

## **JULY 31**

### **2 Chronicles 29**

Hezekiah is one of the two greatest kings after David, rivaled only by Josiah. There are many parallels between Hezekiah and Josiah. Both served after their fathers almost destroyed Judah. Both launched incredible revivals. Both held Passovers that were so genuine that they are commented on as going back to the early days of Israel. Both kings faced the destruction of Judah and the people of God. Of the two, Josiah faces the greatest darkness, but Hezekiah sees the greatest visible deliverance.

Vs. 1-2 Note that Hezekiah's devotion is compared to David's. It is also interesting that although he reigned 29 years, he still died young. Also, his mother seems to have been related to Zechariah the son of Jehoiada. The use of the word "son" or "daughter" often meant a descendant, not the literal son or daughter. I think what Ezra is showing here is why Hezekiah was so much different than his father.

Vs. 3-11 Hezekiah opened the house of the Lord immediately. What a great "pep talk" by this 25-year-old king. Along with the motivation was the command to the Levites to consecrate themselves for the work in the temple and for leading the people in worship. This entire chapter displays Hezekiah's godliness and faith by showing how he refocused the nation on worshipping God.

V. 10 Notice that Hezekiah wanted to make a covenant with the Lord. Only he and Josiah did this. As we have seen, many people of both kingdoms had been captured and led out of Israel. Hezekiah understood he was living in a very dangerous and important time in Israel. By this time, the northern kingdom had already fallen to Assyria and most of the people had been lost to deportation and exile. Most of these people would have been lost to Israel forever, being absorbed into other peoples with no sense of their genealogy or heritage. Deportation usually meant the "extermination" of an ethnic group by mixing them with other peoples.

Vs. 12-19 At Hezekiah's command, the priests first consecrated themselves, and then they consecrated the temple. This was all under the direction of the king.

Vs. 20-24 Once the temple was cleansed, Hezekiah led the priests, Levites and people of Jerusalem and made sin offerings for everyone and everything, cleansing the sin of the land and the people. This was all done according to the books of Moses. Notice too (looking back at v. 2 and looking ahead to the next three verses), that David was also mentioned as being the model to follow.

Vs. 25-31 This time of worship was to complete the consecration of the temple. It was like a celebration. Although the priests and Levites did what only the priests and Levites were allowed to do, these kings, like David and Hezekiah, personally worshiped and led the people in worshipping God.

Vs. 32-36 Now they were ready to worship. This is an interesting note that the Levites were more dedicated to the temple worship than the priests, who were also Levites, but in the family line of Aaron. When God saw that the hearts of the king and the Levites were set to worship Him, He allowed them to make exception and to allow the Levites to participate where there were too few consecrated priests. Isaiah the prophet was present during all of this and I'm sure he was consulted frequently.

V. 36 They perceived that this had come from the Lord. And there's more to come!

As disciples, the lesson is to help people come close to the Lord. Working in the harvest and making disciples can never become separated from loving our Lord and being in His Word daily.

To work without loving Him and seeking Him in the Word creates a work that cannot last. It is a contradiction that Satan knows he can easily exploit.

## **Romans 14**

So, why would this be a huge issue? In a mixed church it is very likely that the Jews were the "weaker" brothers. There was more for them to stumble over, coming from the man-made, restrictive codes of Judaism. As anyone can tell you, "culture" creates incredible disunity in a church and it can keep a church from being able to reach lost people. A church with unresolved internal "cultural" conflicts does not work well in the harvest. It doesn't make healthy disciples, and it usually becomes a bad testimony in its area.

There appear to be two issues here. One is that the conservative people in the congregation were judging the less conservative people. Then the less conservative, more "open," people were publicly engaging in their "eating and drinking" without care, not for the strong judgmental conservatives, but for the weak believers who would violate their own consciences if they were to indulge.

Now, without reading too much of my own experience with this into these notes, I have a few observations.

Vs. 1-4 While "despising" and "passing judgment" seem like the same thing, I don't think they are. Notice that immediately in this chapter they are being linked to the attitudes of two different groups. The despising comes from those who were open to everything. Passing judgment comes from the conservative side of things. In most churches the greatest problem comes from the conservative side judging that the others are wrong. Usually the "open" people really don't care that the conservative people don't, for example, drink wine. They might just "despise" them by making fun of their silly scruples and hang-ups. But the conservative people really do care that the others drink wine and see it as a violation of Scripture and judgment follows.

Vs. 5-9 Regarding matters of conscience, we need to be firmly convinced in our own hearts and live to please the Lord, not others. This is a command. There shouldn't be any judgment toward one another for what the other prefers.

