

**How Does the Lord Respond
When We Do Stupid Things?**
~Isaiah 38-39

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Sometimes people do stupid things – like spending way too much time on something that doesn't really matter. A blogger named Hunter Hobbs decided find out the size of an excel spreadsheet. Excel is a spread sheet program produced by Microsoft that many of you probably use at work or in school. Hunter decided to scroll down to the end of an Excel sheet to learn its size. It took him 9 hours to find out that an Excel spreadsheet is not endless. But he discovered that it has 1,048,576 rows. He discovered this not with keyboard short cuts or other cheats. He just held down the arrow key for 9 hours. "That's a priceless piece of knowledge for which he should go into the history books."¹

Then there was a guy named Mazen Kourouche. The iPhone X was coming out, so he spent 10 days camping in a tent outside an Apple store to ensure he was first in line to get the phone. But then Apple had to delay the delivery. So the day before the release, stock would not arrive for another 50 days. Mazen considered camping out for the full duration but decided 10 days was long enough. So he went home.

Then there's Jack McNee. He wanted to break the Guinness World Record for longest video game session. He succeeded. He played for 36 straight hours. But he did need some help. Friends and volunteers fed him pizza and other food. He had just a few quick bathroom breaks. This is a picture of him during the marathon. Girls doesn't he make for an attractive looking catch?

They say a picture is worth a thousand words. This guy thought he would rest while sawing. So he sat down, put his wood pieces over his knees and applied the circular saw to the wood. Nothing could go wrong with that. Or lastly, here's a man doing some roof work. Instead of wasting precious time building a scaffold or platform to work on the roof. He decided to hook one ladder to a peg on a wall. Then he balanced another ladder on the first ladder so he could get up to the roof. What could possibly go wrong with that? Some people do stupid things.

But lest we think we would never do that, I suspect all of us have done some stupid things at one time or another. Some stupid things are quite serious. Maybe we've been warned at work to not continue irritating another employee. But we do it anyway just to taunt them and now we've been called into a meeting with the big boss. Or we know it's good to get to church regularly to connect with people. But we get in the habit of going only when it's convenient. Before we

¹ <https://www.actitime.com/fun/time-spent-on-stupid-things/>

know it, we hardly go to church. This leads to hardly continuing in the faith. Or neglecting to invest quality with our spouse and eventually a wide gulf exists between us.

We all do stupid things. So what do we do after we've done something stupid? We're likely embarrassed. So we try to solve the situation ourselves before anyone else finds out about it. If we can't fix it or figure it out, we might turn to others for help. Yet even this is tough. Some people might condemn us. Some mock us. Some might even abandon us. Then there's God. How does He respond when we do stupid things?

Well today we get to look in on how He responded to someone who did some stupid things. As we look at God's response, I pray we will learn a couple of key points to give perspective and help us move forward from stupid actions or decisions. We will see how God continued to care for His people through the tense times of Isaiah's ministry. We'll start today in Isaiah 38:1-8. (It's on Page 512 in the bottom right corner of the pew Bibles).

Isaiah 38 (ESV)

38 In those days Hezekiah became sick and was at the point of death. And Isaiah the prophet the son of Amoz came to him, and said to him, "Thus says the LORD: Set your house in order, for you shall die, you shall not recover." ² Then Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed to the LORD, ³ and said, "Please, O LORD, remember how I have walked before you in faithfulness and with a whole heart, and have done what is good in your sight." And Hezekiah wept bitterly.

⁴ Then the word of the LORD came to Isaiah: ⁵ "Go and say to Hezekiah, Thus says the LORD, the God of David your father: I have heard your prayer; I have seen your tears. Behold, I will add fifteen years to your life. ⁶ I will deliver you and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria, and will defend this city.

⁷ "This shall be the sign to you from the LORD, that the LORD will do this thing that he has promised: ⁸ Behold, I will make the shadow cast by the declining sun on the dial of Ahaz turn back ten steps." So the sun turned back on the dial the ten steps by which it had declined.

Sickness strikes King Hezekiah of Judah. We met him last week in Isaiah 36 and 37. He led the nation to resist the Assyrian demand to surrender Jerusalem. Through Isaiah's encouragement and continual prayer, Hezekiah saw the Lord deliver Jerusalem from the Assyrians. Hezekiah demonstrated faith through that time. He also put his faith into action. He ordered the tear down of high places of worship in towns throughout the country. People used them to worship false gods. Hezekiah called them back to worship the Lord and come to the temple at Jerusalem. He also made other wise decisions.

