

HEZEKIAH'S GREAT PASSOVER.

– NOV. 6. – 2 CHRON. 30:1-13. –

"Yield yourselves unto the Lord, and enter into his sanctuary."

OUR LAST lesson respecting Isaiah's vision and his commission, to announce the fall of Israel, was "in the year that King Uzziah died." (Isa. 6:1.) The wicked king, Ahaz, succeeded Uzziah in the throne of Judah, and reigned wickedly, in neglect of God and his law, for sixteen years. It would appear, however, that he had an excellent wife, Abijah, under whose careful training their son, Hezekiah, was prepared for the kingdom, and became in many respects a model ruler, and a faithful servant of God. It is even supposed that the Prophet Isaiah, who was related to the royal family, was Hezekiah's tutor, and helped to guide him into right ways of thinking and doing. The fact that so good a son could come of so evil a father is an evidence to us that under divine providence it is not necessary that we should inherit all the evil traits of our ancestors. Altho we cannot overcome them completely, so that none of the fallen race of Adam can ever hope to regain perfection as a result of personal effort and of training, nevertheless, we see that favorable conditions, religious training, etc., lead to a vast improvement in those who are rightly exercised thereby.

And here we get a suggestive hint of the methods which the Lord will employ in the world's blessing and uplifting during the Millennium. The human family is unable to lift itself out of the degraded condition in which it is, because of shortness of life, and because of the general prevalence of evil; hence, the power that will lift mankind must be a power from the outside, uncontaminated by the fall. Moreover, under the terms of the divine sentence, the penalty of man's sin must be cancelled, his penalty must be paid for him, before he can be fully released from its condemnation and weaknesses. It is this redemption or purchase which has already been

accomplished for mankind: the deliverance out of sin and its consequences, mental, moral and physical depravity, is a future work, made possible by Christ's great sacrifice. And, gracious thought, it is he who redeemed mankind, and who has been highly exalted to power and great glory, who is shortly to use this power on man's behalf, in uplifting to righteousness and perfection whosoever will accept his grace, of all the families of the earth. The uplifting, nevertheless, will be along lines of instruction, chastisement and correction in righteousness, in which the individual will be obliged to cooperate in order to the attainment of full "restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all the holy prophets since the world began." – Acts 3:19-21.

That Hezekiah was already well instructed, and thoroughly consecrated to the Lord, at the time of his father's death and his own entrance to kingship, is evidenced by the fact that he immediately began, in the first month of his reign, to inaugurate reforms of the character noted in our lesson, – the restoration of the worship of Jehovah, as divinely appointed. Had he not been consecrated to the Lord, and thus in the proper attitude of heart, his accession to power would have had an influence the very opposite of this: it would have led to self-gratification and personal vanity.

His first public work was to open and prepare the Temple of the Lord, which had been closed and out of repair for years, and in which had been permitted to accumulate a vast amount of rubbish, etc. The king called to his aid the proper assistants for this work – the divinely appointed tribe of Levi. The cleansing of the Temple proceeded according to the law of Moses, and when completed the first thing in order was a great sin-offering. King Hezekiah was broadminded, and gave special instructions that the offering was to be, not only on behalf of the people of Judah, the two tribes, but on behalf also of their separated brethren – "for all Israel." He recognized properly that the nation was still in some respects one, in the sense that the divine promises were made to all the seed of Abraham: whoever, therefore,

of all the tribes would recognize the Lord God and seek his face was properly to be esteemed a brother-Israelite.

It was the time for the Passover Feast, in commemoration of the Lord's deliverance of Israel from Egypt; typical of the deliverance of Spiritual Israel from the bondage of sin and Satan; and typical also of the ultimate deliverance of those who love righteousness, and desire to serve the Lord, from Satan's bondage, by his complete overthrow during the Millennium. It was determined that this Passover Feast should be properly observed that year, for, altho, from the account, it had evidently been kept by a few Israelites, yet the general **[R2379 : page 323]** religious disorder was such, that apparently it was not observed by the nation, nor with all its appointed particularity by any. This time the king determined that its proper observance should be reinaugurated, preceded by all the proper arrangements of the law respecting the cleansing of the people (Exod. 12:15-20) and the putting away from their houses of leaven, a symbol of sin: thus, in figure at least, typically, the people were sanctified, in order that they might properly keep the feast. But all this required time – to issue the decrees, to succeed in stimulating the zeal of the people, and on their part to perform these works, symbolizing holiness to the Lord and separation from sin. The nation being thus defiled, the time was too short to be ready to observe the Passover on its appointed day, the 14th day of the first month, and hence the 14th day of the second month was observed instead – as the Lord had given permission. – Num. 9:10,11.

