

Kings and Prophets 15-09-24

This is Thursday, the 24th of September, 2015. We're moving forward in our study of the kings and prophets in ancient Israel and now in the Southern Kingdom of Judah. We're in the reign of King Hezekiah and we pick up tonight to further look at the reign of King Hezekiah, specifically after 14 years, the episodes that took place recorded in 2 Kings 20, 2 Chronicles 32, and Isaiah 38-39, also referenced as we have seen elsewhere.

Let's take a moment as we begin to pause and focus, remembering the role that God's Holy Spirit plays in our Bible study and certainly by extension from that in our lives. It's one thing to learn and it is another... You don't know this, but I'm giving you a new revelation here. It's one thing to learn.

It is another to remember and apply. And the Holy Spirit, of course, is essential in not just the first, but in all three of those. And in the same way that we should be remembering and availing ourselves of His presence for remembering what we've learned from God's Word and living in its light, we certainly want to begin the process as we look at the truth of God's Word by cultivating His teaching and enabling ministry.

Shall we pray? Father, we are so thankful to know the means by which we can actually fulfill the potential and the opportunities that are presented to us in the Lord Jesus Christ, in our relationship with You, in our remaining time on this earth. We know this is a time of preparation. We know that it is a time for growth and for establishing understanding and experience in Your truth and in the way that You think, so essential for service and for function in the ages that are to come.

We thank You for these Old Testament examples that help us to see the constant nature of Your grace, of Your faithfulness, of Your plans and purposes, of Your standards, the reflection of Your righteousness, the intolerance for that which falls short and is evil, and the great grace that bridges the gap between our imperfection and Your perfection. We pray that as we move forward in our study of this part of Israel's history and in Your Word that God the Holy Spirit will be our teacher and will facilitate each one of us understanding and seeing the pertinence and the meaningfulness of these examples to our daily attempts to live in a way that pleases You and that glorifies the Lord Jesus. We pray these things in His name.

Amen. Well, there is the king lying on his bed, and after our study last week, we know why. Isaiah is sent to tell him in 2 Kings 20, verse 1, to say, Thus says the Lord, Set your house in order, for you shall die and not live.

There are many reasons why human life comes to an end. God has ordained a lifespan for each one of us. We typically don't know nearly as much about the end as we do the beginning.

We always know the year and the month and the day that goes in front of the hyphen. We most often do not know what goes after the hyphen. And of course, in that short span that the

hyphen represents, we have our chance to do whatever it is we're going to do, learn what it is we will learn, grow to the extent that we will grow, and be judged on that fairly short little horizontal line between birth date and death date.

On rare occasions, we are given advance notice. Sometimes this is God's grace. Sometimes it is just a happenstance.

But the reason for the end of our life is various. The overarching reason is that God has ordained that our time is up. And we're mainly looking at why that might be.

But whatever the specifics, the time has been sufficient to accomplish God's purpose in our lives. The sin unto death is an oft-discussed topic. Many people are interested in, well, would God kill me if I'm excessively disobedient? Generally, this is more a self-fulfilling judgment because you see too many intensely wicked people who seem to live very, very long for it to be a constant rule.

What we can say with great certainty is God knows what he's doing and God establishes how long we are to live. And if it is short, this is God working all things together for good. If it is long, that is God working all things together for good.

And rather than waiting until we receive notice that life is about to end to examine whether or not we are living as we should, it's much better to wake up each morning and realize that we're still here. And that would be a good time to ensure that we are living in a way that pleases God. Whatever the time is, let's figure it out in the morning, not in the evening.

Figure it out while the sun is shining, not as the last rays are disappearing over the horizon. And it is the sun that becomes an issue in the part of this story that we look at tonight. In those days, Hezekiah was sick and near death.

As we know, Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz, went to him and said to him, thus says the Lord, set your house in order for you shall die and not live. Now, there is much more cause and effect in the Bible than there is in what you might consider to be modern life. The reason being, these things are emblematic and are teaching points.

