

EXPLANATION

1. Explain why the king of Assyria is at this particular time in history delivering an ultimatum to Hezekiah, king of Judah? (Isa. 36:1ff)
2. Explain why the representatives of Hezekiah asked the Rabshakeh to speak in Aramaic? (Isa. 36:11)
3. Explain how 185,000 Assyrian soldiers were slain in one night. (Isa. 37:36-38)

APPLICATION

(In its context every scripture has one meaning—the author's intended meaning. How may the following be applied in the believer's life?)

1. Are there times when it is best to remain silent in the face of threats by those who oppose God as Hezekiah's representatives were before the threats of the Rabshakeh? Why? What examples of this are there in the N.T.? (Isa. 36:21)
2. When Hezekiah prayed for deliverance from the threats of the Rabshakeh he made the glory of God his primary request. Should we pray that way today? What other O.T. and N.T. examples of this do we have? (Isa. 37:20)
3. Can pagan rulers defy the living God and get away with it? Is God aware of their defiance? What about godless nations today who defy God's sovereignty over the world? (Isa. 37:21-29)

C. PROSTRATION, CHAPTER 38

1. PERPLEXITY

TEXT: 38:1-8

- 1 In those days was Hezekiah sick unto death. And Isaiah the prophet the son of Amoz came to him, and said unto him, Thus saith Jehovah. Set thy house in order; for thou

shalt die, and not live.

2 Then Hezekiah turned his face to the wall, and prayed unto Jehovah,

3 and said, Remember now, O Jehovah, I beseech thee, how I have walked before thee in truth and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in thy sight. And Hezekiah wept sore.

4 Then came the word of Jehovah to Isaiah, saying,

5 Go, and say to Hezekiah, Thus saith Jehovah, the God of David thy father, I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears: behold, I will add unto thy days fifteen years.

6 And I will deliver thee and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria; and I will defend this city.

7 And this shall be the sign unto thee from Jehovah, that Jehovah will do this thing that he hath spoken:

8 behold, I will cause the shadow on the steps, which is gone down on the dial of Ahaz with the sun, to return backward ten steps. So the sun returned ten steps on the dial whereon it was gone down.

QUERIES

- a. Was Hezekiah claiming he had been perfect?
- b. Why did God add fifteen years to Hezekiah's life?
- c. What was the sign to signify?

PARAPHRASE

About nine years earlier in the reign of Hezekiah, he had become deathly ill. Isaiah the prophet and son of Amoz was sent to the king with this message from the Lord: Thus says The Covenant God, Jehovah, You are going to die from this illness, so you had better give your last word of instruction and get things in order for you are about to be succeeded on the throne. When Hezekiah heard these words from Isaiah

he was very upset because he had no son to succeed him and the menace of the Assyrian empire had become critical. The only recourse left to Hezekiah in the face of these impossible circumstances was the Lord, so Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed. He said, O Lord, please remember that I have always tried to live my life according to Thy truth with my whole heart, and I have always tried to do what Thou hast said is good. Overcome with the emotions of this moment Hezekiah began to weep with great sobs. Immediately the word of the Lord came to Isaiah: Go and say to Hezekiah, Thus says The Covenant God, Jehovah, the same God who promised your ancestor David that his throne would abide forever, I have heard your prayer and I have seen your tears. Since you have such true concern for the promise of Thy God through David's throne I will let you live fifteen more years and produce an heir to David's throne. (Isaiah told him to put a poultice of figs on his boil and he would recover). I will also deliver you and Jerusalem from any Assyrian menace. I, Jehovah, will defend this city. (Hezekiah asked what sign he would be given to verify God's promise of the extension of his life and deliverance from the Assyrian menace. Isaiah asked Hezekiah whether he would prefer the shadow of the sun to go immediately forward ten steps on Ahaz' "step-sun-dial" or backward ten steps. Hezekiah replied that the shadow going forward would be easy so he preferred it to go backward. Isaiah prayed to the Lord). So Isaiah said to Hezekiah, This will be the sign to you from Jehovah. He will do what you asked. Jehovah says, I will cause the shadow on the step-sun-dial of Ahaz to go backward ten steps from where it is now. So the sun went backward ten steps on the step-dial from where it was at that time.

COMMENTS

V. REPINING: Hezekiah died in 695 B.C. The phrase "In those days," of verse 1 must refer to a time at least 15 years prior to 695 B.C. or somewhere near 710 B.C. Hezekiah was "sick unto death" at least nine or ten years prior to the

confrontation at Jerusalem recorded in chapters 36-37 (Sennacherib's invasion of Judah in 701 B.C.) Therefore, Isaiah, chapter 38, is chronologically out of order. That is no problem. The historical data of chapter 38 is accurate, and that is what is important. The Hebrews were not as concerned with chronology as they were with the events and their meanings. Matthew's gospel is a prime example of a Hebrew man writing as an eyewitness what he saw accurately, but recording it out of chronological order. The proper order of these chapters in Isaiah might be as follows: 38, 39, 36, 37.

Isaiah came to the king with this message from the Lord: "Order your house, for die you shall, and not live" (literally from the Hebrew). With the Hebrew language, the verb is usually first in the sentence because the action being done or to be done is more important than the actor. The Hebrews were not as egotistical as Westerners. Leupold translates it, "Give your last orders, for you shall die and not recover." Isaiah's message is very blunt. We do not know what the king's sickness was. There were evidently boils associated with it. Lange has suggested the Hebrew word *shehiyn* translated in 38:21 *boil* "stands not only for the plague boil, but also for other burning ulcers, as it occurs in reference to leprosy (Lev. 13:18ff) and other inflammable cutaneous diseases (Ex. 9:9; Deut. 28:27, 35; Job. 2:7)."

