

CHAPTER 30

In this chapter we have an account of the solemn passover which Hezekiah kept in the first year of his reign.

I. The consultation about it, and the resolution he and his people came to for the observance of it (v. 2-5).

II. The invitation he sent to Judah and Israel to come and keep it (v. 1, 6-12).

III. The joyful celebration of it (v. 13-27). By this the reformation, set on foot in the foregoing chapter, was greatly advanced and established, and that nail in God's holy place clenched.

<401>2 CHRONICLES 30:1-12

PREPARATIONS FOR THE PASSOVER

Here is,

I. A passover resolved upon. That annual feast was instituted as a memorial of the bringing of the children of Israel out of Egypt. It happened that the reviving of the temple service fell within the appointed days of that feast, the seventeenth day of the first month: this brought that forgotten solemnity to mind. "What shall we do," says Hezekiah, "about the passover? It is a very comfortable ordinance, and has been long neglected. How shall we revive it? The time has elapsed for this year; we cannot go about it immediately; the congregation is thin, the people have not notice, the priests are not prepared, v. 3. Must we defer it till another year?" Many, it is likely, were for deferring it; but Hezekiah considered that by that time twelve-month the good affections of the people would cool, and it would be too long to want the benefit of the ordinance; and therefore, finding a proviso in the law of Moses that particular persons who were unclean in the first month might keep the passover the fourteenth day of the second month and be accepted (^{<0011>}Numbers 9:11), he doubted not but that it might be extended to the congregation. Whereupon they resolved to keep the passover *in the second month*. Let the circumstance give way to

the substance, and let not the thing itself be lost upon a nicety about the time. It is good striking while the iron is hot, and taking people when they are in a good mind. Delays are dangerous.

II. A proclamation issued out to give notice of this passover and to summon the people to it.

1. An invitation was sent to the ten revolted tribes to stir them up to come and attend this solemnity. Letters were written to Ephraim and Manasseh to invite them to Jerusalem to keep this passover (v. 1), not with any political design, to bring them back to the house of David, but with a pious design to bring them back to the Lord God of Israel. "Let them take whom they will for their king," says Hezekiah, "so they will but take him for their God." The matters in difference between Judah and Israel, either upon a civil or sacred account, shall not hinder but that if the people of Israel will sincerely return to the Lord their God Hezekiah will bid them as welcome to the passover as any of his own subjects. Expresses are sent post throughout all the tribes of Israel with memorials earnestly pressing the people to take this opportunity of returning to the God from whom they had revolted. Now here we have,

(1.) The contents of the circular letters that were despatched upon the occasion, in which Hezekiah discovers a great concern both for the honour of God and for the welfare of the neighbouring kingdom, the prosperity of which he seems passionately desirous of, though he not only received no toll, tribute, or custom, from it, but it had often, and not long since, been vexatious to his kingdom. This is rendering good for evil. Observe,

[1.] What it is which he presses them to (v. 8): "*Yield yourselves unto the Lord.* Before you can come into communion with him you must come into covenant with him." *Give the hand to the Lord* (so the word is), that is, "Consent to take him for your God." A bargain is confirmed by giving the hand. "Strike this bargain. Join yourselves to him in an everlasting covenant. *Subscribe with the hand* to be his, ²³⁴¹⁵ Isaiah 44:5. Give him your hand, in token of giving him your heart. Lay your hand to his plough. Devote yourselves to his service, to work for him. *Yield to him,*" that is, "Come up to his terms, come under his government, stand it not out any longer against him." "*Yield to him,* to be absolutely and universally at his command, at his disposal, to be, and do, and have, and suffer, whatever he pleases. In order to this, be not *stiff-necked as your fathers were;* let not

your corrupt and wicked wills rise up in resistance of and rebellion against the will of God. Say not that you will do what you please, but resolve to do what he pleases." There is in the carnal mind a stiffness, an obstinacy, an unaptness to comply with God. We have it from our fathers; it is bred in the bone with us. This must be conquered; and the will that had in it a spirit of contradiction must be melted into the will of God; and to his yoke the neck that was an iron sinew must be bowed and fitted. In pursuance of this resignation to God, he presses them *to enter into his sanctuary*, that is, to attend upon him in that place which he had chosen, to put his name there, and serve him in the ordinances which he had appointed. "The doors of the sanctuary are now opened, and you have liberty to enter; the temple service is now revived, and you are welcome to join in it." The king says, *Come*; the princes and priests say, *Come; whosoever will, let him come*. This he calls (v. 6) *turning to the Lord God*; for they had forsaken him, and worshipped other gods. *Repent now, and be converted*. Thus those who through grace have turned to God themselves should do all they can to bring others back to him.