If it's in the Bible, it's there for a reason. And so we will see principles and God's attitudes and God's priorities and God's standards reflected here in ways that are not necessarily typical for us. God is cutting Hezekiah's life off at this point.

Why might that be? Well, we saw last time he has received a promise from God. And as the leader of the nation, he is emblematic. What happens for kings, what is true for kings, is special in Scripture.

The king is almost always in Scripture, emblematic of and representative of the people. He is the people in one, in the same way that the Lord Jesus Christ is his people in one, and we in him are represented. He is our righteousness, our peace, our sanctification, our wisdom.

The king, you think of Herod in the days of John the Baptist, you think of Herod in the days of the crucifixion. You think of King David, you think of the various kings that we have studied so far in both the northern and southern kingdoms. In many ways, they reflect and they embody attitudes that are prevalent in the kingdom.

The king represents the kingdom and as its head will be treated, certainly in prospect many times, the way that God intends to treat the entire group. So, we can't always go to a king and say, as God treated the king, so he will treat me. What we can say is, if these are the attitudes that were widespread in the kingdom, then as God judges the king, he is going to judge the kingdom and to the extent that those things are reflected in my life, I can expect some similar disapproval on God's part when this is bad behavior.

So, Hezekiah receives this news and turns his face to the wall and prayed to the Lord saying, Remember now, O Lord, I pray how I have walked before you in truth with a loyal heart and have done what was good in your sight. And Hezekiah wept bitterly. And we've already seen the short-sightedness of this response.

Is there hope of the resurrection taught in Old Testament theology? Yes, there is. David doesn't despair when he knows his time is short. Job, facing the prospect of death, says, It doesn't matter if the skin worms destroy my flesh, I know that I will see my Redeemer, capital R. I will stand and I will see Him.

I know that I will see Him. Not too long hence from the time of Hezekiah, you will have Daniel who is well aware, you will have Ezekiel who is well aware that these bones will live again. God has power over life and death.

And everyone understood down to the days of Paul that the patriarchs lived as Abraham did, waiting for that city whose founder and builder is God. So, for someone facing death to feel like it's all over and it has ended is a reflection of a severe lack of confidence and expectation. It's all in this life with no hope.

What are our three great Christian virtues? Faith, hope, and love. What is our great hope and earnest expectation? That beyond this life, there is the real life. There is the future life.

Hezekiah seems to lack that entirely. So he turns his face to the wall and he says, Lord, I've walked before you in truth, this is sort of a bargaining technique. I've given to you, I've dedicated to you.

You don't seem to be reciprocal. You don't seem to be, you know, I put my quarter in the machine or my dollar. Now, I have to keep updating my monetary standards.

I put my dollar in the machine and nothing has come out. I walk before you in truth. What am I getting for it? My life is ending.

This is why he weeps bitterly. He doesn't have calm repose. He doesn't have peace, what they

sometimes call dying grace.

Death is met by Hezekiah with great foreboding, disappointment, bitter weeping, and something of an accusation toward God. So it happened before Isaiah had gone out into the middle court that the word of the Lord came to him saying, return and tell Hezekiah, the leader of my people. Why does God use this phrase to Isaiah? We just reviewed it.

Leader of the people. He is emblematic. What happens to Hezekiah is potentially going to happen to the people.

And what's our memory verse? Say it with me. If my people who are called by my name will humble themselves, pray and seek my face, I will hear from heaven, turn, heal the land. Remember that? When did that come about? What is the context of that verse? That's the days of Solomon when Solomon inaugurates the temple.

He says, Solomon prays to God, he says, Lord, if we come and pray to you at this place, hear from heaven, and God affirms the promise of my people who are called by my name, will humble themselves and turn and seek my face, I will hear from heaven, I will relent, I will heal the land. So the fate of the king here is a harbinger of the fate of the southern kingdom of Judah. And so God reminds Isaiah, tell the leader of my people, thus says the Lord, the God of David, your father.

There's a lot of life and death situations for David as well, isn't there? David, your father, I've heard your prayer. I have seen your tears. Surely I will heal you.

On the third day, you shall go up to the house of the Lord. Third day resuscitation, third day resurrection is a common theme. After two days, we will live.