But now he's seriously ill. God inspires the prophet Isaiah to deliver a message to Hezekiah. "Thus says the Lord: Set your house in order, for you shall die, you shall not recover." This would be tough news for anyone to receive. Yet

the Lord sends this message to ensure Hezekiah prepares for succession following his death. Since kings had so many sons with different wives, they needed to choose who would succeed them as king. Then they arranged things so the chosen son would have a clearer path to power.

Yet Hezekiah is relatively young. 2 Kings 18:2 tells us that he was 25 years when he became king and he reigned a total of 29 years. That 29 included the 15 years God is about to grant him. So Hezekiah was **39** when he gets this news that he's about to die. Even for ancient times, this was somewhat young. So Hezekiah responds like many of us would. He's shocked and bewildered. He turns his face to the wall and prays. "Please, O Lord, remember how I have walked before you in faithfulness and with a whole heart, and have done what is good in your sight."

Hmm. Is this a wise prayer, an understandable prayer, a foolish prayer or a mixture of all three? This prayer is the cry of a despairing man. Though he doesn't directly ask to be healed, he points out his faithfulness as reason for the Lord to heal. Then he weeps bitterly. Now I am not saying that it was foolish or stupid for Hezekiah to turn to the Lord in prayer when he hears this devastating news. But the contents of his prayer raises some questions.

Does Hezekiah think he deserves to be healed? Does he think that since he walked in faithfulness, the Lord owed him more time? Is his self-assessment 100% accurate. Yes, he did demonstrate a lot of faithfulness. But he did seem to struggle with pride. Before he turned to the Lord in the Assyrian crisis, 2 Kings 18:14 tells us he rebelled against Assyria. When that didn't work he tried to buy Assyria off. He actually stripped the gold from the temple doors to pay off Assyria. So Hezekiah's life is not as squeaky clean as he tries to portray it here. So Hezekiah's prayer though understandable is a little bit foolish.

How does God respond when we do stupid things? Sometimes He mercifully rescues us. The Lord speaks to Isaiah with a wonderful message of response to Hezekiah's prayer. Verse 5 – "I have heard your prayer and seen your tears. Behold, I will add 15 years to your life." Notice the Lord does not say "I have seen your faithfulness or I note your good deeds." He says, "I have heard your prayer and seen your tears. I will give you 15 years." This is a completely merciful rescue. Hezekiah does not deserve more years. God does not owe him anything. God did not have to answer this way. But he shows great mercy. He also promises to deliver Jerusalem from the threat of the Assyrians. But that already happened in chapter 37. Yes it did which shows that chapter 38-39 happened before 36-37. Those who arranged the

Isaiah scroll were less concerned about chronology and more concerned with getting their message out. We'll explore that further in a moment.

But let's not miss this response of the Lord. Sometimes He mercifully rescues His people out of their foolish choices and even foolish prayers. It happens when he sends angels to protect us even though we've taken foolish risks. It can happen when we ignored warning signs or didn't take necessary precautions. He rescues us when we neglect to pray. He sometimes responds to the prayer of those who have ignored him for months and suddenly call out in a crisis. The Lord sometimes mercifully rescues us from our own foolishness.

Upon his recovery, Hezekiah seems to have learned much. He composes this prayer preserved for us in Isaiah 38:9-22. He first describes what he felt like when he faced the news of his own death. It felt like his life would suddenly end – like a shepherd's tent could be packed up quickly. Or he felt like a weaver who suddenly rolls up the pattern they're working on and cuts the thread from the material. His life hangs in the balance.

But then he celebrates the Lord's deliverance. Look especially at Isaiah 38:17 – "Behold, it was for my welfare that I had great bitterness; but in love you have delivered my life from the pit of destruction, for you have cast all my sins behind your back." Hezekiah's sees the benefit of their moments of bitter weeping. He sees the Lord not only delivering his physical life but somehow delivering him spiritually. It was like the Lord cast or threw Hezekiah's sins behind his back so he wouldn't think about them anymore. So along with deliverance there comes forgiveness.

