

LESSON TWENTY-TWO 27-29

THE REIGN OF JOTHAM. AHAZ AND HIS ALLIES. HEZEKIAH, RELIGIOUS REFORMER.

12. THE REIGN OF JOTHAM. (Chapter 27)

INTRODUCTION

Jotham avoided God's house and failed as king in Judah. The door was opened for Ahaz' wicked reign and terrible idolatry. The Damascus altar had no place in Jerusalem. Times were ripe for Hezekiah, one of Judah's most respected kings.

TEXT

Chapter 27:1. Jotham was twenty and five years old when he began to reign; and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem: and his mother's name was Jerushah the daughter of Zadok. 2. And he did that which was right in the eyes of Jehovah, according to all that his father Uzziah had done: howbeit he entered not into the temple of Jehovah. And the people did yet corruptly. 3. He built the upper gate of the house of Jehovah, and on the wall of Ophel he built much. 4. Moreover he built cities in the hill-country of Judah, and in the forests he built castles and towers. 5. He fought also with the king of the children of Ammon, and prevailed against them. And the children of Ammon gave him the same year a hundred talents of silver and ten thousand measures of wheat, and ten thousand of barley. So much did the children of Ammon render unto him, in the second year also, and in the third. 6. So Jotham became mighty, because he ordered his ways before Jehovah his God. 7. Now the rest of the acts of Jotham, and all his wars, and his ways, behold, they are written in the book of the kings of Israel and Judah. 8. He was five and twenty years old when he began to reign, and reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem. 9. And Jotham slept with his fathers, and they buried him in the city of David: and Ahaz his son reigned in his stead.

PARAPHRASE

Chapter 27:1. Jotham was twenty-five years old at the time

he became king, and he reigned sixteen years, in Jerusalem. His mother was Jerushah, daughter of Zadok. 2. He followed the generally good example of his father Uzziah—who had, however, sinned by invading the Temple—but even so his people became very corrupt. 3. He built the Upper Gate of the Temple, and also did extensive rebuilding of the walls on the hill where the Temple was situated. 4. And he built cities in the hill country of Judah, and erected fortresses and towers on the wooded hills. 5. His war against the Ammonites was successful, so that for the next three years he received from them an annual tribute of \$200,000 in silver, 10,000 sacks of wheat, and 10,000 sacks of barley. 6. King Jotham became powerful because he was careful to follow the path of the Lord his God. 7. The remainder of his history, including his wars and other activities, is written in The Annals of the Kings of Israel and Judah. 8. In summary, then, he was twenty-five years old when he began to reign and he reigned sixteen years, in Jerusalem. 9. When he died, he was buried in Jerusalem, and his son Ahaz became the new king.

COMMENTARY

Because of Uzziah's leprosy, Jotham had considerable experience in government before he was installed as king of Judah. At age twenty-five he became king in his own right and he held this high office for sixteen years. Nothing more is known about his mother, Jerushah, or her family. In the latter years of Uzziah's reign the people of Judah forsook Jehovah. Jotham came to the throne at a time of spiritual crisis. He was able to provide responsible leadership within certain limits. Whereas Uzziah had entered the Temple to burn incense like a priest, Jotham did not enter "the temple of Jehovah." Even though he led his people back toward God, there was an alienation in that he did not frequent Jehovah's Temple. This should be contrasted with Solomon's early love for God's House. Generally, the people of Judah were in desperate need of a great spiritual revival.

Jotham concerned himself with certain building improve-

ments in Jerusalem such as "the upper gate". This has been described as a gate leading from the king's palace to the court of priests at the Temple. Ophel means "hill" or "mound" and was located in the southeast sector of Jerusalem below the Temple mount. In the regions of Judah he built other fortifications. The ancient rivalry between Judah and the Ammonites continued. Jotham was able to force the Ammonites to pay considerable tribute in the form of wheat and barley. The measure used here was the "cor" which amounted to about three and one-half quarts. Judah was able to collect ten thousand measures each of wheat and barley through each of three succeeding years. In addition, Judah collected one hundred talents of silver each year. The silver talent may be valued at about two thousand dollars. Having considered Jotham's achievements, the historian attributed his success to the fact that the king "ordered his ways before Jehovah". This brief account is a summary of Jotham's life and times. There were other failures, successes, wars. His biography became a part of the significant history of his people. He was accorded a burial with full honors and was succeeded on the throne by Ahaz, his son.

13. THE REIGN OF AHAZ (Chapter 28)

TEXT

Chapter 28:1. Ahaz was twenty years old when he began to reign; and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem: and he did not that which was right in the eyes of Jehovah, like David his father; 2. but he walked in the ways of the kings of Israel, and made also molten images for the Baalim. 3. Moreover he burnt incense in the valley of the son of Hinnom, and burnt his children in the fire, according to the abominations of the nations whom Jehovah cast out before the children of Israel. 4. And he sacrificed and burnt incense in the high places, and on the hills, and under every green tree.

5. Wherefore Jehovah his God delivered him into the hand of the king of Syria; and they smote him, and carried away of his a great multitude of 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. 6. For Pekah the son of Remaliah slew in Judah a hundred and twenty thousand in one day, all of them valiant men; because they had forsaken Jehovah, the God of their fathers. 7. And Zichri, a mighty man of Ephraim, slew Maaseiah the king's son, and Azrikam the ruler of the house, and Elkanah that was next to the king.

8. And the children of Israel carried away captive of their brethren two hundred thousand, women, sons, and daughters, and took also away much spoil from them, and brought the spoil to Samaria. 9. But a prophet of Jehovah was there, whose name was Oded: and he went out to meet the host that came to Samaria, and said unto them, "Behold, because Jehovah, the God of your fathers, was wroth with Judah, he hath delivered them into your hand, and ye have slain them in a rage which hath reached up unto heaven. 10. "And now ye purpose to keep under the children of Judah and Jerusalem for bondmen and bondwomen unto you: but are there not even with you trespasses of your own against Jehovah your God? 11. "Now hear me therefore, and send back the captives, that ye have taken captive of your brethren; for the fierce wrath of Jehovah is upon you." 12. Then certain of the heads of the children of Ephraim, Azariah the son of Johanan, Berechiah the son of Meshillemoth, and Jehizkiah the son of Shallum, and Amasa the son of Hadlai, stood up against them that came from the war, 13. and said unto them, "Ye shall not bring in the captives hither: for ye purpose that which will bring upon us a trespass against Jehovah, to add unto our sins and to our trespass; for our trespass is great, and there is fierce wrath against Israel." 14. So the armed men left the captives and the spoil before the princes and all the assembly. 15. And the men that have been mentioned by name rose up, and took the captives, and with the spoil clothed all that were naked among them, and arrayed them; and shod them, and gave them to eat and to drink, and anointed them, and carried all the feeble of them upon asses, and brought them to Jericho, the city of palm-trees, unto their

brethren: then they returned to Samaria.

16. At that time did King Ahaz send unto the kings of Assyria to help him. 17. For again the Edomites had come and smitten Judah, and carried away captives. 18. The Philistines also had invaded the cities of the lowland, and of the South of Judah, and had taken Beth-shemesh, and Aijalon, and Gederoth, and Soco with the towns thereof, and Timnah with the towns thereof, Gimzo also and the towns thereof: and they dwelt there. 19. For Jehovah brought Judah low because of Ahaz king of Israel; for he had dealt wantonly in Judah, and trespassed sore against Jehovah. 20. And Tilgath-pilneser king of Assyria came unto him, and distressed him, but strengthened him not. 21. For Ahaz took away a portion out of the house of Jehovah, and out of the house of the king and of the princes, and gave it unto the king of Assyria: but it helped him not.

