

THE GLORIOUS REVIVAL UNDER HEZEKIAH

II Chronicles 28:1-31:21

A great revival took place under the leadership of Hezekiah, the king of Judah.

I. The Conditions Preceding This Revival.

The times were characterized by:

1. Religious idolatry. II Chronicles 28:1-4.

During the sixteen years of the reign of King Ahaz Judah became more idolatrous and wicked. Ahaz "made molten images for Baalim." This means that there was brought into Judah not only a form of idolatrous worship, but a system of worship which was marked by licentiousness and unspeakable sensuality. Ahaz forsook the temple and "burnt incense in the valley of the son of Hinnom." He even "burnt his children in the fire." Human victims were offered to Baal, the sun-god, to appease his anger. This was often done in droughts and times of depression. Baal was the god of productivity. This productivity applied to the crops, fruits, animals and people. When prosperity was withheld, the worshipers of Baal would frequently offer a human victim to assuage his wrath and to try to bring about a return of prosperity. The prevailing religious and political condition is described in verse nineteen, "for he made Judah naked." The literal translation is that Ahaz "cast away all restraint." What four words could better describe much of our modern civilization? So many have thrown aside all restraint and live as though the immediate present is all that matters, and that no account for the way that one lives will ever have to be made to God.

When the worship of Baal became the state religion in Judah the morals decayed. It was a sensual worship. Worship reaches the hearts of the people, and its purpose is reflected in their lives. Ahaz "did not that which was right." There was no reason for such an abrupt departure from the right. Jotham before him was a good king, and the kingdom prospered under him. Ahaz had inherited an excellent opportunity in a nation which was prosperous, but with his lapse into idolatry came religious decay, and poverty followed. Because Ahaz sacrificed and burnt incense to Baal, "Wherefore the Lord his God delivered him into the hand of the king of Syria; and they smote him, and carried away a great multitude of them captives, and brought them to Damascus. And he was also delivered into the hand of the king of Israel, who smote him with a great slaughter."

2. Military weakness. II Chronicles 28:5.

We read that in one day Pekah slew 120,000 people in Judah, "because they had forsaken the Lord God of their fathers," and the Israelites "carried away captive of their brethren 200,000, women, sons, and daughters, and took also away much spoil from them." Had Judah been faithful to God and obedient to His laws, she never would have come into the position of prostrate weakness and helplessness before one invasion after another.

This is a moral universe. If the laws of this universe are broken, its skies will inevitably fall in on the transgressors. Ahaz had turned from Jehovah to many other gods. In turn he lost two wars and hundreds of thousands were slain and taken captive. This was too much to pay for so little. Satan always exacts more than the benefit received. God would have strengthened Ahaz had he turned to Him in penitence and sought His help.

3. Diplomatic frustration. II Chronicles 28:16.

"At that time did king Ahaz send unto the kings of Assyria to help him." Ahaz did wrong when he turned away from God. He committed a second evil when he turned to Assyria for military help. Instead of helping him, Tiglath-pileser robbed him. Ahaz offered sacrifices unto the gods of Syria thinking that they might help him, but "they were the ruin of him." He "shut up the doors of the house of the Lord." This was tantamount to breaking off all relations with Jehovah. This act ruled out every protection and blessing of Jehovah. Naturally he stumbled from one frustration to another.

II. The Commencement Of A Glorious Revival.

God saw fit to choose a young king, Hezekiah, to kindle the fires of revival. Hezekiah pitifully described the condition into which his country had come when he said, "Our fathers have trespassed, and done that which was evil in the eyes of the Lord our God, and have forsaken him, and have turned away their faces from the habitation of the Lord, and turned their backs ... Wherefore the wrath of the Lord was upon Judah and Jerusalem, and he hath delivered them to trouble, to astonishment, and to hissing, as ye see with your eyes."

Every great revival begins with one yielded servant of God, and, of course, begins first in the heart of such a man. In this case Hezekiah was that man.

III. The Characteristics Of Hezekiah.

1. He was a man of purpose.

Hezekiah said, "Now it is in mine heart to make a covenant with the Lord God of Israel" (II Chronicles 29:10). He did not say that with his lips until he had purposed it in his heart. Many have spoken just as nobly with their lips, but it did not amount to anything because it did not come from the heart. Hezekiah had bent his will to the will of God. When a man says what he said you may know that his life is yielded to the Spirit of God, that he has surrendered his stubborn will to the will of God, that the honor of God has become the pre-eminent passion of his life, and that everything else is subservient to God's will, first for his own life, then for the life of the nation. He believed that everything else was secondary to spiritual religion. The moment the king declared his purpose to alter the whole religious life of the nation, and went about cleansing the city of Jerusalem from its idolatrous abominations, great multitudes of his people gladly fell in with his plans and did as he commanded.

