
a *Grace Notes* course

Old Testament History

by Alfred Edersheim

History 520

Grace Notes

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VII_11 - Hezekiah (Thirteenth) King of Judah
2 Kings 18:7-19; 2 Chronicles 32:1-26; Isaiah 36, 37

Although the beginning of Hezekiah's reign was mainly devoted to the first and most important task of religious reform, other matters of pressing necessity were not overlooked. The same wisdom which marked his restoration of the Temple services also guided his other administration, and the same happy results attended both. In fact, Hezekiah made use of the years of quiet to prepare against the troublous period which he must have felt to be at hand. And in the Book of Kings we have this general notice:

"And Jehovah was with him; in all to which he proceeded he prospered; and he rebelled against the king of Assyria and served him not" (2 Kings 18:7).¹

In truth, the relations between Hezekiah and the mighty world-empire of Assyria furnish the explanation of all the outward events of his reign. Of the first of these, the victory over the Philistines "unto Gaza," and the complete subjugation of their country, "from the tower of the watchmen to the fenced city" (2 Kings 18:8), it is impossible to fix the date. To judge from its position in the text, it seems to have taken place during the reign of Shalmaneser, before the accession of Sargon, by whom Samaria was taken. The apparent ill-success of Shalmaneser before Tyre may have rendered possible and encouraged such an undertaking on the part of Hezekiah. In any case, we have to bear in mind that Philistia, so important to Assyria as being the road to and from Egypt, always formed an objective point in the western expeditions of the "great kings," and that its cities seem to have been divided, some being disposed to make cause against Assyria, while others - notably Ashdod and Gaza, - together with

Moab, Ammon, and Edom, were on the side of the eastern empire.²

Thus the period of Shalmaneser's weakness was being utilized by Hezekiah, not only for his religious reformation, but for securing his flank in any future contest with Assyria, as well as for works of internal defense, to which reference will be made in the sequel.

The aspect of matters changed with the accession of Sargon. That monarch did not indeed feel himself strong enough immediately, after the taking of Samaria, to advance south against Egypt. Besides troubles nearer home, especially the subdual of Merodach Baladan, engaged his attention. But in the second year after his accession we find him engaged in a western expedition. In this campaign the rebellion of Hamath was crushed, and the great battle of Karkar won. But what most concerns our history is the expedition of Sargon against the hostile league formed by Seve of Egypt and Hanno, king of Gaza - as we conjecture a dependent of Hezekiah, who sympathized with, though he does not seem actually to have taken part in the anti-Assyrian combination. Sargon was completely successful. In the battle of Raphia the allies were defeated; Seve fled, and was allowed to make his peace by paying tribute, while Hanno was taken prisoner. On this occasion Hezekiah appears to have been called to account, and to have been obliged to make submission. An Assyrian inscription speaks of Sargon as "the subduer of Judah," though without any added mention of battle or triumph. From its date we conclude that it refers to something that had taken place during the expedition of Sargon against Seve and Hanno.³

² Possibly the Assyrian proclivities of the southern Philistine cities may be explained by their proximity to Egypt, and their fear of absorption in that empire.

³ To complete this history we may mention that, in the eleventh year of his reign, Sargon undertook another expedition to quell the rebellion of Ashdod, which had been instigated by Egypt, or rather Ethiopia. Sargon was again victorious. Ashdod was taken; the Egyptian army did not venture to make its appearance, and its king surrendered to Sargon the leader of the Ashdod rebellion, who had fled to him. It is to these events that the prophecy in Isaiah 20 refers, where mark especially verse 5. "The Tartan" was the official

¹ In 2 Kings 18:9-12 the Assyrian conquest of Samaria and the deportation of Israel are again related - either because in chap. 17 they were related out of their chronological order, or else because they followed immediately on the Philistine expedition, recorded in 2 Kings 18:8.

Sargon reigned altogether seventeen years. In the defective condition of the inscriptions, it is impossible to know for certain whether or not he was killed by an assassin. He was succeeded by his son Sennacherib, who, after a reign of twenty-four years, perished at the hands of his own sons (2 Kings 19:37).⁴

The long period of rest between the second year of Sargon and the accession of Sennacherib had, no doubt, been employed by Hezekiah in further improving the condition of the country, possibly in strengthening the defenses of Jerusalem, and preparing for future eventualities (comp. 2 Kings 20:20; 2 Chronicles 32:5-30, and other passages). This is not the place to give a detailed account of the events of the reign of Sennacherib, as we learn them from the Assyrian inscriptions, except in so far as they bear on the narrative of Scripture. And even here we have to bear in mind that admittedly the inscriptions designedly give a false impression of what had really occurred in that war, in which Judaea was overrun and Jerusalem first besieged, and then a second time summoned to surrender. It will be more convenient to give the story of this expedition, in the first place, as told in the Assyrian records, before referring to the Biblical account.

We have many inscriptions of the time of Sennacherib, in Assyrian: Sin-ahi- irib, or Sin-ahi-ir-ba ('Sin,' the lunar god, 'gives many brethren') - famed also for strengthening and fortifying his capital, Nineveh ('Ninua'), and building there two magnificent palaces, one on each side of the river. Among the various memorials of his reign four inscriptions are of special importance.

Summarizing their contents, which vary only in details, we infer that, in the fourth year of Sennacherib's reign, another league had been formed of the principal Philistine and Phoenician cities of Judah and of the Egypto-Ethiopian empire, for the purpose of shaking off the domination of Assyria. So far as the first-named

cities are concerned it comprised Sidon, Ascalon, and Ekron, the inhabitants of which city, probably at the beginning of the war, if not before it, sent Padi, their king, who was faithful to Assyria, in chains to Hezekiah, who cast him into prison. On the other side, Ammon, Moab, and Edom, together with a number of the coast-cities in "the west country" - notably, Ashdod and Gaza - remained faithful to Assyria. Tidings seem to have reached Sennacherib before the confederates had time to carry their plans into execution. The Assyrian army rapidly advanced. Elulæus, king of Sidon, fled to Cyprus, and Ethobal was appointed in his place, while the cities along the route of the Assyrian conqueror either submitted to him or were taken. Sennacherib next advanced against Ascalon, and took it. Zidka, its king, and the royal family, were transported into Assyria; Sarludari, the son of the previous king, was appointed in his place; the whole country overrun and, like Sidon, made tributary. It was probably on his march from Acco to Ascalon - perhaps from Jaffa - that Sennacherib detached a corps into Judah, which took all the "fenced cities" thereof (comp. 2 Kings 18:13). The Assyrian inscriptions speak of the capture of forty-six fortified towns and of "innumerable castles and small places," of the transportation of 200, 150 of their captive inhabitants, men and women; of the taking of immense booty, and the annexation - probably only nominal, and, in any case, temporary - of the conquered districts to the domains of the small potentates on the sea-board, friendly to Assyria. It is to this expedition that Isaiah 10:28-34 refers, as indeed the whole prophecy in the tenth chapter of Isaiah applies to the war of Sennacherib against Judah.

Beyond Ascalon it was scarcely safe for Sennacherib to advance much further. The Egypto-Ethiopian army was expected in front; behind him, yet unconquered, was Ekron, and on his flank the strong fortress of Jerusalem, with the whole flower of the Judæan army and the hired auxiliaries to whom the Assyrian monuments refer. It was therefore a wise strategic movement

designation of the Assyrian commander-in-chief. On this occasion Judah does not seem to have been touched.

⁴ In view of these dates the notice in 2 Kings 18:13, about "the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah," must be regarded as a spurious gloss, which a copyist may possibly have transferred from a marginal note into the text.

on the part of Sennacherib to turn aside and lay siege to Lachish, the modern Umm Lakis.⁵

It was still a continuation of his advance in the direction of Egypt, although a departure from the straight road to it, and it would oblige the Egyptian army to make a disadvantageous digression inland, thus removing it from the main basis of its operations. But in Lachish, Sennacherib also held a strong position both against Ekron and Jerusalem, the latter being at the apex of an isosceles triangle, of which Ekron and Lachish form the extremities of the base. Thus he would be able to turn upon either one or the other line converging upon Lachish, or else to move rapidly upon Gaza. On the other hand, Hezekiah, seeing the success of the Assyrian advance, and perhaps despairing of a timely approach of the Egyptian army, sought to make his peace with Sennacherib, and sent to Lachish the embassy and tribute of which we read in 2 Kings 18:14-16. It was, no doubt, on this occasion also that Hezekiah set at liberty the captive king of Ekron, according to the Assyrian records, and sent him to Sennacherib.

After this point the Assyrian inscriptions purposely become confused, and mix up a series of different events, with the evident intention of conveying a false impression and concealing the virtual, if not the actual, defeat of Sennacherib. As we infer from a comparison of the Assyrian account with the Biblical record, Sennacherib, who by that time must have been aware of the advance of an Egyptian army, detached a large division ("a great host") against Jerusalem, which, however, held out alike against the power and the threats of the Assyrian leaders (2 Kings 18:17-19:7).

Meantime the Egyptian host was approaching, and the Assyrian leaders returned, and found Sennacherib in Libnah, somewhere east of Lachish and north of Eleutheropolis. This probably before the battle which Sennacherib fought with the Egyptians at Altaku, on a parallel line between Jerusalem and Ekron. This indicates a further retreat of Sennacherib with his army. In much

⁵ We remember it as the place to which Amaziah fled, and where he was murdered (2 Chronicles 25:27).

vainglorious language the Assyrian monarch claims a victory; but from the wording of the account, it is evident that the victory, if such it was, could only have been nominal, and was a real defeat. Instead, therefore, of turning upon Jerusalem, the Assyrians advanced against Ekron and took it, having already previously failed in their attempt to obtain the surrender of Jerusalem by a second message full of boastful and blasphemous threats (comp. 2 Kings 19:9-34). Then followed the destruction of the Assyrian host (ver. 35), and Sennacherib's return to Nineveh (ver. 36). On the Assyrian monuments nothing is said of these disastrous events, while Sennacherib boasts that he had shut up Hezekiah in his capital "as a bird in a cage," and the deputation and the tribute sent to Lachish are represented as if Hezekiah had dispatched them to Nineveh, implying a triumph of Assyrian arms and the final submission of Judah. The real course of events is, however, perfectly clear, and the accuracy of the Biblical account of Sennacherib's ignominious failure before Jerusalem and of his final retreat has been universally admitted.

With these facts before us, we turn to the "prophetic" narrative of them, in their spiritual import on the theocracy. As regards the history which we have been hitherto reading from the Assyrian monuments,⁶ the account in 2 Kings 18:13-19 keeps so parallel with what is written in Isaiah 36, 37, as similarly that in 2 Kings 20, with Isaiah 38 and 39 (with the exception of Hezekiah's hymn of praise, Isaiah 38:9-20), that a connection between the two is apparent. Whether either of them, and which, was derived from the other,⁷ are questions which have been differently answered by critics. Probably - for we are dealing in great measure with conjectures - both look back upon a

⁶ We again repeat that we are leaving aside the difficult question of the relation between Biblical and Assyrian chronology, for which - at least, in the judgment of the present writer - we have not yet sufficient data. According to the Assyrian monuments, this expedition was the "third campaign" of Sennacherib.

⁷ The critics who suppose a mutual dependence of the two narratives are somewhat evenly divided as to the priority of the one or the other. It will be understood that all here rests chiefly on conjectural grounds

common original, which, in the Book of Kings and in the prophecies of Isaiah, is presented respectively in a manner accordant with the spirit and object of each of those works.

It is another question whether this original account "in the Book of the Kings of Judah and Israel" was not written by the prophet Isaiah himself, as seems indicated in 2 Chronicles 32:32. In any case, the narrative in the Book of Chronicles, which, in accordance with its general spirit, so largely dwells on the Temple reformation of Hezekiah, seems an abbreviated summary of the two other accounts, although containing some notable peculiarities of its own.

The Biblical narrative opens with a brief reference to the first part of the campaign, when Sennacherib detached a corps which laid waste Judah and took the principal towns along the route⁸ (2 Kings 18:13; Isaiah 36:1). In 2 Chronicles 32:1-8, the various preparations are also noticed which Hezekiah had made, with advice of "his princes and mighty men," when he felt certain of the danger threatening Jerusalem.

First among them was the cutting off of the water-supply for a besieging army. To the west of Jerusalem runs from north to south the valley of Gihon. The rain-water and that coming from the hills around was stored in two pools, the upper (Isaiah 22:11 - the modern Birket Mamilla), and the lower (Isaiah 22:9 - the modern Pool of the Patriarch), which were connected by an open conduit.

As the upper pool lay outside the city walls and would supply the wants of a besieging army, Hezekiah covered it in, and by an aqueduct brought its waters into a large reservoir or "lake," "between the two walls" of the upper and the lower city (Isaiah 22:11; comp. 2 Kings 20:20; 2 Chronicles 32:30). But some writers conjecture that in ancient times (although not at present) there may have been a spring or brook near the upper port, which Hezekiah also covered in, diverting its

waters into the city (2 Chronicles 32:30). Further, he repaired all the walls that were broken down, "and raised (heightened) upon it (the) towers," and repaired (built?) "the other wall without" - probably that which inclosed the lower city - as well as "Millo, in the city of David," probably a strong tower with fortified buildings at the western side of the Tyropoeon, or Valley of Cheesemongers.

Similarly, arms of defense were prepared and officers appointed. Best of all, he gathered his men and captains, and encouraged them with the chief of all comforts, the assurance that Another, greater and stronger than all the might of Assyria, was with them, not "an arm of flesh," but Jehovah their God, to help them and to fight their battles.

When from this account we turn to the prophetic narrative in Isaiah 22, we feel that it had not been always so (ver. 11), but that through the admonitions of the prophet, what had been at first confidence in the strength of their defenses, became transformed into trust in the living God. Indeed, the prophet could not have sympathized with the whole previous policy of Hezekiah, which led up to the humiliating embassy to Lachish. But now he could bring them the assurance of Divine deliverance in that mood of spiritual repentance which was the outcome of his ministrations, and which appeared most fully during the siege of Jerusalem, and at the later summons for its surrender. We shall have to revert to this when telling of Hezekiah's bearing towards the ambassadors of Merodach-Baladan, who visited the Jewish capital before these events, probably some time before the commencement of this campaign.

The second event recorded in Scripture is the embassy of Hezekiah to Lachish, and the tribute there imposed upon him of "three hundred talents of silver and thirty talents of gold" (2 Kings 18:14-16). The impost, although not greatly differing from that which Menahem had to pay to Tiglath-pileser (2 Kings 15:19), was heavy, amounting in gold to 200,000 pounds, and in silver to 110,000 pounds and it necessitated the surrender of all the treasures in the Temple and the palace. It is remarkable that neither in the prophecy of Isaiah nor in the Book of Chronicles do we find any

⁸ The expression, 2 Chronicles 32:1, "And purposed [lit., 'spake'] to win [or 'break up'] them for himself," may refer to the detaching of the conquered towns from Judah, and their annexation to his Phoenician and Philistine vassals, of which the Assyrian monuments make mention.

reference to the embassy of Hezekiah nor to the tribute which he sent. Probably both were viewed as the sequence of a course disapproved, which, however, had no real bearing on the events that followed, and which only because of their spiritual import, came within range of the object of the narrative.