22. And in the time of his distress did he trespass yet more against Jehovah, this same king Ahaz. 23. For he sacrificed unto the gods of Damascus, which smote him; and he said, "Because the gods of the kings of Syria helped them, therefore will I sacrifice to them, that they may help me." But they were the ruin of him, and of all Israel. 24. And Ahaz gathered together the vessels of the house of God, and cut in pieces the vessels of the house of God, and shut up the doors of the house of Jehovah; and he made him altars in every corner of Jerusalem. 25. And in every city of Judah he made high places to burn incense unto other gods, and provoked to anger Jehovah, the God of his fathers. 26. Now the rest of his acts, and all his ways, first and last, behold, they are written in the book of the kings of Judah and Israel. 27. And Ahaz slept with his fathers, and they buried him in the city, even in Jerusalem; for they brought him not into the sepulchres of the kings of Israel: and Hezekiah his son reigned in his stead.

PARAPHRASE

Chapter 28:1. Ahaz was twenty years old when he became king and he reigned sixteen years, in Jerusalem. But he was an evil king, unlike his ancestor King David. 2. For he followed the

example of the kings over in Israel and worshiped the idols of Baal. 3. He even went out to the Valley of Hinnom, and it was not just to burn incense to the idols, for he even sacrificed his own children in the fire, just like the heathen nations that were thrown out of the land by the Lord to make room for Israel. 4. Yes, he sacrificed and burned incense at the idol shrines on the hills and under every green tree.

5. That is why the Lord God allowed the king of Syria to defeat him and deport large numbers of his people to Damascus. The armies from Israel also slaughtered great numbers of his troops. 6. On a single day, Pekah, the son of Remaliah, killed 120,000 of his bravest soldiers because they had turned away from the Lord God of their fathers. 7. Then Zichri, a great warrior from Ephraim, killed the king's son Ma-aseiah and the king's administrator Azrikam, and the king's second-in-command Elkanah.

8. The armies from Israel also captured 200,000 Judean women and children, and tremendous amounts of booty which they took to Samaria. 9. But Oded, a prophet of the Lord, was there in Samaria and he went out to meet the returning army. "Look!" he exclaimed. "The Lord God of your fathers was angry with Judah and let you capture them, but you have butchered them without mercy, and all heaven is disturbed. 10. And now are you going to make slaves of these people from Judah and Jerusalem? What about your own sins against the Lord your God? 11. Listen to me and return these relatives of yours to their homes, for now the fierce anger of the Lord is upon you." 12. Some of the top leaders of Ephraim also added their opposition. These men were Azariah the son of Johanan, Berechiah the son of Meshillemoth, Jehizkiah the son of Shallum, and Amasa the son of Hadlai. 13. "You must not bring the captives here!" they declared. "If you do, the Lord will be angry, and this sin will be added to our many others. We are in enough trouble with God as it is." 14. So the army officers turned over the captives and booty to the political leaders to decide what to do. 15. Then the four men already mentioned distributed captured stores of clothing to the women and

children who needed it, and gave them shoes, food, and wine, and put those who were sick and old on donkeys, and took them back to their families in Jericho, the City of Palm Trees. Then their escorts returned to Samaria.

16. About that time King Ahaz of Judah asked the king of Assyria to be his ally in his war against the armies of Edom. For Edom was invading Judah and capturing many people as slaves. 17, 18. Meanwhile, the Philistines had invaded the lowland cities and the Negeb and had already captured Beth-shemesh, Aijalon, Gederoth, Soco, Timnah, and Gimzo with their surrounding villages, and were living there. 19. For the Lord brought Judah very low on account of the evil deeds of King Ahaz of Israel, for he had destroyed the spiritual fiber of Judah and had been faithless to the Lord. 20. But when Tilgath-pilneser king of Assyria, arrived, he caused trouble for King Ahaz instead of helping him. 21. So even though Ahaz had given him the Temple gold and the palace treasures, it did no good.

22. In this time of deep trial, King Ahaz collapsed spiritually. 23. He sacrificed to the gods of the people of Damascus who had defeated him, for he felt that since these gods had helped the kings of Syria, they would help him too if he sacrificed to them. But instead, they were his ruin, and that of all his people. 24. The king took the gold bowls from the Temple and slashed them to pieces, and nailed the door of the Temple shut so that no one could worship there, and made altars to the heathen gods in every corner of Jerusalem. 25. And he did the same in every city of Judah, thus angering the Lord God of his fathers. 26. The other details of his life and activities are recorded in The Annals of the Kings of Judah and Israel. 27. When King Ahaz died, he was buried in Jerusalem but not in the royal tombs, and his son Hezekiah became the new king.

COMMENTARY

Ahaz became king of Judah about 736 B.C. He was in office during the lifetime of Isaiah, the prophet. The great "Immanuel" prophecy which was so important in Isaiah's

ministry (Isaiah, chapter 7). was announced first of all to Ahaz. This king may also have known Hosea and Micah, although no direct reference is made to them. Ahaz was not a good king. He never followed the ideals of David. He turned, instead, to the Baalism that in his day ruined the northern kingdom. Jeroboam, son of Nebat, had set the pattern for the kings of Israel. He did as he pleased with regard to religion and he disregarded the law of Jehovah. Jeroboam set up calf worship (molten images) at Bethel and Dan. This was repetition of what Israel had done at Sinai in Moses' day. Ahab and Jezebel compounded the troubles of the northern kingdom by bringing in special kinds of Baalism from Phoenicia. There were no limits to Ahaz' idolatry. The valley of Hinnom bounded Jerusalem on the west and the south. Ahaz desecrated this valley with idol worship. "Burning children in the fire" describes Molech worship. Solomon, at an earlier time, (I Kings 11:7, 8), had sinned in the same way by the worship of Chemosh and Molech. The god, Molech, has been described as resembling an ox with outstretched human arms and with a built-in furnace. Whether or not a child placed in the arms of this heathen god perished depended on the control of the flames by the priests of Molech. How any man could so deal with his own children or the children of other parents is beyond our understanding. This king of inhuman conduct was one of the main reasons Jehovah drove the native Canaanites from their homeland. "High places" were special mounds constructed as places of worship. Usually idol worship was practiced in these places. Sometime Jehovah might be worshiped at the "high place". The worship of Baal was often practiced "on the hills" where the devotees could look out over fertile fields supposedly blessed by Baal. Certain features of the worship of Baal and the Asherah (female Baal) could most appropriately be shared "under green trees". Sexual intercourse and the employment of priestesses were characteristics of Canaanite worship from earliest times. Ahaz followed his own pleasure in all of these matters.

Jehovah has always judged His own people when they have despised His Word. His judgment may be delayed or it may come

quite suddenly. In Ahaz' day the Syrians attacked Judah and led great number of them away captive. Damascus, the capital of Syria, was about one hundred thirty miles north northeast of Jerusalem. The Israelites of the northern kingdom under their king, Pekah, came against Judah and killed one hundred and twenty thousand people "in one day". This was certainly a judgment for Judah. Judgment came even into the King's house with the death of Maaseiah, the king's son, at the hands of the Ephraimite warrior, Zichri. Azrikam and Elkanah, both of whom were very close to king Ahaz, were killed. Ahaz should have understood that Jehovah was not pleased with him.

Not only did Pekah and Israel kill many people in the southern kingdom, they also took two hundred thousand captives. They took whatever goods were available to them and brought prisoners of war and goods back to their main city. Samaria was about thirty five miles north of Jerusalem.

