

OpenTheo

November 3rd: 2 Chronicles 30 & Acts 9:32-43

November 2, 2020



Alastair Roberts

Hezekiah's Passover. Peter's healing of Aeneas and raising of Tabitha.

Reflections upon the readings from the ACNA Book of Common Prayer (<http://bcp2019.anglicanchurch.net/>).

If you have enjoyed my output, please tell your friends. If you are interested in supporting my videos and podcasts and my research more generally, please consider supporting my work on Patreon (<https://www.patreon.com/zugzwanged>), using my PayPal account (<https://bit.ly/2RLaUcB>), or by buying books for my research on Amazon (https://www.amazon.co.uk/hz/wishlist/ls/36WVSWCK4X33O?ref_=wl_share).

The audio of all of my videos is available on my Soundcloud account: <https://soundcloud.com/alastairadversaria>. You can also listen to the audio of these episodes on iTunes: <https://itunes.apple.com/gb/podcast/alastairs-adversaria/id1416351035?mt=2>.

Transcript

2 Chronicles 30. Hezekiah sent to all Israel and Judah, and wrote letters also to Ephraim and Manasseh, that they should come to the house of the Lord at Jerusalem to keep the Passover to the Lord, the God of Israel. For the king and his princes and all the assembly in Jerusalem had taken counsel to keep the Passover in the second month, for they could not keep it at that time because the priests had not consecrated themselves in sufficient number, nor had the people assembled in Jerusalem.

And the plan seemed right to the king and all the assembly. So they decreed to make a proclamation throughout all Israel, from Beersheba to Dan, that the people should come and keep the Passover to the Lord, the God of Israel at Jerusalem, for they had not kept it as often as prescribed. So couriers went throughout all Israel and Judah with letters from the king and his princes, as the king had commanded, saying, O people of Israel, return to the Lord, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, that he may turn again to the

remnant of you who have escaped from the hand of the kings of Assyria.

Do not be like your fathers and your brothers, who were faithless to the Lord God of their fathers, so that he made them a desolation, as you see. Do not now be stiff-necked as your fathers were, but yield yourselves to the Lord, and come to his sanctuary, which he has consecrated for ever, and serve the Lord your God, that his fierce anger may turn away from you. For if you return to the Lord, your brothers and your children will find compassion with their captors and return to this land.

For the Lord your God is gracious and merciful, and will not turn away his face from you, if you return to him. So the couriers went from city to city throughout the country of Ephraim and Manasseh, and as far as Zebulun. But they laughed them to scorn and mocked them.

However some men of Assyria, of Manasseh, and of Zebulun humbled themselves and came to Jerusalem. The hand of God was also on Judah to give them one heart to do what the king and the princes commanded by the word of the Lord. And many people came together in Jerusalem to keep the feast of unleavened bread in the second month, a very great assembly.

They set to work and removed the altars that were in Jerusalem, and all the altars for burning incense they took away, and threw into the brook Kidron. And they slaughtered the Passover lamb on the fourteenth day of the second month. And the priests and the Levites were ashamed, so that they consecrated themselves and brought burnt offerings into the house of the Lord.

They took their accustomed posts according to the law of Moses, the man of God. The priests threw the blood that they had received from the hand of the Levites, for there were many in the assembly who had not consecrated themselves. Therefore the Levites had to slaughter the Passover lamb for everyone who was not clean, to consecrate it to the Lord.

For a majority of the people, many of them from Ephraim, Manasseh, Issachar, and Zebulun, had not cleansed themselves, yet they ate the Passover otherwise than as prescribed. For Hezekiah had prayed for them, saying, May the good Lord pardon everyone who sets his heart to seek God, the Lord, the God of his fathers, even though not according to the sanctuary's rules of cleanness. And the Lord heard Hezekiah and healed the people.

And the people of Israel who were present at Jerusalem kept the feast of unleavened bread seven days with great gladness. And the Levites and the priests praised the Lord day by day, singing with all their might to the Lord. And Hezekiah spoke encouragingly to all the Levites who showed great skill in the service of the Lord.

So they ate the food of the festival for seven days, sacrificing peace offerings, and giving thanks to the Lord, the God of their fathers. Then the whole assembly agreed together to keep the feast for another seven days. So they kept it for another seven days with gladness.

For Hezekiah king of Judah gave the assembly one thousand bulls and seven thousand sheep for offerings. And the princes gave the assembly one thousand bulls and ten thousand sheep. And the priests consecrated themselves in great numbers.