Hezekiah turned his face to the wall to pray not that there was any special efficacy in facing the wall but probably as an instinctive reaction to hide his countenance from others standing near. It may be he did it to gain what little privacy he could obtain. Hezekiah appeals to God on the basis of Old Testament standards (see Psa. 15). Hezekiah surely does not claim for himself sinlessness. His claim is that of a life based upon the truth as he knew it from God and a complete (perfect) heart's motivation to do what was good in God's sight. It was a prayer of faith, trusting God to fulfill His will in Hezekiah's life. "Wept sore" would better be translated "wept greatly." The Hebrew *bechiy gadol* might well be translated, as the RSV does, "wept bitterly."

But why did not Hezekiah resign himself to what apparently was God's will—his immediate death? Hezekiah was only 39 or 40 years old when this terminal illness struck him. Manasseh was not to be born for three more years (Mannaseh was 12 years old when Hezekiah died at the age of 54; see II Kings 21:1; II Chron. 33:1). It was contrary to all Hezekiah believed concerning the perpetuation of the dynasty of David (which God had certainly promised) that he should die without a successor to the throne of David! It was also considered by any Jewish male to be a sign of Divine disfavor to be cut off in the midst of one's life without a male child to carry on the family name (Job 15:32; 22:15-16; Psa. 55:23; Prov. 10:27; Eccl. 7:17). As much as anything else, Hezekiah was questioning whether, in view of his godly life, he deserved such an untimely death or not. Death with such suddenness and in the prime of life has a sobering effect—a humbling effect.

V. 4-8 REPRIEVE: While Isaiah was walking "in the middle court" (II Kings 20:4) the word of Jehovah came to him. He was to go back and tell Hezekiah that his prayer was heard. Note, it does not say answered. God answered Hezekiah with His own answer. God hears our prayers and He cares about our difficulties. He is sad that we have to suffer. He is hurt by our disobedience. He is gladdened by our praise and supplications. But, He is not convinced, argued into, worn down by persistence, God's mind is not changed by the perfect logic, massive amount or unending persistence of our prayers. He knows what is best for us and always answers according to His will. He insists that we pray in order that we may put ourselves in the proper attitude of faith, humility and dependence to receive what He wills—whether it be weal or woe. The apostle Paul did not want a thorn in the flesh, and, in fact, prayed three times that it be removed. God's answer was, every time, No! So here, Hezekiah did not change the mind of God, but by his prayer of faith, humility and dependence upon God put himself in the proper condition to be the agent through whom God could continue His work of perpetuating the throne of David. God added to Hezekiah's life 15 years—time to produce

an heir and prepare him for the throne of David. The very fact that Jehovah said, "the God of David thy father," indicates God was answering according to His own purposes and not simply to satisfy Hezekiah's desire for more years of life. And it is not just Hezekiah's life that is to be spared—the city of David and its inhabitants are also to be protected from annihilation. God will continue His program of redemption through Hezekiah and his countrymen in spite of all the threats of the Assyrians.

In II Kings 20:8-11 and Isa. 38:22 we are informed that Hezekiah asked for a sign. To Ahaz God had offered a sign (Isa. 7) but Ahaz did not want a sign for he was depending upon help from Assyria. Hezekiah, realizing the severity of his situation, asks for a sign to strengthen him for the great task of leading his nation to trust Jehovah for deliverance.

The Hebrew word *ma'eloth* may be translated *dials, degrees or steps*, (cf. Ex. 20:26; I Kings 10:19; II Kings 20:9-11). We quote in part a footnote from *Old Testament History*, Smith & Fields, College Press, p. 643: "In the absence of any materials for determining the shape and structure of the . . . instrument . . . the best course is to follow the most strictly natural meaning of the word, and to consider that the dial was really stairs, and that the shadow (perhaps of some column or obelisk on the top) fell on a greater or smaller number of them according as the sun was low or high. The terrace of a palace might easily be thus ornamented. Ahaz's tastes seem to have led him in pursuit of foreign curiosities (II Kings 6:10), and his intimacy with Tiglath-pileser gave him probably an opportunity of procuring from Assyria the pattern of some such structure."

When Hezekiah asked for a sign, Isaiah said, ". . . shall the shadow go forward ten steps, or go back ten steps?" Hezekiah replied that it was easier for the shadow to lengthen than go back, so he asked that the shadow go back ten steps. (II Kings 20:8-11) Isaiah says the *sun* returned ten steps while II Kings 20:11 says the Lord brought the *shadow* back ten steps. The Lord used the sun to produce the moving of the

shadow backward. Whatever the method, whether by refraction of light or by suspending or reversing the laws governing the orbit of the earth around the sun, it was an act performed by the supernatural power of God at work upon the natural world and provided a sign of supernatural verification to Hezekiah.

Alas, Hezekiah was still a man with weaknesses. He was like many men (even the apostle Paul, Rom. 7:13-25) whose intentions are higher than their deeds. After his recovery, Hezekiah "did not make return according to the benefit done to him, for his heart was proud," (II Chron. 32:24-25), when the envoys of Merodachbaladan came (39:1ff). On the other hand, when Hezekiah's ideals and deeds are compared with some of his ungodly predecessors and successors he was, like his ancestor David, "a man after God's own heart." His faith, humility and trust in God saved the nation and preserved a remnant through which redemption came to all men.

Let every reader be here reminded of the uncertainty of this life and the imperative need to "set your house in order." As a poet once wailed, too commonly "at the mercy of a moment are left the vast concerns of an eternal scene." Too often men and women procrastinate setting themselves in order with God until there is no more time or they are incapable. *Now* is the time; *Today* is the day of salvation!

