

2 Chronicles 29: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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[0 : 00] 2 Chronicles chapter 29 Hezekiah began to reign when he was 25 years old, and he reigned 29 years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Abijah, the daughter of Zechariah, and he did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, according to all that David his father had done.

In the first year of his reign, in the first month, he opened the doors of the house of the Lord and repaired them. He brought in the priests and the Levites and assembled them in the square on the east and said to them, Hear me, Levites, now consecrate yourselves, and consecrate the house of the Lord, the God of your fathers, and carry out the filth from the holy place.

For our fathers have been unfaithful, and have done what was evil in the sight of the Lord our God. They have forsaken him, and have turned away their faces from the habitation of the Lord, and turned their backs.

They also shut the doors of the vestibule, and put out the lamps, and have not burned incense, or offered burnt offerings in the holy place to the God of Israel. Therefore the wrath of the Lord came on Judah and Jerusalem, and he has made them an object of horror, of astonishment, and of hissing, as you see with your own eyes.

For behold, our fathers have fallen by the sword, and our sons and our daughters and our wives are in captivity for this. Now it is in my heart to make a covenant with the Lord, the God of Israel, in order that his fierce anger may turn away from us.

[1 : 23] My sons, do not now be negligent, for the Lord has chosen you to stand in his presence, to minister to him, and to be his ministers and make offerings to him. Then the Levites arose, Mahath the son of Amasai, and Joel the son of Azariah, of the sons of the Kohathites, and of the sons of Merari, Kish the son of Abdi, and Azariah the son of Jehalalel, and of the Gershonites, Joah the son of Zimah, and Eden the son of Joah, and of the sons of Elisaphon, Shimri, and Jeuel, and of the sons of Asaph, Zechariah, and Mataniah, and of the sons of Heman, Jehul, and Shimei, and of the sons of Jejuthan, Shemaiah, and Uziel.

They gathered their brothers and consecrated themselves, and went in as the king had commanded, by the words of the Lord, to cleanse the house of the Lord. The priests went into the inner part of the house of the Lord to cleanse it, and they brought out all the uncleanness that they found in the temple of the Lord into the court of the house of the Lord.

And the Levites took it and carried it out to the brook Kidron. They began to consecrate on the first day of the first month, and on the eighth day of the month they came to the vestibule of the Lord. Then for eight days they consecrated the house of the Lord, and on the sixteenth day of the first month they finished. Then they went in to Hezekiah the king and said, We have cleansed all the house of the Lord, the altar of burnt offering, and all its utensils, and the table for the showbread, and all its utensils.

All the utensils that king Ahaz discarded in his reign when he was faithless we have made ready and consecrated, and behold, they are before the altar of the Lord. Then Hezekiah the king rose early, and gathered the officials of the city, and went up to the house of the Lord.

[3 : 10] And they brought seven bulls, seven rams, seven lambs, and seven male goats for a sin offering for the kingdom, and for the sanctuary, and for Judah. And he commanded the priests, the sons of Aaron, to offer them on the altar of the Lord.

So they slaughtered the bulls, and the priests received the blood, and threw it against the altar. And they slaughtered the rams, and their blood was thrown against the altar. And they slaughtered the lambs, and their blood was thrown against the altar.

Then the goats for the sin offering were brought to the king and the assembly, and they laid their hands on them. And the priests slaughtered them, and made a sin offering with their blood on the

altar, to make atonement for all Israel.

For the king commanded that the burnt offering and the sin offering should be made for all Israel. And he stationed the Levites in the house of the Lord with cymbals, harps, and lyres, according to the commandment of David and of Gad the king's seer, and of Nathan the prophet.

For the commandment was from the Lord through his prophets. The Levites stood with the instruments of David, and the priests with the trumpets. Then Hezekiah commanded that the burnt offerings be offered on the altar.

[4 : 16] And when the burnt offering began, the song to the Lord began also, and the trumpets, accompanied by the instruments of David king of Israel. The whole assembly worshipped, and the singers sang, and the trumpeters sounded.

All this continued until the burnt offering was finished. When the offering was finished, the king and all who were present with him bowed themselves and worshipped. And Hezekiah the king and the officials commanded the Levites to sing praises to the Lord with the words of David and of Asaph the seer.

And they sang praises with gladness, and they bowed down and worshipped. Then Hezekiah said, You have now consecrated yourselves to the Lord. Come near. Bring sacrifices and thank offerings to the house of the Lord.

And the assembly brought sacrifices and thank offerings. And all who were of a willing heart brought burnt offerings. The number of the burnt offerings that the assembly brought was seventy bulls, one hundred rams, and two hundred lambs.

All these were for a burnt offering to the Lord. And the consecrated offerings were six hundred bulls and three thousand sheep. But the priests were too few, and could not flay all the burnt offerings.

[5 : 27] So until other priests had consecrated themselves, their brothers the Levites helped them, until the work was finished. For the Levites were more upright in heart than the priests in consecrating themselves.

Besides the great number of burnt offerings, there was the fat of the peace offerings, and there were the drink offerings for the burnt offering. Thus the service of the house of the Lord was restored.

And Hezekiah and all the people rejoiced, because God had provided for the people, for the thing came about suddenly. Three scriptural books record the reign of Hezekiah.

