

Hezekiah's Passover

Devotional Reading: Psalm 1

Background Scripture: 2 Chronicles 30:1–27

Today's Scripture: 2 Chronicles 30:1–9, 26–27

I. Renewing Passover

2 Chronicles 30:1–5

¹ Hezekiah sent word to all Israel and Judah and also wrote letters to Ephraim and Manasseh, inviting them to come to the temple of the LORD in Jerusalem and celebrate the Passover to the LORD, the God of Israel. ² The king and his officials and the whole assembly in Jerusalem decided to celebrate the Passover in the second month. ³ They had not been able to celebrate it at the regular time because not enough priests had consecrated themselves and the people had not assembled in Jerusalem. ⁴ The plan seemed right both to the king and to the whole assembly. ⁵ They decided to send a proclamation throughout Israel, from Beersheba to Dan, calling the people to come to Jerusalem and celebrate the Passover to the LORD, the God of Israel. It had not been celebrated in large numbers according to what was written.

1a. The division between *Israel and Judah*, now 200 years along, works against any chances for unified worship in Jerusalem. But given Israel's oppression at the hands of the Assyrians, *Hezekiah* perceives an opportunity to reunite the people in worship. He is eager to return the purified and consecrated tem-

ple to its intended service for all Israelites. Hezekiah invites *all* of Israel and Judah.

1b. *The temple of the Lord in Jerusalem* and its predecessor, the tabernacle, was to be the focus of Israelite worship. However, following the division of the kingdom, King Jeroboam I established pagan worship practices for the northern kingdom of Israel. These practices were intended to keep his people from going to worship at the temple. His practices directly disobeyed God; the result would be the exile of the northern tribes. Over a dozen evil kings followed Jeroboam I on the throne of the northern kingdom of Israel. We wonder how much hope Hezekiah has in attracting Israelites in the northern territory to *celebrate the Passover*.

Passover commemorates God's deliverance of his people from Egypt. The Law of Moses prescribes this yearly observance "in the place [the Lord] will choose as a dwelling for his Name" (Deuteronomy 16:1–6).

2. The Law of Moses dictates that observance of *the Passover* should begin at twilight on the fourteenth day of the first month of the Israelite year. The Lord allows observance *in the second month* under certain conditions (Numbers 9:9–13).

3. The scope of the Passover observance Hezekiah envisions requires much planning and lead time. These realities

reveal two obstacles that prevent the celebration from occurring *at the regular time* on the fourteenth day of the first month.

The first hindrance, a shortage of *consecrated* priests, echoes the same shortage mentioned in 2 Chronicles 29:34.

The second hindrance is reflected in that not everyone had *assembled* in time to observe. Some time is needed to communicate the invitation and for those accepting it to arrive *in Jerusalem*.

4–5a. Some form of the phrase *from Beersheba to Dan* occurs nine times in the Old Testament to reflect the entirety of the kingdom of Israel before the division of 931 BC. Beersheba is about 45 miles to the south-southwest of Jerusalem, and Dan is more than 150 miles to the north. A walking pace of 3 miles per hour would require 100 hours of walking round trip to get the *proclamation* to Dan and its people. The round trip would likely require the better part of two weeks, depending on various factors.

5b. Approximately 200 years had elapsed since the united monarchy ended. The phrase *in large numbers* indicates only sporadic (at best) Passover observances during that time.

II. Returning to God

2 Chronicles 30:6–9

⁶ At the king's command, couriers went throughout Israel and Judah with letters from the king and from his officials, which read:

“People of Israel, return to the LORD, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, that he may return to you who are left, who have escaped from the hand of the kings of Assyria. ⁷ Do not be like your parents and your fellow Israelites, who were unfaithful to the LORD, the God of their ancestors, so that he made them an

object of horror, as you see. ⁸ Do not be stiff-necked, as your ancestors were; submit to the LORD. Come to his sanctuary, which he has consecrated forever. Serve the LORD your God, so that his fierce anger will turn away from you. ⁹ If you return to the LORD, then your fellow Israelites and your children will be shown compassion by their captors and will return to this land, for the LORD your God is gracious and compassionate. He will not turn his face from you if you return to him.”

6a. The Hebrew word translated *couriers* is actually a participle in the original language. The verb form of this word communicates the idea of running. We can hardly imagine the messengers literally running the 150 miles between Jerusalem and Dan without stopping. Hence, the idea is more along the lines of “without delay.”