[2.] What arguments he uses to persuade them to do this. *First*, "You are children of Israel, and therefore stand related, stand obliged, to the God of Israel, from whom you have revolted." *Secondly*, "The God you are called to return to is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, a God in covenant with your first fathers, who served him and yielded themselves to him; and it was their honour and happiness that they did so." *Thirdly*, "Your late fathers that forsook him and trespassed against him have been given up to desolation; their apostasy and idolatry have been their ruin, as you see (v. 7); let their harms be your warnings." *Fourthly*, "You yourselves are but a *remnant narrowly escaped out of the hands of the kings of Assyria* (v. 6), and therefore are concerned to put yourselves under the protection of the God of your fathers, that you be not quite swallowed up." *Fifthly*, "This is the only way of *turning away the fierceness of God's anger from you* (v. 8), which will certainly consume you if you continue stiff-necked." *Lastly*, "If you return to God in a way of duty, he will return to you in a way of mercy." This he begins with (v. 6) and concludes with, v. 9. In general, "You will find him *gracious and merciful*, and one that *will not turn away his face from you*, if you seek him, notwithstanding the provocations you have given him." Particularly, "You may hope that he will turn again the captivity of your brethren that are carried away, and bring them back to

their own land.” Could any thing be expressed more pathetically, more movingly? Could there be a better cause, or could it be better pleaded?

(2.) The entertainment which Hezekiah's messengers and message met with. It does not appear that Hoshea, who was now king of Israel, took any umbrage from, or gave any opposition to, the dispersing of these proclamations through his kingdom, nor that he forbade his subjects to accept the invitation. He seems to have left them entirely to their liberty. They might go to Jerusalem to worship if they pleased; for, though he did evil, yet *not like the kings of Israel that were before him*, ^{<127B>}2 Kings 17:2. He saw ruin coming upon his kingdom, and, if any of his subjects would try this expedient to prevent it, they had his full permission. But, for the people,

[1.] The generality of them slighted the call and turned a deaf ear to it. The messengers went from city to city, some to one and some to another, and used pressing entreaties with the people to come up to Jerusalem to keep the passover; but they were so far from complying with the message that they abused those that brought it, *laughed them to scorn, and mocked them* (v. 10), not only refused, but refused with disdain. Tell them of the God of Abraham! they knew him not, they had other gods to serve, Baal and Ashtaroth. Tell them of the sanctuary! their high places were as good. Tell them of God's mercy and wrath! they neither dreaded the one nor desired the other. No marvel that the king's messengers were thus despitefully used by this apostate race when God's messengers were so, his servants the prophets, who produced credentials from him. The destruction of the kingdom of the ten tribes was now at hand. It was but two or three years after this that the king of Assyria laid siege to Samaria, which ended in the captivity of those tribes. Just before this they had not only a king of their own that permitted them to return to God's sanctuary, but a king of Judah that earnestly invited them to do it. Had they generally accepted this invitation, it might have prevented their ruin; but their contempt of it hastened and aggravated it, and left them inexcusable.

[2.] Yet there were some few that accepted the invitation. The message, though to some it was a *savour of death unto death*, was to others a *savour of life unto life*, v. 11. In the worst of times God has had a remnant; so he had here, many of Asher, Manasseh, and Zebulun (here is no mention of any out of Ephraim, though some of that tribe are mentioned, v. 18), *humbled themselves, and came to Jerusalem*, that is, were sorry for their

sins and submitted to God. Pride keeps men from yielding themselves to the Lord; when that is brought down, the work is done.

2. A command was given to the men of Judah to attend this solemnity; and they universally obeyed it, v. 12. They did it with one heart, were all of a mind in it, and *the hand of God gave them that one heart*; for it is in the day of power that Christ's subjects are made willing. It is God that works both *to will* and *to do*. When people, at any time, manifest an unexpected forwardness to do that which is good, we must acknowledge that hand of God in it.

~~403~~ 2 CHRONICLES 30:13-20

THE CELEBRATION OF THE PASSOVER

The time appointed for the passover having arrived, a very great congregation came together upon the occasion, v. 13. Now here we have,

I. The preparation they made for the passover, and good preparation it was: *They took away all the idolatrous altars* that were found, not only in the temple, but *in Jerusalem*, v. 14. Before they kept the feast, they cast out this old leaven. The best preparation we can make for the gospel passover is to cast away our iniquities, our spiritual idolatries.