Since the days of Jeroboam I there had been much bitterness between the northern and southern kingdoms of the Hebrews. They often engaged in civil war. Jehovah used Israel at this time to chastise Ahaz; however, Pekah and his people did more than Jehovah intended. The pent-up fury of many years was turned loose. Jehovah intervened in behalf of Judah by sending the prophet, Oded. The slaughter of one hundred twenty thousand of Judah was within Jehovah's will. The captivity and cruel treatment of the two hundred thousand was excessive vengeance. So Oded charged Israel with trespass and warned them that Jehovah would turn His wrath upon them. Wise princes of the tribes of Ephraim, Azariah, Berechiah, Jehizkiah, and Amasa rescued the captives from Judah. Their spoil was restored to them. Their physical needs of food and clothing were provided. Their people who were weak and sick were given attention and the entire army of captives was returned to Jericho and released. Jericho was called "the city of palm trees" even in Moses' time (Deuteronomy 34:3). The city was located in the Jordan valley about seven miles above the Dead Sea and about fifteen miles from Jerusalem.

Isaiah urged Ahaz to trust Jehovah (Isaiah, chapter 7). Ahaz

stubbornly refused. He faced real trouble in Pekah of Israel and Rezin of Syria. He attempted an alliance with the Assyrians which failed miserably. Ahaz had to contend with the Edomites and the Philistines. Judah's people in the vicinity of Beersheba, Beth-shemesh, and Timnah suffered because of these enemies. Tiglath-pilneser, the Assyrian king, did not keep faith with Ahaz. He took the king's money, but he would not fight Ahaz's enemies. In order to pay the heathen king, Ahaz robbed Jehovah's Temple. Ahaz was a genuine outlaw in his relationship to Jehovah. He "dealt wantonly in Judah".

In the days of the Judges when Jehovah's people were terribly oppressed by their enemies because of their sins, the Hebrews finally would repent and Jehovah would send relief. As Ahaz' troubles increased he compounded his sins by adding to the list of gods he served. He observed that the Syrians had been successful in their military engagements. He reasoned that if he served their gods, his luck might change.¹ He saw a heathen altar in Damascus (II Kings 16:10). Urijah, the priest at Jehovah's Temple, was ordered to make a Damascus altar. This heathen altar replaced Jehovah's altar in the Temple. In due time Ahaz impoverished the Temple and closed the doors. Idolatrous altars "in every corner of Jerusalem" and high places "in every city of Judah" were Ahaz' most notable building projects. So he lived and so he died. He never repented. He was one of Judah's most wicked kings. His history was written not to honor the king or the people, but to describe his obstinate refusal to do Jehovah's will and to detail the judgment sent by God. Even in his funeral he was given a dishonorable discharge from life's duties. He was buried in Jerusalem, but not in that plot reserved for those who had served Jehovah well. Judah needed a strong and righteous king. By God's grace such a man was to sit in Ahaz' seat.

14. THE REIGN OF HEZEKIAH (29-32)

TEXT

Chapter 29:1. Hezekiah began to reign when he was five and

¹Clarke, Adam, *A Commentary and Critical Notes*, Vol. II, p. 688

twenty years old; and he reigned nine and twenty years in Jerusalem: and his mother's name was Abijah, the daughter of Zechariah. 2. And he did that which was right in the eyes of Jehovah, according to all that David his father had done. 3. He in the first year of his reign, in the first month, opened the doors of the house of Jehovah, and repaired them. 4. And he brought in the priests and the Levites, and gathered them together into the broad place on the east, 5. and said unto them, "Hear me, ye Levites; now sanctify yourselves, and sanctify the house of Jehovah, the God of your fathers, and carry forth the filthiness out of the holy place. 6. "For our fathers have trespassed, and done that which was evil in the sight of Jehovah our God, and have forsaken him, and have turned away their faces from the habitation of Jehovah, and turned their backs. 7. "Also they have shut up the doors of the porch, and put out the lamps, and have not burned incense nor offered burnt-offerings in the holy place unto the God of Israel. 8. "Wherefore the wrath of Jehovah was upon Judah and Jerusalem, and he hath delivered them to be tossed to and fro, to be an astonishment, and a hissing, as ye see with your eyes. 9. "For, lo, our fathers have fallen by the sword, and our sons and our daughters and our wives are in captivity for this. 10. "Now it is in my heart to make a covenant with Jehovah, the God of Israel, that his fierce anger may turn away from us. 11. "My sons, be not now negligent; for Jehovah hath chosen you to stand before him, to minister unto him, and that ye should be his ministers, and burn incense."

12. Then the Levites arose, Mahath, the son of Amasai, and Joel the son of Azariah, of the sons of the Kohathites; and of the sons of Merari, Kish the son of Abdi, and Azariah the son of Jehallelel; and of the Gershonites, Joah the son of Zimmah, and Eden the son of Joah; 13. and of the sons of Elizaphan, Shimri and Jeuel; and of the sons of Asaph, Zechariah and Mattaniah; 14. and of the sons of Heman, Jehuel and Shimei; and of the sons of Jeduthun, Shemaiah and Uzziel. 15. And they gathered their brethren, and sanctified themselves, and went in, according to the commandment of the king by the words of

Jehovah, to cleanse the house of Jehovah. 16. And the priests went in unto the inner part of the house of Jehovah, to cleanse it, and brought out all the uncleanness that they found in the temple of Jehovah into the court of the house of Jehovah. And the Levites took it, to carry it out abroad to the brook Kidron. 17. Now they began on the first day of the first month to sanctify, and on the eighth day of the month came they to the porch of Jehovah; and they sanctified the house of Jehovah in eight days: and on the sixteenth day of the first month they made an end. 18. Then they went in to Hezekiah the king within the palace, and said, "We have cleansed all the house of Jehovah, and the altar of burnt-offering, with all the vessels thereof, and the table of showbread with all the vessels thereof. 19. "Moreover all the vessels, which king Ahaz in his reign did cast away when he trespassed, have we prepared and sanctified; and, behold, they are before the altar of Jehovah."

20. Then Hezekiah the king arose early, and gathered the princes of the city, and went up to the house of Jehovah. 21. And they brought seven bullocks, and seven rams, and seven lambs, and seven he-goats, for a sin-offering for the kingdom and for the sanctuary and for Judah. And he commanded the priests the sons of Aaron to offer them on the altar of Jehovah. 22. So they killed the bullocks, and the priests received the blood; and sprinkled it on the altar: and they killed the rams, and sprinkled the blood upon the altar: they killed also the lambs, and sprinkled the blood upon the altar. 23. And they brought near the he-goats for the sin-offering before the king and the assembly; and they laid their hands upon them: 24. and the priests killed them, and they made a sin-offering with their blood upon the altar; to make atonement for all Israel; for the king commanded that the burnt-offering and the sin-offering should be made for all Israel.

25. And he set the Levites in the house of Jehovah with cymbals, with psalteries, and with harps, according to the commandment of David, and of Gad the king's seer, and Nathan the prophet; for the commandment was of Jehovah by his prophets. 26. And the Levites stood with the instruments of

David, and the priests with the trumpets. 27. And Hezekiah commanded to offer the burnt-offering upon the altar. And when the burnt-offering began, the song of Jehovah began also, and the trumpets, together with the instruments of David king of Israel. 28. And all the assembly worshiped, and the singers sang, and the trumpeters sounded; all this continued until the burnt-offering was finished.

29. And when they had made an end of offering, the king and all that were present with him bowed themselves and worshiped. 30. Moreover Hezekiah the king and the princes commanded the Levites to sing praises unto Jehovah with the words of David, and of Asaph the seer. And they sang praises with gladness, and they bowed their heads and worshiped.

