

King Hezekiah: Heart of Gold, Feet of Clay

Five Short Studies
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1 King Hezekiah is probably one of the most effective kings in Israel's history (Judah actually). He took the throne after the death of his father Ahaz and faced problems that were bad even by today's "standards". The reforms that Hezekiah implemented had an immediate and dramatic effect on Judah. It is what he implemented and how he implemented the reforms that will be part of this study. Another area we will be dealing with is his reaction to some serious situations that occurred during his reign. Before we can deal with Hezekiah, we need to have a short study about what Judah was like before the reign of Hezekiah.

Hezekiah's father was King Ahaz. His reign was one disaster after another until he died at the age of 36-37. Ahaz followed the practices of the pagan nations that surrounded Judah. The result of his disobedience was that his nation suffered a series of tragedies. Tragedies included losing wars, the deaths of 120,000 soldiers during one particular war, betrayal by an "ally", and exile for thousands upon thousands of his people. Yet even after these disasters, King Ahaz refused to seek the Lord.

Apparently believing that the God of Israel was worthless to him (or just plain worthless), the King shut the temple down to prevent people from worshiping there. He also took many of the items that were in the temple and broke them apart. He put up altars and shrines to pagan gods all over the land so people could offer up sacrifices.

By the time of the death of King Ahaz, Judah was a broken-down shell of a nation. Large numbers of people had died for various reasons and large numbers had been exiled into other lands. The temple was worn from lack of use, it's insides gutted and its doors shut.

These were some of the issues facing Hezekiah when he took over the throne from his father Ahaz. Hezekiah, like any leader in his situation had a lot of rebuilding to do. What were his reforms? Did he implement economic reforms? Did he spread money all over the place? Did he give his subjects silly literary platitudes to give them confidence? The answers to these and other questions are of paramount importance to us as followers of Yeshua (Jesus) in this 21st century.

In the next study, we will discuss the initial reforms King Hezekiah implemented. Those reforms were an outgrowth of his faith in the Lord. His changes were (and still are) very different from current national and economic reforms that are implemented in many parts of our world today.

Kings Hezekiah: Rebuilding a Shattered Nation

2 When King Hezekiah took the throne of Judah, he had a formidable task before him. His father King Ahaz had recently died and left a **broken, shattered** nation. Idolatry was rampant, the Temple was closed and thousands of people were either dead or in exile. King Hezekiah's job was obvious: rebuild a nation. The choice he made is opposite to what most countries in our modern world would take. He chose to seek the Lord and rebuild the house of God.

The first things that Hezekiah did were to open the Temple doors and repair them. He also went through the land removing the pagan shrines, smashing sacred pillars and cutting down Asherah poles. He realized that any physical and/or economic issues that the country faced were not the primary issue. He knew that the problems in his kingdom were spiritual problems.

Next King Hezekiah called the priests and Levites together to meet with him near the Temple. He commanded them to begin the process of restoration. They were to purify themselves and purify the Temple. Although his speech to the priests did not include a specific reference to his father King Ahaz, he was clear in stating that the current desperate situation they were in was because their ancestors abandoned the Lord and His Temple.

The Levites got together and did a methodical cleansing and purification of the Temple, removing every object of defilement. After the Temple was declared clean and purified, the sacrificial system was reinstated along with singing praises to God, blowing trumpets and bowing in worship. The entire process, from cleaning and purifying the Temple to restarting Temple worship took only 16 days.

“And Hezekiah and all the people rejoiced because of what God had done for the people, for everything had been accomplished so quickly.” 2 Chronicles 29:36 (New Living Translation-NLT)

What can we learn?

King Hezekiah understood that if his nation was to prosper again they had to first deal with their relationship with the Lord. In our modern world, few leaders or governments would think that many of the problems they face are actually spiritual issues that need spiritual answers. Problems are usually considered just physical or economic issues. Committees are formed, bills are passed and money is spent. Everyone hopes these things will be part of a permanent solution to their situations. Unfortunately, most of the time they deal with just surface issues. Enduring solutions require changes at a deeper level. Our hearts need to change and only Yeshua (Jesus) can make the change.

Godliness makes a nation great, but sin is a disgrace to any people. Proverbs 14:34 (NLT)

In the next study, we will discuss what happens to the nation after they prepare for and celebrate the first Passover since the time of Solomon.

