

of his statesmanship, the length and unbroken assurance of his ministry, the almost unaided service which he rendered to Judah at the greatest crisis of her history, the purity and grandeur of his style, and the great influence he exerted on subsequent prophecy.

Thus saith Jehovah—The prophet's authority was not his own. It was as the accredited messenger and representative of God that he was respected and obeyed if at all.

Set thy house in order—Literally, "Give commandment to thy house." The parting command of a man about to die was considered sacred and binding. Compare Jacob's charge to Joseph (Gen. 49, 29-33). It was more than a last wish, and was rather of the nature of making a will, as it related oftentimes to the disposition of lands and of property, and in the case of kings of the royal scepter as well.

2. Turned his face to the wall—In order to be alone with God in this hour of anguish. It is probable that Hezekiah was at this time childless (his son Manasseh was born later), in which case his death at this time might have meant the extinction of his house and possibly of the house of David also.

3. Remember . . . how I have walked—Words of bold confidence on the part of Hezekiah. Long life was considered a mark of God's approval, and compared with his immediate predecessors Hezekiah's administration certainly did seem to merit this mark of approval. Jehovah does not dispute the claim, but grants the request.

4. Then came the word of Jehovah to Isaiah—The answer to the prayer was immediate, as shown in the account in 2 Kings 20, 4, which explains that it was "before Isaiah was

gone out into the middle court" that he received word to return with this glad message.

5. David thy father—The terms "father" and "son" were more loosely used among the Hebrews than they are at present among us. It is here used in the sense of "ancestor."

Fifteen years—According to 2 Kings 18, 2 Hezekiah became king at the age of twenty-five, and reigned in all twenty-nine years; hence he must at this time have been thirty-nine years old and in the fifteenth year of his reign.

6. I will deliver thee and this city—This verse seems to point to the fact that the siege of the city had not yet taken place. Doubtless, however, Sennacherib's invasion was at this time anticipated and greatly feared.

7, 8. The shadow on the steps . . . dial of Ahaz—We are to think of a pyramid of steps on the top of which stood a short pillar or obelisk, so constructed that when the sun rose in the morning the shadow of the pillar just covered the lowest step on the western side of the pyramid. As the sun rose in the eastern sky the shadow shortened, climbing step by step to the foot of the obelisk at the top of the pyramid. After noon, as the sun descended toward the west the shadow gradually descended on the opposite or eastern side of the pyramid. Thus the position of the shadow on the steps of the pyramid indicated quite accurately the time of the day. Clocks and watches were at this time unknown. The retreating shadow miraculously lengthening the day was a pledge, as some have thought, symbolic of the postponement of that "night in which no man can work" (death), which had so nearly overtaken the king.

The Lesson Exposition

A KING'S WEAKNESS

Hezekiah appears at his strongest and his weakest in his prayers. In the prayer which he offered when besieged and insulted by Sennacherib, king of Assyria, he reached the climax of his life (Isa. 37, 14-20). Through that extreme ordeal he bore himself altogether as a king and as a man who trusted God. It was an act of a noble spiritual drama when he took Sennacherib's arrogant and boastful letter and "spread it before the Lord" and appealed to him for the deliverance of his people and the vindication of the divine honor. As we read it we feel the quickening and uplift which always come to us when a brave, true man measures up in his deeds and his words to the demands of a great crisis. We are made aware of God when a man fronts great danger in a spirit like that. But in the present lesson he disappoints us. Not that he acts wickedly, but

that he acts weakly. We wish that when the announcement of his approaching death came to him he had borne himself with dignity and calmness. We do not respect a whimpering man, much less a whimpering king, even in extreme sickness and in the presence of death.

EXTENUATING CIRCUMSTANCES

Something can be said for Hezekiah, however. First of all, he was in great physical weakness through sickness and suffering. His disease seems to have been a carbuncle (Isa. 38, 21), and that is a malady that frequently develops in a condition of already depleted vitality, and its searching and ceaseless pain wears out the nervous force and saps the vigor of the mind. It was in that condition, when sickness and suffering had unmanned his resolution, that the prophet came to him with the announcement that he must die. If in full vigor of health

But Hezekiah's personal view, but of the world ushered in. was better than his view showed chosen people in that early a is in the Old there, except tions of statem tion. It is im Testament con man, and of t require as thei