The third event recorded in Holy Scripture is the detachment of the "great host" against Jerusalem, with all the events connected with it. Of this we have an account alike in the Book of Kings, in that of Chronicles, and in the prophecies of Isaiah.⁹

The lead of the Assyrian expedition and the conduct of negotiations were entrusted to the "Tartan," which was the official title of the Assyrian commander-in-chief (comp. Isaiah 20:1), "the Rabh-Saris" - probably the translation of an Assyrian official title, which in Hebrew means "chief of the eunuchs" - and "the Rebh-Shakeh," apparently a Hebrew adaptation of Rab-sak, the Assyrian title of "chief captain," which repeatedly occurs on the monuments, and probably represents the second in command, or chief of the staff.¹⁰ We mark that appropriately the spokesman in summoning the city to surrender was not the general-in-chief, nor the chief eunuch (possibly the political officer), but the Rabh-Shakeh, or second in command.

The wisdom of Hezekiah's preparations, especially in depriving the Assyrians of the water supply, was soon apparent. For it was at that very place - the north-western angle of the city - that the strength of the Assyrian attack was delivered, and it was here, "by the conduit of the upper pool, which is in the highway of the fuller's field," that the three Assyrian leaders met the representatives of King Hezekiah, whom they had summoned to conference. Even had their spiritual preparation been less decisive, all must have felt there was something specially significant in the fact that a speech, such as that which the Rabh-Shakeh made,

⁹ But we note that in the two latter such historical details as the designations of all the leaders of the Assyrian expedition, given in 2 Kings 18:17, are wanting.

¹⁰ The Hebrew form, "Rabh-Shakeh," means "chief butler," but there is no record on the monuments of such a high state official.

should have been delivered on the very spot where Isaiah had uttered God's message to Ahaz (Isaiah 7:3). It is impossible to determine at what period of the siege the conference between the two parties took place. But it was probably not long after the arrival of the besieging army. For, although the Rabh-Shakeh refers to the horrors of a protracted siege (2 Kings 18:27), his coarse language sounds rather like a threat of future than an indication of present straits. Besides, Jerusalem may have been shut up for some time before the actual siege, while in any case that free communication with the country must have been interrupted which was necessary for the supply of provisions to the capital. On the other hand, it was of the utmost importance to the Assyrians to gain possession of Jerusalem without delay, and so to set the besieging army free to operate against Egypt. Of two among the three representatives of Hezekiah - no doubt mentioned in the order of their rank (2 Kings 18:18) - we have some characteristic notices in Isaiah 22:15-22. From these we are led to conjecture that Shebna, "the scribe," or secretary - probably the chief private adviser of the king, and who may possibly have been of Syrian descent - was a man actuated by ambition and selfish motives, to whom the mistaken policy of Hezekiah's anti-Assyrian alliance may have been due.

On the other hand, we derive a correspondingly high impression concerning the first and chief representative of the king, Eliakim, the son of Hilkiah. He seems to have succeeded Shebna (comp. Isaiah 22:20, 21) in the office of major domo, which may be compared to that of the modern chef du cabinet, and as such probably stood nearest to the king. Possibly this transference of office may have been consequent on a change of political and religious views. Of Joab, the son of Asaph, the recorder or analyst, we know not anything farther, nor does he appear afterwards among them whom Hezekiah sent to the prophet Isaiah (2 Kings 19:1; Isaiah 37:2). His attendance on the present occasion was probably in his capacity of secretary of state.

Such were the representatives on the one side and the other, who on that eventful day met to set it clearly before Israel and before all men with

whom was the might: whether with the arm of flesh, or with Jehovah; and whether or not the people had been right in resting themselves upon the words of Hezekiah, king of Judah (2 Chronicles 32:8).

VII_12 - Hezekiah (Thirteenth) King of Judah 2 Kings 18:17-19

RARELY, perhaps, was there an occasion on which faith in the unseen was put to severer test than in the conference between the leaders of the Assyrian army and the representatives of King Hezekiah. What gave special point to the message which the Rabh-Shakeh addressed to the king of Judah was the deep sense of past inconsistency: that, as regarded the matter in hand, it had not always been with Judah as at present, and that in measure their present evil was the outcome of their wrong-doing. But there comes to us also for all time this precious lesson: that even where we have been utterly mistaken, if only we turn in repentance to our God, we may look for His help and deliverance in the new and better course on which we are entering, however we may have to suffer for past sin. For God remaineth faithful, however we may have erred and strayed from His ways.

It was only too true, as the Rabh-Shakeh said,¹¹ that in rebelling against Assyria Hezekiah's confidence had been in Egypt; (compare chapters 9 and 11). Too true also, as even the experience of the past might have taught him, (compare chapters 9 and 11) that this was to trust in "the staff of a bruised reed"¹² (comp. Isaiah 30:1-7).

¹¹ The opening words of the Rabh-Shakeh's speech, "The great king, the king of Assyria," give one of the very titles by which the Assyrian monarchs designate themselves on the monuments.

¹² I prefer this to the rendering "cracked," by Professor Cheyne. It certainly does not mean "broken," the distinction between the two words being clearly marked in Isaiah 42:3. The figure of "a reed" as applied to Egypt is peculiarly happy, from its reference to the Nile banks (comp. Isaiah 19:6, and generally Ezekiel 29:6, which evidently refers to 2 Kings 18:21, or else to Isaiah 36:6). "A reed" is itself an insufficient support; but this reed is besides "bruised." When leaning on it, it will break, and the hand that rests all its weight thereon will fall upon it and be pierced.

Thus, assuredly, whether as regarded his plans or their proposed execution, it was "only word of the lips: counsel and strength for the war!" But in the second point which the Rabh-Shakeh urged lay the weakness of his cause and the strength of Hezekiah's position. Addressing himself to Hezekiah's adherents,¹³ he argued from the heathen point of view that since Hezekiah had abolished all the altars on the heights, and confined public religious worship to that in the Temple, he had not only forfeited any claim upon Jehovah, Whom he regarded as the Jewish national deity, but provoked Him to judgment.

Accordingly, as on the one hand he had taunted Hezekiah with want of all means for resisting the power of his master,¹⁴ so on the other hand he now boldly claimed for the inroad of Assyria and its success, not only the approbation of, but even a mandate from Jehovah.

Alike politically and in its religious misrepresentations, the speech was well calculated to appeal to such a populace as that of Jerusalem. Hence also the representatives of Hezekiah requested the Rabh-Shakeh to communicate with them not in "Jewish"¹⁵ (that is, in Hebrew), as he had done, but in "Aramean," which, although the commercial language of Syria and Palestine, would not be understood by the common people.

The suggestion was haughtily rejected, and the Assyrian openly avowed that his object was not to negotiate with the king nor his representatives, but to produce a reaction among the besieged, whom he represented as reduced to the utmost straits. To them he now directly appealed. They were not to allow themselves to be deceived. Hezekiah would not be able to deliver them - viz., by the aid of

¹³ In Isaiah 36:7 it is put in the singular, "if thou sayest," probably addressed to the chief Jewish spokesman.

¹⁴ The expression 2 Kings 18:23, rendered in the A.V. "give pledges," in the margin of the R.V. "make a wager," neither of which gives a good sense - we would translate "And now enter into competition with my master." In ver. 24 the word, which is true Semitic, signifies a satrap, or governor, but at the same time also a military chief. "The least of the servants," i.e., both numerically and as regards valor and discipline.

¹⁵ The term "Jewish" for Hebrew occurs only here and in the parallel passages (2 Chronicles 32:18 and Isaiah 36:11), and in Nehemiah 13:24.

Egypt - nor yet was this other pretension well-founded, that Jehovah would deliver them. Rather was it their wisdom to ignore the king, and make a treaty of submission ¹⁶ to Assyria, in virtue of which, instead of their present misery, they might continue to enjoy undisturbed possession of their land till they could be transported into districts equally fertile with their own.

This bold avowal of the ultimate policy of Assyria must have marred an appeal otherwise cleverly contrived. But its effectiveness would be completely destroyed - at least with the pious in Israel - by the contemptuous reference to Jehovah, as if He were like the false gods of other nations, ¹⁷ who in the past had been unable to deliver the lands of their worshippers from the might of Assyria.

It was an argument calculated, indeed, to influence heathens, to whom the question was as to the comparative power of gods, to be decided by outward results. But the very essence of Hebrew conviction lay in this, that there was none other God than Jehovah. It is this which constitutes the victory over that which is seen, but on which the men of the world ever deceive themselves in their ignorance of the power of a faith which is based on personal experience. And thus what in their view would seem the strongest argument in their appeal to "common sense" is in reality its refutation. It was in this spirit that the people on the wall of Jerusalem obeyed the injunction of

¹⁶ Lit., "make a blessing," probably not referring so much to religious ceremonies connected with such treaties, as to the offering of gifts on such occasions, - the term, "a blessing," being frequently used for "a present."

¹⁷ In reference to the nations mentioned in 2 Kings 18:34, Arpad, mentioned in the Bible (comp. also Isaiah 10:9; Jeremiah 49:23) and in the Assyrian monuments in connection with Hamath, was a considerable and powerful Syrian town with adjacent territory, probably the modern Tell Erfad, about three hours north of Aleppo. Hamath and Sepharvaim - the twain Sipar - have been previously referred to. From its conjunction with the latter place, we infer that Hena was a city in Babylonia, probably the modern Anat, four days' journey from Bagdad, on both banks of the Euphrates. The locality of Ivvah, or Avvah (2 Kings 17:24, 31), has not been ascertained; but it was probably also a city of Babylonia. All these places were conquered by Sargon; but there is nothing inconsistent with this in the reference to them by the Rabh-Shakeh as affording evidence of the supreme power of Assyria.

Hezekiah, and answered not a word to the Assyrian.

It was wise and right in the representatives of Hezekiah to bring their report of this interview with clothes rent (2 Kings 8:37); wise and right also on the part of the king to share in this token alike of mourning and humiliation (compare 1 Kings 20:32; 2 Kings 6:30), as in a great public calamity. It identified Israel with its LORD, and made public recognition that every blasphemy of Him was a public crime and calamity, and hence a call to public mourning. ¹⁸

It was in such garb that the king went into the Temple to make his appeal to Jehovah. In this garb also did he send his former delegates to the Rabh-Shakeh, together with "the elders," probably the chief officials, of the now reformed priesthood, to Isaiah to bespeak his prayers.

By a proverbial expression he indicated that in the time of Israel's utmost agony they had not strength for deliverance, and were in danger of perishing. But since the words of the Assyrian were a challenge to God, He might "hear" them, and answer the "reproach" by a "rebuke;" therefore let Isaiah pray for the remnant still left. Strange as it may sound, the strength of this plea lay in the sense of felt weakness, which appeared in that the king called upon the prophet not to interpose, but to pray, and even so felt not secure of an answer even to the prophet's prayer, but rested his hope on the nature of the case.

There could not have been greater contrast than between the boastful confidence of the Assyrian in his might and the absolute submission of Hezekiah to the LORD; nor yet could prayer have been the outcome of clearer spiritual perception. Such prayer must have had its answer; and it came in the assurance that this very boastfulness of victory

¹⁸ The Talmud appeals to this passage as proof that every one who hears a blasphemy or who hears it reported, is bound to rend his garment (Moed. Q. 26a). The general direction is given in Sanh. vii. 5; in the Gemara on this Mishnah (Sanh. 60a), it is inferred from 2 Kings 2:12, where the same expression is used, but with the addition "in two pieces," that every such rent is to be permanent. In regard to the rent for blasphemy, it is ruled that the name Jehovah must have been expressly used, whether by Jew or Gentile, but that this had no longer application after the dispersion of Israel, as otherwise a person might have his clothes full of rents.

should give place to fear upon a rumor, and this confidence be laid low when "the great king" should "fall by the sword," and that "in his own land." ¹⁹

It was as had been said. The Rabh-Shakeh returned from his bootless expedition to his master, leaving, as we suppose, his army before Jerusalem. He found Sennacherib not at Lachish, but at Libnah, to which he had retreated probably on hearing of the advance of Tirhakah, ²⁰ the king of Ethiopia. As we have seen, ²¹ Sennacherib gained indeed the victory of Altaku.

But it was a virtual defeat, which, with the failure to gain possession of Jerusalem, determined the final retreat of Sennacherib from Palestine. His circumstances must have made him most anxious to obtain the surrender of the Judaeian capital. Accordingly, a second embassy had been

¹⁹ In 2 Kings 19:7 translate (as in the R.V.), "I will put a spirit in him," i.e., by the direct agency of Jehovah, a spirit of fear would take the place of that of boastful confidence. The "tidings" (this, rather than "rumor") refer on the one hand to the advance of the Egyptian army, which led to the retrograde movement of Sennacherib, and on the other hand to the Divine visitation which determined his return to "his own land." In ver. 6 we mark that the expression "servants," used for the Assyrian ambassadors, is one of contempt, like the German Burschen (lads), or Buben, and that their words are taken up as a blasphemous challenge to the LORD.

²⁰ Tirhakah - on the Egyptian monuments, Tahark and Taharka; on the the Assyrian, Tar-ku-u, the third and last king of the twenty-fifth "Ethiopian" dynasty, although apparently not himself of Ethiopian but of Egyptian descent. In accordance with the Bible, the monuments describe him as king of Ethiopia, and as making an incursion into Palestine against Sennacherib.

²¹ The mention of the places enumerated in 2 Kings 19:12, confirms the view expressed in a previous note, that the boasted conquests were not those of the present reign, but looked back upon the past. Thus Gozan was a district in Mesopotamia on the river Chabor, whence Sargon had transported colonists to Samaria. Not far from Gozan was the town of Haran, the Roman and Greek Carrhae, one of the earliest Assyrian possessions, mentioned even in the 12th cent. B.C. (comp. Genesis 11:31, etc.). Rezepth was another Mesopotamian town, frequently mentioned in Assyrian inscriptions as Rasaappa, or Rasappa. Thelassar (in Ass. Til-Assuri, either "the Assyrian hill," or, "the hill of Asur") seems to have been one of the cities of "the Sons of Eden," a tribe inhabiting a district on both banks of the middle Euphrates. It is probable that either Shalmaneser or Sargon had changed the original name of the city to Telassar (comp. the Eden of Ezekiel 27:23; perhaps also the Beth-Eden of Amos i. 5).

dispatched to demand it - probably before the battle of Altaku, although after the approach of the Ethiopian army. This second summons was addressed to Hezekiah, and was in terms similar to those previously used, although it naturally contained no longer any reference to Egypt, and was also perhaps more directly challenging to the God of Israel (2 Kings 19:9-13).

It argues, in our view, a painful want not only of spiritual insight, but even of deeper sympathy, when certain modern critics depreciate the act of Hezekiah in going to the Temple to spread before Jehovah "the letters" of the Assyrian, either as mechanical or as evidence of a lower standpoint. It was not even symbolical, but, as Delitzsch has rightly designated it, a prayer without words - a sublime expression of faith, in entire accordance with what had preceded, and such as in certain events of our lives we might be disposed to imitate, at least in spirit. Still more strange does it seem to find the authenticity of the prayer with which Hezekiah accompanied this submission to the living God, questioned on the ground that the setting aside of all other gods as powerless, being the work of men's hands, and the exclusive acknowledgment of Jehovah were beyond the spiritual range of the time. Surely this is not only arbitrarily to displace the Scriptural records, but on the ground of it to construct a history of Israel, and then to judge events by this self-made standard.

It was only as we would have expected when Isaiah, in the name of his God, and as His representative, made response alike to the letter of the Assyrian and to the prayer of Hezekiah. His utterance consists, as has been rightly observed, of three parts.