QUIZ

1. When was Hezekiah sick?
2. What is probably the proper chronological order of Isaiah 36-39?
3. What is the meaning, "Set your house in order"?
4. What may have been the nature of the king's illness?
5. Why was Hezekiah upset that he was about to die?
6. For whose sake did God prolong Hezekiah's life?
7. Was Hezekiah always true to God after this?

2. PRAISE

TEXT: 38:9-20

- 9 The writing of Hezekiah king of Judah, when he had been sick, and was recovered of his sickness.
- 10 I said, In the noontide of my days I shall go into the gates of Sheol: I am deprived of the residue of my years.
- 11 I said, I shall not see Jehovah, even Jehovah in the land of the living: I shall behold man no more with the inhabitants of the world.
- 12 My dwelling is removed, and is carried away from me as a shepherd's tent: I have rolled up, like a weaver, my life; he will cut me off from the loom: From day even to night wilt thou make an end of me.
- 13 I quieted myself until morning; as a lion, so he breaketh all my bones: From day even to night wilt thou make an end of me.
- 14 Like a swallow or a crane, so did I chatter; I did moan as a dove; mine eyes fail with looking upward: O Lord, I am oppressed, be thou my surety.
- 15 What shall I say? he hath both spoken unto me, and himself hath done it: I shall go softly all my years because of the bitterness of my soul.
- 16 O Lord, by these things men live; And wholly therein is the life of my spirit: Wherefore recover thou me, and make me to live.
- 17 Behold, it was for my peace that I had great bitterness: But thou hast in love to my soul delivered it from the pit of corruption; For thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back.
- 18 For Sheol cannot praise thee, death cannot celebrate thee: They that go down into the pit cannot hope for thy truth.
- 19 The living, the living, he shall praise thee, as I do this day: The father to the children shall make known thy truth.
- 20 Jehovah is ready to save me: Therefore we will sing my songs with stringed instruments All the days of our life in the house of Jehovah.

QUERIES

- a. Why did Hezekiah feel the need to write?
- b. Was Hezekiah bitter toward the Lord?
- c. Why could there be no hope for God's truth in Sheol?

PARAPHRASE

When Hezekiah had recovered from his deathly illness, he wrote this psalm expressing his thanksgiving to God for his recovery. This is what my thoughts were: Just as my life has reached its zenith, suddenly I must depart this life and enter into the place of disembodied souls—the unknown and unknowing realm of the dead: I have been consigned to this nether-world for the rest of my existence. I was saying, I will never be able to be in the Lord's presence again in this living existence and I will never again enjoy the fellowship of living people. My life is to suddenly disappear from this place like a Bedouin's tent when it is moved from its place; my life is terminated like a rug being woven is suddenly rolled up and cut loose from the loom; as swiftly as the day passes into night, so swiftly is my life to end. After the first shock of my illness I composed myself. But my composure was shattered, like bones are shattered when broken by a lion, by the message of Isaiah that I would die from my illness. How swiftly the Lord brings my life to an end! Delirious with grief, I chattered like a swallow and mourned like a dove; I looked with weary eyes, despairing of help, and cried, O Lord, I am crushed down under this heavy grief, help me!

I am so astounded at my miraculous recovery I do not know what to say! Surely the Lord Himself has done this. I shall live submissively the rest of my days as a result of the distressing experiences I have just come through. O Lord, it is through these disciplinary experiences men live—they are the well-springs of spiritual life. O Lord, give me full recovery and restore me to life again. At first, only grief for my shortened

life possessed me. But I learned a great deal about Thy love, O Lord, and that Thou art in control of my dying and my living. From this great experience I know also, Lord, that thou has pardoned my sins. I am so glad I am alive to praise Thee, O Lord, for when men die and their spirits leave their bodies and go to the place of disembodied spirits, they cannot praise Thee; disembodied spirits cannot join in the joy and celebration of the feasts consecrated to Thee—they cannot know hope in Thy truth. The man still living, yes, only the living, like I am, shall praise Thee. Life is for the experience of the father teaching his son the word of God—there is no joy like that for the dead. I have learned from this experience that I need Thy help always and Thou art ready to give it always. On account of Thy helpfulness, O Lord, my compatriots will join me and we will sing my songs of praise all the rest of our lives, to the accompaniment of stringed instruments in Thy Temple.

COMMENTS

v. 9-14 **TURMOIL:** The first five verses of Hezekiah's psalm record his grief and distress ("bitterness") when first he was told by Isaiah he would die from his illness. The last six verses of the psalm express the king's gratitude for his miraculous healing. The psalm is interesting for its frankness and its pathos. Hezekiah has suffered the most extreme experience a man can suffer—he has faced death in the very prime of his life. It is totally unexpected in the life of a man 39 years of age. Then, almost as completely unexpected, he receives a reprieve from death. This experience reaches into the deepest recesses of a man's soul. Out of this experience Hezekiah wishes to permanently record his testimony of praise.

What distressed Hezekiah most was it appeared he would die at the zenith of his life. His great religious reform was just getting under way. There were political problems and foreign policies that needed his attention. There were great public works around the city of Jerusalem to be accomplished. But

most important, he had no son, no heir to the throne of David. If, in the "noontide" of his days, he should go to Sheol he would suffer the frustration of leaving all this unfulfilled. Sheol, though a few times used to designate the place of punishment after this life, is most often used in the Old Testament to designate simply the place of disembodied spirits of the dead. The KJV rendering "Hell" is not a good translation. Sheol corresponds better to the New Testament word Hades.

The Hebrew word *phukadeti* ("deprived") might better be translated *appointed, ordered, consigned*, and is so translated in the Paraphrase of this section. The idea is that Jehovah has ordered an end to Hezekiah's life on earth.

