

OT LESSON #30

"COME TO THE HOUSE OF THE LORD"

by Ted L. Gibbons

INTRODUCTION: In 1980 I walked through Hezekiah's tunnel. It was an astonishing stroll. We made our way through the darkness and sang hymns about light: *Lead Kindly Light; The Lord is my Light; There is Sunshine in my Soul Today*, and so on. The tunnel is not straight. It bends and angles many times through nearly 1800 feet. If, as I understand, this construction began at both ends simultaneously, how in the world did they manage to find each other in the middle of all the limestone? Anyway, the tunnel was only a little shorter than I am and I managed to leave pieces of my cranial protoplasm on a number of small protrusions extending from the ceiling. What I thought of then as a spectacular feat of engineering now seems to be a lesson with deeper spiritual values. We too face a siege by an enemy at least as destructive as the Assyrians. We must make advance preparations so that the *waters of life* can come to us in our extremities. It will require faith and great effort, but if we wait until the enemy is at our gates, we may find ourselves unable to complete preparations before it is too late.

1. HEZEKIAH ORDERS THE HOUSE OF THE LORD TO BE CLEANSED.

And Ahaz gathered together the vessels of the house of God, and cut in pieces the vessels of the house of God, and shut up the doors of the house of the LORD, and he made him altars in every corner of Jerusalem. And in every several city of Judah he made high places to burn incense unto other gods, and provoked to anger the LORD God of his fathers (2 Chr. 28:24,25).

Ahaz, the father of Hezekiah, pushed the idolatry of Judah to new levels, erecting pagan altars throughout Jerusalem and Judea, and closing the doors of the Temple. The account of Ahaz's reign tells us that he "made Judea naked, and transgressed sore against the Lord" (2 Chr. 28:19). And when the judgements of God loomed over his people, he got worse.

And in the time of his distress did he trespass yet more against the LORD: this is that king Ahaz. For he sacrificed unto the gods of

Damascus, which smote him: and he said, Because the gods of the kings of Syria help them, therefore will I sacrifice to them, that they may help me. But they were the ruin of him, and of all Israel (2 Chr. 28:22,23).

So where did Hezekiah come from? I am astounded to see this kind of son from that kind of father. Once again the Lord and the Scriptures teach us that we can overcome our roots.

He was 25 when he became king, and

He in the first year of his reign, in the first month, opened the doors of the house of the LORD, and repaired them (2 Chr. 29:2).

The Assyrians to whom his father had paid tribute (see 2 Chr. 28:21), were not yet any threat but Hezekiah, long before his workmen attacked the rock and brought the water of Gihon into the city and the pool of Siloam, was already arranging for his people to have *living water*.

He called the priests together and instructed them.

And he brought in the priests and the Levites, and gathered them together into the east street,

And said unto them, Hear me, ye Levites, sanctify now yourselves, and sanctify the house of the LORD God of your fathers, and carry forth the filthiness out of the holy place..

For our fathers have trespassed, and done .that which was. evil in the eyes of the LORD our God, and have forsaken him, and have turned away their faces from the habitation of the LORD, and turned .their. backs.

Also they have shut up the doors of the porch, and put out the lamps, and have not burned incense nor offered burnt offerings in the holy place unto the God of Israel.

Wherefore the wrath of the LORD was upon Judah and Jerusalem, and he hath delivered them to trouble, to astonishment, and to hissing, as ye see with your eyes.

For, lo, our fathers have fallen by the sword, and our sons and our daughters and our wives are in captivity for this.

Now it is in mine heart to make a covenant with the LORD God of Israel, that his fierce wrath may turn away from us.

My sons, be not now negligent: for the LORD hath chosen you to stand before him, to serve him, and that ye should minister unto him, and burn incense (Chr. 29:4-11).

He charged the priesthood to do their duty and to enable all of his people to have the blessings of the temple. Does this sound at all familiar?

His longing for righteousness is a sweet insight into his life and into the future of Judah "Now it is in mine heart to make a covenant with the LORD God of Israel . . . "

Can you see the preparation Hezekiah is making to preserve his people from any enemy? In the beginning of his ministry he focused on the temple, the priesthood, and covenants. First he ordered the cleaning of the temple. Why does it matter that the temple is clean?

And inasmuch as my people build a house unto me in the name of the Lord, and do not suffer any unclean thing to come into it, that it be not defiled, my glory shall rest upon it; and my presence shall be there, for I will come into it, and all the pure in heart that shall come into it shall see God. But if it be defiled I will not come into it, and my glory shall not be there; for I will not come into unholy temples (D&C 97:15-17).

