

# CHAPTER 20

In this chapter we have,

- I. Hezekiah's sickness, and his recovery from that, in answer to prayer, in performance of a promise, in the use of means, and confirmed with a sign (v. 1-11).
- II. Hezekiah's sin, and his recovery from that (v. 12-19). In both of these, Isaiah was God's messenger to him.
- III. The conclusion of his reign (v. 20, 21).

## ~~<20>~~ 2 KINGS 20:1-11

### HEZEKIAH'S SICKNESS AND RECOVERY

The historian, having shown us blaspheming Sennacherib destroyed in the midst of the prospects of life, here shows us praying Hezekiah delivered in the midst of the prospects of death — the days of the former shortened, of the latter prolonged.

I. Here is Hezekiah's sickness. *In those days*, that is, in the same year in which the king of Assyria besieged Jerusalem; for he reigning *reigned?* in all twenty-nine years, and surviving this fifteen years, this must be in his fourteenth year, and so was that, ~~<20>~~ 2 Kings 18:13. Some think it was at the time that the Assyrian army was besieging the city or preparing for it, because God promises (v. 6): *I will defend the city*, which promise was afterwards repeated, when the danger came to be most imminent, ~~<20>~~ 2 Kings 19:34. Others think it was soon after the defeat of Sennacherib; and then it shows us the uncertainty of all our comforts in this world. Hezekiah, in the midst of his triumphs in the favour of God, and over the forces of his enemies, is seized with sickness, and under the arrest of death. We must therefore always rejoice with trembling. It should seem he was sick of the plague, for we read of the boil or plague-sore, v. 7. The same disease which was killing to the Assyrians was trying to him; God took it from him, and put it upon his enemies. Neither greatness nor goodness can exempt us from sickness, from sore and mortal sicknesses. Hezekiah, lately favoured of heaven above most men, yet is sick unto death — in the midst

of his days (under forty) and yet sick and dying; and perhaps he was the more apprehensive of its being fatal to him because his father died when he was about his age, two or three years younger. "In the midst of life we are in death."

**II.** Warning brought him to prepare for death. It is brought by Isaiah, who had been twice, as stated in the former chapter, a messenger of good tidings to him. We cannot expect to receive from God's prophets any other than what they have received from the Lord, and we must welcome that, be it pleasing or unpleasing. The prophet tells him,

- 1.** That his disease is mortal, and, if he be not recovered by a miracle of mercy, will certainly be fatal: *Thou shalt die, and not live.*
- 2.** That therefore he must, with all speed, get ready for death: *Set thy house in order.* This we should feel highly concerned to do when we are in health, but are most loudly called to do when we come to be sick. Set the heart in order by renewed acts of repentance, and faith, and resignation to God, with cheerful farewells to this world and welcomes to another; and, if not done before (which is the best and wisest course), set the house in order, make thy will, settle thy estate, put thy affairs in the best posture thou canst, for the ease of those that shall come after thee. Isaiah speaks not to Hezekiah of his *kingdom*, only of his *house*. David, being a prophet, had authority to appoint who should reign after him, but other kings did not pretend to bequeath their crowns as part of their goods and chattels.

**III.** His prayer hereupon: *He prayed unto the Lord, v. 2.* Is any sick? Let him be prayed for, let him be prayed with, and let him pray. Hezekiah had found, as recorded in the foregoing chapter, that it was not in vain to wait upon God, but that the prayers of faith bring in answers of peace; therefore will he *call upon God as long as he lives*. Happy experiences of the prevalency of prayer are engagements and encouragements to continue instant in prayer. He had now received the sentence of death within himself, and, if it was reversible, it must be reversed by prayer. When God purposes mercy he will, *for this, be enquired of,* <sup><am></sup>Ezekiel 36:37. We have not if we ask not, or ask amiss. If the sentence was irreversible, yet prayer is one of the best preparations for death, because by it we fetch in strength and grace from God to enable us to finish well. Observe,

- 1.** The circumstances of this prayer.

