

Remember Hezekiah’s context?

Hezekiah’s father, Ahaz, was afraid of the combined forces of Israel and Syria,
so he asked the Assyrians to protect him.

That wasn’t so smart!

Now the Assyrians have an invitation to become your next door neighbor!

And now, a few years after Ahaz’s invitation, the Assyrians are coming.

The most brutal war-machine known to man has set its sights on you.

And what are you doing?

As we saw last time,

Hezekiah is cleaning the temple, offering sacrifices, singing praise to God!

Worship is the most *potent* political act imaginable.

No, worship will not prepare the troops for battle.

Worship will not mobilize people for an election.

But battlefields and election booths are not the places where history is made!

In worship we gather at the right hand of God,
where Jesus is seated in glory.

Many kings have sought to dethrone God and oppose his purposes.

Not one has ever succeeded.

If you worship the LORD your God and serve him only,

then you have nothing on earth to fear!

Everything else flows out of our worship of God.

As Wilcock puts it,

“Was God’s temple open, clean, glorious with offerings and praise?

The result was that when the invaders did reach Jerusalem

the presence of God filled it, and was impregnable.” (p247)

In the same way,

when the church of our Lord Jesus worships him –

not just in “technically correct” way,

but wholeheartedly – entirely –

devoted to him with all our heart, soul, mind and strength,

then the glory of the Lord fills his church –

and no foe can possibly stand against that!

1. The Call to All Israel: “Return to the LORD” (v1-9)

30 Hezekiah sent 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 For the king and his princes and all the assembly in Jerusalem had taken counsel to keep the Passover in the second month—³ for they could not keep it at that time because the priests had not consecrated themselves in sufficient number, nor had the people assembled in Jerusalem—⁴ and the plan seemed right to the king and all the assembly.⁵ So they decreed to make a proclamation throughout all Israel, from Beersheba 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 as often as prescribed.

Having cleansed the temple in the first month,

Hezekiah now wrote letters to all Israel and Judah (including Ephraim and Manasseh) urging them to come “to the house of the LORD at Jerusalem to keep the Passover to the LORD.”

2 Kings 18 makes it clear that Hezekiah became king during the reign of Hoshea of Israel, which would mean that the first year of Hezekiah’s reign was before 722 (the year that the northern kingdom was brought to an end), but here, it suggests that Hezekiah’s first year comes *after* the destruction of Samaria.

Many have suggested that there was some sort of co-regency between Ahaz and Hezekiah, so it is likely that Chronicles is referring to the first year of Hezekiah’s sole reign.

We are told in verse 3 that they had to celebrate Passover in the second month, because not enough priests had consecrated themselves in time for the first month.

Why does Hezekiah *change* the date of the Passover?

The Law of Moses is quite clear as to the date of the Passover!

It starts on the 14th day of the first month.

But Numbers 9 permits people who were unclean in the first month to celebrate the Passover in the second month; but it strictly forbids anyone else to do this.

In Hezekiah’s day, on the 14th day of the first month, the temple was still not ready for the Passover.

So they decide that it was better to celebrate Passover one month late, than to skip Passover entirely!

I want you to pay attention to Hezekiah’s letter in verses 6-9:

⁶ So couriers went throughout all Israel and Judah with letters from the king and his princes, as the king had commanded, saying, “O people of Israel, return to the LORD, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, that he may turn again to the remnant of you who have escaped from the hand of the kings of Assyria.⁷ Do not be like your fathers and your brothers, who were faithless to the LORD God of their fathers, so that he made them a desolation, as you see.⁸ Do not now be stiff-

necked as your fathers were, but yield yourselves to the LORD and come to his sanctuary, which he has consecrated forever, and serve the LORD your God, that his fierce anger may turn away from you. ⁹ For if you return to the LORD, your brothers 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.”

The central theme is obviously the theme of “return” (or “turn”).

The word “shub” is used six times in these four verses:

“return to the LORD” (v6)

“that he may turn again to the remnant of you” (v6)

“serve the LORD your God, that his fierce anger may *turn away* from you” (v8)

“For if you return to the LORD” (v9) your children will “return to this land” (v9),

“For the LORD your God is gracious and merciful

and will not turn away [different word!] his face from you,

if you return to him” (v9).

The force of the idea of “turning” (or *re-turning*)

has a very strong idea of *presence* or absence.

Return to the LORD – has an almost physical component –

physically moving from one place to another –

that “he may return to the remnant of you”:

if Israel wants God’s presence – God’s return –

then they must turn to him!

This is what repentance and restoration from exile is all about.

As I read through the Breckinridge letters, I found a beautiful illustration of this.

RJ Breckinridge was a staunch Union man during the Civil War,

and had two sons who fought for the Union –

and two sons who fought for the Confederacy in the Civil War.

