

CHAPTER 31

We have here a further account of that blessed reformation of which Hezekiah was a glorious instrument, and of the happy advances he made in it.

- I.** All the remnants of idolatry were destroyed and abolished (v. 1).
- II.** The priests and Levites were set to work again, every man in his place (v. 2).
- III.** Care was taken for their maintenance.
 - 1.** The royal bounty to the clergy, and for the support of the temple service, was duly paid (v. 3).
 - 2.** Orders were given for the raising of the people's quota (v. 4).
 - 3.** The people, thereupon, brought in their dues abundantly (v. 5-10).
 - 4.** Commissioners were appointed for the due distribution of what was brought in (v. 11-19). Lastly, Here is the general praise of Hezekiah's sincerity in all his undertakings (v. 20, 21).

<4300>2 CHRONICLES 31:1-10

HEZEKIAH DESTROYS IDOLATRY

We have here an account of what was done after the passover. What was wanting in the solemnities of preparation for it before was made up in that which is better, a due improvement of it after. When the religious exercises of a Lord's day or a communion are finished we must not think that then the work is done. No, then the hardest part of our work begins, which is to exemplify the impressions of the ordinance upon our minds in all the instances of a holy conversation. So it was here; when all this was finished there was more to be done.

- I.** They applied themselves with vigour to destroy all the monuments of idolatry, v. 1. The king had done what he could of this kind (<2804>2 Kings 18:4), but the people could discover those profane relics which escaped the eye of the king's officers, and therefore they went out to see what they

could do, v. 1. This was done immediately after the passover. Note, The comfort of communion with God should kindle in us a holy zeal and indignation against sin, against every thing that is offensive to God. If our hearts have been made to burn within us at an ordinance, that spirit of burning will consume the dross of corruption. *What have I now to do any more with idols?* Their zeal here in destroying the *images and groves, the high places and altars*, appeared,

1. In that they did this, not only in the cities of Judah and Benjamin, but in those of Ephraim and Manasseh. Some think that those cities are meant which had come under the protection and the jurisdiction of the kings of Judah. Others think that, Hoshea king of Israel not forbidding it, their zeal carried them out to the destruction of idolatry even in many parts of his kingdom. At least those that came out of Ephraim and Manasseh to keep the passover (as many did, ⁴⁸¹⁸2 Chronicles 30:18) destroyed all their own images and groves, and did the like for as many more as they had influence upon or could make interest in for leave to do it. We should not only reform ourselves, but do all we can to reform others too.

2. They destroyed all: they *utterly destroyed all*; they spared none through favour or affection either to the images or to their worshippers; though ever so ancient, ever so costly, ever so beautiful, and ever so well patronised, yet they must all be destroyed. Note, Those that sincerely set themselves against sin will set themselves against all sin.

3. They would not return to their houses, though they had been long absent, till this was done. They could not be easy, nor think themselves safe, in their cities, as long as the images and groves, those betrayers and destroyers of their country, were left standing. Perhaps the prophet Isaiah pointed to this when, a little before, he spoke of a day in which men should cast away the very idols that they themselves had made. So surprising was this blessed change, ³¹²¹Isaiah 2:20; 31:6, 7.

II. Hezekiah revived and restored the courses of the priests and Levites, which David had appointed and which had of late been put out of course, v. 2. The temple service was put into its proper method again, to run in the old channel. Every man was made to know his work, his place, his time, and what was expected from him. Note, Good order contributes much to the carrying on of a good work. The priests were appointed in their courses for *burnt-offerings and peace-offerings*; the Levites in their

courses were some to minister to the priests, others to *give thanks and praise*. See ^{<1334>}1 Chronicles 23:4, 5. And all this in the *gates or courts of the tents of the Lord*. The temple is here called a tent because the temple privileges are movable things and this temple was shortly to be removed.

III. He appropriated a branch of the revenue of his crown to the maintenance and support of the altar. Though the people were to be at the charge of the daily offerings, and those on the sabbaths, new moons, and feasts, yet, rather than they should be burdened with the expense, he allowed out of his own estate, or out of his exchequer, for all those offerings, v. 3. It was a generous act of piety, wherein he consulted both God's honour and his people's ease, as a faithful servant to him and a tender father to them. Let princes and great men reckon that well bestowed, and set out to the best interest, which they give for the support and encouragement of religion in their country.

IV. He issued out an order to the inhabitants of Jerusalem first, v. 4 (that those who were nearest the temple, and both saved and got by being so, might give a good example to others), but which was afterwards extended to, or at least admitted by, the *cities of Judah*, that they should carefully pay in their dues, according to the law, to the priests and Levites. This had been long neglected, which made the work to be neglected (for a scandalous maintenance makes a scandalous ministry); but Hezekiah, having himself been liberal, might with a good grace require his subjects to be just to the temple service. And observe the end he aims at in recovering and restoring to the priests and Levites their portion, that they *might be encouraged in the law of the Lord*, in the study of it, and in doing their duty according to it. Observe here,

1. It is fit that ministers should be not only maintained, but encouraged, that they should not only be kept to do their work, but that they should also have wherewith to live comfortably, that they may do it with cheerfulness.

2. Yet they are to be maintained, not in idleness, pride, and luxury, but in *the law of the Lord*, in their observance of it themselves and in teaching others the good knowledge of it.

V. The people thereupon brought in their tithes very readily. They wanted nothing but to be called upon; and therefore, *as soon as the commandment came abroad*, the first-fruits and all the holy things were duly brought in, v.