(1.) He *turned his face to the wall*, probably as he lay in his bed. This he did perhaps for privacy; he could not retire to his closet as he used to do, but he retired as well as he could, turned from the company that were about him, to converse with God. When we cannot be so private as we would be in our devotions, nor perform them with the usual outward expressions of reverence and solemnity, yet we must not therefore omit them, but compose ourselves to them as well as we can. Or, as some think, he turned his face towards the temple, to show how willingly he would have gone up thither, to pray this prayer (as he did, ~~2Kings~~ 2 Kings 19:1, 14), if he had been able, and remembering what encouragements were given to all the prayers that should be made in or towards that house. Christ is our temple; to him we must have an eye in all our prayers, for no man, no service, *comes to the Father but by him*.

(2.) He *wept sorely*. Some gather from this that he was unwilling to die. It is in the nature of man to have some dread of the separation of soul and body, and it was not strange if the Old-Testament saints, to whom another world was but darkly revealed, were not so willing to leave this as Paul and other New-Testament saints were. There was also something peculiar in Hezekiah's case: he was now in the midst of his usefulness, had begun a good work of reformation, which he feared would, through the corruption of the people, fall to the ground, if he should die. If this was before the defeat of the Assyrian army, as some think, he might therefore be loth to die, because his kingdom was in imminent danger of being ruined. However, it does not appear that he had now any son: Manasseh, that succeeded him, was not born till three years after; and, if he should die childless, both the peace of his kingdom and the promise to David would be in danger. But perhaps these were only tears of importunity, and expressions of a lively affection in prayer. Jacob wept and made supplication; and our blessed Saviour, though most willing to die, yet offered up strong cries, with tears, to him whom he knew to be *able to save him*, ~~Hebrews~~ Hebrews 5:7. Let Hezekiah's prayer interpret his tears, and in *that* we find nothing that intimates him to have been under any of that fear of death which has either bondage or torment.

2. The prayer itself: "*Remember now, O Lord! how I have walked before thee in truth; and either spare me to live, that I may continue thus to walk, if, if my work be done, receive me to that glory which thou hast prepared for those that have thus walked.*" Observe here,

(1.) The description of Hezekiah's piety. He had had his conversation in the world with right intentions (“I have walked before thee, as under thy eye and with an eye ever towards thee”), from a right principle (“*in truth, and with an upright heart*”), and by a right rule — “*I have done that which is good in thy sight.*”

(2.) The comfort he now had in reflecting upon it; it made his sick-bed easy. Note, The testimony of conscience for us that we have walked with God in our integrity will be much our support and rejoicing when we come to look death in the face, <small>¶112</small> 2 Corinthians 1:12.

(3.) The humble mention he makes of it to God. *Lord, remember it now;* not as if God needed to be put in mind of any thing by us (he is greater than our hearts, and knows all things), or as if the reward were of debt, and might be demanded as due (it is Christ's righteousness only that is the purchase of mercy and grace); but our own sincerity may be pleaded as the condition of the covenant which God has wrought in us: “It is the work of thy own hands. Lord, own it.” Hezekiah does not pray, “Lord, spare me,” or, “Lord, take me; God's will be done;” but, *Lord, remember me; whether I live or die, let me be thine.*

**IV.** The answer which God immediately gave to this prayer of Hezekiah. The prophet had got but to the middle court when he was sent back with another message to Hezekiah (v. 4, 5), to tell him that he should recover; not that there is with God yea and nay, or that he ever says and unsays; but upon Hezekiah's prayer, which he foresaw and which his Spirit inclined him to, God did that for him which otherwise he would not have done. God here calls Hezekiah *the captain of his people*, to intimate that he would relieve him for his people's sake, because, in this time of war, they could ill spare such a captain: he calls himself *the God of David*, to intimate that he would relieve him out of a regard to the covenant made with David and the promise that he would always ordain a lamp for him. In this answer,

1. God honours his prayers by the notice he takes of them and the reference he has to them in this message: *I have heard thy prayers, I have seen thy tears.* Prayers that have much life and affection in them are in a special manner pleasing to God.

2. God exceeds his prayers; he only begged that God would remember his integrity, but God here promises

(1.) To restore him from his illness: *I will heal thee*. Diseases are his servants; as they go where he sends them, so they come when he remands them. <sup><108></sup>Matthew 8:8, 9. *I am the Lord that healeth thee*, <sup><153></sup>Exodus 15:26.