His son, Willie, was devoted to his father – but he joined Morgan’s raiders,

a band of Confederate soldiers who would raid Kentucky and Ohio.

Willie’s wife, Issa, was nineteen years old when Willie left for the war.

She had a six week old baby at the time.

She blamed RJ and the Union members of the Breckinridge family

for driving her husband away.

Little Ella was three years old before she ever saw her father again.

Issa was forced to flee to Canada (or face deportation)

since she was the wife of a Confederate officer

(and the wives of Confederate officers had the resources – and usually the desire –

to provide aid and comfort to the enemy!)

When she asked Abraham Lincoln for a pass

so that she could cross the battle lines and go to her husband,

Lincoln replied that he would only grant one if her father-in-law,
R. J. Breckinridge, co-signed the request.

Issa was furious!

In her mind, RJ symbolized why she was separated from her husband.

She wrote a furious letter

stating that she would die before asking favors from RJB!

For three years *after the war*, Issa and RJ never spoke.

Willie was caught in the middle.

Finally he wrote to his father and told RJ

how pained he was that RJ never visited his family –

how his children did not know their grandfather;

how he felt as though his children were exiled from the family.

RJ replied that he bore no ill will against Issa –

but that her actions and words during the war

had made it impossible for him to make the first move.

But he longed to be reconciled.

So Willie brought his family to Danville for dinner

(and for the next month the brothers and sisters were buzzing with the news –

Issa went to Pa's house *and had a pleasant time!!!*)

Then a few weeks later came the letter from Issa,

inviting her father-in-law to stay with them the next time he came to Lexington.

And then an even more affectionate letter, referring to him as “dear Father,”

and telling him how much the children had enjoyed his visit.

There is no hint in all these letters that anyone ever said the words,

“Please forgive me.”

But all the words in the world could not communicate what their actions declared:

The War is over.

Return from Exile.

Be at peace.

I'm all in favor of saying the words!

But whatever was (or was not) said,

what matters is the true and genuine restoration and reconciliation

between those who were alienated!

And that sort of return is what happens in the reunion of “north and south” in Israel:

2. The Reply of All Israel: Some Mocked...Some Humbled Themselves (v10-12)

¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ However, some men of Asher, of Manasseh, and of Zebulun humbled themselves and came to Jerusalem. ¹² The hand of God was also on Judah to give them one heart to do what the king and the princes commanded

by the word of the LORD.

The call to worship the LORD has a fairly predictable response:
some mocked – and some humbled themselves.

I want you to see here the parallel with what Jesus says at the beginning of Acts.
Jesus is asked, “Will you now restore the kingdom to Israel?”
When Hezekiah restored the kingdom,
he sent his messengers throughout Judea and Samaria.
Jesus says, “You will be my witnesses, in Jerusalem, and in Judea and all Samaria,
and to the ends of the earth.”

And Jesus’ messengers are scorned and mocked by many.
But some “humbled themselves and came to Jerusalem.”

When the Word of the Lord goes forth it accomplishes his purpose –
and all those who were ordained to eternal life believed!

And so Hezekiah restored the kingdom.
In Hezekiah Judah and Israel – north and south – are reunited under the Son of David.

3. The Passover Was Made for Man, Not Man for the Passover (v13-22)

¹³ *And many people came together in Jerusalem to keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread in the second month, a very great assembly.* ¹⁴ *They set to work and removed the altars that were in Jerusalem, and all the altars for burning incense they took away and threw into the brook Kidron.*

Verses 13-14 then speak of the preparations for the Passover –
which included removing the altars that were in Jerusalem,
as well as the altars for burning incense.

Worship in Jerusalem had become corrupt to the core.

But now the Son of David – the new Solomon – has come.
Solomon was the last king in Jerusalem to reign over a united kingdom.
And just as Solomon kept the feast 14 days,
so also does Hezekiah (v23);
as Solomon prayed for the people,
so also does Hezekiah (v18-19) –
as he does precisely what Solomon says the king should do!
the prayer offered by the Son of David in the temple, is heard in heaven!;
and in verse 26, the Chronicler connects the two celebrations explicitly.

¹⁵ *And they slaughtered the Passover lamb on the fourteenth day of the second month. And the priests and the Levites were ashamed, so that they consecrated themselves and brought burnt offerings into the house of the LORD.* ¹⁶ *They took their accustomed posts according to the Law of Moses the man of God. The priests threw the blood that they received from the hand of the*

Levites. ¹⁷ For there were many in the assembly who had not consecrated themselves. Therefore the Levites had to slaughter the Passover lamb for everyone who was not clean, to consecrate it to the LORD. ¹⁸ For a majority 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. For Hezekiah had prayed for them, saying, “May the good LORD pardon everyone ¹⁹ who sets his heart to seek God, the LORD, the God of his fathers, even though not according to the sanctuary's rules of cleanness.”^[a]

The history of the Passover is an interesting one.

