

## **The Reunited Kingdom, part 3 (2 Chronicles 29:1–36:23)**

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### **The Reign of Hezekiah, part 3: Hezekiah Re-establishes Temple Worship, part 2: Hezekiah Initiates Temple Service, part 2 (2 Chronicles 29:20-36)**

#### *Hezekiah Offers Sacrifices in the Temple (29:20-30)*

Following the cleansing of the temple by the priests and Levites, the Chronicler recorded the sacrifices which atoned for national apostasy during the years of Ahaz. This material is marked off by the introductory temporal expression **early the next morning** (29:20). It divides into two parts: the sacrifices (29:20-24), and the music (29:25-30). Both of these sections describe the same events from different perspectives. The first part emphasizes the actual slaughtering of the animals; the second part emphasizes the music accompanying the sacrifices.

#### *Sacrifices Offered (29:20-24)*

This portion begins with a reference to **King Hezekiah** ... and the **city officials** (29:20). The king and his officials began the ceremonies of sacrifice when they **went up to the temple** (29:20). They brought with them an assortment of animals, seven of each kind for sacrifice (29:21). **Bulls ... rams** and **lambs** were brought as **whole burnt offerings**; the **male goats** were brought **as a sin offering** (29:21).

The Chronicler noted that these sin offerings were **for the sanctuary and for Judah** (29:21). The closest parallel to this statement appears in Ezk 43:18-27 where the prophet predicts that the cleansing of the post-exilic temple will be accomplished by a sin offering. Moreover, Ezekiel insisted that the cleansing of the prince and people for Passover would occur in the same way (see Ezk 43:21-23). It is likely that both the Chronicler and Ezekiel viewed Hezekiah's sacrifices similarly. Ministering during the exile, Ezekiel employed Hezekiah's action as a model for his predictions of the future renewal of the temple. After the exile, the Chronicler used Hezekiah's actions as a model for the renewal of temple worship in his day.

Hezekiah ordered the **priests** to sacrifice (29:21b). In response, **they** (i.e. the priests) killed the animals for the burnt offering and **sprinkled the blood on the altar** (29:22). In addition, they **laid**

**their hands** on the goats in symbolic transference of their sin to the animal. This ritual alludes to the similar practice outlined for the day of Atonement (see Lev 16:21).

Throughout the reign of Hezekiah, the Chronicler designated the king's gatherings around the temple as an **assembly** (29:23,28,31-32; 30:2,4,13,23-25; 31:18). This terminology connected this event with many other assemblies in the Chronicler's history. The language of **assembly** raised Hezekiah's actions to the level of these numerous exemplary events (see *Introduction: 5) Religious Assemblies*).

As mentioned before, the purpose of these sacrifices was for the cleansing of the temple and for national atonement. While in 29:21 the focus of sacrifice was **for the sanctuary and for Judah**, the Chronicler's description in 29:24 clarified the extent of the human recipients of the atonement. Twice he noted that the sacrifices were not simply for Judah but for **all Israel** (29:24), his favorite way of describing the entire nation (see: *Introduction: 1) All Israel*). In fact, the word order in the Hebrew of the last clause ("**because the king had ordered ... for all Israel**" [29:24]) stresses that the extent of the atonement was the entire nation. By this means the Chronicler revealed one of Hezekiah's chief motivations for re-establishing the temple was to atone for all the tribes of Judah and Israel.

As we will see in the next chapter, Hezekiah invited the faithful from Israel and Judah to attend Passover in Jerusalem (see 30:1). Moreover, his temple renewal led to reforms throughout the North and South (see 31:1-3). The cleansing of the temple and the atoning sacrifices of this day were intended for all of these people of God. Once again, the Chronicler drew a connection between Hezekiah, David, and Solomon. The Chronicler emphasized that David and Solomon reigned over all the tribes (see *Introduction: 1) All Israel*). Here he indicated that Hezekiah was intent on unifying the kingdom in his day.