Hezekiah's concept of Sheol raises the problem as to the Old Testament believer's view of life after death. It is clear that O.T. saints had a very dim and shadowy concept of life after death. Part of the confusion of thought concerning Sheol arises from the invisibility of the soul. The O.T. teaches immortality, but not with the clarity of the N.T., chiefly because God's revelation in Scripture is progressive and gradually increases in clearness. It was not until "the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death" that "life and immortality was brought to *light* through the gospel" (II Tim. 1:10). But there is definitely a doctrine of a future life taught in the Old Testament (see Special Study, *The Future Life*, by R. C. Foster, p. 287).

It is a mark of the godliness of Hezekiah that one of his main concerns in having to depart this life was his concern that he would apparently not be able to do two of the things most dear to him—worship the Lord and join in companionship with his friends. These, of all our human experiences, enrich this life the most.

In verse 12, the grieving king uses figures of speech to describe his feelings which would be graphically arresting to the Palestinian herdsmen and weavers. The desolation and unfulfillment he feels is likened to the desolation of a spot where the tent of a shepherd had once been staked and made home, but has been pulled up and moved away. Abruptly, there

is nothing left! The second figure is his life likened to a piece of cloth or carpet finished on the loom and clipped off without anything to follow. "From day even to night . . ." emphasizes the abruptness of Hezekiah's death. It probably is a proverbial form meaning that in the morning a man wakes up not expecting any great crisis and by evening catastrophe has fallen upon him. It could have reference to how swiftly day passes into night; just as swiftly was the king's life to be over! The phrase is used again in verse 13 showing the intense feeling of the king about the shortness of his life. Evidently, after the first shock of Isaiah's announcement of his imminent death, Hezekiah composed himself temporarily; then the depression came upon him again tearing him to pieces psychologically, like a lion tears a carcass apart. The Hebrew word *shuiythiy* is a form of the word meaning *equal* or *even* and is translated in v. 13 *quieted*. Hezekiah apparently struggled long and hard in his soul until he got himself back on even keel. Then he was in some way reminded of his impending death and he began to "come apart" all over again. He began talking and chattering, like a bird, to himself or anyone else who would listen. Occasionally a long, low moan would interrupt the chattering. He has worn himself out crying unto the Lord and is so weak he can hardly lift his eyes in prayer once more. Yet, the Lord is his only hope. He is *oppressed*. The Hebrew word *'ashak* literally means *extort*, indicating the intense oppression Hezekiah feels. He asks the Lord to be his *'arebeniy* (pledge, surety). In effect he is asking the Lord "to bail him out."

v. 15-20 **THANKSGIVING:** Verse 15 seems to form a new division in the king's hymn of praise. It is as if he says, "What else can I say about this whole experience of mine? After the vexation of my soul and the wonderful deed of the Lord in restoring my life, what else am I to conclude but that the Lord has done it for my good?" It is to Hezekiah's great credit that he learned the way of the Lord from his traumatic confrontation of death. He learned that the way of the Lord was discipline. The Hebrew word *edadeh*, translated *softly*, really means *submissively*. The king is acknowledging that the

stressful experiences he has just gone through have taught him humility. He vows to live the remainder of his life in submission to God's discipline. He has learned through his "valley of the shadow of death" that troubles are oftentimes the doors to hope (see Hosea 1:14-15, *Minor Prophets*, Butler, College Press). Crises and severities are the stuff of which character is formed. Ease and luxury debilitate character. King Hezekiah learned that it was by the tests and trials of men's lives that they "lived." All the great men of God who have contributed anything at all to the salvation of the human race have been purified and refined by their trials. The very wellsprings of purposeful living are trials (II Cor. 1:3-11; James 1:2-4; etc.).

At first, says the king in verse 17, he was distressed for selfish reasons. His major concern in sickness was that his personal comfort had been taken away. But after prayer and the word of Isaiah concerning his recovery, he realized that the real blessing in restoration to physical health was not personal comfort but the confirmation it gave him that he was in right relationship to God and that God had pardoned him from his sin. This is another concept of the Old Testament that, though true in a sense, was qualified in the New Testament. It is true, as the Mosaic law teaches, health and long life will be granted by God to those who keep His commandments and do not sin against them. It is also true that death, disease and ill-health are often the direct result of disobeying the commandments of God. But it is also true that not all disease, ill-health and tribulation are a consequence of the particular sins of a particular person. So that good health does not always mean a person is not a sinner any more than ill-health always means a person is a sinner. Hezekiah was correct in assuming that God's extension of his life showed that God was pleased with Hezekiah's humility and submission to His discipline. God's forgiveness is by grace to all men. Men are obligated to surrender to God's covenant program in order to receive that grace.

The king rejoiced not only in the evidence of forgiveness he

experienced by his extended life, but also in the opportunity to worship God. His concept of Sheol (state of disembodied spirits of men) did not include worshipping God as the N.T. book of Revelation does. Worshipping at the feast days—partaking of God's truth—none of this was for the dead. The Hebrew word *hay hay, the living one, the living one*, emphasizes Hezekiah's joy that he has been granted an extension of life. The phrase, "even as I do this day," makes it intensely personal. His joy at being allowed to live and praise God was nearly overwhelming. The father making known God's truth to his children was another joyful experience Hezekiah hoped would result from his extension of life. He had no son yet, so he is wistfully hoping God will provide that joy for him also.

The Hebrew word *lehoshiy'enyi* is composed of prepositional and infinitive prefixes attached to the verb and probably expresses an aim, tendency, or direction. Thus Leupold translates, "The Lord is *mindful* to deliver me." Because the Lord has made it His purpose to deliver Hezekiah from an untimely death, he is moved to express the deep, heartfelt gratitude of his soul in songs accompanied by stringed instruments. It will not be a "spur-of-the-moment" praise—but deliberate, planned, arranged, scored musical production. Hezekiah's praise will be set to musical composition and lyric in order that others may share with him in praising the Lord. The great Christian hymn writers have left us a heritage of their personal praise in lyric and tune so that we may share in their experiences. Their experiences and expressions of praise are so nearly our own that we can sing their songs as expressions of our hearts to God also. Such personal expressions become monuments and sacrifices offered to the honor of God. Hezekiah was such a man. How sad, how utterly sad, that Judah did not have a man like Hezekiah to succeed him on the throne.