The whole assembly of Judah, and the priests and the Levites, and the whole assembly that came out of Israel, and the sojourners who came out of the land of Israel, and the sojourners who lived in Judah rejoiced. So there was great joy in Jerusalem. For since the time of Solomon, the son of David, king of Israel, there had been nothing like this in Jerusalem.

Then the priests and the Levites arose and blessed the people. And their voice was heard, and their prayer came to his holy habitation in heaven. King Hezekiah's restoration of the temple in 2 Chronicles chapter 29 made possible a national celebration of the Passover in the next chapter.

Passover is described as more of a family celebration in Exodus chapter 12, but in Deuteronomy chapter 16 verses 1-8 it is described as something that must be celebrated at a central location. Observe the month of Abib, and keep the Passover to the Lord your God. For in the month of Abib the Lord your God brought you out of Egypt by night, and you shall offer the Passover sacrifice to the Lord your God from the flock or the herd at the place that the Lord will choose to make his name dwell there.

You shall eat no leavened bread with it. Seven days you shall eat it with unleavened bread, the bread of affliction, for you came out of the land of Egypt in haste, that all the days of your life you may remember the day when you came out of the land of Egypt. No leaven shall be seen with you in all your territory for seven days, nor shall any of the flesh that you sacrifice on the evening of the first day remain all night until morning.

You may not offer the Passover sacrifice within any of your towns that the Lord your God has given you, but at the place that the Lord your God will choose to make his name dwell in it. There you shall offer the Passover sacrifice, in the evening at sunset, at the time you came out of Egypt, and you shall cook it and eat it at the place that the Lord your God will choose. And in the morning you shall turn and go to your tents.

For six days you shall eat unleavened bread, and on the seventh day there shall be a solemn assembly to the Lord your God. You shall do no work on it. One of the repeated judgments against the kings, particularly in the north but also in the south, was their failure to establish centralized worship in Jerusalem.

The temple in Jerusalem was where the Lord had placed his name, and yet both Israel and Judah worshipped on many high places. Israel worshipped the Lord in an idolatrous manner at the shrines of Dan and Bethel, where Jeroboam the son of Nebat had set up his golden calves. Ahaz the former king of Judah had worshipped many foreign gods and had also built altars all throughout Jerusalem, in competition with the true altar of the Lord and his house.

In restoring the temple and in his invitation to the Passover, Hezekiah is finally dealing with some of these sins and asserting the proper centrality of the temple once more. Hezekiah begins his reign with remarkable vision and with great determination. He wants to restore the true worship of the Lord in his house.

He wants the people to be committed to the Lord once more in covenant, and he intends to join both halves of the divided nation in common service of the Lord. By this point the northern kingdom had been overrun by the Assyrians. Vast numbers of the Israelites had been deported to various lands, and now only a small remnant remained, along with the large number of foreign peoples that the Assyrians were settling there.

Although the tribes of the northern kingdom had not been utterly destroyed, the small remnant of them still living in their former territory were living as dispossessed persons within the promised land, scattered among peoples of other nations. Because a sufficient number of priests have not yet consecrated themselves, the Passover celebration is delayed until the second month. This is not the first time that there was a delay in the celebration of the Passover.

A similar thing happens in Numbers chapter 9 verses 6-12. And there were certain men who were unclean through touching a dead body, so that they could not keep the Passover on that day. And they came before Moses and Aaron on that day.

And those men said to him, We are unclean through touching a dead body. Why are we kept from bringing the Lord's offering at this point of time among the people of Israel? And Moses said to them, Wait, that I may hear what the Lord will command concerning you. The Lord spoke to Moses, saying, Speak to the people of Israel, saying, If any one of you or of your descendants is unclean through touching a dead body, or is on a long journey, he shall still keep the Passover to the Lord.

In the second month, on the fourteenth day at twilight, they shall keep it. They shall eat it with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. They shall leave none of it until the morning, nor break any of its bones.

According to all the statute for the Passover they shall keep it. Due to the fact that an insufficient number of priests are consecrated, and also because word of this general celebration had not been spread throughout the whole land of Israel, the celebration is once again delayed until the second month. This gives messengers of Hezekiah time to

go throughout the whole of the land of Israel, now ruled by the Assyrians, inviting them to this celebration.

Although most of the people may have been deported to various parts of the Assyrian Empire, there seem to be enough Israelites left in the land for some discernible shape of the former tribal boundaries to remain. Sadly, the messengers of Hezekiah are largely dismissed by the people to whom they are sent. This is an opportunity for them to restore themselves to the Lord, to seek the Lord's face, to repent of the sins that placed them under the hand of the kings of Assyria, and also to seek for the restoration of their brothers and their children who are on far off lands.

