



Second Kings - Chapter Twenty

IX 2 Kings 18:1-20:21 - Hezekiah (continues/concludes)

Summary of Chapter Twenty

When Hezekiah became ill the Lord passed him a message through Isaiah that he would die as a result. Therefore, Hezekiah prayed and wept before the Lord, asking for a miraculous healing on account of the way he had been faithful to the Lord. The word of the Lord came back to Isaiah to instruct him to tell Hezekiah that he would indeed be healed and live for a further fifteen years. The sign of this would be for the sun's shadow to move backwards.

Having heard that Hezekiah had been ill, the king of Babylon sent envoys on a diplomatic mission to him. In his pride or foolishness, Hezekiah showed the envoys all the treasures in Jerusalem. Isaiah warned the king of his folly saying that a day would come when all those treasures, along with the king's descendants, would be taken away to Babylon. After a successful reign of twenty nine years, Hezekiah died and was succeeded by his son Manasseh.

IX.g 2 Kings 20:1-11 - Hezekiah's Illness

When Hezekiah became ill with an infected abscess he was told by the Lord through Isaiah that he would not recover. He prayed and wept bitterly at the news and the Lord had compassion on him, stating through Isaiah that the king would live for a further fifteen years. The sign of this would be the sun's shadow moving backwards on the dial of Ahaz, contrary to nature.

¹ In those days Hezekiah became sick and was at the point of death. The prophet Isaiah son of Amoz came to him, and said to him, 'Thus says the Lord: Set your house in order, for you shall die; you shall not recover.'

2 Kings 20:1

In those days. There is significant debate as to when this occurred. Most commentators believe that Hezekiah eventually died in 686 BC and therefore the fifteen extra years added to his life when he recovered from the illness described here would place it around 701 BC, the same year that Sennacherib came against Jerusalem, as described in the previous two chapters. However, basing this text along with the parallel account in Isaiah Chapter 38, commentators believe it occurred much earlier around 712 BC. Thus the extra fifteen years takes the account forward to the time when Hezekiah and his son Manasseh were apparently coregents. The earlier date is supported further on in this chapter when it is King Merodach-baladan who sends envoys to see Hezekiah. This king reigned in Babylon from 722-710 BC and again between 703-702 BC. Also, v.6 indicates that the invasion by Sennacherib had not yet occurred.

Hezekiah became sick and was at the point of death. His later treatment by Isaiah indicates that this unspecified illness was some form of abscess that was probably infected or had caused a high fever.

Thus says the Lord. Isaiah makes it clear to Hezekiah that it is the Lord's judgement and not Isaiah's own diagnosis that is being passed on him.

Set your house in order, for you shall die; you shall not recover. God was remarkably kind to Hezekiah, telling him that his death was near. Not all people are given the time to set their affairs in order. By comparing 2 Kings 18:2 with v.6 below it can be calculated that Hezekiah was only 39 years old when he learned of his imminent death.

² Then Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed to the Lord:
³ 'Remember now, O Lord, I implore you, how I have walked before you in faithfulness with a whole heart, and have done what is good in your sight.' Hezekiah wept bitterly.

2 Kings 20:2-3

Hezekiah turned his face to the wall. Hezekiah is in distress and wishes to be left alone to pray to God, effectively dismissing Isaiah and any other attendants. Hezekiah's actions here are for different reasons to those of Ahab in 1 Kings 21:4, where Ahab was acting like a sulking child for not getting his own way when he had his offer to buy the vineyard belonging to Naboth rejected.

Remember now, O Lord, I implore you. The prayer is somewhat more self-centred than the one he offered in 2 Kings 19:15-19, stressing the king's own righteousness. This is the first hint in this passage that Hezekiah may have had an attitude problem.

In it, his focus is on self-justification and his own merits. It is pretty much as if Hezekiah prayed, “Lord, I’ve been such a good boy and you aren’t being fair to me. Remember what a good man I’ve been and rescue me.” Under the Old Covenant, this was a valid principle on which to approach God. Passages like Leviticus Chapter 26 and Deuteronomy Chapter 28 show that under the Old Covenant, blessing and cursing was sent by God on the basis of obedience or disobedience. On that principle, David could write: *<<O Lord, who may abide in your tent? Who may dwell on your holy hill? Those who walk blamelessly, and do what is right, and speak the truth from their heart>>* (Psalm 15:1-2). However, under the New Covenant, Christians are blessed on the principle of faith in Jesus: *<<Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us – for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree’ – in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith>>* (Galatians 3:13-14). Hezekiah’s principle of prayer is not fitting for a Christian today. They pray in the name of Jesus in accordance with John 16:23-24, not in the name of who they are or what they have or have not done.