I have had a sense of the need to keep the temple clean. As I have performed interviews with my ward members, as I have taught and prepared them for temple experiences, I have often tried to share the feeling I have that a part of my

responsibility is to insure that the cleanliness of the temple is not compromised by permitting people to go to the temple who shouldn't. That must be a part of what temple recommend interviews are about. But the preservation of purity in the temple is more than a priesthood responsibility. Every member who goes to the house of the Lord should examine his soul for uncleanness as he would examine his feet for dirt. No one wants to bring mud into the temple.

We have been gathered to the valleys of these mountains for the express purpose of purifying ourselves, that we may become polished stones in the temple of God, for it is written, "Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out." Christ is represented as a living stone, chosen of God and precious, and the Apostle represents the Saints "as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ." We "are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the Saints and of the household of God, and are built upon the foundation of Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone, in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth into an holy temple in the Lord." Then my brethren, "what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people (Brigham Young, Journal of Discourses, Vol.12, p.161, February 16, 1868).

Once the temple was prepared, Hezekiah invited everybody to come. He planned a special Passover, held later than usual because of delays in preparing the temple (2 Chr. 30:2,3). Invitations were even sent to Israel, because Hezekiah knew his northern neighbors needed the living water as well as his own people.

So they established a decree to make proclamation throughout all Israel, from Beersheba even to Dan, that they should come to keep the Passover unto the LORD God of Israel at Jerusalem: for they had not done it of a long time in such sort as it was written. So the posts went with the letters from the king and his princes throughout all Israel and Judah, and according to the commandment of the king, saying, Ye children of Israel, turn again unto the LORD God of

Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, and he will return to the remnant of you, that are escaped out of the hand of the kings of Assyria (2 Chr. 30:5,6).

Not many of them came. Many had already been carried away into captivity, and the rest were not very repentant:

So the posts passed from city to city through the country of Ephraim and Manasseh even unto Zebulun: but they laughed them to scorn, and mocked them. Nevertheless divers of Asher and Manasseh and of Zebulun humbled themselves, and came to Jerusalem (2 C hr. 30:10,11).

And so a great repentance occurred in Judea. People came to the feast (30:13) and took away the pagan altars out of Jerusalem (30:14) and killed the Passover lamb (30:15,17), and both the priests and the people sanctified themselves (30:17,18).

It would take a great effort not to love Hezekiah. He did things for his people that few kings had done before. We must believe that a great many souls were better prepared for eternity than they had ever been before as they partook of the living waters provided by Hezekiah.

2. THE ASSYRIANS INVADE THE KINGDOM OF JUDAH. ISAIAH AND HEZEKIAH PRAY FOR HELP, AND AN ANGEL OF THE LORD DESTROYS MUCH OF THE ASSYRIAN ARMY.

When Assyria had conquered the northern kingdom, she turned her attention to Judah.

And when Hezekiah saw that Sennacherib was come, and that he was purposed to fight against Jerusalem, He took counsel with his princes and his mighty men to stop the waters of the fountains which were without the city: and they did help him So there was gathered much people together, who stopped all the fountains, and the brook that ran through the midst of the land, saying, Why should the kings of Assyria come, and find much water? Also he strengthened himself,

and built up all the wall that was broken, and raised it up to the towers, and another wall without, and repaired Millo in the city of David, and made darts and shields in abundance And he set captains of war over the people, and gathered them together to him in the street of the gate of the city, and spake comfortably to them, saying, Be strong and courageous, be not afraid nor dismayed for the king of Assyria, nor for all the multitude that is with him: for there be more with us than with him . . . (2 Chr. 32:2-7)

Hezekiah was a man of great faith who trusted in the Lord but still made weapons "in abundance." His statement of comparative numbers in verse 7 is like the testimony of Elisha in 2 Kings 6: "Fear not, for they that be with us are more than they that be with them" (6:16). What is the lesson we ought to learn from faith and works? How do we arm ourselves against the encroaching erosion of satanic doctrines? What weapons do we need in abundance? Faith? Scriptural knowledge? Repentance? Family unity? The Holy Spirit? How well armed are you? How well armed is your family?

Read the message of Sennacherib's servants to the people in Jerusalem in 2 Chronicles 32:9-17. How often are we taught by Lucifer's emissaries that our faith is not sufficient to protect us from the overwhelming challenges of mortality? We are sometimes like the spies sent by Moses to have a look at the promised land. Ten of the twelve were so concerned by the size of the walls they forgot the promises of God and the goodness of the fruit of the land.

Did you notice as you read that the people of Judah were threatened with hunger and thirst ["Doth not Hezekiah persuade you to give over yourselves to die by famine and by thirst . . ." (32:11)]? But they were in no danger of hunger and thirst? Hezekiah had made abundant preparations for the water and the bread of life so that they could have it in abundance.

Hezekiah and the prophet Isaiah gave themselves to prayer (32:20; Isaiah 37:14-20). Notice where Hezekiah went to pray (Is. 37:14). Is that important? Is the temple a place for the resolution of our most serious problems?

