



STORY

The Overthrow of Israel. King Hezekiah - 2 Kings 17-20; 2 Chronicles 29-32

TEACHER PRAYER

Dear Lord Jesus, since by nature I am prone to idolatry, cleanse my heart and rule there. I make gods of my own wants and pleasures, and I trust in many things beside You. Forgive me for Jesus' sake. Now I ask for Your help in explaining the dangers of idolatry to these children. Please give me the knowledge to teach the truths of this lesson, and the strength to lead by example. Amen.

VOCABULARY

Hoshea - The last king of Northern Israel. He was placed on the throne by the Assyrian Tiglath-pileser, but later rebelled against him and was imprisoned. Scripture and history are silent as to his final fate.

Samaritans - A race of mixed Gentile and Jewish blood, formed when the remaining Jews (from both Israel and Judah) intermarried with the pagan peoples imported by Assyria to replace the exiled Jews. The ethnically pure Jews of Judah despised the Samaritans both for their mixed ancestry and for their worship of pagan idols.

Haran and Gozan - Cities located in the north of the Assyrian Empire. It was to these cities that the Israelites were relocated. (See the 6th note under Chapter 17 below for the irony here.)

Babylon, Cuthan, Ava, Hamath, & Sepharvaim - Assyrian cities located in the southeastern part of the Empire. It was from these cities that colonists were sent to inhabit northern Israel after the fall of Samaria.

Nehustan - The name given to the bronze serpent constructed at God's command by Moses in the wilderness. The name literally means: *Bronze Thing*. The people came to regard it as an idol and burned incense to it. When it was destroyed by Hezekiah it was some 650 years old.

Shalmaneser - A family name of five Assyrian kings. The name literally means: "*the god Shulman is ruler.*" An excavated Assyrian obelisk depicts King Jehu of Israel paying tribute to Shalmaneser III. It was Shalmaneser V that laid siege to Samaria in this account. The siege of Samaria lasted three years. Since Shalmaneser V died sometime in 722 BC (the last year of the siege) it is not known whether he or his successor (Sargon) actually banished what was left of Israel. Sargon claimed credit in his inscriptions.

Tartan, Rabsaris, & Rabshakeh - These are not the names of men but titles referring to military rank in the Assyrian army. Literally *tartan* meant "*second in command,*" *rabsaris* meant "*first eunuch,*" and *rabshakeh* meant "*chief officer.*"

Nishroch - An idol worshipped by Shalmaneser V, believed to have a human body with the head and wings of an eagle.

Ararat - The name given to the area between the Caucasus Mountains and the Tigris River (modern day Armenia). The area is located north of the old Assyrian Empire and east of modern day Turkey. Though we know that Noah's ark came to rest on Mount Ararat, its exact location is not known.

Manasseh - During the first part of his reign Manasseh was arguably one of the most wicked kings ever to sit on the throne in either Judah or Israel. He was actually *worse* than the pagans the Lord drove out of the land before him. Since he came to the throne when he was only 12 years old, certainly his advisors (and perhaps also his mother Hephzibah) shared the blame for his return to such open and abominable idolatry. However, 2 Chronicles 33 tells of Manasseh's repentance and return to the Lord. He reigned for 55 years in Judah.

OUTER AIM

Israel is destroyed by Assyria. Because of her idolatry; Judah is spared under King Hezekiah; and King Hezekiah's life is lengthened as an answer to his faithful service and prayer.

INNER AIM

Israel was destroyed because she refused God's blessing and protection and turned instead to idols. Judah under King Hezekiah trusted in the Lord and was protected and blessed. (See also the notes under **Presentation** below.)

BACKGROUND (*Rupprecht Volume 1, pages 379-389*)

The time of grace for the Northern Ten Tribes of Israel is at an end. God raised up the Assyrians to carry them into exile, from which they never returned.

The key to understanding these four chapters is to recognize the same military threat that faced both nations. Israel fell, not because it was militarily weaker than Judah but because it was spiritually bankrupt. Their kings and their people had turned away from the one true God and had adopted the idols of the people they had driven out. Judah was spared because she and her king looked to the Lord for their deliverance. Later, when Judah also turned away, the Lord delivered them over to the Babylonians, preserving only a remnant for the sake of His promise.

Chapter 17

Hoshea was just another in a long line of evil kings in Israel. Though his evil was "not as the kings of Israel who were before him," he nonetheless "did evil in the sight of the Lord." Some Bible-era historians believe that Hoshea was ransomed from his first Assyrian imprisonment and then led a second rebellion against Assyria, which resulted in the destruction of Samaria and the permanent exile of Israel.

Although Assyria destroyed Samaria in 722 BC and carried many Jews off into exile, a fair number of Jews remained in the area. Hezekiah reached out to these remaining Jews, imploring them to return to the God of their fathers, but his words were met for the most part with ridicule (2 Chronicles 30:1-11). Some, however, returned to the Lord, and were gladly accepted back into the fold in Judah. The final deportation in the North was carried out by Esarhaddon in 670 BC. This final annihilation was foretold in Isaiah 7:8.