(2.) To restore him to such a degree of health that *on the third day he should go up to the house of the Lord*, to return thanks. God knew Hezekiah's heart, how dearly he loved the habitation of God's house and the place where his honour dwelt, and that as soon as he was well he would go to attend on public ordinances; thitherward he turned his face when he was sick, and thitherward he would turn his feet when he was recovered; and therefore, because nothing would please him better, he promises him this, *Let my soul live, and it shall praise thee*. The man whom Christ healed was soon after *found in the temple*, <sup><154></sup>John 5:14.

(3.) To add fifteen years to his life. This would not bring him to be an old man; it would reach but to fifty-four or fifty-five; yet that was longer than he had lately expected to live. His lease was renewed, which he thought was expiring. We have not the instance of any other that was told beforehand just how long he should live; that good man no doubt made a good use of it; but God has wisely kept us at uncertainties, that we may be always ready.

(4.) To deliver Jerusalem from the king of Assyria, v. 6. This was the thing which Hezekiah's heart was upon a much as his own recovery, and therefore the promise of this is here repeated. If this was after the raising of the siege, yet there was cause to fear Sennacherib's rallying again. "No," says God, "*I will defend this city.*"

**V.** The means which were to be used for his recovery, v. 7. Isaiah was his physician. He ordered an outward application, a very cheap and common thing: "*Lay a lump of figs to the boil*, to ripen it and bring it to a head, that the matter of the disease may be discharged that way." This might contribute something to the cure, and yet, considering to what a height the disease had come, and how suddenly it was checked, the cure was no less than miraculous. Note,

**1.** It is our duty, when we are sick, to make use of such means as are proper to help nature, else we do not trust God, but tempt him.

2. Plain and ordinary medicines must not be despised, for many such God has graciously made serviceable to man, in consideration of the poor.
3. What God appoints he will bless and make effectual.

## VI. The sign which was given for the encouragement of his faith.

1. He begged it, not in any distrust of the power or promise of God, or as if he staggered at that, but because he looked upon the things promised to be very great things and worthy to be so confirmed, and because it had been usual with God thus to glorify himself and favour his people; and he remembered how much God was displeased with his father for refusing to ask a sign, <sup><2070></sup>Isaiah 7:10-12. Observe, Hezekiah asked *What is the sign, not that I shall go up to the thrones of judgment or up to the gate, but up to the house of the Lord?* He desired to recover that he might glorify God *in the gates of the daughter of Zion*. It is not worth while to live for any other purpose than to serve God.
2. It was put to his choice whether the sun should go back or go forward; for it was equal to Omnipotence, and it would be the more likely to confirm his faith if he chose that which he thought the more difficult of the two. Perhaps to this that of this prophet may refer (<sup><2351></sup>Isaiah 45:11), *Ask me of things to come concerning my sons, and concerning the work of my hands command you me*. It is supposed that the degrees were half hours, and that it was just noon when the proposal was made, and the question is, “Shall the sun go back to its place at seven in the morning or forward to its place at five in the evening?”
3. He humbly desired the sun might go back ten degrees, because, though either would be a great miracle, yet, it being the natural course of the sun to go forward, its going back would seem more strange, and would be more significant of Hezekiah's *returning to the days of his youth* (<sup><4835></sup>Job 33:25) and the lengthening out of the day of his life. It was accordingly done, upon the prayer of Isaiah (v. 11): *He cried unto the Lord* by special warrant and direction, and God brought the sun back ten degrees, which appeared to Hezekiah (for the sign was intended for him) by the going back of the shadow upon the dial of Ahaz, which, it is likely, he could see through his chamber-window; and the same was observed upon all other dials, even in Babylon, <sup><4423></sup>2 Chronicles 32:31. Whether this retrograde motion of the sun was gradual or *per saltum* — *suddenly* — whether it went back at the same pace that it used to go forward, which would make

the day ten hours longer than usual — or whether it darted back on a sudden, and, after continuing a little while, was restored again to its usual place, so that no change was made in the state of the heavenly bodies (as the learned bishop Patrick thinks) — we are not told; but this work of wonder shows the power of God in heaven as well as on earth, the great notice he takes of prayer, and the great favour he bears to his chosen. The most plausible idolatry of the heathen was theirs that worshipped the sun; yet that was hereby convicted of the most egregious folly and absurdity, for by this it appeared that their god was under the check of the God of Israel. Dr. Lightfoot suggests that the fifteen songs of degrees (Psalm 120, etc.) might perhaps be so called because selected by Hezekiah to be sung to his stringed instruments (<sup><2380></sup>Isaiah 38:20) in remembrance of the degrees on the dial which the sun went back and the fifteen years added to his life; and he observes how much of these psalms is applicable to Jerusalem's distress and deliverance and Hezekiah's sickness and recovery.

