

ISAIAH 39 A VISIT FROM THE BABYLONIAN AMBASSADORS

An embassy was sent to Hezekiah by King Merodachbaladan of Babylon to congratulate him upon his recovery. The Babylonians worshiped the sun; and it is likely that when they perceived the great honor which their “sun-god” had done to Hezekiah, in going back for his sake, they thought themselves obliged to do honor to him likewise.

Hezekiah entertained these Babylonian ambassadors kindly. It was indeed his duty to be civil to them, and to receive them with the respect due to ambassadors; but he exceeded this, and was courteous to a fault – for although these men were idolaters, he became close friends with them. He was more open and free than he should have been, and stood not so much upon his guard. He was too fond of showing them his palace and his treasures, so that they might see and report to their master what a great king Hezekiah was. It is not said that he showed them the Temple, the Book of the Law, and the manner of his worship of Jehovah, so that he might proselyte them to the true religion – which he had a fair opportunity of doing at that very moment. Instead, he showed them the rich furniture and precious things of his palace. And what harm was there in this? Since it was done in the pride of his heart – to gain applause from men, and not to give praise to God – it was a sin.

The prophet Isaiah pronounced the Lord’s sentence upon Hezekiah for his pride and vanity. The sentence was that the treasures which he was so proud of would hereafter become a prey, and his family would be robbed of them all. And the king of Babylon, whose ambassadors he had become such close friends with, would be the very enemy who would carry them away! It was not necessarily for this particular sin that this judgment would be carried out, for the idolatries and murders of Hezekiah’s son Manasseh were the cause of that calamity; but it was now foretold to the king, in order to convince him of the folly of his pride, and to make him ashamed of it. Let us pray that we may never think highly of ourselves, and let us earnestly beg God to always keep us humble!

Hezekiah humbly and patiently submitted to this sentence. He acknowledged it as a truth that “good is the word of the Lord” – even this word, which was a threatening one. It was not only just, but it was also good; for the Lord would bring good out of it, and He would do Hezekiah himself good by the foresight of it. True penitents – when they are under Divine rebukes – call them not only just, but also good; they not only submit to the punishment of their iniquity, but they also accept it. Hezekiah did so; and by this, it appeared that

Outline of the chapter:

- ❖ Hezekiah exhibits pride and folly in the manner of his reception of the Babylonian ambassadors – verses 1-2
- ❖ Isaiah, in God’s name, passes sentence upon him in this matter – verses 3-7
- ❖ Hezekiah’s penitent and patient submission to the Lord’s sentence – verse 8

he was indeed humbled for the pride of his heart. He also took notice of the fact that he would not live to see this evil, and that there would be peace and truth in his lifetime. In regard to public matters, it is good indeed if peace and truth exist in our days – not that we should be unconcerned for our posterity, for it surely is a grief for us to foresee evils that may befall them; but we should acknowledge that the deferring of such judgments is a great favor and mercy to all people in general.

Let us consider some of the practical lessons that we may learn from this part of Hezekiah's history. It is a hard matter to keep our spirits humble in the midst of great advancements. Hezekiah is a good example of this. He was a wise and righteous man; but when one miracle after another was worked in his favor, he found it hard to keep his heart from being lifted up and drawn into the snare of pride. Even the Apostle Paul himself needed a thorn in the flesh, to keep him from being lifted up because of the great spiritual privileges that were given to him. Whenever we have reason to suspect that this sly and subtle sin of pride has insinuated itself into our hearts, and mingled itself with our conversation; let us be ashamed of it! As Hezekiah did here, let us honestly confess this great sin; and let us pray the words of the Psalmist: "Let not the foot of pride come against me!" (Ps. 36:11)

But let us not fail to observe that since the Lord Jesus loves us, He will find some way or another to humble our spirits when they are lifted up above measure. A mortifying message was sent to Hezekiah, so that he might be humbled for the pride of his heart, and convinced of the folly of it; for although God may sometimes allow His people to fall into sin, so that He may prove them (as in the case of Hezekiah here), yet He will not allow them to lie in it forever!

Lord Jesus, we desire You to be our everlasting Friend, for then we will not need to seek for close friendships with the people of this world! We repent of times when we have been guilty of pride, but we thank You that You mercifully rebuke and reprove us – either by the spoken words of a faithful friend or minister, or by Your own written Words in the Scriptures. Deliver us from this self-centered sin, and fill our homes with love for You and for our families, so that they may be a clear witness to the world of Christ and His love! Amen.

