

The Reunited Kingdom, part 5 (2 Chronicles 29:1–36:23)

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The Reign of Hezekiah, part 5: Hezekiah Reunites the Kingdom through Temple Worship, part 2: Gathering and Reforms before Passover; Worship and Reforms after Passover; Tribes Return Home (2 Chronicles 30:13–31:1)

Gathering and Reforms before Passover (30:13-14)

At this point, the Chronicler returned to his main narrative begun in 30:1. In these verses, the crowd gathered and began the celebrations.

The group in Jerusalem was **a very large crowd of people** (30:13). Hezekiah's Passover was no minor event. As decided by **the king and his officials and the whole assembly**, the celebration took place **in the second month** (30:13; see 30:2). **The Feast of Unleavened Bread** (30:13) was largely a continuation of the Passover marked by celebration, corporate worship, and the instruction of children (see Exod 12:14-20; Lev 23:4-8; Num 28:16-25; Dt 16:1-8).

As the reunified people of God joined together for worship, they purged the city of evil. They **removed the altars in Jerusalem and cleared away the incense altars** to other gods (30:14). In the previous chapter, the priests and Levites had purified the temple of the objects of foreign religions (see 29:15-17). Now the people purify the entire city in much the same way. They too threw the detestable objects **into the Kidron Valley** (30:14 see 29:16). While the worship reforms here extended beyond that which Hezekiah had accomplished earlier (from the temple to the entire city), these actions merely adumbrate a much greater cleansing to take place later in this chapter (from the city to the entire nation [see 31:1]). This enthusiasm for purity in Jerusalem was exemplary for the Chronicler's readers. Receiving the blessings of God in their day required the destruction of all false worship (see 2 Chr 15:8; see also *Introduction: 6) Royal Observance of Worship*).

Passover Observed (30:15a)

This passage forms the turning point of the main narrative of this chapter. The Passover lamb was slaughtered **on the fourteenth day** (30:15a). The killing of the lamb began the celebration of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. This verse is purposefully ambiguous when it reads **they slaughtered** (30:15a).

In the normal scenario, the laity slaughtered their own lambs. But these were these extraordinary times. As we will see, special measures had to be taken.

More Attention to Northern Israel (30:15b-20)

At this point, the Chronicler turned again from his main narrative to a temporal regression (see figure 53). He explained how the Passover slaughter had taken place (30:15b-19). The verbs in these verses should be translated in the past perfect (*had been ashamed and had consecrated themselves and had brought burnt offerings ...*). They describe three things that took place on the **fourteenth day** (30:15a).

First, the **priests and the Levites** had to deal with their own spiritual condition (30:15b-16). The priests and Levites who had helped Hezekiah in the re-establishment of the temple had already consecrated themselves (see 29:4,15,34). In all likelihood these worship leaders came from outside Jerusalem in response to Hezekiah's invitation. The condition of priests outside Jerusalem had already been noted in 30:3 as one of the reasons for postponing the Passover. Once these priests and Levites were ceremonially prepared, they performed their duties **as prescribed in the Law of Moses** (30:16). Once again, the Chronicler highlighted Hezekiah's concern for observing Passover in the proper manner (see *Introduction: 14) Standards*).

Second, many of the laity who came from outside Jerusalem **had not consecrated themselves** either (30:17). For this reason, extraordinary measures were taken. **Levites had to kill the Passover lambs** (30:17). Normally, the laity were to slaughter their own Passover lambs on the evening of Passover (see Dt 16:5-6; Ex 12:3-6,21). The Levites, however, protected the sanctity of the feast by slaughtering the lambs for them.

Third, **most of the many people who came** from the northern regions had not been purified, but **they ate ... contrary to what was written** (30:18). 30:20 explains that these people had become sick (compare 1 Cor 11:27-30). In response to this crisis, **Hezekiah prayed for them** (30:18). Instead of condemning or excluding the northern Israelites for their violation, Hezekiah interceded on their behalf. The king's prayer constitutes one of many examples in Chronicles of Solomon's dedicatory prayer in action (see 6:29-31; see *Introduction: 17) Prayer*). In times of sickness, Israel was to offer prayers in and toward the temple (see 6:29). Hezekiah appealed to the mercy of God and asked that he forgive the violation of each one **who sets his heart on seeking God ... even if he is not clean according to the rules of the sanctuary** (30:19). Here the Chronicler touched on the important theme of "seeking" God. Sincere repentance and devotion are implied by the term (see *Introduction: 19) Seeking*). Although Hezekiah was concerned with the details of worship regulations (see 30:5,18; 31:3), it is apparent that the king recognized that the heart of the worshippers from the North was more important than mere external conformity to **the rules of the sanctuary** (30:19; see Lev 15:31). This focus on the heart fit well with the Chronicler's concern elsewhere with motivations and desires (see *Introduction: 16) Motivations*). It also fit well with the concern of God; **the Lord heard Hezekiah and healed the people** (30:20).