King Hezekiah: Celebrating Passover Brings National Revival

3 Before the feast of Passover

After King Hezekiah had restored the priesthood and resumed Temple worship, he then set about getting the nation to celebrate Passover. He sent letters of invitation not only to Judah but also to Israel as well. He asked them to come to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover of the Lord. The king sent runners throughout all Israel and Judah. In Israel, most of the people just laughed at the runners, but some of the people from the tribes of Asher, Zebulun, Ephraim and Manasseh humbled themselves and came to the feast.

The letters of invitation that King Hezekiah sent throughout the land of Judah and Israel introduces a sometimes forgotten element to the Passover celebration. Unlike the way that most people, Jewish or Non-Jewish, have celebrated Passover throughout history, the invitation letters were a **straightforward call for repentance**. The “sometimes forgotten” element in Passover is that it includes a call for repentance. **Hezekiah starts out the feast with repentance.**

"O people of Israel, return to the Lord, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, so that he will return to the few of us who have survived the conquest of the Assyrian kings. Do not be like your ancestors and relatives who abandoned the Lord, the God of their ancestors, and became an object of derision, as you yourselves can see. Do not be stubborn, as they were, but submit yourselves to the Lord. Come to his Temple, which he has set apart as holy forever. Worship the Lord your God so that his fierce anger will turn away from you. For if you return to the Lord, your relatives and your children will be treated mercifully by their captors, and they will be able to return to this land. For the Lord your God is gracious and merciful. If you return to him, he will not continue to turn his face from you." 2 Chronicles 30: 6-9 (New Living Translation-NLT)

During Passover-a chronicle of events

- As the people started to arrive in Jerusalem for the feast, they started out by first removing all the pagan altars in Jerusalem and throwing them into Kidron Valley.
- The Levites played an instrumental and invaluable role in helping the priests do their duties. They also helped all those who were ritually impure at Passover time to slaughter their Passover Lamb.
- Four of the tribes were still unclean at the start of the feast. King Hezekiah prayed that the Lord would forgive and heal them. The Lord answered his prayer.
- **Each day** of the feast, the Levites sang to the Lord with loud instruments.
- The people were so blessed by the seven days of Passover that they decided to celebrate for another seven days, making for a combined total of fourteen days.

There was great joy in the city, for Jerusalem had not seen a celebration like this one since the days of Solomon, King David's son. Then the priests and Levites stood and blessed the people, and God heard their prayer from his holy dwelling in heaven. 2 Chronicles 30: 26-27 (NLT)

After the feast

Scripture records an incredible event that occurs after the Passover. It is best to read it for yourself:

When the festival ended, the Israelites who attended went to all the towns of Judah, Benjamin, Ephraim, and Manasseh, and they smashed all the sacred pillars, cut down the Asherah poles, and removed the pagan shrines and altars. After this, the Israelites returned to their own towns and homes. 2 Chronicles 31:1 NLT

A unique Passover feast

This Passover feast had a number of exceptional elements in comparison to what we normally associate with Passover. These elements for the most part follow a pattern of revival.

- King Hezekiah reintroduced the nation to Passover by calling for repentance.
- As the people entered Jerusalem, they “cleaned” the city up by removing the idols and shrines.
- The people of Judah and those tribes from Israel that attended were so blessed that they celebrated for fourteen days. They didn’t want it to end.
- When the feast was finally over and they went home, they smashed all the idolatrous pillars, poles and altars in the land. The Lord had revived the people. The result of the revival was their willingness to clean up the towns where they lived.

King Hezekiah and the Assyrian Invasion

4 When Hezekiah became king of Judah, he restarted Temple worship, restored the Levitical and Priestly functions, preached repentance and celebrated Passover on a national basis. In the midst of all this, the nation went through a series of revivals. On a political level, he revolted against Assyria and refused to send tribute to them. As far as rating his reign Scripture records:

*Hezekiah trusted in the LORD, the God of Israel. **There was no one like him among all the kings of Judah, either before him or after him.** He held fast to the LORD and did not cease to follow him; he kept the commands the LORD had given Moses. And the LORD was with him; he was successful in whatever he undertook. 2 Kings 18:5-7(New Living Translation-NLT) **emphasis added***

However, as often happens in peoples lives, after great victories come times of testing. Testing can come in many forms. Individually it might come against us physically, mentally, emotionally, financially, or legally. Nations are equally susceptible to hard times, testing and difficulties. King Hezekiah was not exempted from that possibility.