The same breadth of mind and heart which characterized **[R2380 : page 323]** Hezekiah's instructions that the sin-offering should be on behalf of all Israel, still controlled him, and led him to desire not only a reformation of "Judah," but also amongst their separated brethren, known as "Israel." Accordingly, special messengers were sent, from Beer-Sheba, the most southern town of the land of Israel, to publicly invite all Israelites of every tribe to return to the worship of Jehovah, and to specially come up on the occasion of this feast. The postal

system of the present day was not in vogue, and hence a special postal arrangement was made for the carrying of these letters.

The time for such an invitation was most favorable, for the prophecy of Isaiah respecting the carrying away of Israel into captivity was already in progress: the ten tribes were at this date paying tribute to Assyria, and the carrying away of many of the people had already actually begun. Thus, the Lord's arrangement served to draw attention of any who might be "Israelites indeed" to the fact that their captivity was a punishment for their rejection of the Lord, and thus to incite those who had any faith and zeal to return to the Lord's worship. King Hezekiah's letters, briefly summed up, were an exhortation to remember the past and to return to Jehovah: "Be not ye like your fathers and like your brethren, which trespass against the Lord God of your fathers, who therefore gave them up to desolation, as ye see....Yield yourselves unto the Lord, and enter into his sanctuary,...that the fierceness of his wrath may turn away from you."

The exhortation held out the suggestion, not only of present deliverance, but also of the return of their brethren already deported. But the postmen who bore these messages were laughed at in the northern kingdom. In proportion as the people were far from the Lord they were proud and vain, as is always the case; and it was in large measure, no doubt, their pride that was leading them on to destruction as a nation. All who are in harmony with the Lord are humbleminded, and only such receive the Lord's gracious messages with appreciation or love and well entreat the servants who bear the messages. We may note also that their obedience under such circumstances would imply considerable faith and devotion to Jehovah, for they would be the subjects of the scoffs and scorns from the unbelieving masses, as well as the messengers who invited them. Some, but not many, we are told, yet in all a fair number, humbled themselves and came, from the tribes of Asher, Manasseh and Zebulun, and of course got the blessing which God always grants to those who humble themselves and are obedient. In addition to this mention in verse 11, we find another, that

"many" came also from the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh, Issachar and Zebulun. (Verse 18.) Thus, at least five of the ten tribes were represented more or less numerously, and of the remainder two were already in captivity, – Reuben and Gad. We are to remember, furthermore, that some from the ten tribes had already allied themselves with the kingdom of Judah, because of the idolatry prevalent in their own land and of the better religious opportunities in Judah. – 2 Chron. 15:9.

Throughout Judah the invitation to the Feast of the Passover seems to have been well received: "The hand of God was to give them one heart to do the commandment of the king and of the princes by the Word of the Lord." In consequence there was an unusually large assemblage of the people at Jerusalem that year. The record is, that no such Passover had been observed since the days of Solomon, – over two hundred and fifty years. The Feast was observed with great joy and gladness, singing and praising God; and so imbued did the people become with religious fervor, that it was by their own proposition that the Passover week of praise and sanctity to holy things was prolonged for an additional week. – Verses 21-26.

We break from our topic here, to call attention to the fact that the true faithful Israelites were gathered out of the ten tribe kingdom into the two tribe kingdom at that early day. After the later captivity of Judah the *division* of Israel was lost sight of. The decree of Cyrus permitting return from captivity ignored any division and was to *all Israel*: and the faithful of all the tribes who returned were unitedly recognized as Israel, and are subsequently so referred to in the Bible. Use a concordance and note the New Testament references to Israel. It was the *remnant* of Israel and not merely of Judah that was gathered into the Gospel age, while the remainder were "blinded" and broken off from the covenant promises, until after the Gospel age shall have **[R2380 : page 324]** selected the "elect," Spiritual Israel. – See Rom. 11:7,25-32.

Nor did the revival of true religion inaugurated by Hezekiah stop with that Passover. While it filled the people with zeal for the true worship of the Lord, to give liberally for the support of the priests and Levites, the maintenance of the sacrifices, etc., it led also to a strong movement against every form of idolatry throughout Judah, extending even throughout the land of the ten tribes: as a consequence, there was a general destruction of idols out of the land, a cutting down of the obscene high places, devoted to the licentious worship of Baal, etc. The result of this proper turning of the people to the Lord brought to them and to their king great earthly blessings, in harmony with God's covenant made with that nation. The king became very rich, and the people also, so that their tithes and offerings to the Lord were not only sufficient for the supply of the priests and Levites, but far in excess of this, so that store-houses had to be built to receive them.