QUIZ

1. Why was Hezekiah so upset about the news of his imminent death?

2. What was Hezekiah's concept of existence after death?
3. What is the difference in Hezekiah's concept of life after death and that of the New Testament?
4. How intense was Hezekiah's reaction to the prediction of his death?
5. What was Hezekiah's eventual attitude toward his traumatic experiences?
6. How did Hezekiah relate his extension of life to his relationship to God?
7. How did Hezekiah say he would express his thanks to God?

3. PRESCRIPTION

TEXT: 38:21-22

- 21 Now Isaiah had said, Let them take a cake of figs, and lay it for a plaster upon the boil, and he shall recover.
- 22 Hezekiah also had said, What is the sign that I shall go up to the house of Jehovah?

QUERIES

- a. What value did the cake of figs have for Hezekiah?

PARAPHRASE

For Isaiah had told Hezekiah's servants, Make an ointment of crushed figs and spread it over the boil, and he will get well again. And then Hezekiah had asked Isaiah, What sign will the Lord give me to prove that He will heal me?

COMMENTS

v. 21 OINTMENT: The Hebrew word *marahk*, translated *plaster*, means literally, *rub, bruise, crush*. Isaiah's instructions evidently were to crush some figs into a soft, fluid ointment that could be rubbed on the boil. If the reader will compare the parallel account of Hezekiah's illness in II Kings 20:1-11 he will find the psalm of thanksgiving omitted. The account in II Kings ends with the medicinal ointment and the omen. Verses 21 and 22 are not out of order here. The psalm of thanksgiving is simply inserted in Isaiah's account and omitted in the Kings account. The Ras Shamra (Ugaritic) literature indicates that figs and their juices were used by the ancients for healing purposes. However, it would seem here the fig ointment was used more as a symbolic agent rather than an actual medicinal cure. Hezekiah's illness was terminal! Hezekiah's healing was miraculous. The fig ointment was commanded of God as a test of Hezekiah's faith. It is the same principle with our "eating the flesh of the Son of man and drinking His blood." The emblems are symbolic, not the actual flesh and blood of the physical body of Jesus. Partaking of the emblems serves as a means of proving our faith. They serve as a test of our obedience. What the *shehkiyn* (boil) was is difficult to know. The word may mean *hot* or *inflamed* or *ulcerated*. It would bring death in Hezekiah's case.

v. 22 OMEN: The Hebrew word *aoth* is translated *sign* and also may be translated *token*, or *type*. One of the great differences between Ahaz, the king who displeased God in his leadership of the nation of Judah, and Hezekiah who pleased God in his leadership, was that Ahaz refused to seek God's sign of divine guidance while Hezekiah sought a sign from God of His divine help. When an abundance of divine signs have been demonstrated it is displeasing to God to seek after more signs (cf. Mt. 12:38-42). It would not honor God for men and women today to seek signs from God. He has given His greatest miraculous sign, once and for all, Jesus Christ, God Incarnate! (cf. Heb. 1:1). Many eyewitnesses have left us a record of God's

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complete and final supernatural revelation—the New Testament. But Hezekiah did not have such an abundance of confirmation. He was not wrong in asking for a sign.

QUIZ

1. What was the nature of the medicinal application made to Hezekiah's boil?
2. Are these two verses out of order?
3. How could fig juice heal a terminal disease?
4. Was Hezekiah correct in asking for a sign?
5. Why would it displease God for men to ask for more signs today?

SPECIAL STUDY

THE FUTURE LIFE

A Study of the Teaching of the Bible concerning the Future Life, with special attention given to the Revelation in the Old Testament.

by

R. C. Foster

We are living in an age in which the belief in the life after death is being widely doubted and denied. This is to be expected in an atheistic age, for the belief in the future life is the necessary corollary of a belief in God. Atheistic groups have seized the government of nations, as in Russia and Germany, and seek to destroy the very remnants of those who still cling to the Bible. Investigations reveal that in our own country at least 40 percent of the young people in our colleges are turning

to atheism under the strong pressure of atheistic professors. Preachers, supposed to be Christian, disavow belief in the future life, although questionnaires show that the percentage of preachers who deny the existence of hell is larger than those who deny entirely the life after death! What more timely topic than to consider "The Teaching of the Bible Concerning the Future Life"?

The Christian is the salt that is to save a dissolute world from utter corruption; he is the light set on the hill to shine out and save the world from despair. Now is the time for Christians everywhere to obey the command of their divine Lord and preach the gospel. The belief in the future life is the very crown of glory which adorns this gospel. To preach the gospel in an age like this requires not merely an intimate mastery of the teaching of the Bible, but a thorough knowledge of the criticisms of the opponents of Christianity, and of the grounds on which they rest.

The universality of the belief in the life after death has always been a convincing argument. Even the most degraded savages have had their conception of the future life. It seems rather strange to hear so many voices of doubt raised in an age so boastful of its intellectualism, its culture and its own infallibility. But reflection upon this leads one to doubt the wisdom and worth of this generation rather than the truth and value of belief in eternal life. The more one studies this present generation and perceives its vaunting egotism, its shallow reasoning, its stupid prejudice and its polluted morals, the more one is inclined to cling to the anchor of hope which has sustained the Christian through the centuries.