Despite the widespread rejection, some do respond positively. Some men of Asher, Manasseh and Zebulun humble themselves and come to Jerusalem. The kingdom of Judah, for its part, responds very positively to the reforms of King Hezekiah.

They are unified in their response to him. And when they come to Jerusalem, one of the first things that they do is to set to work and remove the altars that King Ahaz had set up there. Now that the temple at the heart has been cleared out, the reformation of Hezekiah can start to extend outwards.

Even beyond the fact that it is celebrated in the second rather than in the first month, there are a lot of things about this celebration of the Passover that are irregular or that break with the customary protocol. Levites perform some of the duties that the priests were supposed to perform, as there aren't sufficient numbers of priests that have been consecrated for the task. More seriously, a majority of the people have not been cleansed, and yet they still eat the Passover.

They break with the rules of cleanness, but they have set their hearts to seek the Lord, and Hezekiah prays for the people that they might be cleansed. This is a remarkable prayer. The king is praying that some deficiency in the cultic practice would be overlooked by the Lord, that the Lord would mercifully pardon people on account of the fact that he knew their hearts, and that their actions, though violating the letter of the law and needing forgiveness, were nonetheless undertaken in accord with the spirit of the law.

Hezekiah's request here is not based upon a belief that the spirit of the law is the only thing that matters. The letter of the law matters very much. This is precisely why he needs to ask for forgiveness for the violation of the cultic requirements.

However, his petition is very much based upon an understanding of the weightier and lesser matters of the law, and the fact that in such an anomalous situation, people's concern for the weightier matters of the law might inform the Lord's pardoning of their more minor infractions. The celebration is a very joyful one, and so joyful that they agree to celebrate the feast for an extra seven days, something seemingly unprecedented

since Solomon's first dedication of the temple. In this, as in other respects, Hezekiah and Solomon are very similar to each other.

Hezekiah and the princes offer extravagant gifts of sacrifices for the people, and the priests are consecrated in great numbers. People from the former nation of Israel and people from Judah, along with sojourners in both of these regions, are brought together in this great celebration. It forms one people where people had been formerly separated from each other.

There is in this event a rediscovery of the unity of the people of God in the light of the great action of God's deliverance in the Exodus. For a people living in a state of exile in their own land, and with many of their brothers and relations in exile elsewhere, this would have been a very powerful message. For a nation such as Judah, facing the threat of exile in the future, this reminder of the work of the God of the Exodus would also be a great encouragement.

A question to consider, what are some of the ways in which King Hezekiah might remind us of King Solomon? Acts chapter 9 verses 32-43 Now as Peter went here and there among them all, he came down also to the saints who lived at Lydda. There he found a man named Aeneas, bedridden for eight years, who was paralyzed. And Peter said to him, Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you, rise and make your bed.

And immediately he rose. And all the residents of Lydda and Sharon saw him, and they turned to the Lord. Now there was in Joppa a disciple named Tabitha, which translated means Dorcas.

She was full of good works and acts of charity. In those days she became ill and died, and when they had washed her, they laid her in an upper room. Since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples, hearing that Peter was there, sent two men to him, urging him, Please come to us without delay.

So Peter rose and went with them. And when he arrived, they took him to the upper room. All the widows stood beside him weeping and showing tunics and other garments that Dorcas made while she was with them.

But Peter put them all outside and knelt down and prayed. And turning to the body, he said, Tabitha, arise. And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter, she sat up.

And he gave her his hand and raised her up. Then, calling the saints and widows, he presented her alive. And it became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed in the Lord.

And he stayed in Joppa for many days with one Simon, a tanner. Acts chapter 9 concludes with two miraculous healings performed through the apostle Peter. From here until the end of chapter 12, Peter will be the focus, before Peter largely disappears from

the text of Acts, save for a brief appearance in chapter 15.

Luke often has male and female pairings in his gospel, and here we find another male and female pair of healings. There are also features of these two healings that might remind us of healings in the gospel, or healings in the Old Testament, as we will soon see. The section begins with Peter travelling from place to place between various Christian congregations.

He seems to be consolidating these early gatherings of Christian disciples, encouraging them in the faith and connecting them with the heart of the Judean Christian movement in the city of Jerusalem. As he's doing this, he spends some time among the saints that live at Lydda. While there he encounters Aeneas, who's been bedridden for eight years, a paralytic.

Jesus heals a paralytic in Luke chapter 5, forgiving his sins at the same time. It's not clear whether Aeneas was a Christian or not, but Peter heals him in the name of Jesus the Messiah, instructing him to rise up and make his bed. He is immediately healed, and the news of this healing travels throughout the entire region, and many people turn to the Lord.

