
2KINGS 20: 1 In those days was Hezekiah sick to death. Isaiah the prophet the son of Amoz came to him, and said to him, "Thus says the LORD, 'Set your house in order; for you shall die, and not live.'"

Hezekiah's sickness, and the message of the prophet to him, to prepare for death, 2Kgs 20:1. His distress and prayer to God, 2Kgs 20:2, 2Kgs 20:3. The Lord hears, and promises to add fifteen years to his life, and Isaiah prescribes a means of cure, 2Kgs 20:4-7. Hezekiah seeks a sign; and to assure him of the truth of God's promise, the shadow on the dial of Ahaz goes back ten degrees, 2Kgs 20:8-11. The King of Babylon sends a friendly message to Hezekiah, to congratulate him on his recovery; and to these messengers he ostentatiously shows all his treasures, 2Kgs 20:12, 2Kgs 20:13. Isaiah reproves him, and foretells that the Babylonians will come and take away all those treasures, and take the people into captivity; and degrade the royal family of Judah, 2Kgs 20:14-18. Hezekiah bows to the Divine judgment, 2Kgs 20:19. His acts and death, 2Kgs 20:20, 2Kgs 20:21.

Verse 1

Set thine house in order - It appears from the text that he was smitten with such a disorder as must terminate in death, without the miraculous interposition of God: and he is now commanded to set his house in order, or to give charge concerning his house; to dispose of his affairs, or in other words, to make his will; because his death was at hand. "This sickness," says Jarchi, "took place three days before the defeat of Sennacherib." That it must have been before this defeat, is evident. Hezekiah reigned only twenty-nine years, 2Kgs 18:2. He had reigned fourteen years when the war with Sennacherib began, 2Kgs 18:13, and he reigned fifteen years after this sickness, 2Kgs 20:6; therefore $14+15=29$, the term of his reign. Nothing can be clearer than this, that Hezekiah had reigned fourteen years before this time; and that he did live the fifteen years here promised. That Hezekiah's sickness happened before the destruction of Sennacherib's army, is asserted by the text itself: see 2Kgs 20:6.

2KINGS 20: 2 Then he turned his face to the wall, and prayed to the LORD, saying,

2KINGS 20: 3 "Remember now, LORD, I beg you, how I have walked before you in truth and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in your sight." Hezekiah wept bitterly.

Verse 3

I beseech thee, O Lord - Hezekiah knew that, although the words of Isaiah were delivered to him in an absolute form, yet they were to be conditionally understood, else he could not have prayed to God to reverse a purpose which he knew to be irrevocable. Even this passage is a key to many prophecies and Divine declarations: see Isa 18:1-7 of Jeremiah.

Hezekiah pleads his uprightness and holy conduct in his own behalf. Was it impious to do so? No; but it certainly did not savor much either of humility or of a due sense of his own weakness. If he had a perfect heart, who made it such? - God. If he did good in God's sights who enabled him to do so? - God. Could he therefore plead in his behalf dispositions and actions which he could neither have felt nor practiced but by the power of the grace of God? I trow not. But the times of this ignorance God winked at. The Gospel teaches us a different lesson.

Wept sore - How clouded must his prospects of another world have been! But it is said that, as he saw the nation in danger from the Assyrian army, which was then invading it, and threatened to destroy the religion of the true God, he was greatly affected at the news of his death, as he wished to live to see the enemies of God overthrown. And therefore God promises that he will deliver the city out of the hands of the king of Assyria, at the same time that he promises him a respite of fifteen years, 2Kgs 20:6. His lamentation on this occasion may be seen in Isaiah, Isa 38:9-22.

2KINGS 20: 4 Before Isaiah had gone out into the middle part of the city, the LORD's word came to him, saying,

Verse 4

Into the middle court - הצר hatstser, the court. This is the reading of the Masoretic Keri: העיר haair, "of the city," is the reading of the text, and of most MSS.; but the versions follow the Keri.

