



## Second Chronicles - Chapter Thirty One

### III. 2 Chronicles 10:1-36:23 - The Kingdom of Judah Down to the Exile (continues)

#### III.I 2 Chronicles 29:1-32:33 - Hezekiah (continues)

##### Summary of Chapter Thirty One

Following the great scenes of celebration at the Passover, Hezekiah continued his programme of reform. He had all the pagan shrines destroyed throughout both Judah and the remaining lands of Israel. He also re-established the normal function of the temple with the priests and Levites ministering and the people bringing in their offerings. The king gave abundantly and everyone tithed and there was a mountain of offerings given into the temple for the Lord.

Hezekiah also had the priests and the Levites re-organised and individuals were designated for their various duties in the temple and throughout the Levitical cities. The provision made for the priests from the offerings according to the Law was implemented so that they could perform their duties to the Lord. Thus Hezekiah and the people were once again faithful to the Lord.

#### III.I.v 2 Chronicles 31:1-10 - Pagan Shrines Destroyed

Following the Passover the people returned to their own homes. Hezekiah had all the pagan worship sites destroyed and re-instituted the functions of the temple, with the due offerings brought into the temple according to the statutes of God.

<sup>1</sup> Now when all this was finished, all Israel who were present went out to the cities of Judah and broke down the pillars, hewed down the sacred poles, and pulled down the high places and the altars throughout all Judah and Benjamin, and in Ephraim and Manasseh,

until they had destroyed them all. Then all the people of Israel returned to their cities, all to their individual properties.

### 2 Chronicles 31:1

Now when all this was finished, all Israel who were present went out to the cities of Judah and broke down the pillars. The festival united the Israelites of the north and south and sparked a popular movement to eradicate pagan worship from Ephraim and Manasseh, as well as Judah and Benjamin. This shows how broad the work was, including not only the kingdom of Judah but also substantial portions of the territory of the northern tribes. This reformation was not only carried on through Judah, but they carried it into Israel; whether through a transport of religious zeal, or whether with the consent of Hoshea the Israelite king, remains unknown.

<sup>2</sup> Hezekiah appointed the divisions of the priests and of the Levites, division by division, everyone according to his service, the priests and the Levites, for burnt-offerings and offerings of well-being, to minister in the gates of the camp of the Lord and to give thanks and praise.

<sup>3</sup> The contribution of the king from his own possessions was for the burnt-offerings: the burnt-offerings of morning and evening, and the burnt-offerings for the sabbaths, the new moons, and the appointed festivals, as it is written in the law of the Lord.

### 2 Chronicles 31:2-3

Hezekiah appointed the divisions of the priests and of the Levites, division by division. Hezekiah did not allow the recent Passover celebration to be a one-time event. He followed up by the organisation and institution of the regular priestly service. The Hebrew for Hezekiah's assigning the priests to divisions is definite: he appointed the divisions of the priests. He re-established the twenty-four rotating courses that had been set up by David in 1 Chronicles Chapter 25 to insure orderly worship.

Everyone according to his service; to minister in the gates of the camp of the Lord and to give thanks and praise. This shows some of the duties of the priests and the Levites. Their work included the administration of the sacrifices, general service, and especially worship.

In the gates of the camp of the Lord. There is a reminder here that the temple was to be seen as the dwelling place of the Lord on earth with his people. This was holy duty in a sacred setting.

The contribution of the king from his own possessions was for the burnt-offerings. Hezekiah leads with the example of his own generosity, as David had

done before in 1 Chronicles 29:2-5. It is only right that the leader of the nation should show his commitment to the work through his own unstinted giving.

<sup>4</sup> He commanded the people who lived in Jerusalem to give the portion due to the priests and the Levites, so that they might devote themselves to the law of the Lord. <sup>5</sup> As soon as the word spread, the people of Israel gave in abundance the first fruits of grain, wine, oil, honey, and of all the produce of the field; and they brought in abundantly the tithe of everything.

### 2 Chronicles 31:4-5

He commanded the people who lived in Jerusalem to give the portion due to the priests and the Levites. King Hezekiah did not present this as an option for the people of Judah. They were commanded to fulfil their obligations under the Law of Moses to support the priesthood through their tithes as stipulated in Numbers 18:21-24. As God had said: <<***To the Levites I have given every tithe in Israel for a possession in return for the service that they perform, the service in the tent of meeting***>> (Numbers 18:21). God commanded the tithes, a giving of ten percent of one's income, both financial and in produce, be given to the Levites for their support. This establishes the principle that the tithes belong to God, but he gave them to the Levites so they could concentrate on the work they did.

