

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

**by Dr. Richard L. Pratt, Jr.**

### **The Reign of Hezekiah, part 2: Hezekiah Re-establishes Temple Worship, part 1: Hezekiah Initiates Temple Service, part 1 (2 Chronicles 29:3-19)**

#### *Hezekiah Re-establishes Temple Worship (29:3-31:21)*

The first step in Hezekiah's reign is his most important. Three long chapters (81 verses) describe the first seven months of the king's reign as fully devoted to the restoration of the temple and its services. This material displays the most significant aspect of the Chronicler's presentation of the king's life.

#### *Comparison of 29:3-31:21 with 2 Kgs 18:4-8*

At this point, the records of Chronicles and Kings are very different. The book of Kings devotes only one verse to Hezekiah's worship reforms (2 Kgs 18:4); it roughly parallels 31:1. Moreover, the notice of Hezekiah's conformity to the Law of Moses (2 Kgs 18:5-8) roughly parallels 31:20-21. The writer of Kings gave less attention to Hezekiah's temple effort in order to highlight Josiah's restoration a few generations later (see 2 Kgs 23:1-20 // 2 Chr 34:4-7, 29-33). The Chronicler, however, was intent on using Hezekiah's efforts as a model for his post-exilic readers. For this reason, he expanded these five verses into three full chapters.

#### *Structure 29:3-31:21*

The Chronicler's record of Hezekiah's re-establishment of temple worship divides into three large sections. The arrangement of these materials follows a thematic as well as a chronological progression (see figure 53). The chronological progression of these three chapters appears explicitly in the text. The temple was cleansed in the first month of the king's reign (29:3); the Passover celebration occurred in the second month (30:13); the provisions for continuing temple service were arranged from the third to the seventh month (31:7). The thematic symmetry is evident as well. Hezekiah prepared the temple and its personnel (29:3-36); this initial reorganization was maintained by the king's

other arrangements (31:2-21). The national Passover celebration formed the pivotal event between the initial establishment and permanent arrangements (30:1-31:1).

### *Hezekiah Initiates Temple Service (29:3-36)*

Hezekiah's first step toward restoring the temple and its services was to cleanse the temple from its defilement under Ahaz. The Chronicler's record of this event presented Hezekiah as a paradigm of devotion to God.

### *Comparison of 29:3-36 with Kings*

This material has no parallels in Kings. It represents the Chronicler's emphasis on what Hezekiah did in his first month as king of Judah.

### *Structure of 29:3-36*

The account of Hezekiah's temple cleansing divides into five sections. These portions display symmetrical thematic concerns that focus not only on the cleansing itself, but on the preparations and results of the cleansing (see figure 53). The passage opens with Hezekiah beginning the process of restoring the temple (29:3). This opening balances with the indication that the king had finished the restoration (29:35b-36). In the center of the chapter stands the actual account of the ceremony of sacrifices for the sins of the people of God (29:20-30). On either side of this turning point are the symmetrical accounts of preparations for and results of Hezekiah's temple sacrifices (29:4-11,31-35a).

### *Hezekiah Begins Temple Restoration (29:3)*

The Chronicler made it clear that this chapter dealt with the very first things Hezekiah did as the king of Judah. Similar reforms of worship in Judah took place at other points in the history (see: *Introduction: 6) Royal Observance of Worship*). Hezekiah began to restore the temple **in the first month of the first year** (29:3). By this means, Hezekiah is likened to Solomon whose first major act after receiving wisdom from God was to begin work on the temple (see 2:1).

The king's efforts began with opening **the doors of the temple** (29:3). It is likely that these doors were those separating the Main Hall (i.e. the Holy Place) from the Outer Court (probably the courtyard of the priests; (see *Introduction: Appendix B - The Structures, Furnishings and Decorations of Solomon's Temple*). We cannot know the extent of these initial repairs. Some light may be shed by 2 Kgs 18:16 which indicates that Hezekiah covered the doors of the temple with gold (see 3:7; 4:22). Opening and repairing the doors leading to the Main Hall was essential to the temple renovation. These were the ceremonial doors through which the priests entered as they performed their duties.

Hezekiah's father Ahaz had shut the doors of the temple, thereby making it impossible for Judah to carry out the worship of God (see 28:24). As such, the Chronicler made it evident that Hezekiah reversed the apostasy of his father. A new day had dawned for Judah, symbolized in the opening of the temple doors.

#### *Hezekiah's Preparations for Temple Services (29:4-19)*

As the Chronicler's account moves toward the full scale renewal of the temple, he reported Hezekiah's preparatory work. His focus in these verses was on the king's establishment of priests and Levites to cleanse the temple of its defilement.

#### *Structure of 29:4-11*

This portion of the account divides into three sections (see figure 53). The dramatic flow of this material is apparent. It begins with the king commissioning (29:4-11) and ends with a report from those commissioned indicating that the king's wish had been fulfilled (29:18-19). Between these events, Hezekiah's commission is enacted (29:12-17).

#### *Hezekiah Commissions the Priests and Levites (29:4-11)*

The king began his preparations by commissioning **the priests and Levites** to begin the work of cleansing the temple (29:4). This portion of the record consists of a description of the setting (29:4) and the king's speech (29:5-11).

