

Bible Characters for Your Weekly Bible Study

Compiled by Lt Gen C. Norman Wood, USAF (Ret), Burke, VA 22015

For week of December 1 - 7, 2008

Sinclair, Duncan (CSB, Associate Editor, President, Normal Class Teacher, and Editor), "**God the Only Cause**," EDITORIAL, Christian Science Sentinel, Vol.28 (28 August 1926), p. 1030.

--Christians generally, and many others besides, will readily admit theoretically that God is the cause, origin, or source of "all things."

- They are quite ready to agree that there is a Supreme Being, and that because this Being is supreme He must be the originator of everything that exists.

---Thus a great number of the human race believe that God is the cause of what they believe to be the universe of Spirit and at the same time of the universe of matter, and that He is the source of all phenomena, spiritual and material.

- It is important for the present purpose to note that this is the attitude of the generality of thinking people outside of Christian Science toward the creator and creation, in order to better understand the distinction which Christian Science draws between this view of creation and the truth which Christian Science reveals about creation.

SECTION II: Hezekiah's Sickness and Recovery (Isa 38: 1 [to 1st.], 2-5 [to :], 6, 9, 11, 17-20)

RELATED SCRIPTURE: II Kings 20: 1-11; II Chron 32: 24-33; Isa 39

TIME LINE AND AUTHOR: Written by Isaiah @700 BC

"Hezekiah's sickness [v.1] occurred before the Assyrian siege of Jerusalem described in chapters 36 and 37. Isaiah placed the description of that illness here, along with chapter 39, to introduce chapters 40-66." (MacArthur Bible Commentary)

King **Hezekiah** of Judah
[Hez'uh-ki'uh] ("strengtheneth, [Yahweh] strengthens")

Hezekiah is the name of three or four men in the Old Testament. The most prominent is the 12TH king of Judah.

Hezekiah began his reign as king of Judah when he was 25, and reigned for 29 years. He was considered by some to be the author of the book of Kings; and to have been loyal to the Lord, God of Israel. "Like his later successor Josiah, while young he worked closely with the priesthood and sought unification with the northern kingdom of Israel (left kingless), inviting the northern tribes to an ecumenical Passover (perhaps a midrashic embroidering of his reforms)." (Oxford Guide to People & Places)

He gave attention to ritual matters in his kingdom: he closed down all rural cult sites throughout Judah, thereby centralizing sacrifice at the altar of the Temple in Jerusalem. He also banned many fetishes that had become common practice: the use of sacred pillars and trees and the

reverencing of the "bronze serpent" associated with Moses and the miraculous healing of the people attacked by scorpions in the desert.

Hezekiah's reign, which some term "the finest," occurred during the age of major Assyrian military and commercial activity in Phoenicia and the Philistine coast. Judah prospered under his leadership. He openly broke with Assyria in 705 BC.

"It is possible that during the siege of Lachish, which Sennacherib had difficulty in capturing, he sent part of his army under the Rabshakeh to Jerusalem in order to pin down Hezekiah's forces. The city was besieged but was not captured." (Interpreter's Dictionary)

When Hezekiah was thirty-nine years old, he became very ill. The sickness, related in II Kings 20, seems to have occurred during the crisis of the Assyrian invasion. "Isaiah warned the king to prepare for his approaching death [and "put his house in order"], but Hezekiah prayed that God would intervene. God answered by promising Hezekiah fifteen more years of life and deliverance of Jerusalem from Assyria (Isa 38:4-6)." (Holman Dictionary) "God also provided a sign for Hezekiah as evidence that the promise would be fulfilled." (Who Was Who in the Bible) While Hezekiah was grateful to God for healing him, he quickly became proud and forgot God's kindness to him.

Hezekiah was a consecrated man of God who led his people back to God with great earnestness. The entire nation of Israel (both southern and northern kingdoms) was called to partake of the Passover in Hezekiah's time. Though he is highly praised in the book of Kings (which he may have written), a later generation criticized him for his Babylonian entanglement.