VIEW OF THE ATHEIST

Those who question the teaching of the Bible in regard to the future life are divided into various groups. First, there is the outright atheist. Many sermons have been preached on "The Search for an Atheist." The thought of the sermons has been

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that such a person does not exist. It is said that deep down in the heart of the so-called atheist there is still the latent faith in God, smothered, but sure to break into a flame when misfortune or death comes. The speech of Robert Ingersol at the grave of his brother, when he could almost hear the rustle of angels' wings, was often cited. Likewise the dying statement of Voltaire that if the devil had ever had a hand in anything, it had been in his attacks on the Bible. But it is perhaps more than any one can affirm with assurance that every one who has denied the existence of God and the future life has sooner or later recanted. It is better to rest on the declaration of the Bible without qualifications: "The fool has said in his heart there is no God." H. J. Allen, of Kansas, tells of a young Russian guide, a college graduate, who ridiculed him, as he was touring Moscow, because he frankly admitted that he still read and believed the Bible. He finally asked her where she expected to go when she died. She replied, "Into fertilizer."

THE HUMANISTS' AND MODERNISTS' POSITION

The humanists who reduce God to a mere idea seem to be in utter confusion concerning the future life, and the impression most of them make is that they believe in annihilation, although they use a variety of phrases and illustrations and still talk about "eternity" as they do about "God." Modernists who are not so extreme center their attacks on the Old Testament to prove that the future life is not taught there, or at least only in a very vague way, until later books were written. This theory has been so widely disseminated that quite frequently preachers who think that they believe the Bible proclaim that the future life is not taught in the O.T., but only in the N.T. They think they are exalting Christ and the N.T. by so affirming, but the truth is they have merely consciously or unconsciously adopted a modernistic theory without examining its basis or implications. It is the purpose of this essay to examine both the O.T. and the N.T. to determine the general outline

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of teaching concerning the life after death, with special emphasis upon the question as to whether the O.T. actually teaches the future life.

THE MODERNISTS' PRESUPPOSITION

The presupposition which underlies the modernists' denial that the Old Testament teaches the future life is their theory as to the development of the O.T. They deny that it is revealed of God, and affirm it is merely man's gradual discovery of what is therein affirmed. In support of this they dissect various O.T. books, such as the Pentateuch and Isaiah, and whenever they find a statement or teaching which their theory of evolutionary development of the O.T. supposes could not have prevailed until a late period in the thinking of the Jews, they immediately declare this passage is by some later writer, J, E, D, P, or a second Isaiah. A free use of the evolutionary shears enables them to cut up the O.T. and rearrange its contents so as to make a gradual development throughout of the idea of a life after death. Thus they slyly attempt to prove one presupposition by another presupposition, and depend upon their solemn use of big words and scientific terms to prevent the reader from discovering the hoax.

Prof. Kyrsoff Lake, the famous humanist of Harvard, was pressing in his class one day this theory that the O.T. does not teach the future life. A student spoke up and said: "But, Professor Lake, what about the time when the spirit of Samuel returned and talked to Saul before the battle where the latter was slain?" After a moment's hesitation, Prof. Lake responded: "Well, IF that is in the O.T., I will have to admit that it teaches the future life, but have not the critics been able to cut that passage out?"

A MORE MODERATE VIEW

Prof. A. C. Knudson, of Boston University, who is not so extreme in his modernism, has recently published a book

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entitled, *The Religious Teaching of the Old Testament*. He has a chapter on "The Teaching of the Old Testament Concerning the Future Life." He does not attempt to *cut* out the passages that affirm such a belief; he just tries to *rub* them out, to insist that these passages do not really represent the belief of the Jews of the time. At times he resorts to the dissection of books to relegate certain statements to a late period.

The Christian believes the Bible to be inspired of God. The miraculous proof it offers sustains its claim. That the teaching concerning the future should be more clearly and emphatically presented in the New Testament than the O.T. is to be expected, for the new and final revelation is superior to the old, and it was Christ who "brought life and immortality to light." But that the O.T. does not teach the future life is the theory of unbelievers like the Sadducees in the time of Jesus and the modernists of today. Anyone who has become confused upon this topic should read repeatedly the discussion of Jesus as to whether the O.T. teaches the future life in Matt. 22:23-33, and the great review of this problem in the 11th chapter of Hebrews.

HEATHENISM AND THE OLD TESTAMENT

Prof. Knudson quotes several authors on the question as to why the O.T. has so much less to say on the future life than the religions of Egypt, Greece and other nations. Prof. Salmond declares the O.T. to be below the standard of other religions of ancient times, "less tolerable than the Greek, less ethical than the Egyptian, less adequate and certain than the Persian. These had a more special mission than can be claimed for the Hebrew faith, in the preservation and transmission of the truth of a future life." Kant, the German philosopher, held that, because of this lack of emphasis on the future life, the O.T. lacks a genuinely religious character. While his compatriot, Schopenhauer, calls the O.T. on this basis, "The rudest of all religions."

REPLY TO THE ACCUSATION

A sufficient answer to all this unfavorable comparison of the O.T. to the heathen religions of the times is the reminder that it is not how much, but what is said on a subject that counts. Read the endless silly ideas advanced by these pagan religions. Visit the tomb of Tut-ankh-amen, filled with the rations and decorations prepared for the dead king. Is the religion of Israel inferior to Egypt because the O.T. is not filled with instructions about burying food and gold chariots, etc., with the dead, for them to use hereafter? Prof. Knudson claims that ancient Hebrew graves have been unearthed in Palestine that contain such primitive preparations for the future life. But if this be so, it only proves again what the O.T. continually relates that the Jewish people at times deserted the true faith and became contaminated by the false religions about them. Prof. Knudson cannot find any passage in the O.T. which instructs that such physical equipment be provided for the dead. He argues at great length that the Jews generally accepted the crude practices of their pagan neighbors concerning the future life, such as ancestor worship, citing Deut. 26:14; Jer. 16:7; Psa. 106:28; Hos. 9:4; Ezek. 24:17; Lev. 19:28; 21:5; II Sam. 15:30; Ezek. 24:17. A reading of these passages will show the absolute absence of proof; they warn against excess or mourning. Psa. 106:28 condemns Israel for having joined the heathen in the wilderness in "sacrifices of the dead," but such a reference, together with those that warn Israel against the practice of witchcraft in regard to the dead, shows that the teaching of the O.T. plainly recognizes the life after death, and warns the Jews against the false heathen practices concerning it.

