



LESSON 16 HEZEKIAH'S RESTORATION

Israel		Judah	
Jeroboam	931–910	Rehoboam	931–913
Nadab	910–909	Abijah	913–911
Baasha	909–886	Asa	911–870
Elah	886–885		
Zimri	885		
Omri	885–874		
Ahab	874–853	Jehoshaphat	873–848
Ahaziah	853–852		
Joram	852–841	Jehoram	848–841
Jehu	841–814	Ahaziah	841
		Athaliah	841–835
Jehoahaz	814–798	Joash	835–796
Jehoash	798–782	Amaziah	796–767
Jeroboam II	793–753	Uzziah	792–740
Zechariah	753		
Shallum	752		
Menahem	752–742	Jotham	750–731
Pekahiah	742–740		
Pekah	752–732	Ahaz	735–715
Hoshea	732–722	Hezekiah	729–686
		Manasseh	696–642
		Amon	642–640
		Josiah	640–609
		Jehoahaz	609
		Jehoiakim	608–598
		Jehoiachin	598–597
		Zedekiah	597–586

For generations, the kings of Judah had partially served the Lord, but they had not done so with their whole heart or for their entire lives. The reigns of Joash, Uzziah and others had begun in promising fashion, only to be marred by transgression. Ahaz had broken this mold, not by being faithful to the Lord, but by completely breaking away from the Lord's commands. The Scriptures record how he "closed the doors of the house of the LORD and made altars for himself in every corner of Jerusalem. In every city of Judah he made high places to burn incense to other gods, and provoked the LORD, the God of his fathers, to anger." (2Chronicles 28.24-25). As a result of Ahaz's apostasy Judah was weakened morally, economically and politically as she became a vassal state of Assyria.

In reconstructing the history of Judah, it seems likely that Hezekiah ruled as co-regent with Ahaz for several years before his father's death. However, rather than follow in his father's wicked footsteps, Hezekiah sought after the Lord of Israel. "He trusted in the LORD, the God of Israel; so that after him there was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor among those who were before him. For he clung to the LORD; he did not depart from following Him, but kept His commandments,

which the LORD had commanded Moses." (2Kings 18.5-6).

The reign of Hezekiah is notable for two reasons. First, he led Judah in a great restoration of devotion to and worship of Jehovah. We will consider this restoration in this lesson. Second, he was king as Judah became more heavily involved with the foreign powers of Assyria and Babylon, which will be the topic of our next lesson.

Consecration of the Temple (2Chronicles 29.3-19).

As we've already noted, Ahaz was so antagonistic to Jehovah that he closed the doors of the Temple (2Chron. 28.24). For the duration of his 16 year reign, proper worship of the Lord was forsaken. However, the text notes that it was in the very first month of the very first year of Hezekiah's reign that he re-opened the house of the Lord and commissioned the Priests and Levites to consecrate themselves and the Lord's house (2Chronicles 29.3ff). Note: the first month likely refers to the first month of the Jewish calendar, the month when they were commanded to celebrate the Passover (see Leviticus 23.5). This will be significant later in our study.

Both the priests and the Temple were to be consecrated (set apart, holy) in service to the Lord. Consecration involved the removal of uncleanness (vs. 5) and sacrifice (see Exodus 29; 30.22-33). The unclean things were removed to the Kidron valley, the valley just to the east of the Temple mount and a place already associated with defilement (vs. 16; 2Chronicles 15.16). So great was the required work that it took eight days of work just to purify the area outside of the Temple and another eight days to consecrate the Temple itself (vs. 17).

The importance of this work was emphasized in Hezekiah's address to the priests and Levites (vss. 5-11). He related how Judah and Jerusalem had become "an object of terror, of horror and of hissing" (vs. 8) because rather than worship the Lord, they had "turned their faces away from the dwelling place of the Lord, and have turned their backs" (vs. 6). Their only hope was to renew their covenant with the Lord (vs. 10).

Temple Worship Restored (2Chronicles 29.20-36).

Once the Temple was consecrated, Hezekiah wasted no time in resuming proper worship of the Lord. Sacrifices were immediately offered to the Lord, all of which followed the instructions prescribed in the Law:

- » Sin offerings were made for the priests (vss. 21-22; see Leviticus 4.1-12).
- » Sin offerings were made for the leaders (vss. 23-24; see Leviticus 4.22ff).
- » Burnt offerings were made (vs. 27; see Leviticus 1).
- » Thank offerings were made (vss. 31ff; see Leviticus 7.11-21).

Hezekiah was careful to follow the Lord's will even in matters that weren't commanded in the Law of Moses. For instance, Hezekiah stationed Levites with cymbals, harps and lyres in the Temple not because the Law commanded, but "according to the command of David and of Gad the king's seer, and of Nathan the prophet; for the command was from the Lord through His prophets" (2Chronicles 29.25). Everything the king did, he did with the knowledge that this was what the Lord had commanded and desired. As the Chronicler stated, Hezekiah "did what was good, right and true before the Lord his God.

