

General Church Education



Judah's Decline

2 Kings 20; 21:1-9, 18-24

Lesson 26

Jacob's Ladder Religion Lessons

Level 6: The Lord Is the Prophet and Preserver

For ages 11-12 years

Judah's Decline

2 Kings 20; 21:1-9, 18-24

Teacher Background

King Hezekiah became ill shortly after the Lord saved Judah from Assyria. Hezekiah asked the Lord for a miracle to show that he would live. The Lord assured him of this by turning back the sundial. When the king of Babylon heard about Hezekiah's illness he came to see him. Hezekiah showed the king the treasures of the kingdom. Then the prophet Isaiah asked what he had shown the king of Babylon and warned him Babylon would take those treasures and that his descendants would serve Babylon. After Hezekiah's death, his sons Manasseh and Amon became kings. They were evil and undid the good Hezekiah had done.

Hezekiah remained faithful to the Lord and reigned for fifteen more years. However, he learned that Judah would be carried away by Babylonia. After his death, his sons Manasseh and Amon reigned. Like most other nations they indulged in terrible evils. Due to this, Israel and Judah could no longer be the center of the Lord's special church on earth. The Lord would need to come on earth Himself to start a new church—the Christian Church.

Focus Points

- Hezekiah asked for a sign that he would be healed and received the sign of the sundial.
- Hezekiah welcomed visitors from Babylon and showed them the treasures of the kingdom.
- Isaiah prophesied the end of Judah; Hezekiah's evil sons Manasseh and Amon reigned after him.

Readings from the Writings

“By command of Jehovah they brought to Hezekiah king of Judah, when he was sick, a lump of figs, and placed it as a plaster upon his boil, and so he lived.... From this it can be seen that ‘the fig-tree’ in the genuine sense, signifies the natural man in respect to good and truth, the fig itself as a tree the natural man, the fig as a fruit the good of the natural man, and its leaf the truth of that good.” *Apocalypse Explained* 403

“The idea of God is the primary of all ideas; for such as this idea is such is a person's communication with heaven and his conjunction with the Lord, and such is his enlightenment, his affection of truth and good, his perception, intelligence, and wisdom; for these are not from a person but from the Lord according to conjunction with Him. The idea of God is the idea of the Lord and His Divine, for no other is the God of heaven and the God of earth.” *Apocalypse Explained* 957.3

Teacher Activity Overview

The lesson offers students the following choices:

Recitation

Learn the recitation by heart.

“The word of the Lord which you have spoken is good!” (2 Kings 20:19)

Projects and Activities (for answers, see back of lesson)

Write the Question

Read sentences and write a question that each statement could answer.

The Miraculous Sign of the Sundial

The Lord gave Hezekiah the miraculous sign of the sundial. Construct a simple sundial and mark the movement of the shadow to see how it keeps time by using the sun.

Additional Project and Activity Choices for Parents and Teachers

The Healing Power of Figs

King Hezekiah had a boil that was miraculously healed with a lump of figs. Explore the healing properties of figs and the ways in which figs are used in the Word. Available at: <https://newchurchvineyard.org/file/activity-the-healing-power-of-figs-2-kings-20-2-kings-21.pdf>

The Sins of Manasseh

Every time Manasseh sinned he broke one or more of the Ten Commandments. Look at a list of his sins and write down the commandments he broke with each sin. Available at: <https://newchurchvineyard.org/file/activity-the-sins-of-manasseh-2-kings-21.pdf>

A Chart of the Kings of Israel and Judah

As you learn about the kings of Israel and Judah, complete a chart. As you fill in the spaces, think about whether the king is good or evil. Available at: <https://newchurchvineyard.org/file/activity-a-chart-of-the-kings-of-israel-and-judah-1-kings-2-kings.pdf>