When an Israelite failed to give their tithe, they were not robbing the Levite, although the money ended up with them. They were robbing God according to Malachi 3:8-10, because God received the tithe from the giver, and he gave it to the Levite. The NT nowhere specifically commands tithing, but it certainly does speak of it in a positive light, if it is done with a right heart: <<***But woe to you Pharisees! For you tithe mint and rue and herbs of all kinds, and neglect justice and the love of God; it is these you ought to have practised, without neglecting the others***>> (Luke 11:42). It is also important to understand that tithing is not a principle dependent on the Mosaic Law; as Hebrews 7:5-9 explains, tithing was practiced and honoured by God before the Law of Moses.

What the NT does speak with great clarity on is the principle of giving; that giving should be regular, planned, proportional, and private (1 Corinthians 16:1-4); that it must be generous, freely given, and cheerful (2 Corinthians Chapter 9). Since the NT does not emphasise tithing, one might not be strict on it for Christians, although some Christians do argue against tithing on the basis of self-interest; but since giving is to be proportional, they should be giving some percentage, and ten percent is a good benchmark, and starting place! For some to give ten percent is nowhere near enough; for others, at their present time, five percent may be a massive step of faith. If their question is, "How little can I give and still be pleasing to God?" their heart is not in the right

place at all. They should have the attitude of some early Christians, who essentially said, “We’re not under the tithe, we can give more!” Giving and financial management is a spiritual issue, not just a financial one: <<*If then you have not been faithful with the dishonest wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches?*>> (Luke 16:11).

One fellow Christian once argued that under the UK Government’s gift aid scheme of adding 25% tax relief to charitable donations then a person can give 8% and the government will add the other 2%. This is clearly not in keeping with the right spirit that God wants to see from his people.

So that they might devote themselves to the law of the Lord. The practice of supporting the Levites and priests had apparently ceased and therefore they would have spent their time caring for themselves and their families rather than in the service of God. This is also a reminder of another duty of the Levites, beyond what was mentioned in v.2, the study and teaching of the Law of the Lord. The support of the Levites through the tithes of the people enabled this. This is much the same principle as what Paul wrote: <<*Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honour, especially those who labour in preaching and teaching; for the scripture says, ‘You shall not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain’, and, ‘The labourer deserves to be paid’*>> (1 Timothy 5:17-18).

As soon as the word spread they brought in abundantly the tithe of everything. The response of the people was impressive. Instead of thinking of reasons why this command did not apply to them or excuses to relieve themselves of its obligation, they brought in abundantly the tithe of everything.

The first fruits were for the priests (Numbers 18:12-13), and the tithes were for the Levites (Numbers 18:21-24).

<sup>6</sup> The people of Israel and Judah who lived in the cities of Judah also brought in the tithe of cattle and sheep, and the tithe of the dedicated things that had been consecrated to the Lord their God, and laid them in heaps. <sup>7</sup> In the third month they began to pile up the heaps, and finished them in the seventh month. <sup>8</sup> When Hezekiah and the officials came and saw the heaps, they blessed the Lord and his people Israel. <sup>9</sup> Hezekiah questioned the priests and the Levites about the heaps. <sup>10</sup> The chief priest Azariah, who was of the house of Zadok, answered him, ‘Since they began to bring the contributions into the house of the Lord, we have had enough to eat and have plenty to spare; for the Lord has blessed his people, so that we have this great supply left over.’

## 2 Chronicles 31:6-10

The tithe of the dedicated things that had been consecrated to the Lord their God most likely refers to the ten percent of what the Levites received that they in turn gave to the priests as their own offering.

The amassing of food lasts from the grain harvest in the third month (May-June), i.e. the Festival of Weeks or Pentecost, until the fruit and vine harvest in the seventh month (September-October), the Festival of Ingathering or Tabernacles. On these occasions and at Passover, all Israelite men were to come to the temple in accordance with the law given in Exodus 23:16-17.

When Hezekiah and the officials came and saw the heaps, they blessed the Lord and his people Israel. The response is the right way round here. The Lord is blessed for his provision ahead of the giving of the people. It is recognised that all good things come from God alone and that all the people are doing is giving a small proportion of what they have received from God back to him.

### III.I.vi 2 Chronicles 31:11-21 - Reorganisation of Priests and Levites

Hezekiah had the priests and Levites organised according to their ancestral lines to carry out the duties of the temple and to ensure they all received their share of the offerings in accordance with the Law of Moses.

<sup>11</sup> Then Hezekiah commanded them to prepare store-chambers in the house of the Lord; and they prepared them. <sup>12</sup> Faithfully they brought in the contributions, the tithes and the dedicated things. The chief officer in charge of them was Conaniah the Levite, with his brother Shimei as second; <sup>13</sup> while Jehiel, Azaziah, Nahath, Asahel, Jerimoth, Jozabad, Eliel, Ismachiah, Mahath, and Benaiah were overseers assisting Conaniah and his brother Shimei, by the appointment of King Hezekiah and of Azariah the chief officer of the house of God. <sup>14</sup> Kore son of Imnah the Levite, keeper of the east gate, was in charge of the freewill-offerings to God, to apportion the contribution reserved for the Lord and the most holy offerings.