On the third day, we will rise again. The sign of Jonah, there's scriptures replete. We don't have time to review all those.

We've looked at them many times. On the third day, you shall go up to the house of the Lord. And of course, this is most fully reflected and fulfilled in the Lord Jesus himself on the third day rises and in him, all those by faith who face death don't remain held by death.

Remember what John 11, Jesus talking to Martha, the one who lives and believes in me will never die, believest thou this. I will add to your days, 15 years. I will deliver you and this city from the hand of the King of Assyria.

I will defend this city for my own sake and for the sake of my servant, David. Going back to its origin. Uh, the promises that were made to the patriarchs.

We talked about those, the promises that were made to David. Uh, you can sum up the five great promises in the three that were made to Abraham and the two that were made to David. We reviewed that not long ago.

And there is a reminder here, uh, for my sake and for the sake of my servant, David, what are the two specific promises to David, a throne and a son? Throne of course is meaningless without a kingdom to rule. So there is the, the nation as a kingdom ruled by a monarch who is a son of David and that son ultimately is capital S. And those things are, uh, brought to the fore by the repeated reminders of David. David is mentioned time and again in this, uh, word from the Lord to Isaiah.

So Isaiah, uh, went back in and said, take a lump of figs. They took it and laid it on the boil and he recovered. It isn't until you get the cure that you find out what the malady was.

It was some sort of large swollen infection. So this isn't natural causes. This isn't, um, uh, old age.

It isn't, uh, what one would expect by way of, uh, the end of life. This is, uh, an episode. This would be, uh, being struck with, uh, something of a sudden nature.

And we've seen the reasons for that. The promise being given of deliverance, lack of faith in that promise, human solution, instead, uh, stripping the gold from the doors of God's house, taking the gold from the treasury of God's house and trying to buy off the enemy. This was Hezekiah's decision after having received the fulsome promise of God.

He went to God. He prayed. He said, here's the situation.

God said, this is what I'm going to do. Hezekiah did not lay hold of the promise by faith, or as it says in Hebrews, the promises of God not being mixed with faith in them, which heard what happened to those people, Moses' generation coming out of Egypt. God gives them promises.

They didn't mix them with faith. What was the result? Dropped in the wilderness over the space of 40 years. But the deaths began the day after they couldn't trust God for the land.

The giants are too big. The task is too formidable. God says victory, but I just can't trust Him for it.

They trusted Him to come out of Egypt. They trusted Him on the night of Passover, these very same people. They trusted Him when He gave His law at Sinai, all that the Lord has said we will do.

But when they got to the borders of the land and God says, go on in, here come Caleb and Joshua saying, we can take it. The stretch is too great. They can't apply faith to the promise of God.

Hezekiah, very similar situation. There's a promise of deliverance from what seems to be an excessively formidable and unconquerable foe. It's understandable, given the track record of the Assyrians, that it would give one great pause, just as the giants in the land of Canaan did.

We were like grasshoppers in their sight. And in Hezekiah's mind, he's a grasshopper before

the Assyrians and he loses it. The Israelites that started out by faith fumble it away at the point where it really counts.

It's one thing to enter and to begin. It is something else to move into the land of promise and lay hold of it by faith. They can leave Egypt.

They can enter into the journey, but the journey has a destination. It has a conclusion. It has an objective.

Everything they did by faith until it's time to go in. And so then they spend the next 40 years dying. Well, same thing with Hezekiah.

Because of that, he is going to God. Now, this is the difference. You remember the Israelites also wept with bitter tears after Moses said, guess what? Because you don't trust the report of Caleb and Joshua and their advice and you intend to follow the advice of the other 10 spies who say it's too much.

It's too great. You know, here's these big grapes, but don't expect to go in and eat them. Return and tell Hezekiah.

Hezekiah does, despite his bitter tears, pray. He gets credit for that. The Israelites who wept bitterly all night long, you don't see them praying.

Hezekiah's got one point ahead of his ancestors in the Exodus. I will heal you on the third day. You shall go up to the house of the Lord.

