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Israel and Judah: 35. Reforms of King Hezekiah

by David Sielaff, August 2019

Read the accompanying [Newsletter for August 2019](#)

Israel and Judah: 35

Reforms of
King
Hezekiah

THE SITUATION: King Hezekiah became the ruler of the Kingdom of Judah during the last days of the Kingdom of Israel. Judah was a vassal of Assyria when Hezekiah's father Ahaz died. Hezekiah immediately initiated religious reforms that reversed pagan religious practices demanded, paid for, and spread by Ahaz. During the first years of his reign, Hezekiah renewed YHWH's covenant with the people of Judah. Hezekiah's reforms were not popular with the pagan religious authorities of Judah, the Judean nobles, and many of the people.

Ahaz not only paid monetary tribute to Assyria but he also changed Judean religious practices to be more in line with the polytheism of the Assyrian masters and the entire region of Judea and Samaria. Recall that Ahaz had the high priest Urijah build a Syrian altar outside the Holy Place of the Temple and moved the brazen altar off to the side (2 Kings 16:10–18). Ahaz did things to the Temple to please the Assyrian king:

“King Ahaz cut away the insets of the bases, and he took away the laver off them; and the sea he took down off the copper oxen that were beneath it, and put it on a stone pavement. The covert [covered structure] of the sabbath that they had built at the house and the king's entry outside he turned about from the house of Yahweh because of the king of Assyria.”

• 2 Kings 16:17–18

In fact, Second Chronicles tells us King Ahaz closed down Temple operations in Jerusalem:

“Ahaz gathered together the furnishings of the house of Elohim, and he cut away the furnishings of the house of Elohim. He locked the doors of the house of Yahweh and made himself altars at every corner in Jerusalem.

And in every city, each city of Judah, he made high-places to fume [burn] incense to other elohim; thus he provoked Yahweh Elohim of his fathers to vexation [anger].”

• 2 Chronicles 28:24–25

When Hezekiah ascended the throne of Judah, he took responsibility and countered his father's defilement

of the Temple where YHWH placed His name and presence. He also dealt with pagan practices throughout the city and his entire kingdom.

TEXT: Beginning of the Reign of Hezekiah, King of Judah

2 Kings 18:1–3

¹ It was in the third year of Hoshea son of Elah king of Israel that Hezekiah son of Ahaz king of Judah became king. ² He was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem twenty-nine years; his mother's name was Abi daughter of Zechariah.

³ He did what was upright in the eyes of Yahweh according to all that his father David had done.

2 Chronicles 29:1–2

¹ Hezekiah, he became king *at the age of twenty-five years*, and he reigned in Jerusalem twenty-nine years; his mother's name was Abijah daughter of Zechariah.

² He did what was upright in the eyes of Yahweh according to all that his father David had done.

[end text]

2 Kings 18:1–2 and 2 Chronicles 29:1. These verses give a quick chronological update by relating the date of Hezekiah ascending his throne to a year in the reign of Hoshea, the northern King of Israel. The sentence, "**he reigned in Jerusalem twenty nine-years**" might indicate he reigned as co-regent with his father for a period of time, but Hezekiah reigned alone for those 29 years. Such co-regencies are not counted in the chronology of the kings of Judah. The age of Hezekiah plus the length of his reign "**in Jerusalem,**" means he died at the age of 54. Later we will read that YHWH extended Hezekiah's life.

His mother is named variously *Abi* and *Abijah* as discussed by *McKlintock and Strong's Encyclopedia*:

"The daughter of Zechariah, and mother of King Hezekiah and consequently, the wife of Ahaz, whom she survived, and whom, if we may judge from the piety of her son, she excelled in moral character. She is elsewhere called by the shorter form of the name, ABI. [approx.] B.C. 726. Her father, may have been the same with the Zechariah, the son of Jeberechiah, whom Isaiah took as a witness of his marriage with 'the prophetess'" (Isaiah 8:2; comp. 2 Chronicles 26:5)."

• **"Abijah," *McKlintock and Strong Encyclopedia***

Hezekiah's mother is honored with a mention in both Kings and Chronicles. Her teaching of Hezekiah led the young king to honor and obey YHWH's commandments and to begin his reforms. This involved great risk for the young king. Although his mother is mentioned only here, Hezekiah is an example of Solomon's proverb: "**Train up a youth in accordance with his proper way; Even when he is old he shall not withdraw from it**" (Proverbs 22:6).

Hezekiah not only learned from his mother, but also he must have taken to heart the admonition of YHWH given through Isaiah the prophet at the beginning of his prophetic ministry, "**in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah**" (Isaiah 1:1) when YHWH spoke to the people of Judah (and Israel):

"Why, to Me, your many sacrifices? Yahweh is saying; I am surfeited with ascent offerings [burnt offerings] of rams and the fat of fatlings; And the blood of young bulls and he-lambs and he-goats I do not desire. In that you are coming to appear before Me, Who sought this from your hand, to tramp My courts? Do not continue to bring a futile approach present; Incense, it is an abhorrence to Me; New moon and sabbath, proclaiming of a meeting — I cannot bear a fast and a day of restraint. ...

And when you spread out your palms to Me, I shall obscure My eyes from you; Even though you multiply prayers, I will not hearken. Your hands, they are full of blood, Your fingers with lawlessness. Wash; purge yourselves! Take away the evil of your actions from in front of My eyes! Desist from doing evil; [How? In several ways ...]

[1] **Learn to do good!** [2] **Inquire for right judgment;** [3] **Make happy the wronged!** [4] **Seek right**

judgment for the orphan; [5] **Contend for the widow!** [6] **Come now, and let us have it corrected, Yahweh is saying. If your sins become like scarlet, as snow shall they be white; if they are red as crimson, as wool shall they become. If you are willing and hearken, the good of the land shall you eat.**"

• *Isaiah 1:11–13, 15–19*

When he began his reign Hezekiah was motivated to change the ways of the people of Judah (and Israel if possible) to worship YHWH only.

