect that [Isaiah 38](#) would be left as something all too academic.

So what I want to do for the closing moments is to try and apply it and to cross over the bridge from Hezekiah's situation to our own.

Let me give you 8 lessons or application principles in the form of criteria to let you assess whether you pass or fail when ILLNESS descends upon you:

- **TEST or CRITERIA #1 – as to whether ILLNESS has beaten you – is whether you can say the words - "It has been good for me" or (as Hezekiah said "Surely it was for my benefit..."):**

And for this I'm simply going to bring the words of **Thomas a Kempis** from his timeless classic "**The Imitation of Christ**" (this is Book 1 and Chapter 12 – it's a very short chapter) entitled:

"THE VALUE OF ADVERSITY"

"IT IS good for us to have trials and troubles at times, for they often remind us that we are on probation and ought not to hope in any worldly thing. **It is good for us** sometimes to suffer contradiction, to be misjudged by men even though we do well and mean well. These things help us to be humble and shield us from vainglory. When to all outward appearances men give us no credit, when they do not think well of us, then we are more inclined to seek God who sees our hearts. Therefore, a man ought to root himself so firmly in God that he will not need the consolations of men.

When a man of good will is afflicted, tempted, and tormented by evil thoughts, he realizes clearly that his greatest need is God, without Whom he can do no good. Saddened by his miseries and sufferings, he laments and prays. He wearies of living longer and wishes for death that he might be dissolved and be with Christ. Then he understands fully that perfect security and complete peace cannot be found on earth.”

If you want **A PARALLEL PASSAGE** to this one in [Isaiah 38](#) you would find another in [Jonah chapter 2](#) where Jonah has sunk down to the depths of the sea and is also at death’s door and then God saves him though the agency of the big fish and [chapter 2](#) provides us with a similar writing about that experience and what he learned:

[Jonah 2 Verses 7&8](#) “When my life was ebbing away, I remembered you, Lord, and my prayer rose to you, to your holy temple. “Those who cling to worthless idols forfeit the grace that could be theirs. But I, with a song of thanksgiving, will sacrifice to you. What I have vowed I will make good. Salvation comes from the Lord.”

- **TEST or CRITERIA #2 – as to whether ILLNESS has won – is whether your attachment and appetite for the world has remained intact:**

Q. Does illness win if we die? NO

But illness does win if we die not to this world!

- **TEST or CRITERIA #3 – as to whether ILLNESS has won – is whether or not we have woken up to the reality of God or just to the reality of our illness:**

This can be judged in part by whether we spend all our time reading up on our ILLNESS or reading up on our God, our Saviour, our Judge and our Redeemer.

- **TEST or CRITERIA #4 – as to whether ILLNESS has won – is whether or not we spend our time calculating the odds (i.e. whether we will live or die) or whether we spend our time polishing up our reliance on God:**

The apostle Paul illustrates the principle in:

[2 Corinthians 1 Verse 9](#) “We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. **But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God**, who raises the dead.”

- **TEST or CRITERIA #5 – as to whether ILLNESS has won – is whether or not we retreat into ourselves or whether ILLNESS causes us to have a deeper concern for others:**

Epaphroditus illustrates this well – Paul has this to say of him in:

Philippians 2 verses 26&27 "...he (that is Epaphroditus) **longs for all of you and is distressed because you heard he was ill.** Indeed he was ill, and almost died. But God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, to spare me sorrow upon sorrow."

- **TEST or CRITERIA #6** – as to whether **ILLNESS** has won – is whether or not any testimony arises from our circumstances:

Luke's gospel illustrates WITNESS as a beneficial by-product of SUFFERING:

Luke 21 verse 12&13 "they will lay hands on you and persecute you. They will deliver you to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors, and all on account of my name.

This will result in your being witnesses to them."

- **TEST or CRITERIA #7** – as to whether **ILLNESS** has won – is whether or not we refuse to think about death:

Ecclesiastes chapter 7 reflects on this truth:

(Verse 2) "It is better to go to a house of mourning than to go to a house of feasting, for **death is the destiny of every man; the living should take this to heart."**

- **TEST or CRITERIA #8** – as to whether **ILLNESS** has won – is whether or not we see it as a curse or a gift:

Satan always works to destroy people and he tends to use one of 2 approaches:

1. **EITHER** – he uses **health, wealth & prosperity**
– by which means he **STRANGLES FAITH**
2. **OR** – he multiplies **pain & suffering**
– by which means he tries to **SMOTHERS FAITH with the DUVET of DOUBT**

Q. So where do you stand this morning?

Q. MAN/WOMAN of METAL or MAN/WOMAN OF MUSH?

Q. That is the question? - and one, let me say, that very few of us will find that we get to dodge.

AMEN