2. He was a man of action.

"He in the first year of his reign, in the first month, opened the doors of the house of the Lord." He had observed the folly of Ahaz his father. He was gravely concerned when Ahaz closed the doors of the Lord's house, but he was helpless at that time to do anything about it. He patiently waited for his chance. When his father died, he immediately reopened the doors of the Lord's house. When the doors of the Lord's house were opened and the people entered, the first signs of revival were seen. Within two months from his inauguration, the revival had spread to all parts of Judah. The people followed Hezekiah back to God as readily as they had followed Jeroboam or Ahaz away from God.

3. He was a man of righteousness.

"He did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, according to all that David his father had done." Hezekiah was as devoted to Jehovah and His law as David had been. He was more zealous than the most dedicated men in his kingdom.

IV. The Steps Leading To The Revival.

1. Hezekiah opened and repaired the doors of the house of the Lord.
II Chronicles 29:3.

The closed doors had been a symbol of national repudiation of the worship of Jehovah. Judah could not be reconciled to God as long as the doors of the house of the Lord were closed. Through the open doors the people would have access to God. No nation will ever die as long as it is spiritually strong.

2. Hezekiah assembled the priests and Levites to give them instructions.

"And he brought in the priests and the Levites, and gathered them together into the east street, And said unto them, Hear me, ye Levites, sanctify the house of the Lord God of your fathers, and carry forth the filthiness out of the holy place" (II Chronicles 29:4-5). Hezekiah made a very impressive and enlightening address to these religious leaders.

(1) Hezekiah confessed the sins of their fathers as well as their own sins.

"For our fathers have trespassed, and done that which was evil in the eyes of the Lord our God, and have forsaken him, and have turned away their faces from the habitation of the Lord, and turned their backs" (II Chronicles 29:6). When one chooses not to attend church services, he should ask himself this question, "What would happen if everyone else should adopt this same principle of action?" There would not be a church to proclaim the Gospel of Christ.

(2) He called their attention to the consequences of their conduct.

Such blunders had invoked the wrath of God. "Wherefore the wrath of the Lord was upon Judah and Jerusalem, and he hath delivered them to trouble, to astonishment, and to hissing, as ye see with your eyes. For, lo, our fathers have fallen by the sword, and our sons and our daughters and our wives are in captivity for this" (II Chronicles 29:8-9). They had become the object of ridicule.

(3) He inspired the religious leaders.

"My sons, be not now negligent: for the Lord hath chosen you to stand before him, to serve him, and that ye should minister unto him, and burn incense" (II Chronicles 29:11). In verse five he called them "ye Levites," to remind them of their obligation to God as religious leaders. In verse eleven he called them "my sons," to remind them of their relation to him. He expected cooperation from his sons. He urged them to avoid carelessness. He told them what to do, and he was inspiring them to do it. They were to stand before God first and the congregation second. They were to please God and not the people. They had a tremendous responsibility.

3. He restored worship services in the temple.

"Then Hezekiah the king rose early, and gathered the rulers of the city, and went up to the house of the Lord." At the opening service they had

the sin offering, the burnt offering and the thank offering.

4. He suggested that the observance of the Passover at Jerusalem be delayed until the people were cleansed and prepared to participate in its observance.

He issued a decree that the people throughout the land should come to Jerusalem for the observance of it. Letters were sent to Israel and Judah containing appeals to "turn again to the Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel" (II Chronicles 30:6), to "yield yourselves unto the Lord, to "enter into his sanctuary," and to "serve the Lord your God" (II Chronicles 30:8).

The response to these letters varied. Some "laughed them to scorn, and mocked them" (30:10). But some individuals responded more favorably. Multitudes assembled in Jerusalem for the Passover. The people praised God with singing and the playing of instruments. The Scriptures were opened and read, and the people were taught about God and their duty to Him. This was necessary because they had been without the Word of God for years, and their souls were starved. Hezekiah urged the Levites to study diligently and feed the people the pure Word of God. This teaching and preaching of the Word was a major factor in the revival. The people were convicted of their sins and they confessed them to God. It is worthwhile to note that they confessed to God and not to the priest. "Making confession to the Lord God of their fathers" (30:22).

V. The Results Of The Revival.

1. The idols were destroyed.

Having heard the Word of God, felt the presence of God, had a change of mind about God and truly repented of their sins, they could no longer keep their idols.

2. The public worship of God was restored.
3. The lives of the people were changed.
4. The people were blessed in a material way.

Hezekiah built the economy of the nation around time--honored measures of righteousness.

In view of our need of a revival, we must not be careless or negligent about doing the things which God has commanded us.