

Heart Studies #2 - Hezekiah's Reforms

In the previous study we looked through 2 Chronicles and saw the common phrase or idea of the preparation of the heart, that people either did or did not “prepare their heart to seek God”. We mostly ignored what is in chapters 29-31, to be able to look at it more fully later. That section describes the incredible reforms implemented during the time of Hezekiah, king of Judah.

Edwin Thiele was a very learned man who studied the time period of the kings of Israel and Judah, and he places Hezekiah's reign at 715-686 BC (roughly 240 years after the dedication of Solomon's temple, 7 years after Israel was conquered by the Assyrians, and 100 years before the final destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians).

Chapter 29 – Hezekiah restored the temple physically, and called the Levites, priests, and people in general to sanctify themselves through sacrifices.

Chapter 30 – Hezekiah called a massive Passover observance, greater than any since the time of Solomon.

Chapter 31 – He restored all the long-neglected forms of sacrifice and worship laid down by Moses.

Through all this runs the theme that Hezekiah, the Levites and priests, the people of Judah and some of those surviving from Israel had prepared their hearts to seek and to obey God, along with the recognition that it was actually God that was initiating it by turning their hearts back to Him. Ac. 16:14 – of Lydia, when she heard Paul speak, it says “whose heart the Lord opened”.

Chapter 29: Restoring the temple and sacrificial sanctification and service of Levites and priests, and worship by the people

- 29:3 – Repairing the temple doors
- 29:4-5 – Calling the Levites to sanctify themselves
- 29:6-9 – Acknowledgement of national sin and the resulting wrath of God upon them
- 29:10 – Desire to make a covenant with God
- 29:15-19 – Cleansing and sanctification of the temple, its furniture and vessels
- 29:20-24 – Sin and burnt offerings for the kingdom, the sanctuary, and for all Israel
- 29:25-30 – Establishment of worship, with songs, trumpets, and instruments, singing the songs of David and Asaph with gladness. They “bowed themselves and worshipped”.
- 29:31-33 – Sacrifices, thank offerings, free will offerings, and consecrations from the congregation
- 29:34 – Levites had to help the priests with the physical tasks of sacrifices because not enough priests had yet sanctified themselves. The Levites were upright in heart than the priests!
- 29:35-36 – “So the service of the house of the Lord was put in order”. Hezekiah and all the people rejoiced that God had prepared their heart and the whole work had been done so suddenly.

Observations and Applications

1. It was done in the first month of the first year of Hezekiah's reign, when he was 25 years old. It is apparent that God had been working on his heart already, so that he could initiate the reforms as soon as he became king.
2. He was probably only 18 when the Assyrians conquered and did away with the northern nation of Israel, and the Assyrians were still a threat (as seen later in his reign, chapter 32). He correctly saw that both Israel and Judah had neglected and turned away from the worship of God as instituted by Moses, Samuel, David, and Solomon, and they were therefore under the judgment and wrath of God. He also saw that the only way to turn from this wrath was to make a covenant with God to return to the right ways and forms of religious worship, and to totally turn away from false gods. i.e. Total obedience to the revealed will of God.
3. The Levites were more ready to “get right with God” than the priests.
4. It was not a grudging or unwilling obedience. They did it with gladness, praise, worship, prayers, and overall enthusiasm.
5. The whole thing was done very suddenly, because God had prepared their hearts to respond. We have to believe that at the same time God was dealing with the young Hezekiah, He was also dealing with the Levites and all the people, so that when Hezekiah announced the changes, they were all ready to respond.

So we should not despair, thinking that a great work of God in a loved one, or the church, or even a country would “take forever”. God is working “behind the scenes” to prepare things so that once a thing begins, it can proceed quickly. e.g. Abby Johnson, a Planned Parenthood clinic director, now working with the pro-life side. Also the Reformation with Martin Luther.

Chapter 30: Restoration of the Passover

- 30:1-11 – The invitation went out, not just to Judah, but to Israel, along with a plea to repent and turn back to God, because Passover had not been properly in a very long time (v. 5).
- 30:10-12 - Most of those in Israel mockingly rejected it, but a few “humbled themselves and came to Jerusalem”. In Judah though, there was widespread acceptance because “the hand of God was to give them one heart to do the commandment of the king”. So it was as we saw in the previous study, God had “prepared their hearts”.
- 30:2-3 - It was going to be kept in the second month. Why? Normally the Passover was to be kept in the first month, from the 14th to the 21st (Ex. 12:14-20). But in Num. 9:1-13 there was an exception made for those who, due to uncleanness, were unable to observe it at the normal time, to postpone it until the second month. In the time of Hezekiah, the whole nation was unclean, and it took through the first month just to do the cleansing of the temple and the sanctification of the Levites and priests, king and nation, and to make the associated sacrifices. They were doing all they could, but to observe it in the first month as normal would have been wrong because they were not properly sanctified – they were unclean still, as a nation.
- 30:13-15 – A very great congregation assembled at Jerusalem, and there they observed the Passover.
- 30:15-20 – Even still there were many that were not sanctified and ready to do the Passover, so the Levites assisted the priests in making burnt offerings and killing the Passover lambs for those who were still unclean. The priests were ashamed because they had not been doing their job, and had been reluctant. Evidently some kind of retribution had fallen on the people until Hezekiah prayed for them, asking God to pardon every one who had prepared his heart to seek God, even though they had not yet been properly sanctified. In v. 20, the Lord hearkened, and “healed the people”.
- 30:21-27 – The celebration continued through the normal seven days, and beyond
 - 30:21 – They did it “with great gladness” (we would say “the joy of the Lord”)
 - 30:21 – Levites and priests praised God daily with loud instruments
 - 30:22 – The Levites “taught the good knowledge of the Lord”
 - 30:22 – They continued to make peace offerings and confessions to the Lord.
 - 30:23 – They decided to remain another seven days, for joy at what was happening
 - 30:24 – Hezekiah and the princes provided a large number of bullocks and sheep, and “a great number of priests sanctified themselves”.
 - 30:25-27 - All the congregation of Judah, the Levites, the priests, and those who had come out of Israel rejoiced with great joy, because this kind of Passover had not been done since the time of Solomon. The priests and Levites were blessing the people, and God heard the prayers.

Observations and Applications

1. Hezekiah urged all the people to repentance, even up into the defeated land of Israel, proclaiming God’s grace and mercy to those who would repent. He called them to humble themselves and return to Jerusalem to get back to the old ways. Jer. 6:16 – “ask for the old paths” – not the old ways of dead religion and traditions of men, but the way of the Bible.
2. Most of those in Israel made a mock at this, which shows that even after judgment has fallen, unregenerate men will not turn from their sins. Rev. 9:20-21
3. But some of them did respond. God knows them that are his, and even following that great judgment (from the Assyrians), they could repent and come back to God. Don’t think, “It is too late for me”.
4. They were mostly doing the best they could, considering the massive numbers of people that needed to make sacrifices and to sanctify themselves, but in their enthusiasm some celebrated the Passover even though they were not yet “purified according to the sanctuary”. Yet through Hezekiah’s intercession and God’s mercy they were healed, because they had prepared their hearts to seek God. These were obviously sins of ignorance, because the right observances of Mosaic worship had been neglected so long.
5. It was not merely a restoration of the outward forms of worship – the Levites were teaching the people to know God, and “there was great joy in Jerusalem”. True joy and life is not to be found in mere obedience to rituals or traditions, but in knowing the living God.