

HEZEKIAH . - - who asked God to read a letter  
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(ISAIAH 37:14)

The position was desperate, and the defenders of the city trembled with fear. They were brave men, but it had become obvious that the enemy was too strong for them to resist. City after city had fallen before his ceaseless onslaughts, and the legend of his invincibility had spread through the land. Every movement of the heathen horde had been reported to Hezekiah, but vain had been the hope that the tide of evil would recede. Sennacherib, the king of Assyria, had planned the assault on Jerusalem, and when his armies marched toward the city, the worst fears of king Hezekiah were realized.

Hezekiah's Great Distress. . . . A letter sent out

An arrogant heathen captain stood outside Jerusalem's wall, his armour gleaming in the sunlight. His fierce countenance seemed alight with grim purposeful determination as he shouted, "What confidence is this wherein thou trustest . . . I will give thee two thousand horses, if thou be able on thy part to set riders upon them" (Isa. 36 :4, 8). His rumbling laughter echoed around the wall. The mockery and banter of the Assyrian were revealed again when, with chin fiercely jutting forward, he asked, "How then wilt thou turn away the face of one captain of the least of my master's servants?" (v. 9). Silence reigned among the listeners. It was true that many other cities had fallen, and nothing short of a miracle could save Jerusalem. A little while later a letter was delivered to the king of Israel, and as he read its message, fear increased in his soul. "Let not thy God, in whom thou trustest, deceive thee, saying, Jerusalem shall not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria. Behold thou hast heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all lands by destroying them utterly; and shalt thou be delivered?" (37:10, 11). What could he do? And if other people of today seem to be in a similar predicament, the ancient story might offer advice and comfort.

Hezekiah's Great Desires. . . . A letter spread out

"And Hezekiah received the letter from the hand of the messengers, and read it: and Hezekiah went up unto the house of the Lord, and spread it before the Lord. And Hezekiah prayed unto the Lord, saying . - . Incline thine ear, O Lord, and hear; open thine eyes, O Lord, and see: and hear all the words of Sennacherib, which hath sent to reproach the living God" (vv. 15-17). And surely the God who lived above the mercy seat looked down upon the up-turned face of His troubled servant, and at the same time invisible eyes read the words of challenge so clearly set forth upon the parchment. It is a wise thing to share our problems with God. Earlier, the king had sought the help of Isaiah the prophet, and the warmth of brotherly fellowship had cheered his soul. However, in the greater issues of life it is far better to seek direct audience with the Almighty, and not to trust in the solicitations of any human counsellor. The ancient king was a privileged man in being able to approach that altar; yet, all people of this age may know a far greater privilege.

Hezekiah's Great Deliverance . . . A letter blotted out

"Then Isaiah the son of Amoz sent unto Hezekiah,

HEZEKIAH . - - who asked God to read a letter saying, Thus saith the Lord the God of Israel, Whereas thou hast prayed to me against Sennacherib king of Assyria: This is the word which the Lord hath spoken concerning him; The virgin, the daughter of Zion, hath despised thee, and laughed thee to scorn; the daughter of Jerusalem hath shaken her head at thee. . . . I will turn thee back by the way which thou camest. . . . Thou shalt not come into this city, saith the Lord. For I will defend this city to save it for mine own sake, and for my servant David's sake. Then the angel of the Lord went forth, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians a hundred and fourscore and five thousand: and when they arose in the morning, behold, they were all dead corpses" (37 :21-36). Then the songs of praise were heard again in the city, and the letter of an arrogant king was practically blotted out from the memory of the people. Let us never forget that God is the same "from everlasting to everlasting" (Psa. 90 : 2). We can draw near to share our problems with a heavenly Father. The path of prayer leads to the secret place, and, "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty" (Psa 91:1).

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