Judah's Decline

2 Kings 20, 21:1-9, 18-24

Vocabulary

boil—a pus-filled bump under the skin caused by an infection

cultivate—to acquire or develop

pacifying—using military force to bring peace to a country

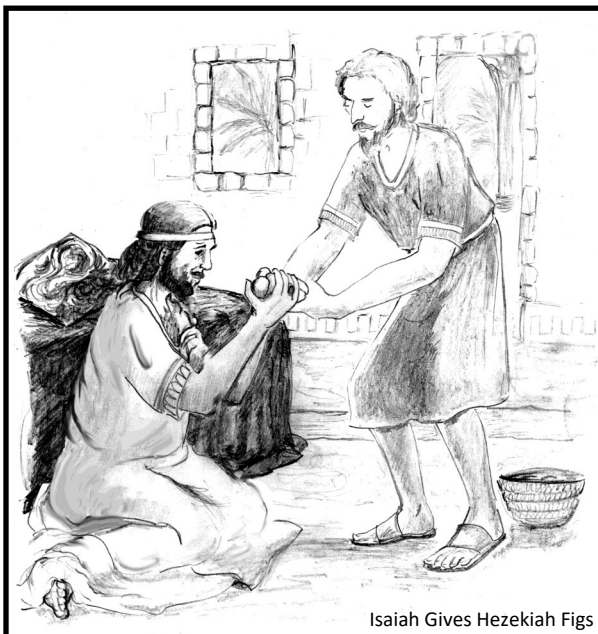
Hezekiah Is Rewarded

Soon after the defeating the Assyrians, Hezekiah became so ill that the prophet Isaiah went to him and told him to prepare to die. So Hezekiah prayed. He reminded the Lord that he had followed Him and tried to do what was right. Then he wept. He did not ask to live longer, but the Lord heard his prayers and sent Isaiah to him with words of hope. Isaiah said that Hezekiah would live for fifteen more years and Judah would be spared from the Assyrians. Then Isaiah had Hezekiah place a lump of figs on the boil that was causing his illness and it was healed.

It might seem strange that a boil could cause a person's death, but until recently there were no antibiotics and people did not understand how to treat infections. Sores could become so infected that a person might die.

Hezekiah Asks for a Sign of His Healing

Even though Hezekiah seemed well after placing the figs on his infection, he doubted the Lord's power by asking Him if he was truly healed. If he had trusted the Lord he would not have asked for a sign. However, the Lord understood Hezekiah's doubt and provided a miracle.



Isaiah Gives Hezekiah Figs

Isaiah asked Hezekiah whether the Lord should cause a shadow on a sundial to go forward ten degrees or backward ten degrees. Sundials of the kind we see today were not yet invented. In fact, some translations refer to the “staircase of Ahaz” rather than the “sundial of Ahaz”. Archaeologists think that the “sundial” would have looked something like the picture on the next page and people could count the shadow moving over the steps to tell the time.

Lesson 26 • Judah's Decline

Hezekiah knew that as time passed the shadow would naturally move forward, but that it would be miraculous for it to go backward, so he asked for it to go backwards. Hezekiah set his doubts aside when the Lord caused the shadow to move ten degrees backwards.

Hezekiah Welcomes Babylonian Visitors

Having heard that Hezekiah was sick, the king of Babylon, Berodach-Baladan, sent him letters and a gift. Hezekiah welcomed the people who brought the present and then showed them the wealth of his household and of the kingdom.

Babylonia was constantly rebelling against Assyria, so the king of Babylon was probably trying to gain Hezekiah's support as a king that had defeated Assyria. Judah was also in a good position to attack Assyria from the south while Babylonia approached from the east. Hezekiah would also have seen the benefits of having a good relationship with Babylonia to ensure greater strength against another Assyrian attack. In addition, he might have been acting to prevent an attack from Babylonia. Although Babylonia was far away from Judah, its armies were raiding nearby nations and might decide to attack Judah as well.

Isaiah Prophesies the End of Judah

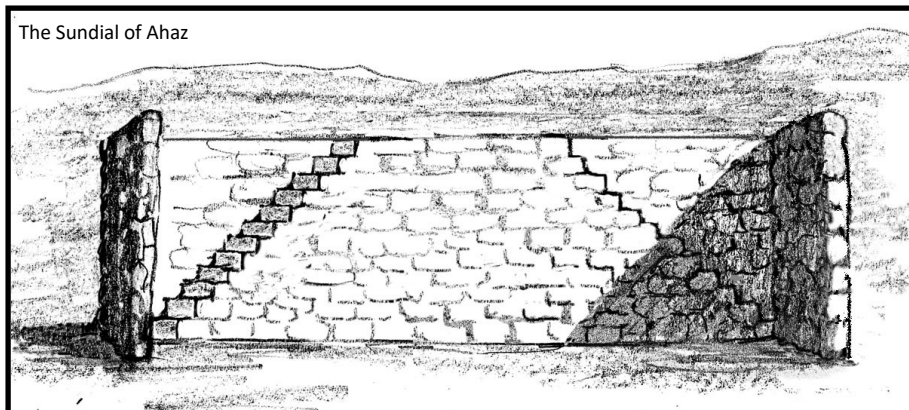
Afterwards, Isaiah went to Hezekiah and asked him about the visit. He especially wanted to find out what Hezekiah had shown the visitors. It is clear that Isaiah already knew the answer, for he brought a warning from the Lord.

