

Heart Studies #3 - Hezekiah's Reforms, continued

Review: In previous studies 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”. Then we looked at chapters 29-30, and the massive reforms implemented during the time of Hezekiah, king of Judah from 715 – 686 BC. Today we will look at chapter 31.

Chapter 29 – Physical restoration of the temple, and sanctification of Levites, priests, and people

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

Chapter 31 – Restoration of 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.

Chapter 31: Restoration of ongoing service to God

- 31:1 – the people went home, smashing idol images and altars, throwing down the groves and high places (used for idol worship) all through Judah and the lands of Ephraim and Manasseh.
- 31:2 – he appointed priests and Levites in their courses (each group would take turns during the year) for making sacrifices, and giving thanks and praise.
- 31:3 – he reestablished the “regular” sacrifices (morning and evening, sabbaths, new moons, and the set feasts)
- 31:4-6 – reinstated the support of priests and Levites through tithes and firstfruit offerings
- 31:7-14 – There was such an abundance brought in by the people that they had to prepare chambers in the temple to store it.
- 31:15-20 – They organized the distributions of the tithes and offerings to the Levites and priests according to their genealogies and courses.

Observations and Applications

1. They did not stop with the big Passover celebration in Jerusalem. They went home to remove all traces of false gods, and to continue following God with their tithes and freewill offerings.

a. Application to churches and their leaders

Some church leaders rely on annual revivals to get the people “pumped back up” (as an analogy of a tire with a slow leak), or “recharged” (analogy of a battery that gradually goes dead). Perhaps that is necessary, but the real solution isn’t an annual “pick-me-up”, but continually to maintain the charge, like an alternator.

How?

- i. Determine that the real guide and authority of proper church order is to be found in the scriptures alone, not in the traditions of men, or a heathen worldview, or the philosophies of men (like psychology, or moral relativism, or humanism). The Word alone is our standard, or plumb line. During the Reformation, this was represented by the phrase “Sola Scriptura” (meaning “Scripture alone”).
- ii. Align the church to this standard to the utmost of your understanding and ability. Identify practices or “denominational leftover” beliefs or teachings that are not scriptural, or that do nothing to advance the spiritual life of the church. These may be difficult to recognize, because they may be ingrained assumptions, but get rid of them.
- iii. If there are “trouble makers” in the church (gossips, false teachings, immorality, back-biters, etc.), and they are showing no signs of repentance or improvement, confront them in the Biblical manner, and require a change, or insist that they depart.
- iv. Encourage the weak and slow to at least be advancing, and not to be satisfied with being a baby Christian. As in the world today, so in the church, there are the “perpetually offended”, who demand that church teachings be watered down to the least common denominator (“We don’t want to offend anyone.”). Leaders who cater to these attitudes become “ear ticklers”.

- v. Teach the Word. Feed the people with all the milk or meat they can stand. Just because some need milk doesn't mean the whole church should be forced to that level. Some Christians are starving because they get nothing but Jn. 3:16 every week. Be like the "one-room schoolhouse", where all the different grades are learning and advancing.
- vi. Encourage the people to individual spiritual effort, and not to be satisfied with mere attendance.

b. Application to individual believers

Likewise, the spiritual experience of a person may be a cycle of ups and downs. Thank God for the revival of the "ups", but occasional revival is not God's will for us. He wants us to be steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord (1 Cor. 15:58). We should be getting recharged every day, not waiting until we are under a mountain of troubles, unrepented sins, and coldness of heart.

How?

- i. After a good revival, determine that (by God's grace), you are going to change your everyday experience, and not continue as before.
 - ii. Do a house cleaning – get rid of evil objects, teachings, temptations, etc. For example, occult items (Ouija, fortune-telling cards, books about ESP, etc.), Watchtower tracts, pornography, Buddha statues, books on Yoga, dream-catchers and other native American paraphernalia, music, movies and videos that are evil, etc. The children of Israel went home and smashed their idols. You might need to have a smashing or burning of physical items that are evil, or are a special temptation to you. [I speak not of mere figurines or pictures, but anything that has a spiritual "presence" or significance.]
 - iii. Determine that you are going to order your life in a Biblical manner – prayer, Bible reading and study, making right any bad relationships, leaving off all sins that have been a snare to you in the past, and being faithful in the church (not just meetings, but seeking your gifts and calling and responsibilities).
2. Generally, the people of God will gladly and generously give to the work of the Lord if they can see that it is being done for God's glory and not just for dead religion or huckster "preachers". If pastors and teachers today would concentrate on really getting the churches into Biblical order, in teaching, worship, and church government, and reject the dead denominational leftovers, God would bless and prosper the work.

This doesn't mean that special requests, or general reminders to our financial responsibilities are never necessary (see 2 Cor. 8 and 9), but if a leader is constantly pressing for money, his motivations begin to become suspect, and he loses his moral and spiritual authority in the eyes of the people.

3. There is much that occurred later in Hezekiah's reign that is notable, but the summation of his reform in these chapters is 31:20-21 – "wrought **that which was good and right and truth** before the Lord his God. And in every work that he began in the service of the house of God, and in the law, and in the commandments, to seek his God, **he did it with all his heart**, and prospered."
4. But as a warning, we also see that such reforms are not permanent. Hezekiah was followed by his son Manasseh, who was an evil king, and 100 years after Hezekiah's death, Jerusalem was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians. **One generation cannot rest on the spirituality and obedient service of a prior one.**