#### *Musical Accompaniment (29:25-30)*

Having described the sacrifices in the temple with particular concern for the role of the priests, the Chronicler revisited the event with a focus on its musical dimension (29:25-30). Throughout the reigns of David and Solomon, the Chronicler stressed the importance of music in the worship of the Lord (see 1 Chr 15-16; 25:1-6; 7:6; see also *The Responsibility and Joy of Music*). In this scene of temple renewal, his delight in the wonder of music moves to the foreground once again.

The Chronicler made it evident that Hezekiah did these things in the proper way. He arranged the Levites with **cymbals, harps and lyres** (29:25). These arrangements were not made according to Hezekiah's whims, but **in the way prescribed by David and Gad ... and Nathan** (29:25). The appeal to Davidic and prophetic arrangements confirmed that Hezekiah did things in the proper manner (see *Introduction: 14) Standards*). This passage is the only place where **Gad** or **Nathan** are given a role in the ordering of music. The purpose for this reference is made clear in the next phrase. These arrangements were ordered by **the Lord through his prophets** (29:25). Hezekiah did precisely as he should have. His arrangements were supported by David, his prophets, and the Lord himself. As a result, the Levites were ready **with David's instruments** (see 29:27 and 1 Chr 15:16; 23:5) and the

**priests** were ready **with trumpets** (see 1 Chr 15:24). The Chronicler presented these arrangements as models for his post-exilic readers. Their temple worship must be according to the same standards.

The performance of music on this day appears in two phases. First, the Chronicler noted that the music **began** as the **offering began** (29:27). The **singing ... accompanied by trumpets and the instruments of David ... continued until the sacrifice ... was completed** (29:28). In this ideal worship, music played all during the time of sacrifice. Second, after **the offerings were finished** (29:29), **Hezekiah and his officials ordered the Levites** to continue to play and sing (29:30). As a result, **they sang praises with gladness and bowed their heads and worshipped** (29:30).

One of the reasons for the Chronicler's interest in worship music comes to the foreground again. The music of worship brought **gladness** to the hearts of the worshipers (29:30). This snippet of insight into the emotional quality of the event served as a positive incentive for the Chronicler's post-exilic readers. The way to celebrative gladness in their day was through the proper arrangement of temple worship (see *Introduction: 8) Music*; see also *Introduction: 27) Disappointment and Celebration*). Once again, the use of the term **assembly** (29:28,30,31) as a designation for this event supported this implication for the Chronicler's readers (see *Introduction: 5) Religious Assemblies*). For the designation of Asaph as a **seer** see *Introduction: 15) Prophets*.

#### *Hezekiah's Results from Temple Service (29:31-35a)*

Having described how Hezekiah brought atonement for the temple and all Israel, the Chronicler moved to the immediate results. The people responded overwhelmingly to the king's invitation to sacrifice at the temple.

#### *Structure of 29:31-35a*

This portion of the narrative divides into three sections (see figure 53): the king's invitation (29:31a), the assembly's response (29:31b), and a report of quantities (29:32-35).

#### *Hezekiah's Invitation (29:31a)*

At this point in the narrative, the Chronicler moved beyond the activities of the king, his officials, and the priests and Levites (see 29:4-30) to the whole assembly gathered at the temple. The king turned to the crowd and noted, "**you have now dedicated yourselves to the Lord**" (29:31a). The terminology of "dedication" or "consecration" as it is translated elsewhere, alluded to the earlier words of Hezekiah (see 29:25). Rituals of consecration appear frequently in Chronicles as examples of proper worship which the post-exilic readers were to imitate in their day (see *Introduction: 6) Royal Observance of Worship*). Hezekiah announced that the crowd was consecrated by the atoning sacrifices. On the basis of their devotion to the temple, the king invited the assembly to **bring sacrifices and thank offerings to the temple** (29:31a). It is likely that the **sacrifices** here are to be identified

with **the fellowship offerings** ("peace offerings" NAS, NKJ; "offerings of well being" NRS) of which **thank offerings** were a type (see Lev 7:11-15). If this understanding is correct, all of these sacrifices were voluntary, given out of gratitude for the forgiveness bestowed by God through the atoning sacrifices (see 29:22-24). Put simply, Hezekiah invited the assembly to show its gratitude for the blessing of forgiveness and renewal.