If all you do is read the “institution” narrative in Exodus 12-13,
then the Passover appears to be a family meal –
there are no references to priests;
and the meat is to be roasted –
there is a very clear prohibition against boiling the meat (12:9)
(the word here is “basha”).

But of course, the Passover institution occurs before there are priests –
and before there is any sanctuary for worship.

Leviticus 23 then speaks of the Passover as a holy convocation –
the Passover was celebrated on the 14th day of the first month,
followed by the Feast of Unleavened Bread on the 15th day
(and continuing for seven days)
one of the three feasts to the LORD.

Numbers 9 records the first anniversary of the Passover.
There are no significant changes from Exodus 12-13,
except for the permission for those who are unclean
(or who are on a long journey)
to celebrate the Passover on the 14th day of the second month.
This suggests that in the wilderness,
the Passover was still considered largely a family celebration.

Numbers 28 records the offerings for Passover (and the Feast of Unleavened Bread)
that are to be offered at the central sanctuary.

But of course, the background for Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers
is the context of the Israel in the wilderness.

Deuteronomy 16 then gets really interesting:

Moses is preaching about what is supposed to happen when they enter the promised land.
“You may not offer the Passover sacrifice
within any of your towns that the LORD your God is giving you,
but at the place that the LORD your God will choose,
to make his name dwell in it,
there you shall offer the Passover sacrifice,
in the evening at sunset, at the time you came out of Egypt.

And you shall cook it and eat it at the place that the LORD your God will choose”
(Dt 16:6-7).

Now, the ESV translates “bashal” as “cook” –
but it is the exact same word used in Exodus 12:9 as the form of cooking
forbidden for the Passover lamb!
namely, *boiling*.

So, how are you supposed to cook the Passover Lamb?

I would suggest that there is a transformation of the Passover
from the original event to the celebration of that event.

Think of the Lord’s Supper.

We don’t do exactly what Jesus did at the *Last Supper*.
Rather, that Supper has taken on a ritual form,
as Paul describes it in 1 Corinthians 11.

(In other words, within a generation, the ritual meal displaced the original)
The same thing happened to the Passover 1400 years earlier!

The people of Israel did not try to “replay” the original Passover –
rather, following the clear teaching of Moses,
they commemorated it.

Likewise, we do not try to “replicate” the original “Last Supper,”
rather, following the clear teaching of the apostles ,
we commemorate it.

Clearly, by Deuteronomy, the Passover is no longer just a family celebration.

Here in 2 Chronicles, it goes a step further, and now it is the priests and Levites
who slaughter the Passover lambs on behalf of the unclean
(suggesting that those who were clean slaughtered their own lambs);
in Ezra 6:20, after the exile, we hear that the priests and Levites
slaughtered *all* of the Passover lambs.

Some people have been perplexed at the variety of directions given regarding Passover.

Usually, they are the same people who tend to be “statute-oriented”
and who think that God should always be very precise
in saying exactly what we need to do,
so that everything is cut and dried,
and there is no ambiguity in our duty.

So when they hear that at one time God commanded that you should not boil the lamb,
and then later they hear a command to boil the lamb,
they insist on translating the words differently.

When they hear that at one time the head of household was to slaughter the lamb,
and then they hear that the priests slaughtered all the lambs,
they insist that the priests were violating the law of God!

I would suggest that they are missing the point.

The point is what the Reformed tradition has articulated
as the “Regulative Principle of Worship.”

The Regulative Principle says that we should only do in worship
what God has said we should do.

But the Regulative Principle *also* distinguishes between the “elements” of worship
and the circumstances.

The elements of worship are the basic things:
the Word, sacraments, and prayer.

The circumstances are pretty much everything else!

Even many of the detailed regulations in the OT were “circumstantial.”

Think about our text here in 2 Chronicles 30.

Two of the basic actions of the Passover are very clear from the Pentateuch:
the Passover lamb should be slaughtered on the 14th day of the first month;
and only those who are both circumcised and ceremonially clean
may partake of the Passover.

Neither of those basic rules are observed in this case!

Hezekiah and the priests were convinced that the fundamental principle of the Passover
was the celebration of God’s saving Israel from Egypt –
and that everyone who desired to remember that great salvation
should be admitted to the Passover, regardless of ceremonial status.
(Sure, in future years, you should make sure that you are ceremonially clean –
but if we wait until we are clean before we do this, it’ll never happen!)

And notice God’s response:

²⁰ *And the LORD heard Hezekiah and healed the people.*

In other words, the LORD entirely approved of Hezekiah’s distinction
between the essential actions of the Passover,
and the circumstantial regulations
that were designed to promote the holiness of the Passover.