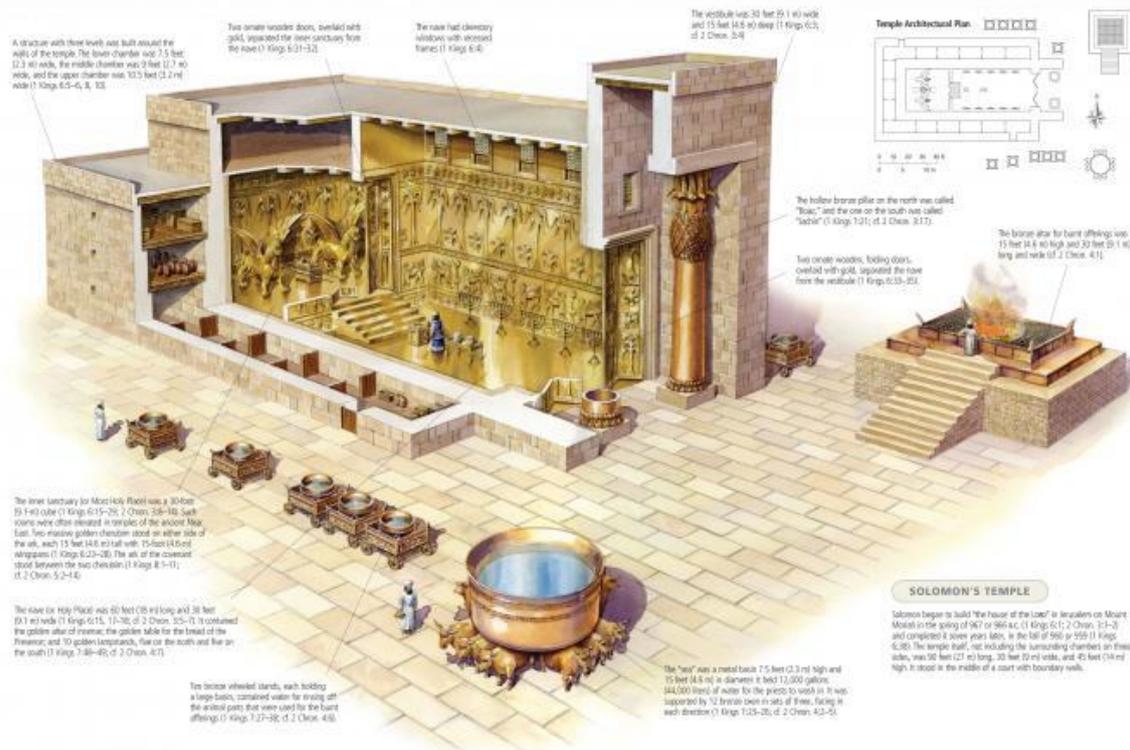
The governor of Judæa Nehemiah was another man who famously asked God to remember him for his good works: *<<Remember for my good, O my God, all that I have done for this people>>* (Nehemiah 5:19), and: *<<Remember me, O my God, concerning this, and do not wipe out my good deeds that I have done for the house of my God and for his service>>* (Nehemiah 13:14).

Hezekiah wept bitterly. Hezekiah lived under the Old Covenant, and at that time there was not a confident assurance of the glory in the life beyond. Instead, Jesus brought life and immortality came to light through the Gospel: *<<but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Saviour Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel>>* (2 Timothy 1:10). Also, under the Old Covenant Hezekiah would have regarded this as evidence that God was very displeased with him.

⁴ Before Isaiah had gone out of the middle court, the word of the Lord came to him: ⁵ ‘Turn back, and say to Hezekiah prince of my people, Thus says the Lord, the God of your ancestor David: I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears; indeed, I will heal you; on the third day you shall go up to the house of the Lord.

2 Kings 20:4-5

The middle court was the area between the temple and the palace; Isaiah is on the way back to the temple. Refer to the image below.



Solomon's Temple

The word of the Lord comes to him suddenly and unexpectedly. The text does not seem to indicate that Isaiah was specifically seeking the Lord for a further word for the king during his time of need.

I have heard your prayer. Hezekiah's prayer was important. By all indications, if Hezekiah had not made his passionate prayer, then his life would not have been extended. This is another demonstration of the principle that prayer matters. In fact, God gave two gifts to Hezekiah. First, he gave him the gift of an extended life, i.e. **I will heal you**. Second, he gave him the gift of knowing he only had fifteen years left (v.6). If he were wise, this would still give King Hezekiah the motivation to walk right with God and to set his house in order.