II. The celebration of the passover. In this the people were so forward and zealous that the priests and Levites blushed to see themselves out-done by the commonalty, to see them more ready to bring sacrifices than they were to offer them. This put them upon sanctifying themselves (v. 15), that the work might not stand still for want of hands to carry it on. The notice we take of the zeal of others should make us ashamed of our own coldness, and quicken us not only to do our duty, but to do it well, and to sanctify ourselves to it. They did according to the duty of their place (v. 16), sprinkling *the blood upon the altar*, which was a type of Christ our passover sacrificed for us.

III. The irregularities they were guilty of in this solemnity. The substance was well managed, and with a great deal of devotion; but, besides that it was a month out of time,

1. The *Levites killed the passover*, which should have been done by the priests only, v. 17. They also assisted more than the law ordinarily allowed in offering the other sacrifices, particularly those that were for the purifying of the unclean, many of which there was now occasion for. Some think that it was the offerers' work, not the priests', that the Levites had here the charge of. Ordinarily every man killed his lamb, but now for those that were under any ceremonial pollution the Levites killed it.

2. Many were permitted to eat the passover who were not purified according to the strictness of the law, v. 18. This was the second month, and there was not warrant to put them off further to the third month, as, if it had been the first month, the law would have permitted them to eat it the second. And they were loth to forbid them communicating at all, lest they should discourage new converts, and send those away complaining whom they desired to send away rejoicing. Grotius observes from this that ritual institutions must give way, not only to a public necessity, but to a public benefit and advantage.

IV. Hezekiah's prayer to God for the forgiveness of this irregularity. It was his zeal that had called them together in such haste, and he would not that any should fare the worse for being straitened of time in their preparation. He therefore thought himself concerned to be an intercessor for those that *ate the passover otherwise than it was written*, that there might not be wrath upon them from the Lord. His prayer was,

1. A short prayer, but to the purpose: *The good Lord pardon every one* in the congregation that has fixed, engaged, or *prepared, his heart* to those services, though the ceremonial preparation be wanting. Note,

(1.) The great thing required in our attendance upon God in solemn ordinances is that we *prepare our hearts to seek him*, that we be sincere and upright in all we do, that the inward man be engaged and employed in it, and that we make heart-work of it; it is all nothing without this. *Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward part*. Hezekiah does not pray that this might be dispensed with, nor that the want of other things might be pardoned where there was not this. For *this* is the *one thing needful*, that we *seek God*, his favour, his honour, and that we set our hearts to do it.

(2.) Where this sincerity and fixedness of heart are there may still be many defects and infirmities, both the frame of the spirit and the performance of the service may be short of *the purification of the sanctuary*. Corruptions

may not be so fully conquered, thoughts not so closely fixed, affections not so lively, faith not so operative, as they should be. Here is a defect in sanctuary purification. There is nothing perfect under the sun, nor *a just man that doeth good, and sinneth not*.

(3.) These defects need pardoning healing grace; for omissions in duty are sins as well as omissions of duty. If God should deal with us in strict justice according to the best of our performances, we should be undone.

(4.) The way to obtain pardon for our deficiencies in duty, and all the iniquities of our holy things, is to seek it of God by prayer; it is not so a pardon of course but that it must be obtained by petition through the blood of Christ.

(5.) In this prayer we must take encouragement from the goodness of God: *The good Lord pardon*; for, when he proclaimed his goodness, he insisted most upon this branch of it, *forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin*.

(6.) It is the duty of those that have the charge of others, not only to look to themselves, but to those also that are under their charge, to see wherein they are wanting, and to pray for them, as Hezekiah here. See ~~3006~~ Job 1:5.

2. A successful prayer: *The Lord hearkened to Hezekiah*, was well pleased with his pious concern for the congregation, and, in answer to his prayer, *healed the people* (v. 20), not only did not lay their sin to their charge, but graciously accepted their services notwithstanding; for healing denotes not only forgiveness (~~2360~~ Isaiah 6:10; ~~4943B~~ Psalm 103:3), but comfort and peace, ~~2578~~ Isaiah 57:18; ~~300E~~ Malachi 4:2.

~~48D~~ 2 CHRONICLES 30:21-27

THE FEAST OF UNLEAVENED BREAD

After the passover followed the feast of unleavened bread, which continued seven days. How that was observed we are here told, and every thing in this account looks pleasant and lively.