Isaiah

[Ī zāy'yuh] ("the salvation of Jehovah")

(Abbreviated)

It appears that the eighth-century prophet Isaiah, the son of Amoz, was from Jerusalem (in contrast to Amos and Jeremiah, who grew up on the periphery), which was the center of his activity. He seems to have belonged to the upper ranks of society although he was apparently a man of humble rank. He was married to a woman he called the prophetess and they had at least two sons: Shearjashub and Mahershalal-hashbaz. There may also have been a third son, Immanuel, either by the prophetess or possibly a second wife. Isaiah is mentioned outside the book attributed to him in parallel passages in II Kings and II Chronicles.

"Isaiah's ministry extended from about 740 BC until at least 701 BC (Isa 37-39)" (Who Was Who in the Bible). Isaiah, a Hebrew, prophesied in Judah [**present day south-southeastern Israel**] during the reigns of kings Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah, and Manasseh in the second half of the eighth century. He had access to the king and was his counselor....

The Book of Isaiah falls into two major books:

Chapters 1-39 First and Second Isaiah

"In chaps. 28-39, the prophet first directs the full force of his rhetoric against Israel and Judah again, just as Amos does after his oracles concerning the foreign nations." (Oxford Guide to People & Places)

"Chapters 36 to 39 correspond to Chapters 18 and 20 of the Second Book of Kings and are devoted mainly to the story of the Assyrian threat to Jerusalem in 701 BC in the reign of King Hezekiah." (Who's Who in the Old Testament)

"With the exception of Isaiah 38:9-21, an original thanksgiving song of Hezekiah after a severe illness, the rest of Isaiah 36-39 duplicates 2 Kings 18:13-20:19." (Holman Bible Dictionary)

Chapters 40-66 Deutero-Isaiah

Alternately, some scholars refer to chapters 40-55 as Second Isaiah (the Babylonian chapters), and chapters 56-66 as Third Isaiah (Trito-Isaiah). "The date and author of the final chapters of Isaiah are unknown." (Eerdmans Commentary)....

Henniker Heaton, Peter J. (Associate Editor), "**The Healing of Hezekiah**," POEM, Christian Science Journal, Vol.51 (September 1933), p. 312.

The king thanked God: beneath him in the court
The dial recorded sun-lit hours serene,
While in the antechambers of his thought
Death with that old, false witness, time, had
been;
But far within gleamed light of happier days
And purer worship, idols vanquished all,
A secret shrine—with calm expectant gaze
He turned from earthly succors to the wall.

Swift, swift God's ever eager answer flew,
And at the gate of thought arose a stir,....

And Hezekiah was whole; death backward reeled,
Its claim by Truth's eternity disproved,
While in the court a wonder was revealed—
The shadow on the dial backward moved.
And still, though dancing hours would lure our feet
From ways where shepherd-truth doth all provide,
We now can prove that waiting, watchful, fleet
Eternity moves changeless at our side.

Sandberg, Karl S., Jr. (CSB, USAF Chaplain, and Normal Class Teacher; Norwell, MA), "**Who are Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel?**," INTRODUCTION TO THE BIBLE: For Kids, Christian Science Sentinel, Vol.100 (23 November 1998), p. 19. [**Crossword Clues**]

--When Isaiah saw the people of his country sinning and worshiping idols—figures carved out of stone or wood—instead of worshipping God, he knew in his heart how much this would hurt his people.

- And because Isaiah loved God so much, he spoke out.

--It took a lot of courage for him to tell the people that God wanted them to stop doing evil things (see Isaiah, chapters 1 and 2).

--As Isaiah remained faithful to God, and followed God's direction to the best of his ability, he was able to look into the future and see a world that would be completely at peace—where everyone would truly love each other, and there would be no more evil.

- He also foresaw and promised the coming of the Messiah.

---He wrote down this vision, this spiritual insight, in the book of Isaiah (see chapters 2 and 11, for example).