I will add your days, 15 years, lump of figs, a poultice of figs. And it says they took it and laid it on the boil and he recovered. Now, was it instantaneous? Reading this, it sounds like, well, they put a lump of figs on and Hezekiah bounced out of bed like Talitha Kumi or, you know, Lazarus come forth.

We're not used to Hebrew storytelling and little branches of the story, features of the story, little trails that are a part of a story will be completed before the main part of the story is. He recovered over the course of the next three days. But it just says he recovered.

He didn't recover right away. If we were telling the story in English, this would be the connotation. But it's not a problem in the way Hebrews tell story.

That's why they can say, you know, God created man, formed him in his own image. Male and female created them. And then it can go back and give you the details in the next chapter of how Adam came to be and Eve came to be and so on.

We're just not used to this backing and filling. It's like a it's like a car in a too tight parking lot. You know, you got to do a little seesawing before you get to where you want to go.

And once you get used to it, you realize it's really kind of a superior way to communicate much

better than our linear sort of sequentially and chronologically dependent way of thinking and telling stories. We're we have to do it that way because we're not as smart as these people were. Honestly, at any rate, when it says he recovered, that means don't worry about the recovery.

The recovery is a certain thing. It's like saying, well, Adam ate the fruit and he died. OK, but not he didn't just keel over as though it was, you know, a neurotoxin.

He recovered, Hezekiah said to Isaiah, what is the sign that the Lord will heal me? This would make no sense whatsoever, would it? He recovered and he says, well, what's the sign? Oh, never mind. I'm healed. What is the sign that the Lord will heal me? And I shall go up to the house of the Lord the third day.

Now, why is this particular event pegged for the third day? Why doesn't it say I will get up from my bed and walk about the palace or I will go forth and speak to the people or I will resume my duties and walk down through the throne room and sit on my throne in the palace on the third day? What is it that he can do? Go to the house of the Lord. What is one of the significant requirements for going to the house of the Lord? Who? Well, let me put it this way. Who can't go to the house of the Lord? People with skin lesions, people with separating, leaking sores.

Right. So you think, well, isn't that holy and pious of him that the first thing he wants to do when he staggers to his feet is go to the house of the Lord? But this is shorthand for I will be so well that a priest can pronounce me clean from my skin lesions. Go back and read in the the teens in Leviticus talking about the you know, if it's if it leaks, if you've got to go to the priest when you've got fluid emissions coming out of your skin until you get that cured.

The priest says, I don't see that anymore. And it doesn't have white hairs growing out of the leprous spot and all the rest of it. You're not clean.

And I don't care if you're the king or you're the most common beggar in the land. Nobody goes to the house of the Lord with living death. And these sorts of leaking sores and leprous spots and so on were a disqualification because they represented a visible manifestation of death.

You're not healthy. You're not sound. You are not clean.

You are not without spot and without blemish. Quite the opposite. So you're not qualified.

So what he's saying is, what is the sign that I'll be what we call a clean bill of health? I'll be clean enough to go to the temple in three days. So Isaiah says, this is the sign to you from the Lord that the Lord will do the thing which he has spoken, which. If I were putting this on as a performance, I would make sure that Hezekiah said this with some attitude.

This is the sign that the Lord will do what he has spoken. What is the doubt in your mind that if God speaks a thing, he's not going to do it? You need a sign that God's going to do what he says. All that the Lord has said he will do.

His words not good enough for you. Reminds me when when we were traveling around the security in the bombed out area of the Murrah building in Oklahoma City and the commandant of the United States Marine Corps came and there was a recruiting office in there and there's Marine Corps space. And so you have some you have some Marines on duty.

Well, when you pull up in the car with the markings and it's very clear from the aides and from your recognition of the face of the commandant, who he is, many times, you know, you come to a checkpoint or whatever and somebody's got to got to show their ID card to prove who they are. But when it's the commandant and you're a last corporal or a corporal on guard and he walks up and you snap the salute, you know, do you need to see the commandant's ID card? Is his word and his rank and the stars on his collar or on his shoulders? Is that good enough for you? Or are you going to say, I really need to see that card? You know, if you don't mind, just, you know, sir, get your wallet out. Let me make sure you there's obviously, you know, it's commendable to to have dedication to duty.