The fact that they are sent *throughout Israel and Judah* necessitates that they take multiple copies of the invitation—hence the plural word *letters*. The messengers’ strategy is to take the invitation “from town to town” (2 Chronicles 30:10). The content of the letters comes next.

6b. We recall that Israel was the name of the patriarch whose original name was Jacob. In the era after the division of the monarchy, the designation “Israelite” or “Israelites” usually refers to those of the 10 northern tribes. And so it seems to be the use of the phrase *people of Israel* here.

The message is simple: *return to the Lord, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel*. The people had turned from the Lord through their idolatry. They had rejected the God of their ancestors—the only God. As a result of this sin, the Lord would allow foreign invasion. *Kings of Assyria* took people

captive. Inhabitants of Israel who were *left* behind in the land or had *escaped* captivity were designated as the remnant.

7. The problem noted in the invitation parallels Hezekiah's previous warning to the priests and Levites. Centuries before Hezekiah's day, the Lord warned the people through Moses of the devastation that would come about should the people reject the Lord (Deuteronomy 4:15–28; etc). The Lord's words came true. Because of the sin of the Israelites, they were conquered by the Assyrians. The remnant Israelites could *see* for themselves the *horror* that had occurred as a result of the invasion.

8a. To *be stiff-necked* is to be stubborn. The Old Testament refers to the Israelite people numerous times

8b. The invitation features three imperatives for returning to the Lord: *submit*, *come*, and *serve*. The three words being translated are found together in only one other place in the Old Testament: Exodus 13:5. There, the order and the actors are somewhat different.

In Exodus 13:5, it is the Lord himself who performs the first two actions. It's almost as if the text is saying, "The Lord took the first actions, and did his parts long ago; now it's your turn." The contexts of the two texts are the same in that both deal with the Passover celebration.

For God to exercise *his fierce anger* is not inevitable—not yet, anyway. There's still an opportunity for change so that God's anger may *turn away from* those receiving the invitation. This is the second time that Hezekiah gives awareness of divine anger; the first time is in 2 Chronicles 29:10.

9. Sound familiar? It should, since what we see here is a relentless theme in the Old Testament. One commentator observes that the message of the Old Testament prophets can be boiled down to three words: *Repent or die!*

The Lord's willingness to renew relationship with his people comes from his *gracious and compassionate* character. Moses identified these attributes of the Lord's character after seeing the Lord on Mount Sinai. The worship of Israel also proclaimed these attributes. The Lord extends mercy to those who seek him.

III. Result of Celebration 2 Chronicles 30:26–27

²⁶ 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. ²⁷ The priests and the Levites stood to bless the people, and God heard them, for their prayer reached heaven, his holy dwelling place.

26. *The days of Solomon* is some 200 years in the past at this point. So, the *great joy in Jerusalem* is not due to any personal recall of previous Passover celebrations. Rather, the people seem to realize that they've received anew something they've been missing.

Several decades after King Hezekiah, his great-grandson Josiah became king of Judah. Josiah "did what was right in the eyes of the Lord" (2 Chronicles 34:2). After destroying items of pagan worship, Josiah would oversee efforts to restore the temple. That included reinstituting Passover celebration.

27. References to *the priests* and *the Levites* remind us that all priests are Levites, but not all Levites are priests. Bestowing a blessing on *the people* was one of the tasks given to the Levites by the Law of Moses. Perhaps this blessing was modeled after the priestly blessing given by the first priest, Aaron. The content of the *prayer* of the priests and Levites may reflect the same sentiment as King Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the temple.

Involvement Learning

Hezekiah's Passover

Into the Lesson

Think about a meaningful family tradition that is no longer observed or celebrated. How could you revive this tradition or make it applicable for a modern-day context?

Why is it important to remember traditions that have faded away?

King Hezekiah worked to bring people back to God by celebrating the Passover. Let's see how his leadership can help develop leadership traits for today.

Key Verse

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.
—2 Chronicles 30:26

Into the Word

Read 2 Chronicles 30:1–5. What was the purpose of Hezekiah's invitation to observe Passover?

How did Hezekiah's actions reflect a move toward religious and national unity?

In what ways was this Passover different from those celebrated before?

Read 2 Chronicles 35:1–19. Contrast Hezekiah's Passover celebration with Josiah's celebration.

List leadership traits evident in Hezekiah.

Into Life

What are essential leadership qualities for Christians today?

Choose a quality that spoke to you. How can you use it to serve the church?

Thought to Remember

Worship and serve as the unified people of God.