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Day 185 - July 4

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## **The Divided Kingdom (930-725 BCE)**

### ***The Reforms of Hezekiah***

**Readings: 2 Chronicles 29:3-31:21**

#### ***Reflections:***

- The rise of Hezekiah recalls the times of Solomon and the opening of the temple. This passion for God and the restoration of the temple echoes the period when the temple is first opened. Although one might think the reader could have some measure of hope as they read this account, with all of the history of failure and the looming prophecies it is easy to see how the reader could also wonder how long this will last. In many ways, we can see ourselves in Israel. We go through periods of really cleaning up our act and getting our lives together before we fall back into patterns of failure. The story of Hezekiah demonstrates how great it is when people DO actually live God's way. Yet without the change of heart, it is not sustainable.
- The first order of business for Hezekiah is to clean house, quite literally. He recommits to a covenant relationship with God. He organizes the spiritual leadership of the nation. He removes everything that is unclean or impure from the temple. Again in this time period all of the signs of spiritual health are very external and practical. In the future we will see that what God will ultimately seek is a pure heart.
- The reinstatement of the temple is beautiful and grand like its first opening. People are radically generous and the gifts and offerings made to God pile up everywhere. All of this comes about very quickly as people rally to the vision of a renewed relationship with God. All of the suffering and difficulties they had experienced motivated them to dive into their recommitment full force. As we will see, unfortunately it will not last.
- Israel celebrates Passover even though it wasn't the right time of year. Again we see their eagerness to get as fully reconnected to God as possible. To that point, Passover was only observed by a minority of faithful people. The nation experiences great unity although some still mock and reject the call to repentance and a return to covenant faithfulness to God.
- Key Verse: "May the Lord who is good forgive everyone who sets his heart on seeking God..." And the Lord heard Hezekiah and healed the people." Here we see God's incredible grace. As the people turn back to God, even after doing terrible things in complete rebellion, he still responds with grace and healing when they reach out to him. The writer of 2 Chronicles is calling us back to the beginning of his historical record

where he writes God's own promise: "If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land." 2 Chronicles 7:14. Here we see God demonstrate his faithfulness to this promise in pouring out healing on the people (physical, emotional, relational and most importantly spiritual healing) in response to their humble repentance. The message is loud and clear: the journey to wellness begins when we humble ourselves before God and seek him alone.

- Like most people who are recommitting to what they know is right, they go over the top. The people continue to party for a second week. Here the writers make a clear connection back to Solomon and the opening of the temple: "There was great joy in Jerusalem, for since the days of Solomon...there had been nothing like this in Jerusalem." And the conclusion was beautiful, "God heard them and their prayer reached heaven, his holy dwelling place." The reader is again reminded of the promise given to Solomon (2 Chronicles 7:14).
- As we witness restoration of the priesthood, we see that everyone is accounted for and cared for, right from the littlest baby right up to the oldest man or woman. This vision of an inclusive community that serves God will carry into the vision Jesus will cast for a people who will be as priests to the entire world, a royal priesthood that would model true family life and community.
- The generosity of the people was so great that storehouses had to be organized to keep the goods that had been donated. When the kings were living selfishly and apart from God, they would pillage all they could from the temple. When a faithful king was restored to leadership, then the purposes of God were fueled with radical generosity. This offers up a very practical lesson. Do we see the blessings and gifts God gives us as opportunities to spend on ourselves? Or do we see the privilege of blessing as an opportunity for radical generosity in giving to God? Do I wish I had more money so I can buy that bigger house, overhaul my wardrobe, go on that luxurious vacation, drive that amazing new car, or get that new wide-screen monster TV? Or do I look at what I already possess as my wealth that I can pour out to God in humble gratitude?
- Hezekiah models for us true love for God: "He sought God and worked wholeheartedly. And so he prospered." God's favor rested on Hezekiah because all he really loved was God, and his life showed it. May God move us with the same vision and passion!