

ning of his reign that Hezekiah had thrown off the yoke of political vassalage to Assyria; but he was compelled almost immediately to accept the yoke again, because the moral spirit was not yet sufficiently restored to stand the test of a definite resistance. But now in the fourteenth year of his reign he had a regenerated nation back of him, whose spirit was like that of early Israel that knew and trusted God. Such a king and such a people could dare make a stand against an invader who came insolently blaspheming their God; and such a king and such a people were worth delivering. A moral condition had been created that made deliverance possible because it made deliverance worth while.

ANOTHER THOUGH UNCROWNED KING

Back of and through the events of the history we are here studying we must not lose sight of one whose presence and personality were perhaps the chief moral force that saved the nation. That potent personality was Isaiah the prophet. Isaiah was God's minister resident and ambassador extraordinary at the court of Judah's kings. He was a princely prophet, belonging to the highest social order, cultured, with a statesman's vision looking out on all the great national and international events that were taking place, but viewing them from a prophet's outlook and seeing their spiritual meaning. He had foreseen the doom that had fallen on Samaria, and he had stood among the nobles of Judah and in the presence of her kings preaching righteousness and unflinching trust in Jehovah, protesting and warning against all foreign alliances, his constant word being, "For God is with us" (Isa. 8, 10). He had withstood the policy of King Ahaz, father of Hezekiah, but in vain. But with Hezekiah he held a place of highest confidence and influence, and there can be no doubt that Isaiah was the inspiring source of the king's reforms and of his confident faith and courage in the crisis of the Assyrian invasion. In the soul-struggle through which the king passed Isaiah joined with him in his prayer to God for deliverance (32, 20). Students of the lesson should not fail to read the article in this issue by Professor Eischen on Isaiah.

HEATHEN VAUNTINGS

The messengers whom Sennacherib sent to Jerusalem to dismay the people and dissuade them from resistance spoke as the servants of a heathen king who had gained many victories might have been expected to speak. They knew that Hezekiah was encouraging and strengthening the people by assuring them that Jehovah would defend them. The Assyrians scoffed at this. They were the conquerors of many gods already. Who was this God of the Jews more than the gods of other peoples, that he could deliver his followers out of the hand

of the conquering king? They thought of Jehovah as simply another little god of a province, who was a mere name and without power. So they had found the gods of other peoples to be, and so they believed in this case. They did not understand. They were proud and boastful in their confidence in their material superiority and resources. If their thought of the God of Judah had been correct, their boasting would not have been in vain. They left God out of the account, but that did not eliminate him from the situation. God does not leave men and nations out of his account because they have left him out of their reckonings. In general, vaunting oneself against God, whether in direct words as those Assyrians did, or in a spirit of worldly self-confidence that fears no divine interference, is both foolish and wicked. How very little of God's power is required to humble human pride even when connected with the greatest human strength! A touch, and the overthrow is complete.

A GREAT PRAYER AND ITS ANSWER

"And for this cause Hezekiah the king, and the prophet Isaiah the son of Amoz, prayed and cried to heaven" (verse 20). The prayer of Isaiah is not recorded, but that of the king is preserved (2 Kings 19, 15-19). The whole chapter of which this prayer is a part should be studied, and the prayer itself should be read before every class. We are told in this fuller account in 2 Kings that the king of Assyria, in addition to the taunts of his messengers, sent to Hezekiah a boastful and blasphemous letter. Hezekiah took that letter into the house of the Lord and, spreading it out before him, made his appeal to God to deliver his people, not merely for their sake but for the honor of his own name. Read the prayer and read the great and instant answer that was given through Isaiah the prophet. The situation presented is one of the most dramatic in Scripture history—a city threatened by an overwhelming army; messages of boasting and threatening delivered from the insolent foe; the people in doubt and fear; a king with a letter from his enemy spread out before him appealing to the challenged and insulted God; and a prophet through whom God was sending answer to the prayers of the king! It was a great occasion for prayer, and the prayer rose to the level of the occasion. And this, and other examples of similarly great occasions associated with great prayers, such as Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the temple, and Daniel's prayer for his captive people, show how natural prayer is in connection with the crises of life, both for the individual and society. When a great hour in a nation's life arrives prayer is almost irresistible. People forget to pray in ordinary times, because they do not strongly feel the need of God; but a crisis compels them to pray.

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