Sirota, Martin (CSB, New York, NY), "**A Seed, a Grain, and a Single Moment**," THE POWER OF JESUS' PARABLES, Christian Science Journal, Vol.125 (June 2007), p. 38.

--There's a beautiful example of...faith...in the Old Testament.

- King Hezekiah is described as someone who did what was right in the sight of the Lord.

---Hezekiah governed his people according to the Ten Commandments. But at one point he found he had an incurable disease, and was told to put his affairs in order.

- Hezekiah has the wisdom to turn to God.

---He literally "turned his face toward the wall, and prayed unto the Lord" (Isa.38:2)."

He relied wholeheartedly on God—the God he loved. He had faith that God would care for him, and he was healed.

- He did what thousands of years later Mrs. Eddy asked her students to do: "When the illusion of sickness or sin tempts you, cling steadfastly to God and His idea. Allow nothing but His likeness to abide in your thought" (*Science and Health*, p.495)

Sinclair, Duncan (CSB, Associate Editor, President, Normal Class Teacher, and Editor), "**The Real or Spiritual Man Is Never Sick**," EDITORIAL, Christian Science Journal, Vol.43 (August 1925), p. 254.

--Whenever...a belief of sickness occurs, or appears to be in evidence, the Christian Scientist does not look upon it as something real; neither does he invoke the power of God to destroy it as such.

- He at once pronounces it to be a false belief of mortal mind, that superstitious mentality which is at enmity with God; and he is able to do this because he has gained through Christian Science some understanding of the perfection of God and man.

---Let corporeal sense argue as it may, the Christian Scientist holds to the absolute truth that sickness is unknown to God, infinite Mind, and that man, the idea of Mind, is never sick.

- He knows that in reality man never needs healing, and that what have to be relinquished are the erroneous beliefs concerning man.

SECTION III: The Golden Image and the Three Boys in the Fiery Furnace (Dan 3: 1, 8-12, 16-18, 21, 24, 25, 27, 28)

TIME LINE AND AUTHOR: Probably written by Daniel @530 BC.

"Nebuchadnezzar sets up a colossal golden image, and summons to its dedication all the officials of his empire, who are commanded to fall down and worship the image at a given musical signal, on pain of being cast into a furnace (vv.1-6). They all do so, with the exception of Daniel's three friends, whose refusal is reported to Nebuchadnezzar (vv.7-12). They are summoned before the king, and persist in their refusal (vv.13-18). Nebuchadnezzar commands the furnace to be heated seven times hotter than usual, and the three Jewish youths are bound and cast into it, the flames slaying their executioners (vv.19-22). The king sees them walking in the fire unbound and accompanied by a divine figure (vv.23-25). He summons them forth, finds them unharmed, magnifies their God, decrees that He be held in universal reverence, and gives them further promotion (vv.26-30)." (Dummelow Commentary)

"The statue [v.1 *image of gold*], which the king arrogantly made, represented himself as a grandiose expression of his greatness and glory and reflected the dream in which he was the head of gold (2:38)." (MacArthur Bible Commentary)

King **Nebuchadnezzar** of Babylon

[Neb you kad nez'ur] ("O god Nabu, protect my son" or "Nebo, defend the boundary")

Nebuchadnezzar was "the powerful king of the Babylonian Empire who captured Jerusalem three times." (Baker Encyclopedia) He was the son and successor of Nabopolassar, who delivered Babylon from its dependence on Assyria and laid Nineveh in ruins. "Before his reign began, he developed a considerable reputation as a field commander." (Anchor Bible Dictionary) He was "the most powerful and longest reigning king of the neo-Babylonian (625-539 B.C.) period. (HarperCollins Bible Dictionary) He married the daughter of Cyaxares, and thus the Median and Babylonian dynasties were united.

In 586 BC Jerusalem fell to the army of Nebuchadnezzar. Under cover of darkness, Zedekiah and many of his men fled through a break in the city wall. But they were overtaken by the Chaldeans in the plains of Jericho and brought captive to Riblah, a city in the land of Hamath where Nebuchadnezzar was camped.