## ~~<1212>~~ 2 KINGS 20:12-21

### HEZEKIAH'S PIETY AND DEATH

Here is,

**I.** An embassy sent to Hezekiah by the king of Babylon, to congratulate him on his recovery, v. 12. The kings of Babylon had hitherto been only deputies and tributaries to the kings of Assyria, and Nineveh was the royal city. We find Babylon subject to the king of Assyria, <sup><12724></sup>2 Kings 17:24. But this king of Babylon began to set up for himself, and by degrees things were so changed that Assyria became subject to the kings of Babylon. This king of Babylon sent to compliment Hezekiah, and ingratiate himself with him upon a double account.

**1.** Upon the account of religion. The Babylonians worshipped the sun, and, perceiving what honour their god had done to Hezekiah, in going back for his sake, they thought themselves obliged to do honour to him likewise. It is good having those our friends whom we perceive to be the favourites of heaven.

**2.** Upon the account of civil interest. If the king of Babylon was now mediating a revolt from the king of Assyria, it was policy to get Hezekiah

into his interest, in answer to whose prayers, and for whose protection, heaven had given that fatal blow to the king of Assyria. He found himself obliged to Hezekiah, and his God, for the weakening of the Assyrian forces, and had reason to think he could not have a more powerful and valuable ally than one that had so good an interest in the upper world. He therefore made his court to him with all possible respect by ambassadors, letters, and a present.

**II.** The kind entertainment Hezekiah gave to these ambassadors, v. 13. It was his duty to be civil to them, and receive them with the respect due to ambassadors; but he exceeded, and was courteous to a fault.

**1.** He was too fond of them. He *hearkened unto them*. Though they were idolaters, yet he became intimate with them, was forward to come into a confederacy with the king their master, and granted them all they came for. He was more open and free than he should have been, and stood not so much upon his guard. What reason had he that was in covenant with God so eagerly to catch at an alliance with a heathen prince, or to value himself at all upon his respectful notice? What honour could this embassy add to one whom God had so highly favoured, that he should please himself so much with it?

**2.** He was too fond of showing them his palace, his treasures, and his magazines, that they might see, and might report to their master, what a great king he was, and how well worthy of the honour their master did him. It is not said that he showed them the temple, the book of the law, and the manner of his worship, that he might proselyte them to the true religion, which he had now a fair opportunity of doing; but in compliment to them, lest he should affront them, he waived that, and showed them the rich furniture of his closet, that house of his precious things, the wealth he had heaped up since the king of Assyria had emptied his coffers, his *silver, and gold, and spices*. All the valuable things he had he showed them, either himself or by his officers. And what harm was there in this? What is more commonly, and (as we think) more innocently, done, than to show strangers the riches and rarities of a country — to show our friends our houses and their furniture, our gardens, stables, and libraries? But if we do this in the pride of our hearts, as Hezekiah did, to gain applause from men, and not giving praise to God, it turns into sin to us, as it did to him.



**III.** The examination of Hezekiah concerning this matter, v. 14, 15. Isaiah, who had often been his comforter, is now his reprove. The blessed Spirit is both, <sup><BIB></sup>John 16:7, 8. Ministers must be both, as there is occasion. Isaiah spoke in God's name, and therefore called him to account as one having authority: "Who are these? Whence come they? What is their business? What have they seen?" Hezekiah not only submitted to the examination (did not ask him, "Why should you concern yourself and question me about this affair?"), but made an ingenuous confession: *There is nothing among my treasures that I have not shown them.* Why then did he not bring them to Isaiah, and show him to them who was without doubt the best treasure he had in his dominions, and who by his prayers and prophecies had been instrumental in all those wonders which these ambassadors came to enquire into? I hope Hezekiah had the same value for Isaiah now that he had in his distress; but it would have become him to show it by bringing these ambassadors to him in the first place, which might have prevented the false step he took.