In the first (vers. 21-28), the unconquered virgin daughter of Zion addresses to Sennacherib her Divine comment on his boasting; the second part (vers. 29-31) brings the Divine message to Hezekiah and to Judah; while the third (vers. 32-34) contains the prophetic announcement of the issue of this war. From the very outset we mark the attitude of lofty scorn in the contrast between the two adversaries, Sennacherib and the Holy One of Israel on high (ver. 22).

Then, in figurative language, the boast of the Assyrian is presented in vers. 23, 24, in each verse

in its twofold aspect: as regarded what he claimed to have already done, and what he declared he would achieve in the future. There had been neither barrier nor resistance to him in the past; there could be no hindrance nor limitation to him in the future. All had been surmounted; all would be at his disposal. But, as against this boast of self-sufficiency, came the Divine question - here Israel's best answer - whether the great king had never "heard" - that is, whether it had never come to his knowledge, nor yet entered his mind - that all his past success had been of God's appointment, and he only the instrument of God's behest in executing pre-ordained judgments.

But since, so far from such acknowledgment of God, Sennacherib had raised himself against the LORD, he would experience alike his own helplessness and the Divine judgment. As a wild beast in the power of its captors, he would, like some of his own captives,²² be brought back the way which he had come (vers. 28, 29).

In its second part (vers. 30-32) the prophetic utterance turns from Sennacherib to Hezekiah and to Judah. We cannot fail to recognize the internal connection between this and the former utterance in Isaiah 7 in regard to the Syro-Israelitish invasion in the time of Ahaz. Once more we have "a sign" of the certainty of promised deliverance in an event as yet future. The absolute deliverance of Judah from the invasion of Assyria is guaranteed by this sign, that in the present year, when the ordinary operations of sowing had been interrupted, they would have sufficient for their support in that which sprang from the grains that had accidentally fallen out of the corn reaped at the former harvest. Similarly, as regarded the next year's harvest, for which it was impossible to make preparation, partly from the presence of the Assyrian army, and partly from the depopulation of the country, there would be sufficiency from the corn which sprang of itself (either on the old stems or from what dropped from unreaped ears). Lastly, in the third year, the ordinary agricultural

operations would be resumed, because the Assyrian host would be gone without retaining occupation of the land, and because such as were left of the population would have returned to their homes from Jerusalem and the other fenced cities where they had sought refuge. Thus "the sign" lay in the promised certainty of their support through the Divine blessing on the land which Assyria boasted to have laid waste²³ (vers. 23, 24).

Nor is it uncommon in fruitful districts of Palestine for a second harvest to spring from the ears of corn left standing in the fields. Thus the provision for their present wants, and that for the agricultural year on which they had already entered, coming to them through the direct blessing of God on a land over which the Assyrian claimed absolute power, would in those two years be a constant sign that the relation between Jehovah and Sennacherib was what had been told, and that they had not to fear any return of the enemy. And so would this prophetic "sign" - "natural" by the special blessing of God, but "supernatural" when viewed by itself - be alike for comfort and the strengthening of faith, but also for the constant exercise of it.

From another point of view also this prophetic utterance connects itself with the earlier prediction in Isaiah 7. Like the latter, it affords insight into the general character and structure of prophecy. Taking its departure from the present condition of things, it points to the full meaning of the prophecy, viewing it in its widening bearing, till in the dim distance it describes its fulfillment in what is the final goal of all prophecy - the Messianic kingdom. Thoughts of the growth of the seemingly scanty yet sufficient fruit left on the fields of Judah, but which in due time, when Judah was restored to quiet homes, would be followed by rich harvests, suggest the higher application to the "remnant escaped," which was yet again to "take root downward, and bear fruit upward." And with yet wider and final application (2 Kings 19:31) does it point forward to "the remnant" according to the election of grace, the faithful remnant, the true Israel (comp. Isaiah 4:2; 6:13; 10:20-23) in the Messianic day, when "the zeal of Jehovah of

²² From the Mesopotamian sculptures, it appears that in the case of distinguished prisoners, literally a ring was passed, in Assyria, through the lower lip, and in Babylonia through the nose, to which a thong or rope was attached, by which the prisoner was led

²³

hosts" should "perform this" (Isaiah 9:7). Lastly, the third part of Isaiah's utterance (vers. 32-34) is a direct prediction with reference to the threats of Sennacherib and the issue of this war.

Nor was the Divine judgment on Sennacherib long delayed. "In that night" "the angel of Jehovah" went forth to smite in the Assyrian host - probably that which still lay before Jerusalem - "all the mighty men of valor, and the leaders and captains" (2 Chronicles 32:21).

From 2 Samuel 24:15, 16, we are led to infer that, while the judgment was directly sent of God, the means employed was a pestilence. The number of victims amounted to not less than 185,000, although the text does not indicate, and there is certainly no reason for believing that they all fell in one night.

But to the sacred historian it seems from his prophetic view-point but as one unbroken scene in the great drama of judgment, and he pictorially describes it as a field of the slain, on which they looked as they "arose early in the morning." And so the Divine judgment completed what the turn which the campaign had taken had begun. It was only natural that Sennacherib should depart and return to his own land. ²⁴

But the account in Holy Scripture in this also evidences its historical accuracy, that it describes him as dwelling "at Nineveh." For Sennacherib not only made this his permanent residence, fortified and converted it into his grand imperial fortress, but adorned it with two magnificent palaces.

There is one event in the history of Israel which the Divine judgment on Sennacherib and the deliverance of Judah must recall to every mind. It is Israel's miraculous deliverance at the time of the Exodus and of the destruction of the army of Pharaoh in the waves of the Red Sea (comp. Exodus 14:23-31). Then, as now, was the danger

²⁴ That some extraordinary event had determined the retreat of Sennacherib appears also from the Egyptian legendary account preserved by Herodotus (II. 141). It describes how, on his advance into Egypt - perhaps mixing up the campaign of Sargon with that of Sennacherib (Schrader in Riehm's *Wörterb.*, II., p. 1366a) - Sennacherib had been forced to fly through a disablement of his army, field-mice having in one night gnawed through the quivers, bowstrings, and shield-straps of his soldiers.

extreme, and it seemed as if Israel were defenseless and powerless before the mighty host of the enemy. Then, as now, was the word of the LORD clear and emphatic; then, as now, it was the night season when the deliverance was wrought; and then, as now, was it Israel's birth-time as a nation. For now, after the final transportation of Israel, did Judah stand forth as the people of the LORD, the inheritors of the promise, the representatives of the kingdom of God. As then, so now was Judah saved without drawing sword or bow, only by the interposition of the LORD. And so it has to all times remained by the side of the miracles of the Exodus as the outstanding event in the typical history of the people of God, perpetuated not only in the later non-canonical literature of Israel, but possibly forming the historical basis of Psalm 46, and more probably that of Psalm 75 and 76.

Yet other thoughts come to us - how the worldly policy of even a Hezekiah in forming alliances against Assyria was rebuked, and he learned in the school of affliction and humiliation to turn from all such help to God, and then obtained mercy; and how from the first Isaiah stood forth faithful in his warnings, and calm and unshaken in his confidence, the true prophet and representative of the LORD. And yet beyond these lessons, which are to all times, comes to the Church and to every member of it the conviction that He who supernaturally, although by what we call natural means, once swept away the host of Egypt and again laid dead the proud warriors of Assyria, also watches with ever mindful care over the meanest of His creatures, so that not a sparrow can fall to the ground without His knowledge, nor yet any harm befall His people, nor earthly might overthrow His cause. For He of old is the living and the true God.

But as regarded Sennacherib himself, the Divine judgment seemed to slumber a long time. ²⁵ Yet, after many years' reign, it overtook him.

²⁵ 2 Kings 19:37 must not be understood as chronologically following immediately upon ver. 36. It is merely the Scriptural conclusion of this whole narrative. In truth, ver. 37 (see next note) contains a brief summary of events, separated by some period of time. But it is the sublime characteristic of the prophetic view-point of sacred history to pass over intervening

"As he was worshipping in the house of Nisroch his god, . . . [his sons] Adrammelech and Sharezer smote him with the sword, and they escaped into the land of Ararat. And Esarhaddon his son reigned in his stead."

"Nisroch" - evidently an Assyrian god - has not yet been identified. Probably it depends upon some corruption of the name, which is differently written in the LXX. and by Josephus. On Adrammelech (here the name of a person), see our remarks on 2 Kings 17:31. Sharezer is apparently a defective form, the full name having been Nirgal-sar-usur -- "Nergal protect the king." Strangely, Abydenus (Euseb. Armen. Chron., ed. Mai, p. 25) has preserved to us the first part of the name, Nergilus, and the Bible its second part. According to the account just referred to, Sennacherib was killed by his son Adramelus, and succeeded for a short time by Nergilus (comp. Schrader, u.s., p. 330, and note), who was overcome and slain by Esarhaddon, who ascended the throne. The latter is confirmed by the Assyrian inscriptions. Professor Sayce (Fresh Light from the A. Mon., p. 127) attributes the murder of Sennacherib to jealousy of Esarhaddon on the part of the two elder brothers, for which he finds a motive in the will of Sennacherib, which bestowed great treasures on Esarhaddon. "The land of Ararat" was south of the mountains of that name, and forms part of Armenia. There was at that time war between Assyria and Armenia.

VII_13 - Hezekiah (Thirteenth) King of Judah

2 Kings 20; Isaiah. 38; 39

THE narrative of Hezekiah's sickness and of the embassy of Merodach-baladan, which in an abbreviated form is also given in the Book of Isaiah ²⁶ (38:1-8, 21, 22; 39) must, on literary grounds ²⁷ and from its position in this history, be

events as of no importance, and to connect the fulfillment with the prediction as in unbroken succession.

²⁶ The abbreviation is in the narrative of Hezekiah's sickness and healing. On the other hand, the hymn of praise, Isaiah 38:9-20, is not inserted in 2 Kings, where, indeed, such a hymn would seem out of place.

²⁷ This appears from the whole cast of the narrative - even from the general and indeterminate note of time in the opening words: "In those days."

regarded as an appendix similar to that added to the account of David's reign in the closing chapters of the Second Book of Samuel.

Whether or not it was taken from a special and distinct record, or else inserted in this place in order not to break the continuity of a narrative which had a spiritual meaning and object of its own, it is certain that the events which it records could not have been posterior to the final departure of Sennacherib from the soil of Palestine.

After that there could not have been occasion for such anxiety in reference to the king of Assyria as to be met by the Divine promise in 2 Kings 20:6; nor could Hezekiah have shown such treasures to the ambassadors of Merodach-baladan, since he had previously stripped himself of them to Sennacherib (2 Kings 18:14-16), nor yet from what we know of the history of Merodach-baladan could he then have sent such an embassy with the manifest purpose of an alliance against Assyria, nor, finally, would Hezekiah then have encouraged such overtures.

In these circumstances it is a question of historical interest, rather than of practical importance, whether the sickness of Hezekiah or rather the embassy of Merodach-baladan had been during the reign of Sargon or in that of Sennacherib, whether they had preceded the campaign of the former in Palestine, or that of the latter.

The text itself seems to point to the period immediately before the invasion of Sennacherib, since in the time of Sargon Jerusalem was not in such danger as is indicated in the reassuring promise given concerning it (ver. 6). But this is not all. On any theory, the numeral "fifteen" years in the promised addition to the spared life of Hezekiah (ver. 6), must have crept into the text by some mistake.

Admittedly, it would not synchronize with the period of Sennacherib's campaign; while on the other hand it is certain that Sargon came into hostile contact with Hezekiah in the second year of his reign (that after the taking of Samaria), that is, in the sixth or seventh, scarcely in the eighth, year of Hezekiah's reign (2 Kings 18:10).

But fifteen years added to this would give at most twenty-two or twenty-three for the reign of

Hezekiah, whereas we know that it lasted twenty-nine years (2 Kings 18:2) If, therefore, it is impossible to date the illness of Hezekiah and the embassy in the time of Sargon, we have to assign these events to the period immediately preceding the campaign of Sennacherib in Palestine. It may have been that the number "fifteen," as that of the years added to the life of Hezekiah, had originally been a marginal remark.

With whomsoever it originated or however it passed into the text, the copyist, annotator, or editor, who regarded the fourteenth year of Hezekiah as that of Sennacherib's invasion (2 Kings 18:13), would naturally deduct this number from twenty-nine, the total of the years of Hezekiah's reign, and so arrive at the number fifteen as that of the years added to the king's life.

But, on the other hand, this also implies that in the view of this early copyist, annotator, or editor, the sickness of Hezekiah and the embassy of Merodach-baladan had immediately preceded the campaign of Sennacherib. The narrative itself offers no special difficulties. As Hezekiah lay sick the prophet Isaiah was directed to go and bid him set his house in order (2 Samuel 17:23), since his illness would terminate fatally.

The announcement was received by the king with the utmost alarm and grief. We have here to remember the less clear views entertained under the Old Testament, before the LORD by His coming and Resurrection had "brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel." Indeed, our own experience teaches the gradual unfolding of truth with our growing capacity for its perception. And any anticipation of fullest truth would neither have been in accordance with the character of the preparatory dispensation and the training under it, nor have done honor to the new Revelation which was to follow. Indeed, even now many of us learn slowly the joy of "departing," nor yet this without constant reference to that which is joined to it, the presence with the Lord, of which they of old knew not. Thus it was neither fatalism nor resignation to the inevitable, but faith, when they laid them down to sleep content with the assurance that sleeping or waking they were still with the LORD, and that it was well in this also to leave themselves implicitly in the hands of the

covenant-keeping God. And so we can from every point of view understand it, that the Psalmist should have prayed, "O my God, take me not away in the midst of my days" (Psalm 102:24), and that Hezekiah "turned his face to the wall²⁸ and prayed. . .and wept with great weeping."

For, assuredly, this being taken away in the midst of his days and of his work, would seem to him not only a mark of God's disfavor, but actual punishment. It is from this point of view, rather than as the expression of self-righteousness, that we regard the language of Hezekiah's plea. And apart from this there was not anything blameworthy either in the wish that his life should be spared, or in the prayer for it, although here also we cannot but mark the lower stand-point of those under the Old Testament.²⁹ The prayer of Hezekiah, as for the present we simply note, was heard. Before Isaiah had passed "the middle city" he was Divinely directed to return to the king with the message that his request was granted, and to add to the promise of lengthened days the assurance of the safety of the kingdom of David and of Jerusalem in anticipation of those dangers which must have been foreseen as threatening the near future.

Thus far all had been as might have been looked for in the course of this history. But what followed suggests questions of the deepest importance. Isaiah had not only promised Divine healing, but that within the briefest period³⁰ Hezekiah should once more go up to the Temple - no doubt to return thanks.

²⁸ In token of sadness, as if to look away from everything else, and to concentrate all thought on one's grief. So also Ahab (1 Kings 21:4), although in a very different spirit.

²⁹ The suggestion of Josephus and of some of the fathers: that the grief of Hezekiah was caused or increased by the circumstance that, at the time, he had not a son to succeed him, is not only wholly improbable but unsupported. The Rabbis however put it still more realistically, and explain: "thou shalt die" - in this world, "and not live" - in the world to come, because Hezekiah had neglected the command in not having children.

³⁰ Whether or not, the expression: "on the third day" be taken literally, manifestly it was intended to convey, not only the briefest period, but one within which such a result could not have been reached had the healing been in the ordinary course.

