

The Reunited Kingdom, part 4 (2 Chronicles 29:1–36:23)

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The Reign of Hezekiah, part 4: Hezekiah Reunites the Kingdom through Temple Worship, part 1: Tribes Invited to Jerusalem; Attention to Northern Israelites; Hezekiah Plans the Invitation; Hezekiah Sends the Invitation; Hezekiah Receives Reactions to Invitation (2 Chronicles 30:1-12)

Hezekiah Reunites the Kingdom through Temple Worship (30:1-31:1)

In the preceding portion of Hezekiah's reign, the Chronicler noted that Hezekiah's actions provided atonement for northern Israel and southern Judah (see 29:24). At this point, the Chronicler developed this theme by reporting how Hezekiah celebrated the Passover with representatives of the entire nation. Through this Passover, the faithful of the southern and northern kingdoms were reunified around the temple and under the leadership of David's son.

Comparison of 30:1-31:1 with Kings

This portion of the Chronicler's record is an enormous expansion of one verse in Kings; 31:1 borrows information from 2 Kgs 18:4. Apart from this connection, however, the account of Hezekiah's Passover is from the Chronicler's hand. The writer of Kings chose to emphasize Josiah's Passover celebration (see 2 Kgs 23:21-23). The Chronicler, however, had much more interest in Hezekiah's Passover. The distinctive quality of Hezekiah's celebration was that it involved the migration of Northerners after the fall of Samaria (722 B.C.). The reunification of all Israel was so important to the Chronicler that he could not neglect the opportunity to bring this aspect of Hezekiah's reign to the foreground.

Structure of 30:1-31:1

The structure of this chapter is complex and deserves a few words of explanation. As the outline below suggests, this material consists of one narrative which contains two lengthy temporal regressions (see figure 53). The skeleton of Hezekiah's Passover celebration follows a straightforward five step

symmetrical pattern. The passage begins with the tribes invited to Jerusalem (30:1); it ends as they return to their homes (31:1b). The turning point of the story is the observance of Passover at the beginning of the feast of Unleavened Bread (30:15a). Prior to the day of Passover the people gathered in Jerusalem and removed foreign worship from the city (30:13-14); after the day of Passover the people extended the celebration of Unleavened Bread and removed foreign worship even outside Jerusalem (30:21-31:1a).

This main story line is interrupted twice by temporal regressions. Unfortunately, most English translations do not make these temporal shifts clear. First, the Chronicler added an explanation of why and how Hezekiah extended invitations to the tribes, especially the northern tribes (30:2-12). Second, he paused to explain why and how the king was able to celebrate Passover with the northern tribes (30:15b-20). In both of these regressions the simple past of most English translations should be replaced by past perfect. See the comments in each section below.

Recognizing when the Chronicler diverged from his central plot illumines some of his chief concerns in this chapter. Both temporal regressions (30:2-12, 15b-20) focus on Hezekiah's special attention to the northern Israelites. Winning the attendance of Northerners presented special challenges to the king (30:2-12). Once the Northerners arrived and participated, even more problems arose (30:15b-20). The Chronicler's interest in this chapter is not simply to record the bare essentials of Hezekiah's celebration. His two regressions demonstrate that he was particularly concerned with the efforts Hezekiah put forth to include the faithful from the northern tribes (see *Introduction: 2 Northern Israel*).

Tribes Invited to Jerusalem (30:1)

The Chronicler portrayed Hezekiah taking his temple restoration to a higher level by re-introducing **the Passover to the Lord** (30:1). The roots of Passover extend from Israel's exodus from Egypt (see Ex 12:1-28). It was a major religious event in the first month of Israel's calendar commemorating the nation's deliverance from slavery. It was only appropriate that Hezekiah should desire to have Passover celebrated in his newly restored temple.

The Chronicler began his record of this Passover with the notice that Hezekiah was not satisfied simply to celebrate with his fellow Judahites. He invited **all Israel and Judah and ... Ephraim and Manasseh** (30:1). The piling up of terms here expresses the Chronicler's conviction that Hezekiah invited everyone without exception. Later he mentioned that invitations went out **from Beersheba to Dan** (see 30:1; see comments on 1 Chr 21:2). In a word, the entire nation was invited. Northern Israel had fallen to Assyrian domination at this time and the capital of Samaria had been destroyed. Hezekiah extended himself to those left behind in the lands of the northern tribes by inviting them to Jerusalem for Passover.

As suggested above, 30:1 summarizes events which are explained more fully in 30:2-5. In many ways, this chronologically displaced verse draws attention to the central concern of this entire chapter. The Chronicler wanted his readers to know from the outset that Hezekiah's Passover celebration was devoted to the reunification of the nation. The motif of national reunification appears several times in

this chapter (see 30:5-6,10-12). Moreover, this theme links this chapter with the preceding narrative. In 29:24 the Chronicler twice pointed out that Hezekiah's preparation of the temple included sacrifices for the sins of all the tribes. In 30:1 Hezekiah put the temple to use in the Passover and he invited the whole nation to attend.

This connection was critical to the efforts of the original post-exilic readers. Re-establishing temple service was to be joined with a desire for national reunification in their day as well.

