

## ***Extraordinary things - Revival comes from Unity*** 2Chronicles 30:1 - 31:1 - Hezekiah's Passover

This passage is about two groups of people:

- A king (Hezekiah) and his religious leaders who did an extraordinary thing
- A group of people that we know very little about. We know where they came from (Asher, Manasseh, and Zebulun [later it adds Ephraim and Issachar too] - mainly from the extreme Northwest of the country - not quite the end of the world but you can see it from there); we know there weren't many of them. Because of the extraordinary thing the king did, they did an extraordinary thing.

As a result, God did an extraordinary thing - he sent revival

I don't know about you but I want to see revival. I'm with Habakkuk (3:2) I've heard about it at other times and in other places. I want to see it here and now.

To understand why all this was extraordinary, we need to look at a bit of history. After death of Solomon, Rehoboam doesn't seem to have inherited any of his father's famed wisdom (1Kings 12:1-16). In response to peoples' request (v4-9) he took the advice of his young friends (He gave in to peer pressure, "Your father treated them harshly and look how prosperous he became. Treat them more harshly and you will be even more prosperous" - he liked the sound of that!) rather than the advice of wise men. Ten tribes told him to 'get lost!' (v16-17), he was left just with Judah (and Benjamin). The kingdom was divided for ever (v19).

This resulted in ***Tribal division and Political division***

. Jeroboam, Solomon's arch enemy, became leader of Israel (10 tribes, eventually named 'Samaria' after capital) and set up new religion based on 2 golden calves - "These are the gods who brought you up out of Egypt!" (1Kings 12:26-33, see too Exodus 32:4) So he set Israel on a course that eventually led to its destruction. The people of Judah came to hate the Samaritans for their false religion.

This resulted in a deep ***Religious division***

There then followed 200 years of animosity and deepening division. For example, during the reign of Hezekiah's father, Ahaz, Judah suffered defeat at the hands of Israel. Judah occasionally had minor revivals when they turned back to God but Israel never did; they lurched from one sin and one disaster to another. However, there was always a remnant who were faithful to God (eg 1Kings 19:18 - 7000 in Israel who have not bowed down to Baal)

Eventually (in the reign of Hezekiah's father Ahaz [a bad king - 2Chron28:2]) Israel was taken into captivity by Assyria and was no more (2Kings 17:6). The Assyrians resettled Samaria with people from all over the known world (2Kings 17:24ff) resulting in a nation of mixed race and mixed religion (the Samaritans) who were generally hated by the Jews.

This resulted in a deep ***Racial division***.

The divisions between the two countries ran very deep, with a history of war both recent and historical, when Hezekiah came to the throne in 715BC. These were very troubled times 2Chron 29:1,2. Israel had been exiled, many of their neighbours had been conquered, Judah was under threat.

But look at Hezekiah's priorities: the very first thing he did was to restore the temple and the services which had fallen into disuse under his predecessors (2Chron 29:3-6, 2Chron 29:35b, 36). How did the son of such a godless king as Ahaz become like this? Did he have a godly mother, is that why she is mentioned in 29:1?

Hezekiah then decided to celebrate the Passover (2Chron 30:1-4) even though they couldn't 'do it properly'. It was a month late and they didn't have enough resources. You can imagine the leaders saying "Look, it's only 3 weeks to Pentecost, let's celebrate that properly rather than not doing Passover justice". But Passover is a festival of beginnings, a festival of deliverance. Hezekiah knew they had to start there. The state of the nation was such that they had to go back to the beginning, to the God who brought them up out of Egypt (in our terms - back to the cross - Passover lamb!) so he used the provision to allow Passover to be celebrated a month late.

This is where he did an *extraordinary thing* - he invited Israel as well! He put aside 200 years of hatred, prejudice and division. However, this magnanimous gesture was not universally appreciated (v10)

This is where the other group of people did an *extraordinary thing* - they humbled themselves and came!

It is impossible to underestimate what this humility meant:

- they were prepared to face the taunting of their fellows (v10)
- they were prepared to overcome potential racial hatred
- they were prepared to put 200 years of animosity and hatred behind them
- they were prepared to make a long, inconvenient journey
- they were prepared to go against their national religion and culture

God graciously gave them unity of purpose. (v12)

The Passover was celebrated (v13-17) with some slight hitches because of the short notice. Hezekiah did a couple of other remarkable things (v18-23): The people from north had just come as they were. They probably didn't know they were supposed to purify themselves because they had been separated from Jerusalem for so long. But Hezekiah is a shepherd-king (like David, like Jesus) in action. He knew it is the heart that matters, not being religious. (Karl Bart said "religion is the pinnacle of man's rebellion against God", Hezekiah would have agreed with that).

They then celebrated the feast of unleavened bread with great rejoicing and they had such a good time, they did it all over again! (v23-26)

Then the most wonderful thing happened (v 27). The priests and the Levites stood to bless the people - "The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face towards you and give you peace" (Num 6:24-26) - and God heard them, for their prayer reached heaven, his holy dwelling place. They were blessed with the Lord's favour! His face shined on them! He put his name on them! (Num6:27)

Pentecost came a week early! (v27-31:1) They went out in his name (Num 6:27) and "undid the works of the devil", what Jesus came to do and what he sends us out to do in his name and in the power of the Spirit.

God heard because they were prepared to humble themselves - Hezekiah in inviting the despised northerners, the northerners in coming - to be united in purpose despite all the reasons they had for not so doing. God had promised to hear, to forgive and to heal the land if his people would humble themselves (2Chronicles7:14)

I would like to ask a bit of a morbid question: If you knew that you were going to die in a few hours, what would you pray? Wouldn't you pray fervently for the people or things that concerned you most?

When Jesus was in that position he prayed for us! He prayed that we would be one (Jn17:20,21). Oneness (unity) amongst Christians is very important to Jesus. Oneness means humbling ourselves, to make it possible.

I believe God is calling the Church to oneness. I believe he is calling us to do what it takes to make this possible; to do what it takes to accommodate unity with other Christians in our church life.

Will we make it possible? Will we accommodate it?

*How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity! .... For there the Lord bestows his blessing, even life for evermore."*  
*Psalm 133:1,3*

Steven Hall  
©1998 Living Waters Christian Fellowship