



Much like Joshua, King Hezekiah has an overwhelming job when he becomes Israel's leader. Unlike Joshua he is young (only 25 years old) and is succeeding a corrupt predecessor. Where Joshua has the great example of the prophet Moses, Hezekiah's father, King Ahaz, "becomes even more unfaithful to the Lord" (2 Chron. 28:22) by closing up the Temple, destroying its articles, and establishing altars to worship other gods throughout his kingdom. So when Hezekiah comes to power, the first thing he does is reopen the Temple and begin repairs. But the purification of the Temple is only a prelude to the real work, the purification of God's people.

In 2 Chronicles 30 Hezekiah embarks on an ambitious plan to celebrate the Passover with the entire nation of Israel. For two centuries the nation has been divided between Israel and Judah. For most of that time the northern kingdom of Israel has worshipped the golden calves and other gods. Politically it sees its end during the reign of Hezekiah's father to the conquering Assyrians. So when Hezekiah sends invitations to all of the remaining people it isn't surprising when the "people scorn and ridicule them" (2 Chron 30:10). Some accept the invitation and go to Jerusalem to celebrate with the people of Judah anyway.

The celebration starts with their renewed commitment to God. They remove the altars of sacrifice and incense to other gods from Jerusalem and throw them into the Kidron Valley (30:14). Then they start the Passover sacrifices. Unfortunately many of the people from the northern kingdom are clueless when it comes to observing Passover, so they are still ceremonially unclean. Nevertheless, Hezekiah includes them by having priests kill their Passover lambs, and the king prays specifically for them and asks for God's pardon in their observance. God's response is to hear Hezekiah and "heal" the people despite their inadequacies.

God's acceptance of their meager attempts encourages their celebration and invites them further into worship. They celebrate "with great rejoicing," and in their joy they all agree to celebrate the Lord's deliverance for an additional week. Hezekiah encourages the priests and Levites and provides additional animals and resources for the continuing celebration, and the people from all over continue to praise the Lord. The celebration is greater than anything that has happened since the reign of Solomon two hundred years prior. The result is God's blessing and preparation for some difficult days ahead. The Chronicler says that "God heard them, for their prayer reached heaven, his holy dwelling place" (30:27). This transformative celebration explains better than anything else the courage of Hezekiah and the people when Sennacherib, king of Assyria, invades a short time later. They know God is with them.

### Discussion Questions

What habits, devotional practices, or values have fallen by the wayside in your life or the life of our church? What changes or pressures have contributed to their decline?

How can we renew our identification with the Lord in 2023, especially as we consider the future of our church together?

What stresses, concerns, and fears do you have for the coming year, and how can prayer and worship strengthen you for the days ahead?