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Hezekiah and his going up to the house of the Lord

“On the third day you shall go up to the house of the Lord”.

2 Kings 20:5 NKJV

Hezekiah And The House Of The LORD

The house of the Lord held an important place in the life of King Hezekiah. He desired to walk in the ways of the Lord, just as his great forefather David did. Therefore Hezekiah wanted to live and act as a righteous king on behalf of God, in complete dependence on His word and will. He took care of God’s interests and of His house, the holy temple of the LORD. This contrasted sharply with the behavior of his godless father Ahaz, who “took part of the treasures from the house of the LORD ... and he gave it to the king of Assyria” (2 Chr. 28:21). After this, Ahaz became increasingly unfaithful and even “shut up the doors of the house of the LORD” (v. 24).

His God-fearing son, Hezekiah, acted quite differently. In the very first year of his reign, in the first month, Hezekiah rectified this desecration and repaired and opened the doors of the house of the LORD (29:3). This wonderful beginning of his reign was followed by a complete restoration of the house of the LORD, its worship and everything connected with it. The Passover was then celebrated in a unique manner by all Israel, and the land was cleansed from idolatry. It was a time of revival, spiritual restoration and return to God and His service.

Hezekiah was prosperous in all this: “Thus Hezekiah did throughout all Judah, and he did what was good and right and true before the LORD his God. And in every work

that he began in the service of the house of God, in the law and in the commandment, to seek his God, he did it with all his heart. So he prospered” (31:20-21).

After that, however, there came a time of testing and trial in Hezekiah’s life. The period of prosperity was followed by a time of severe suffering. There was distress both from the inside and the outside. From the outside, there was the threat of war. The king of Assyria, against whom Hezekiah had rebelled in his period of prosperity (2 Ki. 18:7), marched up against Judah and laid siege to Jerusalem. Inside Jerusalem, the fear for the downfall of the city was followed by a deadly illness that almost carried Hezekiah off to his grave. In this critical period Hezekiah’s behavior with respect to the house of the Lord quickly reached a turning point. Even pious men may fail when they are put to the test! As soon as Sennacherib had conquered the fortified cities of Judah, Hezekiah – would you believe it – used the treasures of the house of the Lord as some kind of redemption money to prevent the king of Assyria from marching any further (vv. 13-16).

In this way Hezekiah desecrated the house of the LORD that at first he had restored. We do not read in this connection that he asked God for advice or that he went up to the house of the Lord to pray. He acted independently, and in doing so he harmed the interests of God’s house. The negative effects were soon felt. Sennacherib received the tribute from Hezekiah but still sent a strong army to Jerusalem – although the main force stayed at Lachish. For the time being, he restricted himself to a sort of psychological warfare by means of his officer. This troubled King Hezekiah so much “that he tore his clothes, covered himself with sackcloth, and went into the house of the LORD” (19:1).

Hezekiah’s Prayers

Now that things were at their worst, Hezekiah could not but seek God’s face. Yet we do not read here that he prayed; he left that to Isaiah. The king asked the prophet to act as mediator and to lift up his prayer for the remnant that was left. We only read about Hezekiah’s praying personally after the envoys of Sennacherib had come once more with a threatening letter. Then he became very much involved in the matter and spoke about the LORD *our* God (v. 19), whereas in the presence of the prophet he had spoken in a more aloof manner about the LORD *your* God (v. 4).

It is moving to read this prayer of Hezekiah. This is the second time that he went into the house of the LORD. He took the letter from the delegation of the king of Assyria and spread it before the Lord. Then he made a striking appeal to the LORD,

pleading for God to maintain His own honor as being the only true God, in contrast to the vain idols of the nations that were only the work of men's hands. His prayer was heard in a wonderful manner. In response, an angel sent by the LORD destroyed Sennacherib's army, so the only thing the king of Assyria could do was return "shamefaced to his own land" (2 Chr. 32:21).

However, this answer to his prayers did not yet end Hezekiah's afflictions; he was struck by a deadly illness in those days. On behalf of God, the prophet Isaiah told Hezekiah that he would "die, and not live" (2 Ki. 20:1). Once more we read that Hezekiah prayed to the LORD. Thereupon he received this comforting answer through the prophet: "I have 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" (v. 5).

Of the three times that this story is recorded in the Bible, it is only in this section that we read the promise that Hezekiah would again go up to the house of the LORD *on the third day*. This time, he would not go up to the temple to pray and to plead for salvation, but *to thank God for the salvation* that had been revealed. Here we have Hezekiah not as a supplicant but as a worshiper, as he himself puts it in his song of thanksgiving: "The living, the living man, he shall praise You ... The LORD was ready to save me; therefore we will sing my songs with stringed instruments all the days of our life, in the house of the LORD" (Isa. 38:19-20). In this respect there is a parallel with Psalm 116, where the sacrifice of praise is offered to the LORD in His temple in order to thank Him for the salvation that had been obtained from the pains of death.