"Nebuchadnezzar made an arrogant boast about all that he achieved (Dan 4:30)." (Who Was Who in the Bible) After the incident of the "burning fiery furnace" into which the three Hebrew boys were cast, Nebuchadnezzar was afflicted with some peculiar mental aberration. "As a punishment for his pride and vanity, that strange form of madness was sent upon him which the Greeks called Lycanthropy, wherein the sufferer imagines himself a beast, and, quitting the haunts of men, insists on leading the life of a beast. (Dan 4:33)" (Smith Dictionary)

"Little is known of the last thirty years of Nebuchadnezzar's rule. The tale of his madness may be a pejorative account of a period in the reign of his successor Nabonidus" (Oxford Guide to People & Places). However, a remarkable confirmation of the Scripture narrative is afforded by the recent discovery of a bronze door-step, which bears an inscription to the effect that it was presented by Nebuchadnezzar to the great temple at Borsippa as a votive offering on account of his recovery from a terrible illness.

He died in 562 BC, after a reign of forty-three years.

Shadrach/Hananiah

[Shad'rak] ("command of [the god] *Aku*)

Shadrach was the Chaldean name given to Hananiah, by Ashpenaz, the chief of Nebuchadnezzar's eunuchs. "The etymology is uncertain." (HarperCollins Bible Dictionary) He was one of the Hebrew youths whom Nebuchadnezzar carried captive to Babylon in 605 BC. In addition to refusing the "king's meat," he, and his two companions, refused to worship the golden image which Nebuchadnezzar had set up (Dan 1:7; 3:12-30) on the plains of Dura. Their conduct filled the king with the greatest fury, and he commanded them to be cast into the burning fiery furnace. Here, amid the fiery flames, they were preserved from harm. Over them the fire had no power, "neither was a hair of their head singed, neither had the smell of fire passed on them." Thus Nebuchadnezzar learned the greatness of the God of Israel.

"The Song of the Three Holy Children is one of the portions of the Book of Daniel that appears in the Greek texts but not in the Hebrew-Aramaic versions. Hence it is relegated in the Authorized Version to the Apocrypha; in the Western canon it is placed in the third chapter." (www.encyclopedia.com)

Meshach/Mishael

[Mee'shack] (Heb. "who is what El [God] is?")

"Meshach was the Chaldean name given to Mishael, one of the three Hebrew youths who were under training at the Babylonian court for the rank of Magi. This was probably the name of some Chaldean god." (Easton Dictionary) He was one of Daniel's companions. "Along with Shadrach and Abednego, Meshach would not bow down and worship the pagan image of gold set up by Nebuchadnezzar. They were cast into 'the burning fiery furnace,' but were preserved from harm by the power of God." (Who Was Who in the Bible)

"The etymology is uncertain, but a relation to Marduk, the god of Babylon, has been suggested." (HarperCollins Bible Dictionary)

Abed-nego/Azariah

[Uh bed'knee gō] ("servant of Nebo")

Abed-nego was "the Chaldean name given to Azariah in King Nebuchadnezzar's court by the prince of the eunuch's when he was chosen as one of the king's servants (Dan 1:7; 2:49)." (Who Was Who in the Bible) "The name appears to be a preservation of the Akkadian name *Arad-nabû*, 'servant of Nabû' (Nebuchadnezzar's personal God). Changing the names of people in order to change their futures was a common practice throughout the ancient Near East." (Eerdmans Dictionary)

He was one of Daniel's three companions. With Shadrach and Meshach, he was delivered from the burning fiery furnace.

Kains, M.G., "Gold," Christian Science Sentinel, Vol.7 (26 August 1905), p. 831.

--No metal has attracted more attention than has gold. While it may not be the most valuable substance, in Human reckoning, nevertheless, from the dawn of time it has held the honored rank of king of metals.

- Among the ancients; it is thought to have been known earlier than silver, copper, tin, iron, or lead, which were the only other metals then in use.