Yet he conjoined with this miraculous help the application of a common remedy, when he directed that a lump of figs should be laid on the boil. And as if still further to point the contrast, Hezekiah asked for "a sign" of the promise, and the prophet not only gave it, but allowed him a choice in that which from any point of view implied direct Divine interposition. For evidently Hezekiah asked for such "a sign" as would be a pledge to him of God's direct intervention on his behalf, while, on the other hand, the alternative proposed to him, that the shadow on the steps of the sun-clock of Ahaz,³¹ might either move forwards or backwards, forbids any natural explanation of it, such as that of a solar eclipse which Isaiah had either naturally or supernaturally foreknown. Hezekiah chose what to him seemed the more difficult, or rather the more inconceivable alternative - that of the shadow receding ten steps. And in answer to Isaiah's prayer, the "sign" desired was actually given.

It is not difficult to perceive the symbolical significance of this sign. As Isaiah had been commissioned to offer to Ahaz "a sign" of the promised deliverance, and to leave him the choice of it, "either in the depth or in the height above" (Isaiah 7:11), so here a similar alternative was presented to Hezekiah. As Ahaz in his trust in natural means and his distrust of Jehovah had refused, so Hezekiah in his distrust of natural means and trust of Jehovah asked for a sign. And lastly, even as Hezekiah had feared that his life-day would have ended in its mid-day hour, so

now, when it was to be lengthened, did the falling shadow climb up again the ten steps to its mid-day mark.

But there are also deeper lessons to be learnt from this history. The change in the announcement of what was to befall Hezekiah, in answer to his prayer, is of eternal meaning. It encourages us "always to pray" - not excluding from the range of our petitions what are commonly called "things temporal." And yet the very idea of prayer also excludes any thought of the absolute certainty of such answer as had been primarily contemplated in the prayer. For prayer and its answer are not mechanically, they are morally connected, just as between Isaiah's promised sign and its bestowal, the prayer of the prophet intervened (2 Kings 20:11). As miracle is not magic, so prayer is not necessitarianism; and on looking back upon our lives we have to thank God as often for prayers unanswered as for prayers answered.

Yet another lesson connected with the change in the message which Isaiah was to bring to Hezekiah has been already noted by Jerome. There is widest bearing in this remark of his (on Ezekiel 33), that it does not necessarily follow because a prophet predicts an event that what he had predicted should happen. "For," as he adds, the prophet "did not predict in order that it might happen, but lest it should happen." And the immutability of God's counsels is not that of fatalism, but depends on the continuance of the circumstances which had determined them.

This may help us to understand another and in some respects more difficult question. Evidently alike the announcement of Hezekiah's untimely death and its revocation were determined by his relation towards God. This would in turn have its important bearing upon the conduct of the king in the coming Assyrian war, which concerned not only Hezekiah personally, but the whole Davidic line and the fate of Judah itself. But the lessons taught the king first by his danger and then by his restoration were precisely those which Hezekiah needed to learn if, obedient to the admonitions of Isaiah, and believing the promise of the LORD, he was consistently to carry out the will of Jehovah amidst the temptations and difficulties of the Assyrian invasion. This, not only because he had

³¹ It is interesting to learn that Ahaz had - probably on his visit to Damascus (2 Kings 16:10) - seen and brought to Jerusalem some of the scientific appliances of the great empire of the East. It is impossible to determine whether this mode of measuring the progress of time (not strictly hours) was by a sun-dial, the invention of which Herodotus ascribes to the Babylonians (2. 109). According to Ideler (Handb. d. Chronol. 1. p. 485) it was a gnomon, or index, surrounded by concentric circles, by which the time of the day was marked by the lengthening shadow. But the term "steps" seems rather to indicate an obelisk surrounded by steps, the shadow on which marked the hours, so that the shadow falling in the morning westwards first on the lowest step, gradually ascended to the plane on the top, and after midday again descended the steps eastwards. As the text seems to imply that there were twenty such "steps," they must have marked the quarters of an hour, and in that case the event have happened about half-past two o'clock p.m.

had experience of the truth of prophetic promise, but because he had learned, as he could not otherwise have been taught, that God answered prayer; that He was merciful and forgiving, and able to turn aside the most threatening danger, even at the extreme moment. In truth, what was afterwards witnessed in the deliverance of Jerusalem was on a large scale the same that Hezekiah himself had experienced in his healing. Thus the lessons of his recovery were intended as spiritual preparation for what was so soon to follow.

It still remains to refer more particularly to "the sign" itself on the sun-clock of Ahaz. From the circumstance that in the original account in the Book of Kings there is no mention of alteration in the relative position of the sun (as in the poetic quotation in Joshua 10:12, 13), but of a possible descent or ascent of the shadow,³² and that even this was to be only observable on the step-clock of Ahaz, we infer that, in the view of the writer, "the sign" was local, and hence could not have implied an interference with the regular order of Nature.

The Scriptural narrative conveys only that in that particular place something had occurred which made the shadow on the dial to retrograde, although at the same time we can have no hesitation in saying that this something was Divinely caused.

What this "something" of a purely local character was, we have not the means of ascertaining. Of the various suggestions most probability attaches to that of an extraordinary refraction of the sun-rays, which has been recorded to have produced similar phenomena in other places. If such Divine intervention be called a miracle, we demur not to the idea nor to the designation - though we prefer that of "a sign." But we add that, in a modified sense, Divine interpositions as signs to us are not so unfrequent as some people imagine.

³² As already stated, the account of the event in the Book of Isaiah (38:8) is evidently not the original one, but possibly abbreviated from that in the Book of Kings. Whether, in its present form ver. 6 is really due to a later editor, or the reference in it to the sun, not the shadow, be only a popular mode of description, is not of any practical importance for our present purpose.

The fame of Hezekiah's healing spread far and wide, with a rapidity not uncommon in the East. It reached a monarch who, especially at that time, was sorely in need of help, Divine or human. Few chapters in history suggest more interesting episodes than that of Merodach-baladan, who contended for the independence and supremacy and for the crown of Babylonia successively with Tiglath-pileser, Sargon, and Sennacherib - and who was by turns successful, vanquished, driven away and restored, and once more a fugitive. This is not the place to give such outline of his history as may be gathered from the notices of Berossus, the Chaldee historian, from the canon of Ptolemy, the Bible, and Assyrian inscriptions.

Suffice it here, that the date of his embassy to Hezekiah must have coincided with a brief period when at the beginning of Sennacherib's reign he once more occupied the throne of Babylonia for six months. It was only natural that in prospect of his conflict with Assyria he should have sought alliances in every quarter, and that the fame of Hezekiah's miraculous healing, of his great wealth and power - all no doubt exaggerated in Eastern fashion - should have induced him to send an embassy to Jerusalem. A diversion there, a possible confederacy against Assyria in the far west, such as was afterwards really formed, would have been of the greatest use to his cause. Equally natural was it, alike with reference to Assyria and to Hezekiah, that such an intention should not have been avowed, nor perhaps the possibility of an alliance formally discussed, till the ambassadors had been able to judge for themselves of the exact state of matters in Jerusalem. And so they went ostensibly to bring to Hezekiah congratulatory letters on his recovery, and "a present."³³ But all parties including Sennacherib on the one side, and the prophet Isaiah on the other - understood the real object of the embassy.

All this fully explains the Biblical narrative. It is not necessary to suppose that the question of a treaty against Assyria was actually discussed

³³ In 2 Chronicles 32:31 the ostensible object is stated to have been "to inquire about the wonder that was done in the land." Such an inquiry as to the real power of the God of Judah would, from the heathen standpoint, not be inconsistent with the real aim of the mission.

between Hezekiah and the envoys of Merodach-baladan. Indeed, as this is not stated in Scripture, it seems unlikely that a treaty had been made or even proposed. In any case, it could not have been carried out, since long before it could have been acted upon Merodach-baladan was driven away. On the other hand, it seems equally clear that Hezekiah, however reticent he may have been, secretly favored the design of the embassy. It was with this view -- to give practical evidence of his might - that "Hezekiah hearkened unto them, and shewed 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 armor, and all that was found in his treasures; there was nothing in his house, nor in all his dominion, that Hezekiah shewed them not" (2 Kings 20:13).

It was a disingenuous device when Hezekiah, in answer to the questioning of Isaiah, sought to divert him by a reference to the "far country" whence the ambassadors had come, as if flattering to Jewish national pride, and implying the acknowledged supremacy of Jehovah's power. Such had not been the object of the prophet in asking about the country of these strangers. By eliciting that they had come from Babylon, he would indicate to Hezekiah that his inmost purpose in showing them all his treasures had been read. But to know it was to pronounce the Divine disapprobation of any such alliance against Assyria. This explains the severity of the punishment afterwards denounced upon Hezekiah for an offense which otherwise might have seemed trivial. But this had clearly appeared, that Hezekiah had not learned the lessons which his late danger and God-granted recovery were intended to teach; nor did he learn them otherwise than in the school of extreme anguish, after all his worldly policy had ended in defeat, his land been desolated, and the victorious host of Assyria laid siege to Jerusalem. And this seems to be the meaning of the reference in 2 Chronicles 32:25, 26, to the ungratefulness and the pride of the king after his miraculous recovery, as well as of this other notice (ver. 31), that in the matter of the ambassadors, God had left Hezekiah to himself, to try him, and "know all that was in his heart."

But with God there was not any changeableness. As afterwards Isaiah denounced the alliance with Egypt, so now he spoke the Divine judgment on the hoped-for treaty with Babylon. So far from help being derived from such alliance, Israel's future doom and misery would come from Babylon, and the folly of Hezekiah would alike appear and be punished in the exile and servitude of his descendants. Thus in the sequence of God this sowing of disobedience should be followed by a harvest of judgment. Yet for the present would there be "peace and continuance" - till the measure of iniquity was filled. And Hezekiah acquiesced in the sentence, owning its justice and grateful for its delay. Yet here also we perceive shortcoming. Hezekiah did not reach up to the high level of his father David in circumstances somewhat similar (2 Samuel 24:17), nor was his even the humble absolute submission of Eli of old (1 Samuel 3:18).

But as throughout this history Isaiah appeared as the true prophet of God by the consistency of his utterance of the Divine Will against all heathen alliances, by his resistance to all worldly policy, however specious, and even by his bearing on the twofold occasion which forms the subject of the present narrative, so did he now rise to the full height of his office. Never before had there been so unmistakable a prediction of the future as when Isaiah in the full height of Assyria's power announced that the world-empire of the future would not belong to it, but to vanquished Babylonia, and that Judah's judgment would not come from their present dreaded enemies, but from those who now had sought their alliance.

VII_14 - Manasseh (Fourteenth), Amon (Fifteenth) King of Judah

2 Kings 21; 2 Chronicles 33

WITH the death of Hezekiah, another and a strange chapter in Jewish history opens. When they buried him "in the ascent of the sepulchers of the sons of David," ³⁴ not only the inhabitants of Jerusalem - for the defense, adornment, and convenience of which he had done so much - but all Judah united to do him honor.

³⁴ This, or perhaps "the height," is the correct rendering. Probably all the space in "the sepulchers" was filled up.

His reign, despite temporary reverses and calamities, had been prosperous for his country, and he left it in political circumstances far different from those when he had ascended the throne. Above all, his history might have been full of most important theocratic teaching to the people. If it was otherwise, we see in this only fresh evidence of that spiritual decay of which the prophets, in their description of the moral condition of the people, give so realistic a picture.

Manasseh was only twelve years old ³⁵ when he succeeded his father. According to our Western notions, he would have to be regarded as merely a child.

But in the East he would at that age have reached the most dangerous period of wakening manhood, before thought could have tempered willfulness, or experience set bounds to impulse. In such circumstances, to have resisted the constant temptation and incitement to gratify every will and desire, would have required one of strong moral fiber. But Manasseh was selfish and reckless, weak and cruel in his wickedness, and scarcely respectable even in his repentance. When the infant Jehoash acceded to the throne, he had the benefit of the advice of Jehoiada (2 Kings 12:2), and we know how his later and independent reign disappointed its early promise. But Manasseh had not any such guidance. The moral and religious corruption in his grandfather's reign, must, as we infer from the prophetic writings, be regarded as not only the outcome, but also partly the explanation of the measures of Ahaz. This condition of things could not have been effectually checked during Hezekiah's reign of twenty-nine years, especially amidst the troubles and the disorganization connected with the Assyrian invasion. In fact, we know that even among the intimate counselors of Hezekiah, there were those whom the prophetic word emphatically condemned (comp. Isaiah 22:15-19; 29:14-16; 30:1, 9-14).

In these circumstances the sudden re-action and the "counter-reformation" of Manasseh's reign, in

which he, apparently, carried the people with him, cannot appear altogether strange or surprising. Briefly, it was a kind of heathen ideal of religion in which various forms of national idolatry were combined. The corrupt mode of Jehovah-worship on "the heights" was restored. To this were added the Phoenician rites of Baal and Asherah, which Ahab had introduced in Israel, and the Assyro-Chaldean worship of the stars. All this was carried to its utmost sequences. In the Temple, on which Jehovah had put His thrice Holy Name, and which, as a firm and lasting abode in contrast to the Tabernacle, symbolized the permanence of His dwelling in the midst of Israel, and their permanence in the land, Manasseh built altars to the host of heaven, placing them in the outer and inner courts. Nay, in the sacred "house" itself, he set up the vilest of idols: "the graven image of the Asherah," whose worship implied all that was lascivious. Conjoined with this was the institution of a new priesthood, composed of them that had familiar spirits, and "wizards," while the king himself practiced divination and enchantment.

And as usual, together with all this, (Compare Deuteronomy 18:10, 11.) the service of Moloch, with its terrible rite of passing children through the fire, was not only encouraged by the example of the king (2 Kings 21:6; 2 Chronicles 33:6), but apparently came into general practice (2 Kings 23:10). Alike the extent and the shameless immorality of the idolatry now prevalent, may be inferred from the account of the later reformation by Josiah (2 Kings 23:4-8). For, whatever practices may have been introduced by previous kings, the location, probably in the outer court of the Temple, of a class of priests, who, in their unnaturalness of vice, combined a species of madness with deepest moral degradation, and by their side, and in fellowship with them, that of priestesses of Astarte, must have been the work of Manasseh.

We know that some such abominations formed part of the religious rites, not only of the inhabitants of Canaan, but of the Babylonians.

On the other hand, we can scarcely avoid the inference that these forms of idolatry were chiefly encouraged for the sake of the vices connected with them. Thus it involved not only religious, but

³⁵ Possibly older sons of Hezekiah may have died, or there may not have been any by Queen Consorts, who would have been qualified for succession to the throne.

primarily moral degeneracy. Yet, as might be expected, there was also spiritual protest and a moral reaction against all this. Prophetic voices were heard announcing the near doom of a king and people more wicked than the Canaanites of old. But it is significant that the names of these Divine messengers are not mentioned here.

In truth, it was a time of martyrdom, rather than of testimony. There may be exaggeration in the account of Josephus, that Manasseh killed all the righteous among the Hebrews, and spared not even the prophets, but every day slew some among them (Ant. x. 3, 1); and only a basis of historical truth may underlie the Jewish tradition, which was adopted by the Fathers, that by command of Manasseh Isaiah was sawn asunder in a cedar-tree, in which he had found refuge. But Holy Scripture itself relates that Manasseh had filled Jerusalem "from end to end" with innocent blood.

As we have already marked, these sins were national, and this in a more special sense than merely the identification of a nation with its rulers and their public acts. As this condition of the people was not exceptional, but the outcome of a long course, so the Divine judgments were to be cumulative, extending back from the first beginning to the present stage of guilt (2 Kings 21:15). And commensurate not only with the sin of Israel, but with their utter unfaithfulness to the meaning and purpose of their calling, would be the coming evil.³⁶

In the figurative language of Scripture, the desolation of Jerusalem would be as complete as that of Samaria and of the house of Ahab - as it were, a razing to the ground, so that the builder might stretch over it the measuring line and apply the plummet, as if not anything had stood there (comp. Isaiah 34:11; Lamentations 2:8; Amos 7:7-9). Nay, Jerusalem would be thoroughly emptied and cleansed, as a dish that was wiped, and then turned upside down.

