

# “Stand in the Gap” // Hezekiah: 2 Chronicles 28–31 // All-In 2014 #2

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For the next couple of weeks, we’re going to be looking at the fascinating figure of Hezekiah... his story is found in 2 Chronicles, so *if you have a Bible, start finding 2 Chronicles*.

I was tempted to have them **open the service** today by telling you to start finding the book of Chronicles, because for some of you it will take that long. It is on **page 454** of my Bible, if that helps. (You can always look in the **table of contents!**) DON’T HAVE A BIBLE?

**AS YOU ARE FINDING THAT... Some of you have started** to read the Bible through with us (I hope a lot of you will do that... a 1-year Bible reading plan on the website, or follow it [@ReadtheBibleRDU](#)). If so, last week on Monday, you read this from the prophet Ezekiel: “**And I looked for someone among them who would... stand before me in the gap on behalf of the land so I would not have to destroy it, but I found no one. <sup>31</sup> So I will... bring down on their own heads all they have done, declares the Sovereign LORD.**” Ezekiel 22:30–31 (NIV)

Ezekiel wrote those words during a time when **Israel had wandered far from God**, for a long time, and God was looking for someone, some man or woman of faith, who would **stand between him and the people** in the gap of their faithlessness and disobedience.

**Had there been even one**, he said—who would have acted righteously and prayed for the people—he would have not destroyed the people. But there was **no one—not even one—in all of Israel**.

Well, today we’re going to see someone in a different period of Israel’s history who actually *did* stand in that gap, and **because of his faith and radical “all-in” obedience**, his people, the southern kingdom of Israel, was preserved from destruction and experienced a great revival in his generation.

The man’s **name is Hezekiah**; he lived 123 years before Ezekiel wrote those words—he **held off Ezekiel’s judgment for 123 years!**, and his story is found in **2 Chronicles 28**.

We’re going to spend **2 weeks** on this really interesting figure, Hezekiah.)

**Historian Thomas Carlyle** famously said that the destinies of societies are shaped by great men and women who act boldly at key times. (Many historians criticize his theory, because multiple factors usually contribute to societal movements, but you can’t overlook that there are ways that the courage and boldness of one person can change the course of an entire society.)

**I want you, today, to see yourself as that one man, or one woman**, standing in the gap for... your *family*; your group of *friends*; a *college campus*; **us, as a church**, standing in the gap for our city.

**Being the faith instrument** that connects his healing with their need.

- **It’s kind of like that scene in Back to the Future** where the mad-scientist doctor goes up and joins the dangling pieces of the wire so that **when lightning strikes at exactly 10:04 pm giving Michael J. Fox’s DeLorean’s flux capacitor going exactly 88 miles an hour** it can have the energy it needs to get him *back to the future*. **PICTURE**. You are going to be that human bridge that connects the lightning of God’s power and someone’s flux capacitor... and the analogy starts to break down pretty dramatically at that point, but you get it.

**Hezekiah** was that man in the gap. We should be the people in the gap.

**Little trivia** before we get started (**just killing time!**): Hezekiah's story is **the most often told story** in the Old Testament—it's found in Chronicles, Kings, and Isaiah, which means it must have been very significant in how Israel saw themselves. It was their go-to story.

Let's start in 2 Chronicles 28... if not, just **close your Bible quietly**, no shame in that. **Hezekiah was born** into the Southern kingdom of Israel at a time of great moral degradation. Ahaz, his father, had been one of the worst, most ungodly kings ever. **Here is how the author of Chronicles** summarized Ahaz' reign: <sup>22</sup>In his time of trouble King Ahaz became even more unfaithful to the LORD. (God had sent some mild trouble to him to bring him back, but instead...) <sup>23</sup>He offered sacrifices to the gods of Damascus, who had defeated him; for he thought, "Since the gods of the kings of Aram have helped them, I will sacrifice to them so they will help me." (If you can't beat them, join them.) But they were his downfall and the downfall of all Israel.