2 Kings 18:3 and 2 Chronicles 29:2. Hezekiah was one of the best kings of Judah, positively compared to King David who was the standard of a good king. In spite of Isaiah's counsel and prophecies, Ahaz traveled and sought the approval of the Assyrian king, pagan priests, pagan gods, and implemented idolatry throughout the kingdom of Judah. Hezekiah learned about YHWH's covenant with His people, and their responsibilities to their God. Hezekiah set to work for all the people of Judah to worship only YHWH.

TEXT: Hezekiah Begins Cleansing Idolatry from the Temple

2 Chronicles 29:3–19

³ And it came to pass as he was established in his kingdom, in the first year of his reign, in the first month, that [1] he opened the doors of the House of Yahweh and [2] repaired them.

⁴ He brought in the priests and the Levites and gathered them together in the east square ⁵ and said to them:

"Hearken to me, Levites! Now sanctify yourselves and hallow the House of Yahweh Elohim of your fathers. Bring forth the impurity from the Sanctuary.

⁶ **For our fathers had offended and done evil in the eyes of Yahweh our Elohim, since they forsook Him and turned about their faces from the tabernacle of Yahweh, and they were giving Him the scruff.**

⁷ **They even locked the doors of the portico and quenched the lamps; they fumed no incense and offered up no ascent approach [burnt offerings] in the Sanctuary of the Elohim of Israel.**

⁸ **Therefore the wrath of Yahweh came over Judah and Jerusalem; He made them a stirring horror, an appalling object and a hissing [to the nations], as you are seeing with your own eyes. ⁹ Hence it is that our fathers fell by the sword, and our sons, our daughters and our wives are in captivity in a land not theirs.**

On this account, ¹⁰ it is now in my heart to contract a covenant with Yahweh Elohim of Israel, [Why?] so that His hot anger may turn back from us. ¹¹ My sons, now you must not be at ease, for Yahweh has chosen you [1] to stand before Him, [2] to minister to Him, and [3] to continue in His ministry and the fuming of incense."

¹² So the Levites set to work: Mahath son of Amasai and Joel son of Azariah from the sons of the Kohathite; from the sons of Merari, Kish son of Abdi and Azariah son of Jehallelel; from the Gershonite, Joah son of Zimmah and Eden son of Joah; ¹³ from the sons of Elizaphan, Shimri and Jeiel; from the sons of Asaph, Zechariah and Mattaniah; ¹⁴ from the sons of Heman, Jehiel and Shimei; and from the sons of Jeduthun, Shemaiah and Uzziel.

¹⁵ They gathered together their kinsmen and sanctified themselves; then they came to cleanse the House of Yahweh, according to the instruction of the king by the words of Yahweh.

¹⁶ The priests now came inside the House of Yahweh to cleanse it; they brought forth all the uncleanness they found in the temple of Yahweh out into the court of the House of Yahweh; and the Levites received it to carry it forth outside to Wadi Kidron.

¹⁷ They started off with hallowing [sanctifying] on day one of the first month, and by the eighth day of the month they came to the portico of Yahweh. They hallowed [sanctified] the House of Yahweh for eight days, and on the sixteenth day of the first month they finished. ¹⁸ Then they came inside to king Hezekiah and reported,

“We have cleansed all the House of Yahweh, the altar of ascent approaches [burnt offerings] with all its furnishings, and the table for the bread in array with all its furnishings.¹⁹ We have also prepared and hallowed [sanctified] all the furnishings that king Ahaz in his offense had cast off during his reign; there they are before the altar of Yahweh.” [end text]

2 Chronicles 29:3. Hezekiah being **“established in his kingdom”** meant he had no serious rivals to the throne. Also, we are not told how long it took him to be established. The first thing mentioned that Hezekiah did was to open the doors of God’s Temple, and then he initiated repairs. It began some time during the first month of the ceremonial year of the Hebrew calendar, the month of Nisan.

The physical effects of sins and evil by his father Ahaz were to be cleansed. Outside the building Ahaz had sacrificed to idols and pagan gods. Hezekiah opened the doors some time during the first month after he was anointed as king. This would have been Hezekiah’s ascension year, the first official year of his reign.

Verses 4–6. Hezekiah gathered the priests and Levites east of the door of the Sanctuary (the Holy Place). His plan began to be implemented in the first month (verse 3) when he began repairs on the Sanctuary. Part of the repair was to remove **“the impurity from the sanctuary,”** meaning the unclean filth from the pagan rituals. He says to the priests and Levites that **“our fathers”** were to blame and not just Ahaz, meaning that all the people of Judah had **“offended and done evil”** before YHWH. The phrase **“giving Him the scruff”** is usually translated as **“turning their backs”** on YHWH.

Verses 7. Hezekiah himself mentions the doors to the Sanctuary were locked. Proper respect could not be given to YHWH without the Temple functioning.

Verses 8–9. YHWH’s response to their disobedience was anger and punishment. The nations scorned the kingdom and Jerusalem. As a result, YHWH’s name and reputation was belittled among the nations. Past punishments are mentioned referring to the defeats of Judah at the hands of the northern kingdom of Israel, Syria, and other neighboring peoples, Judah’s wealth taken, and many being enslaved.

Verses 10–11. Hezekiah proposes **“to contract a covenant with Yahweh.”** This would be a renewal of the covenant of the people with YHWH, similar to the covenant renewal when Solomon dedicated the Temple to YHWH. This would appeal to God’s mercy and deter YHWH’s further wrath and punishment as told by Isaiah. He calls upon the priests and Levites to live up to the purpose YHWH separated them to fulfill.

Verses 12–14. Their response is simple and wonderful, **“So the Levites set to work.”** The Levitical leaders are named for posterity, two from each major house.

Verse 15. They gathered others and began **“to cleanse the house of YHWH.”** We do not know what **“by the words of YHWH”** means. Did Hezekiah have YHWH’s words from the writings during David and Solomon’s days, or was there communication from YHWH through one of His prophets? We are not told. However, we do know this meant outside the Holy Place and Holy of Holies.

