

# Hezekiah's Passover

Devotional Reading: Psalm 1

Background Scripture: 2 Chronicles 30:1–27

## 2 Chronicles 30:1–9, 26–27

<sup>1</sup> 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. <sup>2</sup> The king and his officials and the whole assembly in Jerusalem decided to celebrate the Passover in the second month. <sup>3</sup> 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. <sup>4</sup> The plan seemed right both to the king and to the whole assembly. <sup>5</sup> 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.

<sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> 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. <sup>8</sup> 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. <sup>9</sup> 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.”

<sup>26</sup> 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.

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

## Key Text

*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*

# Introduction

## A. Renewing Relationships

Families, friends, and communities sometimes grow apart and become estranged. Sometimes, separation occurs due to external circumstances, such as one person moving away from the other; other times, the division results from conflict in the relationship.

When passive tensions or outright hostilities exist, meals with family during the holidays sour. High-school reunions fail to reunite old friends. There is no hope for any possibility of restarting past traditions, celebrating common values, or renewing relationships.

Following years of separation between the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah, an opportunity arose for the two to reunite. Would unified celebration and worship overcome years of hostility?

## B. Lesson Context: Hezekiah and Judah

The division of the united monarchy of Israel into the kingdoms of Israel and Judah occurred in 931 BC during the reign of Solomon's son, Rehoboam. Instead of peaceful coexistence, the two kingdoms were hostile toward each other (1 Kings 15:16, 32; 2 Chronicles 13:1–20).

Nearly 200 years later, Ahaz ascended to the throne in Judah (reigned 735–715 BC). Evil and unfaithfulness marked his reign (2 Chronicles 28:1–4). A few years before Ahaz began his reign, Assyrian forces under Tiglath-Pileser III (reigned 745–727 BC) had started to pressure the northern kingdom of Israel. The pressure was relieved temporarily by paying tribute (2 Kings 15:19–20). The Assyrian king, also known as “Pul,” deported members of the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh in the process (1 Chronicles 5:6, 26).

The pressure returned after King Ahaz of Judah offered Tiglath-Pileser tribute in exchange for military help against Aram and the northern kingdom of Israel (2 Kings 16:7–9; 2 Chronicles 28:16–21). One thing led to another, and two eventual results were (1) the exile of the 10 northern tribes of Israel in 722 BC (2 Kings 17:5–6) and (2) the providential (but temporary) deliver-

# Judah, from Isaiah to the Exile

## Unit 1: Isaiah and the Renewal of the Temple

Lessons 1–4

## Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Identify qualities of Hezekiah's leadership.
2. Compare and contrast Hezekiah's Passover celebration with that of Josiah in 2 Chronicles 35.
3. Suggest leadership traits that are desirable for Christians today.

## Lesson Outline

### Introduction

- A. Renewing Relationships
- B. Lesson Context: Hezekiah and Judah
- C. Lesson Context: 1 and 2 Chronicles

### I. Renewing Passover (2 Chronicles 30:1–5)

- A. Israel and Judah (v. 1)
- B. Problem and Solution (vv. 2–3)
- C. Approval and Publicity (vv. 4–5)  
*The Power of Celebration*

### II. Returning to God (2 Chronicles 30:6–9)

- A. What to Do (v. 6)
- B. What Not to Do (vv. 7–8)
- C. Why to Do It (v. 9)  
*Reason for Obedience*

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

- A. Joyous People (v. 26)
- B. Blessed People (v. 27)

### Conclusion

- A. The Hope of Unity
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

ance of the city of Jerusalem in 701 BC, during the reign of Hezekiah (2 Kings 18:17–19:36; Isaiah 37).

When Ahaz’s son Hezekiah took the throne (reigned 715–685 BC), the temple was in physical disrepair and spiritual defilement. As a result, Hezekiah initiated a restoration project to purify the temple so that the people might again faithfully worship the Lord (2 Chronicles 29:3). After the project concluded in only 16 days (29:17), the king held a rededication ceremony, which included rightly ordered worship (29:20–36).

**C. Lesson Context: 1 and 2 Chronicles**

The books of 1 and 2 Chronicles (treated as one book in Hebrew texts) were among the last Old Testament books to be written. Authorship is uncertain. Because of this uncertainty, scholars often refer to the writer simply as “the Chronicler.”

We may wonder why the Chronicles are even needed, given that most of their material is already recorded in the books of 2 Samuel and 1–2 Kings. A clue lies in the title of the Chronicles as it appears in the Septuagint, the ancient Greek version of the Old Testament. The title of Chronicles there translates to something like “Things Omitted.” For example, compare the account of King Amaziah in 2 Kings 14:1–22 with its counterpart in 2 Chronicles 25:1–28; the latter is longer by some 40 percent. This is even more the case with today’s text regarding Hezekiah’s Passover—it is completely lacking in the book of 2 Kings.

**I. Renewing Passover**

(2 Chronicles 30:1–5)

**A. Israel and Judah (v. 1)**

**1a. Hezekiah sent word to all Israel and Judah and also wrote letters to Ephraim and Manasseh,**

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 temple to its intended service for all Israelites.

