

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

Purpose: For us to see how we should and should not respond when God brings the test of IMPORTANCE into our lives.

INTRODUCTION

A quick quiz question to make sure that you are awake, at least at this point:

Q. What do the following items have in common?

- A red triangle
- a pack of self-test breathalysers
- a hi-vis vest
- a GB sticker &
- some headlight beam converters

Very good! They are all the things that you need if you are going to go and drive legally on the Continent – (especially in France anyway).

A second question:

Q. Which of these 5 (repeat them) do you think are probably the most essential of all?

Yes! The headlight beam converters.

You see, driving in France means that you are driving on the other side of the road and our car headlights are directed in such a way that they point away from on-coming traffic.

HOWEVER – if you reverse which side the oncoming traffic is on as they drive towards you, you will soon realise that **your headlights will then be pointing directly at them DAZZLING THEM!!**

(I have to confess I would never have thought of that – but when you think about it, it is fairly obvious.)

Today

Today, as we come to Isaiah Chapter 39 – we are coming to a passage which shows us King Hezekiah for one final time – and here he finds himself getting:

completely DAZZLED by what we might call “**some oncoming traffic from another far away land**”.

Recap the 3 tests

If you have been with us the past two weeks then you will know that we have been looking at a unique section of 4 chapters here in Isaiah (and this forms part of our larger study of the book as a whole). These

are chapters 36 thru to 39 and they are all historical chapters about this King Hezekiah.

What has united these 4 chapters is not just that they concern the same person (that is Hezekiah) – but that they show us **3 SPECIFIC TESTS** that he has to face:

1. In Chapters 36&37 – the test was that of INVASION

And he did pretty well all-told – so a definite 8 out of 10 score for him.

2. In Chapter 38 – the test was that of ILLNESS

Hezekiah was told by the prophet Isaiah that he was going to die and then Hezekiah comes before the LORD, prays and weeps and God hears him and grants him a 15 year reprieve.

And last week we saw, in more detail, how God dealt with him on His operating table.

3. Now this week, as we deal with the final chapter of these 4 – so Isaiah 39 - we come to what is a SEQUEL to the ILLNESS CHAPTER and we come to see that **THE 3RD TEST** is one of what I'm going to call IMPORTANCE.

This is where Hezekiah is going to meet with the DAZZLING FLATTERY arising from envoys that have travelled from afar – in fact all the way from BABYLON.

2 readings this morning

The reason we had two readings this morning is because the one in 2 Chronicles 32 states clearly what might be merely suspected from what we read of the parallel account in Isaiah 39.

And **there are TWO THINGS clearly noticeable** in 2 Chronicles 32 from Verse 24 thru to 33:

- **ONE** – that there is a whole section which details Hezekiah's achievements and his great riches that he had amassed likening him to the great King Solomon.

So it does not play down Hezekiah in anyway – it shows him as truly a great king.

- **THE SECOND THING** – is that the passage has 2 BUT's in it. These are the flies in the ointment of his life and they BOTH have relation to him getting ill and nearly dying.

2 Chronicles 32 verse 25 reads "**BUT** Hezekiah's heart was proud and he did not respond to the kindness shown him; therefore the LORD's wrath was on him and on Judah and Jerusalem."

The **second BUT** comes further down in Verse 31:

“**BUT** when envoys were sent by the rulers of Babylon to ask him about the miraculous sign that had occurred in the land, God left him to test him and to know everything that was in his heart.”

So equally we see that **Isaiah 39** is all about the details of this occasion where Hezekiah is left alone by God to face up to the test of having people come and make him feel very IMPORTANT.

Background – Merodach-Baladan

So we are back now to **Isaiah 39** and straight up we meet this character with the wonderful name of **Merodach-Baladan** son of Baladan King of Babylon.

Babylon, although it was very much bigger and more powerful than puny little Judah, was nevertheless similarly under the domination of Assyria. And Merodach-Baladan was in control of Babylon for a couple of periods from 721-710 and then also again from 705-703 BC, and it is this second period which would seem to tie in best with the likely time that Hezekiah had been seriously ill.

Well they hear of Hezekiah’s illness and his recovery **and in particular** they hear also of **the great miracle** that took place (see **2 Chronicles 32 verse 31** “...to ask him about the miraculous sign that had occurred in the land...”).

Hezekiah is DELIGHTED!

And right at the start of our chapter **Verse 2** it says that “Hezekiah received the envoys **gladly**...”.

In some **more literal translations** it says that “he was **pleased** with them...” **OR EVEN** “he **rejoiced** over them...”.

It is important we get a sense of what is going on here.

