



## Second Chronicles - Chapter Thirty

### III. 2 Chronicles 10:1-36:23 - The Kingdom of Judah Down to the Exile (continues)

#### III.I 2 Chronicles 29:1-32:33 - Hezekiah (continues)

##### Summary of Chapter Thirty

The account of Hezekiah's Passover is not mentioned in Second Kings. Hezekiah demonstrates his commitment to the Law of Moses by implementing this celebration immediately after the reconsecration of the temple. At the same time, the ceremony is unorthodox in its date and in the participation of the ceremonially unclean. The Passover is also the occasion in which people from the north and south are reunited, at least in principle, in true worship at the temple, in contrast to earlier attempts to secure a false unity through force of arms or ungodly alliances.

#### III.I.iv 2 Chronicles 30:1-27 - The Great Passover

Refer to the chapter summary above.

<sup>1</sup> Hezekiah sent word to all Israel and Judah, and wrote letters also to Ephraim and Manasseh, that they should come to the house of the Lord at Jerusalem, to keep the passover to the Lord the God of Israel.

##### 2 Chronicles 30:1

Hezekiah sent word to all Israel and Judah. The destruction of the northern kingdom in 725-722 BC by Assyria and the deportation of much of its population as recorded in 2 Kings 17:5-6 allowed Hezekiah to make this invitation at the beginning of his reign in 715 BC. In all probability, this Passover was observed before the final passing of the northern kingdom into captivity.

The house of the Lord at Jerusalem is the Solomonic temple, the place where God had put his name: <<*The Lord said to him, 'I have heard your prayer and your plea, which you made before me; I have consecrated this house that you have built, and put my name there for ever; my eyes and my heart will be there for all time'*>> (1 Kings 9:3), and the only place where the people should gather for festivals: <<*But you shall seek the place that the Lord your God will choose out of all your tribes as his habitation to put his name there. You shall go there, bringing there your burnt-offerings and your sacrifices, your tithes and your donations, your votive gifts, your freewill-offerings, and the firstlings of your herds and flocks*>> (Deuteronomy 12:5-6).

And wrote letters also to Ephraim and Manasseh. The tribal lands of Ephraim and Manasseh were among the last to be taken into captivity and were the closest to Judah in the north. Although it had long been the practice to send messengers throughout the land with verbal communications, certainly from the time of Jacob, this is only the third time it is recorded that written communications were sent.

The use of written correspondence being sent was first recorded in Scripture during the time of the kings: <<*In the morning David wrote a letter to Joab, and sent it by the hand of Uriah*>> (2 Samuel 11:14). Sending out multiple letters, thus forming a sort of postal service, was first seen used by Jezebel more than one hundred years earlier than Hezekiah: <<*So she wrote letters in Ahab's name and sealed them with his seal; she sent the letters to the elders and the nobles who lived with Naboth in his city*>> (1 Kings 21:8).

To keep the passover to the Lord the God of Israel. This great festival remembered the great and glorious deliverance of God on Israel's behalf in the days of the Exodus; refer to Exodus Chapter 12. It was a deliberate, emblematic reminder of the central act of redemption in the OT, i.e. the deliverance from slavery in Egypt into the Promised Land: <<*Now I desire to remind you, though you are fully informed, that the Lord, who once for all saved a people out of the land of Egypt, afterwards destroyed those who did not believe*>> (Jude 5).

Communion is likewise an emblematic reminder of the central act of redemption of the NT and the Bible as a whole. The long neglect of Passover among the tribes of Israel would be like a church that had not celebrated the Lord's Table in a long, long time.