For Judah - the remnant of what had been the inheritance of God - would be cast off, and surrendered to their enemies for "a prey and a spoil" (2 Kings 21:12-14). Here the history of

Manasseh abruptly breaks off in the Book of Kings, to be resumed and supplemented in that of Chronicles (2 Chronicles 33:11-20). This in itself is noticeable, first, as casting fresh light on the "prophetic" character of the history as presented in the Books of the Kings, and, secondly, as attesting the historical value of those of Chronicles. In the Books of the Kings, the writer, or compiler, gives not the annals of a reign, nor the biographies of kings and heroes; but groups together such events as bear on the Divine issues of this history, in relation to the calling of Israel. This explains not only the brief summary of the longest reign in Judah or Israel - that of Manasseh, which lasted fifty-five years - but specifically the omission of what he had done for the defense of Jerusalem and Judah (2 Chronicles 33:14), as well as of his captivity, his repentance, return to his capital, and reformation. For these defenses of Judah were useless; the captivity of Manasseh was temporary; and his reformation was, as we shall see, only superficial. But rarely has the skepticism of a certain school of critics received more severe rebuke than in regard to the doubts which on internal grounds have been cast - and that not long ago - on the credibility of the narrative in 2 Chronicles 33:11-20.

It was called in question for this reason, that, in view of the silence of the Book of Kings, there was not ground for believing that the Assyrians exercised supremacy in Judah - far less that there had been a hostile expedition against Manasseh; and because, since the residence of the Assyrian kings was in Nineveh, the reported transportation of Manasseh to Babylon (ver. 11) must be unhistorical. To these were added, as secondary objections, that the unlikely account of a king transported in iron bonds and fetters was proved to be untrustworthy by the still more incredible notice that such a captive had been again restored to his kingdom. Eminently specious as these objections may seem, they have been entirely set aside by the evidence from the Assyrian inscriptions, the preservation of whose testimony is here specially providential. Unfortunately, the lessons which might have been learned in regard to skepticism on "internal grounds" have had little influence.

³⁶ Kings 21:12. The same expression for terrifying news occurs in 1 Samuel 3:11; Jeremiah 19:3.

Of the supremacy of Assyria over Judah in the time of Manasseh, there cannot be any doubt, notwithstanding the silence of the Book of Kings. In a list of twenty-two subject kings of "the land Chatti," in the reign of Esarhaddon, whom that monarch summoned, appears expressly the name of Minasi sar mat (ir) Jaudi, Manasseh, king of Judah.

But the capture of Manasseh by the Assyrian captains, and his deportation to Babylon, recorded in 2 Chronicles 33:11, seems to have taken place not in the reign of Esarhaddon, but in that of his successor, Asurbanipal (the Sardanapalus of classical writers), when his brother Samas-sumukln, the viceroy of Babylon, involved among other countries also Phoenicia and Palestine in his rebellion. And although the ordinary residence of Asurbanipal was in Nineveh, we have not only reason to believe that after his assumption of the dignity of king of Babylon, he temporarily resided in that city, but monumental evidence of it in his reception there of ambassadors with tributary presents. Lastly, we find the exact counterpart alike of this, that Manasseh was carried to Babylon with "hooks," and "bound in fetters," and then afterwards restored to his kingdom, in the Assyrian record of, precisely the same mode of deportation and of the same restoration by Asurbanipal of Necho of Egypt.

Holy Scripture tracing this restoration - not, as in the Assyrian inscription, to its secondary cause "the mercy of the king" - but to its real source, connects it with the repentance and prayer of Manasseh in his distress (2 Chronicles 33:12, 13). That in such circumstances the son of Hezekiah, with the remembrance of the Divine deliverance of his father in his mind, should have recognized the folly and guilt of his conduct, humbled himself, and prayed unto the LORD - seems so natural as scarcely to require confirmation.

Yet there is such, at least of his return to Jerusalem, in the historical notice of his additions to the fortifications of Jerusalem (2 Chronicles 33:14). And if his abolition of the former idolatry, and restoration of the service of Jehovah, seem not consistent with the measures that had afterwards to be adopted by his grandson Josiah, we have to remember that between them intervened the

wicked reign of Amon; that Manasseh seems rather to have put aside than destroyed idolatry; and that the sacred text itself indicates the superficiality and incompleteness of his reformation (2 Chronicles 33:17).

The events just recorded must have taken place near the close of this reign, which extended over the exceptional period of fifty-five years. As Holy Scripture refers to his sins as extreme and permanent instance of guilt (2 Kings 23:26; 24:3; Jeremiah 15:4), so, on the other hand, Jewish tradition dwells upon the repentance of Manasseh and the acceptance of his prayer, as the fullest manifestation of God's mercy, and the greatest encouragement to repentant sinners.³⁷ And, in truth, the threatened judgment upon Jerusalem was deferred for more than half a century. So it was in peace that Manasseh laid himself to sleep. He was buried in a garden attached to his palace, which popularly bore the name of "the garden of Uzza."

That the reformation made by Manasseh could only have been superficial, appears also from the record of the brief reign of his son and successor Amon. Indeed, some writers have seen a picture of that period in certain of the utterances of Zephaniah, although he prophesied during the reign of Josiah.

Amon was twenty-four years old at his accession, and his rule only lasted two years. It was marked by the resumption of the idolatry of Manasseh - apparently in an even aggravated form (2 Chronicles 33:23). A palace-conspiracy put an end to his life. As on a former occasion (2 Kings 14:20, 21), "the people of the land" secured the Davidic succession by proclaiming Josiah, the youthful son of Amen, heir to his throne.

³⁷

The Talmud (Sanh. 103a) says that to deny that Manasseh had share in the world to come, would be to weaken the hands of penitents. As justice demanded that heaven should be closed against him, the Almighty opened for him a hole in the firmament. In the Midrash (Deba. R. 2) a legendary account is realistically given, first of the idol he set up; then how, when he was being burned by the Assyrians, and found all his gods failed him, he cried to the LORD; lastly, how the ministering angels had shut up all the windows of heaven against his prayer, but God had bored for it a hole under the throne of His glory for the encouragement of penitents to all time.

VII_15 - Josiah, (Sixteenth) King of Judah**2 Kings 22; 23:1-23; 2 Chronicles 34; 35:1-19**

Josiah was only eight years old when he succeeded to the royal dignity. As his extreme youth would withdraw him from the influences and temptations to which Manasseh had been exposed at his accession, so it must have necessitated the tutorship, or at least guidance, of men to whom, as generally venerated, a royal child would be entrusted. That such there were, we infer from the revival of prophecy, as represented by a Huldah, a Jeremiah, and a Zephaniah; from the notices we have of some whom we afterwards find surrounding the king; and, lastly, from the bearing of the priesthood under their chief Hilkiah.

Nor, indeed, could the lessons of the reign of Hezekiah, and even of that of Manasseh, have been wholly effaced during the brief rule of Amon. Such men as they, under whose auspices afterwards the reformation of Josiah was carried out, could have had no difficulty in showing the youthful king how the brightest memories of the royal house of Judah were associated with the names of David, Jehoshaphat, and Joash, Uzziah, and Hezekiah, and that the times of greatest national prosperity had been those of faithful and earnest allegiance to Jehovah and His service.

These are indeed mainly inferences; but they are grounded on the facts of this history, and explain them. Nor can we help thinking that even the early birth of an heir to the crown, implying as it does a royal marriage at the early age of thirteen,³⁸ may here be of significance (comp. 2 Kings 22:1 with 23:36). But the whole history of Josiah's reign is of such importance, and it raises so many questions, that, for clearness' sake, it seems better to discuss separately its religious and its political aspect, so far as this is possible.

First and foremost in this reign stand the measures of religious reformation inaugurated by Josiah. These comprise the preliminary abolition of idolatry; the repair of the Temple; the discovery in it of the Book of the Law; the consequent national reformation by the king; and, lastly, the solemn

national observance of the Passover. We have stated the events in the order of their time, and as given in the Book of Kings, from which the arrangement in the Book of Chronicles differs only in appearance. Each of these two accounts relates, with different circumstantiality, one or other of the events mentioned - in each case in accordance with the different view-point of the writers, to which reference has frequently been made. Thus the main topic in the Book of Kings is the religious reformation, alike in its positive aspect as regarded the Temple, the Law, and national Religion (2 Kings 22:3; 23:3), and in its negative aspect in the abolition of idolatry (2 Kings 23:4-20). On the other hand, the chronicler records at greatest length, and with fullest detail, the Paschal observance (2 Chronicles 35:1-19), while he passes very briefly over what might appear as of graver importance (2 Chronicles 34:4-7).

This will explain what otherwise might have seemed a difficulty in the arrangement of the narrative. The account both in the Book of Kings and in Chronicles places the Temple restoration "in the eighteenth year of king Josiah." But in the former the record of the religious reformation begins with this event, while the chronicler prefaces it by a very brief summary of what had previously been done for the abolition of idolatry (2 Chronicles 34:3-7). That something of this kind must have preceded the restoration of the Temple seems evident. It cannot be supposed that a monarch like Josiah should for seventeen years have tolerated all that Amon had introduced, and then, in his eighteenth year, suddenly proceeded to the sweeping measures which alike the writers of Kings and of Chronicles narrate. It is, therefore, only reasonable to accept the statement of the latter, that "in the eighth year of his reign, while he was yet young" [in his sixteenth year - when presumably he commenced personally to administer the government], king Josiah "began to seek after the God of David his father," and that "in the twelfth year he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem" from their idolatry (2 Chronicles 34:3).

And then the chronicler, who, as we have stated, makes only briefest reference to the reformation described with such detail in 2 Kings 23:4-20, at

³⁸ Amon became the father of Josiah at the age of 16 (comp. 2 Kings 21:19).

once adds to the mention of the initial measures towards the abolition of idolatry a summary of what was finally done in that direction, after the restoration of the Temple and in consequence of the discovery of the Book of the Law (vers. 4-7). That such is really the purport of the narrative appears also from the reference at the close of the account of the Temple restoration in 2 Chronicles 34:33, which synchronizes with 2 Kings 23:4.

It was only natural that such preliminary measures as the chronicler relates should have been followed by, as indeed they must have stood in connection with, the restoration of the Temple and its services. This was done in the eighteenth year of Josiah's reign. Nearly two and a half centuries had passed since the former restoration by Joash (2 Kings 12:4-16), and the sacred building must have greatly suffered under the idolatrous kings, especially during the late reigns of Manasseh and Amon. As the restoration was naturally on the same lines with the previous one under Joash, the two accounts are necessarily similar. The collections for the Temple repairs, to which reference is made, must have begun some years previously (2 Kings 22:4) - perhaps so early as the eighth year of the king's reign. But what specially interests us is that contributions came not merely from Judah, but from the Israelitish inhabitants of what had been the kingdom of Israel (2 Chronicles 34:9). This indicates not only a religious movement among them, such as previously in the time of Hezekiah, (Compare 2 Chronicles 30:1, 18.) but that politically also the remnant of Israel in the land was drawn into a hopeful alliance with Judah. Yet further insight into the character of the reformation now begun comes from the history of some of those whom the king employed, either now or later, in connection with it. Foremost among them is Hilkiyah, the high priest, the father or grandfather of Seraiah³⁹ (1 Chronicles 6:13, 14; Nehemiah 11:11) who was high-priest at the time of the captivity (2 Kings 25:18), and an ancestor of Ezra (Ezra. 7:1). Again, chief among those whom Josiah sent to Hilkiyah, was Shaphan

³⁹ But he could not have been identical with the father of Jeremiah (Jeremiah 1:1), since the priests at Anathoth were from the line of Ithamar (1 Kings 2:26), while the high-priest Hilkiyah belonged to that of Eleazar.

the Scribe (2 Kings 22:3), the father of Gemariah,⁴⁰ the protector of Jeremiah (Jeremiah 36:10, 19, 25), and grandfather of Micaiah (Jeremiah 36:20-13).

Of the personages afterwards mentioned 1 Kings 22:14), we have definite notices about Ahikam (the son of another Shaphan), who protected Jeremiah (Jeremiah 26:24), and was the father of Gedaliah (2 Kings 25:22); and about Achbor, the father of Elnathan, one of those among "the princes of Judah" who vainly endeavored to prevent the burning of the prophetic roll dictated to Baruch by Jeremiah (Jeremiah 36:12). Scanty as these notices are, they leave the impression that Josiah had surrounded himself with men imbued, on the whole, with a true religious spirit.

This inference is the more important in view of the general state of the people. The whole history leads to the conviction that the reformation inaugurated by Josiah, although submitted to, and apparently shared in by the people, was not the outcome of a spiritual revival. It was a movement on the part of the king rather than of the nation. Of this we have only too much confirmation in the account which the prophets give of the moral and religious condition of the people, and of the evidently superficial and chiefly external character of the reformation.

And as we derive our knowledge of it from the pages of Jeremiah, we bear in mind that the beginning of his prophetic activity, in the thirteenth year of Josiah (Jeremiah 1:2), synchronized with the commencement of the reformatory movement. Thus we further understand why the changes inaugurated, however extensive, could not avert, as the prophetess Huldah announced, the Divine judgment from the nation, but only from their king (2 Kings 22:14-20). A reformation such as this could be but transient, and the people hastened only the more rapidly to their final apostasy.

It was during the extensive repairs in the Temple that a discovery was made of the greatest influence on the movement about to begin, and which has, especially of late, been connected with some

⁴⁰ He must not be confounded with the father of Ahikam. Comp. 2 Chronicles 34:14.

important critical questions regarding the Pentateuch. As we read in Holy Scripture, the high priest Hilkiah informed "Shaphan the Scribe," that he had "found the book of the law (in 2 Chronicles 34:14: "the book of the law of the LORD, by the hand of Moses") in the house of the LORD" (2 Kings 22:8). This book Hilkiah gave to Shaphan. Its perusal led Shaphan not only to inform the king of it, but to read the book to him. On this Josiah "rent his clothes," in token of mourning for the guilt which Israel had incurred in their long absolute breach of its commandments.

Into the complicated questions, What was the exact compass of this special book (whether it comprised the whole Pentateuch, or what parts of it), and again, What was the date of this copy, and how it came to be found in the Temple - the present is not the place to enter. On some points, however, all sober-minded and reverent inquirers will be at one. Assuredly the finding of the book was not a fraud on the part of Hilkiah, nor yet the book itself a forgery, either by Hilkiah or any priest or prophet of that or the immediately preceding period.

Assuming, as there is every reason to do, that certainly it contained the Book of Deuteronomy, and probably also other portions, if not the whole, of the Law, we cannot imagine any reasonable motive on the part of the priesthood, and still less of the prophets, for the invention of such a book.

And plainly it must have been accepted and its genuineness attested by Jeremiah, who at that time had already been five years in the prophetic office. The further question of the precise contents of the book is both difficult of discussion and not of great practical importance. Irrespective of the time which the reading of the whole Pentateuch would have occupied (comp. here 2 Kings 23:2), the wording of Holy Scripture scarcely conveys in the first instance that the Book comprised the strictly historical portions of the Pentateuch (such as Genesis), but, as we expressly read, "the Book of the Covenant," and "the Book of the Law."