Four years into his reign the king witnessed the northern kingdom, Israel, being destroyed by Assyria, its people sent into exile for their sins. Fourteen years into his reign, Assyria now with a different king invaded Judah with the intention of conquering the nation and Jerusalem. Unlike in times past the king of Judah, Hezekiah, reacted differently, almost atypically, to what we might expect of him. After years and years of trusting the Lord, it almost seems as if the king panicked.

First Hezekiah sends an apology to the king of Assyria, Sennacherib, for revolting and not sending tribute. Hezekiah asks about terms for tribute money if only Assyria would withdraw. When the amount demanded is received, Hezekiah does an almost incomprehensible series of actions. To meet the demands, he takes all the gold and silver from the treasuries and the Temple, even striping off all the gold on the doors and doorposts of the Temple. It didn’t work. King Sennacherib continued to send his armies towards Jerusalem.

Apparently, Hezekiah must have realized his folly, because he started to take the proper steps to prepare for war. The king fortified the city walls, stopped the flow of water outside the city and redirected it in a different direction, and built weapons. When the confrontation with the army of King Sennacherib occurred, Hezekiah reacted in a manner more consistent with trusting the Lord. He didn't panic. Instead, he and Isaiah the prophet prayed to the Lord for help. The result was the miraculous destruction of Assyria's army by The Angel of the Lord.

Things to consider and learn

- Testing, trials and difficulties can occur to anyone. They have a tendency to reveal parts of our lives we didn't know existed.
- Perhaps we need to consider the possibility that the Lord allowed this to happen because Hezekiah had grown a little too comfortable with success. Trials can reveal weaknesses in us that need to be dealt with.
- We are all men and women who have been saved by grace. Like Hezekiah, we are imperfect and can make mistakes. Hezekiah made the mistake of panicking and trying to solve the crisis without the Lord. He learned from his mistake and got back on track. He trusted the Lord.
- A worse failure would have been if Hezekiah had not learned from his mistake but instead continued in his folly. Making mistakes does not make us failures. Not learning from them would.

After the Lord rescued Hezekiah and Jerusalem from their enemies, there was peace throughout the land. The King became highly respected by the surrounding nations. We must remember that Hezekiah's reputation was the result of his obedience to the Lord and His Word. He could not possibly take any credit for his status and standing. It is a lesson we must all remember.

Hezekiah: His later years

5 About the same time, if not just after the Lord's rescue of Israel from the Assyrians, King Hezekiah became deathly ill. After years of hard work and struggle to restore the nation to the way of the Lord, Isaiah the prophet informs the king that his current illness will be fatal. It must have come as quite a shock. Hezekiah responded by prayer and weeping before the Lord. The answer to his prayer was 15 extra years of life and the confirming sign of his prayers by a miracle of the sun moving backwards.

Yet the bible records that the king and the nation of Judah did not respond properly (lack of gratitude?) to the Lord's grace. After years of struggle, Hezekiah seems to have developed a problem that would occur later in his life - the sin of pride and boasting.

Someone must have confronted the king and the nation, because both repented and humbled themselves before the Lord. Hezekiah displayed the same noble character as he demonstrated during the Assyrian crisis. When he realized he was wrong, in sin or being foolish, he would admit it, repent to the Lord and move back in the right direction. As I said before, making a mistake is not failure; however, not learning from them would be.

Summary of King Hezekiah's life

It amazes me that there are not more books and studies on the life of King Hezekiah. Scripture states that there was no other king before or after him that served the Lord with such devotion. Within a few years of his ascension to the throne, he led the nation in a full-fledged revival. It is an "accomplishment" that can be said about few leaders in history. Yet included with his numerous successes was the fact that he was human just like all of us - zealous for the Lord but prone to panic, pride and boasting.

What can we learn from Hezekiah?

Nationally: He knew that the nation of was far from the Lord. He also knew that the restoration of the nation meant repentance before they do anything else. In other words, a *lasting* restoration of the nation was dependent on first seeking the Lord. Any enduring national and economic reforms would come out of putting the Lord first.

Individually: Seek **first** the kingdom of God and His righteousness and then everything else will be given to us.