Recognise that the tests that have been coming at Hezekiah are very much tests that will come against us:

- We are going to know times when something is **THREATENING TO INVADE OUR LIVES**
- We are going to know times when **SERIOUS ILLNESS** IS PRESSING US TO FALL TO PIECES
- We are going to know times when our own **SENSE OF IMPORTANCE** WILL BE A HUGE TRAP

Being noticed

We need to realise that we can all be **DAZZLED** when someone **NOTICES US** and feeds and fuels our own **SENSE OF IMPORTANCE**.

You see in the Bible record we are told that we need to be alert because our enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. (1 Peter 5 verse 7).

But alongside this, we also need to realise that Satan is:

- not only, in Scripture, likened to a **ROARING LION**
- but he is also likened to a **SILENT SERPENT**

If he cannot INTIMIDATE us as that LION – he will come as something very INVITING instead.

Churchill's assessment of Adolf Hitler

Just prior to the Second World War - when **Adolf Hitler** sought to placate the Austrian minister **Kurt von Schuschnigg** by complimenting and praising him publicly, a disgusted **Winston Churchill** muttered:

“When a snake wants to eat his victims he first covers them with saliva”.

You see **Satan is devious**, he has a few very well used tricks up his sleeve and he knows that:

- where he can't get you with blows from his **WEAPONS**
- he will swap over to using **GIFTS INSTEAD**.

Remember the **Book of Revelation**:

Q. What do we find there when it comes to the domain of the evil one?

Well he:

- **EITHER** comes as the **BEAST** to **SMASH US**
- **OR** comes as the **WHORE** to **SEDUCE US**

Q. Why so prone to falling?

Now it is worth just pondering for a moment:

Q. Why Hezekiah was not stronger than he seemed to be here as we are entering **Isaiah 39**?

Q. Just why is he so seemingly prone to falling and failing?

He has just gone through a **wonderful grace-filled episode (in Isaiah 38)** – **YES** he was seriously ill (and that wouldn't have been nice) **BUT** he did, in the midst of that, meet God working deep down inside him (and last week we were imagining God placing Hezekiah on the operating table).

- God gave him: **15 extra years** – a reprieve
- He gave him a **solid promise** that he would certainly deliver Jerusalem from the invasion of King Sennacherib
- And last but not least a **cosmic sign** whereby the shadow of the sun would actually retreat!!

And here he is, maybe just a matter of months further down the line, falling lock stock and barrel into a trap – one that God himself is standing back in order to see what he will do.

I would suggest that some of the dynamics at play here are as follows:

- FIRST – after a period of some notable success OR growth OR intimate time with the Lord

we then tend to RELAX
we let down our GUARD.

I bet you have experienced that just when everything was going so well – you had spent an evening with an unbeliever and had had such an excellent set of conversations and that person was showing great interest in the faith – and then you feel really good, you let down your guard and before you know it – Satan has led you quietly into some sin – he has lulled you into a false sense of security, he has got you to put down your shield of faith for a moment (whereby you should have been able to deflect the fiery arrows of the evil one).

- SECOND – if that **first dynamic** is failing due to **RELAXING BACK**, this **second one** is only one stage further on and that is **RELAPSING BACK**, going back once again to the old ways which have been so familiar.

We tend to quickly forget the gains, the new lessons that we have learned.

To put that another way we are lulled into a false sense of REMEMBERING. Satan helps us to forget the vital lessons that God has laboured to teach us and replaces them with a false sense of MEMORY whereby we believe that we have mastered and got these new lessons firmly under our belts.

Q. And what were some of the truths and effects that God had worked into Hezekiah from the illness?

Well he had learned not to attach so much value to earthly things.

He had learned not to be filled with self-pity and accusation towards God of unfairness, but to know that God Himself was in the circumstances and that they were achieving good things in his soul.

He was learning that through these things God was now closer to him and that he now had a testimony whereby he could praise God.

But now all this has faded into the recent past and is nothing much more useful than a distant memory.

The story continued

Well, let's follow the story on.

Verse 2 goes on ***READ Verse 2***

You have to say that King Hezekiah really doesn't hold back. He opens himself up completely – he gives the envoys of this important King of Babylon the grand tour with nothing missed out.

Isaiah comes in

No sooner has he done this and the envoys have no doubt headed back – mission accomplished – then Isaiah pops his head round the door and says:

“So what exactly did they say and where did they come from?”

Notice that Hezekiah does not entirely answer his questions. He skips over the first one entirely and seems to perhaps lessen the impact of the 2nd question.

You see Hezekiah knows that Isaiah as a man of God will ask the tough questions.

Q. How do you feel with regard to people that will ask you the hard questions?

Q. Do you resent them? Q. Do you side step them?

Hezekiah just says that they were from “a distant land” (verse 3) that they were from “Babylon”.

It is as though he is saying that everything is alright because they are far away. These people can’t be any threat because they are not near enough to cause any problem.

Isaiah follows it up with a 3rd penetrating question: Verse 4 “What did they see in your palace?”

