

## The Sun Returned Ten Degrees

Once again we have an embarrassment of riches in this passage. It is like a Russian doll of miracles; miracle within miracle, wonder within wonder. Yet the miracles are only the start. 'The writing of Hezekiah', this confession of the king in his sickness and upon his recovery, is full of spiritual wisdom and the earnest wrestling of a child of God. In facing his own mortality this dying man opened his heart and his mouth to the Saviour whom he loved and bequeathed to the church a blessed testimony of God's grace, faithfulness and mercy.

### **A lesson for all time**

Because the phrase 'in those days' is somewhat imprecise it is not clear exactly when this sickness afflicted Hezekiah, or indeed the order of these events in the context of the four chapters. It may be this illness occurred prior to the Assyrian invasion of Judaea though some think Hezekiah's weakness may have been occasioned by Sennacherib's letter and prior to the slaying of his army. Either way, it is clear God was guiding Hezekiah by the word of Isaiah the prophet.

### **An unexpected death**

Hezekiah's sickness is unto death and Isaiah is sent to inform him to put his affairs in order for by no ordinary means will he recover from this illness. The news throws the king into great distress. He turns his face to the wall and weeps sorely. Here the faith of Hezekiah may be discerned. Not only is news of his imminent death a shock to his mind and emotions it also fills him with perplexity. Hitherto Hezekiah imagined he had time. He had lived obediently according to God's pattern, he had striven to honour the Lord in his kingly role. Scripture encouraged Hezekiah to hope for long life and expect prosperity.

### **Huge implications**

Furthermore, the nation did not have an heir. There was no obvious successor. Hezekiah, it seems, had no son and his untimely death would surely throw the kingdom into disarray. But there was more, Hezekiah knew the covenant promise to David concerning David's heir sitting upon the throne and how the Messiah would emerge from David's line. Like Abraham before him, dying without an heir was utterly confounding to Hezekiah's faith, and drove the king to anguished prayer.

### **The sun goes back**

It was a prayer God heard, indeed, the Lord heard and answered it at once. Before Isaiah got to the middle court the Lord told him to return and tell Hezekiah God would heal him and give him fifteen more years. A sign would confirm God's word as a pledge to both king and people. The Lord chose the sign of the sundial and gave Hezekiah the choice of the shadow moving forward ten steps or back. Forward did not seem abnormal so Hezekiah asked for it go back and we read, 'So the sun returned ten degrees, by which degrees it was gone down'.

### **When it pleased God ...**

This miracle shows the power of God to intervene and alter at His will the ordinary course of nature. It confirms God's sovereignty and omnipotence. It provided a sign so unusual as to settle beyond doubt both the promise of extended years to Hezekiah and more profoundly the promise of spiritual life in accordance with God's covenant promise to David; our endless life in Jesus Christ. The appointed time of Christ's coming was fixed, certain and going to plan. The lives and times of all God's elect are in His hand.

### **A heartfelt song of praise**

Within three days Hezekiah was sufficiently restored to be able to go to the temple to thank and worship God for healing and restoration. He took with him a writing or testimony composed as he lay upon his bed. It is a beautiful song reminiscent of the psalms of David and worthy of reflective meditation by believers in times of sickness and while going through difficult experiences.

### **God's love and our sin**

Hezekiah reminds us the Lord is the source of all life, temporal and eternal. We walk all our days before the Lord and every moment is His to give. Knowing this inspires humility and expels vanity. Hezekiah understood the spiritual

dimension of God's goodness, in love 'thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back'. This encourages you and me who have passed from spiritual death to newness of life also to say, 'I shall go softly all my years', walking step by step, a day at a time, regarding every day as a gift of God's grace and pleasure.

### **An eternal promise**

The extension of Hezekiah's life by fifteen years was not a change of God's purpose. The Lord does not change. The experience came as a lesson for the king and for the Lord's church in every age. Our lives are in the Lord's hand, our days measured and numbered according to His grace and power. Time is God's servant and all nature bows to His will. We who know the love of Christ and trust in His faithfulness for living and dying may rest easy in the goodness and kindness of Him who loved us and gave Himself for us.

Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take;  
The clouds ye so much dread  
Are big with mercy, and shall break  
In blessings on your head.  
His purposes will ripen fast,  
Unfolding every hour;  
The bud may have a bitter taste,  
But sweet will be the flower.

Amen

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