Verse 16. Only the priests of the Levites could cleanse **“inside the House of YHWH.”** This meant not cleaning the ordinary dirt, but also cleansing it from pagan ritual objects and idols, both inside and out. Remember, all priests were Levites, but only Levites from families of the line of Aaron (the brother of Moses) were priests. Only priests could go into the House of YHWH. The idolatrous idols, artifacts, and tools collectively called **“uncleanness”** were taken and dumped into the Wadi Kidron. This was the Kidron Valley below and east of the Temple. It was also the common sewer of the City of David.

Verse 17. After the physical cleansing, the rituals of “hallowing” or sanctifying the House of YHWH began on **“day one of the first month”** meaning the first day of the ceremonial year, the first of Nisan. This was before Hezekiah opened up the Temple in verse 3 above. The work was completed on the 16th of Nisan. The proper day for the Passover was on the 14th of Nisan. They missed the time for the Passover:

“... On the tenth of this month they shall take for themselves, each man a flocking according to their fathers’ house, a flocking for each household. ... A flawless flocking, a year-old male, shall you come to have. From the he-lambs or from the goats shall you take it. And it will become a charge of yours until the fourteenth day of this month. Then they will slay it ...”

• Exodus 12:3–6

Verses 18–19. The completion of the Temple cleansing was reported to Hezekiah. They returned or replaced items removed by Ahaz and displayed them for Hezekiah’s approval. All the tools were ready. The offerings to YHWH could begin.

TEXT: Hezekiah Begins the Cleansing Rituals of the Temple

2 Chronicles 29:20–36

²⁰ King Hezekiah rose early, gathered together the chief officials of the city and went up to the House of Yahweh.

²¹ They brought seven young bulls, seven rams, seven he-lambs and seven he-goats of the goats as a sin offering [1] for the kingdom and [2] for the Sanctuary and [3] for Judah. He told the sons of Aaron, the priests, to offer them up on the altar of Yahweh. ²² So they slew the oxen, and the priests received the blood and sprinkled it toward the altar, they slew the rams and sprinkled the blood toward the altar, and they slew the he-lambs and sprinkled the blood toward the altar.

²³ Then they brought the hairy goats of the sin offering close before the king and the assembly, who supported their hands on them. ²⁴ The priests slew them and made a sin offering with their blood toward the altar, to make a propitiatory shelter over all Israel; for the king had ordered an ascent approach [burnt offerings] and a sin offering for all Israel.

²⁵ He made the Levites stand in the House of Yahweh with cymbals, zithers and harps in accordance with the instruction of David, Gad the king’s vision seer, and Nathan the prophet, for such was the instruction by the hand of Yahweh by means of His prophets.

²⁶ When the Levites stood ready with the instruments of David, and the priests with the bugles, ²⁷ Hezekiah ordered to offer up the ascent approach [burnt offerings] on the altar. And now, as the ascent approach [burnt offerings] started, the song of Yahweh and the bugles also started, along with the instruments of king David of Israel.

²⁸ All the assembly was worshiping, while the song was sung and the bugles were blown; all this continued until the ascent approach was finished. ²⁹ At the end of the offering up, the king and all those found with him bowed and prostrated themselves.

³⁰ Then king Hezekiah and the chief officials ordered the Levites to praise Yahweh in the words of David and Asaph the vision seer; so they gave praise with rejoicing, and they bowed and prostrated themselves.

³¹ Hezekiah responded and said,

“Now you have consecrated yourselves to Yahweh. Come close and bring sacrifices and acclamation [thank] offerings to the House of Yahweh.”

So the assembly brought sacrifices and acclamation [thank] offerings to the House of Yahweh, and all willing of heart brought ascent approaches [burnt offerings]. ³² And the number of ascent approaches [burnt offerings] that the assembly brought was seventy oxen, a hundred rams, two hundred he-lambs — all these for ascent approaches [burnt offerings] to Yahweh; ³³ and the holy offerings were six hundred oxen and three thousand flocklings.

³⁴ But the priests were too few and could not flay all the ascent approaches [burnt offerings]. So their kinsmen, the Levites, aided them until the work was finished and until other priests had hallowed themselves; for the Levites were more upright of heart in hallowing themselves than the priests.

³⁵ For besides ascent approaches [burnt offerings] in abundance, there were the fat pieces of the peace offerings and the libations for the ascent approaches [burnt offerings]; so the service of the House of Yahweh was prepared.

³⁶ Hezekiah and all the people rejoiced over the preparation that the One, Elohim, had made for the people, for the thing had come about so suddenly.

[end text]

2 Chronicles 29:20. We do not know when this was, but it was probably the next day after the cleansing of the Temple was completed. A holy convocation will take place.

Verses 21–22. The three purposes for the “sin offerings” of the bulls, rams, and lambs are listed. The animals were killed and their blood sprinkled **“toward the altar”** before the Holy Place.^a These offerings were conducted east of the Temple structure in the courtyard. Those in prayer to YHWH faced west toward God’s presence in the Holy Place and Holy of Holies. The sin offerings are described in Leviticus chapter 4 and Numbers 15:22–24.

Verses 23–24. The seven he-goats were a sin offering with the king and other leaders placing their hands upon the goats. The petitioners ask God’s forgiveness for sins, in this case **“a sin offering for all Israel.”**

Verse 25. Instruments were played and songs were sung, as it is translated, **“in the House of YHWH.”** This is the same rendering in the sample of translations that I have looked at. The porch and steps of the Temple were considered by some to be **“in the house of YHWH.”** If this is the case, the sound of instruments and song resonated throughout the outer courtyard of the Temple.

Verses 26–29. The Songs of Ascent or “Songs of the Degrees” may refer to 15 Psalms most of which are attributed to King David that were gathered and put in order by King Hezekiah later in his reign. In the Jewish Middoth there is a statement of where the psalms of the Songs of Ascents were performed.