Now whether Hezekiah is just naïve or whether he just feels that he doesn’t need to be ashamed about what he has done – well that’s not so clear – but he just admits that they have seen absolutely everything.

(Verse 4b) “They saw everything in my palace,” Hezekiah said. “There is nothing among my treasures that I did not show them.”

Isaiah gives the verdict

It is now that Isaiah gives the verdict from the LORD on this encounter:

*** READ Verses 5-7 ***

Hezekiah was being groomed

The letters from Merodach-Baladan King of Babylon, the gifts, the envoys were all having an effect on Hezekiah – his SENSE OF IMPORTANCE was being INFLATED.

He is DAZZLED by this and does not see things in their proper light.

No doubt there was an invitation to join in the BIG LEAGUE – to become a player on the INTERNATIONAL STAGE on a par with the BIG BOYS (like EGYPT, like ASSYRIA, like BABYLON).

It is very attractive.

And it is also an age-old problem – this problem of RECEIVING and WELCOMING the PRAISE OF OTHERS – even ending up LIVING FOR or LIVING ON - THE PRAISE OF OTHERS.

Jesus & the Pharisees

Turning to the NT for a moment we can see that this problem of PRAISE was a stumbling block to the religious leaders of the time:

John 5 verse 41-44 ““I do not accept praise from men, but I know you. I know that you do not have the love of God in your hearts. I have come in my Father’s name, and you do not accept me; but if someone else comes in his own name, you will accept him. **How can you believe if you accept praise from one another, yet make no effort to obtain the praise that comes from the only God?**”

It was also a stumbling block for the ordinary people as well:

John 12 verse 42&43 “Yet at the same time many even among the leaders believed in him. But because of the Pharisees they would not confess their faith for fear they would be put out of the synagogue; **for they loved praise from men more than praise from God.** “

The apostle Paul reveals his own approach as he reminds the Thessalonian Christians of how he had acted:

1 Thessalonians 2 verses 4-6 “we speak as men approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. **We are not trying to please men but God**, who tests our hearts. **You know we never used flattery**, nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed—God is our witness. **We were not looking for praise from men, not from you or anyone else.**”

Hezekiah and his missed opportunity

If you think about this area of IMPORTANCE, when we fall under the spell of feeling very important because someone has heaped praise up on – it really does lead Hezekiah into at least 3 problems:

- PROBLEM #1 – it is a real missed opportunity.

Here Hezekiah has been on the receiving end of God doing an amazing cosmic level miracle for him to assure him that within 3 days he will recover and will walk on his own feet back up to the temple of the Lord leaving his sick bed behind.

What a testimony this would – should – have made to any that came to him.

A golden opportunity to speak in praise of the LORD Almighty.

Instead of speaking all about God’s IMPORTANCE he is totally derailed into believing in his own SELF-IMPORTANCE.~

What a tragedy!

- PROBLEM #2 – is that it begins to cause him to be separated from his close friend Isaiah.

He becomes all “pally” with the King of Babylon and in order to maintain this he needs to slightly distance himself from Isaiah who stands for “the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth of God”.

The praise of men is a trap and it not only SUBTRACTS glory from God it also puts DISTANCE between us and those that stand for truth.

- PROBLEM #3 – this comes out at the end of the passage:

Isaiah 39 verse 8 reads “The word of the LORD you have spoken is good,” Hezekiah replied (well so far so good you might think – perhaps he is just saying that whatever God say must be right and accepted – however he goes on to reveal the way he is really thinking) For he thought, “There will be peace and security in my lifetime.”

See how the cancer of SELF-IMPORTANCE is changing Hezekiah and certainly not for the better.

Where before he had gained a beautiful and precious God-focus now this is being replaced with an all-too-ugly Self-focus.

As Derek Kidner says in his classic commentary on Isaiah “When pride replaces humility, self-satisfaction replaces concern for others, and works replace faith then the die is cast and the kingdom is doomed.”

CONCLUSION

How subtle Satan can be: silently & slowly seducing us through our pride and our proneness to SELF-IMPORTANCE to that somewhat addictive drug of the PRAISE OF MEN.

King Hezekiah – 3 tests:

- INVASION
- ILLNESS
- and now today IMPORTANCE

It maybe that you say – well that was him but I am me

OR well that was a very different time from ours

OR well God doesn’t do those sorts of things NOWADAYS!

BUT you need to remember what Jesus told us in John 15 (that chapter on the Vine and the Branches) it shows us that it is really very up-to-date.

It is what the bible calls PRUNING and just as Satan TEMPTS US in order to DESTROY US.

So too God TESTS & TRIES US in order to PROVE US & BUILD US UP – to make us, yes, more FRUITFUL.

Well, let us pray that God will surely line up the tests we need to make us into the shape He wants for us and for our fruitfulness.

In Jesus Name - AMEN