Looking for analogies in Spiritual Israel, we find several. (1) All true religion is identical with order and cleanliness, as the Apostle intimates, saying, If any man defile the Temple of God, him God will destroy, and correspondingly we may say that whoever attempts to cleanse the Temple of God, and to bring it into accord with the divine arrangement will be blessed now, as were Hezekiah and his kingdom, only we should remember that the rewards promised to Spiritual Israel are spiritual and not temporal blessings. As heretofore noticed, the congregation of the Lord in the present time may be considered nominally his Temple, tho the real Temple is the Church triumphant, not yet completed. Nevertheless, it is proper also to apply this lesson to our own individual hearts; for, as the Apostle also points out, each Christian is a temple of the holy spirit, and the Church in general, therefore, may be properly considered, even in its present imperfect condition, a temple of the holy spirit, devoted, consecrated, to the Lord. So then, each individual Christian, justified and sanctified by the great atonement of our High Priest, should seek to keep himself (and, so far as possible, all others associated with him, and imbued by the same spirit) free from all worldly contamination, if they would

have the Lord's blessing in spiritual things. All of the Lord's people need to remember the necessity for cleansing from worldly defilements, not only those of the past, but also those which are ever present in the world. We remember the Apostle's words, "Let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." – 2 Cor. 7:1.

Not only should the cleansing be done, but it should be done according to the divine arrangement. As Hezekiah and the priests and Levites cleansed and sanctified "according to the law of Moses," the mediator of Israel's covenant, so we, who belong to the house of sons, are to seek cleansing and sanctification in strict accordance with the law of Christ, the Mediator of the New Covenant, under which "we are accepted in the beloved." As there was a formal ritual to be observed under the law, so there is a form of faith, of sound words and of obedience, to be observed under the Gospel. Our cleansing is not with the blood of bulls and goats, but through the merit of the more precious blood of Christ, which does not call for vengeance upon us because of his death, but on the contrary calls for mercy, pardon, grace, to all those who come unto the Father by him.

(2) There is a lesson for us also in Hezekiah's broad conception that all Israelites who were willing to join in the worship of the Lord were to be esteemed as brethren, and to be invited so to do. Nor would it have been sufficient that he should have broad and liberal and Scriptural ideas on this subject: it was his duty, as well as his privilege, to make sure that there were no fences of separation between any of the Lord's people, and the arrangement for the Lord's worship in the Lord's house, the Temple. So with Spiritual Israelites, there should be a realization that all "Israelites indeed" are one in Christ Jesus, and all are to be esteemed and treated as Israelites indeed who trust in the precious blood of Christ, as the great sin-offering of atonement, and are consecrated to the service of the Lord. Such a general recognition of Christian character is, we are glad to believe, greatly on the increase during the last half century. But more is still

to be done along proper lines: sectarian fences should all be pulled down and sectarian names and creeds all be abolished, and true Christians (all who trust in the precious blood, and are fully consecrated to the Lord, to obey the instructions of his Word as best they can understand them) should mingle together, and be one people, without other distinctions than that some may have attained to greater knowledge and sanctification than others – all, however, seeking to "come to the full stature of manhood in Christ Jesus."

(3) There is a lesson for us also in the fact that such a message of true fellowship to the true Israel, and in the promises of God, made alike to all, and ignoring [R2381 : page 324] all creeds and parties, would not be popular to-day, as it was not popular with many at that time. Now, as then, the majority are disposed to "laugh with scorn," and to mark as visionary enthusiasts those who advocate the simplicity which is in Christ Jesus, as taught in the Scriptures, and practiced in the early Church. Nevertheless, now as then, some are attracted by what they realize to be the proper message, the truth. Many will hear the message, no doubt, who will not have sufficient [R2381 : page 325] courage to act upon it, as no doubt there were some in Israel. A few, nevertheless, from almost all sects and parties and creeds will be attracted; and they will be found to be the meek, those ready and willing to humble themselves. The proud will stand up for sectarianism and for the honors and dignities which go therewith, and will fail to get the divine blessing, "Blessed are the meek."

(4) A true revival of religious sentiment toward God, and his worship in the beauty of holiness and in accordance with the directions of his Word, will imply now, as well as in Hezekiah's day, a general breaking up of idols. And Oh! how many idols there are which the Lord's people should be zealous in overthrowing. They are many in form and feature, but one in general character. One of these idols, before which thousands upon thousands prostrate themselves in the dust, is Sectarianism; another is Money; another is Lust; another,

Selfish Ambition; another, Pride; another, Ease; and on the whole, they are legion, with the one family name, Selfishness. Whoever has come into a condition of full consecration to the Lord through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whoever has come to worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness, will readily realize the abominable character of these idols which the great Adversary has induced him, through sin, to bow down to and worship. And in proportion to our zeal for the Lord, in proportion to the measure of his spirit in our hearts, will we be zealous in putting down all these idols, and bringing not only the words of our mouths and the acts of life, but also our very thoughts, into subjection to the will of God in Christ. – 2 Cor. 10:5.