Jesus is the ultimate Passover lamb who, by his own body and blood, established a new covenant; refer to Luke 22:14-20. Just as Hezekiah's congregation were cleansed and healed, Christians are made clean by their Passover sacrifice, except that Jesus' sacrifice is the ultimate and unrepeatable Passover: <<*The death he died, he died to sin, once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God*>> (Romans 6:10), and: <<*For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God.*>>

*He was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit, in which also he went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison, who in former times did not obey, when God waited patiently in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight people, were saved through water>> (1 Peter 3:18-20).*

<sup>2</sup> For the king and his officials and all the assembly in Jerusalem had taken counsel to keep the passover in the second month <sup>3</sup> (for they could not keep it at its proper time because the priests had not sanctified themselves in sufficient number, nor had the people assembled in Jerusalem). <sup>4</sup> The plan seemed right to the king and all the assembly. <sup>5</sup> So they decreed the making of a proclamation throughout all Israel, from Beer-sheba to Dan, that the people should come and keep the passover to the Lord the God of Israel, at Jerusalem; for they had not kept it in great numbers as prescribed.

### 2 Chronicles 30:2-5

The Passover was delayed until the second month, in an application of the principle in Numbers 9:9-13 providing for those who were ceremonially unclean or absent on a journey. This is an early example of the Law of Moses being interpreted to cover new situations.

Hezekiah's consultation of the assembly in decision making aligns him with David (1 Chronicles 13:1-5) and Solomon (2 Chronicles 1:2-5).

From Beer-sheba to Dan is a common saying in Scripture to define the whole land from its southern to northern most borders respectively.

For they had not kept it in great numbers as prescribed. Even though Passover was one of the three festivals that deserved special emphasis and it was mandatory for all males to attend each year (Exodus 23:14-17), it had not been celebrated for a long time. Hezekiah was dedicated to righting this wrong.

<sup>6</sup> So couriers went throughout all Israel and Judah with letters from the king and his officials, as the king had commanded, saying, 'O people of Israel, return to the Lord, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, so that he may turn again to the remnant of you who have escaped from the hand of the kings of Assyria. <sup>7</sup> Do not be like your ancestors and your kindred, who were faithless to the Lord God of their ancestors, so that he made them a desolation, as you see. <sup>8</sup> Do not now be stiff-necked as your ancestors were, but yield yourselves to the Lord and come to his sanctuary, which he has sanctified for ever, and serve the

Lord your God, so that his fierce anger may turn away from you. <sup>9</sup> For as you return to the Lord, your kindred and your children will find compassion with their captors, and return to this land. For the Lord your God is gracious and merciful, and will not turn away his face from you, if you return to him.’

### 2 Chronicles 30:6-9

The letters of invitation are similar in content and language to Hezekiah’s speech to the priests and Levites in 2 Chronicles 29:5-11. More than an invitation to participate in a festival, they are really a summons to repentance, i.e. to return to the Lord, so that God will avert his fierce anger and the captives of the Assyrians will eventually be returned.

The northern kingdom of Israel had fallen and all that remained after exile to the Assyrians was the remnant of you who have escaped from the hand of the kings of Assyria. Yet Hezekiah still believed in the concept of the people of Israel, those belonging to the twelve tribes of Israel descended from the great patriarchs and not just those who had split off to form the northern kingdom of Israel.

**In the history of the divided kingdoms there were some attempts to reunify the nation by force under a single human king, but these all came to nothing as it was the will of man. In comparison with previous failures, this incident shows that the only really effective approach to unity has to be based on the principle of faithful worship to God alone.**

Do not now be stiff-necked as your ancestors were. This stubbornness was especially relevant as the letter went to the remnant of the northern kingdom. Generally speaking, they had neglected the Jerusalem Passover for a long time. However, there had been a number of apostate kings in Judah, most recently Ahaz, so the people of Judah too had gone away from God as a community.

For as you return to the Lord. The letter of invitation promised two things if the remnant of Israel would return to the Lord and obediently celebrate this Passover in Jerusalem. First, under God’s blessing it would go well with those already taken captive by the Assyrians. Second, God would restore the northern kingdom and allow them to return to this land.

For the Lord your God is gracious and merciful. These promises were based on an eternal principle of God’s character: that he will not turn away his face from his people if only they were willing to repent and return to him. God promises to draw near to those who draw near to him: <<*Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded*>> (James 4:8).