The Lord's answer came through Isaiah. It was filled with promises.

Therefore thus saith the LORD concerning the king of Assyria, He shall not come into this city, nor shoot an arrow there, nor come before it with shields, nor cast a bank against it. By the way that he came, by the same shall he return, and shall not come into this city, saith the LORD. For I will defend this city to save it for mine own sake, and for my servant David's sake (Isaiah 37:33-35).

The result?

Then the angel of the LORD went forth, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians a hundred and fourscore and five thousand: and when they arose early in the morning, behold, they [were] all dead corpses (Is. 37:36).

The Lord guaranteed that the Assyrians would not shoot a single arrow in Jerusalem. A promise, repeated four times in the scriptures, is worth a note here.

- No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD, and their righteousness is of me, saith the LORD (Isaiah 54:17)
- No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue that shall revile against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and their righteousness is of me, saith the Lord (3 Nephi 22:17).
- Verily, thus saith the Lord unto you--there is no weapon that is formed against you shall prosper . . . (D&C 71:9)
- That no weapon formed against them shall prosper; that he who diggeth a pit for them shall fall into the same himself . . . (D&C 109:25).

3. JOSIAH AND HIS PEOPLE COVENANT TO SERVE THE LORD.

Josiah was the great-grandson of Hezekiah. He came to the throne when he was eight years old (2 Chr. 34:1). By the time he was 16—a truly critical age in our culture, Josiah “began to seek after the Lord” and to remove the pagan altars evidently erected by his father (2 Chr. 34:3). This is heady stuff for a 16-year old. But this young man demonstrated throughout his life that he was willing to take a stand against evil of any kind.

Like his ancestor, he determined to repair the temple (34:8). His servants, attending to this important work made a wonderful discovery. He found a copy of the book of the law—the five books of Moses. I wonder how long the people had been without it. Can you imagine what would happen in only a generation or two if no one had scriptures. Think about the people of Zarahemla who had no records:

And at the time that Mosiah discovered them, they had become exceedingly numerous. Nevertheless, they had had many wars and serious contentions, and had fallen by the sword from time to time; and their language had become corrupted; and they had brought no records with them; and they denied the being of their Creator; and Mosiah, nor the people of Mosiah, could understand them (Omni 1:17).

What would happen to your family, your ward, your stake, if you had no scriptures? Notice how Josiah reacted when the words of the book were read to him and realized how far his people had strayed:

And it came to pass, when the king had heard the words of the law, that he rent his clothes. And the king commanded . . . saying, Go, enquire of the LORD for me, and for them that are left in Israel and in Judah, concerning the words of the book that is found: for great is the wrath of the LORD that is poured out upon us, because our fathers have not kept the word of the LORD, to do after all that is written in this book (23 Chr 34:19-21).

Josiah’s whole intent seems to have been to repair the temple and to repair his people. He brought everybody to the temple:

Then the king sent and gathered together all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem. And the king went up into the house of the LORD, and all

the men of Judah, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and the priests, and the Levites, and *all the people*, great and small: and *he read in their ears all the words of the book of the covenant* that was found in the house of the LORD. And the king stood in his place, and made a covenant before the LORD, *to walk after the LORD*, and *to keep his commandments*, and his testimonies, and his statutes, with all his heart, and with all his soul, *to perform the words of the covenant which are written in this book*. And he caused all that were present in Jerusalem and Benjamin to stand to it. And the inhabitants of Jerusalem did according to the covenant of God, the God of their fathers (2 Chr. 34:30-32, emphasis added).

The three parts of this covenant will excavate tunnels through the hardest rock to allow the flow of living waters:

1. *to walk after the LORD*
2. *to keep his commandments*, and his testimonies, and his statutes
3. *to perform the words of the covenant which are written in this book*

I am confident that our immersion in the scriptures will increase our desire to do the things Josiah and his people covenanted to do. What a tragedy it would be if our own books were misplaced or buried under the flood of daily duties so that years passed without their power in our lives!

CONCLUSION: Have you ever been really thirsty? I mean so thirsty that nothing else mattered? I remember hiking out of a deep canyon up a precipitous hillside and then several miles back to my car and a cooler of soda and ice water. I had lost my canteen while fishing a mountain river, and was fearful of the dangers of drinking from the stream. So my son and my brother-in-law and I hiked. They were both young and healthy and left me staggering in their dust as they practically loped up the incline and down the trail. When I got too far behind, they stopped and waited till I closed the gap, and then they were off again. I longed for liquid with an intensity that I have never experienced before nor since.

Hezekiah's and Josiah's people were suffering from that kind of spiritual thirst. The solutions provided by their leaders are eternal: temples, cleanliness, priesthood, repentance, scriptures . . . These activities are the tunnels that

carry to us the living water promised by the Savior:

But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life (John 4:14).

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