“Fifteen steps led up from within it to the Court of the Israelites, corresponding to the fifteen Songs of Ascents in the Psalms, and upon them the Levites used to sing. They [the steps] were not four-square, but rounded like the half of a round threshing-floor.”

• *Mishnah Middoth 2:5*

Verse 30. The psalms of David and Asaph were performed with instruments and voice during the times of praise and rejoicing. The words (and psalms) of **“Asaph the vision seer”** included psalms written by Asaph, himself, but also likely his descendants as well: see Psalm 50:1, 73:1, 74:1, 75:1, 76:1, 77:1, 78:1, 79:1, 80:1, 81:1, 82:1, 83:1, and Isaiah 36:22.

Verse 31. Usually translated “burnt offerings,” these are sin offerings, translated **“ascent offerings”** in the Concordant Literal Old Testament translation. This offering is a burnt offering of the entire animal body. No parts of the sacrifice are eaten, not by the priests, the Levites, or by those making the offering. The term “ascent” refers to the smoke from the sacrifices that goes into the air toward heaven.

Verses 32–33. The **“holy offerings”** were eaten by those who brought them with a portion going to the priests and Levites. The combined totals of ascent and holy offerings was 670 oxen, 100 rams, 200 male lambs, and 3,000 **“flocklings”** which is normally translated sheep.

Verse 34. There were so many animals (but not enough **“hallowed”** or purified priests to butcher them), that permission was granted to non-priest Levites who had “hallowed” themselves to assist the unsanctified priests in some unspecified way. There was no violation of ritual procedure. The chief actor for **“peace offerings”** is the person bringing the animal offered which he must kill, skin, and cut the meat. An Aaronic priest is not always required but he is the ideal and usual person to perform that duty. Levites were brought in because they were more efficient than non-Levitical Israelites in performing the sacrifices. There were so many animals being sacrificed (and cooked and eaten) that efficiency was very important. The whole burnt

^a See the article [“Sacrifice and Offering”](#) in Hastings, James, *Hastings' Dictionary of the Bible*, 1909, for details on the system of sacrifices in the Old Testament. Also read (and/or listen to) Dr. Martin’s 1995 article, [“The Sacrificial System of Israel”](#) where he examines the true purposes of the sin offerings while the Tabernacle and Temple were in operation from the time of Moses to the destruction of the Temple by the Babylonians. Then after a 70-year exile, the Temple was rebuilt and offerings resumed until the final destruction of the Temple in 70 AD.

My September 2013 Commentary, [“What Is a Temple?”](#) gives a quick overview of the purposes and societal functions of Temples for the people of Israel in the Old and New Testaments. Hezekiah restored those purposes to Judah. Then read (and/or listen to my reading of) Dr. Martin’s 1995 article [“The Symbolism of Biblical Holydays.”](#)

offerings could only be touched by the priests, except in a case of necessity, such as the present.^b

The procedures did change somewhat when the Solomonic Temple was built because of the great number of animals that were sacrificed at that time also. A procedure to kill, skin, trim fat from the meat for cooking and eating, it had to be done efficiently. The priests and Levites had greater experience in such matters than most Israelites.

Verse 35. The “**peace offerings**” were cut up, roasted, and eaten by the priests and those bringing the sacrifice. Only the fat was placed on the offering (Exodus 29:13; Leviticus 3:15–16).

Verse 36. These events took place “**suddenly**” because the unexpected death of Hezekiah’s father Ahaz.^c The time of the death of Ahaz made it impossible to accomplish the purification before the 14th of Nisan. Hezekiah, the chief priests, the Levites, the tribal elders postponed Passover until the second month. No official Passover would have been celebrated at all if Ahaz were king. Therefore, we do not know precisely when these events took place, but in chapter 30, there was not enough time for preparations to be made for the first Passover of Hezekiah’s reign to occur at the assigned time on the tenth of Nisan, the first month of the ceremonial year. This indicates that events of chapter 29 occurred just a few months prior to that time.

TEXT: Hezekiah’s Passover Preparations

2 Chronicles 30:1–14

¹ Hezekiah sent word to all Israel and Judah; he also wrote letters to Ephraim and Manasseh to come to the House of Yahweh in Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover to Yahweh Elohim of Israel.

² The king and his chief officials and all the assembly in Jerusalem had taken counsel to celebrate the Passover in the second month. ³ For they had been unable to celebrate it at its [proper] time since the priests had not hallowed themselves in sufficient numbers, and the people had not gathered themselves at Jerusalem. ⁴ The plan seemed upright in the eyes of the king and in the eyes of all the assembly.

⁵ So they affirmed the plan to let the proclamation pass through all Israel from Beer-sheba unto Dan, to come and celebrate the Passover to Yahweh Elohim of Israel in Jerusalem, for in such multitude they had not celebrated it according to what was written. ⁶ So the couriers went out with the letters from the hand of the king and his chief officials through all Israel and Judah, according to the instruction of the king, saying:

“Sons of Israel! Return to Yahweh Elohim of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, and He shall return to the remnant of you who were delivered from the palm of the kings of Assyria.

⁷ Do not be like your fathers and like your brothers who offended Yahweh Elohim of their fathers, so He gave them up to desolation, as you see. ⁸ Now do not stiffen your scruff like your fathers; give acclamation to Yahweh your Elohim and come to His Sanctuary, which He has sanctified for the eon, and serve Yahweh your Elohim, and He shall turn back from you His hot anger.

⁹ For if you return to Yahweh, your brothers and your sons will win compassion before all their captors and return to this land; for Yahweh your Elohim is gracious and compassionate; He shall not withdraw His face from you if you return to Him.”