2KINGS 20: 5 "Turn back, and tell Hezekiah the prince of my people, 'Thus says the LORD, the God of David your father, "I have heard your prayer. I have seen your tears. Behold, I will heal you. On the third day, you shall go up to the LORD's house.

2KINGS 20: 6 I will add to your days fifteen years. I will deliver you and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria. I will defend this city for my own sake, and for my servant David's sake.'"

Verse 6

I will add unto thy days fifteen years - This is the first and only man who was ever informed of the term of his life. And was this a privilege! Surely no. If Hezekiah was attached to life, as he appears to have been, how must his mind be affected to mark the sinking years! He knew he was to die at the end of fifteen years; and how must he feel at the end of every year, when he saw that so much was cut off from life? He must necessarily feel a thousand deaths in fearing one. I believe there would be nothing wanting to complete the misery of men, except the place of torment, were they informed of the precise time in which their lives must terminate. God, in his abundant mercy, has hidden this from their eyes.

2KINGS 20: 7 Isaiah said, "Take a cake of figs." They took and laid it on the boil, and he recovered.

Verse 7

Take a lump of figs - and laid it on the boil - We cannot exactly say in what Hezekiah's malady consisted. שחין shechin signifies any inflammatory tumour, boil, abscess, etc. The versions translate it sore, wound, and such like. Some think it was a pleurisy; others, that it was the plague; others, the elephantiasis; and others, that it was a quinsey. A poultice of figs might be very proper to mature a boil, or to discuss any obstinate inflammatory swelling. This Pliny remarks, Omnibus quae maturanda ant discutienda sunt imponuntur. But we cannot pronounce on the propriety of the application,

unless we were certain of the nature of the malady. This, however was the natural means which God chose to bless to the recovery of Hezekiah's health; and without this interposition he must have died.

2KINGS 20: 8 Hezekiah said to Isaiah, "What shall be the sign that the LORD will heal me, and that I shall go up to the LORD's house the third day?"

Verse 8

What shall be the sign - He wished to be fully convinced that his cure was to be entirely supernatural; and, in order to this, he seeks one miracle to prove the truth of the other, that nothing might remain equivocal.

2KINGS 20: 9 Isaiah said, "This shall be the sign to you from the LORD, that the LORD will do the thing that he has spoken: shall the shadow go forward ten steps, or go back ten steps?"

2KINGS 20: 10 Hezekiah answered, "It is a light thing for the shadow to go forward ten steps. Nay, but let the shadow return backward ten steps."

2KINGS 20: 11 Isaiah the prophet cried to the LORD; and he brought the shadow ten steps backward, by which it had gone down on the dial of Ahaz.

Verse 11

He brought the shadow ten degrees backward - We cannot suppose that these ten degrees meant ten hours; there were ten divisions of time on this dial: and perhaps it would not be right to suppose that the sun went ten degrees back in the heavens, or that the earth turned back upon its axis from east to west, in a contrary direction to its natural course. But the miracle might be effected by means of refraction, for a ray of light we know can be varied or refracted from a right line by passing through a dense medium; and we know also, by means of the refracting power of the atmosphere, the sun, when near rising and setting, seems to be higher above the horizon than he really is, and, by horizontal refraction, we find that the sun appears above the horizon when he is actually below it, and literally out of sight: therefore, by using dense clouds or vapors, the rays of light in that place might be refracted from their direct course ten, or any other number of degrees; so that the miracle might have been wrought by occasioning this extraordinary refraction, rather than by disturbing the course of the earth, or any other of the celestial bodies.

The dial of Ahaz - See the note on 2Kgs 9:13, and the observations and diagram at the end of this chapter.

2KINGS 20: 12 At that time Berodach Baladan the son of Baladan, king of Babylon, sent letters and a present to Hezekiah; for he had heard that Hezekiah had been sick.

Verse 12

At that time Berodach-baladan - He is called Merodach-Baladan, Isa 39:1, and by the Septuagint, Syriac, and Arabic versions, and by several of Kennicott's and De Rossi's MSS.; and also by the Babylonian and Jerusalem Talmuds. The true reading seems to be Merodach; the מ mem and ב beth might be easily interchanged, and so produce the mistake.