Israel was destroyed for her idolatry. Her sin of turning away from the Lord was compounded by her refusal to hear the many prophets God sent to call Israel to repentance. They failed to learn the lesson taught to Jonah in the belly of the great fish: "Those who regard worthless idols forsake their own Mercy."

2 Kings 17:18 tells us, "Therefore the LORD was very angry with Israel, and removed them from His sight; there was none left but the tribe of Judah alone." Though individual Jews remained in Samaria after the deportation, Israel as a nation ceased to exist.

Jeroboam was the first king of Israel after Solomon's kingdom was divided. "The sins of Jeroboam" refers to the many evil practices initiated by Jeroboam, including the building of the golden calves in Bethel and Dan, the erection of the high places, alternate feasts not prescribed by God, and the establishment of a priesthood outside the tribe of Levi.

Assyria resettled the area with pagans who carried with them their foreign gods. It is the height of irony that the new inhabitants of Israel come from the same area as the original patriarch Abraham (a native of Ur); and that the apostate Israelites were exiled in part to the hometown of the matriarch from whom they all sprang - Rebekah, the wife of Isaac, who was a native of Haran.

Although an increase in predators and other wild animals was common in the areas where great battles were fought (due to an abundance of carrion and a decreased human population), the lions in Samaria were sent by God for a purpose. Although the people brought to Samaria continued to worship their pagan gods, they at the very least had to be taught to fear the Lord. This God accomplished this by sending the lions.

The people who resettled Samaria superstitiously believed that the observance of certain local customs or rituals would appease the local God. Thus they "feared" the Lord, but did not worship Him or serve Him.

Chapter 18

Note the roller coaster of sin and righteousness on the part of the kings in Judah. Jotham was a righteous king who was the father of Ahaz. Ahaz was an evil king and the father of the righteous king Hezekiah. Hezekiah was a righteous king and the father of Manasseh, an evil king. Manasseh later repented and returned to the Lord. After returning to the Lord, Manasseh was succeeded by his son Amon, an evil king. Amon was succeeded by his son, Josiah, a righteous king. Righteous Josiah was succeeded by Jehoahaz, an evil king.

The Bible tells us that Hezekiah was without equal among the kings of Israel and Judah. Some wonder if this statement includes David and Solomon. The statement in 18:6 that Hezekiah "held fast to the LORD; he did not depart from following Him, but kept His commandments, which the LORD had commanded Moses" seems to indicate that Hezekiah was the greatest of *all* kings. David committed adultery and murder in connection with Bathsheba, and Solomon turned to other gods in his later years.

We have an insight in 2 Chronicles 30 as to Hezekiah's mission spirit. He reached out to the fallen Jews to the north and invited them to return to their true God.

Roughly halfway through Hezekiah's 29-year reign Judah is attacked by Assyria. When the fortified town of Lachish falls, Hezekiah strips the treasury and the temple for tribute in an effort to appease Sennacherib, the Assyrian king. Having received the tribute, Sennacherib advances on Jerusalem anyway.

Unlike Israel to the north, Judah turned to the Lord when danger threatened. Though they armed themselves, Hezekiah warned them to trust not in weapons but in the Lord (2 Chronicles 32:5-9).

The three military officials sent by Sennacherib to Jerusalem make the fatal mistake of blaspheming the God of Judah.

Chapter 19

Great faith was required on the part of the king and people of Judah. Assyria had crushed all who dared to stand in her way. They had carried northern Israel into exile. They were capable of sustaining sieges for years. According to human reckoning, Jerusalem's cause was all but lost. Yet the Lord demonstrated His power in rescuing those who put their trust in Him alone.

Note how Hezekiah literally takes his case to the Lord and lays it out before Him. The Lord did not need to have the letter of Sennacherib brought to His temple for Him to know what it said, but doing so demonstrates Hezekiah's complete reliance on the Lord. This is the kind of trust the Lord wants to see in His people.

The great prophet Isaiah was a contemporary of Hezekiah. In his prophesy from the Lord he mentions a "hook in your nose and... bridle in your lips." The barbaric Assyrian kings were in the habit of piercing the nose and/or lips of conquered kings, inserting rings, and leading them about by ropes fastened to the rings. In picturesque language, the Lord was letting the Assyrians know exactly who was in charge and who possessed the ultimate power and authority. The one true God detests sinful pride, arrogance, and blasphemy.

The Word of the Lord through Isaiah was, of course, fulfilled. Though some have tried to reduce the miraculous slaughter of the Assyrians to an outbreak of bubonic plague (or the like), we have no reason to doubt the text's clear words that an angel (or Angel) of the Lord personally killed 185,000 men, and did so in a single night. The number 185,000 is in perfect harmony with the historical record of the typical size of an Assyrian army during this period.

Although Sennacherib was spared by the angel of the Lord, he returned to Nineveh in shame and defeat and was soon murdered by his own sons as he worshipped his pagan god, Nisroch.