Hezekiah invites *all* of Israel and Judah, mentioning two tribes of Israel by name. The significance of *Ephraim* is that the designation is often synonymous with the entire kingdom of Israel (examples: Jeremiah 7:15; Hosea 5:1–3). The tribe of *Manasseh* is the largest of the 12 tribes in terms of geographic size. Its land allotment is specified in Joshua 17:7–11.

**1b. inviting them to come to the temple of the LORD in Jerusalem and celebrate the Passover to the LORD, the God of Israel.**

*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 (1 Kings 12:25–33). His practices directly disobeyed God; the result would be the exile of the northern tribes (2 Kings 17:1–20). 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 (Exodus 12:1–14, 21–30). 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; compare 12:1–7). A well-attended Passover would be the climax of Hezekiah’s restoration project (see Lesson Context).

**What Do You Think?**

How can believers celebrate God’s work of deliverance and salvation?

**Digging Deeper**

What steps can your class take to include such a celebration in your congregation’s yearly calendar?

**B. Problem and Solution (vv. 2–3)**

**2. The king and his officials and the whole assembly in Jerusalem decided to celebrate the Passover in the second month.**

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 (Leviticus 23:5). The Lord allows observance *in the second month* under certain conditions (Numbers 9:9–13).

**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.**

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. This is one of six places where the Chronicler mentions the issue of self-consecration (1 Chronicles 15:12; 2 Chronicles 5:11; 29:5; 30:3, 17). What this involves for *priests* is outlined in Leviticus 21:1–22:16.

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*. The logistics of this is the subject of 2 Chronicles 30:4–5a, below.

**C. Approval and Publicity (vv. 4–5)**  
**4–5a. The plan seemed right both to the king and to the whole assembly. They decided to send a proclamation throughout Israel, from Beersheba to Dan, calling the people to come**

How to Say It

Ahaz	Ay-haz.
Assyrians	Uh-sear-e-unz.
Beersheba	Beer-she-buh.
Hezekiah	Hez-ih-kye-uh.
Ephraim	Ee-fray-im.
Jeroboam	Jair-uh-boe-um.
Josiah	Jo-sigh-uh.
Levites	Lee-vites.
Manasseh	Muh-nass-uh.
Rehoboam	Ree-huh-boe-um.
Tiglath-Pileser	Tig-lath-Pih-lee-zer.

**to Jerusalem and celebrate the Passover to the LORD, the God of Israel.**

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 (here and Judges 20:1; 1 Samuel 3:20; 2 Samuel 3:10; 17:11; 24:2, 15; 1 Kings 4:25; 1 Chronicles 21:2). 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. It had not been celebrated in large numbers according to what was written.**

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. The phrase *what was written* probably refers to the instructions in Deuteronomy 16:1–8.

**What Do You Think?**

How might your congregation work with a congregation in another part of town to plan a revival or worship celebration?

**Digging Deeper**

When was the last time that you participated in such an event?

**The Power of Celebration**

I’ve hosted an annual Super Bowl party for friends and family for several years. While I don’t care much for the game, I like hosting the party. I value the celebration, food, laughter, conversation, and community resulting from the gathering. Friends become “rivals” for the day as they cheer for their preferred team. New acquaintances become like old friends after spending several hours cheering together. The party brings us together and allows us to enjoy one another’s company. And that is something I can get excited about.

Hezekiah invited people from Israel and Judah to celebrate Passover and thereby reorient their

spiritual focus. The gathering would remind the people of their shared spiritual heritage. Through the celebration, the people could put aside differences and attend to what they had in common as the people of God.

When did you last celebrate togetherness despite differences? How could you celebrate your shared spiritual heritage with the entire body of Christ that is the church? —N. H.

## II. Returning to God

(2 Chronicles 30:6–9)

### A. What to Do (v. 6)

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

The Hebrew word translated *couriers* is actually a participle in the original language. The verb form of this word communicates the idea of running (example: 2 Chronicles 23:12). 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, not in today’s text). The content of the letters comes next.

**6b. “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.”**

We recall that Israel was the name of the patriarch whose original name was Jacob (Genesis 32:28; 35:10). In the era after the division of the monarchy, the designation “Israelite” or “Israelites” usually refers to those of the 10 northern tribes (examples: 2 Chronicles 13:16, 18; 31:1). And so it seems to be the use of the phrase *people of Israel* here.

The decree’s 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 there is.

As a result of this sin, the Lord would allow foreign invasion. *Kings of Assyria* took people captive (2 Kings 15:29; 1 Chronicles 5:26). Inhabitants of Israel who were *left* behind in the land or had *escaped* captivity were designated as the remnant.

### B. What Not to Do (vv. 7–8)

**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.”**

The problem noted in the invitation parallels Hezekiah’s previous warning to the priests and Levites (2 Chronicles 29:4–6). 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.

