

LESSON TWENTY-THREE 30-33

HEZEKIAH AND THE PASSOVER REORGANIZATION OF TEMPLE PROCEDURES ASSYRIAN INVASION THE REIGNS OF MANASSEH AND AMON

14. THE REIGN OF HEZEKIAH—Continued (29-32)

INTRODUCTION

The passover was kept and Hezekiah led in a genuine religious reformation. The Temple became the real house of God again. Priests served and worshipers brought their tithes. God delivered Hezekiah and his people from the Assyrians. Manasseh destroyed much of the good his father had accomplished.

TEXT

(Scripture text in Lesson Twenty-two)

PARAPHRASE

(Scripture text in Lesson Twenty-two)

COMMENTARY

The celebration of the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread received Hezekiah's immediate attention. That which was attempted by the king had not been done among Jehovah's people since Solomon's day. He dared to hope that all of the Hebrews, both southern and northern kingdoms, would gather in Jerusalem for the Passover and the week of worship and feasting that followed. One of the main concerns of Jeroboam I was to keep the people of the northern kingdom from attending these celebrations at the Temple. So he had made idolatrous worship convenient and readily available for his people. The summons to the feast were sent out through the length and breadth of the land. "From Beersheba to Dan" (verse 5) covered all of Canaan from south to north, a distance of one hundred and fifty miles. The "posts" (swift runners) carried the

good news calling for genuine repentance, for faithfulness to "Jehovah", the God of the Hebrew patriarchs. In the invitation was expressed the hope that the northern kingdom might not be completely lost to the Assyrians who at that time had led many northern Hebrews captive. The king's appeal was that these northern brethren remember their relationship in the common parentage of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Hezekiah urged them not to be stiffnecked (recklessly stubborn); but rather to return (to repent) to Jehovah. Hezekiah's runners remind us of the men sent out by Jesus to the villages of the Jews to tell them He was coming. The posts were as far north as Asher which bordered Phoenicia. Their brethren in the north subjected them to ridicule. A few of the northern Israelites accepted the invitation. The people of Judah showed a willingness to follow Hezekiah's leadership.

The time of the keeping of the Passover as this was done by Hezekiah is a matter of interest. This feast was supposed to be kept during the evening of the fourteenth day of the first month, Abib (Exodus 12:18). When the Hebrews were preparing to leave Mount Sinai the time came for the Passover to be observed. Some of the people were ceremonially unclean and could not share in the feast. For such persons an appointment was made whereby they could keep the Passover one month later on the same day of the month (Numbers 9:11). In Hezekiah's day the decision was made, apparently with Jehovah's approval, that the Passover be kept in the second month, Iyar, because there was a need for more sanctified priests and because a general announcement of the celebration needed to be published.

Many of the priests did what was necessary to qualify themselves to serve in God's House. By special dispensation they were assisted in the preparation of the offerings by the Levites. God's Word required that one be ceremonially clean in order to keep the Passover. Due to the special circumstances of this Passover, some of the ceremonial requirements were relaxed. Hezekiah personally prayed for the whole assembly. He asked Jehovah's forgiveness. The Lord heard the king's prayer;

“He healed the people” (verse 20). The Feast of Unleavened Bread followed immediately upon the Passover and lasted seven days (Exodus 12:15). These were days of worship and of unrestrained joy in the offering of sacrifices to Jehovah. The joyful spirit of the whole assembly is well demonstrated in their request that the usual seven day period be doubled. Many sacrifices were presented to Jehovah and it was truly a religious holiday in Jerusalem.

There had been a concerted effort to destroy every suggestion of idolatry in the city of Jerusalem. When the feast days had passed, attention was given to the destruction of images throughout Judah and even in Ephraim and Manasseh to the North.

Due to Ahaz' utter disregard of the Temple and of Jehovah worship the priesthood was seriously disorganized. David, in his time, had carefully set up the courses of priests and Levites. Hezekiah determined to follow David's example in this matter. Priests were appointed and the king made certain that they were well acquainted with every part of their work. He made all provisions for the daily sacrifices. There was to be an offering on the altar day and night. The people were taught to bring their tithes to the Temple and thus provide for their ministers, the priests and Levites, so the ministers could “give themselves to the law of Jehovah”. Grain, wine, oil, honey, sheep and oxen were brought to the Temple. By the third month, Sivan, the harvest of barley and wheat was completed. By the seventh month, Tisri, the vintage, flax, and olive harvest had been gathered. Out of these materials the “heaps” were fashioned. Hezekiah was well pleased with the popular acceptance of his leadership. Azariah, the chief priest, made a good report on the people's “oblations” (offerings). The priests and Levites had all necessary provisions and the people's lives were blessed.

