

WHY THE SUN WENT BACKWARD

BIBLE TEXT : II Kings 20:1-18; II Chronicles 32:26, 31-33.

LESSON 345 Junior Course

MEMORY VERSE: "I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears: behold, I will heal thee" (II Kings 20:5).

BIBLE TEXT in King James Version

2 Kings 20:1-18

¹ In those days was Hezekiah sick unto death. And the prophet Isaiah the son of Amoz came to him, and said unto him, Thus saith the LORD, Set thine house in order; for thou shalt die, and not live.

² Then he turned his face to the wall, and prayed unto the LORD, saying,

³ I beseech thee, O LORD, remember now how I have walked before thee in truth and with a perfect heart, and have done *that which is good* in thy sight. And Hezekiah wept sore.

⁴ And it came to pass, afore Isaiah was gone out into the middle court, that the word of the LORD came to him, saying,

⁵ Turn again, and tell Hezekiah the captain of my people, Thus saith the LORD, the God of David thy father, I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears: behold, I will heal thee: on the third day thou shalt go up unto the house of the LORD.

⁶ And I will add unto thy days fifteen years; and I will deliver thee and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria; and I will defend this city for mine own sake, and for my servant David's sake.

⁷ And Isaiah said, Take a lump of figs. And they took and laid *it* on the boil, and he recovered.

⁸ And Hezekiah said unto Isaiah, What *shall be* the sign that the LORD will heal me, and that I shall go up into the house of the LORD the third day?

⁹ And Isaiah said, This sign shalt

BIBLE REFERENCES:

NOTES:

A Message

Hezekiah received a strange message. It was delivered by Isaiah, the prophet of the Lord. The message was sent from God. Hezekiah was sick when Isaiah went to see him. As Hezekiah heard the message he turned his face to the wall, and wept and prayed. What kind of message could affect the king so much?

The word of the Lord to Hezekiah was, "Set thine house in order," because he was going to die. Most people do not know when they are going to die. If the Lord should tarry, death is something that all will experience. The Bible says that "it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment" (Hebrews 9:27). Since we do not know either when the Lord will come or when we are going to die, we should keep our house, our life, in order at all times.

Do you think you would be ready to meet Jesus if you had carelessly neglected to make a confession or to ask forgiveness? Would you want to meet Jesus with your life cluttered with sin and broken promises? It would be pleasing unto the Lord to have our life "set in order" and to keep it so.

Prayer

Before Hezekiah called his servants to give his last orders and to make a will, he turned his face to the wall and prayed. We remember that Ahab lay upon his bed and turned his face away (I Kings 21:4). Ahab pouted and would not eat. He was displeased because he could not have his own way. But Hezekiah turned his face to the wall so that he could shut out the others in the room and be alone as he prayed. In like manner we today can shut our ears and our eyes to those about us and think about Jesus, pray to Him, and be alone with Him. In the time of need, many Christians have breathed a prayer when it was not possible to kneel. At their work, at their play, and surrounded by others, many Christians have learned to shut themselves in with the Lord as they pray in their heart.

After receiving the message, the first thing Hezekiah did was to pray. If such a message came to some people, they might want first to tell all their friends good-by, or to count their money, or to make restitution, or to make some last requests. Hezekiah prayed. No doubt Hezekiah prayed often because he loved the Lord. What he loved came first to his mind. If we love the Lord we will think of prayer before other things. A Christian prays when he first awakens in the morning; he prays the last thing at night; he prays before he eats, before he works, and before he plays. Whatever problem or pleasure arises during the day, a Christian prays. All these prayers need not to be aloud but may come quietly from the heart.

To Remember

What did Hezekiah say in his prayer? He asked God to remember how he had walked before Him. Hezekiah knew that the Lord sees our actions. Sometimes our friends, our parents, and our teachers do not see or know what we have done, but God does. Some people would like to have God forget the things that they have done. Hezekiah asked God to remember them. He did not say to remember the way he had treated his family or

thou have of the LORD, that the LORD will do the thing that he hath spoken: shall the shadow go forward ten degrees, or go back ten degrees?

¹⁰ And Hezekiah answered, It is a light thing for the shadow to go down ten degrees: nay, but let the shadow return backward ten degrees.

¹¹ And Isaiah the prophet cried unto the LORD: and he brought the shadow ten degrees backward, by which it had gone down in the dial of Ahaz.

¹² At that time Berodachbaladan, the son of Baladan, king of Babylon, sent letters and a present unto Hezekiah: for he had heard that Hezekiah had been sick.

¹³ And 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 ointment, and *all* the house of his armour, and all that was found in his treasures: there was nothing in his house, nor in all his dominion, that Hezekiah shewed them not.