Hezekiah called for an assembly of **the priests and Levites** (29:4). Normally, the Chronicler reserved these terms for Zadokites and non-Zadokites respectively. In Hezekiah's speech, however, he designated both groups under the rubric of **Levites** (29:5).

Hezekiah's speech is one of four speeches in the Chronicler's account of his reign (see 29:31; 30:6-9; 32:7-8). This speech began and ended with the king giving orders (29:5,11) and contained an historical explanation of his orders (29:6-10).

Hezekiah ordered the priests and Levites to **consecrate** themselves and **the temple** (29:5). In reporting these words, the Chronicler not only connected Hezekiah's actions with those of David (see 1 Chr 15:2), but also showed Hezekiah's intention to conform his efforts to the Law of Moses. The Mosaic Law offered detailed instructions for the consecration of priests and Levites (see Ex 29:1-35; 30:19-21,30; 40:31-32; Num 8:5-14). These rituals of consecration symbolized God's setting apart priests and Levites from ordinary occupations to perform the service of the tabernacle and Temple. To this end, they were ceremonially cleansed, dressed, and restricted from going places that might contaminate them. In fact, the priests were anointed with the same oil as the tabernacle furniture (see Ex 30:22-30), thereby indicating that they were to share in the holiness of the dwelling place of God.

The consecration of the temple itself involved removing **all defilement from the sanctuary** (29:5) by destroying foreign objects and by setting all temple furnishings in proper order (29:15-19). 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 consecration Hezekiah ordered was a large project. For this reason, he offered an explanation to motivate the priests and Levites (29:6-10). He explained that the previous generation was **unfaithful ... and forsook** the Lord (29:6). The terms **unfaithful** and **forsook** were the Chronicler's typical terms for describing flagrant violation of Israel's covenant with the Lord (see *Introduction: 21) Unfaithfulness*; see also *Introduction: 22) Abandoning/Forsaking*). Judah had demonstrated infidelity by neglecting the temple and its holy services (29:6-7).

As a result of this apostasy, Hezekiah argued that **the anger of the Lord has fallen on Judah and Jerusalem** (29:8). This terminology parallels earlier descriptions of northern Israel's terrible conditions (see 28:9,11,13,25). Northern Israel received the wrath of God, but now Hezekiah declared that in Ahaz's day Judah had sunk to the same level as her northern neighbor (see *Introduction: 2) Northern Israel*).

The similarity between Israel and Judah was taken one step further. Judah had become and **object of dread and horror and scorn**. Usually, these terms depict the tragedy of exile (see Dt 28:25,41; Jer 15:4; 19:8; 25:9,18; 34:17; Ezk 23:46). Hezekiah explained that the judgment of God had caused "**our fathers to die by the sword**" ... and had led "**our sons and daughters and our wives in captivity**" (29:9).

Because Old Testament prophets used these expressions to describe the Babylonian exile, it would appear that the Chronicler intended for his readers to draw a connection between their own post-exilic situation and that of Hezekiah. The Chronicler presented Hezekiah as living in a situation similar to theirs. Many Judahites were taken captive to Damascus during Ahaz's reign (see 28:5). This event adumbrated the larger exile of Judah to Babylon. As a result, Hezekiah's attention to worship came after an exile and provided a model for the post-exilic readers of Chronicles as they lived after an even greater exile.

The last step in Hezekiah's explanation focuses on his own intention. He planned to **make a covenant with the Lord** (29:10). The language of this verse suggests that Hezekiah did not have in mind a national covenant renewal, but his own devotion to royal obligations. Much like Joash before him (see 15:12), Hezekiah saw that he had to affirm his responsibilities as king. Renewing his covenant with God was the only way Hezekiah could hope that God's **fierce anger will turn away** (29:10). Hezekiah understood that Judah could expect God's blessing only when the Davidic king was fully devoted to leading the nation in righteousness, especially in the area of temple worship. The Chronicler's message was plain. The same benefit would come to the post-exilic community only when they served a new Davidide with the same commitments (see *Introduction: 13) Covenant*).

Hezekiah concluded his speech with a final exhortation to the priests and Levites. He warned them not to be **negligent** (29:11). They too played a vital role in the restoration of the temple because **the Lord has chosen** them to serve in the temple (29:11). The roles of priests and Levites are highlighted throughout the Chronicler's history (see *Introduction: 4-9) King and Temple*). This

emphasis spoke directly to those who held these offices within post-exilic Judah. Priests and Levites shared responsibility with political families for reinstating the temple as the place for the worship of God.

### *Hezekiah's Commission is Performed (29:12-17)*

After reporting Hezekiah's exhortation to the priests and Levites, the Chronicler immediately added that the king's order was initiated. The priests and Levites consecrated themselves and then cleansed the temple.

### *Structure of 29:12-17*

The account of Levitical efforts divides into two main parts (see figure 53): lists of Levitical participants (29:12-14), reports of Levitical activities (29:15-17).

