

Passover 2006

Background

Reading:

2 Chr 28:8, 17

2 Chr 29:1-11, 17, 20-21, 31-36

2 Chr 30:1-27

Hezekiah was king of Judah at the end of the 8th century BC (rsee chronological note below). His reign is described in three places in the OT, with a different emphasis in each one. The table shows # of verses devoted to each of the main sectors of his life.

	<i>2 Kgs</i> <i>18-20</i>	<i>2 Chr</i> <i>29-32</i>	<i>Isa</i> <i>36-39</i>
Prolog	3	2	
Spiritual restoration	3	72	
The Assyrian Invasion	68	23	60
Sickness and Pride	19	3	30
Epilog	2	7	

- 2 Kings emphasizes how he strengthened the nation and withstood Sennacherib's invasion
- 2 Chronicles emphasizes the spiritual revival that he led
- Isaiah emphasizes his sickness, healing, and subsequent pride toward Babylon.

Detailed outline of Chronicles:

- 29:1-2, incipit: righteous reign
- 29:3-19 cleansing the temple
- 29:20-36 restoring the temple sacrifices
- 30:1-27 the great passover
- 31:1, destroying pagan shrines
- 31:2-21 reorganizing the priesthood
- 32:1-23 invasion and defeat of Sennacherib
- 32:24-26 sickness and pride
- 32:27-33 epilog

The narrative in 2 Chr 29,30 offers a revealing portrait of this remarkable king. We will consider

- his Distinction as a man of faith;
- his Discernment of the meaning of the events of his day;
- his Discipleship of the people entrusted to his care, and
- his Dynamic, what really made his efforts succeed.

His Distinction

The Jewish writer Sirach commented of the kings of Israel (49:4), “All, except David and Ezekias and Josias, were defective: for they forsook the law of the most High, even the kings of Juda failed.” These men were not perfect—David sinned with Bathsheba, and Hezekiah was lifted up with pride. But they did seek to lead the people according to the law of God.

The writer of Kings distinguishes Hezekiah from the other kings of Judah:

2 Kings 18:5 He trusted in the LORD God of Israel; so that after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor *any* that were before him.

It is instructive to compare this accolade with the same writer's later tribute to Josiah:

2 Kings 23:25 And like unto him was there no king before him, that turned to the LORD with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; neither after him arose there *any* like him.

How can these both be true? Note that they are distinguished for different purposes.

- Hezekiah is distinguished for his *trust* in the Lord.
- Josiah is distinguished for his *zeal* and *orthodoxy* (“according to all the law of Moses”).

Hezekiah did “bend the rules” a little (30:18-20) in ways that Josiah would not, but his faith was unquestioned. Conversely, he would never have gone out against Necho as Josiah did, but would have prayed, as he did with Sennacherib. (There is a lesson here for those who would deny salvation to brethren that are in error. Josiah shows that God desires and commends strict orthodoxy, but Hezekiah shows that some errors do not negate faith.)

The evidence of his faith is clear and decisive throughout the history.

- He makes spiritual reform a priority, “in the first year of his reign” (29:3).
- He recognizes captivity as a sign of God's judgment, 29:9; 30:6, 9, per Lev 26:33.
- He resolves to make a covenant with God, 29:10, to avert any further disaster, cf. Neh 10.

His Discernment

Hezekiah's rule came at a time when the nation was experiencing captivity.

- His own nation Judah had been ravaged at least twice by captivity in ch. 28, to Israel (28:8) and again to Edom (28:17).
- The chronology of his reign is the most difficult to understand of any of the kings, but 1 Kings 18:1 has him take the throne (perhaps as co-regent with his father Ahaz) in the third year of Hoshea king of Israel. Just before Hoshea took the throne, the Assyrian king Tiglath Pileser led some of the northern kingdom into captivity (2 Kings 15:29, about 732).
- He was king in Judah when Shalmaneser besieged Samaria, and when his successor Sargon took the northern kingdom captive in 720.

His spiritual revival appears to have been motivated strongly by these events.

- The revival in Jerusalem reported in ch. 29 was directly motivated by the captivities recently

experienced by the Judaeans (29:9).

- When he invited the northern kingdom to his passover celebration, he motivated them by their own experience of captivity in the north (30:9). Depending on how you untangle the chronology, this could be either to TPIII or Sargon, but it really doesn't matter. The point is that he understood that captivity was a sign of God's judgment, and called for a spiritual response.