<sup>10</sup> So the couriers went from city to city through the country of Ephraim and Manasseh, and as far as Zebulun; but they laughed them to scorn, and mocked them. <sup>11</sup> Only a few from Asher, Manasseh, and Zebulun humbled themselves and came to Jerusalem. <sup>12</sup> The hand of God was also on Judah to give them one heart to do what the king and the officials commanded by the word of the Lord.

### 2 Chronicles 30:10-12

But they laughed them to scorn, and mocked them. Mostly, the reception among the remnant of the northern kingdom was not warm. Reflecting the same attitude of heart that brought the kingdom as a whole into exile, the people of the northern kingdom laughed at and mocked the messengers who invited them to this great Passover in Jerusalem. It is noted that there was no rational argument against the invitation; it was all opposed with simple laughter and mocking. For the frivolous and simple-minded, these replace serious thought.

**According to the Jewish historian Josephus the messengers and prophets who brought the invitations were not only mocked, they were murdered!**

Only a few from Asher, Manasseh, and Zebulun humbled themselves and came to Jerusalem. The response from the other tribes was disappointing to say the least. However, they had only known apostasy for the past two hundred years or so since the two nations split.

**Far more northerners participated than previously, and the recent fall of the northern kingdom in 722 BC meant that Jerusalem now offered the only alternative for corporate worship of the Lord.**

The hand of God was also on Judah. The response among the peoples and villages of Judah was entirely different. God gave them one heart to obey the command of the Lord and their king.

<sup>13</sup> Many people came together in Jerusalem to keep the festival of unleavened bread in the second month, a very large assembly. <sup>14</sup> They set to work and removed the altars that were in Jerusalem, and all the altars for offering incense they took away and threw into the Wadi Kidron. <sup>15</sup> They slaughtered the passover lamb on the fourteenth day of the second month. The priests and the Levites were ashamed, and they sanctified themselves and brought burnt-offerings into the house of the Lord. <sup>16</sup> They took their accustomed posts according to the law of Moses the man of God; the priests dashed the blood that they received from the hands of the Levites.

## 2 Chronicles 30:13-16

Many people came together in Jerusalem; a very large assembly. This was the greatest assembly gathered for a Passover in generations. Not only had the Passover been neglected in Judah for many years, but this Passover also included those from the remnant of the northern tribes who responded to the invitation.

They set to work and removed the altars that were in Jerusalem. These were either altars to pagan gods or unauthorised altars to the true God. Both were prohibited, and as a demonstration of preparation for this great Passover, the city was cleansed of all idolatrous or unauthorised worship.

The Wadi Kidron. The Kidron Valley, a place of olive groves, ancient tombs and misnamed funerary monuments, divides Jerusalem's Temple Mount from the Mount of Olives. Once a deep ravine channelling a seasonal stream or wadi, it provided a defensive border to the original City of David, and a route into the wilderness for King David when he fled from his rebellious son Absalom; refer to 2 Samuel 15:23.

Jesus often traversed the Kidron on his way to the village of Bethany, his favourite place of rest and refuge. After the Last Supper, he crossed the valley with his disciples to the garden of Gethsemane. Then, after he was betrayed, he was brought back the same way to the house of the high priest. By the light of the Passover moon, the whitewashed tombs cut into the valley's rock-face would have provided a stark reminder to Jesus that on the following day his own body would be laid in a tomb.



View of the Kidron Valley

Since the 4<sup>th</sup> Century AD, an identification of the Kidron with the Valley of Jehoshaphat, a name meaning 'Yahweh shall judge' mentioned in the Book of Joel: <<*I will gather all the nations and bring them down to the valley of Jehoshaphat, and I will enter into judgement with them there, on account of my people and my heritage Israel, because they have scattered them among the nations*>> (Joel 3:2a), and: <<*Let the nations rouse themselves, and come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat; for there I will sit to judge all the neighbouring nations*>> (Joel 3:12), has led to the belief that it will be the place of final judgement.

