

Passover (Part 8)

Josiah, Hezekiah and Deuteronomy

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We are going to continue once again in the discussion regarding Passover. We are getting to some places here where the description is going to be a little bit more technical. I began with the things that were simpler, and we are working toward those things that are more difficult.

We are doing this on the belief that if we start with what is simple, then it is going to help in proving that the more difficult scriptures should be interpreted in a very definite way. You let the clear scriptures interpret the difficult ones. You do not let the vague interpret those which are clear. That ought to be a very simple principle, yet I believe that it has been forgotten by some, and as a result we find part of the church getting into very vague territory.

I am going to begin by giving a quotation from the book, *The Religions of the Ancient Near East*. This will be a description of a pagan festival to Baal that coincided exactly with the same seven days as the Feast of Unleavened Bread beginning on the fifteenth and ending on the twenty-second day of the first month

The spring festivals reached their climax in sexual acts performed on the housetops where the participants felt they were nearest to the sun-god's power, and in the groves where it was believed Baal himself would join them in their worship. There were those who spawned their human seed upon the ground, sincerely trusting that this invoked a special heavenly blessing. At the temple feast, proxies for the invisible god and goddess gorged themselves, and in wanton dances called upon the bull god to appear. Women, intoxicated by concoctions of herbs and wine, lay naked upon the newly planted fields in adulation of Asherah. These were the occasions when the fathers gave their daughters to their own sons for harlotry, or took their own daughters to play the role of wife. For seven days and nights the demonstrations continued.

The parallels there are obvious. There was a pagan seven-day celebration taking place at the same time that God established a festival for Israel.

The Israelite undoubtedly felt he was serving the true God all the while that he was serving Baal. We can certainly see parallels with that in our day. People are celebrating Christmas, Easter, and other days. As a matter of fact, there is a well-known large Christian denomination that has saint days. They have a saint for every day.

All Souls' Day, which follows Halloween, is for any saint who was unlucky enough not to have a day appropriated to him. We have something here with which we are familiar, only it was happening quite a few thousand years ago. It is a pattern that Satan has established to counterfeit celebrations of those true celebrations God has given to us.

Jeremiah 7 contains a very important set of scriptures. It is good to remember the chronology of when Jeremiah spoke. He began his prophecies during the time of Josiah. However, it is indicated within the context of the things Jeremiah wrote that many of them did not take place until after Josiah was dead.

Jeremiah really began preaching in earnest after Josiah was dead, because as long as Josiah was alive, things were going reasonably well. But after Josiah died, the bottom fell out, and they very quickly reverted back to what they were doing before Josiah instituted his reform. That is not something you can find by chapter and verse within the book, but it is something that is very clear within the context of the entire book of Jeremiah.

Understand that Jeremiah's preaching and writing took place *after* Josiah was dead, which indicates the repentance that took place during the reforms of Josiah was hollow. We will see this more clearly a little bit later. The repentance was just a surface thing, and not something that was really from the heart.

Jeremiah 7:1-3 The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying, Stand in the gate of the LORD'S house [the Temple], and proclaim there this word, and say, Hear the word of the LORD, all you of Judah who enter in at these gates to worship the LORD! Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Amend your ways and your doings, and I will cause you to dwell in this place.

Here is an indication Jeremiah said this after Josiah was dead, because when Josiah was alive they were mending their ways. Josiah did what he did, because after reading the book of Deuteronomy, and especially Deuteronomy 28 that had the curses in it, he knew that they had just about had it.

Josiah's reign came immediately after Manasseh's, which was a bad, foul fifty-five years of desecration of God's way. Josiah very quickly began to act, and as a result God's immediate punishment was averted. God gave Josiah a promise that His taking of Judah into captivity would not take place during Josiah's reign, but after Josiah died, the people went back to their old ways again.

Jeremiah 7:4 Do not trust in these lying words, saying, The temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD are these.

This is just another way of saying, "I'm in the church. I'm okay. I'm safe. I am part of the body of Christ. I am part of the body that is going to go to the place of safety."

Jeremiah 7:5-7 For if you thoroughly amend your ways and your doings, if you thoroughly execute judgment between a man and his neighbor, if you do not oppress the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, and do not shed innocent blood in this place, or walk after other gods to your hurt, then I will cause you to dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers forever and ever.