## 2 Chronicles 31:11-14

Then Hezekiah commanded them to prepare store-chambers in the house of the Lord. Hezekiah's provision of storerooms and appointing of Levites to be in charge of them recalls David's arrangements of 1 Chronicles 23:28 and 28:12. King Hezekiah was wise enough to know that it was important to properly manage the generous gifts of God's people. They were concerned to do everything faithfully, out of respect to both God and his people who generously gave.

Since much of the offerings were given during times of ingathering but had to last the priests and Levites until the next offering was due then the food had to be stored to ensure they had provisions throughout the year. This principle was seen during the time of Joseph in Egypt when he organised storehouses during the seven years of plenty so that the people could be fed during the seven years of famine: <<Let Pharaoh proceed to appoint overseers over the land, and take one-fifth of the produce of the land of Egypt during the seven plenteous years. Let them gather all the food of these good years that are coming, and lay up grain under the authority of Pharaoh for food in the cities, and let them keep it. That food shall be a reserve for the land against the seven years of famine that are to befall the land of Egypt, so that the land may not perish through the famine>> (Genesis 41:34-36)

Conaniah and Shimei, with their ten assistants, are responsible for the storerooms, while Kore and his six assistants arrange for distribution in the priests' cities; refer to 1 Chronicles 6:54-60. Hezekiah put faithful men in positions of responsibility and accountability over these tithes. The king knew that faithful administration is promoted when people are accountable as overseers.

<sup>15</sup> Eden, Miniamin, Jeshua, Shemaiah, Amariah, and Shecaniah were faithfully assisting him in the cities of the priests, to distribute the portions to their kindred, old and young alike, by divisions, <sup>16</sup> except those enrolled by genealogy, males from three years old and upwards, all who entered the house of the Lord as the duty of each day required, for their service according to their offices, by their divisions. <sup>17</sup> The enrolment of the priests was according to their ancestral houses; that of the Levites from twenty years old and upwards was according to their offices, by their divisions. <sup>18</sup> The priests were enrolled with all their little children, their wives, their sons, and their daughters, the whole multitude; for they were faithful in keeping themselves holy. <sup>19</sup> And for the descendants of Aaron, the priests, who were in the fields of common land belonging to their towns, town by town, the people designated by name were to distribute portions to every male among the priests and to everyone among the Levites who was enrolled.

### 2 Chronicles 31:15-19

Distribution was made to priests and their families, including provision for males from three years old, i.e. the age by which all of them had been weaned.

From twenty years old and upwards. In Numbers Chapter 4 it was stipulated that the Levites would serve between the ages of thirty and fifty years old. However, it was during the time of David that the age was reduced to twenty years old: <<*These were the sons of Levi by their ancestral houses, the heads of families as they were enrolled according to the number of the names of the individuals from twenty years old and upwards who were to do the work for the service of the house of the Lord*>> (1 Chronicles 23:24).

<sup>20</sup> Hezekiah did this throughout all Judah; he did what was good and right and faithful before the Lord his God. <sup>21</sup> And every work that he undertook in the service of the house of God, and in accordance with the law and the commandments, to seek his God, he did with all his heart; and he prospered.

### 2 Chronicles 31:20-21

Hezekiah did what was good and right and faithful before the Lord his God. The summarising evaluation of Hezekiah echoes the praise of the king in 2 Kings 18:3-7a, but reflects the Chronicler's characteristic vocabulary and concept of the exemplary king: seeking his God, with all his heart, and the fact that he prospered. This recalls David's exhortation of Solomon; refer to 1 Chronicles 22:13, 22:19, and 28:9.

In every respect Hezekiah was a thoroughly excellent man, saw his duty to God and to his people, and performed it with becoming zeal and diligence. The prayer today should be that God would send such kings and political leaders to the nations of the world; and that the people who are blessed with such be duly obedient to them, and thankful to the God who sends them! His prosperity was evidence of the blessing of God, especially in connection with his own generosity and wise stewardship. These words reveal his purpose, his method, and the result; and form a revelation of abiding value to all who are called upon to perform divine service in any form. Hezekiah's purpose was to seek his God; and the expression is exactly equivalent to that with which Christians are familiar: <<*But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well*>> (Matthew 6:33 NIV). His method was that of complete devotion, with all his heart. The result was that of prosperity, that is, of success in the very work which was attempted.