#### What Do You Think?

How will you live so future generations can see you as an example of faithful living and obedience to God?

#### Digging Deeper

During the upcoming week, how will you encourage younger believers in their faithfulness to God?

**8a. “Do not be stiff-necked, as your ancestors were;**

To *be stiff-necked* is to be stubborn. The Old Testament refers to the Israelite people numerous times; several of those connect being stiff-necked across generations (2 Kings 17:14; Nehemiah 9:16; Jeremiah 7:26). This problem persists into the New Testament era (Acts 7:51).

**8b. “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.”**

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.

Exodus 13:5:	<i>give</i>	<i>brings</i>	<i>observe</i>
	↓	↓	↓
2 Chronicles 30:8:	submit	come	serve

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 (compare 2 Chronicles 28:11, 13).

C. Why to Do It (v. 9)

**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.”**

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!* Some passages in regard to (re) turning to God are Deuteronomy 30:2–5; Isaiah 1:16; 55:7; Jeremiah 25:5; and Ezekiel 33:11.

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 (Exodus 34:6). The worship of Israel also proclaimed these attributes (Psalms 103:8; 111:4; 145:8; etc.). The Lord extends grace and mercy to those who seek him.

Reason for Obedience

A few years ago, we brought home a traumatized, 90-pound rescue dog named Sam. We don't know what he experienced before we got him, but previous owners seemed to have hurt him. He would need extensive training, and the first step was earning his trust.

Our training started with simple commands like “sit” and “stay.” When Sam obeyed, we gave him high-value rewards, like chicken and bacon. He became increasingly comfortable with us and began trusting us more. Eventually, he would follow our commands without the need for treats. Obedience itself had become his reward. He seemed to know that we were for his good, so he was comforted by our guidance and eager to receive it.

Watching Sam, I can't help but think how I relate to God, my trusted leader. I hasten to add that we should reject any analogy of “God is to us as we are to dogs.”

God expects our obedience because he is our Creator, Ruler, and Redeemer, not because he bestows high-value earthly “treats.” Is that why you obey?  
—N. H.

III. Result of Celebration

(2 Chronicles 30:26–27)

Although the king's invitation was sent throughout Israel and Judah, it was not always received positively. Some people “humbled themselves and went to Jerusalem” (2 Chronicles 30:11); others responded with laughter and mockery (30:10). All of Judah, some from Israel, and foreigners in Judah



Visual for Lesson 2. Point to this visual as you ask learners to silently reflect on ways that believers can delight in God's ways.

celebrated Passover and the Festival of Unleavened Bread together in Jerusalem (30:13–25).

A. Joyous People (v. 26)

**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.**

*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 (see 2 Chronicles 7:8–10).

Several decades after King Hezekiah, his great-grandson Josiah became king of Judah (reigned 640–609 BC). Like his great-grandfather, Josiah “did what was right in the eyes of the Lord” (2 Chronicles 34:2). After destroying items of pagan worship (34:3–7), Josiah would oversee efforts to restore the temple. That included reinstituting Passover celebration (35:1). Comparing the animal sacrifices of 2 Chronicles 30:24 with those of 35:7–9, we surmise that Josiah’s Passover drew almost twice the number of people to Jerusalem as did Hezekiah’s. The Chronicler describes Josiah’s Passover similarly to Hezekiah’s: “The Passover had not been observed like this in Israel since the days of the prophet Samuel; and none of the kings of Israel had ever celebrated such a Passover as did Josiah” (35:18).

What Do You Think?

How will you worship God with “great joy” in the upcoming week?

Digging Deeper

What is a new worship practice you can participate in during the upcoming week?

B. Blessed People (v. 27)

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

References to *the priests* and *the Levites* remind us that all priests are Levites (that is, descended from the tribe of Levi), but not all Levites are

priests (Numbers 3; etc.). Bestowing a blessing on *the people* was one of the tasks given to the Levites by the Law of Moses (Deuteronomy 10:8; 21:5). Perhaps this blessing was modeled after the priestly blessing given by the first priest, Aaron (Numbers 6:23–27). 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 (2 Chronicles 6:21, 24–31, 34).

Conclusion

A. The Hope of Unity

Christians are not immune to division. Unfortunately, a brief look at social media, not to mention centuries of history itself, reveals hostilities and disputes among believers. However, when faced with these attitudes, we can look to the example of Hezekiah. His leadership in the face of sin and other dysfunction can be an example for us in the twenty-first century AD.

First, we must always turn to the Lord and repent; this requires realizing that the most important thing is to be with him. Second, we should unite with other believers and come before God in worship as a repentant people. When these happen, blessings result.

What Do You Think?

What behaviors or ideologies prevent you from a life of repentance and unity?

Digging Deeper

What steps will you take to eliminate these barriers?

B. Prayer

Lord God, we want to be united as your people. Remind us to turn to you in worship. Show us how we can gather with other believers to serve you and offer our praise to you. Help us be attentive to the unifying work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Fill us with your love so that we can enjoy unity with other believers. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Worship and serve as the unified people of God.