¹⁰ So the couriers continued on, passing along from city to city in the area of Ephraim and Manasseh as far as Zebulun; but they were ridiculing them and deriding them. ¹¹ Nevertheless some men from Asher and Manasseh and from Zebulun were submissive and came to Jerusalem. ¹² Furthermore, the hand of Elohim

^b Ralph W. Klein, *2 Chronicles: A Commentary*, ed. Paul D. Hanson, Hermeneia—A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2012), 425.

^c Josephus in *Antiquities of the Jews* 9:256–257, Whiston translation, gives extra-biblical details from Jewish tradition:

“... and when he [Ahaz] was beaten [defeated] again, he began to honor the gods of the Assyrians; and he seemed more desirous to honor any other gods than his own paternal and true God, whose anger was the cause of his defeat: nay, he proceeded to such a degree of despite and contempt [of God’s worship], that he shut up the temple entirely, and forbade them to bring in the appointed sacrifices, and took away the gifts that had been given to it. And when he had offered these indignities to God, he died, having lived thirty-six years, and of them reigned sixteen; and he left his son Hezekiah for his successor.”

was on Judah to give them one heart to obey the instruction of the king and the chief officials, by the word of Yahweh.

¹³ Many people gathered at Jerusalem to celebrate the festival of unleavened bread in the second month, a very numerous assembly. ¹⁴ They rose up and took away the altars that were in Jerusalem, and they took off all the incense stands and flung them into Wadi Kidron. [end text]

2 Chronicles 30:1. In chapter 29 Hezekiah, the priests, and the Levites rededicated themselves to YHWH. With proper attitude and obedience to the Mosaic rituals, offerings were presented to YHWH at the Temple of Solomon on behalf of themselves and the people of Judah. Now the people of Judah will renew their adherence to their covenant with YHWH by obeying the command to gather at Jerusalem for the Feast of Passover.

Hezekiah wrote **“to all Israel and Judah,”** meaning to those who remained in the northern Kingdom of Israel. Ephraim and Manasseh had the largest populations of the tribes. Remember, both were sons of Joseph (Genesis 41:50–52), Jacob’s second youngest son, Benjamin being the youngest. The wars with Assyria resulted in many being taken away before Assyria completed its dismantling, destruction, and deportation of most of the rest of the northern kingdom’s population.

See the map. Ephraim is immediately north of Benjamin’s tribal area and Manasseh is divided into two sections, west and east of the Jordan River. East Manasseh (east of the Jordan River) was the first area of Israel to be conquered and its people deported to Assyria. Ephraim and West Manasseh during the early reign of Hezekiah were still part of the diminished but independent Kingdom of Israel under her last two kings, Pekah and Hoshea. However, the kingdom was under severe threat from Assyria during this period (see [“Israel and Judah: 33. Isaiah and the Death of Ahaz”](#) and [“Israel and Judah: 34. Death of the Kingdom of Israel”](#)).

So Hezekiah appealed to the people of Israel, particularly Ephraim and Manasseh, to return to worshipping YHWH, to celebrate the Passover festival that was the common heritage of all Israelites since the Exodus. Such an invitation indicates great disruption within the northern kingdom that made Hezekiah feel that many would respond. Many attended.

Verses 2–3. The reason for the late Passover is repeated. It was the 14th day of the first month (Leviticus 23:4–5). After the Temple’s cleansing and sanctification, the priests and Levites needed to be sanctified for their ritual work, and this took more time. So the Passover was delayed to the second month.

Verse 4. Hezekiah, the priests, Levites, the tribal elders, and the nobility all agreed to postpone the Passover celebration until the second month.

Verse 5–6. The number of people attending was expected to be extremely large. Notification was sent out **“from Dan to Beersheba”** (King James Version), meaning from north to south, to include all the tribes of Israel.

Verses 6–10. The letter of Hezekiah to all Israel and Judah appealed to the common ancestry and history of all Israel, but also to their common knowledge that disobedience to the Covenant with YHWH will bring punishment. Obedience will bring compassion and escape from punishment for their idolatry.



Hezekiah's letter reads like a condensed version of verses from the first chapter of Isaiah, written years, perhaps decades before the deprivations of Ahaz and before Hezekiah began his reign:

“Woe, nation of sin! People heavy with depravity! Seed of evildoers! Sons who are corrupters! They forsake Yahweh! They spurn the Holy One of Israel! They are alienated, going backward! On what shall you be smitten further, Since you are adding more stubbornness?”

All of the head is ill, And all of the heart is sick; From the sole of the foot unto the head there is no soundness in it; Injury and welt and smiting raw, They are not pressed out nor bound up nor made tender with oil. Your land is a desolation, Your cities burned with fire; Your ground — in front of you aliens [strangers] are devouring it, Yea desolation like the overturning by aliens [strangers]. ...

Hear the word of Yahweh, captains of Sodom; Give ear to the law of our Elohim, people of Gomorrah. Why, to Me, your many sacrifices? Yahweh is saying; I am surfeited with ascent offerings of rams and the fat of fatlings; And the blood of young bulls and he-lambs and he-goats I do not desire.

In that you are coming to appear before Me, Who sought this from your hand, to tramp My courts? Do not continue to bring a futile approach present; Incense, it is an abhorrence to Me; New moon and sabbath, proclaiming of a meeting — I cannot bear a fast and a day of restraint. ...

And when you spread out your palms to Me, I shall obscure My eyes from you; Even though you multiply prayers, I will not hearken. Your hands, they are full of blood, Your fingers with lawlessness.

Wash; purge yourselves! Take away the evil of your actions from in front of My eyes! Desist from doing evil; Learn to do good! Inquire for right judgment; Make happy the wronged! Seek right judgment for the orphan; Contend for the widow!

Come now, and let us have it corrected, Yahweh is saying. If your sins become like scarlet, as snow shall they be white; If they are red as crimson, as wool shall they become. If you are willing and hearken, the good of the land shall you eat, Yet if you are refusing and rebel, by the sword shall you be devoured, For the mouth of Yahweh, it has spoken.”

• *Isaiah 1:4–7, 10–13, 15–20*

When the people had Hezekiah's letter read to them, they were very likely familiar with the sentiments spoken and written by Isaiah and other prophets.