They slaughtered the passover lamb on the fourteenth day of the second month. This shows the Passover being celebrated according to the Scriptural commands that allow for the celebration of Passover in the second month

according to Numbers 9:5-14. They took care to honour and obey in their celebration of this important festival.

<sup>17</sup> For there were many in the assembly who had not sanctified themselves; therefore the Levites had to slaughter the passover lamb for everyone who was not clean, to make it holy to the Lord.

### 2 Chronicles 30:17

For there were many in the assembly who had not sanctified themselves. This multitude seems to have mostly come from the remnant of the northern tribes, who would naturally be ignorant about how to properly prepare for Passover. There is no record of them having to sanctify themselves when they attended the alternative festivals set up in Samaria and Dan before golden calves.

Therefore the Levites had to slaughter the passover lamb for everyone who was not clean. This was a new, and possibly a permanent change in their duties: <<*Take position in the holy place according to the groupings of the ancestral houses of your kindred the people, and let there be Levites for each division of an ancestral house. Slaughter the passover lamb, sanctify yourselves, and on behalf of your kindred make preparations, acting according to the word of the Lord by Moses*>> (2 Chronicles 35:5-6). It had originally been the responsibility of the elders to slaughter the Passover lamb: <<*Then Moses called all the elders of Israel and said to them, 'Go, select lambs for your families, and slaughter the passover lamb'*>> (Exodus 12:21). The role then passed to the priests, supported by the Levites: <<*They slaughtered the passover lamb, and the priests dashed the blood that they received from them, while the Levites did the skinning*>> (2 Chronicles 35:11).

<sup>18</sup> For a multitude of the people, many of them from Ephraim, Manasseh, Issachar, and Zebulun, had not cleansed themselves, yet they ate the passover otherwise than as prescribed. But Hezekiah prayed for them, saying, 'The good Lord pardon all <sup>19</sup> who set their hearts to seek God, the Lord the God of their ancestors, even though not in accordance with the sanctuary's rules of cleanness.' <sup>20</sup> The Lord heard Hezekiah, and healed the people.

### 2 Chronicles 30:18-20

For a multitude of the people, many of them from Ephraim, Manasseh, Issachar, and Zebulun, had not cleansed themselves, yet they ate the passover otherwise than as prescribed. Although the northerners who ate the Passover were ceremonially unclean and thus deficient according to the letter of the law, their genuine repentance and Hezekiah's intercession were enough to override this

deficiency. This shows the wonderful and warm mercy of God. By the letter of the command the people deserved judgement for their disobedience. Yet God showed his mercy and goodness to those who had prepared their heart to seek God, although in ignorance they did not do it all according to the commandments.

Unaccustomed to temple usage, and now strangers to the temple rites, the people had participated in the festivities of this great Passover without submitting first to the necessary cleansing rituals. Their heart was prepared to seek God, they were proud of their ancestral history, they desired to stand right with the Lord God of their fathers; but they were sadly ignorant and careless. The only thing to be done was to pray that their ignorance and negligence might be forgiven. And it was. This interpretation of the law can be summed up in the words of Jesus: <<*Then he said to them, 'The sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the sabbath; so the Son of Man is lord even of the sabbath'*>> (Mark 2:27-28).

Their pattern of preparing to receive the Passover is instructive for those who come to the communion table, especially those who feel unworthy to partake of communion:

- They forgot their differences and came together as one people.
- They removed their idols.
- They prepared their hearts.
- Their sins and ignorance were confessed.
- They prayed.

The Lord heard Hezekiah, and healed the people in fulfilment of the promise: <<*When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command the locust to devour the land, or send pestilence among my people, if my people who are called by my name humble themselves, pray, seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land*>> (2 Chronicles 7:13-14). Healing here is probably a metaphor for forgiveness and spiritual cleansing so that the people could come before God in keeping with Hezekiah's prayer: <<*As for me, I said, 'O Lord, be gracious to me; heal me, for I have sinned against you'*>> (Psalm 41:4), and: <<*For I will restore health to you, and your wounds I will heal, says the Lord, because they have called you an outcast: 'It is Zion; no one cares for her!'*>> (Jeremiah 30:17).