Isaiah chapters 36-39, 2 Kings chapters 18-20, and the account of 2 Chronicles that begins here in chapter 29, and continues until the end of chapter 32.

In each of these books, Hezekiah plays an important role. After the wickedness of Ahaz, one of the most evil kings, especially of the southern kingdom, there is another good king on the throne of Judah.

[6 : 27] During his reign, the northern kingdom of Israel will fall to the Assyrians, but the southern kingdom will undergo a dramatic spiritual reformation. Hezekiah is highly commended. He is described as doing what is right in the eyes of the Lord, according to all that David his father had done.

2 Chronicles, uniquely among the three biblical sources that we have for Hezekiah's life, discusses his restoration of the temple of the Lord. Ahaz had compromised the temple and its worship, reordering it after the pattern of pagan worship.

He had built a new altar according to the plan of an altar in Damascus. He had sold off many of the treasures, removed most of the utensils, and redesigned things such as the Bronze Sea.

Ahaz had even closed off the doors of the temple, in 2 Chronicles 28, verse 24. And Ahaz gathered together the vessels of the house of the Lord, and cut in pieces the vessels of the house of God.

And he shut up the doors of the house of the Lord, and he made himself altars in every corner of Jerusalem. Hezekiah, in the very first year of his reign, in the first month, opens the doors of the house of the Lord, and repairs them.

[7 : 34] From the very outset, he sets out to repair, and utterly to reverse, what his father has done. One of the primary tasks of the king was to establish true worship. And this is of great concern to Hezekiah, who's going to restore the proper worship of the temple of God, he's going to cut off idolatry, he's going to reform the Levitical priesthood, and he's going to re-establish the nation in covenant with the Lord.

He charges the priests to recognize the sins of their predecessors, and to set things right. Throughout the history of Judah, the kings and the priests have been failing. They have fallen short. Every single king has something against him. Every single king has in some respect brought God's judgment down upon the nation, and the priests have failed also. The appalling state of the temple of the Lord is a testimony to their failure to perform their duties.

As a consequence of the sins of the priests, and the people, and the kings, the many judgments that Judah has experienced has come upon them. Hezekiah reminds the Levites of their duties, and they are listed according to their clans.

He's going to re-establish order in the priesthood. The whole building needs to be cleaned out, both physically and spiritually. Hezekiah intends to make a covenant with the Lord, rededicating the nation to him.

[8 : 50] Before this can occur, the Levites must remove everything impure from the temple, and replace it with consecrated objects and consecrated persons. The building represents the people of the Lord.

One could perhaps regard it as a sort of picture of Dorian Gray at the heart of the nation in Jerusalem. In the temple, the spiritual and the moral wickedness of the people has been made apparent, and the fact that the temple is filled with filth and impurity and pollution that needs to be cleared out is a concrete indication of how far the nation has fallen.

It takes eight days to go through the building and clear out all the impurity, and to consecrate it again takes eight further days. The Levites, having done all of this, then provide a full report to Hezekiah of their work.

In addition to the temple of the Lord, the people need to be reconsecrated to the Lord. Hezekiah instructs them to perform a comprehensive sin offering, seven bulls, seven rams, seven lambs, and seven male goats.

These animals stand for the kingdom, for the sanctuary, and for Judah. Every single part of the nation needs to be atoned for. They were all sinful and without health, and now they need to be restored.

[10 : 00] The sin offering of the goats represents the rulers, as we see in Leviticus chapter 4, verses 22 to 24. When a leader sins, doing unintentionally any one of all the things that by the commandments of the Lord his God ought not to be done, and realizes his guilt, or the sin which he has committed is made known to him, he shall bring as his offering a goat, a male without blemish, and shall lay his hand on the head of the goat, and kill it in the place where they killed a burnt offering before the Lord.

It is a sin offering. Before anything else can be done, the sins of the nation, and their pollution of the house of the Lord, have to be dealt with completely. While all of this is taking place, Levites are standing with musical instruments, with trumpets.

As part of the ceremony, David introduced music into the worship of the Lord to a far greater degree than formerly. The music and the symbolic animal sacrifices go together, and they integrate the two into a more humanized sort of sacrifice.

Within the New Testament, when animal sacrifices pass away, it will be the sacrifice of praise and other such things that come to the foreground. Here we already see this movement starting to take place.

After the sin offerings, burnt offerings followed, the people symbolically offering themselves up to the Lord, and this is accompanied, fittingly, by music and by song. Once the people have been cleansed by the sin offerings, and rededicated to the Lord by the burnt offerings, the worship of the temple can begin again.

[11 : 28] The building has been cleansed, the people have been cleansed, and the people and the building have both been rededicated. As the very initial act in his reign then, Hezekiah re-establishes the true service of the Lord.

In this respect, he is performing his task as a king admirably. Once the worship of the Lord has been re-established, the assembly offers sacrifices in great number, 70 bulls, 100 rams, 200 lambs, and then 600 bulls and 3,000 sheep for the consecrated offerings.

And as there simply aren't enough priests to deal with this quantity of offerings, the Levites have to help them. This re-establishing of the true worship of the Lord, and the rededication of the people to him, is a cause of great rejoicing for Hezekiah and the people.

Hezekiah has begun his reign in the very strongest of possible ways. A question to consider.