Verses 7–8. A warning of judgment is threatened if they do not serve YHWH as the only Elohim. All Israelites knew the sorry history of disobedience constantly warned about by the prophets of YHWH.

Verses 10–11. As a result of Hezekiah's letter, not many but **“some men from Asher and Manasseh and from Zebulun were submissive and came to Jerusalem.”** In some places the messengers were ridiculed, yet some from the ten tribes did come to Jerusalem. Those from the tribe of Asher were singled out. Remember, this all took place before the northern Kingdom of Israel was destroyed. The chaotic situation in the north allowed Hezekiah's messengers to convey their message unmolested by Israel's King Hoshea — as far as our text tells us.

Verses 12–13. The response of the people of Judah to **“the word of YHWH”** was better: **“Many people gathered at Jerusalem ...”** God motivating them. Did they perform the Passover in Jerusalem? Yes.

“So you will sacrifice the Passover to Yahweh your Elohim from the flock and the herd in the place where Yahweh your Elohim shall choose to tabernacle His Name. ...

You cannot sacrifice the Passover within any one of your gates which Yahweh your Elohim is giving to you, but rather only in the place that Yahweh your Elohim shall choose to tabernacle His Name. There shall you sacrifice the Passover in the evening as the sun sets, the appointed time of your going forth from Egypt. Then you will cook and eat in the place that Yahweh your Elohim shall choose, and you may turn around in the morning and go to your tents.”

• *Deuteronomy 16:2, 5–7*

This was written by Moses just before Israel entered the land God promised to them. Once the tribal lands were allotted, God required them to gather at a location where He chose to place His name for the festivals.^d If the people were unable to gather at the Temple in Jerusalem, they could still kill the Passover lamb in their homes as told in Leviticus (and as the Israelites did during their exile and after the Herodian Temple was destroyed in 70 AD). In Jerusalem the lambs were killed in the Temple, and the carcasses taken to their temporary gathering place to be roasted and eaten by their family.^e

Verse 14. The writer notes that those who did gather in Jerusalem spontaneously removed pagan altars and incense stands and threw them into the Kidron Valley. This was part of extensive Mosaic commands from Deuteronomy 12:1–13. Moses specifically instructed the people to destroy pagan shrines. The people in Jerusalem under Hezekiah fulfilled that command of God:

“These are the statutes and the ordinances which you shall observe to do in the land that Yahweh Elohim of your fathers gives to you to tenant it all the days that you are alive on the ground. You shall destroy, yea destroy all the places where the nations (whom you are dispossessing) have served their elohim on the high mountains, on the hills and under every flourishing tree. You will tear down their altars and break their monuments; their Asherah poles you shall burn with fire, and the carvings of their elohim you shall hack down; thus you will destroy their name from that place.”

• *Deuteronomy 12:1–3*

Generations after Moses, at the beginning of Hezekiah’s reign, the people of Judah and some from other tribes of Israel again obeyed YHWH’s command, in their own capital of Jerusalem, where YHWH placed His name.

TEXT: Hezekiah’s Passover Performed

2 Chronicles 30:15–27

¹⁵ They slew the Passover on the fourteenth of the second month; the priests and the Levites were mortified [ashamed], and they hallowed themselves and brought ascent approaches [burnt offerings] to the House of Yahweh.

¹⁶ They stood at their position as was their custom according to the law of Moses, the man of Elohim. The priests were sprinkling the blood received from the hand of the Levites. ¹⁷ Since there were many in the assembly who had not hallowed themselves, the Levites were in charge of slaying the Passover lambs so as to sanctify them to Yahweh for everyone who was not cleansed.

¹⁸ For most of the people — many from Ephraim and Manasseh, Issachar and Zebulun — had not cleansed themselves; so they ate the Passover, yet not according to what is written. Hence, Hezekiah prayed for them, saying,

“Yahweh is good; may He make a propitiatory shelter about [around] ¹⁹ everyone who has set his heart to seek after the One, Elohim, Yahweh Elohim of his fathers, though not according to the cleansing rules of the Sanctuary.”

²⁰ Yahweh hearkened to Hezekiah and healed the people.

²¹ The sons of Israel who had converged in Jerusalem celebrated the festival of unleavened bread seven days with great rejoicing, while the Levites and the priests were praising Yahweh day by day with powerful instruments for Yahweh.

²² Hezekiah spoke to the heart of all the Levites who had proceeded effectively and with good insight concerning Yahweh. They ate the appointed feast for seven days, sacrificing sacrifices of peace offerings and acclaiming Yahweh Elohim of their fathers.

²³ Then all the assembly took counsel to celebrate another seven days; and so they celebrated seven more

^d The Temple was called “The House of the Name” referring to God’s name of YHWH. See “[A Name for the Temple of God.](#)”

^e “[Passover Sacrifice](#),” article, *Jewish Encyclopedia*, 1906.

days with rejoicing. ²⁴ For Hezekiah king of Judah himself donated for the assembly 1,000 young bulls and 7,000 flocklings, and the chief officials donated for the assembly 1,000 young bulls and 10,000 flocklings; and priests hallowed themselves in abundance.

²⁵ All the assembly of Judah rejoiced, also the priests and the Levites, along with all the assembly coming from Israel and the sojourners coming from the land of Israel and those dwelling in Judah. ²⁶ There was great rejoicing in Jerusalem, for since the days of David's son Solomon king of Israel, nothing like this had occurred in Jerusalem.

²⁷ The Levitical priests rose up and blessed the people; Yahweh heard their voice, and their prayer advanced to His holy habitation, to the heavens. [end text]

2 Chronicles 30:15. Most translations state that the priests and Levites were “ashamed” that even with the extra month to prepare, not enough of them were purified to perform in the Temple. Their reason for being mortified or ashamed makes biblical sense. They were upset that the commanded day was missed. But there was a provision for those who became ritually impure through no fault of their own. It allowed them to perform the Passover in the second month, as YHWH had Moses tell the people of Israel:

“Speak to the sons of Israel, saying, In case any man of you or of your generations becomes unclean by a dead soul or is on the road afar, he will also prepare a Passover to Yahweh. In the second month on the fourteenth day, between the evening hours shall they observe it. Over unleavened bread and bitter herbs shall they eat it.”