The Third Day: The Resurrection Day

As has been said, Hezekiah was allowed to give thanks to the LORD for his recovery *on the third day*. This is certainly no coincidence, since the third day in Scripture is very often connected with life from the dead. It is the day of resurrection. Christ rose again "the third day according to the Scriptures" (1 Cor. 15:4). He "was raised because of our justification" (Rom. 4:25). And His resurrection from the dead is the basis of our salvation from the power of sin and the pains of death. Only on this new ground can we burst out into the song of redemption and offer the sacrifice of praise to our God and Father in His house. To us Christians the house of God here on earth is not a temple of wood and stone, but a spiritual house. It is the Church of the living God, being built up with living stones. In the midst of the redeemed we offer up spiritual sacrifices to God through Jesus Christ (consider 1 Cor. 3:16; Eph. 2:18-22; 1 Tim. 3:15; 1 Pet. 2:5).

In this figurative sense, the promise to Hezekiah of going up to the house of the LORD is also applicable to us. *On the third day*, that is, on the ground of Christ's resurrection from the dead, we too pay homage to our God. We come to Him as made alive together with Christ. We enter the Holiest with our sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving; as a holy priesthood we dwell in God's presence. If we approach God in that way, it is really going up to the house of the Lord. For our hearts and minds are lifted up to Him, and our songs of praise rise up like sweet-smelling incense before His throne.

In Genesis 1:9-13 we read that *on the third day* the dry land appeared and the earth began to bring forth fruit. The dry land symbolizes the place of safety from the wrath of God, which can only be reached through death. God has prepared this safe ground for us, and there we are kept from the waters of death – the waters of judgment. We are safe and secure in the risen Christ, and we belong to a new creation. The dry land is also the place of fruit bearing. We are to bear fruit to God: the fruit of the Spirit, the fruit of a new creation. We also “offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name” (Heb. 13:15; consider Rom. 6:22, 7:4; Gal. 5:22-23, 6:8). So we serve God on this new ground in separation from the world that is passing away.

In the history of Israel we see that God's people had to leave Egypt and go “*three days' journey* into the wilderness” in order to bring Him their sacrifices (Ex. 8:27). Worship is founded on Christ's finished work on Calvary's cross and His resurrection from the dead. It was also on the third day that God revealed Himself to Israel on Mount Sinai, and then the people were allowed to approach Him there (Ex. 19:11,16-17). The number three speaks of the inner sanctuary and of divine revelation – consider Leviticus, the *third book* of the Pentateuch. On the third day, according to Joshua 1:11, Israel was to cross the river Jordan, the river of death, following the ark which is a type of Christ. In this way they reached the Promised Land, which is a type of the heavenly places.

Many more examples could be cited to illustrate the importance of the third day. Jonah, the prophet, reached the dry land after having been in the bonds of death for three days (Matt. 12:40). Queen Esther approached the king “on the third day” and “found favor in his sight” (Est. 5:1-2). So she was saved from condemnation. In short, the third day is the day of resurrection, of reaching a place of safety before God, the place where we can bear fruit to Him.

Divine Favor, Human Unfaithfulness

Unfortunately, Hezekiah showed a lack of fruitfulness. It appears that the marks of the flesh sprang up again. The author of Chronicles said it very clearly, “But Hezekiah did not repay according to the favor shown him, for his heart was lifted up; therefore wrath was looming over him and over Judah and Jerusalem” (2 Chr. 32:25).

If only he would have gone up to the house of the LORD again and again with a song of praise, he might have been kept from this sin! Regrettably, the house of the LORD no longer held such an important place in his life after his recovery. The delegation from Babylon heard and saw nothing of the house of the LORD, but they did see Hezekiah’s *own* house (2 Ki. 20:12-17). Hezekiah became arrogant and sought his own honor rather than the honor of the LORD. Because of that, he no longer acted as a grateful worshiper.

This failure reminds us of what the Bible says about King Solomon after he had completed the construction of the temple in “seven years”: “But Solomon took *thirteen* years to build his own house” (1 Ki. 6:38; 7:1). It also reminds us of the words with which the prophet Haggai reproached the remnant that had returned from the Babylonian exile: “Is it time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, and this temple to lie in ruins?” (Hag. 1:4).

Of course there are a lot of good things to say about Hezekiah, about Solomon and the remnant of the people of Israel, but we see in these three cases that their *own* interests took a greater place than those of the house of the LORD. In this way they did not give God His due. In fact they wronged *His* honor and *His* rights.

We will be kept from this danger by imitating the example of our Lord and Savior, of whom it is written: “Zeal for Your house has eaten Me up” (Ps. 69:9; Jn. 2:17). We will then long for the house of our Lord in order to thank Him for all His mercies. It will be our desire to dwell in His house forever. Just like our Lord, we will be found in God’s house, because we have to be about our Father’s business (Lk. 2:46-49). Our life will be characterized by dwelling “in the house of the LORD,” beholding “the beauty of the LORD” and inquiring “in His temple” (Ps. 27:4).

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