<sup>21</sup> The people of Israel who were present at Jerusalem kept the festival of unleavened bread for seven days with great gladness; and the Levites and the priests praised the Lord day by day, accompanied by loud instruments for the Lord. <sup>22</sup> Hezekiah spoke encouragingly to all the Levites who showed good skill in the service of the Lord. So the

people ate the food of the festival for seven days, sacrificing offerings of well-being and giving thanks to the Lord the God of their ancestors.

### 2 Chronicles 30:21-22

The people of Israel who were present at Jerusalem kept the festival of unleavened bread for seven days with great gladness. There was special gladness for these who had come from the northern tribes. They had never before experienced such obedient and joyful worship, where they praised the Lord day by day, accompanied by loud instruments for the Lord.

Hezekiah spoke encouragingly to all the Levites who showed good skill in the service of the Lord. The gathering at this Passover was not only given to worship, but also to teaching. This was helpful and good at all times; one might say it was urgently needed with the presence of the northern tribes.

So the people ate the food of the festival for seven days, sacrificing offerings of well-being and giving thanks to the Lord the God of their ancestors. The third component to their gather was fellowship. They shared the same food, the same relationship with God (demonstrated by the peace-offerings) and the same need for him (demonstrated by their confession of sin). This was a remarkable and wonderful response to their experience of worship, teaching, and fellowship. They wanted to make the necessary sacrifices to continue the festival for another week, and they did it with gladness. There is no indication in the text that they offered more Passover lambs or continued eating unleavened bread, which belonged to the specific seasons of these festivals. The emphasis is on their continuation of worship, teaching, and fellowship.

<sup>23</sup> Then the whole assembly agreed together to keep the festival for another seven days; so they kept it for another seven days with gladness. <sup>24</sup> For King Hezekiah of Judah gave the assembly a thousand bulls and seven thousand sheep for offerings, and the officials gave the assembly a thousand bulls and ten thousand sheep. The priests sanctified themselves in great numbers. <sup>25</sup> The whole assembly of Judah, the priests and the Levites, and the whole assembly that came out of Israel, and the resident aliens who came out of the land of Israel, and the resident aliens who lived in Judah, rejoiced. <sup>26</sup> There was great joy in Jerusalem, for since the time of Solomon son of King David of Israel there had been nothing like this in Jerusalem. <sup>27</sup> Then the priests and the Levites stood up and blessed the people, and their voice was heard; their prayer came to his holy dwelling in heaven.

## 2 Chronicles 30:23-27

Then the whole assembly agreed together to keep the festival for another seven days. The festival was extended for another week, just as the temple dedication had been, and the great joy of this occasion recalls the time of Solomon: <<*On the eighth day they held a solemn assembly; for they had observed the dedication of the altar for seven days and the festival for seven days. On the twenty-third day of the seventh month he sent the people away to their homes, joyful and in good spirits because of the goodness that the Lord had shown to David and to Solomon and to his people Israel*>> (2 Chronicles 7:9-10). Since those days there had not been a Passover in Jerusalem so widely and enthusiastically celebrated.

Then the priests and the Levites stood up and blessed the people, and their voice was heard. According to Numbers 6:22-27, it was the duty of the priests to bless the people with these words: <<*The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace*>>. As the priests obeyed this command, their voice was heard, even in heaven, the holy dwelling place of God, and the people were indeed blessed.

Although the Levites had been carrying out some of the tasks of the priests because too few were consecrated when the festival started, it is not clear if the Levites themselves blessed the people, a task normally reserved for the priests. The text could be translated as the Levitical priests rather than the priests and the Levites, which would clarify this statement.