

Last half of “The Life of Hezekiah, King of Judah, in Light of His ‘Perfect Heart,’” by Justin Singleton. Original paper submitted in fulfillment of BCS 651 “Monarchy” class requirements on November 16th, 2010.

Understanding Hezekiah in light of the phrase שָׁלֵם לֵב/לִבָּב ¹

This [2] can be determined directly from the text, as we have seen above, but also linguistically by understanding the Hebrew phrase שָׁלֵם לֵב/לִבָּב .

This phrase שָׁלֵם לֵב/לִבָּב , where שָׁלֵם is connected with either לִבָּב or לֵב , is found only fourteen times in the Old Testament. In the King James version, this phrase is translated “perfect heart” fourteen times – this being the phrase I have used throughout this paper. Of course, one often finds a deeper meaning when paraphrasing an expression, or at least retranslating from the original. The New International Version (NIV) does this for us, for the same Hebrew expression above is translated in the NIV as “heart fully committed” one time, “heart fully devoted” three times, etc. The New American Standard Version gives us a bit different feel by adding such phrases as “blameless heart” and “wholeheartedly.” As is evidenced from the different translations, the idea here is simply a heart committed to something. But let’s go beyond that.

From the fourteen different times this phrase is used, in both non-theological³ and theological passages, we can say that a שָׁלֵם לֵב/לִבָּב is “to willingly⁴ give one’s whole self

¹ The fourteen passages studied to determine the stated definition, all containing some combination of the phrase שָׁלֵם לֵב/לִבָּב , are as follows: 1 Ki 8:61; 11:4; 15:3, 14; 2 Ki 20:3; 1 Chr 12:38; 28:9; 29:9, 19; 2 Chr 15:17; 16:9; 19:9; 25:2; Isa 38:3. By first establishing the non-theological meaning, other passages can be understood in the proper sense.

² “This” is in reference to the original paper, the context of which is stated here: “Concerning the issue at hand, though, this ‘high heart’ is not in direct contradiction to the ‘perfect heart’ of Hezekiah, for although a ‘high heart’ does release trust from the Lord and place that trust upon oneself, loyalty to other deities may not be an issue; in the case of Hezekiah, loyalty to Yahweh alone is always the case.”

³ Note: 1 Chronicles 12:29,33,38 provides the non-theological contextual information for determining the implications surrounding the phrase שָׁלֵם לֵב/לִבָּב . In this specific context, it can

completely over to someone,⁵ not in perfection to the letter,⁶ but in complete heart obedience to the illumination given”⁷ and can therefore be seen in a theological light as “to be completely devoted to God⁸ in accordance with all the light the Holy Spirit has given,⁹ particularly devotion in regards to religious worship¹⁰ resulting in pure motives.¹¹”

This definition, while acceptable, may become more clear when juxtaposed with the passages that refer to those who specifically are said not to have a לֵב/לִבָּב שְׁלֵם. Of these, only three are named: Solomon, Amaziah, and Abijam. In all three cases, the text is very plain in that the reason these do not have a perfect heart is because of idolatry. In reference to Solomon, 1 Kings 11:4 explains, “When Solomon became old, his wives shifted his allegiance to other gods; he was not *wholeheartedly devoted* to the Lord his God, as his father David had been” (cf. 1 Ki 11:4-6; emphasis on the Hebrew expression). In the case of Amaziah (2 Chr 25:1-2,14; emphasis on the Hebrew expression), “He did what the Lord approved, but not with *wholehearted devotion*. ... When Amaziah returned from defeating the Edomites, he brought back the gods of the people of Seir and made them his personal gods. He bowed down before them and offered them sacrifices.” Abijam is simply said not to have a perfect heart in connection with the fact that he “followed all the sinful practices of his father before him” (1 Ki 15:3).

be determined that לֵב/לִבָּב שְׁלֵם here refers to the loyalty of David’s men to David over Saul. From this non-theological explanation, the move from observation to implication becomes much easier on the theological side.

⁴ 1 Chr 29:9,19

⁵ 1 Chr 12:38

⁶ 1 Ki 15:14; 2 Chr 15:17

⁷ 1 Ki 15:14; 2 Chr 15:17; 1 Ki 8:61; 2 Ki 20:3; 1 Chr 29:19

⁸ Inferred from 1 Ki 15:14; 2 Chr 15:17

⁹ Inferred from 1 Ki 15:14; 2 Chr 15:17; 1 Ki 8:61; 2 Ki 20:3; 1 Chr 29:19

¹⁰ Inferred from 1 Ki 11:4; 2 Chr 25:2,14-15

¹¹ 2 Chr 19:9

By way of a quick comparison between Hezekiah and Amaziah, notice that both pleased the Lord, but only one of them pleased the Lord in a “perfect” manner. Later in the text it is made quite clear that Amaziah had followed after false gods.

We can see, then, that those kings who are said to have a perfect heart showed evidence of total commitment to Yahweh alone. They exhibited failures at times, but not in the degree of idolatry.

From Hezekiah’s life, this can be seen. Note that in our definition perfection to the letter is not necessary, and in fact this can be seen in Hezekiah’s actions in his reformation period (especially in not requiring perfect obedience to Levitical practices - 2 Chr 30:18), though still accepted of God.

Nonetheless, Hezekiah did fail. It can be said that he is one of the best kings of Judah, but even the best kings were erring humans. Hezekiah’s great failure eventually brought a complete destruction upon Jerusalem and the Lord’s temple, that not in his day; however, there is still hope. In the life of such men, we can be comforted to know that to leave this world with a perfect heart does not involve never slipping at some point in life, but it does involve complete devotion to God. If Hezekiah’s attitude and actions warranted such fame, perhaps there is yet hope for us mere humans as well.