

# Combating the Relativization of Scripture

## Lesson Four

### Time as a Relativizing Factor (Part Two)

**Text: 2 Kings 20:1-11, Isaiah 38:1-22**

**(Supplementary reading on the life of Hezekiah: 2 Chronicles chapters 29-32.)**

#### *BASIC CONTEXT:*

1. This story of the healing of Hezekiah occurs during a turbulent period in the history of the nation of Judah. Take a moment to read silently 2 Chronicles chapter 29-32 for an overview of the life of Hezekiah. (If time is limited, just read chapter 30.)
2. This passage in 2 Chronicles points out an extraordinary relationship that Hezekiah apparently had with the Lord. Because of the king's prayer, God actually declared people who were ceremonially unclean, as if they were clean.
3. This response of God to Hezekiah echoes the way that God declared Abraham righteous when he'd done some unrighteous things (Genesis 15:6.) It also reminds us of the way that Abraham prayed for Abimelech and God, in response, healed Abimelech's household (Genesis 20:17-18).
4. Such a tremendous response to prayer also prefigures and looks forward to the way that the atonement of Christ covers all sin and erases all uncleanness from all who believe in Him and desire to come to the Father through Him.
5. The main texts for this lesson are 2 Kings 20:1-11 and Isaiah 38:1-22. These two parallel texts expand upon something just mentioned in 2 Chronicles: the miracle that God performed to show Hezekiah that He was about to heal him.
6. Hezekiah is mortally ill and becomes distraught at the news that he will soon die. He cries out to the Lord and the Lord hears and announces, through the prophet Isaiah, a new outcome for the illness, based on Hezekiah's prayer. The Lord indicates four bases for His response to Hezekiah. First, Hezekiah's heritage of promises, being a descendant of David. Second, Hezekiah's heartfelt prayer—which included a reminder to the Lord of his life of service to God. Third, Hezekiah's tears.

7. There's a fourth motivation mentioned by God. He promises more than just a healing, He promises rescue for the whole city which is being besieged by Assyria. All this, God says, is done for a) His own sake as well as b) that of the long-dead King David (verse 6.)

*RELATIVIZATION INDEX:*

In continuation of the previous lesson, we are concentrating in this lesson mostly on the category of Time.

**TIME:**

1. Somewhere during Isaiah's delivery of the message to Hezekiah, the king asks for some sort of confirmation of the message of his coming healing. According to the accounts in 2 Kings and in Isaiah, Isaiah promises a confirmational sign involving a shadow on the steps of a well-known landmark, the steps of Ahaz. Isaiah and Hezekiah agree that a truly miraculous sign would to have a shadow move, but in the opposite direction that it normally would.
2. Again we see a response to prayer when God graciously does what Isaiah asks of him and moves the shadow backwards.
3. We can assume that this is a miracle of time, since a shadow (such as that from a sundial) moving across a surface demarks time (measured, as in steps in this instance.) Normally, a shadow can only move across the surface in one direction as the sun moves each day from east to west.
4. We might speculate on what happened to the time that moved backwards. Was it erased? Were the events of those ten hours (or other ten periods of time) erased as well? (Remember that in the resurrection of Lazarus, in the previous lesson, the effects of death and decay were undeniably reversed.)
5. There is strong Scriptural precedent for the fact that God has in the past, in some way we cannot understand, manipulated periods of time and the events in them. Look at the following examples:
  - a. Joshua chapter 10, especially verses 7-15. Here we see that the Lord caused the sun and moon to stand still, apparently for the space of time normally covered for about a day. This miracle is identified specifically as the response of God to the prayer of a man (verse 14) and also as the intercession of God in human affairs to prevent a disaster that seemed otherwise inevitable.
  - b. Joel 2:25. This verse occurs in the middle of a book of prophecy in which God tells the nation that they will undergo successive waves of disaster and

destruction that will be like repeated invasions of destructive locusts. In the verse in question, God tells the people that He will compensate them for the **years** the locusts ate. In some translations of the Bible God says “I will repay you for the years the locusts have eaten” (NIV) but in others the thought of the restitution of the time, the years themselves seems more prominent: “I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten” (NKJV). The word is *shalam*, a Hebrew word conveying fulfillment of vows, completion of covenants, the restoration of something damaged or incomplete to a perfect condition. The idea is that a period of time that was one of loss, can be restored to something that is not loss but bountiful gain.