The critics who argue that the O.T. does not teach the future life until a very late period, when they had borrowed the idea from their heathen neighbors, are in desperate straits trying to explain the amazing difference between the teaching of the O.T. and that of the surrounding pagan nations. Some suggest that the reason the future life is not emphasized more is the

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“strong sense of solidarity” which held the nation immortal. They say, “The Messianic hope rendered unnecessary the belief in personal immortality.” But this falsifies the facts as to the O.T. teaching and as to the natural and inevitable longings of the human heart. The Messianic hope was one that the individual was to share. Prof. Toy holds that the lack of teaching on the life after death is due to the lack of constructive imagination on the part of the Semites; the Jews knew nothing of drama or metaphysics. In other words, if the Jews could have just seen one or two Greek plays, it might have occurred to them that life after death would be desirable! Another explanation of this difficulty seems to have been overlooked: that it may be caused by a lack of eye-sight on the part of the critics.

EVIDENCE FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT

What evidence does the Old Testament bear that the writers who led and molded the faith of the nation believed in the future life? What evidence that God was revealing to His chosen people in His own way and time the glories of the beyond, drawing them away from the foolish and degrading teaching of the heathen, and leading up to the natural climax of the revelation in Christ?

- (1) Actual cases of resurrection of the dead (I Kgs. 17:22; II Kgs. 4:35; 13:21)
- (2) Actual cases of translation where the individual did not die, but was translated by God. (Gen. 5:22-24; II Kgs. 2:11)

The modernists argue that these cases do not mean that the people would be led by such to believe in a future life. How so, unless we presume the Jews were a nation of imbeciles?

- (3) Actual case of reappearance of Samuel, after his death, to talk with Saul. (I Sam. 28:12-19)
- (4) Definite declarations of belief in future life.

After David's extravagant mourning on the ash heap

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during the illness of his child, as he prayed for forgiveness and for the child's life, his servants feared to report to him the death of his child, and were astounded at the calmness with which he heard the news and ceased his mourning. His statement is a classic for all time: "But now that he is dead, wherefore should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he will not return to me." (II Sam. 12:15-23). David's statement does not mean annihilation, for his whole conduct was that of hope instead of despair. And his repeated declarations voice his faith in the future life.

OVERLOOKING THAT EVIDENCE

Prof. Knudson overlooks the above incident. He quotes four Psalms (16, 17, 49, 73) as teaching vaguely (16, 17) or definitely (49, 73) the future life, but claims they are all of late origin. His theory compels him to hold that no clear statements of the future life were made until about the Maccabean period, when the Jews could have had time to learn this from the Persians. The apostle Peter did not feel compelled to trim the O.T. to fit the theory of evolution, for on the day of Pentecost he made the teaching of the O.T. on the future life one of the central points of argument in his sermon as he quoted David as saying in Psa. 16:8ff.: "Thou wilt not leave my soul unto Hades, Neither shalt thou give thy holy one to see corruption." He declared that David was predicting the resurrection of Jesus.

Just to show that the belief in the future life underlies the whole O.T., and to take a Psalm which nobody denies is written by David, read the famous 23rd Psalm: "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil. . . ." He does not say "into the valley," but "through the valley." Death was not a destination to him, but a thoroughfare. He had the mountain-top vision. He was traveling through the valley and on to the heights of glory beyond. Hear him as he closes: "And I shall dwell in the house of the Lord *for ever.*"

THE RESURRECTION AND JUDGMENT

Many other passages might be quoted, such as Ezek. 37:1-14; Isa. 14:9; 25:8; 26:19; 53:10-12; 66:24; Dan. 12:2. The last passage is particularly interesting: "And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt." Critics hold that this teaches man is immortal; i.e., some will be raised and some annihilated (not raised). But this would mean that man may achieve the resurrection by either pre-eminent righteousness or pre-eminent wickedness! Ewald holds the "many" means all Israelites as contrasted with the heathen; Charles and Knudson hold it means "The pre-eminently good and bad in Israel." But the next verse makes quite clear that all the wise and noble are to be raised to a blessed existence, and it immediately follows that all the wicked shall also be raised, but to everlasting punishment.

THE OLD TESTAMENT ANSWERS DOUBTERS

The fact that a number of O.T. writers argue the question of the future life, and state both the position of doubt and of faith, does not alter the fact of what the O.T. teaches. For the point is not that some verse may be quoted from Job or Ecclesiastes or Psalms which expresses doubt as to the life after death, but the question is: To what conclusion did the author come in the end? It is futile to quote the earlier expressions of doubt in Ecclesiastes. What does he say is his conclusion after he has considered the whole range of human pleasures, doubt and despair? "Man goeth to his everlasting home, and the mourners go about the streets: before the silver cord is loosed, or the golden bowl is broken, or the pitcher is broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern, and the dust returneth to the earth as it was, and the spirit returneth unto God who gave it . . . This is the end of the matter; all hath been heard: Fear God, and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every work into

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judgment, with every hidden thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil" (Eccl. 12:5-14). It is true that Job ponders the side of doubt as he asks, "If a man die, shall he live again?" (Job 14:14). But hear his conclusion: "But as for me, I know that my Redeemer liveth, and at last he shall stand up upon the earth: And after my skin, even this body, is destroyed, then without my flesh shall I see God" (Job 19:25, 26). The same is true of the Psalmist.

