

ROYAL INTRODUCTIONS

Kings of the Past Who Point Us to the True King

HEZEKIAH: A Fresh Wind of Change

(2 Kings 18-20; 2 Chronicles 29-32; Isaiah 37-39)

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When we last looked at Judah's kings, we were at the end of the very dark reign of Ahaz. Really, the only good thing you could say about Ahaz is that his rule didn't last longer than it did. When he died after ruling for 16 years, Jerusalem was in a very low place. Yet, it is in these very low places that our Covenant God comes to show His grace, and He does so here in a wonderful way through Hezekiah's ascension to the throne.

Hezekiah was probably the closest thing we have to David in the history of Israel. It is amazing that a man like Ahaz could produce an offspring like Hezekiah, but as we saw previously, the faithful promise-keeping hand of Yahweh was working in spite of Ahaz's evil. Hezekiah's mother was the daughter of a godly priest who undoubtedly had a great influence on Hezekiah. On day one of his reign he began a restoration work not only on the Temple and worship practices, but on the heart of Israel herself. I want to look at the reform efforts that he made. These reforms are only one part of what he accomplished, yet they are the main reason he is so highly respected, and they can teach us a lot about what real reform looks like and what it requires. Let's dig into 2 Kings 18-19 and 2 Chronicles 29.

2 Chronicles 29:3 states, ***"In the first year of his reign, in the first month, he opened the doors of the house of the LORD and repaired them."*** It almost appears that Hezekiah had been planning on this. He began to restore the worship of Yahweh immediately, and through that the hearts of his people. That required throwing out all of the idols, all of the pagan religious objects, and restoring all that was necessary for the proper worship of Yahweh. The Temple, which had been allowed to fall into disrepair, was fully restored. The Levites were admonished, purified, and consecrated to restore covenant worship. When that work was done, Hezekiah led worship for the atonement for all of Judah's sins and a rededication to covenant faithfulness. This was indeed a glorious moment.

This had all been done before by previous kings with little lasting impact. Hezekiah was different in that he went farther than these kings. **2 Kings 18:4** says, ***"He removed the high places."*** Several of the kings who preceded Hezekiah made efforts to bring reform, but the biblical writers repeatedly say that they failed to remove the high places. High places were exactly what the phrase says- places of worship on top of hills and mountains, supposedly closer to the pagan gods. They were an example of syncretism, which is a blend of real religion with pagan religion. Israelites didn't completely cast off worship of Yahweh. They added pagan elements, probably trying to cover all of their bases. Such polluted worship created

many problems, the biggest of which was a corrupted understanding of who Yahweh was. Truth about him was blended with pagan ideas, resulting in a false god that might resemble Yahweh in some ways, but was far from the true Yahweh. Previous kings didn't go deep enough in reform to uproot this dangerous worship form. Hezekiah did. He knew that, until his people were broken from their pagan religious habits and beliefs, their devotion for Yahweh would always lag behind.

Hezekiah didn't just remove bad things from the people; he exchanged them for something much more substantive. Hezekiah re-instituted the Passover. Why was this so significant? Passover had not been faithfully celebrated in Israel for centuries. So most, if not all, the people in Israel had never been a part of a Passover celebration. Also, it was one of the pivotal feasts by which God's people worshipped. The Passover reminded them of Yahweh's salvation, of His covenant, of His faithfulness to His promise, and of His purchase of Israel as His own people. It is on this basis that Yahweh then calls them to live as if they are indeed His beloved children. The Passover pointed to the very foundation of their relationship with Yahweh as His people. Because of that critical purpose, Passover was to be celebrated every year by every family. Neglecting it for so long undoubtedly contributed to their deteriorated spiritual state.

This celebration was such a huge success that one week was not enough. They decided to continue it for a second week. There was so much joy in Jerusalem over what Yahweh had done to bring them out of slavery, as well as His promise to be their God and to shepherd them as His people. It was such an incredible joy to remember their identity as His people and His promises to them. Religious reform is not about emotions alone, but the depth of their joy pointed to something taking place deep in their hearts, something they had not tasted in a long time. True spiritual reform will always be accompanied by deep and passionate joy.

This renewal of faith and joy was critical at this time, because when true reform comes and the people are called to repent and cast off their false sources of security and hope, it has to happen for the leaders as well. Hezekiah's father, Ahaz, had put Israel in a position of debt and slavery to Assyria, because he sought Assyria's help instead of praying to Yahweh. Instead of getting help, he gained only slavery. Hezekiah now had a decision to make. Was he to continue bowing to this pagan king, which would probably maintain the status quo of life in Jerusalem? The price for a façade of peace would be doling out precious resources to the Assyrian king, and continuing to bow to a slave master. Or, he could break from Assyria and not pay. That would make him and Jerusalem rebels, and invite the wrath of the unbeatable Assyrian army to come and enforce their rule, probably destroying Jerusalem. It would definitely involve dealing harshly with Hezekiah personally. In **2 Kings 18:7** we get his answer. **"He rebelled against the king of Assyria and would not serve him."**

This is a critical lesson in regard to repentance. Repentance does not always lead to a better life. The initial consequences of a needed repentance might be painful. This was the case with Hezekiah. He was taking a major risk and putting his whole nation up as a target of this savage nation. Yet, true repentance demanded it. Hezekiah had to break from finding security in pagan hands and instead find it in

Yahweh alone. If they would survive, Yahweh would have to defend them, which He did in a glorious way. Hezekiah did not know if or how they might survive, but it didn't matter. Regardless, they would no longer serve Assyria. They would place themselves completely in the hands of their Covenant God. You can read about it in **2 Kings 18:13 – 19:37**.

So, what do we take away from Hezekiah's story? If we want renewal in our lives, in our church, or in our nation, it will not come if our efforts are only skin deep and do not disrupt our daily lives or put us at risk. If we want true renewal, then we have to ask the hard question, what or who do I love the most, and what is in my life that is a barrier to that love? Hezekiah demonstrated his love for Yahweh by being willing to disrupt the worship practices of the Judaeans. Regardless of how much the people would be inconvenienced or how much their lives would be upended, it had to happen. Hezekiah took the risk of their ire. He also took the risk of offending a nation which had never been successfully opposed. Yet, repentance demanded that any other dependence had to go and dependence in Yahweh alone had to be restored. Hezekiah took those extreme steps, unlike any of his predecessors, because His full confidence and his complete affection was given to Yahweh. To him, it was better to lose to human powers if he had the promise of Yahweh.

How far will we go in repentance? What other "gods" live undisturbed in our lives while we play with religion on the surface? How far will we go and what will we lay down that we might be solely dependent on the promise and affections of Yahweh?

This is a shadow of what the true King to come would demonstrate. When Jesus came, His full devotion was to His Father, even to the point of His own physical destruction. He refused to trust anything in the world other than His Father. He never had to repent of sin, but He went to the extreme to conquer it once and for all, paying the ultimate price of being condemned in our place that we might find freedom from the power of sin and death. He did not come to rule at our expense. He came at his own expense that we might now know true prosperity, freedom, and joy. This is the true King that Hezekiah points us to, and in this King we can rejoice!