The promise is now extended. They must have known through Jeremiah and perhaps through other faithful prophets and faithful priests, that if they did obey God, then they would dwell in

the land. If they did not, then they were going into captivity. But there was a whole body of false prophets and false priests who were telling the people, "Good times are here again! Everything is fine. You don't have to worry. Just keep going on the way you are. Everything is all right."

You can see this was nice smooth talk, making the people feel complacent. It sounds like Laodiceanism.

Jeremiah 7:8-10 Behold, you trust in lying words that cannot profit. Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, burn incense to Baal, and walk after other gods whom you do not know, and then come and stand before Me in this house which is called by My name, and say, We are delivered to do all these abominations?

The people believed they were safe as long as they were in the church. They believed that somehow or another their attendance at services gave them absolution from having to pay for things they had done, and maybe for the things that they were planning to do in the future. This is dangerous thinking that amounts to nothing more than superstition. In the midst of their gross wickedness they were so naïve as to believe that they would be delivered from impending destruction and disaster merely by going through the motions of attending church.

God's Temple is living people who are submissive to His way of life. We have to understand that the Temple of God—the church of God—does not afford protection of and by itself. The determining factor is obedience to the commands of God.

Remember that our overall subject here involves a major command of God, not on the order of one of the Ten Commandments. We are talking about Passover, and Passover would certainly fit within the framework of the Fourth Commandment—keeping the Sabbath, or the festivals of God. Nonetheless, it is very important to God, and if one begins to go aside from keeping God's Passover, one is going to lose very important teaching relative to the whole purpose and way of God.

I want to go through II Kings 17:7 again because I want us to see a summary of why Israel went into captivity. Very shortly we are going to skip from Israel to Judah, but it is important that we begin with Israel. We will then jump to Judah, and we will see that they were guilty of exactly the same things as Israel, only worse. Remember this, because it was Judah (the Jews) who have given us the late 14 th-15 th Passover, and they are culpable before God for what they have done. They got a lot of the ideas for what they did from Israel, and we will begin to see that here.

II Kings 17:7-12, 14, 16-19 For so it was that the children of Israel had sinned against the LORD their God, who had brought them up out of the land of Egypt, from under the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt; and they had feared other gods, and had walked in the statutes of the nations whom the LORD had cast out from before the children of Israel, and of the kings of Israel, which they had made. Also the children of Israel secretly did against the LORD their God things that were not right, and they built for themselves high places in all their cities, from watchtower to fortified city.

They set up for themselves sacred pillars and wooden images on every high hill and under every green tree; and there they burned incense on all the high places, as the nations had done whom the LORD had carried away before them: and they did wicked things to provoke the LORD to anger, for they served idols, of which the LORD had said to them, You shall not do this thing.... Nevertheless they would not hear, but stiffened their necks, like the necks of their fathers, who did not believe in the LORD their God.... So they left all the commandments of the LORD their God, made for themselves a molded image and two calves, made a wooden image and worshipped all the host of heaven, and served Baal. And they caused their sons and daughters to pass through the fire, practiced witchcraft and soothsaying. Therefore the LORD was very angry with Israel, and removed them from His sight; there was none left but the tribe of Judah alone. Also Judah did not keep the commandments of the LORD their God, but walked in the statutes of Israel which they made.

Now we are beginning to involve Judah. Judah should have learned from what happened to Israel, but they failed to learn. Instead, they learned to do the things that Israel did. Those things must have been rather exciting. It was certainly appealing to the flesh, and they fulfilled their desires by following after Israel. I do not think enough can be said of the horrible paganism into which Israel degenerated, but as evil as Israel was, Judah became worse.

Jeremiah 3:6-7 The LORD said also to me in the days of Josiah the king. Have you seen what backsliding Israel [the ten northern tribes] has done? She has gone up on every high mountain and under every green tree, and there played the harlot. And I said, after she had done all these things, Return to Me. But she did not return. And her treacherous sister Judah saw it.

Israel went into captivity in 722 bc. Josiah came on the throne about one hundred years or so later. I believe the historians say it was about 626 bc. Josiah was eight years old when he came on the throne. A lot of water has passed under the dam. A lot of history has gone by.

The Jews now knew what was going on in Israel. They knew that the Assyrians came down and conquered Israel. That was not hidden from them. They knew why Israel went into captivity. They should have learned, but they did not. Even though what Judah did may not have been any worse in terms of the actual acts that they did, yet Judah is more culpable, more responsible, because they had an example to follow, or to not follow. "To whom much is given, much is required," and that is why God says Judah was worse.