I have seen your tears. As with his ancestor David, Hezekiah's prayers were very emotional: *<<I am weary with my moaning; every night I flood my bed with tears; I drench my couch with my weeping. My eyes waste away because of grief; they grow weak because of all my foes. Depart from me, all you workers of evil, for the Lord has heard the sound of my weeping>>* (Psalm 6:6-8), and: *<<Hear my prayer, O Lord, and give ear to my cry; do not hold your peace at my tears. For I am your passing guest, an alien, like all my forebears>>* (Psalm 39:12).

On the third day. A detail not included in Isaiah's parallel account: *<<Go and say to Hezekiah, Thus says the Lord, the God of your ancestor David: I have heard*

your prayer, I have seen your tears; I will add fifteen years to your life>> (Isaiah 38:5).

You shall go up. God's response to Hezekiah's prayer in v.3 shows that many prophecies, although stated in unconditional terms (v.1), have implied conditions.

⁶ I will add fifteen years to your life. I will deliver you and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria; I will defend this city for my own sake and for my servant David's sake.' ⁷ Then Isaiah said, 'Bring a lump of figs. Let them take it and apply it to the boil, so that he may recover.'

2 Kings 20:6-7

I will add fifteen years to your life. In response to Hezekiah's prayer, God granted Hezekiah fifteen years more. Because Hezekiah recovered, was God's word: <<***you shall die; you shall not recover***>> (v.1b) proved false? No; firstly, Hezekiah did in fact die - just not as soon as God had first announced. Secondly, when God announces judgement it is almost always an invitation to repent and to receive mercy.

If the historians are right that Hezekiah died in 686 BC and the early date of Hezekiah's illness is accepted (v.1), then he lived much longer than the fifteen years given to him here.

I will deliver you and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria. This supports an earlier date for Hezekiah's illness as the Lord did indeed deliver them from Sennacherib in 701 BC as seen in the previous two chapters and there was no indication that Hezekiah was taken ill during that campaign, so it is likely that he was ill some time before the Assyrians attacked Judah.

I will defend this city for my own sake and for my servant David's sake. This promise was in accord with the Lord's previous prophecies of deliverance, and dates this chapter as being before God destroyed the Assyrian army: <<***Then the angel of the Lord set out and struck down one hundred and eighty-five thousand in the camp of the Assyrians; when morning dawned, they were all dead bodies. Then King Sennacherib of Assyria left, went home, and lived at Nineveh***>> (Isaiah 37:36-37). The connection of the two promises indicates that one would confirm the other. When Hezekiah recovered his health, he could know that God would also deliver him from the Assyrians.

Figs had long been cultivated in Palestine. They could be eaten fresh or dried, made into cakes, or fermented and made into wine. Here a lump of figs, serving as a compress, is applied to what may have been an abscess. Apparently, God used this medical treatment to bring about Hezekiah's healing. God can, and often

does, bring healing through medical treatments, and apart from an unusual direction from God, medical treatment should never be rejected in the name of faith. The belief that figs had medicinal qualities is also attested earlier at Ugarit and later in Rome. However, the healing of such a serious illness almost certainly included an element of the supernatural work of God as well.

⁸ Hezekiah said to Isaiah, ‘What shall be the sign that the Lord will heal me, and that I shall go up to the house of the Lord on the third day?’

⁹ Isaiah said, ‘This is the sign to you from the Lord, that the Lord will do the thing that he has promised: the shadow has now advanced ten intervals; shall it retreat ten intervals?’ ¹⁰ Hezekiah answered, ‘It is normal for the shadow to lengthen ten intervals; rather let the shadow retreat ten intervals.’ ¹¹ The prophet Isaiah cried to the Lord; and he brought the shadow back the ten intervals, by which the sun had declined on the dial of Ahaz.

2 Kings 20:8-11

What shall be the sign that the Lord will heal me? The king is unwilling to believe the promise of healing without a sign, which is provided in the unnatural movement of a shadow on some steps associated with Ahaz for it moves back, even though the sun has already caused it to go down the steps. The text offers no explanation of the details of this miracle; in the biblical worldview, nothing is beyond the power of the creator of heaven and earth. Hezekiah, too, is sinking down towards death, but he will miraculously recover and go up to the temple.