¹⁴ Then came Isaiah the prophet unto king Hezekiah, and said unto him, What said these men? and from whence came they unto thee? And Hezekiah said, They are come from a far country, *even* from Babylon.

¹⁵ And he said, What have they seen in thine house? And Hezekiah answered, *All the things that are* in mine house have they seen: there is nothing among my treasures that I have not shewed them.

¹⁶ And Isaiah said unto Hezekiah, Hear the word of the LORD.

¹⁷ Behold, the days come, that all that *is* in thine house, and that which thy fathers have laid up in store unto this day, shall be carried into Babylon: nothing shall be left, saith the LORD.

neighbours or enemies. He did not cry out for God to spare his life a little longer. He said, "LORD, remember now how I have walked before thee in truth and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in thy sight."

After Hezekiah had prayed, he wept sorely. He was a young man, not yet 40 years old. The Lord had made his life prosperous, and his reign good. No doubt Hezekiah wept because he would have liked to stay awhile to do more for his people and for his God.

Return Message

Before Isaiah the Prophet had left the palace the Lord told him to return to Hezekiah with another message. This time the Lord told Isaiah to tell Hezekiah that He would add fifteen years to his life. Isaiah turned around and promptly delivered the Lord's message. Some people might have hesitated to deliver the second message since the first one was not coming to pass. Like Jonah who was told to cry out against Nineveh! He said, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown" (Jonah 3:4). But Nineveh was not destroyed because the people humbled themselves and call upon God and repented. "It displeased Jonah exceedingly" when what he had said did not come to pass. He did not have a love for the souls of all the inhabitants of Nineveh who would have been destroyed if they had not prayed.

The Answer

When Hezekiah prayed, the Lord said, "I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears: behold, I will heal thee." This was the answer to his prayer. Hezekiah received more than he asked for. Besides healing for his body, Hezekiah was promised deliverance from the king of Assyria, and protection for the city. Because Hezekiah prayed, he could look forward to recovery from his illness, and years added to his life, as well as peace from his enemy.

Prayer changes things for us today just as it did for Hezekiah. What happened to Hezekiah in a physical way can happen in a spiritual way, too. In the Bible we read that "the soul that sinneth, it shall die" (Ezekiel 18:20), and "the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). So the unsaved are "dead in trespasses and sins" (Ephesians 2:1) and will be eternally lost. But it is possible for the unsaved to pray, and their condition before God will be changed. There is healing for sin-sick souls. Many blessings can be added to their life, as well as an eternity with the Lord and His people. Has prayer changed anything in your life, either in a physical or spiritual way?

Obedience

Isaiah ordered a lump of figs, which was laid on Hezekiah's boil. Hezekiah recovered because he obeyed the words of the Lord's prophet. God always requires faith and obedience on our part. Sometimes God requires us to do a certain thing in order to show our faith in Him. There are recorded in the Bible some cases where the Lord demanded obedience to show the person's faith before he was healed. To a man with a withered hand, Jesus said, "Stretch forth thine hand." As the man did so, his hand was "restored whole as the other" (Mark 3:5). A man who had palsy was told to arise and walk. The man "arose, and departed to his house" (Matthew 9:7). He was healed!

Ten lepers were instructed to show themselves to the priests, which was according to the Law (**Leviticus 14:2** ² *This shall be the law of the leper in the day of his cleansing: He shall be brought unto the priest:*). "And it came to pass, that, as they went, they were cleansed" (Luke 17:14). Jesus told a blind man to "go, wash in the pool of Siloam." Somehow the blind man made his way to the pool of Siloam. He "washed, and came seeing" (John 9:7).

¹⁸ And of thy sons that shall issue from thee, which thou shalt beget, shall they take away; and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon.

2 Chronicles 32:26

²⁶ Notwithstanding Hezekiah humbled himself for the pride of his heart, *both* he and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the wrath of the LORD came not upon them in the days of Hezekiah.

2 Chronicles 32:31-33

³¹ Howbeit in *the business of* the ambassadors of the princes of Babylon, who sent unto him to enquire of the wonder that was *done* in the land, God left him, to try him, that he might know all *that was* in his heart.

³² Now the rest of the acts of Hezekiah, and his goodness, behold, they *are* written in the vision of Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz, *and* in the book of the kings of Judah and Israel.

³³ And Hezekiah slept with his fathers, and they buried him in the chiefest of the sepulchres of the sons of David: and all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem did him honour at his death. And Manasseh his son reigned in his stead.

In one way or another we must show our faith in Jesus. He said: "What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them" (Mark 11:24). Thus by obedience to God and faith in Him, we can receive an answer to our prayer.