6. In all the examples from Scripture we’ve looked at, from the resurrection of Lazarus, to the Resurrection of Jesus, to the moving of a time-indicating shadow backwards, to the standing still of the sun and the elongation of a “day,” to the restoration of lost years – all of these carry with them the idea of the power of God to reverse time. The sense in which we understand this is that the events that happen within a period of time do not sequentially follow in the way they normally would.

7. When you speak of the reversal of time, you’re not just running the hands of a clock backwards. Time is perceived and defined by the events which happen within it. What these scriptural examples demonstrate is the power of God to reverse time—and its effects.

8. In every case, such a reversal is for the benefit of human beings in desperate need. It is done to demonstrate the power and sovereignty of God. Since such power cannot ever be earned or paid back, God’s manipulation of time is always a signal of His unmerited favor, which is called in Scripture by the name of grace.

#### *THE DEVELOPMENT OF DISCOURSE:*

Let us consider one further verse that shows that the reversal of time and the events within it are *actually a basis for reasoning*. Look at Isaiah 1:18. God pleads here with a recalcitrant nation, and He provides a foundation for what He’s going to say – and how His listeners should think about it.

“Come, let us reason together,” He pleads. Instead of understanding this as God saying, look, let’s talk about this, could it be that He is introducing a way of thinking? And what is that way of thinking? He calls it “reasoning.” --“Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow.” He says that the way that the people should reason about things is this: He can change the events of the past, and the effect they have upon an offended Righteousness, simply by saying so. He is, after all, not only “the God who gives life to the dead,” but also He “who calls things that are not, as though they were” (Romans 4:17). God says, let this be your basis for thinking, your basis for reasoning. He can change not only the past, and prevent the horrible inevitable future, but He can also make long-dead people alive, and by His very say-so, make the non-existent real!

After all, didn't He begin human history by doing just that – by creating something out of nothing?

We face a sober choice between two discourses about time:

- (a) A DISCOURSE THAT TRIES TO RELATIVIZE SCRIPTURE. In such a discourse, a person would assume that matters that have to do with the seemingly-inexorable passage of time are unchangeable: things as the sun appearing to stand still in the sky to prolong time, or the reversal of the decay of a long-dead man. The discourse of such a person might do one of the following: 1) He or she might utterly deny the truthfulness of these Scriptures 2) He or she might try to “allegorize” or say they are stories with good moral meaning but no historical content or 3) Assert that these events may have happened but were misunderstood by a pre-scientific group of people when they actually had a scientifically-based explanation (we could call this “the History Channel Explanation”) or 4) Believe that such inexplicable things may have happened in some way in the past, but that they have no immediate relevance to our personal present because they were one-time, non-repeatable instances that will not be reproduced in the present.
  
- (b) A DISCOURSE SHAPED BY THE REVELATION OF THE LORD. Here is discourse that has been shaped by exposure and obedience to the will of the Lord. Such a discourse demonstrates both hope and trust in a wondrous God who can not only make time stand still or run backwards; but can do something even more helpful: He can treat us as if our sins never existed. By restoring lost years and lost dreams, He can indeed as He promised “make everything new” (Revelation 21:5).

Not only that, but He promises, as our Predecessor in newness of life, to raise our bodies from the grave – regardless of if we've been dead four years or four thousand – and take us, rescued and redeemed, to a heavenly home where time itself will no longer exist at all.

*QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:*

1. How does Jeremiah 18:1-12 shed light on the announcement of God to Hezekiah that he was about to die?
2. What connection do you see between the way that God related to ceremonially unclean people in 2 Chronicles 30, and what is said in Isaiah 1:18?
3. What discourse of daily life do you hear concerning time, that indicates that people who are speaking about time would believe utterly that Scripture is relativized to time?
4. Which other elements from the Nine Categories of Relativization-- EXPERIENCE, HUMAN INTELLIGENCE, TEMPORAL VARIABLES, COMMUNITY, HISTORY,

CULTURE, RACE, TIME, DESIRE/AMBITION – do you see active in the story of Hezekiah? Did he or people of his time relativize the Word or power of God to any of them?

5. Compare and find common elements in Joshua 10:7-15 to 2 Kings 20:5-6.
6. Explain why Isaiah 1:18 can be seen as a basis for reasoning. Then tell how you would reason about past events using that basis for reasoning.
7. Think of a current situation you are facing in which time seems to be a factor. How can your discourse demonstrate an understanding that time is relativized to Scripture? That time is relativized to the power of God?
8. Time is an oppressive taskmaster to many of us. Discuss the implications of the fact that time will not exist in heaven. How could this understanding help you here and now?