His understanding is scripturally grounded.

- Lev 26:33-45 both described exile as a punishment for sin, and prescribed confession and repentance as the key to healing (v. 40).
- Solomon understood this as well. In his great prayer of dedication of the temple, one of the conditions that he anticipates is captivity and repentance, 2 Chr 6:36-39. Notice how the last verse of ch. 30 (30:27) echoes 6:39.

Perhaps this is why he placed such urgency on getting things ready for the passover. This feast recalls the disaster of a captive people, and points to the deliverance that they can enjoy through God's redemption. Hezekiah understood the perilous times in which the nation lived, and embraced this feast as a biblical means for challenging the people to repent before the full judgment fell.

His Discipleship

He encourages others to do their duty: priests and Levites (29:5-11, 30; 30:22), the people (29:31), those of the north (30:6-9). Note the range of his outreach.

Priests: He could not himself do the priestly function, but he encouraged and motivated those who were qualified. The part of a godly leader is not to do everything himself, but to discern the gifts and roles of others and encourage them.

These religious leaders are as distinguished for their mediocrity as Hezekiah is for his faith.

- 29:34—note the distinction between the priests (descendants of Aaron) and the Levites (other descendants of Levi). Though the priests were the central characters and the Levites were only their helpers and assistants, yet the Levites were more zealous than the priests in spiritual matters! It often happens that the more formal credentials one has for spiritual work, the less qualified one is personally and spiritually to do that work!
- 30:3, their sluggishness in sanctifying themselves was one of the factors in delaying the passover to the second month (as Num 9 permitted).
- 30:15, those who came to the passover were put to shame by the zeal of those who were offering (or perhaps, the priests were put to shame by the zeal of the people in offering; recall from Lev 1:5 that it is the offerer, not the priest, who slays the animal).
- 30:22, 27, enabled by Hezekiah's encouragement, they rose to the occasion, leading to a time of great triumph.

People of the Northern Kingdom: Hezekiah has the heart of an evangelist, to reach out to those who have strayed from the Lord. He invites those of the northern kingdom to come to the passover celebration.

This is a remarkable action. Recall that one of the first actions of Jeroboam in setting up the northern kingdom was to establish sanctuaries at its southern and northern limits, in Bethel and Dan, to prevent

his people from leaving the country for spiritual purposes. Now Hezekiah deliberately invites the people to come south. This is most easily understood if he is dealing with the remnant after the fall of Samaria in 720. But it's possible that Hoshea is still on the throne, and Hezekiah is bravely trying to exert what evangelical influence he can on the north, before it is too late.

As one might expect, their response is mixed.

- Some of them mock the invitation and refuse to come, 30:10.
- Others humble themselves, 30:11, and enjoy the blessing of the feast, 30:25.

People of Jerusalem: They are a real contrast to both the temple staff and the northerners. Both the religious officials and the half-pagan north display division and inconsistency, but the people are united. They respond willingly to Hezekiah's leadership.

His Dynamic

Why was he able to succeed in with such a challenging agenda? And why did the people support him so unanimously? The Chronicler twice calls our attention to God's influence on the people: he prepared them (29:36), and he gave them one heart (30:12).

Lesson

In times of sin, when judgment looms, those whom God raises up use biblical institutions to warn people and call them to repentance. We live in such a time. Are we willing to let God use us as Hezekiah's, to call people back to faithfulness to him?

Notes

The chronology is extremely difficult. In spite of KD, it seems clear that the Chronicler sees the passover as part of the same series of reforms dated in ch. 29 to Hezekiah's first year, and delayed because of the lack of priestly sanctification in 29:34. But when was that first year? In the third year of Hoshea (2 Kings 18:1), which was still six years before the fall of Samaria in 722, or fourteen years before Sennacherib's invasion of Jerusalem (Isa 36:1), which was in 701? Various explanations have been introduced; see Payne's BibSac article. The reference to captivity in 30:9 would seem to suggest the latter, but TP's captivity (2 Kings 15:29, just before the accession of Hoshea) might also be in view.

I'll follow Wood, who explains the differences in terms of coregencies and takes the revival to be Hezekiah's first full year of reign.

A recent treatment, which assumes errors in the text, is <http://www.bsw.org/project/biblica/bibl80/Comm10.htm>