Miracles

When Hezekiah prayed and obeyed the prophet, he was given a sign that the Lord would heal him. The sun went backward ten degrees. Hezekiah said that it would be a "light thing" for the sun to go forward ten degrees and set earlier. Moreover, rather than give God the glory, people would probably try to make an explanation — that the fog had covered the sun, or that the condition of the air made it appear that it was gone. Some people think up strange things to try to explain the work of God instead of admitting that God does work miracles.

No doubt those in Hezekiah's room stood near the sundial to watch as Isaiah prayed. God answered! The shadow on the sundial of Ahaz, Hezekiah's father, went backward ten degrees. The sun actually went backward forty minutes and then proceeded in its usual way!

God performed another miracle in perfectly healing Hezekiah of what otherwise would have been a fatal disease. He had been about to die, but in three days he was able to go to church!

Praise to God

After Hezekiah was well, he wrote a song of thanksgiving to God. He told of his sickness and that he had called upon the Lord. Hezekiah said: "What shall I say? he hath both spoken unto me, and himself hath done it" (Isaiah 38:15). He meant that God had not only given a promise but God had also fulfilled that promise.

There are promises in the Bible for us today. When we believe and obey, God will fulfil those promises in our life. God made a promise to Abraham, which was impossible so far as the natural was concerned, and which looked hopeless. But Abraham believed God. "He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; and being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform" (Romans 4:20, 21).

Hezekiah gave God the credit for sparing his life. He praised God for the healing. Hezekiah said: "For the grave cannot praise thee, death can not celebrate thee: . . . The living, the living, he shall praise thee, as I do this day" (Isaiah 38:18, 19). Hezekiah even wrote some songs of thanksgiving and praise to God, which were to be used in worship. "We will sing my songs to the stringed instruments all the days of our life in the house of the LORD" (Isaiah 38:20).

A Test

When the Lord turned the sun backward forty minutes, all the land knew that something unusual had happened. Soon word was spread around "of the wonder that was done in the land." The king of faraway Babylon sent ambassadors with gifts to Hezekiah. At this time God left Hezekiah "to try him, that he might know all that was in his heart" (II Chronicles 32:31). Hezekiah had proved God, now God was proving Hezekiah.

The princes of Babylon showered Hezekiah with a present, letters, and congratulations. Hezekiah liked flattering words of praise and wonder. He took the foreign ambassadors into his confidence. Together they walked through the palace, viewing the treasures of silver, gold, and precious stones. Hezekiah took them to the armoury where his ammunition and weapons of defence were kept. He had no secret weapons now because he had opened his house to his neighbours. Throughout the land they went, Hezekiah making a boast and show of his prosperity, trying to impress the Babylonians.

This vain display of Hezekiah's was not pleasing to God. Hezekiah apparently took credit to himself and did not give glory to God for his prosperity. "Hezekiah rendered not again according to the benefit done unto him; for his heart was lifted up" (II Chronicles 32:25). In the time of trial Hezekiah had failed because he did not give God credit and glory.

Wrath of God

Isaiah the Prophet was sent to Hezekiah again. Hezekiah admitted that the men of Babylon had seen all things in his house, and that there was nothing among his treasures that he had not shown them. Isaiah spoke the words of the Lord: "All that is in thine house, . . . shall be carried into Babylon: nothing shall be left." Hezekiah's children were to be taken captives of the Babylonians because he had trusted these men rather than God.

When Hezekiah humbled himself for the pride of his heart, God postponed the judgment so that it did not come during Hezekiah's lifetime. He was grateful that God had given him peace and truth in his day. His heart must have been heavy to realise that he had failed God in a test and that he was responsible for the sorrow, which was to come into the lives of his children.

Our lives, today, can influence others -- either for good or for bad. By living for the Lord and giving glory to Him, we can be responsible for good in the lives of others. May we let our light shine before men, that they may see our works and want to do likewise; that they will glorify God by living for Him!

How can one be true to God in a trial? Job said: "But he knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold. My foot hath held his steps, his way have I kept, and not declined. Neither have I gone back from the commandment of his lips; I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food" (Job 23:10-12).

Job found that God is the refuge of a Christian in any time of need. He trusted God in time of test, and he did not fail. God has promised to be with His people. God said: "He shall call upon me, and I will answer him: I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honour him" (Psalm 91:15). Read in Jeremiah 17:7, 8, what God will do for those who put their trust in Him.

QUESTIONS

1. Who was the prophet at this time?
2. Who was king of Judah?
3. What message did the king receive?
4. What did Hezekiah do when he heard the words of the prophet?
5. Why was Hezekiah's life spared?
6. How many years were added to Hezekiah's life?
7. What was the sign given to Hezekiah?
8. Name two miracles that God performed for Hezekiah.
9. Why did Hezekiah fail in his test?
10. What happened because he failed?