### *Levite Participants (29:12-14)*

The Chronicler wasted no time forming a list of the **Levites** who **set to work** (29:12). His list contains fourteen names that represent groups of Levites who served at Hezekiah's command. Two representatives appear from each Levitical family (see 1 Chr 6:1-80): **Kohathites**, **Merarites**, and **Gershonites** (29:12).

In addition to these names, two men are listed from the important Kohathite clan of **Elizaphan** (29:13a). **Elizaphan** was one of two Levites whom Moses ordered to purify the Tabernacle by carrying out the dead bodies of Nadab and Abihu (see Lev 10:4-5). David had the descendants of Elizaphan help bring the ark to Jerusalem (see 1 Chr 15:8,10-11). Now once again, descendants of Elizaphan helped to purify the Temple and restore acceptable worship. Two names also appear from the families of **Asaph** ... **Heman** and **Jeduthun** (29:13b-14), the three clans of Levitical singers (see 1 Chr 25:1-31).

This list of Levites participating in Hezekiah's restoration is only representative; **their brothers** joined them in the work as well (29:15). Yet, the breadth of this list points out that all the families of Levi participated. In this manner, the Chronicler drew another connection between Hezekiah and the ideal reigns of David and Solomon. All three kings set all the Levitical families in order (see 1 Chr 15:4-24; 23:1-32; 24:20-26:32; 2 Chr 5:4-5,12-14; see also *Introduction: 4-9) King and Temple*).

*Levite Activities (29:15-19)*

After his representative list of participants, the Chronicler shifted attention to the actual activities which cleansed the temple (29:15-19). The Chronicler's report focuses on three matters: initiation (29:15), process (29:16), and temporal notices (29:17).

The priests and Levites initiated their work by gathering others to their company. Then they **consecrated themselves** (see 29:5) and began to **purify** the temple (29:15). The Chronicler succinctly evaluated their efforts, saying that they did **as the king had ordered** (29:15; see 29:5). Moreover, Hezekiah's orders were according to **the word of the Lord** (29:15). By this means the Chronicler made it clear that everything was done just as it should have been (see *Introduction: 14) Standards*). In sharp contrast with the apostasy of Ahaz his father, Hezekiah and the priests and Levites under his command treated temple worship as a holy duty to be performed according to divine instruction (see Dt 12:2-4). Once again a strong connection appears between Hezekiah and the idealized reigns of David and Solomon (see 1 Chr 15:2-15; 16:39-42; 2 Chr 5:1-7:10; 8:12-13).

The process of purification also took place with the sanctity of the temple in mind (29:16). The Chronicler explained a twofold process. First, **priests went into the sanctuary** (29:16). The term **sanctuary** ("inner part" NAS, NRS) is not altogether specific. It may refer to the Most Holy Place where the Ark of the Covenant was kept (see 3:8-14; 4:22; 5:7; 1 Chr 28:11; Ex 26:34). The **priests** alone were allowed into the inner sanctuary of the temple (see 5:4-11). It could also refer, however, to the Main Hall (see *Introduction: Appendix B - The Structures, Furnishings and Decorations of Solomon's Temple*). The **priests** brought **everything unclean** out of the inner portions of the temple **to the courtyard** surrounding the temple proper (29:16).

Second, in the courtyard the **Levites** took charge and carried the unclean items to the **Kidron Valley**, a burial site near Jerusalem that was considered unclean and therefore appropriate for these items (see 15:16; 30:14; 2 Kgs 23:4,6,12).

The details of the process indicate the Chronicler's desire to show the care with which Hezekiah's temple restoration took place. His efforts illustrated the care with which the post-exilic community must treat the temple and its services.

The Chronicler also added a chronological notice. It took from **the first day of the first month** until **the sixteenth day of the first month** to complete the cleansing of the temple (29:17). At least two purposes lie behind this temporal reference. On the one hand, it makes evident the extensive nature of the effort. The task was performed carefully and thoroughly. On the other hand, it foreshadows a problem with which Hezekiah must deal in the next chapter. The temple and its services were not ready by the time of Passover on the fourteenth of the first month (see 30:3).

*Hezekiah Receives Report from Priests and Levites (29:18-19)*

After completing their tasks, the priests and Levites reported to Hezekiah. They announced that they had cleansed **the entire temple of the Lord** (29:18); no defilement remained in the entire temple

complex. Moreover, their report focused specifically on the preparation and replacement of various furnishings and **utensils** which **King Ahaz removed** (29:19). The Chronicler repeated his description of Ahaz's life as one of **unfaithfulness** (29:19; see 29:6), a term which he used frequently in his history to describe serious sins (see *Introduction: 21) Unfaithfulness*).

The utensils of worship were a special concern to the early post-exilic community. The utensils of Solomon's temple (see 4:19-22; 1 Chr 28:14-17) were taken to Babylon and brought back in the early days of restoration (see 36:18; 2 Kgs 25:14-15; Ezr 1:7-11; Dan 5:2-3). This particular focus of the Levitical report to Hezekiah spoke clearly to the post-exilic community. Apparently, the Chronicler thought it was important to stress that restoration of the temple included attention to the purification and restoration of the instruments of worship brought back by those returning from Babylon.