Sent letters and a present - It appears that there was friendship between the king of Babylon and Hezekiah, when the latter and the Assyrians were engaged in a destructive war. The king of Babylon had not only heard of his sickness, but he had heard of the miracle; as we learn from 2Chr 32:31.

2KINGS 20: 13 Hezekiah listened to them, and showed them all the house of his precious things, the silver, and the gold, and the spices, and the precious oil, and the house of his armour, and all that was found in his treasures: there was nothing in his house, nor in all his dominion, that Hezekiah didn't show them.

Verse 13

Hezekiah hearkened unto them - Instead of וַיִּשְׁמַע vaiyishma, he hearkened, וַיִּיֶשְׂמַח vaiyismach, he rejoiced or was glad, is the reading of twelve of Kennicott's and De Rossi's MSS., the parallel place, Isa 39:2, the Septuagint, Syriac, Vulgate, Arabic, some copies of the Targum, and the Babylonian Talmud.

All the house of his precious things - Interpreters are not well agreed about the meaning of the original נִכְתָּהּ nechothoh, which we here translate precious things, and in the margin spicery or jewels. I suppose the last to be meant.

There was nothing in his house - He showed them through a spirit of folly and exultation, all his treasures, and no doubt those in the house of the Lord. And it is said, 2Chr 32:31, that in this business God left him to try him, that he might know all that was in his heart; and this trial proved that in his heart there was little else than pride and folly.

2KINGS 20: 14 Then Isaiah the prophet came to king Hezekiah, and said to him, "What did these men say? From where did they come to you?" Hezekiah said, "They have come from a far country, even from Babylon."

2KINGS 20: 15 He said, "What have they seen in your house?" Hezekiah answered, "They have seen all that is in my house. There is nothing among my treasures that I have not shown them."

2KINGS 20: 16 Isaiah said to Hezekiah, "Hear the LORD's word.

2KINGS 20: 17 'Behold, the days come, that all that is in your house, and that which your fathers have laid up in store to this day, shall be carried to Babylon. Nothing shall be left,' says the LORD.

Verse 17

Behold, the days come - This was fulfilled in the days of the latter Jewish kings, when the Babylonians had led the people away into captivity, and stripped the land, the temple, etc., of all their riches. See Dan 1:1-3.

2KINGS 20: 18 ‘Of your sons who shall issue from you, whom you shall father, shall they take away; and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon.’”

Verse 18

They shall be eunuchs - Perhaps this means no more than that they should become household servants to the kings of Babylon. See the fulfillment, 2Kgs 24:13-15, and Dan 1:1-3.

2KINGS 20: 19 Then Hezekiah said to Isaiah, “the LORD’s word which you have spoken is good.” He said moreover, “Isn’t it so, if peace and truth shall be in my days?”

Verse 19

Good is the word of the Lord - He has spoken right, I have done foolishly. I submit to his judgments.

Is it not good if peace and truth be in my days? - I believe Hezekiah inquires whether there shall be peace and truth in his days. And the question seems to be rather of an interested nature. He does not appear to deplore the calamities that were coming on the land, provided peace and truth might prevail in his days.

2KINGS 20: 20 Now the rest of the acts of Hezekiah, and all his might, and how he made the pool, and the conduit, and brought water into the city, aren’t they written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah?

Verse 20

The rest of the acts of Hezekiah - See the parallel places in Isaiah and in 2 Chronicles. In this latter book, 2Chr 32:24-33, we find several particulars that are not inserted here; especially concerning his pride, the increase of his riches, his storehouses of corn, wine, and oil; his stalls for all manner of beasts; his cities, flocks, and herds, in abundance; and the bringing the upper water course of Gihon to the west side of the city of David, by which he brought a plentiful supply of water into that city, etc., etc., etc.