The temple mount is the highest point in Jerusalem and therefore one always goes up to and down from the temple: <<About the middle of the festival Jesus went up into the temple and began to teach>> (John 7:14). Similarly, Jerusalem itself was at a higher elevation than the surround landscape and therefore people went up to Jerusalem: <<Some of the people of Israel, and some of the priests and Levites, the singers and gatekeepers, and the temple servants also went up to Jerusalem, in the seventh year of King Artaxerxes>> (Ezra 7:7)

This is the sign to you from the Lord, that the Lord will do the thing that he has promised. God showed even more mercy to Hezekiah. God was under no obligation to give this sign. In fact, God would have been justified in saying, “I said it and you believe it. How dare you not take my word for true?” But in real love, God gave Hezekiah more than he needed or deserved.

The Lord also offered a later generation a sign that he would not forsake them even though they were in exile: <<And those who escape the sword shall return from the land of Egypt to the land of Judah, few in number; and all the

remnant of Judah, who have come to the land of Egypt to settle, shall know whose words will stand, mine or theirs! This shall be the sign to you, says the Lord, that I am going to punish you in this place, in order that you may know that my words against you will surely be carried out: Thus says the Lord, I am going to give Pharaoh Hophra, king of Egypt, into the hands of his enemies, those who seek his life, just as I gave King Zedekiah of Judah into the hand of King Nebuchadrezzar of Babylon, his enemy who sought his life>> (Jeremiah 44:28-30).

Jesus took a different standpoint when he was repeatedly asked to give signs because he had already done so and the people still did not accept him as the Messiah but did enjoy seeing the miracles: <<When the crowds were increasing, he began to say, 'This generation is an evil generation; it asks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah. For just as Jonah became a sign to the people of Nineveh, so the Son of Man will be to this generation>> (Luke 11:29-30). Christians today still ask to see the signs. Although it is right to ask the Lord for healing and relief from suffering, if the answer to prayer appears not to come it should not lessen a person's faith, just as having a positive response should not increase a person's faith. Jesus clearly said in the above passage that his death and resurrection were the only signs that was needed and the same is applicable today.

The shadow has now advanced ten intervals; shall it retreat ten intervals? God promised to do something completely miraculous for the confirming sign. He promised to make the shadow on the steps move backward instead of forward. This was a wonderfully appropriate sign for Hezekiah. By bringing the shadow on the steps backwards, it symbolically gave more time in that day - just as God gave Hezekiah more time in his life.

The dial of Ahaz. Dial is the Hebrew word *ma'alo* and means degrees, steps or staircase rather than a sundial or an astrological instrument.

Some people make the claim that the Lord reversed the rotation of the earth to do this or even somehow realigned the sun and earth's relative positions. There is no need for such a suggestion to even be contemplated for the shadow only reversed on the steps and therefore seems to have been a local phenomenon created by the Lord.

No matter how the miracle happened, the Chronicler reveals that Hezekiah did not respond rightly to this gift of healing: <<In those days Hezekiah became sick and was at the point of death. He prayed to the Lord, and he answered him and gave him a sign. But Hezekiah did not respond according to the benefit done to him, for his heart was proud. Therefore wrath came upon him and upon Judah and Jerusalem. Then Hezekiah humbled himself for the pride of his heart, both he and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the wrath of

the Lord did not come upon them in the days of Hezekiah>> (2 Chronicles 32:24-26).

IX.h 2 Kings 20:12-19 - Envoys from Babylon

Because Hezekiah had been ill, envoys came to see him from Babylon on a diplomatic mission. Hezekiah showed them all the treasures that were in his palace and in the temple. Isaiah came to tell him that because he had been so rash a time would come when all the treasures and even some of his descendants would be taken away by the Babylonians.

¹² At that time King Merodach-baladan son of Baladan of Babylon sent envoys with letters and a present to Hezekiah, for he had heard that Hezekiah had been sick. ¹³ Hezekiah welcomed them; he showed them all his treasure house, the silver, the gold, the spices, the precious oil, his armoury, all that was found in his storehouses; there was nothing in his house or in his entire realm that Hezekiah did not show them.

2 Kings 20:12-13

At that time. This was after the miraculous recovery of Hezekiah. By the time news of the illness had reached Babylon and the envoys journey time to Jerusalem means that several months at least would have passed. The Lord was good enough to give King Hezekiah fifteen years more of life; but it was up to Hezekiah if those years would be lived in wisdom and to the glory of God.