Rooms were provided at the Temple for the storage of the material of the tithes. The Levites who were specially appointed to attend to the storage and use of the tithes are named in this account. Kore had the special assignment of administering the free will offerings. These were associated with the peace

offering and were the only offerings for which an imperfect animal would be accepted. In Joshua's day forty eight Levitical cities were appointed throughout Palestine. With the division of the kingdom, the number of these cities was greatly reduced. Kore and his associates were to fair and were not to respect persons in administering the tithe. All of the Levitical families were to share in the Temple provisions. The serving priests and Levites at this time began their ministries at the age of twenty years. The sons of Aaron were those priests who were of high priestly lineage. The "suburbs" were the pasture lands surrounding each Levitical city. The chronicler commends Hezekiah. His work was good, right, faithful. He sought God with his whole heart.

A more complete record of Hezekiah's encounter with Sennacherib is given in II Kings 18:13 through II Kings 19:37 and in Isaiah, chapters 36 and 37. We have here a summary of these experiences. In Isaiah's day the Assyrians under Tiglath-pileser and Sargon had captured Samaria (722-721 B.C.) and had over-run the northern kingdom. Jerusalem and Judah were to feel the threat of Assyrian dominion when Sennacherib led a powerful army into Judah and camped in the Philistine plain. Sennacherib had already taken several Judean villages and was busy marshaling his forces for an attack on Jerusalem. Hezekiah reasoned that his captial would soon be under siege. He cut off the water supply that might aid the enemy and very skillfully diverted the water so as to bring it into reservoirs within the city.¹ He strengthened the walls of the city, provided his army with necessary weapons, and called them to trust in Jehovah.

As Sennacherib planned his assault on Jerusalem his army was at Lachish about thirty five miles southwest of the capital. He sent a captain named Rabshakeh² to threaten Hezekiah and his people and to offer the opportunity of surrender. Rabshakeh said they would besiege the city. He said that Hezekiah had deceived the Hebrew people. He made his fatal

¹Spence, H. D. M., *The Pulpit Commentary*, II Chronicles, p. 384

²A Babylonian title meaning "Chief Prince".

mistake when he defied Jehovah by challenging His power to deliver Jerusalem and Judah from the Assyrians. This defiance of Jehovah had proved to be Goliath's ruin in David's day. Sennacherib would have come against the city at once, but he had to meet an attack by the Ethiopians under Tirhakah, their king. So Rabshakeh had come and without respect for king or people heaped his insults on his hearers in their own language. Letters were brought from the Assyrian field headquarters which were just as insolent as Rabshakeh's words. Hezekiah spread these scrolls before Jehovah and prayed for guidance. Jehovah answered through Isaiah, the prophet, and predicted that the Assyrians would not build a mound against Jerusalem or shoot an arrow at a Hebrew soldier. In one night one hundred eighty five thousand Assyrian soldiers died in their camp at the hands of "an angel" (verse 21). Sennacherib hurriedly fled to Nineveh, his capital. While he worshiped his god, Nisroch, his two sons killed him and fled to the region of Ararat. Jehovah vindicated His holy name and spared His people.

Hezekiah's boil (cancer) threatened his life. He heard God's word, "Set your house in order. You are to die". He asked the Lord for some more time to complete his reformation and to father a son. Jehovah told him He would add fifteen years to his life and confirmed the same by causing the shadow to reverse on the sun dial (two sun-rises in one day). Hezekiah was a great and good king; but he did not perfectly follow Jehovah. Terrible times were in store for Jerusalem and Judah; but Jehovah was merciful in sparing Hezekiah from the sorrow of those days.

Many internal improvements were made in the kingdom during Hezekiah's time. He added to the national treasury. He built cities. He promoted agriculture. He employed his engineering genius in providing water for Jerusalem. When the visitors came from Babylon, Hezekiah failed to ask Jehovah's will. He treated them like brethren. Jehovah sent Isaiah to condemn Hezekiah in this matter and to tell him that these very people would come at a later day and ruin Jerusalem. "God left

him" in this matter because the king did not seek His counsel. Even in this instance, however, Hezekiah graciously resigned himself to Jehovah's will. He accepted the judgment of the Lord.