31. Then Hezekiah answered and said, "Now ye have consecrated yourselves unto Jehovah: come near and bring sacrifices and thank-offerings into the house of Jehovah." And the assembly brought in sacrifices and thank-offerings; and as many as were of a willing heart brought burnt-offerings. 32. And the number of the burnt-offerings which the assembly brought was threescore and ten bullocks, a hundred rams, and two hundred lambs: all these were for a burnt-offering to Jehovah. 33. And the consecrated things were six hundred oxen and three thousand sheep. 34. But the priests were too few, so that they could not flay all the burnt-offerings: wherefore their brethren the Levites did help them, till the work was ended, and until the priests had sanctified themselves; for the Levites were more upright in heart to sanctify themselves than the priests. 35. And also the burnt-offerings were in abundance, with the fat of the peace-offerings, and with the drink-offerings for every burnt-offering. So the service of the house of Jehovah was set in order. 36. And Hezekiah rejoiced, and all the people, because of that which God had prepared for the people: for the thing was done suddenly.

Chapter 30:1. And Hezekiah sent to all Israel and Judah, and wrote letters also to Ephraim and Manasseh, that they should come to the house of Jehovah at Jerusalem, to keep the passover unto Jehovah, the God of Israel. 2. For the king had

taken counsel, and his princes, and all the assembly in Jerusalem, to keep the passover in the second month. 3. For they could not keep it at that time, because the priests had not sanctified themselves in sufficient number, neither had the people gathered themselves together to Jerusalem. 4. And the thing was right in the eyes of the king and of all the assembly. 5. So they established a decree to make proclamation throughout all Israel, from Beer-sheba even to Dan, that they should come to keep the passover unto Jehovah, the God of Israel, at Jerusalem: for they had not kept it in great numbers in such sort as it is written. 6. So the posts went with the letters from the king and his princes throughout all Israel and Judah, and according to the commandment of the king, saying, "Ye children of Israel, turn again unto Jehovah, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, that he may return to the remnant that are escaped of you out of the hand of the kings of Assyria. 7. "And be not ye like your fathers, and like your brethren, who trespassed against Jehovah, the God of their fathers, so that he gave them up to desolation, as ye see. 8. "Now be ye not stiffnecked, as your fathers were; but yield yourselves unto Jehovah, and enter into his sanctuary, which he hath sanctified for ever, and serve Jehovah your God, that his fierce anger may turn away from you. 9. "For if ye turn again unto Jehovah, your brethren and your children shall find compassion before them that led them captive, and shall come again into this land: for Jehovah your God is gracious and merciful, and will not turn away his face from you, if ye return unto him."

10. So the posts passed from city to city through the country of Ephraim and Manasseh, even unto Zebulun: but they laughed them to scorn, and mocked them. 11. Nevertheless certain men of Asher and Manasseh and of Zebulun humbled themselves, and came to Jerusalem. 12. Also upon Judah came the hand of God to give them one heart, to do the commandment of the king and of the princes by the word of Jehovah.

13. And there assembled at Jerusalem much people to keep the feast of unleavened bread in the second month, a very great assembly. 14. And they arose and took away the altars that

were in Jerusalem, and all the altars for incense took they away, and cast them into the brook Kidron. 15. Then they killed the passover on the fourteenth day of the second month: and the priests and the Levites were ashamed, and sanctified themselves, and brought burnt-offerings into the house of Jehovah. 16. And they stood in their place after their order, according to the law of Moses the man of God: the priests sprinkled the blood which they received of the hand of the Levites. 17. For there were many in the assembly that had not sanctified themselves: therefore the Levites had the charge of assembly that had not sanctified themselves: therefore the Levites had the charge of killing passovers for every one that was not clean, to sanctify them unto Jehovah. 18. For a multitude of the people, even many of Ephraim and Manasseh, Issachar and Zebulun, had not cleansed themselves, yet did they eat the passover otherwise than it is written. For Hezekiah had prayed for them, saying, "The good Jehovah pardon every one 19. that setteth his heart to seek God, Jehovah, the God of his fathers, though he be not cleansed according to the purification of the sanctuary." 20. And Jehovah hearkened to Hezekiah, and healed the people. 21. And the children of Israel that were present at Jerusalem kept the feast of unleavened bread seven days with great gladness; and the Levites 22. And Hezekiah spake comfortably unto all the Levites that had good understanding in the 22. And Hezekiah spake comfortably unto all the Levites that had good understanding in the service of Jehovah. So they did eat throughout the feast for the seven days, offering sacrifices of peace-offerings, and making confession to Jehovah, the God of their fathers.

23. And the whole assembly took counsel to keep other seven days; and they kept other seven days with gladness. 24. For Hezekiah king of Judah did give to the assembly for offerings a thousand bullocks and seven thousand sheep; and the princes gave to the assembly a thousand bullocks and ten thousand sheep: and a great number of priests sanctified themselves. 25. And all the assembly of Judah, with the priests and the Levites, and all the assembly that came out of Israel,

and the sojourners that came out of the land of Israel, and that dwelt in Judah, rejoiced. 26. So there was great joy in Jerusalem; for since the time of Solomon the son of David king of Israel there was not the like in Jerusalem. 27. Then the priests, the Levites arose and blessed the people: and their voice was heard, and their prayer came up to his holy habitation, even unto heaven.

Chapter 31:1. Now when all this was finished, all Israel that were present went out to the cities of Judah, and brake in pieces the pillars, and hewed down the Asherim, and brake down the high places and the altars out of all Judah and Benjamin, in Ephraim also and Manasseh, until they had destroyed them all. Then all the children of Israel returned, every man to his possession, into their own cities.

2. And Hezekiah appointed the courses of the priests and the Levites after their courses, every man according to his service, both the priests and the Levites, for burnt-offerings and for peace-offerings, to minister, and to give thanks, and to praise in the gates of the camp of Jehovah. 3. He appointed also the king's portion of his substance for the burnt-offerings, to wit, for the morning and evening burnt-offerings, and the burnt-offering for the sabbaths, and for the new moons, and for the set feasts, as it is written in the law of Jehovah. 4. Moreover he commanded the people that dwelt in Jerusalem to give the portion of the priests and the Levites, that they might give themselves to the law of Jehovah. 5. And as soon as the commandment came abroad, the children of Israel gave in abundance the first-fruits of grain, new wine, and oil, and honey, and of all the increase of the field; and the tithe of all things brought they in abundantly. 6. And the children of Israel and Judah, that dwelt in the cities of Judah, they also brought in the tithe of oxen and sheep, and the tithe of dedicated things which were consecrated unto Jehovah their God, and laid them by heaps. 7. In the third month they began to lay the foundation of the heaps, and finished them in the seventh month. 8. And when Hezekiah and the princes came and saw the heaps, they blessed Jehovah, and his people Israel. 9. Then

Hezekiah questioned the priests and the Levites concerning the heaps. 10. And Azariah the chief priest, of the house of Zadok, answered him and said, "Since the people began to bring the oblations into the house of Jehovah, we have eaten and had enough, and have left plenty; for Jehovah hath blessed his people; and that which is left is this great store."

11. Then Hezekiah commanded to prepare chambers in the house of Jehovah; and they prepared them; 12. and they brought in the oblations and the tithes and the dedicated things faithfully. And over them Conaniah the Levite was ruler, and Shimei his brother was second; 13. and Jehiel, and Azaziah, and Nahath, and Asahel, and Jerimoth, and Jozabad, and Eliel, and Ismachiah, and Mahath, and Benaiah, were overseers under the hand of Conaniah and Shimei his brother, by the appointment of Hezekiah the king, and Azariah the ruler of the house of God. 14. And Kore the son of Imnah the Levite, the porter at the east gate, was over the freewill-offerings of God, to distribute the oblations of Jehovah, and the most holy things. 15. And under him were Eden, and Miniamin, and Jeshua, and Shemaiah, Amariah, and Shecaniah, in the cities of the priests, in their office of trust, to give to their brethren by courses, as well to the great as to the small: 16. besides them that were reckoned by genealogy of males, from three years old and upward, even every one entered into the house of Jehovah, as the duty of every day required, for their service in their offices according to their courses; 17. and them that were reckoned by genealogy of the priests by their fathers' houses, and the Levites from twenty years old and upward, in their offices by their courses; 18. and them that were reckoned by genealogy of all their little ones, their wives, and their sons, and their daughters, through all the congregation: for in their office of trust they sanctified themselves in holiness. 19. Also for the sons of Aaron the priests, that were in the fields of the suburbs of their cities, in every city, there were men that were mentioned by name, to give portions to all the males among the priests, and to all that were reckoned by genealogy among the Levites.