The latter expression leads us in the present case to think, first of all, of that aspect of the law which specially affected the people, and the breach of which entailed the national judgment that Huldah had announced, and the apprehension of which

had caused such consternation to the king. If so, we should perhaps not have to think in the first place of those ritual ordinances found in the central portions of the Pentateuch, which are now commonly called the "Priest Code." These would chiefly affect the priesthood, nor perhaps could the people have followed with complete understanding the mere reading of their complicated ritual details. Besides, the previous history has furnished us with sufficient instances to show that, unlike the Law, the provisions and ordinances of the "Priest Code" must have been well known.

On the other hand, the main contents of the Book of the Law read in hearing of the people must have concerned the whole fundamental relation between Israel and Jehovah. Hence we conclude that it must have contained, besides the Book of Deuteronomy, at any rate those portions of the Pentateuch which related to the same all-important subject. Beyond these suggestions, which are necessarily in the nature of conjectures, we cannot here discuss this question. But on the main points we cannot have any hesitation. In Deuteronomy 31:25, 26, we find directions for depositing the Book of the Law in the innermost Sanctuary, as indeed might have been expected. That in the various troubles, when during many reigns the Mosaic law and order of worship were so often set aside, "the book" should have been removed and hidden by pious hands, and so for a time have become lost, can as little surprise us as its finding during the thorough repairs of the Temple.

And whatever the compass of this special book, the whole context shows, on the one hand, that it implies the embodiment of the Mosaic law in the Pentateuch, and, on the other, that the existence of that law was generally known and universally admitted as primitive, derived from the great Lawgiver himself, valid, and Divine.

We can now understand how, on hearing "the words of the Book of the Law," the king had "rent his clothes" and "sent to inquire of the LORD" both concerning himself and his people. For such breach of the covenant and the law, as he now knew Israel to have been guilty of, must involve signal judgment. In the execution of the king's behest, they whom he sent, including the high-

priest, addressed themselves to Huldah, "the prophetess," the wife of Shallum, "the keeper of the wardrobe," who "dwelt in Jerusalem, in the second town." This part of the city is also designated "the mortar" (Zephaniah 1:10, 11) - in the first place, probably, from its shape, being in the hollow of the valley, and surrounded by rising ground.

It probably formed the first addition to the old city which the increase of the population must have rendered necessary even in the time of Solomon.

It occupied the upper part of the Tyropoeon valley west of the Temple area, and north of "the middle city," and was the great business quarter, containing the markets, the bazaars, and homes of the industrial population. This may imply a comparatively humble outward position of "the prophetess." Why a Jeremiah or a Zephaniah should not have been sought - whether they were not in Jerusalem or from other reasons it is impossible to conjecture. But that such a deputation should have unhesitatingly addressed itself at such a crisis and in a matter so important to a woman, not only indicates the exceptional position which Huldah occupied in general opinion - by the side of and even above the two other Old Testament prophetesses, Miriam (Exodus 15:20) and Deborah (Judges 4:4) - but also casts light on the spiritual relations under the Old Testament, and on the religious conditions of the time.

Above all, it shows with what absolute freeness the Spirit of God selected the instruments which He employed in the execution of the Divine behests (comp. Joel 2:28, 29).

The plain and faithful words in which the prophetess announced the coming judgment (2 Kings 22:14-20) give a new and deeper meaning to the assembly of priests, prophets, and people from Jerusalem and from all parts of the land whom Josiah gathered to hear "the words of the book of the covenant which was found in the house of the LORD" (2 Kings 23:2).

Evidently in all that he did, the king was actuated by higher motives than merely the wish to avert punishment. In the Temple a solemn national "covenant" was made - no doubt, by the people

expressing their assent to the law as binding upon them. In consequence of this, immediate measures were taken under the supervision of the high-priest and his subordinates (2 Kings 23:4) for the removal of all the emblems of idolatry which had defiled the Temple. The various "vessels made for Baal and for the Asherah, and for all the host of heaven" were burnt (comp. Deuteronomy 7:25; 12:3), "in the fields of Kidron, north-east of the city (comp. Jeremiah 31:40). Next, the Kemarim, or non-Levitical priesthood, that officiated whether at the high places, or at the various shrines of idolatry, were "put down." Thus the vile idol of Asherah was brought out from the sanctuary which it had desecrated, burnt by the brook Kidron, its ashes stamped to powder, and further to mark its profanation scattered over the common burying-place. Lastly, the houses erected in close proximity to the Temple itself, for the lowest form of frenzied heathen degradation, were broken down.

But these measures were not limited to the removal of idolatry from the Temple, and of the non-Levitical priesthood from office. Beside the Kemarim there were those of Levitical descent - Kohanim, or priests - who had celebrated an unlawful worship at the high places throughout Judah. These unworthy members of the priesthood were brought to Jerusalem and declared unfit for strictly priestly service in the Temple, although not deprived of what to many must have been the only means of subsistence.

At the same time any resumption of the former unlawful services was rendered impossible by the destruction of all the high places. Chief among these, as the common resort of those who passed in or came out of the city, were "the high places of the gates: that at the entrance of the gate of Joshua the governor of the city, [as well as] that at the left of a man, in the city-gate."

Similarly Topheth was permanently defiled. The sacred horses dedicated by previous kings to the sun, and perhaps used in processional worship, were "put away," and the sun-chariots burned. The altars, alike those on the roof of the Aliyah of Ahaz, and those set up by Manasseh in the two courts of the Temple, were broken down, their

debris "made to run down from thence," and the dust of them cast into the Kidron.

Nor was this all. Outside Jerusalem, on the southern point of the Mount of Olives, there appear still to have been remains of even more ancient idolatry, which dated from the time of Solomon. These were now removed, and the places desecrated. And beyond Judah proper the movement extended throughout the ancient kingdom of Israel, even to the remotest northern tribal possession of Naphtali (2 Chronicles 34:6). This again affords indication of an approximation between the Israelitish inhabitants left in what had been the northern kingdom and Judah. And in the increasing weakness of the Assyrian empire, alike Josiah and the Israelitish remnant may have contemplated a reunion and restoration under a king of the house of David. At any rate the rulers of Assyria were not in a condition to interfere in the affairs of Palestine, nor to check the influence which Josiah exercised over the northern tribes. On the other hand, we can understand that the measures against former idolatry should have been all the more rigorously carried out in the ancient Israelitish kingdom, which had so terribly suffered from the consequences of former apostasy (comp. 2 Kings 23:20). In Beth-el itself, the original seat of Jeroboam's spurious worship, not only was the altar destroyed, but the high place - that is, the sanctuary there - was burned, as also the Asherah, which seems to have taken the place of the golden calf. But as they proceeded further publicly to defile the altar in the usual manner by burning upon it dead men's bones, Josiah espied among the sepulchers close by - perhaps visible from where he stood - the monument of the prophet of old sent to announce, in the high-day of the consecration of that altar, the desolation which should lay it waste (comp. 1 Kings 13:1, 2).

But while they rifled the graves of an idolatrous people, they reverently left untouched the sepulcher which held the bones of the man of God from Judah, and by their side those of his host, the prophet of Beth el. And so literally did the judgment announced of old come to pass, that the bodies of the idol-priests were slain upon the altars at which they had ministered. And not only in Beth-el, but in the furthest cities of Samaria - as

the chronicler graphically and pathetically puts it (2 Chronicles 34:6), "in their ruins round about" - was judgment executed, and even more severely than according to the letter of the Deuteronomic law (Deuteronomy 17:2- 5); for the representatives of the old idolatry were not only stoned, but slain "upon the altars."

It is with almost a sense of relief that we turn from scenes like these to the celebration of the Passover at Jerusalem by a people now at least outwardly purified and conformed to the Mosaic law. Of this festival, and the special mode of its observance, a full account is given in the Book of Chronicles (2 Chronicles 35:1-19). This only need here be said, that whether as regards the circumstances of king and people, or the manner of the Paschal observance,

"surely there was not kept such a Passover from the days of the Judges that judged Israel, nor in all the days of the kings of Israel, nor of the kings of Judah" (2 Kings 23:22).

VII_16 - Josiah (Sixteenth), Jehoahaz (Seventeenth), Jehoiakim (Eighteenth), King of Judah

2 Kings 23:29-36; 2 Chronicles 35:20; 36:5

The observant student of this history must have been impressed with the seemingly strange fact that, at the final crisis in the history of Judah, when that kingdom was hastening to its fall, monarchs of such opposite religious tendencies as Ahaz and Hezekiah, Amon and Josiah, should have succeeded one another. And it reflects most unfavorably on the moral and religious condition of the people that each reformation should, within so short a period, have been followed by a counter-reformation. On the other hand, it must be felt how gracious had been the divine dealing when, in succession to monarchs who, as we cannot but think, too truly represented the real state of the nation, pious kings were raised up, as if to give space for tardy repentance and recovery. Even the history of Manasseh would, in that sense, almost seem to have borne a symbolic meaning. But especially does the mind dwell on the administration of Josiah, with its very significant re-discovery and re-publication of the Law of Moses. As neither before nor after him was there

any king whose heart was so "tender," and who so humbled himself before Jehovah (2 Kings 22:19), nor yet any who so "turned to Jehovah with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses" (2 Kings 23:25) - so we must surely regard his upraising at that crisis, his bearing, and his rule as of direct Divine grace and interposition.

It is when taking into wider consideration these two facts - regarding the people and the king - that we fully understand the Divine sentence of judgment upon Jerusalem and Judah (2 Kings 23:26, 27), and the personal mercy extended to Josiah (2 Kings 22:20). We have been hitherto occupied with the most important measures of his reign - that public religious reformation which had as its necessary sequence the abolition of private idolatrous practices (2 Kings 23:24). But the political history of the time is also of deepest interest.

Reference has already been made to the approximation between Judah and the remnant of Israel left in the northern kingdom. All indications point to the inference that hopes were entertained, if not plans actually formed, of a possible re-union of the two kingdoms under the sway of Josiah. Thus, just as the independent existence of Judah was about to cease, the national prospects might seem to human view more promising than for centuries past. The disappointment of these hopes must have shown that, even as Israel had at the first held the land, not by the power of man, but by the Divine appointment, so would no combination, however hopeful, succeed in restoring what only the God of Israel could bestow. And this has its lessons for the future, as well as in the past.

It has already been stated that Assyria was no longer able to suppress any attempts at independent action in Palestine. Under the brilliant but cruel reign of Asurbanipal (the son of Ezarhaddon) Assyria had reached the highest point of its might; but with it also commenced the decay of the cumbrous empire. Its beginning may be dated from the rebellion of Sammu-ukin (Saosduchin, i.e., Samul-sum-iskun), the brother of Asurbanipal and viceroy of Babylon. That rebellion was indeed crushed, and its author perished in the flames, the victor himself assuming the crown of Babylon.

But already other forces were in the field. Elam-Persia, the latest conquest of Assyria, rose in rebellion. These armies were indeed vanquished in two or rather three wars; but from the east the Medes invaded Assyria. The attack was unsuccessful, and cost the Median king, Phraortes, his life. But over Western Asia and far down to Egypt the power of Assyria was lost. And from the north of the Black Sea, from the steppes of Russia, the Scythians swept down and overran the country to the shores of the Mediterranean, and down to the borders of Egypt. There Psammetichus succeeded in buying them off, and the majority of the barbarians returned northwards. Some writers have supposed that they came into conflict with Josiah, and that Jeremiah 4:5-6:30, as well as some of the utterances of Zephaniah, refer to this, and that the presence of the invaders was perpetuated in the later name of Scythopolis for Beth-Shean. But this is, to say the least, doubtful. When, after many years, the Medes succeeded in finally repelling the Scythians, Assyria was utterly exhausted, and the fall of Nineveh at hand.

But before that an event had taken place of special importance in the history of Judah. The decline of Assyria had naturally rekindled the hopes of Egypt, its rival for the empire of the ancient world. Hitherto it had always been worsted in the contests with Assyria. But now, Pharaoh-Necho (really Necho II.), the son of Psammetichus (the founder of the twenty-sixth, Saite dynasty), resolved to attack the Assyrian power. To us a special interest attaches to Necho, since he was the first to attempt joining the Red Sea with the Mediterranean, although he had finally to desist from the enterprise.

Circumstances seemed indeed favorable to the expedition of Necho against Assyria. Asurbanipal had on his death (probably in 626 B.C.) bequeathed to his successor or successors a very troubled heritage. In Babylonia Nabopolassar appears (in 626 or 625) as nominally a viceroy, but virtually independent of Assyria.

The expedition of Necho, to which reference is made in 2 Kings 23:29, and at greater length in 2 Chronicles 35:20-25, was made in the year 609 B.C., or sixteen years after Nabopolassar had become ruler of Babylonia. In 2 Kings 23:29 the

expedition is expressly described as against "the king of Assyria." But here a difficulty arises. According to some authorities the fall of Nineveh preceded or coincided with the accession of Nabopolassar to the Babylonian throne in 626 B.C.

In that case the expedition of Necho would have been against the Babylonian monarch, who would have been designated "King of Assyria" as successor to that power. According to other authorities the fall of Nineveh would have to be placed between the years 609 and 606 B.C. As Asurbanipal seems to have still occupied the throne in 626 B.C., and as we read of two sieges of Nineveh, it appears most likely that this (the first) expedition of Necho was still literally against "the king of Assyria."

Avoiding a march through the land of Judah, the Egyptian army advanced along the ordinary route followed towards the East. At the slope of the hills which separate the low coast tract south of Carmel from the great plain of Esdraelon, its progress was barred by a Judæan army under Josiah, holding the strong position of Megiddo, the modern el-Lejjun, which commanded the valley of the Kishon (called in 1 (3) Esd. i. 27 that of Mageddo), and also access to the mountains of Samaria. It is not easy to form a definite opinion as to the motives which induced Josiah to attempt arresting the march of Necho. But probably he may have been influenced by those plans for the re-union of Israel and Judah to which reference has already been made. He may have thought that the danger to the independence of the new kingdom would be much greater if Necho succeeded in the object of his expedition than if matters continued as they were. Of the two powers which threatened Palestine - Egypt and Assyria - the former was, at that time, certainly more to be dreaded. Besides, had Josiah succeeded, he would have secured not only the gratitude of Assyria, but the virtual, if not the nominal independence of his kingdom.

It was in vain that Necho remonstrated with Josiah. In the remarkable message which his ambassadors were instructed to deliver (2 Chronicles 35:21), he probably did not refer to any special prophecies against Assyria, but rather to what he regarded as the general lesson which

Josiah should derive from the history of Hezekiah, viewed in connection with subsequent events, as indicating the will of the God of Israel in regard to the destruction of Assyria.

But Josiah gave not heed to the warning. A decisive battle was fought on "the plain of Megiddo" (2 Chronicles 35:22). If the reading is correct that Josiah "disguised himself," we would almost be reminded of the similar device of Ahab (2 Chronicles 18:29).

But the precaution, if adopted, was useless. Mortally wounded by the archers, Josiah was lifted from his chariot, and probably expired on the way to Jerusalem (2 Kings 23:30), whither they carried him. He was buried in "his own sepulcher" - apparently in the new place of sepulcher prepared by Manasseh (2 Chronicles 35:24; comp. 2 Kings 21:18, 26). General and deep was the mourning in Jerusalem and Judah for good King Josiah. The prophet Jeremiah composed a "lament" for him, which, although now lost, seems to have been inserted in a special book of "Laments" mentioned by the Chronicler (35:25). Nay, his memory and the "lament" for him continued in Israel - and the memorial, if not some of the words, of it are preserved in Jeremiah 22:10, 18, and so late as in Zechariah 12:11.