Isaiah was well qualified by character and personal knowledge to write about the life and times of Hezekiah. This king was honored in his death. He had been one of Judah's strongest leaders since David's reign.

15. THE REIGN OF MANASSEH. (33:1-19)

TEXT

Chapter 33:1. Manasseh was twelve years old when he began to reign; and he reigned fifty and five years in Jerusalem. 2. And he did that which was evil in the sight of Jehovah, after the abominations of the nations whom Jehovah cast out before the children of Israel. 3. For he built again the high places which Hezekiah his father had broken down; and he reared up altars for the Baalim, and made Asheroth, and worshiped all the host of heaven, and served them. 4. And he built altars in the house of Jehovah, whereof Jehovah said, "In Jerusalem shall my name be for ever." 5. And he built altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of Jehovah. 6. He also made his children to pass through the fire in the valley of the son of Hinnom; and he practised augury, and used enchantments, and practised sorcery, and dealt with them that had familiar spirits, and with wizards: he wrought much evil in the sight of Jehovah, to provoke him to anger. 7. And he set the graven image of the idol, which he had made, in the house of God, of which God said to David and to Solomon his son, "In this house, and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, will I put my name for ever: 8. neither will I any more remove the foot of Israel from off the land which I have appointed for your fathers, if only they will observe to do all that I have commanded them, even all the law and the statutes and the ordinances given by Moses." 9. And Manasseh seduced Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that they did evil more

than did the nations whom Jehovah destroyed before the children of Israel.

10. And Jehovah spake to Manasseh, and to his people; but they gave no heed. 11. Wherefore Jehovah brought upon them the captains of the host of the king of Assyria, who took Manasseh in chains, and bound him with fetters, and carried him to Babylon. 12. And when he was in distress, he besought Jehovah his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers. 13. And he prayed unto him; and he was entreated of him, and heard his supplication, and brought him again to Jerusalem into his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that Jehovah he was God.

14. Now after this he built an outer wall to the city of David, on the west side of Gihon, in the valley, even to the entrance at the fish gate; and he compassed Ophel about with it, and raised it up to a very great height: and he put valiant captains in all the fortified cities of Judah. 15. And he took away the foreign gods, and the idol out of the house of Jehovah, and all the altars that he had built in the mount of the house of Jehovah, and in Jerusalem, and cast them out of the city. 16. And he built up the altar of Jehovah, and offered thereon sacrifices of peace-offerings and of thanksgiving, and commanded Judah to serve Jehovah, the God of Israel. 17. Nevertheless the people sacrificed still in the high places, but only unto Jehovah their God.

18. Now the rest of the acts of Manasseh, and his prayer unto his God, and the words of the seers that spake to him in the name of Jehovah, the God of Israel, behold, they are written among the acts of the kings of Israel. 19. His prayer also, and how God was entreated of him, and all his sin and his trespass, and the places wherein he built high places, and set up the Asherim and the graven images, before he humbled himself, behold, they are written in the history of Hozai.

PARAPHRASE

Chapter 33:1. Manasseh was only twelve years old when he

became king, and he reigned fifty-five years, in Jerusalem. 2. But it was an evil reign, for he encouraged his people to worship the idols of the heathen nations destroyed by the Lord when the people of Israel entered the land. 3. He rebuilt the heathen altars his father Hezekiah had destroyed—the altars of Baal, and of the shame-images, and of the sun, moon, and stars. 4, 5. He even constructed heathen altars in both courts of the Temple of the Lord, for worshiping the sun, moon, and stars—in the very place where the Lord had said that he would be honored forever. 6. And Manasseh sacrificed his own children as burnt offerings in the Valley of Hinnom. He consulted spirit-mediums, too, and fortune-tellers and sorcerers, and encouraged every sort of evil, making the Lord very angry. 7. Think of it! He placed an idol in the very Temple of God, where God had told David and his son Solomon, “I will be honored here in this Temple, and in Jerusalem—the city I have chosen to be honored forever above all the other cities of Israel. 8. And if you will obey my commands—all the laws and instructions given to you by Moses—I won’t ever again exile Israel from this land which I gave your ancestors.” 9. But Manasseh encouraged the people of Judah and Jerusalem to do even more evil than the nations the Lord destroyed when Israel entered the land.

10. Warnings from the Lord were ignored by both Manasseh and his people. 11. So God sent the Assyrian armies, and they seized him with hooks and bound him with bronze chains and carted him away to Babylon. 12. Then at last he came to his senses and cried out humbly to God for help. 13. And the Lord listened, and answered his plea by returning him to Jerusalem and to his kingdom! At that point Manasseh finally realized that the Lord was really God!