The purpose of this lengthy aside (30:15b-20) is evident. The participation of northern Israelites in Hezekiah's day called for a number of extraordinary measures. Patience and flexibility were required. The Chronicler drew attention to these aspects of Hezekiah's celebration to instruct his post-exilic readers. Uniting the people of God from distant places would require extraordinary measures in their day as well. Fear of corruption from unschooled or unprepared Israelites should not forestall the higher goal of gathering all the tribes to the son of David and the worship of God in Jerusalem (*Introduction: 2) Northern Israel*).

Worship and Reforms after Passover (30:21-31:1a)

In balance with the report of gathering and worship reforms in Jerusalem before Passover (30:13-14; see figure 53), the Chronicler turned to the worship and reforms that follow the Passover (30:21-31:1a).

Structure 30:21-31:1a

This material consists of two sections (see figure 53): the first seven days (30:21-22) and the seven day extension (30:23-31:1a).

First Seven Days (30:21-22)

Once again, the Chronicler's designation of this event as a religious **assembly** indicated his keen interest in this gathering (see 30:23-25). Time and again, he pointed to religious assemblies as examples of ways in which the post-exilic community was to observe the worship of God at the temple (see *Introduction: 5) Religious Assemblies*). This assembly in Hezekiah's day was no exception to this focus.

The Chronicler first reported that the **Feast of Unleavened Bread** was celebrated **for seven days** (30:21). This length of time was true to the instructions of Mosaic Law (see Ex 12:15). The striking feature of this festival was that it took place **with great rejoicing** (30:21). In fact, **all who had assembled ... including aliens ... rejoiced** (30:25). The Chronicler often highlighted events in his history by pointing to their celebrative quality (see *Introduction: 27) Disappointment and Celebration*).

This **rejoicing** was connected with the **Levites and priests** performing their musical duties (30:21). The text even notes that Hezekiah encouraged the Levites for their faithful service in the celebration (30:22). As in other portions of his history, the Chronicler emphasized the joy of worship as it was expressed in music (see *Introduction: 8) Music*). This picture of celebration was designed to encourage his readers by demonstrating the positive effects of Hezekiah's efforts. If they wanted to rise to these heights of joy, they must devote themselves to the reunification of Israel at the temple much like Hezekiah did in his day.

Seven Day Extension (30:23-31:1a)

The wonder of Hezekiah's Passover was so great that a decision was made to extend the feast for **seven more days** (30:23). This choice was not imposed by the king; the decision was made when **the whole assembly... agreed** (30:23). The Chronicler touched on the cooperation between Judahite kings and their citizens on a number of occasions. Several honorable kings developed consensus among their people before implementing policies (see 30:2). (For a summary of the Chronicler's view on popular consent see comments on 1 Chr 13:2,4.)

In an effort to highlight the wonder of Hezekiah's celebration, the Chronicler drew close parallels between Hezekiah and Solomon in several ways. 1) He noted that the celebration in Jerusalem was extended **seven more days** (30:23). The same length of extension occurred in the temple assembly in Solomon's reign (see 7:8-10). 2) The Chronicler made one explicit comparison with Solomon. Hezekiah's Passover was greater than all celebrations in Jerusalem **since the days of Solomon** (30:26). 3) Also like Solomon, Hezekiah provided large numbers of sacrifices (30:24 see 2 Chr 7:5). The numbers here are less than in Solomon's day, but they are still remarkably high. 4) It was also a time when **the priests and Levites stood to bless the people** (30:27). These were not empty pronouncements, but efficacious prayers. **God heard them from his holy dwelling place** (30:27). The allusion here to Solomon's prayer (6:21,33,39) indicates that Hezekiah had at last brought the temple back in line with the Solomonic ideal as the place of effectual prayers.

After describing the actual celebrations, the Chronicler moved to the religious fervor that resulted. When the people first gathered in Jerusalem for the festival, they removed foreign worship altars from the city (see 30:14). In balance with this report, the Chronicler turned to the reforms that took place after the festival (31:1a). At this point, however, the destruction of foreign objects of worship went far beyond the city of Jerusalem. The Chronicler paraphrased the content of 2 Kgs 18:4 at this point. The people who had worshipped with Hezekiah went throughout **the towns of Judah** destroying the altars and sacred objects of other religions (31:1a).

To support the central theme of reunification, the Chronicler also mentioned that these reforms took place **throughout Judah and Benjamin and in Ephraim and Manasseh** (31:1a). These same tribes were represented among the first returnees to the land (see 1 Chr 9:3). Hezekiah's Passover celebration brought recommitment to the worship of the Lord in all of these families.

In the Chronicler's day the remnants of these tribes had the opportunity to experience these blessings again.

Tribes Return Home (31:1b)

The story of Hezekiah's Passover reunification closes with a simple note that **the Israelites returned to their own towns and to their property** (31:1b). With this brief ending, the Chronicler rounded off his focus on the participation of northern Israelites. The Northerners returned home with

their faith renewed. This final scene was fitting for the portrait of the future the Chronicler offered his post-exilic readers. Through reunification around Judah's king and temple, all the tribes would revive their faith in the Lord and return to their tribal lands (For the Chronicler's geographical hopes see comments on 2:42-55.). This portion of Hezekiah's reign provided a compelling motivation for the post-exilic readers to renew their own commitments to David's line, the temple, and the unity of the people of God.