Every work which he began in the service of the house of God in law and in commandment, seeking his God, he did with all of his heart and prospered" (2Chronicles 31.20-21).

Celebration of the Passover (2Chronicles 30).

Hezekiah had wasted no time in restoring proper worship of Jehovah, but it was not quick enough to observe the Passover at the proper time. Recall that Hezekiah reopened the Temple in the first month (29.3), and it was consecrated from the 1st to the 16th of the first month (29.17). However, the Passover was to be celebrated on the 14th of the first month (Leviticus 23.5). Thus, it was impossible to celebrate the Passover at the proper time, but the Law also provided a way for defiled persons to celebrate the Passover in the second month (Numbers 9.10-11). Hezekiah and the leaders of the people decided to celebrate the Passover at this later date (vs. 2-3).

Hezekiah wanted to provide an opportunity for ALL of Israel to celebrate and commemorate their deliverance, thus he sent letters through all the land from Beersheba (the southern boundary of Judah) to Dan (the northern boundary of Israel). The king appealed for all the people to "return to the Lord God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, that He may return to... you" (vs. 6). Sadly, many in the northern territory mocked the king's message, even though they had been severely afflicted by the Assyrians. However, many responded by humbling themselves and journeying to Jerusalem (vss. 10-11).

Vss. 13-27 record how this Passover was celebrated, an event where "there was great joy in Jerusalem, because there was nothing like this in Jerusalem since the days of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel" (vs. 26). However, there were challenges as many of those who attended were not consecrated, thus they could not slay their own Passover lambs. The Levites were selected to do this in the people's stead (vss. 16-18) and Hezekiah prayed that "the good Lord pardon everyone who prepares his heart to seek God, the LORD God of his fathers, though not according to the purification rules of the sanctuary." (vs. 19). So great was the joy of the people that they celebrated the days of unleavened bread an extra seven days (vs. 23).



Removal of Idols (2Chronicles 31.1; 2Kings 18.4).

Ahaz “made altars for himself in every corner of Jerusalem (2Chronicles 28.24), and Hezekiah removed these before the Passover was celebrated (30.14). Following the Passover, Hezekiah and the people continued this purification by removing the idols in all the cities of Judah, as well as Ephraim and Manasseh (2Chronicles 31.1). So great had Israel’s apostasy been that they had turned an object associated with God’s mercy into an idol (2Kings 18.4; see Numbers 21.8-9). Apparently, the worship of this bronze serpent had become quite prominent in Judah: “Easily the most significant clue for the identification of the Mosaic copper snake is one of the bronze bowls found in the royal palace of Nineveh, the capital of Assyria. These bowls date to the end of the eighth century and by their inscribed Hebrew names probably indicate that they were booty or tribute delivered to Tiglath-pileser III by King Ahaz (2 Kings 16:8) or to Sennacherib by King Hezekiah (2 Kings 18:14–16). The bowl in question has engraved on its rim a winged snake perched on a standard, precisely as one would imagine it upon recollecting the verse ‘Moses made a copper serpent and mounted it on a standard’ (v. 9).” (JPS Torah Commentary on Numbers 21).

Resumption of Regular Sacrifice (2Chronicles 31.2-3)

The Law required regular offerings to the Lord. Some were offered daily, some on the sabbath days, some at the new moon and some at various festivals (see Numbers 28-29). The text does not go into the details of these offerings, but notes yet again how Hezekiah provided that all would be done according to “the law of the Lord”.

Provision for Priests and Levites (2Chronicles 31.4-21)

The final aspect of Hezekiah’s restoration was insuring that the priests and Levites received what the Law specified they should (see Numbers 18.8ff). These provisions were necessary so that the priests and Levites could serve in the Temple and “devote themselves to the law of the Lord” (vs. 4, see Malachi 2.7). The people brought their contributions for four months, giving so much that store rooms had to be constructed to hold the excess.

However...

The Chronicler was effusive in his praise of Hezekiah, for how he followed the Lord and restored proper worship. However, the text also notes that at one point Hezekiah’s “heart was proud” and “wrath came on him and on Judah and Jerusalem” (2Chronicles 32.25). We will examine this moment of weakness, and its consequences, in our next lesson. More significantly, we’ve noted in previous lessons that even when Judah was led by righteous kings, the people

did not necessarily follow (2Chronicles 20.33; 27.2). Sadly, it would seem that this remained true of the people during Hezekiah's reign...

Isaiah 29:1–4 (NASB95)

¹ Woe, O Ariel, Ariel the city where David once camped! Add year to year, observe your feasts on schedule. ² I will bring distress to Ariel, And she will be a city of lamenting and mourning; And she will be like an Ariel to me. ³ I will camp against you encircling you, And I will set siegeworks against you, And I will raise up battle towers against you. ⁴ Then you will be brought low; From the earth you will speak, And from the dust where you are prostrate Your words will come. Your voice will also be like that of a spirit from the ground, And your speech will whisper from the dust.