



REVIEW ARTICLE

A RECONSIDERATION OF HEZEKIAH'S RELIGIOUS REFORMATION

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ABSTRACT

Dtr. Historian assessed all the kings of the Northern Kingdom of Israel as 'evil kings in the sight of the LORD', while giving the six kings of Judah in the southern kingdom a good assessment of their 'honesty in the eyes of the Lord'. This illustrates the religious judgment of Dtr. Historian on the north and south kingdoms. However, among the kings of the Southern kingdom, there are two kings who have received the highest praise for comparison with other kings. One of them is the thirteenth King Hezekiah(715-687 B.C.). The other one is Josiah. Josiah was judged by Dtr. Historian as 'the king who, with all his heart, turned his heart to the LORD, following all the laws of Moses with all his heart'(2 Kings 23:25). These two kings, who were evaluated by Dtr. Historian "the best king ever" and never before, are the kings of the great Reformation in the history of Israel in the Old Testament. I will examine Hezekiah's religious reforms and the spirit of reform that modern churches and Christians should look back on.

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INTRODUCTION

Hezekiah refused to be subordinated to Assyria, the great empire that unified the Ancient Near East for the first time, and began political reform. He tried to expand control over parts of the formerly dislocated kingdom of Israel and the Philistines. This political reform of Hezekiah naturally led to the military response of Assyria. Assyria had already destroyed the kingdom of northern Israel in 722 B.C. In 701 B.C., Sennacherib king of Assyria led a great army to strike the kingdom of Judah. The Assyrian records of this war appear in Sennacherib's Prism Inscription from the excavation of Nineveh. Let's look at some of the records here: And Hezekiah, the Judean, who did not submit to my yoke:

I besieged and captured forty-six of his strong walled cities, and the small cities of their environs which were without number, by the spanning of a ramp, the approach of siege machines, the battling of infantry, breaches, breaks and stormladders. 200,150 people, small and great, male and female, horses, asses, mules, camels, oxen, and sheep and goats without number I brought out from them and I counted as spoil. Himself, I locked him up like a caged bird in the midst of Jerusalem, his royal city. I connected siegeworks against him so that I turned those going out of his city gate into a taboo for him. I cut off the cities that I despoiled from the

midst of his land, and I gave them to Mitinti King of Ashdod, Padi King of Ekron, and Silli-Bel King of Gaza, so that I diminished his land... The fear of the splendor of my majesty overcame Hezekiah, and the Arabs and crack troops that he had brought in for the strengthening of Jerusalem his royal city ceased working. He sent a heavy tribute and his daughters and his harem and singers, together with thirty talents of gold, eight hundred talents of silver, choice antimony, blocks of stone, ivory couches, ivory armchairs, elephant hides, ivory, ebony, boxwood, and all sorts of things to the midst of Nineveh, my lordly city, and he sent his ambassadors for the giving of tribute and the performance of vassal service.(Friedman, 1997, 94)

If we look at the contents of this inscription, Assyria seems to have won the battle. But Assyria failed to break down the kingdom of Judah as it had destroyed Israel. The statements of the Old Testament about this war appear in three places (2 Ki 18:13-19:37; Isa 36-37; 2 Ch 32:1-23): That night the angel of the LORD went out and put to death a hundred and eighty five thousand men in the Assyrian camp. When the people got up the next morning, there were all the dead bodies! So Sennacherib king of Assyria broke camp and withdrew. He returned to Nineveh and stayed there(2 Ki 19:35-36). Thus the Bible reports that Jerusalem was safe under Hezekiah from the conquest and destruction of Assyria.

Which of the Sennacherib inscriptions and the Bible's record is a more credible statement? Biblical scholars who respect both the ancient Near East and both the Bible and the Prism inscription often judge the war between the two countries as a draw. But we should not overlook the mantra that God helped Hezekiah lead the war to victory. The kingdom of Judah was weaker than northern Israel. It is significant that Judah survived the massive assault of Assyria, the great empire that has already broken North Israel. How then did Hezekiah try to fight against the great Assyrian army? The tunnel that Hezekiah built at that time to prepare for the war against Assyria and to use the spring of Gihon outside the city of Jerusalem has biblical and archaeological value.

Hezekiah's tunnel: The Istanbul archeological museum in Turkey still has a Siloam statue containing important records about the tunnel built by Hezekiah. This Siloam stone was found near the Siloam pond in Jerusalem, which is not very large, about 25cm high and 60cm wide. Here, the process by which King Hezekiah dug a rock and made an underground tunnel is recorded shortly in ancient Hebrew. Jerusalem, located at the highest point in the land of Canaan, had a vulnerability that it could not raise water itself because there was no water source in the castle.

The only water supply in Jerusalem was the Gihon spring outside the city. Normally there is no problem in putting the water there into the castle, but things have to be different in an emergency such as a war. So Hezekiah built a tunnel to use the waters of the spring outside the city directly in the city, and when this underground tunnel was completed, the people in the city of Jerusalem could use the spring water in the castle. This is the famous pool of Siloam in the New Testament (Lk 13:4; Jn 9:7,11). Siloam rock has a brief record of the construction of this tunnel:...