King Merodach-baladan son of Baladan of Babylon sent envoys with letters and a present to Hezekiah, for he had heard that Hezekiah had been sick. Apparently this was a gesture of kindness from the king of Babylon, showing concern to Hezekiah as fellow royalty. There is no indication that this was a deliberate spying mission but the reports of the great wealth that the envoys were shown would have been reported and remembered for a later action.

Although this was an act of diplomacy, it would also have been an opportune time for the Babylonians to request the support of Judah in their own struggles with the Assyrians. This was the conclusion of Josephus in Jewish Antiquities 10.2.2.

When Sargon II ascended the Assyrian throne in 722 BC, Merodach-baladan, the Hebrew name for Marduk-apla-iddina II, had been crowned king in Babylon, and the ensuing conflict in Mesopotamia lasted intermittently until Esarhaddon's reign in Assyria; refer to the comments made on 2 Kings 17:24-41 and 19:37. This visit of Merodach-baladan's envoys to Jerusalem is best set during his first spell of kingship in Babylon (722-710 BC), before Sargon II reconquered Babylonia after 710 BC and drove him into exile.

Hezekiah welcomed them. Although it was under the yoke of Assyria at that time, Babylon was showing every indication that it could eventually break free and become the next superpower in the region. Hezekiah must have been delighted to be honoured by such a delegation.

He showed them all his treasure house. The reader can imagine Hezekiah wanting to please these envoys from Babylon, and wanting to show them that they had good reason to be impressed with him and his kingdom. So he did everything he could to impress them, and showed them the very best riches of the royal household - and he showed them everything. Hezekiah is evidently proud of his wealth, but pride comes before a fall: <<**When pride comes, then comes disgrace; but wisdom is with the humble**>> (Proverbs 11:2), when nothing shall be left and even some of the king's descendants will be taken away into exile in Babylon. As the coming rebuke from Isaiah will demonstrate, this was nothing but proud foolishness on Hezekiah's part. He was in the dangerous place of wanting to please and impress man, especially ungodly men.

¹⁴ Then the prophet Isaiah came to King Hezekiah, and said to him, 'What did these men say? From where did they come to you?' Hezekiah answered, 'They have come from a far country, from Babylon.'¹⁵ He said, 'What have they seen in your house?' Hezekiah answered, 'They have seen all that is in my house; there is nothing in my storehouses that I did not show them.'

2 Kings 20:14-15

What did these men say? From where did they come to you? Isaiah probably already knew the answer to these questions. It was likely that his questions were guided by God to allow Hezekiah the opportunity to answer honestly, which he did, and to see his error himself, which he apparently did not.

This type of conversation between a king and a true prophet seems to have been quite common. That a man should talk to a king in that way was unheard of and it shows both the respect that kings had or should have had for prophets, and the courage that prophets had in bringing such messages to kings and other influential authorities.

They have seen all that is in my house. There is the flavour that Hezekiah was proud to tell Isaiah this. He was like a small-town boy who was awed by the attention of a big-city man. "Isaiah, you should have seen how impressed those Babylonians were by all I have. They really know we are something here in Judah!" Hezekiah's pride and inflated ego seemed to make him blind to the dangers.

¹⁶ Then Isaiah said to Hezekiah, 'Hear the word of the Lord: ¹⁷ Days are coming when all that is in your house, and that which your ancestors

have stored up until this day, shall be carried to Babylon; nothing shall be left, says the Lord. ¹⁸ Some of your own sons who are born to you shall be taken away; they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon.'

2 Kings 20:16-18

Days are coming when all that is in your house, shall be carried to Babylon. Hezekiah thought that this display of wealth would impress the Babylonians. All it did was show them what the kings of Judah had and what they could get from them. One day the kings of Babylon would come and take it all away. This was fulfilled in 2 Kings 24:10-13 and 25:11-17, under the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar.

It would be more than a hundred years before Babylon carried away the royal treasures of Judah, but they did come, just as Isaiah prophesied. This prophecy is so remarkably accurate that many sceptics insist - without grounds other than unbelief - a later 'Isaiah' must have written it after the fact.

They shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon. Worse than taking the material riches of the kings of Judah, the king of Babylon would take the sons of the king of Judah - his true riches! Eunuchs are typically castrated males, although here the term may be intended metaphorically rather than literally, i.e. the sons will be powerless servants of the king of Babylon.

Again, the Lord would let his people know that they would not be abandoned even in exile: <<Writhe and groan, O daughter Zion, like a woman in labour; for now you shall go forth from the city and camp in the open country; you shall go to Babylon. There you shall be rescued, there the Lord will redeem you from the hands of your enemies>> (Micah 4:10).