Jeremiah 3:8-10 Then I saw that for all the causes for which backsliding Israel had committed adultery, I had put her away and given her a certificate of divorce; yet her treacherous sister Judah did not fear, but went and played the harlot also. [They were so far gone there was no fear left.] So it came to pass, through her *casual harlotry*, that she defiled the land and committed adultery with stones and trees [those images of the false gods]. And yet for all this her treacherous sister Judah has not turned to Me with her whole heart, but in *pretense*, says the LORD.

Can you imagine that? No fear. It was just as if it did not matter at all. The harlotry we are talking about here is primarily spiritual harlotry—committing spiritual adultery by worshipping false gods.

Hypocrisy is involved here. The reforms by which the Jews came under the authority of God were made possible by hypocrisy. They reformed, but it was not of the heart. They did what Josiah said, but they really did not do it willingly. They did it because Josiah made them do it. He had to use the authority of the office of king to get these people to make the reforms. It was done with pretense. It was hollow. There was no real heart there.

Jeremiah 3:11 Then the LORD said to me, Backsliding Israel has shown herself more righteous than treacherous Judah.

All those quotes I gave, especially from that book *The Religions of the Ancient Near East*, showed how rotten the religions were of Baal and Asherah, and yet Judah is worse. I guess we could say that Judah was so bad they made Israel look good, at least by comparison.

We are going to look at Ezekiel 23 so that we can get the picture here.

Ezekiel 23:1-5 The word of the LORD came again to me, saying: Son of man, there were two women, the daughters of one mother. They committed harlotry in Egypt, they committed harlotry in their youth; their breasts were there embraced, Their virgin bosom was there pressed. Their names: Oholah the elder and Oholibah her sister; they were Mine, and they bore sons and daughters. As for their names, Samaria [Israel, the ten northern tribes] is Oholah, and Jerusalem [Judah, the two southern tribes] is Oholibah. Oholah played the harlot even though she was Mine; and she lusted for her lovers, the neighboring Assyrians.

Ezekiel 23:9, 11-12, 16 Therefore I have delivered her into the hand of her lovers, into the hand of the Assyrians, for whom she lusted... Now although her sister Oholibah saw this, she became more corrupt in her inordinate love than she [Oholah], and in her harlotry more corrupt than her sister's harlotry. She lusted for the neighboring Assyrians, captains and rulers, clothed most gorgeously, horseman riding on horses, all of them desirable young men... As soon as her eyes saw them, she lusted for them and sent messengers to them in Chaldea.

These are the people who have given us the late 14th-15th Passover. I ask you, "Can they be trusted?"

I think I have shown you in quite a bit of detail that when God originally gave His commands in Exodus 12, and then reconfirmed them through the book of Exodus, beginning about chapter 25, when coupled with Numbers 9, 27, 28, and 33, He had every opportunity to make changes; but those commands given in Exodus 12 were never changed. It was to be that the Passover lamb was to be slain at the beginning of the 14th.

The people then spent the daytime portion of the 14th making preparations for leaving. Those preparations included marching and getting themselves in order so that they could leave the city

of Rameses. Then they went *out*, beginning probably right about near sunset of the 14th day, and so they left Egypt by *night*, at the beginning of the 15th. It undoubtedly took them most of the night to get out of there.

How in the world did we ever get a late 14th sacrifice and a 15th celebration of the day of Passover? That is what we are going to look at now. How did it ever come to pass? How did it ever get changed? There is enough information in the Bible for us to be able to see the outline of it. I do not say that we will see tremendous detail. I do not say that we will see God giving a scripture to change it, because He never did. It is just simply not there.

II Chronicles 28:1-5 Ahaz was twenty years old when he became king, and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem ; and he did not do what was right in the sight of the LORD, as his father David had done. For he walked in the ways of the kings of Israel, and made molded images for the Baals. He burned incense in the Valley of the Sons of Hinnom, and burned his children in the fire, according to the abominations of the nations whom the LORD had cast out before the children of Israel. And he sacrificed and burned incense on the high places, on the hills, and under every green tree. Therefore the LORD his God delivered him into the hand of the king of Syria. They defeated him, and carried away a great multitude of them as captives, and brought them to Damascus. Then he was also delivered into the hand of the king of Israel, who defeated him with a great slaughter.