In truth, the defeat of the Judean army and the death of Josiah, not only put an end to his great reformatory movement, and to the hopes of the possible re-union and recovery of Israel and Judah, but it sounded the knell of Jewish independence. Henceforth Judah was alternately vassal to Egypt or Babylonia. According to 1 Chronicles 3:15, Josiah had four sons, of whom the eldest, Johanan, seems to have died, either before his father or perhaps in the battle of Megiddo.

The other three, arranging them in the order of age, were Eliakim, afterwards called Jehoiakim; Shallum, afterwards called Jehoahaz; and Zedekiah. On the death of Josiah "the people of the land" made and anointed, as his successor, not the eldest royal prince, but his younger brother Shallum, who, on his accession, assumed the name Jehoahaz, "Jehovah holds up" (comp. 2 Kings 23:30, with Jeremiah 22:11, and 1 Chronicles 3:15).

From the fate which so speedily overtook him, we may infer that the popular choice of Jehoahaz was largely influenced by his opposition to Egypt. Of his brief reign of three months and, according to Josephus, ten days, we only know that "he did the evil in the sight of Jehovah." If Josephus also characterizes him as "impure in his course of life," this may refer to the restoration of the lascivious rites of his grandfather's reign.

Meantime, Necho had, after the battle of Megiddo, continued his march towards Syria. Thither, at Riblah (the modern Ribleh, on the Orontes) "in the land of Hamath," the victor summoned the new Jewish king.

On his arrival, Jehoahaz, who had been crowned without the leave of Necho, was put in bonds. Necho does not seem, on this occasion, to have pursued his expedition against Assyria. The great battle at Carchemish, to which the chronicler refers by anticipation (2 Chronicles 35:20), was fought on a second expedition, three years later, when the Egyptian army under Necho was defeated with great slaughter by Nebuchadnezzar, the son of Nabopalassar. This was after the fall of Nineveh, and when the Babylonian or Chaldean empire had taken the place of the Assyrian. But on the present occasion Necho seems to have returned, before encountering the Assyrians, into Egypt, whither "he brought" with him Jehoahaz, who died in captivity.

The Pharaoh appointed, in room of Jehoahaz, his brother Eliakim, who ascended the throne at the age of twenty-five, being two years older than Jehoahaz (2 Kings 23:31). After a not uncommon practice (Comp. Genesis 41:45; Ezra 5:14; Daniel 1:7), and to show how entirely the new king was his subject, Necho changed his name, Eliakim, into Jehoiakim - "Jehovah setteth up" - the selection of the name being probably determined by a regard for its effect upon the people. A tribute of 100 talents of silver and one talent of gold was imposed upon the land. This sum, so small as compared with the tribute formerly imposed by Tiglath-pileser on Menahem of Samaria (2 Kings 15:19), and that given to Sennacherib by Hezekiah (2 Kings 18:14), and amounting to only about 37,500 pounds in silver and 6,750 pounds in gold, affords evidence of the impoverishment of the

country. After the example of Menahem of Samaria (2 Kings 15:20), Jehoiakim raised the tribute by a general tax upon the land. It was an ominous precedent to follow. But, to use the language of a great writer, the twenty-three years which elapsed between the decease of Josiah and the final deportation to Babylon, were only "the dying time" of the kingdom of Judah.

VII_17 - Jehoiakim (Eighteenth), Jehoiachin (Nineteenth), Zedekiah, (Twentieth) King of Judah

2 Kings 24, 25; 2 Chronicles 36:5 to the end

The reign of Jehoiakim, which lasted eleven years, was in every respect most disastrous. In truth, it was the beginning of the end. The reformatory work of Josiah gave place to a restoration of the former idolatry (comp. 2 Chronicles 36:8). As in previous reigns, it was connected with complete demoralization of the people (comp. Jeremiah 7:9-15; 17:2; 19:4-9; Ezekiel 8:9-18). And this not only among the laity, high and low, but equally among the priests and prophets (comp. Jeremiah 23:9-14). All the louder rose the voices of the prophets' Jeremiah, Urijah, and Habakkuk. But their warnings were either unheeded and scorned, or brought on them persecution and martyrdom (2 Kings 24:4; Jeremiah 26:10, 11; and especially verses 20-23). Otherwise, also, it was a wretched government, characterized by public wrong, violence, oppression, and covetousness. While the land was impoverished, the king indulged in luxury, and built magnificent palaces, or adorned towns, by means of forced labor, which remained unpaid, and at the cost of the lives of a miserable enslaved people (Jeremiah 22:13-18; Habakkuk 2:9-17).

In these circumstances the crisis could not be long delayed. As previously stated, three years after his first expedition, Necho once more advanced against the rival empire in the east. There great changes had taken place. Nineveh had fallen under the combined assault of Nabopalassar, king of Babylonia, and Kyaxares, king of the Medes. Notices, however brief, of these events seem necessary for the more complete understanding of this history.

Media, by which name we understand the district in Asia reaching from south of the Caspian Sea, but east of the Zagros mountain, down to Elam (Susiana), seems to have been inhabited by a twofold population: the earlier settlers being of non-Arian, the later of Arian descent. Their history first emerges into clear light during the reign of Tiglath-pileser II., who incorporated into the Assyrian empire districts of Media, these conquests being continued by Sargon and Sennacherib. Media regained its independence during the reign of Asurbanipal (668-626, B.C.) when, as previously noted, Phraortes of Media made an unsuccessful inroad upon Assyria. His successor, Kyaxares (633-593, B.C.), in conjunction with Nabopalassar of Babylonia, put an end to the Assyrian empire and destroyed Nineveh. But the independence of Media did not long continue. Astyages, the successor of Kyaxares, was dethroned by Cyrus (in 558, B.C.), and his kingdom incorporated with Persia.

The other, and in this history more important factor in the destruction of the Assyrian empire, was Babylonia, which took its place. Babylonia, also known to us as "the land of the Chaldees," was bounded in the north by Armenia and Media as far as Mount Zagros; in the west by the Arabian desert; in the south by the Persian Gulf; and in the east by Elam (Susiana).

Its population was of twofold race. The earliest inhabitants were non-Semitic - the Accadians. To them the culture of the people is really due, and they were the inventors of the so-called cuneiform writing. To these inhabitants there joined themselves at any rate so early as in the third millennium before our era, Semitic immigrants, coming from Arabia. They occupied, in the first place, Southern Babylonia, in and around Ur, whence they gradually spread northwards, slowly gaining the mastery over the earlier nationality, but receiving the impress of its culture. These settlers were what we know by the name of the Chaldees. To the earlier history of Babylonia and its relations with Assyria, we have, so far as necessary for our present purpose, already adverted in connection with Merodach-bal-adan. Without here entering into the troubled period of the contests between Assyria (under Tiglath-

pileser, Sargon, and Sennacherib) and Babylonia for its independence, we recall the rebellion of Saos-duchin, the brother of Asurbanipal, whom he had appointed viceroy of Babylon. After the suppression of that rising, and the death of Saosduchin, Asurbanipal himself assumed the crown of Babylon. But, as we have seen, his successors could not maintain the supremacy of Assyria. After the final defeat of the Scythians, the Medes, under Kyaxares, were advancing a second time against Assyria. The last king of that empire was purposing himself to make a stand against them. But Nabopalassar, instead of holding Babylonia for Assyria, had turned against it, and made common cause with the enemy, cementing the new alliance by the marriage of his son, Nebuchadnezzar, with Amytis, the daughter of Kyaxares. The two armies now marched against Nineveh, which made brave resistance. Saracus destroyed himself in the flames of his palace, and Nineveh was utterly laid waste.

With Nabopalassar, who founded the new Babylonian empire, began the period of the Chaldees - as they are chiefly known to us in Scripture. Here we may at once indicate that he was succeeded by his son, Nebuchadnezzar (or Nebuchadnezzar), and he in turn by his son, Evil-merodach, who, after two years' reign, was dethroned by his brother-in-law, Neriglissar. After four years (559-556, B.C.) Neriglissar was succeeded by his youthful son, Laborosoarchod. After his murder, Nabonidos (Nabunit, Nabunaid) acceded to the government, but after seventeen years' reign (555-539 B.C.) was dethroned by Cyrus. The eldest son of Nabonidos, and heir to the throne, was Belshazzar, whom we know from the Book of Daniel, where, in a not unusual manner, he is designated as the son, that is, the descendant of Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 5:2, 11, 18). We infer that, while his father, Nabonidos, went to meet Cyrus, to whom he surrendered, thereby preserving his life, Belshazzar had been left as "king" in Babylon, at the taking of which he perished in the night of his feast, described in Holy Scripture.

From these almost necessary digressions we return to the Biblical history. It was three years after his first expedition that Pharaoh Necho once more

turned his arms against the eastern empire. Even the direction of his march, as indicated by the battle fought at Carchemish, shows that the expedition was really intended against Assyria. But Nineveh had fallen, and the Egyptian army was encountered by the youthful heir to the new Babylonian empire, Nebuchadrezzar - in the inscriptions Nabukudurri-usur - "Nebo, protect the crown."

The Egyptian army was thoroughly defeated and followed by the victorious Nebuchadrezzar, who now recovered the Assyrian possessions in Western Asia, which had been lost in the previous reign. The date of this battle deserves special attention. For the victory of Carchemish (606 or 605 B.C.) was gained by the Babylonian army in the fourth year of Jehoiakim (Jeremiah 46:2), and it was in the same fourth year of his reign that Jeremiah made Baruch write in a book his prophetic denunciations of judgment (Jeremiah 36:1). The conjunction of these two events is deeply significant.

What followed can be easily understood. As Nebuchadrezzar advanced towards Palestine (2 Kings 24:1) - in the fifth year of the reign of Jehoiakim - the Jewish king, in abject fear, proclaimed a national fast (Jeremiah 36:9). Whether this was done from superstition, or for the sake of popular effect, or else in hope of conciliating the prophet and his adherents, certain it is that the professed repentance was hypocritical. The book of Jeremiah's prophecies, which Baruch had publicly read on that occasion, was cut in pieces by the king himself, and thrown on the fire (Jeremiah 36:22, 23). Jeremiah and Baruch only escaped imprisonment, if not death, by timely concealment. Nevertheless, Nebuchadrezzar appeared in Jerusalem. Jehoiakim, who would be regarded as a vassal of Egypt, was bound in fetters, with the intention of being carried to Babylon. This, however, was not done - perhaps because of the summons which rapidly recalled Nebuchadrezzar to Babylon. But the vessels of the temple were sent to Babylon, and placed, first in the victor's palace, and then in the temple of his god - probably Bel-Merodach or Belus (comp. 2 Kings 24:13; 2 Chronicles 36:6, 7; Jeremiah

35:11; 36:29-31; Daniel 1:2; and for the date also Jeremiah 25:1).

During the Syrian campaign of Nebuchadrezzar his father, Nabopalassar, had sickened. Tidings of his death now induced the heir to the crown speedily to return to Babylon, committing his Jewish, Phoenician, Syrian, and Egyptian captives, together with the spoil, to his subordinates (Jos. Ant. x. II, I).

Jehoiakim was allowed to remain for three years as a tributary to Babylonia (2 Kings 24:1). At the end of that time he rebelled. Nebuchadrezzar, who was probably detained by domestic affairs, left his punishment, in the first place, in the hands of his Chaldean garrisons, and of the old hereditary enemies who surrounded Judah. In the latter respect it is specially significant that the account in the Book of Kings attributes this to the direct agency of the Lord, in fulfillment of His purpose of judgment (2 Kings 24:2). The king of Egypt, who probably was not without share in the rebellion of Jehoiakim, did not venture to come to the aid of the land which was overrun by the enemy (2 Kings 24:7). In the midst of these troubles Jehoiakim died - perhaps by the hand of his assailants. The king who had wrought so much evil (2 Kings 24:4), and who had brought such misfortunes on his land, descended into the grave unmourned and unhonored (Jeremiah 22:18, 19; 36:30).

Jehoiakim was succeeded by his son, Jehoiachin ("Jehovah confirms"), a youth of eighteen years, who reigned for only three months and ten days (2 Chronicles 36:9).

He occupied the throne when Nebuchadrezzar himself appeared a second time on the soil of Palestine (2 Kings 24:11). It is impossible to determine whether what now happened was in punishment of the previous rebellion, or because the young king was guilty of similar intrigues with Egypt. From the indications in Holy Scripture we are led to suppose that the queen-mother, Nehushta ("the brazen"), the daughter of Elnathan, an influential prince of Jerusalem (2 Kings 24:8; Jeremiah 36:12, 25), had considerable share in the events of this brief reign. We infer this, on the one hand, from the connection of her father with Egypt (Jeremiah 26:22), and on the other from the

pointed references to her and her fate (2 Kings 24:12; Jeremiah 13:18; 22:26; 29:2).

At first the siege of Jerusalem was entrusted to subordinate officers. But when the fall of the city seemed near Nebuchadnezzar himself appeared. Jehoiachin, together with the queen-mother, the court, the princes, and the leaders seem to have surrendered to the victor. The punishment inflicted on the city was of signal severity. All the treasures of the temple and the palace were carried away, the heavier furnishings of the sanctuary being cut in pieces.

Thus was the word of the Lord, long and often spoken, fulfilled (2 Kings 24:12, 13). The king himself, his mother, his wives, and all the officials, whether of the court, the state, or the army, were carried to Babylon. Nay, to make sure of the permanence of the conquest, "all Jerusalem" - in the sense of what made it the capital - and all who in any sense were "strong and apt for war" - who could either lead, or fight, or prepare the means for it - were carried into captivity. Their number is roughly stated as 11,000 (11,023[?] comp. Jeremiah 52:28), comprising 3,000 ranked as "princes" and leading citizens, 7,000 soldiers (10,000, 2 Kings 24:14), and 1,000 craftsmen, especially smiths (2 Kings 24:13-16).

Considering that the total population of Jerusalem at that time - including women and children - is only calculated at between 50,000 and 60,000 souls, only a sparse remnant can have been left behind - and that wholly composed of "the poorest sort of the people of the land." Among the captives was also the prophet Ezekiel (Ezekiel 1:1, 2; 40:1, comp. Jeremiah 29:1).

We may as well here relate the sequel of Jehoiachin's history. For thirty-seven years he lingered in a Babylonian prison. At the end of that period Evil-merodach ("the man of Merodach"), the son and successor of Nebuchadnezzar, showed him favor. Selected from out the other captive kings he was restored to rank, admitted to the royal table as one of the vassals at the court of the Babylonian monarch, and had a regular allowance assigned to him suited to the wants of his family and establishment. This continued till his death, the date of which is uncertain (2 Kings 25:27-30; Jeremiah 52:31, 34).

We now rapidly near the close of this history. On his departure from Jerusalem Nebuchadnezzar had, with singular generosity, appointed a king of the old Davidic lineage. His choice had fallen on Mattaniah ("the gift of Jehovah"), whose name was changed into Zedekiah ("the righteousness of Jehovah").

The new king was the uncle of Jehoiachin, being the youngest son of Josiah by the same mother as Jehoahaz (comp. 2 Kings 23:31). The eleven years of his reign may be summed up in the brief formula which described that of Jehoiaquim, as of so many others: "he did the evil in the sight of Jehovah." And significantly the sacred text adds: "For because of the anger of Jehovah did it come to pass in Jerusalem and in Judah, until He cast them out from His presence. And Zedekiah rebelled against the King of Babylon" (2 Kings. 24:20).