But if that same commandant says, well, well done, you know, I appreciate your diligence on on post here and I'm going to recommend to your superiors, you know, that you get a promotion for being so diligent. Well, sir, could I have that in writing? Your word's not really sufficient. I'd really like to have that in writing.

You say you're going to talk to my CEO and get me a promotion or letter of commendation. But I'd really like something more tangible, something more meaningful to me than what you're telling me. Commandant gives you an order, says report directly to the brig and tell them I sent you.

Well, sir, I really need that order in writing. Yeah, you get the you get the drift here. This is another manifestation, another symptomatic expression of Hezekiah's.

His faith has just gone to zero. God told him the Assyrian problem is already solved. Just trust me.

And he doesn't believe it. And he tries to buy the Assyrians off. God tells him that he has heard his prayer.

Isaiah had to turn around and come back. If you want a sign, how did Isaiah know that Hezekiah had prayed? He turned his face to the wall. Nobody can see his lips moving.

Evidently, nobody heard the words of his prayer. All they hear is him sobbing and weeping. And yet Isaiah returns and says, God has heard your prayer.

Is that not sign enough for you that God is in his heaven? And here's the the thoughts and intents of your heart. Here's the expression of your sorrow and your bitterness. The prophet returned.

How did he know? And he gives you a word of encouragement and a word of response and of

affirmative reply to your prayer. And you say, well, how do I know he's going to do that? It's just the worst hubris and the most petulant, short-sighted, self-centered, subjective response you could imagine. And we can all be grateful that God is not the kind of God that, you know, in the next verse and behold, fire did come forth from heaven and consume Hezekiah, Isaiah, the throne, the palace and the whole upper portion of Mount Zion for the cheek and the impertinence and the disrespect of this response.

God is being gracious and Hezekiah basically slaps him in the face and says, not good enough. But Isaiah patiently says, this is the sign to you from the Lord that the Lord will do the thing which the Lord has spoken. Shall the shadow go forward 10 degrees or go backward 10 degrees? And he just says the shadow.

This is not the shadow, capital S, the radio hero. You know, who knows what evil lurks in the hearts of men? Well, he's standing over there on the steps of Ahaz. Do you want him to step up or step down? Now, this is very interesting because this in either case is supernatural.

If he had said, let the shadow go forward, it would have moved very quickly while they were standing there watching, not over the course of however many more minutes or hours it would take for the sun to finish. It would have moved quite rapidly, and that would have been supernatural. So it's not like it isn't a good sign, but it's forward or backward.

So the on the staircase here, and we know that this is the Ma'alot, Allah, I've told you before, means to go up. This is where the Arabic cognate, you know, Allah, the one who is up, the one who is high, the most high. So Ma'alot meaning from, Ma'alot, from goings up, Alot, the ups, from the ups.

It's steps, steps or stairs. And this is the staircase mentioned in 2 Kings 16, verse 18, that Ahaz built around the house of the Lord because of the king of Assyria. He's the guy that made this modification.

Formerly, there had been a different kind of passage that provided access. David had made a causeway that goes up westward, by the gate of Shalaketh. This is 1 Chronicles 26, 16.

And this itself may have been at least modified or expanded or in some way redone by Solomon in 2 Chronicles 9, verse 4. And the Queen of Sheba saw this thing and was greatly impressed. It was a wonderful, whether it was a hallway or a corridor or a walkway between pillars or something that went from one to the other. But Ahaz made this into a staircase.

And that is what is in view. Now, since we know that the palace is southeast of the temple, we know that the stairway, staircase, these steps, if you stand at the south and look at it, the temple is on the left and back somewhat. The palace, the location of the king, is at the right and forward somewhat.

And there are these steps of Ahaz in between. So if the steps are going to go down, if the shadow is going to go down the steps, and he says, well, it's going to do that anyway, this

means that as the sun sets, this is the shadow of the temple on the steps. So the sun is in the west, it's afternoon, it's the latter part of the day.