20. And thus did Hezekiah throughout all Judah; and he

wrought that which was good and right and faithful before Jehovah his God. 21. And in every work that he began in the service of the house of God, and in the law, and in the commandments, to seek his God, he did it with all his heart, and prospered.

Chapter 32:1. After these things, and this faithfulness, Sennacherib, king of Assyria came, and entered into Judah, and encamped against the fortified cities, and thought to win them for himself. 2. And when Hezekiah saw that Sennacherib was come, and that he was purposed to fight against Jerusalem, 3. he took counsel with his princes and his mighty men to stop the waters of the fountains which were without the city; and they helped him. 4. So there was gathered much people together, and they stopped all the fountains, and the brook that flowed through the midst of the land, saying, "Why should the kings of Assyria come, and find much water?" 5. And he took courage, and built up all the wall that was broken down, and raised it up to the towers, and the other wall without, and strengthened Millo in the city of David, and made weapons and shields in abundance. 6. And he set captains of war over the people and gathered them together to him in the broad place at the gate of the city, and spake comfortably to them, saying, 7. "Be strong and of good courage, be not afraid nor dismayed for the king of Assyria, nor for all the multitude that is with him; for there is a greater with us than with him: 8. "with him is an arm of flesh; but with us is Jehovah our God to help us, and to fight our battles." And the people rested themselves upon the words of Hezekiah king of Judah.

9. After this did Sennacherib king of Assyria send his servants to Jerusalem (now he was before Lachish, and all his power with him), unto Hezekiah king of Judah, and unto Judah that were at Jerusalem, saying, 10. "Thus saith Sennacherib king of Assyria, 'Whereon do ye trust, that ye abide the siege in Jerusalem? 11. 'Doth not Hezekiah persuade you, to give you over to die by famine and by thirst, saying, "Jehovah our God will deliver us out of the hand of the king of Assyria?" 12. 'Hath not the same Hezekiah taken away his high places and his

altars, and commanded Judah and Jerusalem, saying, "Ye shall worship before one altar, and upon it shall ye burn incense?" 13. 'Know ye not what I and my fathers have done unto all the peoples of the lands? Were the gods of the nations of the lands in any wise able to deliver their land out of my hand? 14. 'Who was there among all the gods of those nations which my fathers utterly destroyed, that could deliver his people out of my hand, that your God should be able to deliver you out of my hand? 15. 'Now therefore let not Hezekiah deceive you, nor persuade you after this manner, neither believe ye him; for no god of any nation or kingdom was able to deliver his people out of my hand, and out of the hand of my fathers: how much less shall your God deliver you out of my hand?' "

16. And his servants spake yet more against Jehovah God, and against his servant Hezekiah. 17. He wrote also letters, to rail on Jehovah, the God of Israel, and to speak against him, saying, "As the gods of the nations of the lands, which have not delivered their people out of my hand, so shall not the God of Hezekiah deliver his people out of my hand." 18. And they cried with a loud voice in the Jews' language unto the people of Jerusalem that were on the wall, to affright them, and to trouble them; that they might take the city. 19. And they spake of the God of Jerusalem, as of the gods of the peoples of the earth, which are the work of men's hands.

20. And Hezekiah the king, and Isaiah the prophet the son of Amoz, prayed because of this, and cried to heaven. 21. And Jehovah sent an angel, who cut off all the mighty men of valor, and the leaders and captains, in the camp of the king of Assyria. So he returned with shame of face to his own land. And when he was come into the house of his god, they that came forth from his own bowels slew him there with the sword. 22. Thus Jehovah saved Hezekiah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem from the hand of Sennacherib the king of Assyria, and from the hand of all others, and guided them on every side. 23. And many brought gifts unto Jehovah to Jerusalem, and precious things to Hezekiah king of Judah; so that he was exalted in the sight of all nations from thenceforth.

24. In those days Hezekiah was sick even unto death: and he prayed unto Jehovah; and he spake unto him, and gave him a sign. 25. But Hezekiah rendered not again according to the benefit done unto him; for his heart was lifted up: therefore there was wrath upon him, and upon Judah and Jerusalem. 26. Notwithstanding Hezekiah humbled himself for the pride of his heart, both he and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the wrath of Jehovah came not upon them in the days of Hezekiah.

27. And Hezekiah had exceeding much riches and honor: and he provided him treasuries for silver, and for gold, and for precious stones, and for spices, and for shields, and for all manner of goodly vessels; 28. store-houses also for the increase of grain and new wine and oil; and stalls for all manner of beasts, and flocks in folds. 29. Moreover he provided him cities, and possessions of flocks and herds in abundance; for God had given him very much substance. 30. This same Hezekiah also stopped the upper spring of the waters of Gihon, and brought them straight down on the west side of the city of David. And Hezekiah prospered in all his works. 31. Howbeit in the business of the ambassadors of the princes of Babylon, who sent unto him to inquire of the wonder that was done in the land, God left him, to try him, that he might know all that was in his heart.

32. Now the rest of the acts of Hezekiah, and his good deeds; behold, they are written in the vision of Isaiah the prophet the son of Amoz, in the book of the kings of Judah and Israel. 33. And Hezekiah slept with his fathers, and they buried him in the ascent of the sepulchres of the sons of David: and all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem did him honor at his death. And Manasseh his son reigned in his stead.

PARAPHRASE

Chapter 29:1. Hezekiah was twenty-five years old when he became the king of Judah, and he reigned twenty-nine years, in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Abijah, the daughter of Zechariah. 2. His reign was a good one in the Lord's opinion, just as his ancestor David's had been. 3. In the very first month

of the first year of his reign, he reopened the doors of the Temple and repaired them. 4, 5. He summoned the priests and Levites to meet him at the open space east of the Temple, and addressed them thus: "Listen to me, you Levites. Sanctify yourselves and sanctify the Temple of the Lord God of your ancestors—clean all the debris from the holy place. 6. For our fathers have committed a deep sin before the Lord our God; they abandoned the Lord and his Temple and turned their backs on it. 7. The doors have been shut tight, the perpetual flame has been put out, and the incense and burnt offerings have not been offered. 8. Therefore the wrath of the Lord has been upon Judah and Jerusalem. He has caused us to be objects of horror, amazement, and contempt, as you see us today. 9. Our fathers have been killed in war, and our sons and daughters and wives are in captivity because of this. 10. "But now I want to make a covenant with the Lord God of Israel so that his fierce anger will turn away from us. 11. My children, don't neglect your duties any longer, for the Lord has chosen you to minister to him and to burn incense."