“Behold the days are coming when all that is in your house, and what your fathers have accumulated until this day, shall be carried to Babylon; nothing shall be left”, says the Lord.” (2 Kings 20:17)

Isaiah continued by telling Hezekiah that Babylon would not only take the treasures of Judah, but that some of the king's descendants would be made to serve the king of Babylonia. Hezekiah's response to Isaiah might seem strange. He said,

“The word of the Lord which you have spoken is good.” (2 Kings 20:19)

Might he have been saying that his words were true—since everything the Lord had told him so far had happened? Or might he have been pleasing Isaiah, for his next words were an entreaty to the Lord. He asked that there be truth and peace during the remainder of his days.



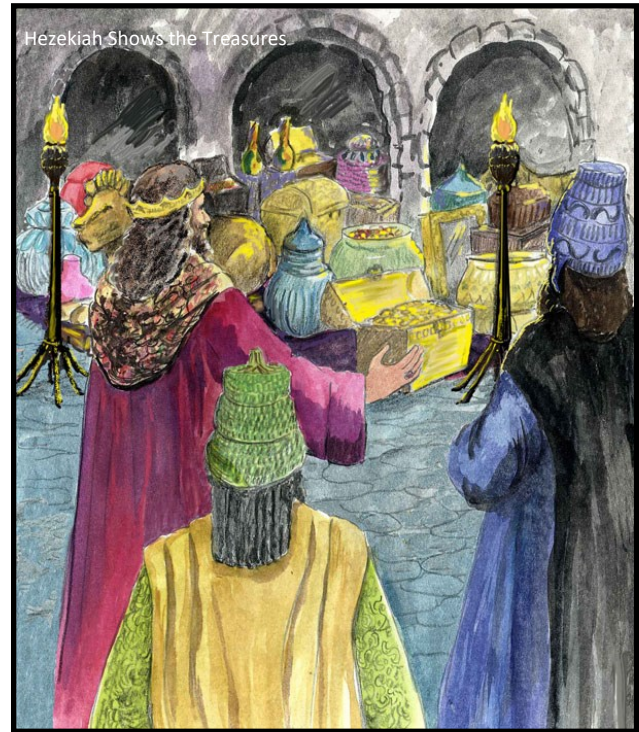
He asked that there be truth and peace during the remainder of his days.

Although Isaiah did not answer, it would seem that the Lord fulfilled his wish. Hezekiah continued to reign

well and to show strength against its enemies. He also brought water Jerusalem—an amazing feat. He did not see the destruction of Judah in his lifetime.

Two Evil Kings in Judah

When Hezekiah died, his son Manasseh became king at the age of twelve. Although he was not a good king he reigned for fifty-five years. He undid all the good his father had done and returned to the practices of the most evil kings before him. He rebuilt the high places Hezekiah had torn down and put up altars and wooden images to Baal. He also put a carved image of Asherah in the temple. Manasseh consulted mediums rather than the Lord, and brought back human sacrifice and witchcraft. He also shed innocent blood to further his evil desires.



The terrible acts that Manasseh did and encouraged Judah to do were worse than those of nations the Lord had destroyed. Manasseh was compared to Ahab, the most evil king of Israel. Like Ahab, he encouraged people to turn away from the Lord. Therefore, the Lord warned Judah:

“Behold, I am bringing such calamity upon Jerusalem and Judah, that whoever hears of it, both his ears will tingle.... So I will forsake the remembrance of My inheritance and deliver them into the hand of their enemies; and they shall become victims of plunder to all their enemies.” (2 Kings 21:12,14)

When Manasseh died, his son Amon became king. Amon continued in his father's footsteps, serving false gods and forsaking the Lord. His servants killed him after two years and his eight year old son, Josiah, became king.

Affirmative Doubt

In Hezekiah, we see a king who had faith in the Lord, who tried to lead his people back to Him, and who tried to live according to His commandments. However, we also see a man who doubted and feared that the Lord could not always help him.

When Assyria threatened Judah, Hezekiah immediately acted like his predecessors—he sent riches to king Sennacherib before asking the Lord if he should be afraid. Sennacherib was not impressed and continued to march against Judah. Might things have been different if Hezekiah had first gone to the Lord?

Activity Overview

Recitation

Learn the recitation by heart.