Now remember a moment ago we learned that Isaiah 38 happened before chapters 36-37. So, why put it after? The compiler had to have a reason. Well do you remember in one of the earlier messages on Isaiah that we came across someone else who was very sick? We met them in the first verses of the book. Isaiah 1:5-6. The Lord speaks to the nation. "Why will you still be struck down? Why will you continue to rebel? The whole head is sick and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even to the head, there is no soundness in it, but bruises and sores and raw wounds; they are not pressed or bound up or softened with oil." This graphically describes the nation's spiritual sickness. For 35 chapters, Isaiah exposes and speaks against this sickness. But the message is about to change in chapter 40. From judgment and the call to repentance, the message will change to comfort, healing and forgiveness. So, the person who arranged the chapters, maybe Isaiah himself, uses Hezekiah's illness and healing portrays what the Lord will do for the nation. Isaiah 1-35 have been an extended commentary on the spiritual sickness of the people. But now the Lord will mercifully deliver

them, just like He did with Hezekiah. This story prepares us for this change. It reminds us how the Lord can sometimes respond with such great mercy to our foolishness. But the story continues; so Hezekiah receives 15 more years of life. What did he do with it? We find out some of this in Isaiah 39.

Isaiah 39 (ESV)

39 At that time Merodach-baladan the son of Baladan, king of Babylon, sent envoys with letters and a present to Hezekiah, for he heard that he had been sick and had recovered. ²And Hezekiah welcomed them gladly. And he showed them his treasure house, the silver, the gold, the spices, the precious oil, his whole armory, all that was found in his storehouses. There was nothing in his house or in all his realm that Hezekiah did not show them. ³Then Isaiah the prophet came to King Hezekiah, and said to him, “What did these men say? And from where did they come to you?” Hezekiah said, “They have come to me from a far country, from Babylon.” ⁴He said, “What have they seen in your house?” Hezekiah answered, “They have seen all that is in my house. There is nothing in my storehouses that I did not show them.”

⁵Then Isaiah said to Hezekiah, “Hear the word of the LORD of hosts: ⁶Behold, the days are coming, when all that is in your house, and that which your fathers have stored up till this day, shall be carried to Babylon. Nothing shall be left, says the LORD. ⁷And some of your own sons, who will come from you, whom you will father, shall be taken away, and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon.” ⁸Then Hezekiah said to Isaiah, “The word of the LORD that you have spoken is good.” For he thought, “There will be peace and security in my days.”

The king of Babylon hears about Hezekiah’s illness and healing. So he sends a delegation all the way from Babylon to Jerusalem. They bring letters and a present. At this point in history, Babylon is not a great power. But it’s starting to rise. It doesn’t like the Assyrian domination. So this King Merodoch-baladan rebels against Assyria. He’s looking for allies. Anyone he can get to join him in this rebellion can help. We are not told specifically of the purpose for the Babylonian mission. But we are told they brought letters. They likely do not only contain “congratulations on your recovery” messages. They could contain an invitation to an alliance.

According to verse 2, Hezekiah welcomes them gladly. He does not consult the Lord or Isaiah for counsel on how he might respond to them. It seems he is flattered by the attention. Then he shows them the nation’s treasures. He also shows them the armory which contains the weapons Jerusalem has ready for war. Perhaps Hezekiah tried to prove that Judah would serve as a worthy ally.

But Hezekiah’s actions raise many red flags. You never revealed your strengths and secrets to a foreign power! Hezekiah lets these envoys see the storehouses and treasures collected by Israel’s kings for several hundred years. Talk about creating an appetite for robbery. He also reveals his military power. The envoys likely took careful notes of Jerusalem’s defenses. Hezekiah may have thought Babylon was too far away to pose any threat. But he should already

have learned from the Assyrians that great empires travel far to expand their territory. Hezekiah's visitors attracts Isaiah's attention.

He comes to Hezekiah and questions him specifically. "What did the men say? Where did they come from? Notice Hezekiah does not tell Isaiah what they said. He only announces "they have come to me from a far country, from Babylon." Isaiah then asks "What have they seen?" Hezekiah reveals he has held nothing back. He showed them everything in the storehouses.

So Isaiah brings another prophecy. "All that is in your house, and that which your fathers have stored up to this day, shall be carried to Babylon." So all that the kings of Jerusalem stored up would be plundered by the Babylonians. On top of that, Isaiah reveals that some of Hezekiah's own descendants will be taken away into exile. The Babylonian will make them into eunuchs to serve the Babylonian court. Well this is a pretty dire prophecy. This is bad news.