But then... <sup>26</sup> Hezekiah his son succeeded him as king. **29:1** Hezekiah was (only) twenty-five years old when he became king... <sup>3</sup> and he did what was right in the sight of the Lord. (2 Chronicles 28:22–29:3)

Chapter 29 goes on to describe how Hezekiah not only got himself right with God, but also led Israel in a national awakening back to God.

I want to break down this revival into several steps, to show you what an awakening in our city will look like. This is how you stand in the gap.

**1. Awakening happens when God's people clean out the junk from their lives (29:3–5)**

<sup>3</sup>In the first month of the first year of his reign, Hezekiah re-opened the doors of the temple of the LORD and repaired them. (During Ahaz' reign the temple had fallen into disrepair; it had been boarded up and mostly abandoned). <sup>4</sup>He brought in the priests and the Levites <sup>5</sup>and said: "Listen to me, Levites! Remove all defilement from the sanctuary. Then he had them consecrate themselves and the temple. (29:3–5)

- **Hezekiah started this revival** with himself, the priests, and the house of worship.
- **Revival always begins in the house of God.**
  - We think it's **out there**—they are the problem. They are callous, unbelieving... Hollywood is too immoral; the media is too liberal; college professors are too cynical; the Supreme Court has failed us.
- But **it's us in here** that always keeps a community from revival. **When we harbor** secret sins; things in our heart and lives we know aren't right, we keep our community from the presence of God.
- **Nothing grieves and drives out presence of the Holy Spirit like harbored, unconfessed sin in the church.** *Sin destroys our sense of, and hunger for, God's presence.*
  - Tim Keller says that when he reconnects with a college student who grew up in Christian homes but lost his faith in college, he usually asks, "So who you sleeping with?" 9 out of 10s times, he says, he will see a flush of embarrassment cross their face and they'll stutter, "Uhh ... what does that have to do with anything?" Everything, he says. Willful sin makes the presence of God imperceptible to you."
- **Sin extinguishes the presence of the Holy Spirit like water does a flame.**

**So, God's awakening in a community always begins in the church.**

One of the greatest revivals ever in church history happened in Korea in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. It's beginning always gets traced back to one event, when the Korean church was small, just a **few hundred believers** in the whole country. At a prayer service one of the Korean

church leaders—Mr. Kang—stood up, trembling, and said in barely more than a whisper, *“I have something to confess. I have, for weeks, harbored an intense hatred in my heart for Mr. Lee, our friend and missionary. I confess before God and before you, and I repent.”* **The room fell silent.** Did this man just publicly admit to hating the host of the conference? Every eye turned to Mr. Lee, to **see how he would respond.** Mr. Lee was taken aback, and **could not hide his own surprise.** But he quickly answered, “Mr. Kang, I forgive you.” What followed was a scene that people there later called *“a poignant sense of mental anguish due to conviction of sin.”* Church members began to confess hidden sins, to weep over them, and to pray for forgiveness. The meeting, which was scheduled for a few hours, stretched on until 5 the next morning.<sup>1</sup>

- It led to a massive outpouring of God’s Spirit, and in 1 year **50,000 Koreans** had come to Christ—this in a country where before there had only been a few hundred. The local college campus in Pyongyang, where this started, saw *90% of its students come to faith in Christ. 90%!* Today South Korea is one of the most thriving missionary-sending hubs in the world.
- I read a book on revivals recently that said that revivals always begin when God’s people get serious about their sin. **True revival, it said, is not noisy; at least, not at first.** It usually begins in a hushed awe. People weep over sin before they shout with joy.
- Can I ask you a question: Might it be you?
  - Campbell: “Is it me?”
  - Pornography/Gossip/Hate/Adultery
- *I’ve got other things to say... but let me ask: What is your junk?*

**Here’s what happened next:**

**29:25** (Hezekiah) stationed the Levites in the temple of the LORD with cymbals, harps and lyres *in the way prescribed* by David and Gad the

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<sup>1</sup> Mark Shaw, *Global Awakening: How 20th-Century Revivals Triggered a Christian Revolution* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2010), 40–41. I have condensed Shaw’s telling of the story.

king’s seer and Nathan the prophet; this *was commanded by the LORD* through his prophets.