And the shadow is probably about halfway down these steps. How do I know this? There's got to be at least 20 steps because you have a choice. The shadow can go back 10 steps or it can go forward 10 steps.

Well, you got to have at least 20 steps if it can go 10 steps in either direction, right? It's not a 10 step staircase or going forward, there'd be no steps to go down. So this is a very lengthy ascent composed of at least 20 steps and you're right at the halfway mark. Where are we in Hezekiah's reign? About the halfway mark.

Now, God says, which sign do you want? Do you want the shadow to do what it is supposed to do, but more rapidly go down the steps ending its traverse? This is what's normal. This is what's natural. Or are you, in other words, do you really want me to do something outside what I have designed, what I have planned, what is a part of the normal working of the earth, which is that based on your status right now, you need to go.

And his remaining time on earth would be shortened. The days would be shortened and the shadow would reach the bottom of the steps, which is, that's the end of your day. Make sense? You want that to happen rapidly? Well, of course not.

This is the gist of his whole prayer. I'm too young to die. I want it to go the other way.

I want the sun to come back up and give me a longer day. The implication here, if he was thinking at all, and it's tough to think when you've got a big sore boil probably, but you know, we're supposed to think under pressure, right? And this time-related sign that God gives, he doesn't say, shall I send an angel to fly through the room? Shall I have a lightning bolt incinerate a nearby fruit tree? Shall I, you know, dangle an Assyrian before you and explode him in your face? What would you like me to do? Of all of the signs that God offers, could have offered, the one he offers is, do you want me to do what I've just said I'm going to do, which is advance the end of your day very quickly? Or do you want a sign that indicates I'm going to reverse the normal order of things on your behalf? Well, Hezekiah, of course, chooses the latter. He says, it's an easy thing for the shadow to go down 10 degrees.

Well, not necessarily. It's not an easy thing for it to go down all at once. And this would have been observable.

You know, have you ever tried to watch, you know, that if you've got a really extreme angle, you can actually see a shadow creeping, especially toward the end of the day. The sun's getting low, the shadow's getting long. And if you're patient, you can actually see the progress of the shadow very slowly.

This would have been a very rapid progress, as rapid as the reverse, because this reverse movement is rapid. They don't come back a couple hours later and say, well, lookie there, it's

lighter on the top steps. But thinking about the geometry of it, here's the sun that is sinking in the West.

It's probably mid afternoon, late afternoon, because the shadows are coming across. And this is not any old shadow. The only shadow that can be obscuring these steps and that is going to go down the steps as time advances is the shadow of the temple.

Has to be. There's no other shadow it can be. These are the steps that lead to the temple from the direction of the palace.

They are the steps of Ahaz. And the only way a shadow can go down those steps is for the sun to be to the West of the temple and the shadow of the temple itself. Here's the sun, here's the house with the presence of God and at the Ark of the Covenant, and here's the shadow.

So he says, well, I want it to go the other way. I want the shadow to move up the steps 10 degrees, backward 10 degrees, backward. I want the shadow to go backwards.

Generally, going backwards isn't normal. How much time do you spend in drive and how much time do you spend in reverse? Unless your car is broken, I did one time have to drive a car in reverse for quite a distance because I had no forward, well, I had no clutch. Anyway, it's not normal to go forward in reverse.

Backward isn't generally the best thing. You know, when Jesus was identified in the Garden of Gethsemane, the soldiers and people with clubs and torches didn't fall forward, they fell backward. Falling backward is usually worse than falling forward.

So even the direction is somewhat significant. So Isaiah the prophet cried out to the Lord and he brought the shadow. Now, whose sign is this? Go back to verse 9. This is the sign to you from the Lord that the Lord will do the thing which he, the Lord, has spoken.

Shall the shadow go forward 10 degrees or go backward 10 degrees? You notice that shall is in italics and the question mark is sort of added. In Hebrew, this just says this is the sign from the Lord. The shadow will go forward 10 degrees or backward 10 degrees.