#### *Assembly's Response (29:31b)*

The assembly responded to Hezekiah's invitation with enthusiasm. In addition to **sacrifices and thank offerings**, those **whose hearts were willing** brought **burnt offerings** (29:31b). The focus on the willingness of the people brings this passage once again into contact with David. In his final assembly the "willingness" of the people appears a number of times (see 1 Chr 29:5,6,9,14,17). The enthusiasm of Hezekiah's assembly reflected the kind of enthusiasm the Chronicler hoped his own audience would have for the temple in their day. As they remembered that the temple held the possibility of atonement for their sins, they too would delight in its services with voluntary offerings (see *Introduction: 16 Motivations*).

#### *Quantity of Service (29:32-35a)*

To highlight the splendor of this event, the Chronicler summarized the numbers of sacrifices and offerings (29:32-35). He focused on large numbers of sacrifices in a number of passages (see 1:6; 5:6; 7:4-5; 24:14; 29:32-35; 35:8-9). In each case, his intention was to convey the enthusiasm for the temple and its services (see *Introduction: 6 Royal Observance of Worship*). He mentioned that the people offered **seventy bulls, a hundred rams, and two hundred male lambs** as **burnt offerings** (29:32). Hundreds more animals were **consecrated as sacrifices** (29:33). This terminology probably refers to animals that were not completely burned on the altar but partially given to the priests as food. The priests were given a portion of all three types of fellowship offerings (thanksgiving, votive, free will; see Lev 7:11-36), as well as portions of some but not all sin offerings (see Lev 6:24-30) and guilt offerings (see Lev 7:1-6).

In the middle of his report on the numbers of sacrifices, the Chronicler paused to mention extraordinary measures that had to be taken at this time (29:34). Lev 1:5-6 indicates that worshipers were suppose to skin their own sacrifices. For some unknown reason, however, on this occasion the **priests** skinned the burnt offerings (29:34). Perhaps the widespread apostasy of the generation before Hezekiah made it necessary to take extra precautions against syncretism among the laity. In all events, the priests **were too few** to handle all of the work (29:34). So, **the Levites helped them** (29:34). Interestingly enough, the Chronicler added an explanation that cast a favorable light on the Levites. **The Levites had been more conscientious in consecrating themselves than the priests had been** (29:34). It is likely that this comment addressed some controversy among the priests and Levites in the Chronicler's day. In a time when Zadokite priests reasserted their leadership over the Levites, such controversies were unavoidable. Rituals of consecration appear frequently in Chronicles as examples

of proper worship which the post-exilic readers were to imitate in their day (see *Introduction: 6*) *Royal Observance of Worship*).

The Chronicler closed his portrait of this glorious event with a catalogue of the offerings that took place **in abundance** (29:35). Along with the **burnt offerings** were **fellowship ... and drink offerings** (29:35).

#### *Hezekiah Completes Temple Restoration (29:35b-36)*

The Chronicler completed his record of Hezekiah's first act as king with a brief notice. He first stated that the atoning sacrifices and voluntary offerings had re-established **the service of the temple of the Lord** (29:35b). Hezekiah had accomplished what the Chronicler hoped his own readers would do.

The result of Hezekiah's accomplishment was also important for the Chronicler's purposes. **Hezekiah and all the people rejoiced** (29:35). In this and many other passages, the Chronicler connected joy for Israel with the proper functioning of the king and the temple (see *Introduction: 27*) *Disappointment and Celebration*). His repeated focus on this connection spoke directly to the needs of his readers. They too desired the happiness and rejoicing. In Hezekiah's day they rejoiced **at what God had brought about** (29:35). They were sure it was an act of God **because it was done so quickly** (29:35). Enthusiastic devotion to the Davidic family and the re-establishment of temple services brought a swift response of blessing from God. The Chronicler's advice was plain enough. The post-exilic readers could enjoy the same blessing if they devoted themselves fully to the king and temple in their day.