

# Triennial Torah Cycle

17/08/2013    Deut 31    2 Chron 30-32    Revelation 15-17

## The Law to Be Read in the Year of Release

(Deuteronomy 31:1-29)

Here we read of the inauguration, commissioning or ordination of Joshua to take the place of Moses as the chief human judge over Israel. We also read God's wonderful words of encouragement: "Be strong and of good courage, do not fear nor be afraid of them; for the Lord your God, He is the One who goes with you. He will not leave you nor forsake you" (Deuteronomy 31:6). God will repeat this to Joshua in Joshua 1:5. And the apostle Paul quotes part of this phrase as a message from God to Christians today (see Hebrews 13:5).

Moses instructs that the law be read "at the end of every seven years," that is, the "year of release" from slavery and debts. This reading was to be done "at the Feast of Tabernacles." All Israel was to listen, including the children "who have not known it" (verse 13), so that they all could learn to fear God and keep His commandments (verses 12-13; compare Ecclesiastes 12:13). At a time when there were no mass communications and when books, including personal copies of the Scriptures, were almost nonexistent among the common people, this practice would have been invaluable. Nehemiah 8 recounts the revival of the spirit of this command following the Babylonian captivity of the Jews.

Deuteronomy 31 ends with the placement of the Book of the Law beside the Ark of the Covenant and Moses teaching the people a special song, the words of which appear in the next chapter.

## Reorganization of the Levitical System (2 Chronicles 31:2-21)

Hezekiah continues his religious reforms, restoring the priestly courses David had established and commanding the people to bring in their tithes and firstfruits for the priests as prescribed by God's law. One of the reasons God had designed this system was so that the Levites, who served as God's ministry in the Old Testament, could "devote themselves to the Law of the Lord" (verse 4). Rather than spending most of their time in other vocations or laboring in the field to provide for themselves and their families, God wanted the priests and Levites to be able to spend most of their time delving into His principles and instructions and teaching them to His people. God has similar desires for His ministry and people today (see Acts 6:1-7; 1 Corinthians 9:11; Galatians 6:6). (To see what God's Word has to say on the subject of tithing and the financing of His ministry today, request or download our free booklet *What Does the Bible Teach About Tithing?*).

The Levites were greatly blessed through the people's response to Hezekiah's commands, being abundantly provided for. And the people of the nation responding were, in turn, greatly blessed themselves for enabling far more godly instruction to come their way.

Hezekiah was a living testimony to the well-known proverb, "When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice" (Proverbs 29:2). Interestingly, this verse is one of the "proverbs of Solomon which the men of Hezekiah king of Judah copied" (see 25:1). The last verse of the current reading summarizes what a great king and great man of God Hezekiah was.

Invasion of Sennacherib and Micah's Warning (2 Chronicles 32:1-5, 30; 2 Kings 18:13-16; Micah 3; 2 Chronicles 32:26, 6-19; 2 Kings 18:17-37; Isaiah 36)

In 701 Sennacherib marched west to crush the brewing revolt. He came down the Mediterranean coast, "and after the surrender of Ashkelon and Ekron turned toward Judah. He made his headquarters at Lachish [28 miles southwest of Jerusalem]; reliefs found at Nineveh [now displayed in the British Museum] show the breaching of the double walls and the fortifications of the gate [of Lachish] by siege rams. Traces of the intense destruction have been found in the excavations on the site (stratum III) and also at Tell Beit Mirsim (Ashan) and Beer-sheba" (Yohanan Aharoni and Michael Avi-Yonah, Macmillan Bible Atlas, 1977, p. 99).

In conjunction with the Assyrian invasion, Hezekiah took further precautions to protect Jerusalem. Rather than just having the water of Gihon brought inside the city by his tunnel, it was necessary to keep enemies from polluting the spring or preventing its waters from reaching Jerusalem—or from using it and other springs. So he concealed the springs outside the city (compare 2 Chronicles 32:3-4). But this alone would not protect Hezekiah's people.

Sadly, besides Hezekiah's own lapse in attitude and failure to completely rely on God, Judah had declined quite a bit spiritually during the reign of Ahaz so that even Hezekiah's reforms were not sufficient to entirely reverse the downward trend. Perhaps if Hezekiah had fully trusted in God, he could have successfully continued to withstand the Assyrians, but God permitted Sennacherib to invade the land and capture many of its cities. It is, of course, possible that God would have brought destruction against Judah anyway because of their injustice and wrongdoing, as brought out in Micah and Isaiah's prophecies.