One fulfilment of this was the taking of Daniel and his companions into captivity. Daniel was one of the king's descendants taken into the palace of the king of Babylon; refer to Daniel 1:1-4. Because of this promise of God through Isaiah, many think that Daniel and his companions were made eunuchs when they were taken to serve in the palace. However, there is no record that they were.

¹⁹ Then Hezekiah said to Isaiah, 'The word of the Lord that you have spoken is good.' For he thought, 'Why not, if there will be peace and security in my days?'

2 Kings 20:19

Why not? Hezekiah is surprisingly unmoved by Isaiah's prophecy, and again displays self-centeredness. All he cares about is peace and security during his own reign.

This was a sad state of heart in the king of Judah. God announced coming judgement, and all he could respond with was relief that it would not happen in his lifetime. Even this 'king like David' has his dark side.

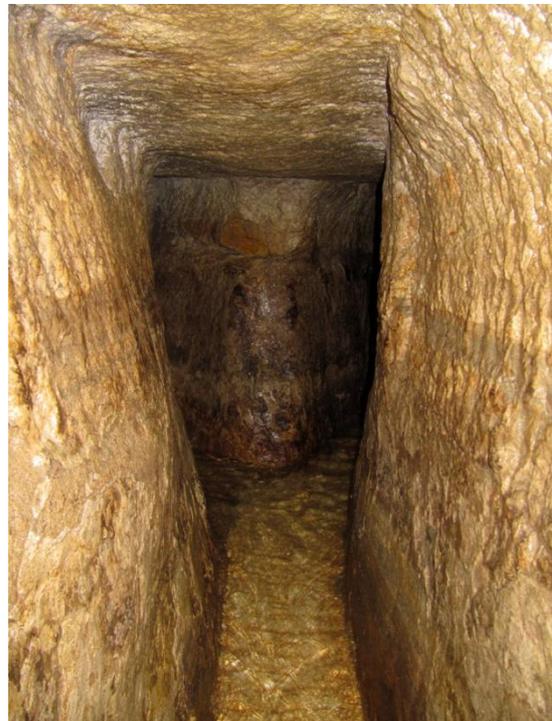
IX.i 2 Kings 20:20-21 - Death of Hezekiah

When Hezekiah died he was succeeded by his son Manasseh.

²⁰ The rest of the deeds of Hezekiah, all his power, how he made the pool and the conduit and brought water into the city, are they not written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Judah? ²¹ Hezekiah slept with his ancestors; and his son Manasseh succeeded him.

2 Kings 20:20-21

The pool and the conduit. This was an amazing engineering feat. He built an aqueduct to ensure fresh water inside the city walls even during sieges. It was 533m long through solid rock. Excavation began at each end and met in the middle. The Gihon Spring in the Kidron Valley was Jerusalem's crucial water resource, and this large conduit, often known as the Siloam Channel as it ends at the Pool of Siloam, brought water from there to a reservoir at the southern end of the city of David. Since this water supply lay outside the city's walls and was vulnerable in time of siege, a subsidiary tunnel leading from the Siloam conduit allowed residents to access its water from inside the city walls. In preparation for the Assyrian attack, Hezekiah had an additional tunnel cut that diverted water from the Gihon Spring directly underground to the Pool of Siloam which now lay within the city walls, whereupon the old water system was apparently abandoned. An inscription cut into the conduit wall and known as the Siloam Tunnel Inscription commemorates this accomplishment.



Inside the tunnel.

The Book of the Annals of the Kings of Judah was a separate record from Kings and Chronicles to which the authors had access that recorded everything of significance that occurred during the reign of the kings.

Hezekiah slept with his ancestors. There is no doubt that Hezekiah started out as a godly king, and overall his reign was one of outstanding godliness, as confirmed in 2 Kings 18:3-7. Yet his beginning was much better than his end; Hezekiah did not finish as well as he might have done. God gave Hezekiah the gift of fifteen more

years of life, but the added years did not necessarily make him a better or a more godly man. Hezekiah was buried on the sloping hill where the tombs of David's descendants were cut: <<**Hezekiah slept with his ancestors, and they buried him on the ascent to the tombs of the descendants of David**>> (2 Chronicles 32:33a). This was because the royal Iron Age burial caves north of the city were full by this time and hereafter no Judæan king was buried in the rock-hewn caves there.

His son Manasseh succeeded him. The reign of Hezekiah was mostly good and peaceful. A complete reversal was about to take place as this wicked king took the helm of state.