Attention to Northern Israelites (30:2-12)

As mentioned above, in 30:2-12 the Chronicler regressed temporally to provide a lengthy explanation of how Hezekiah invited the entire nation for Passover celebration. For this reason, all of the main verbs in this section should be translated in the past perfect (...*had decided* ... **had not been able** ... **had not consecrated** ... **had not assembled** ... *had seemed right* ... *had decided* ... etc. [30:2-12]).

Structure of 30:2-12

This passage divides into three steps (see figure 53). It begins with the king's plan to invite Northerners (30:2-5). It ends with mixed reactions to the invitation (30:10-12). The turning point of this material is Hezekiah's distribution of the invitation (30:6-9).

Hezekiah Plans the Invitation (30:2-5)

The Chronicler explained that instead of holding the Passover at its prescribed time in the first month (see Lev 23:5), Hezekiah held the celebration **in the second month** (30:2). Hezekiah's decision to postpone for a month was not entirely without precedent. Num 9:10-11 made an exception for individuals who were far away or were unclean because they had touched a corpse. These people could celebrate in the second month. Hezekiah's situation was not exactly that envisioned in Num 9, but apparently he thought it was close enough to warrant postponement of the entire event.

The Chronicler mentioned three factors that legitimized Hezekiah's decision. 1) The decision was made by **the king and his officials and the whole assembly** (30:2). The same explanation is repeated in 30:4. The Chronicler emphasized that the postponement was not simply the king's choice; the entire community supported the move. (For a summary of the Chronicler's outlook on popular consent see comments on 1 Chr 13:1.)

2) The reason for postponement was that **not enough priests had consecrated themselves and the people had not assembled in Jerusalem** (30:2). Proper consecration was so important that the king postponed the Passover. Rituals of consecration appear frequently in Chronicles as examples of

proper worship which the post-exilic readers were to imitate in their day (see *Introduction: 6) Royal Observance of Worship*).

The Chronicler's implicit approval of Hezekiah's reasoning reveals much about the manner in which he understood the application of the Law of Moses. He was no pedantic legalist, insisting on precise and wooden applications of the Law. Hezekiah's situation was unusual and this extraordinary situation required the application of precedents in Mosaic Law in creative ways. The fact that Hezekiah postponed only one month demonstrates the king's desire to adhere to Mosaic standards, but his unique situation required ingenious application.

3) Hezekiah's motivation for this entire event is spelled out plainly. He did not seek the reunification of the people primarily for economic or political reasons. He invited all the tribes because Passover **had not been celebrated in large numbers according to what was written** in the Law of Moses (30:5 see also 30:12). Throughout this chapter Hezekiah is hailed as a king determined to enforce the observance of the Law in his day. As such he was a model king for the post-exilic readers of this book (see *Introduction: 14) Standards*).

The king's desire to see **large numbers** (30:5) join the celebration, led him to send invitations **throughout Israel, from Beersheba to Dan** (30:5). Once again, the Chronicler reversed the traditional "Dan to Beersheba" as he referred to all the tribes of Israel (see comments on 1 Chr 21:2). His southern orientation stemmed from his focus on Judah and Jerusalem as the center of hope for all of the tribes. It should also be noted that all of the tribes are now simply called **Israel** (30:5). From the Chronicler's point of view, Israel and Judah were joined again in this great event because Hezekiah was determined to make it possible to have the entire nation at his Passover.

Once again, the Chronicler designed this event as an **assembly** (see 30:2,4,13,23-25). 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. This assembly in Hezekiah's day was no exception to this focus (see *Introduction: 5) Religious Assemblies*).

Hezekiah Sends Invitations (30:6-9)

This step continues the elaboration in Hezekiah's invitation. It consists of a summary of the letters he sent to the tribes. This material divides into a brief introduction (30:6a) and the text of the letters (30:6b-9; see figure 53).

In continuity with motifs which have appeared in this and the previous chapters, the Chronicler introduced Hezekiah's letter with the notice that **the king and ... his officials** (2 Chr 30:2,6) sent letters **throughout Israel and Judah** (30:6a). The unity among the leaders and the participation of the whole nation are in view once again.

The letter which follows was addressed to northern Israelites only (see 30:6b). It is likely that other letters went out to Judahites. At this point, however, the Chronicler emphasized that all the tribes received letters from Hezekiah and the officials of Judah. Hezekiah's letter consists of exhortations to the northern tribes.

Hezekiah's letter consists of eight exhortations. These exhortations may be divided in the following manner (see figure 54):

return (30:6b)	Guiding Principle
do not be like your fathers (30:7a)	Negative Requirement
do not be stiff-necked (30:8a)	
submit (30:8b)	Positive Requirement
come (30:8c)	
serve (30:8d)	
if you return (30:9a)	Guiding Principle
if you return (30:9b)	

Outline of 2 Chronicles 30:6b-9 (figure 54)

Hezekiah's speech focused on a basic principle which he elaborated at the beginning and end of his letter (30:6b,9). The repetition of **return** forms an inclusion for the entire correspondence. The inner portion of the invitation explains the two dimensions of what it meant to "return" (i.e. repent) to the Lord. On the negative side (30:7-8a), the northerners must reject the practices of their forebears. On the positive side (30:8b-c), they must worship at the temple in Jerusalem.