12, 13, 14. Then the Levites went into action: From the Kohath clan, Mahath (son of Amasai) and Joel (son of Azariah); From the Merari clan, Kish (son of Abdi) and Azariah (son of Jehallelel); From the Gershon clan, Joah (son of Zimmah) and Eden (son of Joah). From the Elizaphan clan, Shimri and Jeuel; From the Asaph clan, Zechariah and Mattaniah; From the Hamanite clan, Jehuel and Shime-i; From the Jeduthun clan, Shemaiah and Uzziel. 15. They in turn summoned their fellow Levites and sanctified themselves, and began to clean up and sanctify the Temple, as the king (who was speaking for the Lord) had commanded them. 16. The priests cleaned up the inner room of the Temple, and brought out into the court all the filth and decay they found there. The Levites then carted it out to the brook Kidron. 17. This all began on the first day of April, and by the eighth day they had reached the outer court, which took eight days to clean up, so the entire job was completed in sixteen days. 18. Then they went back to the palace and reported to King Hezekiah, "We have completed the

cleansing of the Temple and of the altar of burnt offerings and of its accessories, also the table of the Bread of the Presence and its equipment. 19. What's more, we have recovered and sanctified all the utensils thrown away by King Ahaz when he closed the Temple. They are beside the altar of the Lord."

20. Early the next morning, King Hezekiah went to the Temple with the city officials, 21. taking seven young bulls, seven rams, seven lambs, and seven male goats for a sin offering for the nations and for the Temple. He instructed the priests, the sons of Aaron, to sacrifice them on the altar of the Lord. 22. So they killed the young bulls, and the priests took the blood and sprinkled it on the altar, and they killed the rams and sprinkled their blood upon the altar, and did the same with the lambs. 23. The male goats for the sin offering were then brought before the king and his officials, who laid their hands upon them. 24. Then the priests killed the animals and made a sin offering with their blood upon the altar, to make atonement for all Israel as the king had commanded—for the king had specified that the burnt offering and sin offering must be sacrificed for the entire nation.

25, 26. He organized Levites at the Temple into an orchestral group, using cymbals, psalteries, and harps. This was in accordance with the directions of David and the prophets Gad and Nathan—who had received their instructions from the Lord. The priests formed a trumpet corps. 27. Then Hezekiah ordered the burnt offerings to be placed upon the altar, and as the sacrifice began, the instruments of music began to play the songs of the Lord, accompanied by the trumpets. 28. Throughout the entire ceremony everyone worshiped the Lord as the singers sang and the trumpets blew. 29. Afterwards the king and his aides bowed low before the Lord in worship. 30. Then King Hezekiah ordered the Levites to sing before the Lord some of the psalms of David and of the prophet Asaph, which they gladly did, and bowed their heads and worshiped.

31. "The consecration ceremony is now ended," Hezekiah said. "Now bring your sacrifices and thank offerings." So the people from every part of the nation brought their sacrifices

and thank offerings, and those who wished to, brought burnt offerings too. 32, 33. In all, there were 70 young bulls for burnt offerings, 100 rams, and 200 lambs. In addition, 600 oxen and 3,000 sheep were brought as holy gifts. 34. But there were too few priests to prepare the burnt offerings so their brothers the Levites helped them until the work was finished—and until more priests had reported to work—for the Levites were much more ready to sanctify themselves than the priests were. 35. There was an abundance of burnt offerings, and the usual drink offering with each, and many peace offerings. So it was that the Temple was restored to service, and the sacrifices offered again. 36. And Hezekiah and all the people were very happy because of what God had accomplished so quickly.

Chapter 30:1. King Hezekiah now sent letters throughout all of Israel, Judah, Ephraim, and Manasseh, inviting everyone to come to the Temple at Jerusalem for the annual Passover celebration. 2, 3. The king, his aides, and all the assembly of Jerusalem had voted to celebrate the Passover in May this time, rather than at the normal time in April, because not enough priests were sanctified at the earlier date, and there wasn't enough time to get notices out. 4. The king and his advisors were in complete agreement in this matter, 5. so they sent a Passover proclamation throughout Israel, from Dan to Beer-sheba, inviting everyone. They had not kept it in great numbers as prescribed. 6. "Come back to the Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel," the king's letter said, "so that he will return to us who have escaped from the power of the kings of Assyria. 7. Do not be like your fathers and brothers who sinned against the Lord God of their fathers and were destroyed. 8. Do not be stubborn, as they were, but yield yourselves to the Lord and come to his Temple which he has sanctified forever, and worship the Lord your God so that his fierce anger will turn away from you. 9. For if you turn to the Lord again, your brothers and your children will be treated mercifully by their captors, and they will be able to return to this land. For the Lord your God is full of kindness and mercy and will not continue to turn away his face from you if you return to him."

10. So the messengers went from city to city throughout Ephraim and Manasseh and as far as Zebulun. But for the most part they were received with laughter and scorn; 11. However, some from the tribes of Asher, Manasseh, and Zebulun turned to God and came to Jerusalem. 12. But in Judah the entire nation felt a strong, God-given desire to obey the Lord's direction as commanded by the king and his officers.

13. And so it was that a very large crowd assembled at Jerusalem in the month of May for the Passover celebration. 14. They set to work and destroyed the heathen altars in Jerusalem, and knocked down all the incense altars, and threw them into Kidron Brook. 15. On the first day of May the people killed their Passover lambs. Then the priests and Levites became ashamed of themselves for not taking a more active part, so they sanctified themselves and brought burnt offerings into the Temple. 16. They stood at their posts as instructed by the law of Moses the man of God; and the priests sprinkled the blood received from the Levites. 17, 18, 19. Since many of the people arriving from Ephraim, Manasseh, Issachar, and Zebulun were ceremonially impure because they had not undergone the purification rites, the Levites killed their Passover lambs for them, to sanctify them. Then King Hezekiah prayed for them and they were permitted to eat the Passover anyway, even though this was contrary to God's rules. But Hezekiah said, "May the good Lord pardon everyone who determines to follow the Lord God of his fathers, even though he is not properly sanctified for the ceremony." 20. And the Lord listened to Hezekiah's prayer and did not destroy them. 21. So the people of Israel celebrated the Passover at Jerusalem for seven days with great joy. Meanwhile the Levites and priests praised the Lord with music and cymbals day after day. 22. (King Hezekiah spoke very appreciatively to the Levites of their excellent music.) So, for seven days the observance continued, and peace offerings were sacrificed, and the people confessed their sins to the Lord God of their fathers.

23. The enthusiasm continued, so it was unanimously decided to continue the observance for another seven days. 24.

King Hezekiah gave the people 1,000 young bulls for offerings, and 7,000 sheep; and the princes donated 1,000 young bulls and 10,000 sheep. And at this time another large group of priests stepped forward and sanctified themselves. 25. Then the people of Judah, together with the priests, the Levites, the foreign residents, and the visitors from Israel, were filled with deep joy. 26. For Jerusalem hadn't seen a celebration like this one since the days of King David's son Solomon. 27. Then the priests and Levites stood and blessed the people, and the Lord heard their prayers from his holy temple in heaven.

Chapter 31:1. Afterwards a massive campaign against idol worship was begun. Those who were at Jerusalem for the Passover went out to the cities of Judah, Benjamin, Ephraim, and Manasseh and tore down idol altars, the obelisks, shame-images, and other heathen centers of worship. Then the people who had come to the Passover from the northern tribes returned again to their own homes.

2. Hezekiah now organized the priests and Levites into service corps to offer the burnt offerings and peace offerings, and to worship and give thanks and praise to the Lord. 3. He also made a personal contribution of animals for the daily morning and evening burnt offerings, as well as for the weekly Sabbath and monthly new moon festivals, and for the other annual feasts as required in the law of God. 4. In addition, he required the people in Jerusalem to bring their tithes to the priests and Levites, so that they wouldn't need other employment but could apply themselves fully to their duties as required in the law of God. 5, 6. The people responded immediately and generously with the first of their crops and grain, new wine, olive oil, money, and everything else—a tithe of all they owned, as required by law to be given to the Lord their God. Everything was laid out in great piles. The people who had moved to Judah from the northern tribes and the people of Judah living in the provinces also brought in the tithes of their cattle and sheep, and brought a tithe of the dedicated things to give to the Lord and piled them up in great heaps. 7, 8. The first of these tithes arrived in June, and the piles continued to grow

until October. When Hezekiah and his officials came and saw these huge piles, how they blessed the Lord and praised his people! 9. "Where did all this come from?" Hezekiah asked the priests and Levites. 10. And Azariah the High Priest from the clan of Zadok replied, "These are tithes! We have been eating from these stores of food for many weeks, but all this is left over, for the Lord has blessed his people."