--Who desires freedom: let him know the truth, for the truth shall make him free.

- Who desires power: let him learn meekness, for the meek shall inherit the earth.

- Who desires peace: let him master strife in himself, let him stay his mind on God, for He will "keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed" on Him.

- Who desires understanding, wisdom: "let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him."

Sindell, Rev. Martin, "Nebuchadnezzar," Christian Science Journal, Vol.28 (April 1910), p. 9.

--Nebuchadnezzar "walked in the palace of the kingdom of Babylon."

- He was viewing the vastness and splendor of his earthly accomplishments, doubtless thinking with supreme satisfaction of himself as the architect of his own fortunes.

---But his pride was to be abased, for suddenly the sentence which Daniel had passed upon him entered his consciousness: "The kingdom is departed from thee. And they shall drive thee from men, and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field: they shall make thee to eat grass as oxen, and seven times shall pass over thee, until thou know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will."

- "Behold, how are the mighty fallen"!

--So far as earthly power is concerned, it betrays its weakness by the very methods it employs.

- When Nebuchadnezzar looked into the fiery furnace and saw in the seven times hot flames the unharmed Hebrew lads, he was at least partially convinced that there was but one power, and that good.

Kidder, Rushworth M., "**Who coverest thyself with light as with a garment,**" POEM, Christian Science Sentinel (17 March 1980), p. 443.

Seamless, the knit
light, the coat fit
to un-king the great and robe the humble, bright
spinning of grace in a tattered place, a sight
like a fourth man walking at Shadrach's side
so brilliantly that the white-hot coals
faded to shadow and might have been cold.

Make mine, Love, from a similar cloth
washed, on the loom of the Lamb, no claw
beneath the wool, no savage tooth
or tongue to lash back at the deviled and fire-mad tyrant.
Just unillusioned trust: the Christ apparent,
the knit coat smokeless,
the shining seamless.

Reynolds, Lucy Hays, "**Triumphing In Furnace Fires,**" Christian Science Journal, Vol.58 (June 1940), p. 128.

--Three simple, God-loving men, we are told in the Scriptures, refused to compromise with certain orders of the king of the land.

--Aroused to fury against their unyielding position, King Nebuchadnezzar ordered the three men to be thrown into a fiery furnace, where they fell down bound.

--As the three men stepped forth unharmed from the fire, with all the people looking on, how wonderfully had misjudgment, disgrace, persecution, and death been defeated!

- Autocracy and despotisms had yielded to the authority of Spirit, and the men were promoted to positions of honor and responsibility.

---Verily it took but three God-loving men, relying upon Him, to awaken the king to acknowledge the one God as supreme over all.

Korinek, Kim Crooks (CS, Arbor Vitae, WI), "**Severe Facial Burns Healed,**" TESTIMONY, Christian Science Sentinel, Vol.109 (7 May 2007), p. 25.

--The practitioner and I prayed with ideas from the Bible story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who were protected from the heat of a "fiery furnace" when they leaned on God's strength and protection.

- The confident prayer of these three men and their understanding of God's protecting power allowed them to walk away entirely unharmed: "The princes, governors, and captains, and the king's counsellors, being gathered together, saw these men, upon whose bodies the fire had no power, nor was an hair of their head singed, neither were their coats changed, nor the smell of fire had passed on them" (Dan 3:27).

---The spiritual law illustrated in this story helped me see that I was under God's care at all times, and that nothing, not even a scorching fire, could surmount the protecting power of God.

- I, too, could expect to walk away from my "fiery" experience without a trace of pain or fear.

--Within a few weeks of this incident, my eyebrows and hair had grown back naturally, and my skin had healed.

- There were no marks or scars.

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*The weekly Bible Lessons are made up of selections from the King James Version of the Bible and the Christian Science textbook, *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures* by Mary Baker Eddy, the Discoverer and Founder of Christian Science. The Golden Text this week is from the New Living Translation of the Bible.