14. It was after this that he rebuilt the outer wall of the City of David and the wall from west of the Spring of Gihon in the Kidron Valley, and then to the Fish Gate, and around Citadel Hill, where it was built very high. And he stationed his army generals in all of the fortified cities of Judah. 15. He also removed the foreign gods from the hills and took his idol from the Temple and tore down the altars he had built on the

mountain where the Temple stood, and the altars that were in Jerusalem, and dumped them outside the city. 16. Then he rebuilt the altar of the Lord and offered sacrifices upon it—peace offerings and thanksgiving offerings—and demanded that the people of Judah worship the Lord God of Israel. 17. However, the people still sacrificed upon the altars on the hills, but only to the Lord their God.

18. The rest of Manasseh's deeds, and his prayer to God, and God's reply through the prophets—this is all written in The Annals of the Kings of Israel. 19. His prayer, and the way God answered, and a frank account of his sins and errors, including a list of the locations where he built idols on the hills and set up shame-idols and graven images (this of course was before the great change in his attitude) is recorded in The Annals of the Prophets.

COMMENTARY

Hezekiah had a wicked father; even so, he served God well. The son born late in Hezekiah's life-time proved to be as wicked as his grandfather, Ahaz.¹ A father's wickedness or righteousness does not guarantee the same character in his offspring. Manasseh began to reign at the age of twelve and he was to have the responsibility of the longest reign (55 years) among the kings of Judah. After Hezekiah there was to be only one more good king in Judah, namely, Josiah. Manasseh hurried the kingdom toward its ultimate destiny. Without restraint Manasseh brought in the gods of the nations. High places, heathen altars, Baalim, Asheroth, passing children through the fire were fully sanctioned by the king. Altars to gods were once more set up in Jehovah's Temple.² The host of heaven", the sun, moon, and stars and worshiped as deities. Fortune-telling, astrology, contact with the dead (familiar spirits) were all practiced openly with the government's consent. Instead of leading Judah toward God, Manasseh "seduced" his people and

¹Elmslie, W. A. L., *The Interpreter's Bible*, Vol. III, p. 533.

²Schaff, Philip, *Lange's Commentary, Chronicles*, p. 262.

they became more wicked than the native Canaanites with whom Joshua had contended in his day.

"Jehovah spake to Manasseh" most likely through prophets. There was no inclination to hear God. The Assyrians came and took Manasseh captive. They bound him like a criminal and he was utterly humiliated. In captivity the king came to his senses, repented of his sins and Jehovah mercifully restored him to the throne in Jerusalem. After returning to Jerusalem Manasseh attempted to fill his office honorably. The walls of Jerusalem were strengthened. Gihon was in the Kidron valley just east of Ophel. The fish gate was in the south-east sector of the wall of the city. The king began to cleanse the city of its idols and he also removed gods and altars from Jehovah's Temple. He worshiped Jehovah at the altar designated for this devotion. He was not able to centralize all Jehovah worship at the Temple. Some Jehovah worship was conducted at "high places" in the city and the country. The prayer of Manasseh was regarded as very important. Careful records of this prayer were kept in the annals of his reign. "Hozai" may be a proper name. It also means "seers". A seer was a prophet, one who spoke for God to man. These persons also kept written records about important events. Manasseh's wickedness was also a part of the record of his life. The good he accomplished did not erase the evil he had done. He probably was not granted the highest burial honors in that he was "buried" in his own house".

16. THE REIGN OF AMON (33:20-25)

TEXT

Chapter 33:20. So Manasseh slept with his fathers, and they buried him in his own house: and Amon his son reigned in his stead.

21. Amon was twenty and two years old when he began to reign; and he reigned two years in Jerusalem. 22. And he did that which was evil in the sight of Jehovah, as did Manasseh his father; and Amon sacrificed unto all the graven images which Manasseh his father had made, and served them. 23. And he

humbled not himself before Jehovah, as Manasseh his father had humbled himself; but this same Amon trespassed more and more. 24. And his servants conspired against him, and put him to death in his own house. 25. But the people of the land slew all them that had conspired against king Amon; and the people of the land made Josiah his son king in his stead.