When we were about three cubits away, we could hear people calling on the other side. Finally, when the tunnel was pierced, the stone-cutting extensions bumped into each other. And from the (Gihon) spring the water flowed 1,200 cubits over the reservoir (Siloam). (Park, 2001, 182)

The whole length of the tunnel is 1,200 cubits. The current measurement unit is 535m. This record provided another knowledge that the length of one cubic foot corresponds to about 45 cm (53,500 cm ÷ 1200 = 44.58). And there remains a mystery still unresolved in this tunnel. This is because the shape of this tunnel has an S-shape instead of a straight line. It is surprising that people started to work on rocks at different points with a hammer and a dragon, and could hear each other's voices almost exactly at the middle point. How great this was also confirmed by the fact that Dtr. Historian, who makes a final assessment of King Hezekiah's life: "As for the other events of Hezekiah's reign, all his achievements and how he made the pool and the tunnel by which he brought water into the city, are they not written in the book of the annals of the kings of Judah? Hezekiah rested with his fathers. And Manasseh his son succeeded him as king" (2 Ki 20:20-21). In the eighth century, the kingdom of Judah endured the siege of Assyria, even though the kingdom of Assyria caused the destruction and suffering of all nations, including northern Israel. Rather, the population of Jerusalem grew in this age, and Jerusalem firmly established itself as a religious center. There was the wisdom and temperament of King Hezekiah.

Nehushtan, just a bronze snake: In addition to political independence movement and tunnel construction, Hezekiah has one more important accomplishment. It is a massive religious reform movement that he spread. Hezekiah's Reformation was, above all, the nature of worship reform. (Albertz, 2003, 406) Hezekiah's Reformation included the expulsion of many other religious practices in addition to the permitted worship in Jerusalem's temple. It was merely breaking the idol and cleansing the temple. He destroyed the place of worship outside Jerusalem. Even if the worship was toward the LORD God. At that time, the people of the kingdom of Judah used to visit other local sanctuaries besides the Temple of Jerusalem. These places of worship in the local community are called high places. Even the kings did not remove them because the high places occupied so much of the religious life of the Southern kingdom at that time. These high places acted as idols of idolatry or religious syncretism. Hezekiah had removed these high places. It promoted religious centralization in Jerusalem temples.

In Hezekiah's reformation, the mention of bronze snake in the wilderness journey of Israel comes back. The people of Israel, who were advancing toward Canaan received the wrath of God with complaint and disobedience, and many of them were killed by snakes. At that time God told Moses to make a bronze snake, to hang the bronze snake at the end of a long pole, and when people looked at the bronze snake, those who bite it would be able to save their lives. The very bronze snake that Moses made himself was preserved until Hezekiah's day. And at that time the Israelites were serving the bronze snake as a kind of idol. When the very bronze snake that God once used to save Israel was idolized, Hezekiah did not hesitate to remove it with other idols forever. In this regard, Hezekiah's Reformation was a reform that was not comparable to the reforms of any previous kings: "He did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, just as his father David had done. He removed the high places, smashed the sacred stones and cut down the Asherah poles. He broke into pieces the bronze snake Moses had made, for up to that time the Israelites had been burning incense to it. (It was called Nehushtan.) Hezekiah trusted in the LORD, the God of Israel. There was no one like him among all the kings of Judah, either before him or after him" (2 Ki 18:3-5). It is necessary to remember that the name of the bronze snake named by Hezekiah is Nehushtan. Nehushtan is simply a piece of bronze. It no longer helps Israel's faith. Leaders are those who see what they should look at and who can give up what is not worth. Although the fact that the bronze snake played a great role in the history of Israel was true, Hezekiah boldly broke it when it no longer helped the people's faith. He was the leader of the crisis, when the faith of Israel was raised to God again.

Renewed passover: Chroniclers describes Hezekiah much greater than Dtr. Historian (2 Ch 29-32). This does not go beyond differences in quantity. Chroniclers describes Hezekiah as the greatest king and religious leader who is equal to David and Solomon. As in the description of David and Solomon, Hezekiah depicted by Dtr. Historian has some negative aspects, but the chroniclers writes Hezekiah as a restorer of the collapsed worship and a model of absolute faith. In the first month of his reign, Hezekiah opened and sanctified YHWH's temple and set all his worship and life according to the word of God. For this, the temple of YHWH was restored and sanctified, and the priests and the Levites were gathered together to offer burnt offerings (2 Ch 29).

The Passover festival, which had been severed for a long time, was also restored. The original Passover feast begins with grazing sheep and ends with a seven-day unleavened bread festival. However, the Passover renewal of Hezekiah was successful, as all the congregation of Judah was pleased to extend the Passover festival for a week (Lee, 2018, 67946). The chroniclers tell the atmosphere of this time as follows: "There was great joy in Jerusalem, for since the days of Solomon son of David king of Israel there had been nothing like this in Jerusalem. The priests and the Levites stood to bless the people, and God heard them, for their prayer reached heaven, his holy dwelling place" (2 Ch 30:26-27).

Mistake: 2 Kings 20, which contain the last record of Hezekiah, speak of events when he became sick and die. Hezekiah prayed to the Lord with his face toward the wall, and God extended his life for fifteen years. God listened to Hezekiah's prayer and saw his tears (2 Ki 20: 5). He also experienced a case in which the shadow of the sun had stepped backward. But Hezekiah committed a fatal mistake at this time. He welcomed the Babylonians and showed everything in the royal warehouse and arsenal. This event is the forerunner of Babylon's plundering of treasures and capturing the descendants of Hezekiah (Satterhwaite and McConville, 2009, 296-297). Even the chroniclers, who does not spare absolute praise for Hezekiah, defines it as Hezekiah's "pride" (2 Ch 32:25). So much of this work remains a blot in Hezekiah's achievements. And because of this event, the prophet Isaiah prophesies that everything in the storehouse will be transferred to Babylon (2 Ki 20: 16-19). Indeed, it did not take long for the kingdom of Judah to fall to Babylon.

Conclusion

Hezekiah in the eighth century BC must be one of the greatest kings in the Old Testament. His political and religious reforms were historic events that brought the country back to work. But like all heroes, unfortunately, his reformation did not lead to his son Manasseh son and his grandson Amon, but the story of Hezekiah gives important lessons to the leaders of our time.

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