<sup>30</sup> King Hezekiah and his officials ordered the Levites to praise the LORD *with the words of David and of Asaph the seer.* (29:25, 30) **(Do you see what he did?** Hezekiah re-established Scripture as the center of their lives and worship.)

## 2. Awakening happens when churches re-center themselves on Scripture (29:25–30)

**The Bible is the church’s life.** Without it we die. **I hope you notice** how seriously we try to take the Bible here.

**In my sermons:** The **largest time-slot** we give to anything in the service is to the person who stands up here and opens the Bible. And **our custom here is to preach through texts** of Scripture.

- Want to know why? I’ve noticed that when pastors don’t do that, they end up talking about the same 7–8 things continually. I just feel like you need more than my 7–8 shticks. God decides what you should know, and he’s put it in here, and so I better serve you by walking you through it.
- You need to hear from God not “Uncle J.D.”

*We try to make Scripture **the center of the songs** we sing: Like they did, we sing songs whose **words are based** on Scripture, and we usually **stop in worship to reflect** on Scripture.*

- Why? Because the most important thing we need in worship is to be reminded of the promises of Scripture.
- **Pet peeve.** Worship leaders who get up and say, “How you guys *feeling?* You feel good? Let’s praise the Lord.”
  - How do I *feel?* I feel spiritually cold; I feel sinful; I’m thinking more right now about the guy who just cut me off in traffic than I am the promises of God.
  - Worship, we say, is a **rhythm of revelation and response...**

- So when I come to worship I don't want to start with my feelings, I want to start with the promises and beauty of God and let my feelings respond to that.
- We don't want our worship to be centered on a bunch of songs that just talk about how we feel... little John Legend love song phrases repeat those phrases 1000 times until I work myself into a lulling stupor... Let our worship be based on the revelation of who *he is* and how *he loves*, and then then we'll respond naturally.
  - And by the way, **when you've seen God** in Scripture you will respond exuberantly.
  - **These people worshipped** with joy and gladness. If that doesn't **characterize your worship**, you definitely have never glimpsed a *vision* of God or *understood* his promises.
  - No angel heaven around the throne seeing God has their hands in the pocket wondering what time we are getting out.

**Our prayers:** *I hope you see that we try to base even our prayers on Scripture. Because Scripture teaches us how to pray. Effective prayer is figuring out what God wants and asking him for it.*

- **This week: 2 Sam 7:** David offers to build God a house. God tells him he will build him a house. 2 Sam 7:27, **David says, "By this promise your servant has found courage to pray."** Literally in Hebrew he says he "found the heart to pray." God's word gave him the desire and drive and strength to pray!
- Prayers that start in heaven are heard by heaven.

Scripture is the life of the church. We put it **everywhere**. Remove the centrality of Scripture from the church, and we die. Remove the centrality of Scripture from your life, your marriage, your family, your job, and it will die. **Cling to it; savor it; plumb its depths.** So saturate yourself in it that everything that comes out of your mind and heart are Scripture.

### 3. Awakening happens when Christians re-center themselves on the gospel (2 Chronicles 30)

2 Chronicles 30 gives a lengthy description of how Hezekiah reinstated the **Passover feast**.

- Now, the Passover was a feast that commemorated the night when God had told all of Israel to take the blood of a lamb and put in on the doorposts of every house to protect them from the curse of death he was sending on the whole country. *When I see the blood, God said, I will "pass over" you.*
- **In the New Testament**, this becomes the symbol for what Christ did for us on the cross.
  - We are under the curse of death; Jesus' blood on the doorposts of our heart keeps us from it.

When Hezekiah came into power the people had neglected that ceremony. So he put it square back in the middle.

If you go back and **study Israel's times of spiritual decline**, they are always characterized by a "spiritual forgetting."<sup>2</sup> *"They forgot what God had done; they forgot his mighty works in the past."* How God brings them back is by reminding them of his great salvation.

The same is true with us: **2 Peter 1:9** says that when we grow cold spiritually it is because we have "forgotten" that we were cleansed from our first sins.