WHAT DID JESUS TEACH?

A question of supreme interest is: What did Jesus have to say on the teaching of the Old Testament as to the future life? The skeptics of His day rendered a negative verdict as today. But hear the Son of God as He tore apart the flimsy argument of the Sadducees "Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God" (Matt. 22:29). No better comment could be written across the face of many books on this subject, written by men who claim to be scholars. After answering the puzzle about the seven husbands and one wife, and pausing to press it home that there are angels in heaven even as there is a resurrection, even though the Sadducees denied both, Jesus offered just one passage from the Old Testament to prove that it teaches the future life. And what an extraordinary passage it is! Ye blind leaders of the blind, hear His words! "But as touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living." Not invented by man; not learned in Egypt, Greece or Persia, but "spoken unto you by God." And as if to meet the critics of the 20th century, He does not quote Daniel, Isaiah or the Psalms; He quotes from the words of God to Moses, recorded in Exodus 3:6. No room for late development of ideas! His argument is this: Abraham had been dead many years, also Isaac and Jacob; but God does not say to Moses, "I was the God of Abraham"

(while he was living, but not now), but, "I *am* the God of Abraham"; he is alive now, for a dead person who is no longer in existence can have had a creator, but he cannot have a God. It is as if Jesus said: "Approach the Old Testament where you will, and scratch the surface; you will find the life after death implied, if not stated."

TESTIMONY IN THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS

Like most problems which concern the Old Testament, the question as to its attitude toward the life after death finds a sublime discussion in the Epistle to the Hebrews. One might well write across the magnificent 11th chapter, the title, "The Teaching of the Old Testament Concerning the Future Life." It reviews the first glimmer of hope in Abel's obedient sacrifice; the translation of Enoch; the faith and hope of Abraham. "These all died in faith, not having confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth" (11:13). By its emphatic study of the word "pilgrim" which Abraham used, Hebrews analyzes his faith. It pictures Abraham standing by the grave of Sarah and solemnly affirming that he was a pilgrim (Gen. 23:4). A pilgrim is a traveler with a destination. So with Abraham in his sojourn in Palestine: he dwelt in tents and kept looking for a permanent city. It was not Ur of the Chaldees, for the way was open to return there. "But now they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed of them to be called their God; for he hath prepared for them a city" (11:16). Hebrews pictures Abraham with uplifted knife, about to kill Isaac, in obedience to God's command. How was this possible? Because Abraham believed that death did not end all, but that God would be able to raise Isaac from the dead. What strong faith was this in the future life! The faith of Isaac and Jacob as they died, and the specific command of Joseph "concerning his bones," all are cited. The critics who cite this longing of Joseph to be buried with his fathers as proof that the O.T. leaders counted the geographical location of burial more important than righteous

living, ought to be given the first prize for intellectual confusion. It proves this much, however, that Joseph was looking forward to a blessed life hereafter, or why bother about any command "concerning his bones," that his body should be taken with the Israelites to Palestine? Moses' hope in the "recompense of reward," which was to offset all his sacrifice and suffering for the Lord here on earth, receives great emphasis. Special mention is made of the fact that "women received their dead by a resurrection; others were tortured not accepting their deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection" (Heb. 11:35).

The Old Testament thus was God's message to Israel to clear their minds of the confused and false teaching of pagan nations about the after life, and to prepare the way for His final and complete revelation in the New Testament. The second coming of Jesus, the end of the world, the judgment of men according to the deeds done in the body, the separation of the righteous from the wicked, the blessed life of the redeemed with God forever, the eternal punishment of the wicked—all this has tremendous emphasis in the teaching of Jesus and the whole New Testament. The resurrection of Jesus is the keystone on which all this is builded. It is the very type of our resurrection. It contains a double miracle: not merely the rejoining of the soul and body of Jesus, but the final translation of this earthly body into the heavenly at the time of the ascension.

PAUL'S TEACHING CONCERNING THE RESURRECTION

Of this mystery Paul speaks in I Corinthians, when he seeks to explain the fact that, although the Christian is to expect a resurrection, he is not expected to have in heaven exactly the same body as on earth. People were disturbed at Corinth with the question as to "how are the dead raised? . . . and with what manner of body do they come?" Paul illustrates by the grain of wheat planted in the ground. It is the same grain of wheat and it is not the same grain of wheat which comes forth.

We see different kinds of flesh here: beasts, birds, fish. This should illustrate God's power to give us a heavenly body according to His own will. "This corruptible shall put on incorruption." We shall preserve our identity. We shall be like Him when we see Him as He is. "These that are arrayed in the white robes, who are they and whence came they? . . . These are they that come of the great tribulation, and they washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" (Rev. 7:13, 14). In this blessed hope let us live and die, for death is but the beginning of life, unending and blessed, for those who follow the Son of God.

Addendum: For an excellent expose' of Modern Higher Criticism dealing at length with the Pentateuch, see Dr. John L. Campbell's book, *The Bible Under Fire*. Read especially the first chapter which deals with the Polychrome ("Rainbow") Bible where the critics literally took shears and cut and pasted until they made a Bible which would "prove" their theories of "gradual development."

D. PRESUMPTION, CHAPTER 39

1. PRIDE

TEXT: 39:1-4

- 1 At that time Merodachbaladan the son of Baladan, king of Babylon, sent letters and a present to Hezekiah; for he heard that he had been sick, and was recovered.
- 2 And Hezekiah was glad of them, and showed them the house of his precious things, the silver, and the gold, and the spices, and the precious oil, and all the house of his armor, and all that was found in his treasures: there was nothing in his house, nor in all his dominion, that Hezekiah showed them not.