“The word of the Lord which you have spoken is good!” (2 Kings 20:19)

Projects and Activities (answers at back of lesson)

Choose one or two.

Write the Question

Read sentences and write a question that each statement could answer.

The Miraculous Sign of the Sundial

The Lord gave Hezekiah the miraculous sign of the sundial. Construct a simple sundial and mark the movement of the shadow to see how it keeps time by using the sun.

Write the Question

2 Kings 20; 21

Write a question for each answer.

1. Question:

Answer: He told Hezekiah that he would die of his illness.

2. Question:

Answer: Hezekiah prayed to the Lord and wept.

3. Question:

Answer: The Lord told Isaiah to tell Hezekiah that he would be healed and would reign for fifteen more years.

4. Question:

Answer: The Lord moved the shadow on a kind of sundial ten degrees backward.

5. Question:

Answer: Isaiah prophesied that there would come a time when all of Judah's riches and the king's sons would be carried away by the Babylonians.

6. Question:

Answer: Hezekiah said that the Lord's words were good. Then he asked for peace during the rest of his days as king.

7. Question:

Answer: He built a tunnel and a pool and brought water into the city of Jerusalem.

8. Question:

Answer: He rebuilt the high places, raised up altars to Baal, made a wooden image, made his son pass through the fire, and practiced witchcraft.

9. Question:

Answer: He walked in all the evil ways of his father and forsook the Lord.

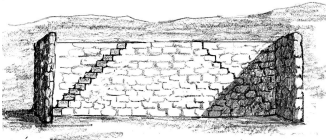
10. Question:

Answer: Josiah, Amon's son

The Miraculous Sign of the Sundial

Isaiah told Hezekiah that he would die soon. Hezekiah did not accept this but wept and prayed, reminding the Lord that he had continually tried to follow Him. The Lord heard his prayers and told Isaiah to tell Hezekiah that he would live. Hezekiah asked for a sign that this was true.

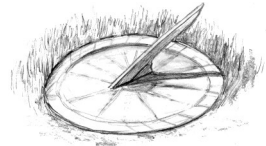
The Lord gave Hezekiah a miraculous sign. The Heavenly Doctrine tells us that the Lord used signs to show His Divine power, and to strengthen belief in Him. The Heavenly Doctrine tells us that the miraculous sign of the sundial represented Hezekiah's death being turned back.



Before clocks were invented in the 13th century, people did not reliably know the time. Today we count time by fractions of a second, and rely on watches for the time whenever we need it.

In ancient times, people measured time by using the sun and the moon. The first sundials were sticks or large stones set upright to cast a clear shadow on the ground. People looked at the direction shadow a pointer (or *gnomon*) cast on a scale of measurement. During Hezekiah's reign scholars believe that people recorded the sun's movement on a device called the "steps of Ahaz." People told the time by counting the number of steps in light or shadow.

Over time, people developed increasingly accurate sundials to tell the time of day. As the earth turns and rotates around the sun, the sunlight's angle changes and affects how objects cast shadows. The gnomon's shadow moves across a sundial's face through the day. By reading where the shadow falls on the sundial people can tell the time of day. You may have seen a modern sundial that looks like this.



Set up your own primitive sundial on a sunny day and observe the sun's movement over several hours.

1. Put a paper plate or piece of paper in a dry sunny place on level ground outside.
2. Stick a pencil through the center of the plate or paper into the ground.
3. Use a pencil to record the length and direction of the shadow on your base.
4. Write the time next to it.
5. Return to the paper at regular intervals—either half-hourly or hourly for several hours. Each time, record the shadow's direction, length and the time.
6. Note the changes of shadow size and direction.

To do this experiment indoors, choose a large sunny window and put a piece of paper on a flat surface. Use an upright weighted object as the gnomon. Remember that the sun will not stay in the same window all day—choose your window wisely!

Reflect on the miracle that the Lord performed for Hezekiah. By what means might the sun have moved backwards on the steps of Ahaz?

Answers

Lesson 26

Write the Question

1. What did the prophet Isaiah tell Hezekiah?
2. How did Hezekiah react to Isaiah's news?
3. What happened when the Lord heard Hezekiah's prayer?
4. What miracle did the Lord so Hezekiah would know he would live?
5. What happened after Hezekiah showed the king of Babylon the treasures?
6. How did Hezekiah react to Isaiah's news?
7. In what ways did Hezekiah improve Jerusalem?
8. How do we know that Manasseh did not love the Lord?
9. Was Manasseh a good king?
10. Who reigned after Amon?