11. Hezekiah decided to prepare storerooms in the Temple. 12, 13. All the dedicated supplies were brought into the Lord's house. Conaniah, the Levite, was put in charge, assisted by his brother Shime-i and the following aides: Jehiel, Azariah, Nahath, Asahel, Jerimoth, Jozabad, Eliel, Ismachiah, Mahath, Benaiah. These appointments were made by King Hezekiah and Azariah the High Priest. 14, 15. Kore (son of Imnah, the Levite), who was the gatekeeper at the East Gate, was put in charge of distributing the offerings to the priests. His faithful assistants were Eden, Miniamin, Jeshua, Shemaiah, Amariah, and Shecaniah. They distributed the gifts to the clans of priests in their cities, dividing it to young and old alike. 16. However, the priests on duty at the Temple and their families were supplied directly from there, so they were not included in this distribution. 17, 18. The priests were listed in the genealogical register by clans, and the Levites twenty years old and older were listed under the names of their work corps. A regular food allotment was given to all families of properly registered priests, for they had no other source of income because their time and energies were devoted to the service of the Temple. 19. One of the priests was appointed in each of the cities of the priests to issue food and other supplies to all priests in the area, and to all registered Levites.

20. In this way King Hezekiah handled the distribution throughout all Judah, doing what was just and fair in the sight of the Lord his God. 21. He worked very hard to encourage respect for the Temple, the law, and godly living, and was very successful.

Chapter 32:1. Some time later, after this good work of King Hezekiah, King Sennacherib of Assyria invaded Judah and laid

siege to the fortified cities, planning to place them under tribute. 2. When it was clear that Sennacherib was intending to attack Jerusalem, 3. Hezekiah summoned his princes and officers for a council of war, and it was decided to plug the springs outside the city. 4. They organized a huge work crew to block them, and to cut off the brook running through the fields. "Why should the king of Assyria come and find water?" they asked. 5. Then Hezekiah further strengthened his defenses by repairing the wall wherever it was broken down and by adding to the fortifications, and constructing a second wall outside it. He also reinforced Fort Millo in the City of David, and manufactured large numbers of weapons and shields. 6. He recruited an army and appointed officers and summoned them to the plains before the city, and encouraged them with this address: 7. "Be strong, be brave, and do not be afraid of the king of Assyria or his mighty army, for there is someone with us who is far greater than he is! 8. He has a great army, but they are all mere men, while we have the Lord our God to fight our battles for us!" This greatly encouraged them.

9. Then King Sennacherib of Assyria, while still besieging the city of Lachish, sent ambassadors with this message to King Hezekiah and the citizens of Jerusalem: 10. "King Sennacherib of Assyria asks, 'Do you think you can survive my siege of Jerusalem?' 11. King Hezekiah is trying to persuade you to commit suicide by staying there—to die by famine and thirst—while he promises that "the Lord our God will deliver us from the king of Assyria"! 12. Don't you realize that Hezekiah is the very person who destroyed all the idols, and commanded Judah and Jerusalem to use only the one altar at the Temple, and to burn incense upon it alone? 13. Don't you realize that I and the other kings of Assyria before me have never yet failed to conquer a nation we attacked? The gods of those nations weren't able to do a thing to save their land! 14. Name just one time when anyone, anywhere, was able to resist us successfully. What makes you think your God can do any better? 15. Don't let Hezekiah fool you! Don't believe him. I say it again—no god of any nation has ever yet been able to rescue his people from

me or my ancestors; how much less your God!"

16. Thus the ambassador mocked the Lord God and God's servant Hezekiah, heaping up insults. 17. King Sennacherib also sent letters scorning the Lord God of Israel. "The gods of all the other nations failed to save their people from my hand, and the God of Hezekiah will fail, too," he wrote. 18. The messengers who brought the letters shouted threats in the Jewish language to the people gathered on the walls of the city, trying to frighten and dishearten them. 19. These messengers talked about the God of Jerusalem just as though he were one of the heathen gods—a handmade idol!

20. Then King Hezekiah and Isaiah the prophet (son of Amoz) cried out in prayer to God in heaven, 21. and the Lord sent an angel who destroyed the Assyrian army with all its officers and generals! So Sennacherib returned home in deep shame to his own land. And when he arrived at the temple of his god, some of his own sons killed him there. 22. That is how the Lord saved Hezekiah and the people of Jerusalem. And now there was peace at last throughout his realm. 23. From then on King Hezekiah became immensely respected among the surrounding nations, and many gifts for the Lord arrived at Jerusalem, with valuable presents for King Hezekiah, too.

24. But about that time Hezekiah became deathly sick, and he prayed to the Lord, and the Lord replied with a miracle. 25. However, Hezekiah didn't respond with true thanksgiving and praise, for he had become proud, and so the anger of God was upon him and upon Judah and Jerusalem. 26. But finally Hezekiah and the residents of Jerusalem humbled themselves, so the wrath of the Lord did not fall upon them during Hezekiah's lifetime.

27. So Hezekiah became very wealthy and was highly honored. He had to construct special treasury buildings for his silver, gold, precious stones, and for his shields and gold bowls. 28, 29. He also built many storehouses for his grain, new wine, and olive oil, with many stalls for his animals, and folds for the great flocks of sheep and goats he purchased; and he acquired

many towns, for God had given him great wealth. 30. He dammed up the Upper Spring of Gihon and brought the water down through an aqueduct to the west side of the City of David sector in Jerusalem. He prospered in everything he did. 31. However, when ambassadors arrived from Babylon to find out about the miracle of his being healed, God left him to himself in order to test him and to see what he was really like. 32. The rest of the story of Hezekiah and all of the good things he did are written in The Book of Isaiah (the prophet, the son of Amoz), and in The Annals of the Kings of Judah and Israel. 33. When Hezekiah died he was buried in the royal hillside cemetery among the other kings, and all Judah and Jerusalem honored him at his death. Then his son Manasseh became the new king.

COMMENTARY

Hezekiah's appearance in Judah's history was indeed timely and by divine appointment.¹ How could a man as corrupt as Ahaz be the father of a son who was as godly as Hezekiah? "Hezekiah" means "Jehovah has strengthened". We wonder who it was that named him. Whatever good he accomplished, he had no spiritual heritage from his father upon which to build. Again in history here is God's man for the hour. He began his reign at the age of twenty five and led Judah through twenty nine years. The "Zechariah" named in 29:1 cannot be identified with certainty. The name Abijah means "Jehovah is my father". This woman was Ahaz' wife and Hezekiah's mother. A wife with such a godly name apparently had no good influence on Ahaz. Perhaps she influenced Hezekiah in his godly disposition. The Davidic pattern of righteousness was Hezekiah's ideal. David is called "father" in the sense that the new king was his direct lineal descendant. Ahaz had shut the doors to the Temple. One of the first official acts of Hezekiah was to "open the doors of the house of Jehovah". If religious reformation was to be realized, the king knew that the religious leaders (priests and Levites) had to set the example. In the presence of the Temple the king met these men and told them to concern

¹Elmslie, W. A. L., *The Interpreter's Bible*, Vol. III, p. 519

themselves with sanctification (genuine holiness), "sanctify yourselves and sanctify the house of Jehovah" (verse 5). The term "filthiness" has to do with everything associated with Ahaz' idolatries. Hezekiah showed his awareness of Judah's crisis as he reviewed the recent history of his people. God's people had trespassed (disregarded Jehovah's rights), forsaken God, turned their backs upon the Lord, put out the lamps in His Temple. Jehovah had permitted His people to be tossed about like a ball. Even Judah's enemies were "astonished" at the sufferings to which Jehovah's people had been subjected. Judah had become as a "hissing" in that they were regarded as shameful even by the nations. As Moses had predicted (Deuteronomy 28:28, 32, 36, 37), the sword and captivity had been experienced in some measure already. Hezekiah enlisted the support of the priests and Levites in the renewal of the covenant with Jehovah.

