

## **Dr. August Konkell, Chronicles, Session 22, Hezekiah**

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With Hezekiah, we move into another era in the story of all Israel, as told by the Chronicler. The Chronicler clearly has a very strong interest in Hezekiah because he gives him four long chapters. The Chronicler also has a unique interest in Hezekiah because only one of his four long chapters makes reference to the story of Hezekiah as we know it in both Kings and Isaiah.

The story of Hezekiah, as we know it in Kings and Isaiah, has mostly to do with one particular event, the siege of Sennacherib against Jerusalem. We made note of the fact that the alliance that Ahaz had attempted with the Assyrians failed rather utterly in that the Assyrians had no intention of keeping an agreement with him. Their intention was to take over Judah and that is precisely what happened during the reign of Hezekiah in the year 701.

This is one of those dates that can be dated very, very precisely by our calendar, both because of the detail of the biblical records as well as the detail of the Assyrian records. By using solar and lunar eclipse calculations, we can calculate that date at the end of the 8th century very precisely. So, that's Kings and that's Isaiah.

Kings emphasizes particularly the faithfulness of Hezekiah, and of course, Isaiah uses Hezekiah as an example of the way in which there is a future for the city of Jerusalem and renewal for the city of Jerusalem. For the Chronicler, Hezekiah is critically important because now we have the restoration of worship in a way that has not been present since the time of Solomon and this is one of the reasons why we refer to Hezekiah in Chronicles as a type of second Solomon. It's because of the great detailed description we have of the restoration of not only the temple but the Passover and the other festivals that go along with it.

So, this is why this king becomes so prominent for the chronicler. It also is prominent because, of course, now there is no competition at Baal and at Dan. Those shrines are all gone.

That has all been taken over. Those people have no independent rule, and so Hezekiah is free, completely free to appeal to these people to come to the temple at Jerusalem, and that becomes part of what the chronicler wants to emphasize. So, to come back to our outline of Chronicles, this is the second major section within 2 Chronicles.

The first was Solomon's reign and then his successors, but now we have what the chronicler is going to call healing. Hezekiah is that king who submits to God and

through whom healing comes. So, we begin with a summary of Hezekiah's reign as given by the chronicler, which then moves to Hezekiah's exhortation immediately upon his reign to restore the temple.

An exhortation that this is what needs to be done. So, we have a detailed description of the way the temple begins to be purified and the sanctuary restored. We may be more familiar with this from Josiah because in Kings, that's the more prominent story, and that's when the book of Law is discovered in the temple, but the temple restoration and this is also pretty clear in Kings, really begins with Hezekiah.

Josiah is not the first king to begin this, as sometimes seems to be the presentation. Hezekiah begins with the restoration of the temple and with the rededication of the temple, which is, of course, associated with the sacrifices. The sacrifices now give praise to God, and here, of course, we have all of the musicians and all of the songs of praise which Hezekiah was all a part of restoring.

So, this chapter in Chronicles is very important in emphasizing that Hezekiah is dedicated to the one thing that matters. This is not his throne; it is God's throne, and to demonstrate that it's God's throne, he must restore the symbolism and the rituals that tell us about the rule and the kingdom of God in Judah. So, Hezekiah's then first ambition is the Passover.

This is just a marvelous description of the Passover under Hezekiah. Once the temple has been restored, the next step then is to restore the festivals that go along with the temple. and as we have already said, there are three major pilgrimage festivals as they're called, a hag or a time when people from all representatives from all parts of all Israel come to Jerusalem and celebrate. Now the Passover as we know from Exodus doesn't start out as being a pilgrimage festival.

It actually starts out as something that's sacrificed in each home where everybody eats the entire lamb. But it evolves, and because it's a major festival and it's at the start of the year, it comes to be a pilgrimage for all of the people to come to Jerusalem to worship, and of course, we clearly see that that's the time, true in the time of Jesus where Jesus gathers his disciples together on the feast of the Passover. So what Hezekiah does then is, first of all, extend an invitation to all Israel to join the Passover.

There's a pun in the narrative here that should really not be ignored. It's on the Hebrew word shul. It has that word, the sense of return.

The sense of return can mean to repent and to turn to God or it can have a more literal sense of simply a turning. The narrator uses this word multiple times in this account in which he calls on the people to do two things. One, he wants them to turn in the sense of repent.

So, we've been negligent. We haven't observed the Passover. In fact, the narrative makes clear that no Passover like this has been observed since the beginning of the kingdom.

So, Hezekiah sends his messengers out to everywhere in Israel, not just Judah, but he sends his messengers everywhere, and they're saying shul, return, which means we have to repent. We have to turn back to God and then return back to the temple. Come to my Passover.

Let us celebrate the Passover. So, this is the appeal of the messengers. Now, what happens in the course of this appeal is that they are so enormously successful that they discover they weren't ready.

There weren't enough people who were prepared to offer the Passover lamb according to regulations at the temple. And there weren't enough priests around to perform all of the ceremonies. So, they actually had to violate the procedures that were given for the celebration of the Passover just so they could accommodate all of the people.

And this, of course, is recognized. So, Hezekiah turns to God, and he says, you know, we haven't observed the Passover because we've not followed the time correctly, and we couldn't follow all of the procedures correctly. We just didn't have enough people.

But Lord, we're turning to you, and we're seeking your mercy. And here is where the chronicler points out that when Hezekiah sought the Lord, the Lord would hear from heaven, and he would turn and he would heal. And that word is used very deliberately.

So, the chronicler uses this experience of the Passover to show precisely that the prayer of Solomon that came to him in the vision at Gibeon is being recognized, that if my people which are called by my name will turn and will seek my face, then will I hear from heaven and will heal. So, this is another sense in which Hezekiah is the second Solomon because he's actually the one who, in a way like never before, implements the fulfillment of this prescription that Solomon himself has given for the way in which the kingdom of God may be observed. So, then, we will continue the celebration of the Passover until the whole time is complete, which goes beyond all of the regulations.

So, Hezekiah then, is that king who does much more than restore the temple. What he's doing is restoring the hearts of the people and he's bringing them to Judah and bringing them to realize their roots. Of course, by bringing them to the Passover, they are remembering the very roots of their redemption.

What was the Passover? Well, the Passover was to remember the coming from Egypt. That was where God had judged the Egyptians in the last plague, the slaying of their son, the oldest son. And the Israelites in the observance of the slaying of the lamb were declaring that they were the ones who belonged to God and God decreed at that point in time, the Passover is always the sign that you observe, the festival that you observe of my redemption.

It is no accident that at the Passover, Jesus takes the bread, and he takes the wine. And essentially, he says, this now is your Passover. I am the lamb.

When you eat this bread, it's my body. And when you drink this wine, it's the new covenant because I am the one who is bringing to you the redemption that God began at the Exodus. Well, that's the significance of the Passover here in the story of Hezekiah: to remind them of their very roots, of their very beginning.

It is all Israel in a very dynamic way because there no longer is a Northern Israel. So, they are not a political state. They are a people, a people under God, a people of confession, and the people identified as participating in God's redemption because they are participating in God's Passover, the major event that must take place.

For that reason, for the chronicler, Hezekiah is a whole turning point in showing what all of Israel is supposed to be.