**IV.** The sentence passed upon him for his pride and vanity, and the too great relish he had of the things of the world, after that intimate acquaintance he had so lately been admitted into with divine things. The sentence is (v. 17, 18),

- 1.** That the treasures he was so proud of should hereafter become a prey, and his family should be robbed of them all. It is just with God to take that from us which we make the matter of our pride and in which we put our confidence.
- 2.** That the king of Babylon, with whom he was so fond of an alliance, should be the enemy that should make a prey of them. Not that it was for this sin that that judgment should be brought upon them: the sins of Manasseh, his idolatries and murders, were the cause of that calamity; but it is now foretold to Hezekiah, to convince him of the folly of his pride and of the value he had for the king of Babylon, and to make him ashamed of it. Hezekiah was fond of assisting the king of Babylon to rise, and to reduce the exorbitant power of the kings of Assyria; but he is told that the snake he is cherishing will ere long sting the bosom that cherishes it, and that his royal seed shall become the king of Babylon's slave (which was fulfilled, <sup><BIB></sup>Daniel 1:1, etc.), than which there could not be any thing more mortifying to Hezekiah to think of. Babylon will be the ruin of those that

are fond of Babylon. Wise therefore and happy are those that *come out from her*, ~~6884~~ Revelation 18:4.

**V.** Hezekiah's humble and patient submission to this sentence, v. 19. Observe how he argues himself into this submission.

**1.** He lays it down for a truth that “*good is the word of the Lord*, even this word, though a threatening; for every word of his is so. It is not only just, but good; for, as he does no wrong to any, so he means no hurt to good men. It is good; for he will bring good out of it, and do me good by the foresight of it.” We should believe this concerning every providence, that it is good, is working for good.

**2.** He takes notice of that in this word which was good, that he should not live to see this evil, much less to share in it. He makes the best of the bad: “Is it not good? Yes, certainly it is, and better than I deserve.” Note,

**(1.)** True penitents, when they are under divine rebukes, call them not only just, but good; not only submit to the punishment of their iniquity, but accept of it. So Hezekiah did, and by this it appeared that he was indeed *humbled for the pride of his heart*.

**(2.)** When at any time we are under dark dispensations, or have dark prospects, public or personal, we must take notice of what is *for* us as well as what is *against* us, that we may by thanksgiving honour God, and may in our patience possess our own souls.

**(3.)** As to public affairs, it is good, and we are bound to think it *so, if peace and truth be in our days*. That is,

**[1.]** Whatever else we want, it is good if we have peace and truth, if we have the true religion professed and protected, Bibles and ministers, and enjoy these in peace, not terrified with the alarms of war or persecution.

**[2.]** Whatever trouble may come when we are gone, it is good if all be well in our days. Not that we should be unconcerned for posterity; it is a grief to foresee evils: but we should own that the deferring of judgments is a great favour in general, and to have them deferred so long as what we may die in peace is a particular favour to us, for charity begins at home. We know not how we shall bear the trial, and therefore have reason to think it well if we may but get safely to heaven before it comes.

*Lastly*, Here is the conclusion of Hezekiah's life and story, v. 20, 21. In 2 Chronicles 29-32 much more is recorded of Hezekiah's work of reformation than in this book of Kings; and it seems that in the civil chronicles, not now extant, there were many things recorded of his might and the good offices he did for Jerusalem, particularly his bringing water by pipes into the city. To have water in plenty, without striving for it and without being terrified with the noise of archers in the drawing of it, to have it at hand and convenient for us, is to be reckoned a great mercy; for the want of water would be a great calamity. But here this historian leaves him *asleep with his fathers*, and a son in his throne that proved very untoward; for parents cannot give grace to their children. Wicked Ahaz was the son of a godly father and the father of a godly son; holy Hezekiah was the son of a wicked father and the father of a wicked son. When the land was not reformed, as it should have been, by a good reign, it was plagued and ripened for ruin by a bad one; yet then tried again with a good one, that it might appear how loth God was to cut off his people.