Ahaz was among the worst of Judah's kings. "Burned in the fire" mentioned there means that his children were sacrificed to Baal. Their lives were given up as an offering to Baal. We learned from the previous sermon that our English word for "cannibal" means "priests of Baal." It was required of the priests to eat some of this human sacrifice. I do not say that it absolutely happened, but it is entirely possible since it is mentioned here, that he burned his children in the fire and that Ahaz's own children were, at least in part, eaten by the priests of Baal. That is the kind of man we are dealing with here. That is the kind of practice the leadership of the Judean nation was doing, setting an example for the rest of the people to follow.

In II Chronicles 29:1 we see that Ahaz's reign is over, and Hezekiah his son becomes the king. Under Hezekiah a revival occurred.

II Chronicles 29:1-4 Hezekiah became king when he was twenty-five years old, and he reigned twenty-nine years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Abijah the daughter of Zechariah. And he did what was right in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his father David had done. In the first year of his reign, in the first month, he opened the doors of the house of the LORD and repaired them. [We can see that the Temple had fallen into disrepair because of the acts of Ahaz.] And he brought in the priests and the Levites, and gathered them in the East Square.

Right here I want you to begin to see the way the Bible is presenting Hezekiah. It is presenting Hezekiah *as in control*. He is the one bringing about the reform. Things are being done because Hezekiah wants them done. He is doing the kind of thing that the priests ought to be doing. The priests ought to be the ones leading the revival. Were they not the agents of God? Was not the

high priest the mediator between God and man under their system? Absolutely! They should have been leading the revival, but they were not. The king was doing it. The king has taken charge.

II Chronicles 29:5-10 And said to them: Hear me, Levites! Now sanctify yourselves, sanctify the house of the LORD God of your fathers, [He did not say *your* God, but *the LORD God of your fathers*.] and carry out the rubbish from the holy place. For our fathers have trespassed and done evil in the eyes of the LORD our God; [Now it is *our* God.] they have forsaken Him, have turned their faces away from the habitation of the LORD, and turned their backs on Him. They have also shut up the doors of the vestibule, put out the lamps, and have not burned incense or offered burnt offerings in the holy place to the God of Israel. Therefore the wrath of the LORD fell upon Judah and Jerusalem, and He has given them up to trouble, to astonishment, and to jeering, as you see with your eyes. For indeed, because of this our fathers have fallen by the sword; and our sons, our daughters, and our wives are in captivity. [Remember, we just read some of this stuff about what happened to Ahaz.] Now it is in my heart to make a covenant with the LORD God of Israel, that His fierce wrath may turn away from us.

The Bible shows very clearly, from the time of Moses, that civil authority exceeds the authority of religion. We have here a civil figure, a civil authority. Hezekiah is the driving force in regard to this revival. The Bible presents prophets that came after Moses as being *outside* of both civil *and* religious authority. They were sent by God and they operated, as it were, on their own.

They carried a powerful message, but they wielded no actual authority in the execution of their responsibility. They simply went to the king and said, "This is what you ought to do," or they went to the high priest and said, "The LORD has said this you need to do." They did not stand there with a rod and beat them, and say, "This you must do." We see then a structure of government with the king being in supreme authority, and the high priest being subject to him. However, in this case the king has taken the authority to lead the revival himself. This is a very interesting situation.

Under Samuel, the prophet, the priest, and the judge were combined in one man; that is, in Samuel. It separated again whenever God made Saul king. Once again civil authority was now in the hand of the king. But Saul did not do too well in that office, and so he was replaced by David—a man who would do God's bidding.

David was a man who was responsible for writing many psalms, and he was undoubtedly a very great man in God's eyes. However, whenever David sinned, who corrected him? The priest did. That should have been the priest's responsibility. Nathan was a faithful priest, and Nathan *did* what was his responsibility to do.

Now that should have happened here. The priests should have been leading the revival. They should have gone to the king and said, "Now look, King Hezekiah, you should be doing thus and such." But we do not see that. We see that Hezekiah has grabbed the bull by the horns, and he is the one who is giving the orders. The spiritual man was not the priest in this case. It was the king,

and he was the driving force both in civil and in spiritual affairs.

Hezekiah has made a major step, and he has assumed authority over the priesthood in a way that other kings did not. A unique situation has arisen here, and God, in His mercy, allowed it to be put in His word so we would have an example that this was done.