As for the scale of what happened, notice these words of Sennacherib himself from the famous clay prism on which this campaign is recorded: "But as for Hezekiah, the Jew, who did not bow in submission to my yoke, forty-six of his strong walled towns and innumerable smaller villages in their neighbourhood I besieged and conquered by stamping down earth-ramps and then by bringing up battering rams, by the assault of foot-soldiers, by breaches, tunneling and sapper operations. I made to come out from them 200,150 people, young and old, male and female, innumerable horses, mules, donkeys, camels, large and small cattle, and counted them as spoils of war" (quoted in Eerdmans Handbook to the Bible, 1983, sidebar on 2 Kings 18). It is interesting to consider, then, that by this deportation many people of Judah, Benjamin and Levi joined the Assyrian captivity of the northern tribes—20 years after Samaria's fall.

At these dire events, Hezekiah panics while Sennacherib is still at Lachish (2 Kings 18:14). Hezekiah takes much of the gold and all the silver from the temple to pay the tribute imposed on him (verses 15-16). Yet Sennacherib is not fully appeased.

It was perhaps right around this time that the prophet Micah delivered his powerful warning of chapter 3 to the leaders of Jerusalem, including Hezekiah. Interestingly, years later this episode will be used by some as a defense of Jeremiah, when others want him put to death for pronouncing judgment on Jerusalem. At this point, you should read Jeremiah 26:17-19. As you can see from the later testimony given in these verses, it does appear that Micah's warning corresponded to events at the time of Sennacherib's invasion. Micah's preaching—probably along with Isaiah's and the terrible events—brought about Hezekiah's humbling himself in repentance. Jerusalem would not fall. Sennacherib sends a delegation to taunt the city (2 Kings 18:17). Whether coincidentally or not, they conduct their business at the very place Isaiah had confronted Ahaz about 30 years earlier to warn him of the Assyrian threat (compare Isaiah 7:3).

Tartan, Rabsaris and Rabshakeh of 2 Kings 18:17 are probably titles, as in the New King James Version, rather than names as in the earlier KJV. The NIV translates these as "supreme commander," "chief officer" and "field commander." The field commander addresses Hezekiah's representatives, speaking Hebrew in the hearing of all the people, to maximize intimidation (verse 26). He first questions their reliance on Egypt for help (verse 21). This was something God Himself had rebuked them for (compare Isaiah 30:1-5).

Then he questions why they claim to rely on God, when Hezekiah has taken away all of the high places and insisted that they worship only at the altar in Jerusalem (2 Kings 18:22). This of course reflects a total misunderstanding on his part on how God was to be worshiped, though it may have planted some doubts and worries into the minds of the besieged Jews.

The field commander then claims that God had told the Assyrians to destroy the land (verse 25). God probably did not speak to the king of Assyria, although He apparently did move the Assyrians to war against the northern kingdom of Israel and take its people captive—and now He may have been similarly moving Assyria against Judah. Yet in his particular claim the Assyrian official was, no doubt, being rather presumptuous. But he really gets into trouble when he challenges God Himself, saying that God is no different than the gods of the other nations he has destroyed, and is incapable of delivering Jerusalem (verses 30-35).

As we will see in the rest of the account, God is not like the false gods of pagan nations.

## Hezekiah Receives the Babylonian Envoys

(2 Chronicles 32:27-29; 2 Kings 20:12-19; Isaiah 39; 2 Chronicles 32:25, 31)

Merodach-Baladan of Babylon was, as we've seen, involved in his own ongoing struggle to gain independence from Assyria. He ruled as king twice in Babylon—first from 721-710 B.C. and later for a short time in 703. "Amazingly, Marduk-apla-iddina [Merodach-Baladan] rebounded...and instigated yet another rebellion in 700. Again, and for the last time, he was put down; and Assur-nadin-sumi, a son of Sennacherib, was installed as regent in Babylon" (Eugene Merrill, Kingdom of Priests: A

History of Old Testament Israel, 1987, p. 414). What this tells us is that, though he wasn't then on the throne, Merodach-Baladan was still a factor in 701—when Hezekiah was sick and Sennacherib invaded.