So you would hope Hezekiah would take this seriously. You might think he would express remorse over his actions. Or he would even grieve over the coming suffering to his descendants. But what does he say? "The word of the Lord that you have spoken is good." For he thought, "There will be peace and security in my days." Really? Is that the response of someone who's concerned for the next generation and the future of the nation? No! Hezekiah offers up a short sighted and self-centered response.

Yet this whole episode accomplishes two important purposes. First, it shows us another way God responds when His people do foolish things. **Sometimes, God lets our foolishness run its course so we (and others) can learn from it.** He's still with us through it but He lets us taste the consequences. Remember this account started with the Lord informing Hezekiah that he needed to get his home in order – for he would soon die. This included planning for his succession. The Lord gives Hezekiah's plea for 15 more years of life. But what does Hezekiah do with those 15 years? Does he prepare well for succession? Does he work with his chosen heir to train him in wise governance and walking with the Lord?

It doesn't seem like it. Hezekiah wasn't thinking much about the future. He only seemed care about peace and security during his time. But something else happened during those 15 years. Hezekiah and one of his wives had another son. 2 Kings 21:1 tells us he began to rule when he was 12 years old. So he would not have been born if God had not given Hezekiah those extra 15 years. Who was this boy? His name was Manasseh. He had the longest rule of any king in the southern kingdom – 55 years! He led the nation away from the Lord. He completely undid all the spiritual reforms

his father had done. He burned his own sons in pagan worship. Isaiah died under his reign, most likely by execution. A tradition ties Hebrews 11:37 to the death of Isaiah. Talking about the faithful people of God, it says “They were stoned, they were sawn in two.” The tradition ties that phrase to Isaiah’s execution. Hezekiah’s boy lived in such rebellion towards the Lord that he had the Lord’s prophet sawn in two inside a log.

Manasseh’s rule further weakened the nation. So by the end of his time as king, Judah was ripe for picking by the Babylonians. Judah got progressively weaker until she finally fell. Then Isaiah’s prophecy came true. Babylon carried away all Jerusalem’s treasures. Hezekiah didn’t see the consequences of his foolishness. But the people did. And the readers of Isaiah did. They lived it. They were survivors of the Babylonian invasion and exile.

God sometimes lets us live through the consequences of our foolishness. We pay for it and suffer for it. He will work with us. Hopefully we will learn and pass on to others our learning so they don’t repeat our foolishness.

But the compiler of Isaiah accomplishes something else through this unflattering picture of Hezekiah. It weakens our confidence in human kings! Hezekiah was a very good king compared to most of the other kings of Judah. Yet even he had some character flaws and made critical errors. So if even a good king does stupid things, we are left searching for someone else to ultimately deliver us. Starting in chapter 42, Isaiah will introduce us to someone who will be unlike any other who came before – the Servant of the Lord.

He will do a remarkable work that no other king could accomplish. Remember the nation’s sickness described back in chapter 1:5-6? Remember Hezekiah’s sickness and the Lord’s merciful deliverance. Well listen to what this servant will do. Isaiah 53:5 - “But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and by His wounds we are healed.” So through this Servant’s physical suffering, he will cure the spiritual sickness that afflicts us. This Servant will turn out to be Jesus Christ. To Him we must be true.

So we’ve seen how God responds to our foolishness. Sometimes he mercifully rescues us. Sometimes he lets things run their course so we and others can learn from it. But, we still have Jesus. So, after we’ve done something stupid, what must we do? **We must receive God’s rescue and learn to live by His wisdom.**

If you have never received God’s initial rescue, now is the time for your salvation. The Lord may have revealed to you today that you suffer from spiritual sickness. That sickness is caused by sin. Yet He has provided the cure for sin and separation from Himself through Jesus and the cross. He mercifully offers deliverance to anyone who would receive it.

But he won't force it on anyone. You must receive it. If you sense God's call on your life today, I want to invite you to put your trust in Christ. Put the trust of your life onto Him and what He has done.

Once we've received God's initial rescue, we need to learn and walk in His wisdom. The more we learn His wisdom, the less stupid stuff we'll do. Let's come now to our rescuing and wise God in prayer.