• **Numbers 9:10–11**

In this case, the Temple, Jerusalem, and the entire Kingdom of Judah were impure and required proper cleansing. The people humbled themselves. YHWH told Solomon personally before the dedication of the Temple:

“When My people upon whom My Name has been called,

- [1] **are submissive and**
- [2] **pray and**
- [3] **seek My face and**
- [4] **turn back from their evil ways, then**
 - [a] **I shall hear from the heavens,**
 - [b] **I shall pardon their sin, and**
 - [c] **I shall heal their land.**

Now My eyes shall be open and My ears attentive to the prayer of this place.”

• **2 Chronicles 7:14–15**

According to the text of 2 Chronicles chapters 29 and 30, Hezekiah and Judah made heartfelt attempts to fulfill YHWH's requirements for this unique Passover but circumstances beyond their control entered into the situation. Their motivations were pure to do God's will under difficult conditions. In such circumstances God is always tolerant.

Verses 16–17. The Passover offerings have begun. As before, there were too few purified or sanctified priests to deal with the large number of Passover lamb or goat sacrifices, so the Levites assisted with killing and cutting up the animals. This freed up the priests for the ritual of praying, sprinkling the blood, and performing other duties before God at the altar.

Verses 18–20. Most of the people did not prepare themselves, but they apparently tried to do so. This included some from Judah, the tribe of Benjamin,^f and the tribe of Levi, the tribes comprising the Kingdom

^f See Dr. Martin's article, "[The Tribe of Benjamin](#)" about this tribe's turn from extreme evil to extreme loyalty and faithfulness to God and to its fellow tribe of Judah.

of Judah. Other attendees included some from the four other tribes named. What they were unable to do was they **“had not cleansed themselves,”** which may have included the care of the young lamb or goat to be sacrificed for the proper number of days before being slaughtered.⁸

What did it mean to purify or cleanse oneself in preparation for the Passover? Well, a standard for the conditions of one’s heart whenever anyone approaches God’s presence had long been known. It was given in Psalm 24, a psalm by King David:

“Who shall ascend into the mountain of Yahweh, And who shall rise in His holy place?

- [1] **The innocent of palms [hands] and pure of heart,**
- [2] **Who has not lifted up his soul to mere idols, And**
- [3] **has not sworn by what is deceitful,**

He shall obtain blessing from Yahweh, And righteousness from the Elohim of his salvation. This is the generation of those seeking after Him, Those seeking Your face, O Elohim of Jacob.”

• *Psalm 24:3–6*

Often psalms were read when rituals were performed at the Temple. If the priests did not read this psalm as the people approached the places of sacrifice, they should have done so. Also applicable to the situation of approaching God properly would be all of David’s Psalm 51.

In the Gospel of John in the time of Christ’s ministry, purification for the Passover is mentioned even though we are not told what they did, but we can be sure there was an accepted procedure the people followed:

“Now near was the Passover of the Jews, and many went up into Jerusalem out of the country, before the Passover, that they should be purifying themselves.”

• *John 11:55*

For the people in Isaiah’s time, Hezekiah’s statement is correct and proper according to God’s requirements of purity — the people were properly pure for them to approach YHWH with pure hearts.

Verse 21. Immediately after the Passover came the seven-day festival of unleavened bread, also set forth in the Law of Moses. There was music every day **“with powerful instruments,”** perhaps trumpets, other horns, drums, cymbals and string instruments.

Verse 22. Hezekiah spoke to the people. The platform of the Temple above the Gihon made a natural amphitheater for those listening to the east on the western slope of the Mount of Olives.

Verses 23–24. Another seven days of celebration was allowed. King Hezekiah and the **“chief officials”** provided the meat of 19,000 animals, most of them small. “Young bulls” means they were smaller animals, but the meat was probably very tender.

Verses 25–26. The text indicates everyone had a great time. As a saying goes “It was the best feast ever!” The people from the northern Kingdom of Israel and those of the southern Kingdom of Judah all rejoiced. I do not doubt that people were thinking about reunification of the tribes of Israel into a single kingdom. If so, it was not to happen. This time of happy celebration was only a moment in time. Soon the ordinary political, religious, and social concerns reentered the minds of everyone. The feeling of revival would soon fade and the natural human tendency to sin and do evil would return.

Verse 27. The **“Levitical priests”** means the family line of Aaron, the brother of Moses. Only those descended from Aaron from the tribe of Levi could be priests. They blessed the people. The writer of this passage said YHWH heard their blessing, and their prayer on behalf of the people went **“to His holy habitation,”** meaning it went through the Temple **“to the heavens.”** The writer of this verse is conveying that YHWH was pleased with all the acts of the king, the religious officials, and the people. It was a rare moment when YHWH’s chosen people were united with their God.

⁸ See my March 2018 Commentary [“Preparation of the Lamb.”](#)

TEXT: Hezekiah Destroys Idols**2 Kings 18:4**

⁴ It was he who took away the high-places and broke down the monuments; he also cut down the Asherah pole and

2 Kings 18:4 (continued)

[he] pounded to pieces the serpent of copper that Moses had made; for until those days the sons of Israel had been fuming incense to it, and one called it Nehushtan.

2 Kings 18:5–8

⁵ In Yahweh Elohim of Israel [1] he trusted; and after him there was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor was there among those before him. ⁶ [2] He clung to Yahweh and [3] did not withdraw from following Him; [4] he kept His instructions that Yahweh had enjoined on Moses. ⁷ And Yahweh came to be with him; in all wherein he went forth, he proceeded intelligently.