Chapter 20

The fact that the Lord heard and granted Hezekiah's prayer is evidence of the condition of Hezekiah's heart when he offered it. The Lord is not fickle when it comes to carrying out His will. He consistently desires to bless His servants with that which is best for their salvation.

Note the blessing and the curse Hezekiah received in being told that he would live another fifteen years. Death comes to all men, but knowing beforehand could well have been a terrible burden. Also of interest is the fact that his son and heir, Manasseh, (who led Judah back into grievous idolatry) was born three years after Hezekiah was healed.

God healed Hezekiah, but just as Jesus later used the visible remedy of mud made with his own saliva to cure a blind man, here the remedy of a fig poultice is used.

Ahaz refused a sign from God and was condemned for it (Isaiah 7:11-12). Hezekiah does not make the same mistake. Exactly how the Lord made the shadow on the sundial retreat ten degrees is not known.

Hezekiah's life is lengthened, but the stage is set for the fall of Judah when the king shows the envoys from Babylon all the treasures in the royal city. We are told in 2 Chronicles 32:31 that God brought the Babylonian diplomats as a test for Hezekiah - "that He might know all that was in his heart." Apparently Hezekiah gave in to the sin of pride when he paraded the treasures of Judah to impress the Babylonians. As prophesied by Isaiah, Babylon returned and plundered Judah in 597 BC.

STUDENT PRAYER

Heavenly Father, I have seen in Your Word the price that must be paid for idolatry and rebellion. Help me to remember that there are idols all around us, even today. Help me to remember that an idol is not only wood or stone, but whatever I fear, love, or trust above You. Keep me from that which hurts me, and give me the strength to love you with all my heart, soul, and mind. Amen.

PRESENTATION

This account is obviously too long to read in class and should be assigned reading for the students (preferably before the class). In presenting the lesson, note that Chapter 17 deals with Israel's fall and the reasons for that fall - idolatry. Chapters 18 and 19 stand in contrast, for there we read that the same Assyrian military threat that destroyed Israel was turned away from Judah because of faithful obedience to the Lord on the part of Judah under King Hezekiah. Chapter 20 deals with Hezekiah's sickness and recovery, again emphasizing that the Lord is ready and willing to bless us when we turn to Him in time of need rather than to idols.

APPLICATION

1. Militarily Israel was probably stronger than Judah, yet Judah survived the Assyrian invasions. Try to solicit from the students the reason why Judah survived and Israel did not (God was with them). Next, ask them for other examples where God's people won against impossible odds because God fought for them (David and Goliath, King David against Saul, Elijah against the prophets of Baal, Elijah and the bands of fifty soldiers, Gideon, etc.)
2. Have the children list some of the idols common today (money, pleasure, boats, cars, cabins, celebrities, sports heroes, etc.)
3. Imagine how difficult it was to be a God-fearing prophet of God in Israel during these times. Lead the students to recognize how God might call upon them to make some difficult witnesses or confessions. Out of love for our Lord Jesus we should never keep silent when we have a chance to tell others what we believe.
4. As the Lord sent lions to get the attention of the new inhabitants of Samaria, so the Lord may allow some hard things to come into our lives. Have the students give examples. What should be our reaction when God allows hardships to occur?
5. The unbelievers in Samaria "feared" the Lord but did not believe in Him nor serve Him. What do we mean when we say we should "fear God above all things"? (Love and respect Him.)
6. Though his father was evil, Hezekiah recognized that the shrines to the pagan idols in Judah were evil and destroyed them. Demonstrate to the children with examples how each new generation needs to carefully examine even those customs they take for granted, contrasting them to God's Word to see if they are God pleasing. For example, dressing up like a devil on Halloween is not something the Christian will want to do since it glorifies and trivializes evil.
7. Point out to the students the confidence and the comfort that we can have in our hearts when we lay our needs before the Lord in prayer. He will answer in the way He knows to be best.
8. Proverbs 16:18 says, "Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall." Ask the students how and when this passage applied to King Hezekiah? (When he pridefully displayed all of his wealth to the Babylonian diplomats.) Ask for examples of how this saying applies to us *spiritually* even today.

PASSAGES

These passages can be assigned as memory work or simply discussed in class as to how they fit the lesson.

Lower

Genesis 39:9 - How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?

Psalms 37:5 - Commit your way to the LORD, trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass.

1 John 5:21 - Little children, keep yourselves from idols.

Middle

1 Thessalonians 4:7-8a - For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness. Therefore he who rejects this does not reject man, but God.

Jonah 2:8-9 - Those who regard worthless idols forsake their own Mercy. But I will sacrifice to You with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay what I have vowed. Salvation is of the LORD."

2 Peter 3:5 - For this they willfully forget that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of water and in the water.

Upper

Psalms 1:1 - Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful.

Romans 12:2 - And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

Galatians 2:20 - "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.

HYMN CHOICES

Lord, to Thee I Make Confession - TLH #326

The Man Is Ever Blest - TLH #414

Abide with Me! Fast Falls the Eventide - TLH #552:5-8