The "rebellion" of Zedekiah was the more culpable and aggravated that he had taken a solemn oath of fidelity to Nebuchadnezzar (2 Chronicles 36:13; Ezekiel 17:13). The precise circumstances which led up to his attempt at independence cannot be fully ascertained. Still there are sufficient indications to show the progress of what ultimately ended in open revolt.

The first care of the new king must have been to gather around him counselors and people. As all the most prominent and able men of Judah were in captivity, the task would in any circumstances have been one of extreme difficulty. In the present instance the measures taken seem to have been disastrous. The capital and the Temple were the scene of every idolatry (Ezekiel 8), while the administration of justice would appear to have been of the worst kind (Jeremiah 21:11, 12). It was not long before political intrigues began. Soon ambassadors from Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre, and Sidon, appeared at the court of Zedekiah - no doubt to deliberate about a combined movement against Babylonia (Jeremiah 27). Perhaps the contemplated rising was connected with troubles which Nebuchadnezzar had at that time to encounter in Elam (comp. Jeremiah 49:34-39). But all such hopes were doomed to speedy disappointment.

Zedekiah now deemed it prudent to send ambassadors to Babylon to assure his suzerain of his fidelity. The messengers also carried with them letters from Jeremiah to the exiles, who seem to have been in a state of restless expectation, probably due to the plans of Zedekiah (Jeremiah 29:1 and follow.). This was in the fourth year of Zedekiah (Jeremiah 28:1). How such hopes were fostered by false prophets appears from Jeremiah 28, which records the predictions of one Hananiah, and the Divine punishment which overtook him. The embassy to Babylon seems not to have appeased the suspicions of Nebuchadrezzar, and Zedekiah had to appear personally in Babylon (Jeremiah 51:59). This closes the first scene in the drama.

The next scene opens with fresh intrigues - this time chiefly with Egypt (Ezekiel 17:15-18) - probably through the numerous Judaeans immigrants to that country (Jeremiah 24:8). Neighboring tribes, were, however, also implicated. Whether Zedekiah now deemed himself sufficiently strong with the help of Egypt, or else it was impossible any longer to conceal the plans of the allies, certain it is that he now openly rebelled (2 Kings 24:20). His punishment came quickly. Nebuchadrezzar advanced with his army, and pitched his camp at Riblah - significantly, the same place where Jehoahaz had been cast into bonds by Necho (2 Kings 23:33). Riblah remained the headquarters of the Babylonian army, as being a convenient point whence to operate against Palestine and Tyre on the one side, and on the other against Ammon and Moab (Ezekiel 21:19, 20, 22, 28; 26:1-7). Presently all Judaea was overrun. Indeed, it was entirely defenseless, with the exception of the fortified towns of Lachish, Azekah, and Jerusalem (Jeremiah 34:7). Against Jerusalem itself Nebuchadrezzar and his host now laid siege. This was on the tenth day of the tenth month of the ninth year of Zedekiah (2 Kings 25:1; Jeremiah 39:1).

In the city, the greatness of the danger gave rise to what might have seemed feelings of repentance, alternating, however, with opposite tendencies, as amidst the general stupefaction and helplessness one or the other party had the upper hand. In the midst of it all the king seemed as one utterly lost.

At first all was energy. The useless houses which the kings and the nobles had reared, were thrown down, and their place and materials used for the defenses of the city (Jeremiah 33:4). It was a vain measure - and these defenses only became the graves of those who held them. Popular measures also were adopted. The king made a covenant with the people, and a solemn proclamation restored freedom to all of Hebrew nationality - men and women - whom previous exactions, violence, and unrighteousness had reduced to, or kept in, slavery (Jeremiah 34:8, 9). The "princes" sulkily submitted. But during the brief time that the Babylonians withdrew to meet the Egyptian army, they not only ignored what had been done, but once more reduced to bondage those who had so lately been set free (Jeremiah 34:10, 11).

As for Zedekiah himself, his conduct was characterized by that helpless perplexity and vacillation, which were the outcome of weakness and want of religious conviction. Deputations were sent to Jeremiah for inquiry of the LORD, and appeal to Him in name of past deliverances (Jeremiah 21:1, 2; 37:3). And yet, at the same time, the king imprisoned and maltreated the prophets. All this according as his nobles either opposed or protected Jeremiah. Yet when the prophet clearly set before the king the certain alternative of resistance and captivity, or else surrender and safety (Jeremiah 34:2-6, 38:17,18), Zedekiah could form no decision. Most characteristic of the situation is Jeremiah 38. As we read it, the king first yielded to his princes, who even ventured to charge the prophet with treacherous designs (Jeremiah 37:13), and Jeremiah was cast into a loathsome dungeon. Next, Zedekiah listened to intercessions on the other side, and Jeremiah was at least removed from the subterranean prison, where his feet had sunk in mire, and more humanely treated. Then the king actually sent for him and consulted him. Nay, he not only most solemnly swore to protect him, but seemed willing to follow his advice and surrender to the Chaldeans. But once more fear prevented his taking that step, notwithstanding the assurances of Jeremiah. In the end Zedekiah was even in fear that his nobles should hear of his conference with the prophet, and bade him give a different interpretation to their interview.

Meantime the siege was continuing, without hope of relief. Tyre suffered straits similar to those of Jerusalem, while Ammon, Moab, Edom, and the Philistines had not only withdrawn from the alliance, but were waiting to share in the spoil of Judah (Ezekiel 25). At length a gleam of hope appeared. An Egyptian army, under their King Hophra, the grandson of Necho, advanced through Phoenicia, and obliged the Chaldeans to raise the siege of Jerusalem (Jeremiah 37:5-7). The exultation and reaction in Jerusalem may be imagined - and it was probably in consequence of it that Jeremiah, who still predicted calamity, was cast into prison (ib. ver. 4). But the relief of Jerusalem was brief. The Egyptian army had to retire, and the siege of Jerusalem by the Chaldeans was resumed, and that under even more disadvantageous circumstances to the besieged. To the other calamities that of famine was now added (2 Kings 25:3). Of the horrors of that time Jeremiah has left a record in the Book of Lamentations (comp. i 19; ii. 11, 12, 20; iv. 3-10). The last resistance was soon overcome. On the ninth day of the fourth month [Tammuz], in the eleventh year of Zedekiah, the enemy gained possession of the northern suburb (2 Kings 25:4; Jeremiah 39:2, 3; 52:6, 7). Before the middle gate the Babylonian captains held a council of war (Jeremiah 39:2, 3). Then the king and all the regular army sought safety in flight during the darkness of the night (Jeremiah 39:4). As the Chaldeans held the northern part of the city, they fled southwards. Between the two walls, through the Tyropoeon, then out of the "fountain-gate," and through the king's garden, they made haste to gain the Jordan. But their flight could not remain unobserved. They were pursued and overtaken in the plains of Jericho. The soldiers dispersed in various directions. But the king himself and his household were taken captives, and carried to the headquarters at Riblah, where Nebuchadrezzar himself was at the time. Here Zedekiah was formally arraigned and sentence given against him. His daughters were set free, but his sons were slain before him. It was the last sight the king saw. His eyes were put out; he was bound hands and feet with double fetters of brass, and so carried to Babylon. (Compare 2 Kings 25:4-7; Jeremiah 4-7;

43:6; Ezekiel 12:12, 13.) There he died in ward (Jeremiah 52:11).

The remainder of this mournful tale is soon told. After the flight and capture of the king, the city could not long hold out. A month later, and on the seventh day of the fifth month (Ab) Nebuzar-adan ["Nebo gave posterity"] penetrated into the city.

The Temple was set on fire, as well as the king's palace. The whole city was reduced to ruins and ashes, and the walls which had defended it were broken down (2 Kings 25:9, 10). After three days the work of destruction was completed; and ever afterwards was the 10th (9th) of Ab mourned as the fatal day of Jerusalem's fall (Jeremiah 52:12; Zechariah 7:3, 5; 8:19).

"The rest of the people left in the city," and those who had previously passed to the enemy, together "with the remnant of the multitude," were carried away (2 Kings 25:11). We can scarcely be mistaken in regarding these captives as the chief part of the non-combatant population of Jerusalem and Judah.

The capture of Jerusalem found Jeremiah in prison for his faithfulness in announcing the coming ruin, and for warning his people of their impending fate. But the same faith and faithfulness led him there to yet loftier display of the prophetic character than even when bearing steadfast testimony amidst gainsaying, persecution, and suffering. In that prison, and in full view of the impending desolation, he announced, with the same firm faith as formerly the judgments upon Israel, not only the terrible doom that would overtake Babylon (Jeremiah 51:1), but also the certain restoration of Israel. And in sublime confidence of this event, he bought while in prison - in this also obedient to the Divine direction - fields in Anathoth, as it were in anticipation of the return of his people to their own land (Jeremiah 32:6-23). And beyond this did his rapt vision descry a better and spiritual restoration of Israel (Jeremiah 32:37-44). Assuredly, viewing the Prophet in the surroundings of his time and circumstances, it is not easy to understand how any one can fail to perceive either the sublime dignity of the prophetic office, or the Divine character of prophecy.

But the end has not yet been fully told. All of any value in the Temple that could be removed, either whole or when broken up, was taken to Babylon. As already stated, the general population of Jerusalem and of Judah were carried into captivity. Only the poorest in the land were left to be husbandmen and vine-dressers, so as not to leave the soil uncultivated - probably in expectation of a future colonization from Babylonia.

Lastly, signal punishment was dealt out to those who were regarded as ringleaders or as representative persons during the late rebellion. "Seraiah, th the second priest" (probably the substitute of the high priest), "and the three keepers of the door" - that is, the chiefs of the Levites who kept watch at the three Temple gates (Jeremiah 38:14), were brought before the court which sat at Riblah, and executed.

The same punishment as that of the Temple officials was meted out to the royal officers in the city - the chamberlain who had charge of the troops, five of the king's councilors, and the secretary of the general of the army. With these were executed sixty of the people of the land, either as prominent in the late rebellion, or as representing the people generally.

The civil administration of the country was entrusted by Nebuchadrezzar to Gedaliah, the son of Ahikam. The latter had held a high position in the reign of Josiah (2 Kings 22:12), and was even more distinguished for the piety and courage which saved the life of Jeremiah in the time of Jehoiakim (Jeremiah 26:24). The same adherence to the prophetic Word had induced Gedaliah to support the unpopular advice of submission to Nebuchadrezzar. Information of all that passed in the city would no doubt reach the camp of the Chaldeans, and it would be in consequence of what he had heard that Nebuchadrezzar appointed Gedaliah to his post. It was also this, as well as respect for the prophet and his office, which must have induced the king to give such charge about Jeremiah to Nebuzar-adan, his chief captain (Jeremiah 39:11-14; 40:1-4). The prophet was apparently set at liberty, but afterwards, by some mistake, carried with the other captives in chains to Ramah. Here the error was discovered, and Nebuzar-adan gave the prophet the choice of

either going to Babylon, where all honorable provision should be made for him, or of settling in any part of the country. With true patriotic feeling, as well as in accordance with his prophetic work, Jeremiah chose to remain with the new Jewish governor, in order to support his authority, and to guide by his counsel the remnant of the people. But even this proved a thankless and a hopeless task. Gedaliah had taken up his residence in the ancient historic Mizpah.

Thither all that was left of Judah's representative men gathered, as also the wives, daughters, and children of the slain and the captives. Thither also came the fugitives who had sought safety in neighboring lands, as well as the remnants of the dispersed Jewish army. A court was being formed, and the governor was surrounded by a Chaldean and Jewish guard (Jeremiah 40:6-end; 41:3; 43:6). It even seems as if a kind of sanctuary had been set up (Jeremiah 41:5). For a brief time it appeared as if not only peace but a measure of prosperity were to be vouchsafed to the remnant of Judah. But once more all such hopes were disappointed. The rule of Gedaliah lasted only two months.

Chief among them who had come to him was Ishmael, the son of Nathaniah, himself of the seed royal. Partly in the hope of possessing himself of the government, to which his descent might lead him to aspire, and partly at the instigation of Baalis, the king of the Ammonites - who no doubt had purposes of his own in the matter - Ishmael put himself at the head of a gang of conspirators (comp. 2 Kings 25:25; Jeremiah 40:8-16). In vain the generous Gedaliah was warned of his danger. Incapable of treachery himself, he would not believe in that of others, nor sanction measures of needful self-defense. Accordingly the plan of the conspirators was carried out. Gedaliah and all who were around him were massacred, and their dead bodies cast into the pit which, long before, Asa the king had made, for fear of Baasha, king of Israel (Jeremiah 41:1-9). Only ten men escaped slaughter by promises of rich supplies to the conspirators.

But even so the measure was not full. After his bloody success at Mizpah, Ishmael had carried away captive not only the women, but all the people, with the intention of passing over to the Ammonites. But when tidings of the crimes

perpetrated reached Johanan, the son of Kareah, and the captains of the forces in the fields, who had formerly in vain warned Gedaliah of his danger (Jeremiah 40:13-16), they mustered to avenge the wrong. They pursued and overtook Ishmael at Gibeon. The captive Jews now made common cause with their deliverers, and Ishmael escaped with only eight followers into Ammon. But the faith of Johanan and his companions was not equal to the occasion. Afraid that the Chaldeans would avenge on them the treachery and slaughter at Mizpah, they drew off towards Egypt. With hypocritical pretense of a desire that Jehovah might through His prophet show them whither to go and what to do, they approached the prophet. Jeremiah was to inquire of the LORD - and they gave solemn promise implicitly to obey the voice of Jehovah. Yet all the time they had resolved to retire into Egypt. And so Jeremiah told them when he brought them the twofold message from his God, that they might dismiss all fear of the Chaldeans if they remained in the land; but that if they sought safety in Egypt, the sword of the conqueror, who would smite down their protector, should surely overtake them.

The warning was in vain. The message of Jeremiah was represented as only the outcome of his own and of Baruch's personal resentment; and the leaders of Judah carried the feeble remnant to Tahpanhes in Egypt - there yet again to hear the voice of the aged prophet, announcing the coming judgment on the country, where, in their unbelief and hard-heartedness, they had sought shelter (comp. Jeremiah 42 and 43).

So the last remnant of Judah had gone from the land. The Davidic rule had passed away, so far as merely earthly power was concerned. The Davidic kingdom to come would be wider, higher, deeper. It would embrace the brotherhood of man; it would reach up to heaven; it would root in righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.

But over all the land would be desolateness and stillness. Yet was it a "stillness unto God." The land was keeping long-neglected silent Sabbath unto God ten times, "to fulfill three-score and ten

years." ⁴¹ It was just about seventy years ⁴² after the battle of Carchemish, which really decided the fate of Palestine and its subjection to Babylon, that, like the priests' silver trumpets at morn in the Temple, the voice of Cyrus announced the dawn of morning after the long night of exile, and summoned the wanderers from all lands to the threshold of their sanctuary (2 Chronicles 36:21-23). Again is the land keeping Sabbath.

And again is it "stillness unto God," till His Voice shall waken land and people, Whose are land and people, dominion and peace: till He shall come Who is alike the goal and the fulfillment of all past history and prophecy "a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of Thy people Israel."

⁴¹ The reference in 2 Chronicles 36:21 is to Jeremiah 25:11, 12, and Leviticus 26:34, 35. But it is not necessary to suppose that this seventy years Sabbath refers to an exact previous period of 490 years, during which the observance of Sabbatic years had been neglected.

⁴² The time from the deportation of the last remnant to the decree of Cyrus was about fifty years.