1. Abundance of sacrifices were offered to God in peace-offerings, by which they both acknowledged and implored the favour of God, and on part of which the offerers feasted with their friends during these seven days

(v. 22), in token of their communion with God and the comfort they took in his favour and their reconciliation to him. To keep up this part of the service, that God's altar might be abundantly regaled with the fat and blood and his priests and people with the flesh of the peace-offerings, Hezekiah gave out of his own stock 1000 bullocks and 7000 sheep, and the princes, excited by his pious example, gave the same number of bullocks and a greater number of sheep, and all for peace-offerings, v. 24. By this God was honoured, the joy of the festival was kept up, and the strangers were encouraged to come again to Jerusalem. It was generously done of the king and the princes thus plentifully to entertain the whole congregation; but what is a great estate good for but that it puts men into a capacity of doing so much the more good? Christ feasted those that followed him. I believe neither Hezekiah nor his princes were the poorer at the year's end for this their pious liberality.

2. Many good prayers were put up to God with the peace-offerings, v. 22. They *made confession to the Lord God of their fathers*, in which the intent and meaning of the peace-offerings were directed and explained. When the priests sprinkled the blood and burnt the fat they made confession, so did the people when they feasted on their part. They made a religious confession of their relation to God and dependence upon him, a penitent confession of their sins and infirmities, a thankful confession of God's mercies to them, and a supplicatory confession of their wants and desires; and, in all these, they had an eye to God as *the God of their fathers*, a God in covenant with them.

3. There was a great deal of good preaching. The Levites (whose office it was, ⁴⁵³⁰Deuteronomy 33:10) *taught the people the good knowledge of the Lord*, read and opened the scriptures, and instructed the congregation concerning God and their duty to him; and great need there was of this, after so long a famine of the word as there had been in the last reign. Hezekiah did not himself preach, but he *spoke comfortably to the Levites* that did, attended their preaching, commended their diligence, and assured them of his protection and countenance. Hereby he encouraged them to study hard and take pains, and put a reputation upon them, that the people might respect and regard them the more. Princes and magistrates, by owning and encouraging faithful and laborious preachers, greatly serve the interest of God's kingdom among men.

4. They sang psalms every day (v. 21): *The Levites and priests praised the Lord day by day*, both with songs and musical instruments, thus expressing their own and exciting one another's joy in God and thankfulness to him. Praising God should be much of our work in our religious assemblies.

5. Having kept the seven days of the feast in this religious manner, they had so much comfort in the service that they *kept other seven days*, v. 23. They did not institute any new modes of worship, but repeated and continued the old. The case was extraordinary: they had been long without the ordinance; guilt had been contracted by the neglect of it; they had now got a very great congregation together, and were in a devout serious frame; they knew not when they might have such another opportunity, and therefore could not now find in their hearts to separate till they had doubled the time. Many of them were a great way from home, and had business in the country to look after, for, this being the second month, they were in the midst of their harvest; yet they were in no haste to return: the zeal of God's house made them forget their secular affairs. How unlike those who snuffed at God's service, and said, *What a weariness is it!* Or those who asked, *When will the sabbath be gone?* The servants of God should abound in his work.

6. All this they did *with gladness* (v. 23); they all rejoiced, and particularly *the strangers*, v. 25. *So there was great joy in Jerusalem*, v. 26. Never was the like since the dedication of the temple in Solomon's time. Note, Holy duties should be performed with holy gladness; we should be forward to them, and take pleasure in them, relish the sweetness of communion with God, and look upon it as matter of unspeakable joy and comfort that we are thus favoured and have such earnestness of everlasting joy.

7. The congregation was at length dismissed with a solemn blessing, v. 27.

(1.) The priests pronounced it; for it was part of their office to *bless the people* (⁽⁴⁰¹²⁾Numbers 6:22, 23), in which they were both the people's mouth to God by way of prayer and God's mouth to the people by way of promise; for their blessing included both. In it they testified both their desire of the people's welfare and their dependence upon God and that word of his grace to which they commended them. What a comfort is it to a congregation to be sent home thus crowned!

(2.) God said *Amen* to it. The voice of the priests, when they *blessed the people*, was heard in heaven and came up to the *habitation of God's*

holiness. When they pronounced the blessing God commanded it, and perhaps gave some sensible token of the ratification of it. The prayer that comes up to heaven in a cloud of incense will come down again to this earth in showers of blessings.