Hezekiah said, well, it's an easy thing for it to go down 10 degrees. Let the shadow go backward. So why does Isaiah have to cry out to the Lord? Is the Lord not paying attention here? The Lord heard Hezekiah's prayer when he turned his face to the wall and he's sobbing.

But it says, Isaiah the prophet cried out to the Lord. He didn't stand there waiting for a silent word in his earbud. Okay, I'm going to make it go backward.

Isaiah has to cry out and does so. Why? Lest there be any confusion between the messenger and the one who is the originator of the message. That somehow Isaiah is a magic man, that he's a wizard, that he's got supernatural control over the forces of nature.

Isaiah cries out. Why does he cry out? There's an audience for this. There's people all over the

place.

The king is sick and nigh unto death. There's hangers on everywhere. And when Isaiah cries out to the Lord, this is a testimony and a witness by Isaiah to the fact that this thing is of God, not of Isaiah.

And it is the responsibility of every messenger of God to ensure that he establishes in the minds of all hearers that the message he is delivering is the message of God, not something of himself. Easiest way to do that is stick to the text. Everybody knows that pastors and teachers don't write the Bible.

Just try to figure out what it means. And so he cries out to the Lord. And he, the Lord, brought the shadow ten degrees backward by which it had gone down on the sundial of Ahaz, went backward ten steps on the staircase of Ahaz.

But it's kind of interesting what you can figure out from looking at those details. This is a long staircase. My staircase in my house going from the first floor to the second floor has 17 steps.

The 18th gets you on your 18th footfall. You're on the second story. There's 17 of those.

You know this if you have to put in your own stairway and if you have to cut the treads and stain them and install them and trim them and so on. There's 17. And then there's the top step.

Well, this is there's at least 20 steps on this. So there is a significant most steps fall into a reasonable climbing height. Steps that are too high or too low, people find tedious.

And it's interesting. There's a whole science of stair steps. And there's an optimum distance that people from time immemorial, the most ancient temples in the world, the steps don't differ by more than an inch or two from all other steps.

There's just a convenient, comfortable footstep based on, you know, average leg length and whatnot. But there's at least 20 of these. And so either people were a lot shorter in those days, or it was more than a 10 foot gap from where the staircase began until it ended.

But it falls back. Now, what can we derive from this very quickly? His choice of the sign, his father Ahaz did not want to put God to the test. When he says, what sign do you want from the Lord in Isaiah chapter 7? You know, this should be a sign unto you.

Virgin will conceive. Well, he didn't want a sign, but he got one anyway. Hezekiah wants a sign and God gives him a choice.

There's substantial difference between Ahaz and Hezekiah, right? God is more patient. God is more flexible. God will work with us even when we are as messed up.

And as sad a state as Hezekiah is, he's got that glimmer. He's still got a bit of faith, a bit of acknowledgement. He's at least pointing in the right direction.

He is talking to God, unlike his father Ahaz. Ahaz chains shut the doors to the temple. Hezekiah just strips all the gold off of him, but he doesn't shut them.

So what does the sign mean very quickly? Hezekiah's impending quick death was a part of the natural progress of God's plan. It was a reflection of the normal order of things. In this case, perhaps judgment as a warning to the people.

If Hezekiah had died suddenly as a result of rejecting the word of the Lord, and you know that this has gotten out, people can't look at the temple and not realize that Hezekiah has paid off the Assyrians, right? It's a public testimony to lack of faith and lack of belief in God. And God, in the same way that Moses was not allowed to enter the land, that was a public rebuke for a public sin that had public consequences when Moses struck the rock the second time. Hezekiah publicly, flagrantly advertises his disbelief in the promise of God by pulling down one of the most public things there is, which is the decorations on the doors of the house of God.

And God says, I've got to show the people that I'm in my heaven, I keep my word, and this kind of behavior will not stand. Well, ultimately, his illness is going to do that sufficiently. God says, all right, you've prayed.

I promised that if you would pray and turn, seek my face, I would heal you. So I'll heal you. And I'll heal this land.