He revolted against the king of Assyria and would not serve him. ⁸ It was he who smote the Philistines as far as Gaza and its territories, from the tower of field-keepers to the city fortress. **[end text]**

2 Chronicles 31:1

¹ *When all this was finished, all Israel who had converged went out to the cities of Judah and broke down the monuments, hacked down the Asherah poles, tore down the high-places and the altars from all Judah and Benjamin, also in Ephraim and Manasseh, until they had finished.*

Then all sons of Israel returned to their own cities, each man to his holding. **[end text]**

2 Kings 18:4 and 2 Chronicles 31:1. After the Passover, the festival of unleavened bread, and the extra week of celebration, Hezekiah became the very definition of the word “iconoclast,” someone who destroys religious images or opposes their veneration.^h He continued his campaign against anything that was used to worship any god other than YHWH, and anything symbolic of non-YHWH worship.

Hezekiah understood his responsibility. It came directly when Moses told Israel how to treat pagan idols, ritual objects, or places of worship. These are in addition to Deuteronomy 12:1–3 (quoted on page 10 above):

“But rather, thus shall you do to them: You shall [1] tear down their altars, [2] break their monuments, [3] hack down their Asherah poles, and you shall [4] burn their carvings [idols] with fire. For you are a people holy to Yahweh your Elohim; Yahweh your Elohim has chosen you to become His, a special people from all the peoples who are on the surface of the ground. ...

You shall burn the carvings of their elohim with fire. You shall not covet the silver and gold on them or take it for yourselves, lest you be trapped by it, for it is an abhorrence to Yahweh your Elohim. You shall not bring an abhorrence into your house, or you will become doomed just as it is. You shall reject it as abominable, yea abominable; you shall reject it as abhorrent, yea abhorrent, for it is doomed.”

• **Deuteronomy 7:5–6, 25–26**

2 Kings 18:4. Hezekiah destroyed an artifact that Moses made, as it says in Numbers 21:8–9:

“Then Yahweh said to Moses: ‘Make for yourself a burning serpent, and place it on a banner pole; and it will come to be that anyone bitten, when he sees it, he will live.’

Moses made a serpent of copper and placed it on the banner pole, and it came to be that if a

^h “Iconoclast,” 2019 Merriam-Webster Dictionary.

serpent had bitten anyone, when he looked to the **copper serpent** he lived.”

The serpent icon (called a “caduceus”) existed from Moses to the days of Hezekiah and Isaiah. Some in Judah considered it an object of veneration, burning incense to it, perhaps when they were ill. We do not know where the serpent icon was located, but I think it was perhaps close to the sanctuary of the Temple. Hezekiah destroyed it just as he destroyed pagan objects. The Hebrew terms translated “copper” and “Nehushtan” are from the same root. The Concordant Literal Old Testament here consistently translates the Hebrew word as “copper” but most translations render the term as “brass.”ⁱ



Ancient (left) and Modern Caduceus

One can wonder, why YHWH commanded Moses to construct this object in the first place. Of course, it was merciful that He did so, but He also forbade Israel to make any likenesses of animals that could be understood as religious objects. It was important for the writer to tell us what Hezekiah did, because Israelites were “**fuming incense**” to the object.

Verses 5. Hezekiah’s personal trust and faith in YHWH are said to be unparalleled among all the kings “**after him**” and “**before him.**” This assessment favorably compared Hezekiah to the good kings of Judah: David, Asa, Jehoshaphat, Uzziah (Azariah), Jotham, and Josiah, the last of the good Kings of Judah. This assessment of Hezekiah indicates the writer or editor of 2 Kings 8:5 lived long after Hezekiah died.

Verse 6. Hezekiah never wavered in his devotion and worship of YHWH alone. The writings of Moses were the guide and example for Hezekiah — influenced by God’s prophets.

Verses 5 and 6 list four features of Hezekiah’s character:

- [1] Hezekiah trusted YHWH,
- [2] Hezekiah clung to YHWH,
- [3] Hezekiah did not withdraw from following YHWH,
- [4] Hezekiah kept YHWH’s instructions according to Moses.

Verse 7a. YHWH rewarded Hezekiah for his trust, and the young king “**proceeded intelligently.**” Hezekiah made an important decision only briefly mentioned here, but it would have decisive impact on the future of the Kingdom of Judah. Hezekiah decided to revolt against the king of Assyria. This meant he stopped paying tribute, and then refused to provide troops to help fight Assyria’s battles alongside the Assyrian king as his subordinate vassal ruler.

Verses 7b–8. Since the times of the Judges the Philistines have been a constant source of trouble and threat to all Israel and particularly to the Kingdom of Judah. Thankfully, the Philistines were sometimes unified and sometimes divided. When YHWH acts on behalf of the king and the people of Judah, good things happen regarding the defense against Philistine incursions.

This statement about the Philistines is an insert separating two major subjects, (1) Hezekiah’s early reign and anti-idolatry campaign, and (2) Assyria’s final destruction of the northern Kingdom of Israel (see [Israel and Judah: 34. Death of the Kingdom of Israel](#)). Assyria will be consolidating their victory over the northern Kingdom of Israel. They then will deal with internal problems of its own kingly successions. Only later will Assyria remember Hezekiah’s rebellion.

Hezekiah has more religious reforms to promote and enforce on the people of Judah before the Assyrians return to confront Hezekiah’s kingdom. Secret idolators will not be happy.

David Sielaff, August 2019

ⁱ See Dr. Martin’s article “[Lingering Idolatry in the Temple of God](#)” where Hezekiah’s destruction of the serpent on a pole icon is discussed. Possibly related are sightings of flying serpents all over the desert regions of the eastern Mediterranean lands. See my December 2018 Commentary “[Fiery Flying Serpent](#).” Isaiah wrote about these reptiles in Isaiah 14:29, and later in Isaiah 30:6 during the reign of Hezekiah. Such creatures are mentioned in a surprising number of secular historical sources.