Now *why* did Hezekiah do it? This faithful man, Hezekiah, came on the scene during a period of extreme spiritual rebellion. Something had to be done because they were just about, according to Hezekiah's judgment, going to be allowed to go into captivity, and so he grabbed the bull by the horns and he did what had to be done.

II Chronicles 29:17 Now they began to sanctify on the first day of the first month, and on the eighth day of the month they came to the vestibule of the LORD. Then they sanctified the house of the LORD in eight days, and on the sixteenth day of the first month they finished.

Passover is already past. We all understand that Numbers 9 contains a command within it that if a person is unclean at the time of the first Passover, he is then permitted by God to take the second Passover thirty days later. But as we saw clearly, it had to be done in the same manner as the original Passover commands were to be done. We will see what happened.

II Chronicles 30:1 And Hezekiah sent to all Israel and Judah, and also wrote letters to Ephraim and Manasseh, that they should come to the house of the LORD at Jerusalem, to keep the Passover to the LORD God of Israel.

We are now one month later.

II Chronicles 30:6-7 Then the runners went throughout all Israel and Judah with the letters from the king and his leaders, and spoke according to the commandment of the *king*: Children of Israel, return to the LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel; then He will return to the remnant of you who have escaped from the hand of the kings of Assyria. And do not be like your fathers and your brethren, who trespassed against the LORD God of their fathers, so that He gave them up to astonishment, as you see.

II Chronicles 30:12-13 Also the hand of God was on Judah to give them singleness of heart to do *the commandment of the king* and the leaders, at the word of the LORD. Now many people, a very great congregation, assembled at Jerusalem to keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread in the second month.

First I want you to notice authority for what I said a little bit earlier that this Passover and Days of Unleavened Bread, which are the focal point of a reform, a revival that occurred under Hezekiah, were done at the commandment of the king. It was not done at the commandment of God. They took advantage of a commandment of God that they were allowed to keep the Passover thirty days later, but as we are seeing here now, they not only kept the Passover, but they also kept the Days of Unleavened Bread. There was nothing like that said in the law.

I bring this up to you just to reinforce that we are dealing with an unusual circumstance here. Hezekiah sincerely felt that the lives of the people and their continued existence as a nation was on the line. He took the bull by the horns and he said, "We are going to make a covenant with God. We are going to repent. We are going to reform, and we are going to begin this by cleaning out the Temple."

After the Temple was cleaned out, they were past the Passover, and Hezekiah said, "We're going to keep the Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread in the second month, beginning with the 14th day of the second month." This was an unusual situation, all done at the commandment of the king.

Taken at face value, I think we would have to see that Hezekiah was bending the rules. Considering the circumstance, I think we would also have to say it was justified. This Passover took place about 140 years after the captivity of Israel. Remember, Israel went into captivity, and Ezra, who is the author of I and II Chronicles, did not write until about 100 years after the captivity of Judah. Now why would Ezra write what he did? This is just to put a thought, a question, in your mind.

I do not know who wrote I Kings, but II Kings, which is a parallel to II Chronicles, does not even have a mention of this Passover. If we would go through the chapters in II Kings devoted to Josiah, there is only a two-verse mention of an even more astounding and spectacular Passover that Josiah kept. Why did the book of II Kings pay no attention to Hezekiah's Passover? But more interesting is why did the book of Chronicles, written by Ezra, contain it? Does it have something to do with the Jews now keeping a late 14-15th Passover? I think we will answer that question as we go along.

Again notice that these things were done *according to the commandment of the king*. Hezekiah is shown as being completely in charge. If we look at verse 1 again, the Passover is mentioned. In verse 13 we find the Feast of Unleavened Bread is mentioned. Here is the first time in Scripture that there is any indication that Passover and Unleavened Bread are linked together in an unusual way.

The Jews of Jesus' day called that whole period of time Passover. That was their common approach to it. Here we have the first indication of a linking together of Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread, with the Days of Unleavened Bread also called "Passover" in the first verse. The name did not get changed here, but it is the first indication of something that is going to come.

Why did Hezekiah do what he did? I have already shown you enough information that Judah was more culpable in what they did. They were more responsible. They were treacherous in their handling of the law of God. I have read to you quotes from *The Religions of the Ancient Near East*, showing you the practices that were being kept, celebrated, and observed in the northern Ten Tribes *and* in Judah as well. I specifically read to you a quote that had to do with a 7-day festival dedicated to Baal that was kept at exactly