PARAPHRASE

Chapter 33:20, 21. When Manasseh died he was buried beneath his own palace, and his son Amon became the new king. Amon was twenty-two years old when he began to reign in Jerusalem, but he lasted for only two years. 22. It was an evil reign like the early years of his father Manasseh; for Amon sacrificed to all the idols just as his father had. 23. But he didn't change as his father did; instead he sinned more and more. 24. At last his own officers assassinated him in his palace. 25. But some public-spirited citizens killed all of those who assassinated him, and declared his son Josiah to be the new king.

COMMENTARY

Amon, Manasseh's son, reigned only two years. The principal feature of his reign was the re-installation of the images and idolatries which Manasseh had brought to Jerusalem. He was a very irresponsible prince and king. A conspiracy resulting in his death cut his reign short. He made no significant contribution to the lives of his people.

SUMMARY QUESTIONS

LESSON TWENTY-THREE (30-33)

912. Who was invited to share in the Passover?
913. When did they decide to observe the Passover? Was this the appointed time as in Exodus?
914. How extensive was the territory from which people were invited to come to the celebration?
915. What are "posts" as in 30:6?
916. Why name Abraham, Isaac, and Israel?

917. How might the people hope to have Jehovah's wrath removed?
918. What is the promise in 30:9?
919. Where was Zebulun?
920. How were the messengers received?
921. Locate Asher's territory.
922. What was the feast of unleavened bread?
923. Just when was this passover kept?
924. Why were priests and Levites ashamed?
925. How would an ordinary worshiper in the assembly sanctify himself?
926. Who were the responsible persons in killing the passover lambs?
927. What prayer did Hezekiah offer especially for those of the northern regions of Canaan relative to the passover?
928. Explain the "healing of the people" as in 30:20.
929. How long did the feast of unleavened bread last?
930. How were the days of unleavened bread spent? What did the people do?
931. Explain the reference to "other seven days".
932. How was the joy in Jerusalem described?
933. After this great passover what happened in Judah?
934. What were these pillars?
935. Describe the responsibility assumed by Hezekiah relative to the Temple.
936. What were the morning and evening offerings?
937. Explain the reference to the portion of the priests in 31:4.
938. List the material things brought to the Temple by the Hebrews.
939. What happened from the third to the seventh month?
940. What was the content of Azariah's report?
941. For what purpose were chambers prepared in the Temple?

942. What was Kore's assignment?
943. From what age did they number the Levites?
944. From what age did they number the priests?
945. What were the suburbs?
946. How is the work of Hezekiah evaluated in the conclusion of chapter 31?
947. Explain the phrase, "this faithfulness" in 32:1.
948. Name the capital of Assyria and locate it.
949. Why would Hezekiah be concerned about the fountains?
950. What was Millo?
951. Explain the last statement in 32:7.
952. Evaluate Hezekiah's leadership.
953. Carefully locate Lachish.
954. Why did Sennacherib's servants come to Jerusalem?
955. What charge did the enemy bring against Hezekiah regarding altars and high places?
956. What charge did the Assyrians bring against the gods of other nations?
957. Explain the fatal mistake that the Assyrians make at this time?
958. What language did the Assyrian envoys use?
959. In the critical hour what great man of God came to Hezekiah's aid?
960. How was it that Assyria suffered heavy defeat?
961. How did Sennacherib die and where did his death occur?
962. Trace the reference in II Kings and state how many soldiers Assyria lost in one night.
963. When it appeared that Hezekiah would die, how many years were added to his life? What was the sign?
964. Was Hezekiah perfect? Explain.
965. Describe the wealth and material provisions of Hezekiah.
966. Explain the reference to the waters of Gihon.
967. How did Hezekiah deal with the Babylonian ambassa-

- dors? Look in II Kings for Isaiah's word to the king.
968. Who wrote a history of Hezekiah?
 969. How did Jerusalem respond to Hezekiah at his death?
 970. How long did Manasseh reign?
 971. Who set the pattern for Manasseh's religion?
 972. Make a list of the sinful acts of Manasseh.
 973. Explain the reference to children passed through fire.
 974. What is augury?
 975. How did he desecrate the Temple?
 976. Just how wicked did Manasseh and his people become?
 977. How was Manasseh removed from the throne?
 978. How did Manasseh accomplish his re-instatement as king?
 979. Carefully locate Gihon and Ophel.
 980. Identify the "mount of the house of Jehovah".
 981. How were the high places used at this time?
 982. Where are the accounts of Manasseh's life recorded?
 983. How is the reign of Amon described?
 984. How long did Amon reign and what caused his death?
 985. What happened to the conspirators?