- "Forgotten." That doesn't mean we don't know that it happened, just that it's not **real and fresh** to us.
- HONEY
- **LISTEN: For you to experience** personal awakening, you usually don't need to learn some new precept; you need to become more intimate with how great a salvation God has given you in Jesus.

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<sup>2</sup> (Deut. 4:9; 8:14; Josh. 4:20–24)

- *Are you cold spiritually?* Ask God to open your eyes to **the enormity of what you have** in Christ; **what manner of love** the Father has bestowed on you...
- The gospel, you see, is **like a well**. You don't find better water by widening the well, but by plunging deeper into it.

If I have one goal in my preaching it is to help you **behold** each week the **wonder** of the gospel: You were so bad that Jesus had to die to save you; **his love for you was so intense** that he was glad to die to save you. MOTIVATIONAL SPEECH VS. GOSPEL SERMON

One other dimension of this before I go on **number 4**: Since many in the crowd had not consecrated themselves, the Levites had to kill the Passover lambs for all those who were not ceremonially clean and could not consecrate their lambs to the Lord. (30:17)

- What this shows you is that the sacrifice has to be individually applied to everyone. **Now, in this setting, the priests could do it for the people**, because it was more of a ceremonial thing. **I can't apply the sacrifice of Jesus** to you; you have to choose it for yourself. But the **point being made** is the same: The gospel has to be individually applied to every person. There is no "salvation by association with the right group." You have to choose to receive it personally.
- So, very simply:
  - **Have you done that? Have you personally trusted Christ?**
  - I fear that many of you get caught up in the movement without ever making the decision.
- I've been reading **Pilgrim's Progress** with my kids... There is a guy who travels with him to the Celestial City with Christian who has **no parchment**, which represents his salvation experience. **Christian asks him several times** about it and he blows them off. But when they get to the gates of the Celestial City, the angels ask him where his parchment is, and since he doesn't have it, they bar his entrance to heaven and cast him, Bunyan says, "into outer darkness."

- I want to make sure you aren't in that group. **Traveling with us** but never having made a decision personally. As we say, God has **no grandchildren**. *You have to choose to receive Christ personally*. Have you done that?

#### 4. Awakening happens when God's people devote themselves to intercessory prayer (30:18-27)

Throughout these chapters, we find Hezekiah praying for the people. Chapter 30: 18 But Hezekiah prayed for them, saying, "May the Lord, who is good, pardon everyone... 20 And *the Lord heard Hezekiah and healed the people*... 27 The priests and the Levites stood to pray for the people, and God heard them, for *their prayer reached heaven*, his holy dwelling place. (30:27)

Awakening happens when God's people devote themselves to prayer. Period.

- **Jonathan Edwards**, who led in the First Great Awakening, the largest revival our country has ever seen, said that "extraordinary prayer" characterized the Great Awakening. There is no awakening, he said, apart from prayer.
  - Prayer doesn't bring the awakening; prayer is the awakening.
- Another missionary who has worked in China during the great revivals there, said, "*I used to think that prayer should have the first place and teaching the second. I now feel it would be truer to give prayer the first, second, and third places and teaching the fourth.*"<sup>3</sup>
- Apostles in Acts: 10 days
- Do you **pray daily** for our church? Our city? Your own kids?
- It is inconceivable that you want the power of God and don't pray
- If God answered all your prayers in one, fell swoop

<sup>3</sup> James O. Fraser, missionary to China, quoted in A. Scott Moreau, *Introducing World Missions: A Biblical, Historical and Practical Survey* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), 176.

Summit, we have a chance to do this. **This Friday**, we're going to do a massive, **all together prayer and worship night** at the Brier Creek campus. We are going to **recreate this chapter**, in a way.

In fact, I found this verse in Hezekiah's story which I believe will **characterize our night**: "So they sang praises with gladness (we're going to have our choir and worship teams) and bowed down and worshipped... (Not a time of "hand in our pockets worship," but joy and gladness) and God heard them, for their prayer reached heaven, his holy dwelling place." (2 Chr 29:30; 30:27) This will not be a time of casual prayers, but prayers that engage the presence of God. It will probably be our best event of the year. **If this is your church, I need you to be there. Don't miss it.** It's worth your Friday night.