On the subject of the Babylonian embassy I may say a few words. However we may endeavor to excuse Hezekiah, it is certain that he made an exhibition of his riches and power in a spirit of great vanity; and that this did displease the Lord. It was also ruinous to Judea: when those foreigners had seen such a profusion of wealth, such princely establishments, and such a fruitful land, it was natural for them to conceive the wish that they had such treasures, and from that to covet the very treasures they saw. They made their report to their king and countrymen, and the desire to possess

the Jewish wealth became general; and in consequence of this there is little doubt that the conquest of Jerusalem was projected. History is not barren in such instances: the same kind of cause has produced similar effects. Take two or three notable instances.

When the barbarous Goth and Vandal nations saw the pleasant and fruitful plains and hills of Italy, and the vast treasures of the Roman people, the abundance of the necessaries, conveniences, comforts, and luxuries of life, which met their eyes in every direction; they were never at rest till their swords put them in possession of the whole, and brought the mistress of the world to irretrievable ruin.

Vortigern, a British king, unhappily invited the Saxons, in 445, to assist him against his rebellious subjects: they came, saw the land that it was good, and in the end took possession of it, having driven out, or into the mountains of Wales, all the original Britons.

The Danes, in the ninth century, made some inroads into England, found the land better than their own, and never rested till they established themselves in this country, and, after having ruled it for a considerable time, were at last, with the utmost difficulty, driven out.

These nations had only to see a better land in order to covet it, and their exertions were not wanting in order to possess it.

How far other nations, since those times, have imitated the most foolish and impolitic conduct of the Jewish king, and how far their conduct may have been or may yet be marked with the same consequences, the pages of impartial history have shown and will show: God's ways are all equal, and the judge of all the earth will do right. But we need not wonder, after this, that the Jews fell into the hands of the Babylonians, for this was the political consequence of their own conduct: nor could it be otherwise, the circumstances of both nations considered, unless God, by a miraculous interposition, had saved them; and this it was inconsistent with his justice to do, because they had, in their pride and vanity, offended against him. To be lifted up with pride and vain glory in the possession of any blessings, is the most direct way to lose them; as it induces God, who dispensed them for our benefit, to resume them, because that which was designed for our good, through our own perversity becomes our bane.

1. I have intimated, in the note on 2Kgs 20:11, that the shadow was brought back on the dial of Ahaz by means of refraction. On this subject some farther observations may not be improper.

2. Any person may easily convince himself of the effect of refraction by this simple experiment: Place a vessel on the floor, and put a piece of coin on the bottom, close to that part of the vessel which is farthest off from yourself; then move back till you find that the edge of the vessel next to yourself fairly covers the coin, and that it is now entirely out of sight. Stand exactly in that position, and let a person pour water gently into the vessel, and you will soon find the coin to reappear, and to be entirely in sight when the vessel is full, though neither it nor you have changed your positions in the least.

By the refracting power of the atmosphere we have several minutes more of the solar light each day than we should otherwise have. "The atmosphere refracts the sun's rays so as to bring him in sight every clear day, before he rises in the horizon, and to keep him in view for some minutes after he is really set below it. For at some times of the year we see the sun ten minutes longer above the horizon than he would be if there were no refractions, and above six minutes every day at a mean rate." - Ferguson.

And it is entirely owing to refraction that we have any morning or evening twilight; without this power in the atmosphere, the heavens would be as black as ebony in the absence of the sun; and at his rising we should pass in a moment from the deepest darkness into the brightest light; and at his setting, from the most intense light to the most profound darkness, which in a few days would be sufficient to destroy the visual organs of all the animals in air, earth, or sea.

That the rays of light can be supernaturally refracted, and the sun appear to be where he actually is not, we have a most remarkable instance in Kepler. Some Hollanders, who wintered in Nova Zembla in the year 1596, were surprised to find that after a continual night of three months, the sun began to rise seventeen days sooner than (according to computation deduced from the altitude of the pole, observed to be seventy-six degrees) he should have done; which can only be accounted for by a miracle, or by an extraordinary refraction of the sun's rays passing through the cold dense air in that climate. At that time the sun, as Kepler computes, was almost five degrees below the horizon when he appeared; and consequently the refraction of his rays was about nine times stronger than it is with us.