The irenic quality of Hezekiah's opening words should be noted. He addressed the northern tribes as the **people of Israel** and affirmed their common ancestry with Judah in **Abraham, Isaac and Israel** (30:6b). Hezekiah's tone is open and inviting. As a political entity, northern Israel had turned away from God's temple and king in Jerusalem (see 13:4-9). Even so, the faithful within those tribes were to be given opportunity to join with Judah (see *Introduction: 2) Northern Israel*).

Hezekiah described his addressees as **you who are left, who have escaped** (30:6b). The Northerners who had been spared from death and deportation by the **hand of the kings of the Assyrians** were invited to repent and join with Judah at the temple (30:6b). These descriptions of the North are very close to the manner in which the Chronicler described those who were eventually carried into exile in Babylon. They were **the remnant, who escaped from the sword** (36:20). This common terminology suggests that the Chronicler identified those who joined Hezekiah's Passover and those who went to exile in Babylon. Both groups were the remnant who could receive a brighter future by returning to the Lord and to Jerusalem.

Hezekiah established the basic principle of his letter at its beginning and reiterated it at the end. The Northerners must **return to the Lord** (30:6b,9a,c). To return to God (or "to repent" as it may be translated) was to acknowledge failure and to reaffirm submission to the standards of his covenant with Israel (see *Introduction: 22) Repentance*).

The central portions of the letter explained that returning to the Lord had negative and positive dimensions. Negatively, it meant that the Israelites must reject the apostasies of the past (30:7-8a). The North had been **unfaithful** (30:7; see *Introduction: 21) Unfaithfulness*) and **stiff-necked** (30:8a; see 36:13). These flagrant violations of the covenant were to be rejected by those returning to the Lord. Positively, to return to the Lord meant that they were to **submit to the Lord** (30:8b), i.e. obey his commands, **come to the sanctuary** (30:8c), and **serve** (or "worship") **the Lord** (30:8d). In short, repentance required rejecting the old ways and endorsing Hezekiah's invitation to worship in Jerusalem. The book of Kings makes it clear that Jeroboam's great sin was the establishment of worship at Dan and Bethel (see 1 Kgs 12:29). Hezekiah called on the faithful of northern Israel to reaffirm Jerusalem as their only place of worship.

The opening and closing portions of this letter also specify the results of returning to covenant fidelity. If the northern Israelites will return, then the Lord will **return to [them]** (30:6a). Moreover, those taken away **will be shown compassion by their captors and will come back** (30:9a). Beyond this, Hezekiah even promised that their **brothers and ... children** taken away would return to the land of promise (30:9a).

The words of Hezekiah certainly spoke clearly to the Chronicler's post-exilic readers. In many respects, they stood in very similar circumstances. They had suffered at the hands of foreign powers; many of their relatives remain outside the land; they had the opportunity to give temple worship its rightful place again. If they would only returned to the Lord in their day, then the promises of divine blessing, including the ingathering of those remaining outside the land, would be theirs.

Hezekiah Receives Reactions to Invitation (30:10-12)

Having explained why and what Hezekiah wrote to the tribes of Israel, the Chronicler reported the results of his invitation. He mentioned that Hezekiah's **couriers** traveled throughout **Ephraim and Manasseh, as far as Zebulun** (30:10). Their mission was to reach the distant tribes as well as those nearby. The Transjordanian tribes may not be listed here because they were probably under stricter Assyrian control. In all events, the reaction to Hezekiah's invitation was mixed. Many of **the people scorned and ridiculed** the couriers (30:10), but **some men** from several northern tribes **humbled themselves and went to Jerusalem** (30:11). The theme of humility appears a number of times in Chronicles as recognition of guilt and surrender to God's requirements (see *Introduction: 18) Humility*). These Northerners took Hezekiah's message to heart and returned to their God (see 30:6-9). In addition to a number of faithful northern Israelites, Hezekiah also received positive responses from many Judahites. As a result of **the hand of God**, the Judahites **had unity of mind** about Hezekiah's Passover (30:12). Once again, the Chronicler pointed to God's purposes behind human events (see *Introduction: 10) Divine Activity*). Moreover, God brought about a remarkable unity among Judahites. This notice of popular unity fit well with the Chronicler's emphasis on the need for cooperation between Israel's people and her leaders. (For a summary of the Chronicler's outlook on popular consent see comments on 1 Chr 13:2,4.) The reunification of the nation in Hezekiah's day did not just involve the repentance of northern Israelites. It also resulted from the overwhelming popular support of Judahites. They were eager to follow **the word of the Lord** (30:12; see *Introduction: 14) Standards*).

The Chronicler painted an ideal portrait for his readers in these words. At the command of David's son, repentant Israelites came to Jerusalem and met alongside Judahites fully supportive of temple worship. Nothing less was required of the post-exilic community (see *Introduction: 2 Northern Israel*).