This gives a window into the spread of the gospel in Judean regions beyond Jerusalem. The church is clearly growing, expanding outwards into these various parts of the land. Only a year or two previously, the disciples themselves had gone throughout all these different regions as Jesus had moved towards Jerusalem.

At that time they had declared the good news of the Kingdom of God that was coming. During that period they had performed signs and wonders. This work presumably prepared the ground for what was taking place now.

As they went to these various towns and villages, they were going to places that had already received messages about Christ prior to his crucifixion and resurrection, and now they could be filled in on the rest of the story. The fame of Christ and of the gospel is spread by these marvellous works, works that are performed in the name of Jesus Christ. The Apostle Peter does not claim miraculous power of his own, rather he claims to act as the emissary of Jesus Christ, speaking and healing in his name.

As has happened in many other occasions in the history of the church, miraculous healings and signs are a means by which God's Kingdom announces itself in a new region. The power of the name in which the church acts, and a reality-filled promise of the healing and the restoration of the Kingdom that it proclaims, are both conveyed in such signs and wonders. Some have seen in the name Aeneas some reference to the mythical founder of Rome.

Perhaps in giving us the name of this man, Luke is drawing our attention to the direction

in which the gospel is moving. Lydda, where Peter was currently working, was about 12 miles from the city of Joppa. Joppa was a port, perhaps most famously where the prophet Jonah had sought to catch a ship to take him to Tarshish when he was running from the mission of the Lord.

At Joppa a female disciple has just died, a woman named Tabitha, which is translated as Dorcas. Tabitha means gazelle, and Dorcas would be the equivalent name in Greek. Burial usually occurred quite swiftly after someone died, as we saw in the case of Ananias and Sapphira, but this woman after she has died is washed and placed in an upper room, and the disciples hurry to summon Peter from Lydda.

When someone dies, it's most common to bring their bodies down, to bring their bodies down towards the earth where they will finally rest. The bringing of a body up into an upper room might remind us of two stories from the books of 1st and 2nd Kings. In 1st Kings chapter 17 Elijah carries the body of the dead son of the widow of Zarephath up into his upper room.

In 2nd Kings chapter 4 the Shunammite woman brings the body of her dead son up into the upper room of the prophet Elisha. In each of these cases there is a movement of the body away from the realm that is associated with death, the lower realm, and a raising of the body up. Tabitha is presented to Peter and to us as a woman noted for her good works and her charity, her ministry is one of making clothes for needy people, and she is particularly of service to the widows.

After Peter places them all outside, he raises Tabitha up. As Tabitha is brought back to life, the miracle is another proof of the power of Christ to the surrounding region, and many people throughout Joppa believe in the Lord. Peter had been present at a similar raising by Jesus in the outside and took the child's father and mother and those who were with him and went in where the child was.

Taking her by the hand he said to her, Talitha kumi, which means, little girl I say to you, arise. And immediately the girl got up and began walking, for she was twelve years of age, and they were immediately overcome with amazement. And he strictly charged them that no one should know this, and told them to give her something to eat.

Talitha kumi might remind us of Tabitha arise. Only one letter differs between these two words, and it is one of many details that makes this raising of Tabitha reminiscent of Christ's raising of Jairus' daughter. It is also, as we have already noted, reminiscent of Elijah's healing of the son of the widow of Zarephath in 1 Kings 17, 17-24, and of Elisha's healing of the son of the Shunammite woman in 2 Kings 4, 18-37.

Comparable miracles of Christ occur in Luke 7, 11-17 and 8, 41-42 and 49-56. Robert Tannehill is one of various commentators who observe different family resemblances between these stories. Not every story has all of these details, but each one contains

enough of them to connect them with the other stories.

First, the dead body is placed in an upper room. Second, the healer is absent and summoned. Third, the healer encounters people weeping.

Fourth, the healer excludes the public. Fifth, the healer prays in private. Sixth, there is a command to rise.

Seventh, after the command or healing action, the dead person's eyes open. Eighth, the dead person sits up. Ninth, the healer either grasps the hand of the dead person or, after they are revived, gives them their hand.

Tenth, the healer calls relatives or friends to show them the person alive. Eleventh, the report of the person being raised up goes round about. There will be another similar story in Acts 20 when Paul raises Eutychus.

The effect of all of this is for the Gospel to grow in its influence in these various parts of Judea. More and more people are hearing and responding, and Peter's missionary journey, which anticipates the missionary journeys of Paul among the Gentiles, leads to a great number of converts in the land of Palestine. A question to consider, what might we learn from Luke's portrayal of Tabitha's ministry?