### 5. Awakening happens when God's people give extravagantly (31:5–10)

The Israelites generously gave the firstfruits of their grain... They brought a great amount, a tithe of everything... and they piled it in heaps... 8 When Hezekiah and his officials came and saw the heaps, they praised the Lord and blessed his people Israel. 9 Hezekiah asked the priests and Levites about the heaps; 10 and Azariah the chief priest... answered, "Since the people began to bring their contributions to the temple of the Lord, we have had enough to eat and plenty to spare, because the *Lord has blessed* his people, and this great amount is left over." (31:5, 8–10) You can't outgive God.

...Hezekiah led in an offering. And the people were **so grateful for what** they had seen God do in their midst that they poured out **so much there were heaps** left over.

Summit, **aren't you grateful** for what we've seen God do here in the last two years? **The 1400** we've seen baptized? **The 2000** members we've added in the last 2 years? The individual stories of deliverance and salvation and forgiveness and restoration that we've heard?

Y'all, as we approach the end of the year, we still have some big things in front of us want to do. **I told you a few last week**: We have to get **Blue Ridge campus renovated** and up and running on Sunday morning (so we can start meeting there on Sunday a.m.). We've got to get some of our **mobile campuses transitioned** into permanent ones. We need to **identify and launch our next campus or two**, most likely another one in Cary and a couple of other places.

**I want to challenge you, Summit Church, to 2 things** (If you are a guest, or new here, or **not a Christian**, I'm not talking to you):

- First of all, I want to challenge you, if you made a commitment to All-In, to finish strong. You showed FAITH, finish it.
- Second, I want to challenge many of you to **consider a really large, sacrificial gift here at the end**. These things we want to do—renovating and opening new campuses, take us heaping up resources God *will* use in his work.
- **So I want you to ask** the Holy Spirit if there is a particular sacrifice he wants you to make to help **continue this awakening** in our city. **Something special** you want to give. An end of the year **bonus**. An **asset—stock, savings, a car, a house**—about which you feel like God might saying, "*Invest that in my kingdom to extend this awakening to your neighbors.*"
  - Last week: Veronica and I set an audacious giving goal that we are going to not only be able to meet, but I told you last week God put his finger on a sizable sum that we were **saving for something else**, and we are going to be able to exceed our goal by \$10,000!
- Summit: let's pile it up in a heap like Hezekiah had them do so we have not only enough for what we need to do, but heaps to spare.

One last little thing: "The entire assembly of Judah rejoiced, along with the priests and Levites and all who had assembled from Israel, **including the foreigners** who had come from Israel and also those who resided in Judah." (30:25)

**Their generosity not only restored the Temple, it blessed their neighbors—foreigners**, those who didn't belong to Israel.

## Communion

I'm **continually moved to hear** how you care for one another and members in our community.

- **Julius' testimony** (on video last week). Someone gave him a **car!**
- **Prison letter** from this week: I want my family to be a blessing to someone else the way this family has been to me!

## Conclusion

Summit, we “stand in the gap.” Awakening will not happen in our city when *they* become less wicked, or when our politicians finally get it right, or the professors at the local universities becoming less liberal; it will happen when we devote ourselves to these things.

“And I looked for someone among them who would... stand before me in the gap on behalf of the land so I would not have to destroy it, but I found no one. <sup>31</sup> So I will... bring down on their own heads all they have done, declares the Sovereign LORD.” Ezekiel 22:30–31 (NIV)

Here's what I most love about that passage: The **ultimate one who would stand** in the gap between God and us was Jesus. He rendered perfect obedience to the Father. He **prayed for us**. He **gave himself** as a sacrifice, **and God brought down on his head** the punishment for our disobedience.

**Those of us who are saved because of his sacrifice should then no longer then live for ourselves**, but we ought to offer our lives, like Jesus did, so that others can live through our sacrifice and death like we live through Jesus' sacrifice.

- *Do you have unconfessed sin?*
- *Are you devoted to Scripture?*
- *Are you sure you have received Christ?*
- *Will you come to this prayer time?*
- *Do you have a sacrificial gift to make?*