But it's a single threat. I've had several questions about what is the timing, you know, since this seems to be told in something of a backward fashion. And next week, I'll give you just a timeline of where the references fit, what the sequence of events is.

But this all happens after the rabshakha. This happens after laying the letter before the Lord. This happens after the opportunity to trust God and present to the people a great victory of faith.

Hezekiah does just the opposite. And the public penalty for that is his early exit. And God says, I'm going to hasten your death when he doesn't.

That's why you have the pultice of figs. The figs, the land, the nation is going to instead absorb the poison of your boil. It would have been you.

You as an object lesson would have chastened, humbled and perhaps motivated the people to faith and obedience. But since you're not willing to serve as that example, you're not, you know, I can't use you in that way. We have to do something different.

So the result of this is a celebration. And we saw this over in Isaiah, where he says, I will write this song. And he wants to ensure that his songs are sung in the land.

And the result of this is the songs of steps in the book of Psalms. These are Psalm 120 through 134. If you start at 120 and go through 134, how many Psalms is that? 15.

15 steps because of the zero. The zero counts as one. So you got 15 total Psalms, one for each of the years, songs of steps.

You say, well, but the shadow only moved 10 steps. Well, how big is the staircase? And so as soon as you get a healthy group on the steps, you start singing these songs of steps. And there are 15 of these songs that they can sing.

And remembering that there's going to be a group on the steps, you know, you want the whole group to be able to move 15 steps as they sing. They go up a step and they sing a song. They go up a step and they sing a song.

And you think, well, there should be only 15 steps if there's 15 songs, not if you've got a group of people on the steps taking up several steps at a time. So the group is moving up and you don't want the last guys. You know how it is when you're singing around or something and the last guys have to finish up in kind of a lame and weak fashion.

You want the whole group singing all 15 of the songs. So there are enough steps that this group can stand on them and each, all of them ascend 15 steps, all of them singing these 15 songs of steps. Psalm 120 to 134.

We don't have time to look at it tonight, but if you look at the content of those songs, you will see why they were selected. By the way, five of those are Psalms of David. Ten of them are unascribed.

Five and ten, just as the 500 years and the 1000 years reflected in the 10 plus five years given to Hezekiah are of two different kinds. You have those that belong to the days of David, and then you have those that belong to a time that is less determinate. No author.

None of those ten Psalms have an author ascribed. So very interesting. The 15 are divided ten and five.

What is the point of application for us very quickly? Remember in the book of Hebrews, beware lest a promise of rest is made to us and we fail to enter in. The promises of God not mixed with faith in them that heard. God takes these things seriously.

When He says something in His Word, He expects us to believe Him. We don't need a sign. We don't need God to prove that the whole canon of Scripture is testimony and witness that what God has said, He will do.

The resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ is the earnest of our own inheritance. He is the first fruits. And as He was raised, we shall be raised.

The same Spirit that raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also. He's already given the sign. It's the sign of Jonah.

And that's enough. By the way, has the sign of Jonah already been given in the days of

Hezekiah? Yes, it has. We've already studied the book of Jonah, right? Remember when he prophesied? Jonah's three days already happened.

People already know that story. It's fresh history for them. Sign of Jonah is fresh on their minds.

And what is the message of Jonah? Turn. God is in His heaven. God will relent.

These godless pagans just put on sackcloth and ashes, humbled themselves, and God relented and did not pass judgment on Nineveh, capital of what? Nineveh is the capital of what? Syria, right? So should have caught the clue, should have been paying a little more attention. And we want this to be us. We want to be sharp.

We want to be alert. We want to watch and pray that we enter not into, that we don't fall for temptation. Give away our heritage.

Give away our inheritance for lack of faith. Well, let's close here in a word of prayer. Father, thank You for the truth of Your Word, how powerfully and vividly it illustrates for us Your faithfulness, the tremendous substance of Your promises toward us, the great provision that You have made for us, and the example You have set before us in the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

We pray that God the Holy Spirit will illuminate our path, enlighten our hearts, and motivate us to faith and obedience through the things that we've studied tonight. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.