Vs. 10-12 At this point Paul is saying that all of us must give a personal account of ourselves to Christ. This is what Paul mentioned about the gold-silver-precious stone-wood-hay-stubble.

Vs. 13-19 Based on our own personal accountability before the Lord, we are not to judge one another regarding our preferences, but what about the weak? The strong are to refrain from their freedom publicly if it would cause the weak to fall into a trial of conscience.

V. 13 With this challenge in focus, each person was to focus on strengthening others for the harvest rather than contending about matters of conscience. To really understand the issues here, read 1 Corinthians 8, which is a very clear description of a part of the problem faced by believers in that pagan world. The fact that there were also Jews coming into Christianity was a problem too. They had many cultural traditions that could be held on to, but were not necessary in following Christ. Some Jews could shed these traditions in a moment and dive into the ribs and bacon; but others, while understanding the freedom, were still bound in conscience. Look at 1 Corinthians 6 and 10, and notice how Paul affirms freedom but condemns unbridled freedom, especially where it was destroying other believers.

Vs. 14-16 While Paul and the Spirit are declaring all things being clean, they are also saying that living as servants of Christ means living to please God and facilitating growth and unity. This is a very important portion of Scripture, and I think we'll see in chapter 15 that the point of this unity is to proclaim Christ. It is not to simply live peaceably in church. It is to facilitate proclaiming God with one voice.

V. 17 The focus for each disciple is not to express their personal liberty or their personal conservatism, but rather to live in a way before the Lord that reflects the “rightness” of following the Lord and experiencing the peace and joy that come from the Spirit.

V. 18 This kind of service is also expressed in 1 Corinthians 9:19, and it is done for the sake of the gospel.

V. 19 This sounds like 1 Corinthians 14:26. The goal of our interactions is to strengthen and encourage one another.

Vs. 20-23 God is commanding here that a person keeps his freedom to himself. I think that Paul and the Spirit are talking about a proud public display of freedom. Again, if you look at 1 Corinthians 8 and 10, you can see that the real violation occurred publicly, *for if anyone sees you who have knowledge, eating in an idol's temple, and if one of the unbelievers invites you to dinner and you are disposed to go, eat whatever is set before you without raising any question on the ground of conscience. But if someone says to you...* Inherent in the abuse of freedom is that the person doing this has lost connection with his Lord and his Lord's mission on this earth.

Paul isn't done here. This "command" continues into chapter 15, where it ends at the unified testimony in the harvest. Keep in mind that living each day following God's redemptive purpose requires us to keep respecting the mercy we have been shown. This gives us love and humility as we follow Christ in the harvest and helps us overcome our "cultural" preferences. But today we still have churches fighting over "insider" cultural issues. The strongly conservative hold the church hostage to maintain strict and outdated cultural preferences citing these verses. Although they say the harvest is important, they deny what God desires - the lost being reached and disciples being made. On the other hand, you have people making everything so “contemporary,” that there is hardly any substance to their message. In both cases the lost find it hard to find Jesus and disciples are not made who can make disciples.

The following verses are for everyone. 1 Corinthians 9:19-23 *For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them.* <sup>20</sup>*To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law.* <sup>21</sup>*To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law.* <sup>22</sup>*To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some.* <sup>23</sup>*I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings.*

## **Psalm 24**

When you read this, you can see why David's devotion and love for God became the measure of all things. Many of the songs we sing today in worship use words and ideas from the psalms he wrote. Also, since these are Scripture and given by the Spirit, David was one of those people who the Spirit used to inspire the worship of Israel back then, and he still inspires the worship of the church today.

Vs. 1-2 David establishes that God is God and His power and preference is what we bow to.

V. 3 So then, according to the Lord, who does He allow to approach Him?

V. 4 This is the answer, but this only makes sense as God defines these things in His Word. This person lives for God according to God's will, not his own desires.

Vs. 5-6 The blessing of the Lord is for all those who seek Him and call upon Him.

Vs. 7-10 These verses intensify and add to vs. 1 & 2. Why should the earth bow? Because *He is the King of glory*. What does that mean? It means He is our Savior and Protector.

**Proverbs 20:12**

I read this morning where Jesus said to His disciples, "Do you not yet perceive or understand?" We need to spend more time than we do straining ourselves to understand the Word, and to perceive what the Spirit is doing around us. And just like He gave us eyes and ears, He is willing to give to those who ask, show to those who seek and open to those who knock. This should be the pastime of disciples in the harvest.