3. Now this might be all purely natural, though it was extraordinary, and it proves the possibility of what I have conjectured, even on natural principles; but the foretelling of this, and leaving the going back or forward to the choice of the king, and the thing occurring in the place and time when and where it was predicted, shows that it was supernatural and miraculous, though the means were purely natural. Yet in that climate, (Lat. thirty-one degrees fifty minutes north, and Long. thirty-five degrees twenty-five minutes east), where vapors to produce an extraordinary refraction of the solar rays could not be expected, the collecting or producing them heightens and ascertains the miracle. "But why contend that the thing was done by refraction? Could not God as easily have caused the sun, or rather the earth, to turn back, as to have produced this extraordinary and miraculous refraction?" I answer, Yes. But it is much more consistent with the wisdom and perfections of God to perform a work or accomplish an end by simple means, than by those that are complex; and had it been done in the other way, it would have required a miracle to invert and a miracle to restore; and a strong convulsion on the earth's surface to bring it ten degrees suddenly back, and to take it the same suddenly forward. The miracle, according to my supposition, was performed on the atmosphere, and without in the least disturbing even that; whereas, on the other supposition, it could not have been done without suspending or interrupting the laws of the solar system, and this without gaining a hair's breadth in credulity or conviction more by such stupendous interpositions than might be effected by the agency of clouds and vapors. The point to be gained was the bringing back the shadow on the dial ten degrees: this might have been gained by the means I have here described, as well as by the other; and these means being much more simple, were more worthy the Divine choice than those which are more complex, and could not have been used without producing the necessity of working at least double or treble miracles.

4. Before I proceed to the immediate object of inquiry, I shall beg leave to make some observations on the invention and construction of Dials in general.

Sundials must have been of great antiquity, though the earliest we hear of is that of Ahaz; but this certainly was not the first of its kind, though it is the first on record. Ahaz began his reign about four hundred years before Alexander, and about twelve years after the foundation of Rome.

Anaximenes, the Milesian, who flourished about four hundred years before Christ, is said by Pliny to have been the first who made a sundial, the use of which he taught to the Spartans, but others give this honor to Thales, his countryman, who flourished two hundred years before him.

Aristarchus of Samos, who lived before Archimedes, invented a plain horizontal disc, with a gnomon, to distinguish the hours, and had its rim raised all around, to prevent the shadow from extending too far.

Probably all these were rude and evanescent attempts, for it does not appear that the Romans, who borrowed all their knowledge from the Greeks, knew any thing of a sundial before that set up by Papirius Cursor, about four hundred and sixty years after the foundation of Rome; before which time, says Pliny, there was no mention of any account of time but by the rising and setting of the sun. This dial was erected near the temple of Quirinus, but is allowed to have been very inaccurate. About thirty years after, the consul Marcus Valerius Messala brought a dial out of Sicily, which he placed on a pillar near the rostrum; but as it was not made for the latitude of Rome, it did not show the time exactly; however it was the only one they had for a hundred years, when Martius Philippus set up one more exact.

Since those times the science of dialing has been cultivated in most civilized nations, but we have no professed treatise on the subject before the time of the jesuit Clavius, who, in the latter part of the sixteenth century, demonstrated both the theory and practice of dialling; but he did this after the most rigid mathematical principles, so as to render that which was simple in itself exceedingly obscure. Though we have useful and correct works of this kind from Rivard, De Parcieux, Dom. Bedos de Celles, Joseph Blaise Garnier, Gravesande, Emerson, Martin, and Leadbetter; yet something more specific, more simple, and more general, is a desideratum in the science of sciaterics or dialling.

2KINGS 20: 21 Hezekiah slept with his fathers; and Manasseh his son reigned in his place.