5, 6. What the priests had occasion for, for themselves and their families, they made use of, and the overplus was *laid in heaps*, v. 6. All harvest-time they were increasing these heaps, as the fruits of the earth were gathered in; for God was to have his dues out of them all. Though a prescription may be pleaded for a *modus decimandi* — *tenth proportion*, yet it cannot be pleaded *pro non decimando* — *for the omission of the tenth*. When harvest ended they finished their heaps, v. 7. Now here we have, 1. The account given to Hezekiah concerning those heaps. He *questioned the priests and Levites* concerning them, why they did not use what was paid in, but hoarded it up thus, (v. 9), to which it was answered that they had made use of all they had occasion for, for the maintenance of themselves and their families and for their winter store, and that this was that which was left over and above, v. 10. They did not hoard these heaps for covetousness, but to show what plentiful provision God by his law had made for them, if they could but have it collected and brought in, and that those who conscientiously give God his dues out of their estates bring a blessing upon all they have: *Since they began to bring in the offerings the Lord has blessed his people*. See for this ^{<3729>}Haggai 2:19. “Try me,” says God, “if you will not otherwise trust me, whether, upon your bringing the tithes into the store-house, you have not a blessing poured out upon you,” ^{<3980>}Malachi 3:10, 11; ^{<3481>}Ezekiel 44:30.

2. The acknowledgment which the king and princes made of it, v. 8. They gave thanks to God for his good providence, which gave them something to bring, and his good grace, which gave them hearts to bring it. And they also *blessed the people*, that is, commended them for their doing well now, without reproaching them for their former neglects. It is observable that after they had tasted the sweetness of God's ordinance, in the late comfortable passover, they were thus free in maintaining the temple service. Those that experience the benefit of a settled ministry will not grudge the expense of it.

^{<4811>}2 CHRONICLES 31:11-21

THE MAINTENANCE OF THE PRIESTS

Here we have,

I. Two particular instances of the care of Hezekiah concerning church matters, having put them into good order, to keep them so. The tithes and other holy things being brought in, he provided,

1. That they should be carefully laid up, and not left exposed in loose heaps, liable to be wasted and embezzled. He ordered chambers to be made ready in some of the courts of the temple for store-chambers (v. 11), and into them the offerings were brought and there kept under lock and key, v. 12, 13. Treasures or store-keepers were appointed, who had the oversight of them, to see that *moth and rust* did not *corrupt* them nor *thieves break through to steal*. This wisdom of laying up the surplus in days of plenty we may learn from the ant, who *provideth meat in summer*. The laying up in store what was brought in was an encouragement to people to pay in their contributions. That will be given cheerfully by the public which appears to be well husbanded.

2. That they should be faithfully laid out, according to the uses they were intended for. Church treasures are not to be hoarded any longer than till there is occasion for them, lest even the rust should be a witness against those who hoard them. Officers were appointed, men (no doubt) of approved wisdom and faithfulness, to *distribute the oblations of the Lord and the most holy things* among the priests (v. 14), and to see that they all had a competent maintenance for themselves and their families. The law provided sufficient for them all, and therefore, if some had too little, it must be because others had too much; to prevent such inequality these officers were to go by some certain rule of proportion in the disposal of the incomes of the temple. It is said of the priests here (v. 18) *that in their set office they sanctified themselves; in faith* they sanctified themselves (so the word is), that is, as bishop Patrick explains it, they attended their ministry at the house of God, not doubting but they should be provided with all things necessary. Now, because they served God in that confidence, care was taken that they should not be made ashamed of their hope. Note, Those that sanctify themselves to God and his service in faith, believing that he will see them want for nothing that is good for them, *shall* certainly *be fed*. Out of the offerings of the Lord distribution was made,

(1.) To the priests in the cities (v. 15), who staid at home while their brethren went to Jerusalem, and did good there in *teaching the good knowledge of the Lord*. The preaching priests were maintained as well as

the sacrificing priests, and those that abode by the stuff as well as those that warred the warfare.

(2.) To those that *entered into the house of the Lord*, all the *males from three years old and upwards*; for the male children even at that tender age, it seems, were allowed to come into the temple with their parents, and shared with them in this distribution, v. 16.

(3.) Even the Levites from twenty years old and upwards had their share, v. 17.

(4.) The wives and children of the priests and Levites had a comfortable maintenance out of those offerings, v. 18. In maintaining ministers, regard must be had to their families, that not they only, but theirs, may have food convenient. In some countries where ministers have their salary paid them by the state an addition is made to it upon the birth of a child.

(5.) The priests in the country, that lived *in the fields of the suburbs*, were not overlooked in this ministration, v. 19. Those also had their share who were *inhabitants of the villages*, though they might be supposed to live at a less expense.

II. A general character of Hezekiah's services for the support of religion, v. 20, 21.

1. His pious zeal reached to all the parts of his kingdom: *Thus he did throughout all Judah*; every part of the country, and not those only that lay next him, shared in the good fruits of his government.

2. He sincerely designed to please God, and approved himself to him in all he did: He *wrought that which was good before the Lord his God*; all his care was to do that which should be accepted of God, which was *right* (that is, agreeable to natural equity), *and truth* (that is, agreeable to divine revelation and his covenant with God), *before the Lord*; to do according to that law which is holy, just, and good.

3. What he began he went through with, prosecuted it with vigour, and *did it with all his heart*.

4. All his good intentions were brought to a good issue; whatever he did in the service of the house of God, and in the government of his kingdom, he prospered in it. Note, What is undertaken with a sincere regard to the glory of God will succeed to our own honour and comfort at last.