A very hearty response was made by the ministering priests and Levites. (The student is reminded that every serving priest was a Levite. All Levites could not serve as priests. To serve at the altar and to burn incense, one had to be a Kohathite Levite within certain age limits, and physically perfect. The Merarite and Gershonite Levites could do other tasks related to Temple service if they met certain requirements.) Since all three Levitical families are named here, Kohath, Merari, and Gershon; it is evident that all of the Levites supported Hezekiah's reformation.¹ Asaph, Heman, and Jeduthun were Levites who had special responsibility for music and singing in the Temple services in David's day. In Hezekiah's time their descendants joined the great program of religious renewal in Judah. It should be observed that the priests and Levites, first of all, sanctified themselves. They certified their own ceremonial cleanness. They washed their bodies and changed their garments. They committed themselves to God. Next in order, they proceeded with a general house cleaning of the Temple. They began in the "inner part of the house" and they continued through the court removing every suggestion of idolatry, every foreign object with

¹Spence, H. D. M., *The Pulpit Commentary*, II Chronicles, p. 360

which Ahaz had defiled the Temple. All of this "filthiness" and "uncleanness" was dumped in the valley of the Kidron to the East of the Temple. The work just described required a total of sixteen days. Sanctifying the house of Jehovah also meant that all of the sacred furniture and vessels had to be washed. The holy vessels which Ahaz had removed had to be brought out of store rooms and cleansed and replaced in the Temple proper.

If this was the first month of the religious year, it was Abib or Nisan. The Passover was to be kept on the fourteenth day of that month. The keeping of the Passover is not mentioned in this account. This would not mean that it was not observed. The overriding consideration at this time was the cleansing of the Temple and opening the doors to the house of Jehovah. When the priests and Levites reported that all preparations had been made, Hezekiah gathered the princes about him and they met at the Temple. The burnt offering was the basis of all offerings made at the altar (verse 24). It signified complete devotion to Jehovah in that the entire animal was consumed in the fire. The sin offering was made "for the kingdom and the sanctuary and for Judah" (verse 21). The king and the princes (the kingdom), the priests and Levites (the sanctuary), and all of the people (Judah) were included in these offerings. The sin offering was a confession of guilt and a sincere request for pardon. When the blood of the animals was sprinkled on the altar it was displayed before Jehovah and those who offered the sacrifices. The blood was the symbol of life, but it could not be so displayed until there had been death. When the king and other responsible leaders "laid their hands" (verse 23) on the animals, they designated these particular animals for the blood atonement and recognized that the animals were their substitutes. So "atonement for all Israel" was made according to the prescriptions recorded in the book of Leviticus.

The historian is careful to note that all of Hezekiah's actions were according to the best Hebrew tradition. He had named the ancient Levitical families. He had mentioned the chief musicians of David's day. He now refers to the commandment of David, of Gad, and of Nathan (verse 25). Sacred music was very

important in this religious reformation. Percussion instruments (cymbals), strings (harps, psaltery), wind instruments (trumpets), and the great Levitical choir were all used in the praise of Jehovah. The burnt offering would smoulder on the altar throughout the day. Through this period the choir and orchestra sang and played. At twilight another lamb would be placed on the altar to burn slowly through the night (Exodus 29:38, 39). Hezekiah and all of the princes joined in humble worship of Jehovah.

When the priests had sanctified themselves and the king and princes had given themselves completely to the Lord, then the congregation was charged to do likewise. The thank offering was a variation of the peace offering. It usually followed the burnt and sin offerings and meant that the offerer was in a happy covenant relationship with Jehovah. Because of the great number of persons who wanted to share in the religious services and the correspondingly large number of sacrifices, the priests needed more help. So Levites who were not priests were allowed to help in these services on this particular day. To "flay" an animal meant to kill it, catch the blood, remove the animal's hide, cut the animal into proper portions and lay it out on the altar. Some of the persons who were qualified by birth and family to serve as priests were hesitant to sanctify themselves for this work. Drink offerings (verse 35) were brought with the burnt offerings. They consisted of wine which was poured out as a libation at the base of the altar of burnt offering. This was one of the truly memorable days in Judah's history because Jehovah's house "was set in order". By God's grace and through Hezekiah's leadership the doors of the Temple once more were opened.

SUMMARY QUESTIONS

LESSON TWENTY-TWO (27-29)

855. How could Jotham be a good king and not enter into the Temple?
856. What was the length of Jotham's reign?

857. Carefully identify and locate Ophel.
858. Why would Jotham build castles in the forests?
859. Over what enemy did Jotham prevail and what tribute did he receive?
860. How does the Bible record account for the might of Jotham?
861. How old was Jotham at his death?
862. Whose reign is mentioned as a standard of righteousness for the kings of Judah?
863. List the charges brought against Ahaz.
864. Locate the valley of Hinnom.
865. Why is mention made of "green trees"?
866. Carefully identify two powerful kings who caused Ahaz much trouble.
867. Why was there such terrible loss of life in Judah?
868. Who was Zichri?
869. What did the children of Israel do to Judah at this time?
870. Who was Oded? What was the nature of his work?
871. What were the Israelites told to do?
872. Why would the Israelites show compassion to the people of Judah?
873. To what place were the captives returned and what provisions were made for them?
874. To whom did Ahaz appeal for military help?
875. What other enemies did Ahaz and Judah now have to face?
876. Locate Bethshemesh.
877. Explain the phrase, "to deal wantonly".
878. Who was Tiglath-pilneser?
879. Where did Ahaz get monies to buy help?
880. Why did Ahaz worship the Syrian gods?
881. What does the record say about Ahaz and altars?
882. What were the "high places"?

883. Where is the rest of Ahaz' history written?
884. What do you learn in II Kings 16 about the altar from Damascus?
885. How long did Hezekiah reign?
886. Why was Hezekiah not wicked like his father?
887. When did Hezekiah begin to repair the Temple?
888. What instruction did Hezekiah bring to the Levites?
889. Explain the reference to "putting out the lamps".
890. Why should Judah and Jerusalem be "tossed to and fro"?
891. How did Hezekiah describe the condition of his people in 29:9?
892. What was the importance of burning incense?
893. Name the major Levitical families mentioned in 29:12.
894. What was involved in "cleansing the house of Jehovah"?
895. To what place were the unclean things removed? Locate this place
896. How long did it take to cleanse the Temple?
897. To whom was the report of the cleansing brought?
898. What kind of an offering was made according to 29:21? Why was this most appropriate?
899. Explain the importance of sprinkling the blood.
900. Why would the king and other leaders put their hands on the he-goats?
901. For whom were these offerings made?
902. Why are Gad and Nathan mentioned at this time?
903. Explain the meaning of the burnt-offering.
904. What other exercise accompanied the service of the burnt offering?
905. Who were the persons engaging in worship?
906. What other kind of offering did the king tell the people to bring?
907. Distinguish between Levites and priests as in v. 34.
908. What other kinds of offerings are named in v. 35?

909. How many offerings were made according to 29:32, 33?
910. What is the meaning of "flaying" and offering?
911. Why was there so much rejoicing on this occasion?