We can therefore see why he would be sending a delegation to Jerusalem at this time. Ostensibly it was to congratulate Hezekiah on his recovery from illness, but there was surely more political motivation behind it. Indeed, this was likely part of an attempt to forge an alliance with Hezekiah against their common foe, Assyria. Hezekiah was more than willing to show off his wealth—possibly to prove that he had enough to help finance a joint rebellion—and did so with a certain amount of pride (2 Chronicles 32:25).

Isaiah, however, warns that all of that wealth would eventually be taken by the Babylonians when they were no longer friends—perhaps even prompted by the reports taken back by these visitors. Sadly, Hezekiah's response is not one of humility or repentance—only selfish satisfaction at the fact that this won't transpire in his days.

God was greatly displeased at Hezekiah's attitude in the whole affair. Though the king had been miraculously healed and been promised deliverance from the Assyrians by God, here he was again looking to his wealth and the help of foreign powers to overcome Assyria. And he was not sorry at Isaiah's rebuke. "Therefore wrath was looming over him and over Judah and Jerusalem" (verse 25). Indeed, God withdrew from him as a test (verse 31). This all seems to refer to God allowing the catastrophic invasion of Sennacherib.

## Revelation 15

John now sees another great sign in the heavens: seven messengers with the seven last plagues in which the wrath of Elohim will end. He sees the sea of glass and the saints who have overcome all standing upon it with harps in their hands. They sing the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb. After this he sees the Dwelling Place of the Tent of Witness opened and from it came the seven messengers with the seven plagues. They were dressed in fine linen and had golden bands girded about their chests.

One of the four living creatures gave to the seven messengers seven bowls filled with the wrath of Elohim. The Dwelling Place was filled with smoke and no one was able to enter until the seven messengers and their duty were ended.

## Revelation 16

A loud voice instructs the seven messengers to go and do their duty on the earth. The first messenger: an evil and wicked sore came upon the men who had the mark of the beast and those worshipping it.

The second messenger: poured out his bowl on the sea, it became blood and every living creature in the sea died.

The third messenger: poured out his bowl on the rivers and fountains of water and they too became blood. Those who spilled the blood of the set apart ones are given blood to drink for their works of spilling blood.

The fourth messenger: poured his bowl out on the sun and men were burned with fire, great heat, and they blasphemed the Name of Elohim but they did not repent or give Him Esteem.

The fifth messenger: poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast. His reign became darkened and those following him gnawed their tongues from pain. They too blasphemed Elohim for their pain and sores and did not repent of their works.

The sixth messenger: Poured his bown on the great river Euphrates and it dried up to prepare the way of the sovereigns from the east. John saw that out of the mouth of the dragon, the beast and the false prophet three unclean spirits. They were the spirits of demons and were doing signs in order to persuade the sovereigns of the earth to gather and do battle against Elohim.

They gathered at Har Megiddo.

The seventh messenger: poured out his bowl into the air. A loud voice came out of the Dwelling Place saying, "It is done!"

Noises, thunders, lightening, earthquake. The great city become divided into three parts and all the nations fell. The great Babel was given the cup of wrath to drink that was filled with the fierceness of Elohim's wrath. An exceedingly great hail was sent upon men of the earth and they once again blasphemed Elohim.

## Revelation 17

One of the seven messengers who had one of the bowls of wrath instructed John to come with him and he will show John the judgment of the great whore sitting above all the peoples. He was carried away in the Spirit into the wilderness. He saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast covered with names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns. She was identified as the harlot with names of many blasphemies upon her and in her hand a golden cup filled with abominations. She was drunk with the blood of the set apart ones and the martyrs.

Then the messenger explains to John the secret to who this woman is and the beast she rides. The beast is the very one who was, and is not, and is about to come up out of the pit of the deep and goes to destruction. All those whose names are not written in the Book of Life shall marvel when they see this beast.

The sovereigns of the ten horns have not yet received a reign but when they do, they will have authority with the beast for one hour. They have one mind and they will give over their power to the beast. They will fight with the Lamb and the Lamb will overcome them.

The waters where the whore sits are peoples, crowds, nations, and tongues. The ten horns shall hate the whore and lay her waste and naked. They shall eat her flesh and burn her with fire. Elohim causes all this by His Authority and Power.