

ISAIAH 38

AN ADDITIONAL FIFTEEN YEARS

In the 14th year of King Hezekiah's reign (713 BC), King Sennacherib of Assyria came against all the fenced cities of Judah, and took them (2 Kings 18:13). The alarm of the people was extreme; and in their distress, Hezekiah paid a tribute to Sennacherib to make him go away – although the Assyrian monarch returned four years later and sent the arrogant Rabshakeh to Jerusalem, which has been described in the previous two chapters. But it was around the time of Sennacherib's *first* invasion that Hezekiah got sick, and his life was extended by 15 years – even though this part of the narrative is recorded *after* the destruction of Sennacherib's army when he invaded Judah the second time. We know that this sickness transpired in the time of the Assyrians' first invasion in Hezekiah's 14th year because he lived for 15 years after it, and his whole reign lasted for 29 years. Perhaps anxiety of mind over the Assyrians' attack brought Hezekiah's sickness on. In any case, the critical moment at which this attack occurred explains the ardent desire which Hezekiah had to keep living. If he were cut off, who would head the army? Who would continue to lead the people in their works of reformation? At this time, he did not even have an heir to his crown, for his son Manasseh was not yet born. Thus his great desire for a prolonged life was connected with his concern for his nation's Godliness and preservation. It was connected with a desire to glorify Jehovah, and to complete the great work which had been begun for him. With a powerful enemy threatening the capital city of the kingdom, and with no son to succeed him to the throne; the prolonging of his life seemed to be of the utmost importance for the well-being of God's people, and for the promotion of His glory.

It is best for our happiness when we can leave the time of our death unre-servedly in the Lord's hands, just like every other event in our life. Of course, the most important thing is for us to make sure that our sins are forgiven, and that we belong to Christ "who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him" (1 Thess. 5:10). If we have believed in Jesus and laid hold of His salvation, then the sting of death is gone! And by enjoying constant communion with Him now, we can say with Paul, "Whether we live, we live unto the Lord, and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's" (Rom. 14:8).

Verses 7 and 8 tell us of the sign by which God accompanied His promise of extended life to Hezekiah. In the Old Testament, when Jehovah made a covenant with man, He would often accompany it with a sign for the help of man's

Outline of the chapter:

- ❖ Hezekiah becomes sick and is told to prepare for death - verse 1
- ❖ He prays to the Lord, Who graciously extends his life, assures him of deliverance from the king of Assyria, and gives him a sign in the sundial - verses 2-8
- ❖ He leaves a written record of thanksgiving to God for his recovery - verses 9-22

faith. And very frequently, the sign had some peculiar suitability to the covenant which it represented. Just as Hezekiah's life seemed about to close, God was pleased to prolong it for 15 years; and as a sign of this covenant, He also prolonged a day beyond its natural term. By some miraculous intervention, He caused the shadow on the sundial to go backwards, making the daylight to last longer. And by seeing God's power in this immediate instance, Hezekiah learned to trust His promises regarding the future. It is a great thing to make the



Lord's past actions a ground of trust for what He will do for us in the future! If we watch His dealings with us in our own life's story, and fully note the instances in which He works for us and helps us; then we shall discover many good reasons for trusting, and for not being afraid of what lies ahead of us. And in this way, the Christian has a great advantage over other men. Life goes on and often becomes more dreary. But herein lies the difference in the Christian's life: his hope in God is continually growing stronger and brighter! His life has been one of faith, and every year has added fresh instances of the way in which God has answered prayer and fulfilled His promises.

How touching and beautiful is the piece of writing which Hezekiah committed to paper after his sickness and recovery! From his words that he wrote down, we may gather that the sweetness and preciousness of the blessing lay in its coming as a token of God's forgiving mercy, and of God's love in hearing his prayer. The manner in which Hezekiah connects the forgiveness of his sins with his recovery from sickness (verse 17) reminds us of our Savior's way of dealing with the paralyzed man in Matthew 9:2-6. First, He gave him the greater blessing, saying, "Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee!" And then He added, "Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house." It is remarkable to see the strong expressions that are used in the Scriptures to assure us how completely God will forgive our sin. Hezekiah says here, "Thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back." Through the mouth of Isaiah, the Lord says, "I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions!" (chapter 44:22) And the prophet Micah said, "Thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea" (Mic. 7:19). Just as when some polluted thing is cast into the sea, and it sinks to the bottom; and the great unpolluted ocean rolls on in all its majesty, and shows no place where the evil thing lies – so also does the Lord's great and wide love in Jesus Christ cover over and swallow up, in its unfathomable depths, all the sins of His redeemed sons and daughters!

Lord, when our bodies are weak, our troubles are heavy, our minds are confused, and we can only weep – thank You for seeing and understanding our tears. Amen.