Chronicles is not saying that we can play fast and loose with God’s law –
but Chronicles *is* saying what Jesus will say about the Sabbath:
“Passover was made for man, not man for the Passover.”

If you are so strict in your adherence to the law that you destroy the *point* of the law,
then you have not truly kept the law!

There is an important lesson here.

Some have used this text to say that outward actions aren’t that important:
the *heart* is what really matters.

But that’s not the point at all.

After all, if you think about what is happening here,

the whole point of the story is that Israel (all Israel – not just Judah)
is doing something *outward* together!
It's true that they are setting aside certain regulations regarding clean/unclean.
But they are setting aside the sanctuary's rules of cleanness –
in other words, they are relaxing some of the purity laws
so that the heart can be properly expressed in the outward actions of worship.

And that is what we see in verses 21-22:

²¹ And the people of Israel who were present at Jerusalem kept the Feast of Unleavened Bread seven days with great gladness, and the Levites and the priests praised the LORD day by day, singing with all their might^[b] to the LORD. ²² And Hezekiah spoke encouragingly to all the Levites who showed good skill in the service of the LORD. So they ate the food of the festival for seven days, sacrificing peace offerings and giving thanks to the LORD, the God of their fathers.

I want you to see the result of the wise and charitable application of God's law:
the result is a *wholehearted* pursuit of the LORD!

The rigid and heartless application of God's law leads to legalism and sterility.
The loose and lax neglect of God's law leads to license and rebellion.

The equitable and prudent application of God's law leads to great joy and gladness –
with Levites and priests singing with all their might,
the King encouraging those who are skilled in the service of the LORD,
and all the people rejoicing and giving thanks.

Indeed, so joyful and thankful are they
that they agreed to keep the feast for another seven days!

We don't want to go home!
We want to be together!
It has been over 200 years since we have done this –
and we want to savor the moment!

4. Joy in Jerusalem (v23-27)

²³ Then the whole assembly agreed together to keep the feast for another seven days. So they kept it for another seven days with gladness. ²⁴ For Hezekiah king of Judah gave the assembly 1,000 bulls and 7,000 sheep for offerings, and the princes gave the assembly 1,000 bulls and 10,000 sheep. And the priests consecrated themselves in great numbers. ²⁵ The whole assembly of Judah, and the priests and the Levites, and the whole assembly that came out of Israel, and the sojourners who came out of the land of Israel, and the sojourners who lived in Judah, rejoiced. ²⁶ So there was great joy in Jerusalem, for since the time of Solomon the son of David king of Israel there had been nothing like this in Jerusalem. ²⁷ Then the priests and the Levites arose and blessed the people, and their voice was heard, and their prayer came to his holy habitation in heaven.

Not since the dedication of the temple in the days of Solomon
had there been anything like this.

Indeed, the language of Solomon's prayer (from 2 Chronicles 6-7) is all over this chapter.
God's people humble themselves and pray, and seek the LORD,
turning to the LORD, who then hears and heals his people.
In Solomon's day the celebration of the Feast of Booths overflowed into a second week
of rejoicing during the dedication of the temple.
Now, once again, the celebration continues for 14 days.

Now, I want you to think about the context again.

This is the spring of Hezekiah's first year as king.
No one could ignore the Assyrian menace
No doubt there were some who questioned such a large expense on liturgy,
when what was really needed was fortification!

But Hezekiah understood –
and apparently, for once, so did all Judah – and much of Israel! –
that liturgy is the most important political act of all.

The rise and fall of nations is decreed at the right hand of God.
I always chuckle when I read the political commentators
saying that this election will be decisive for the future of America.
It saddens me when I read *Christian* commentators
saying that this election will be decisive for the future of America!

What you are doing right now is more decisive for the future of America
than anything you might do on election day.
[I'm not saying "don't vote" – please, go ahead and use your earthly citizenship
as wisely as you can to benefit the kingdom of Christ!]
Sure, Hezekiah will defend the walls
(he will even go out and fight against the Assyrians!).
But he understands that all of our political activity
must be grounded in our heavenly politics – our liturgy.

Everything on earth is ruled from heaven!

That is why such joy and gladness overflows from Jerusalem in the days of Hezekiah!
The Assyrians have just destroyed Samaria.
There is nothing in between the Assyrians and Jerusalem.

Nothing – except the LORD of Hosts.

Michael Wilcock comments wisely on this:

“The world expects everyone to react to crisis in terms of that crisis.

And the church, if it is sufficiently infected with worldliness, will readily oblige.
When there is a financial crisis, the first thing we think about is money.
When there is a communication crisis, our prime concern
is to learn how to talk the language of the modern generation.
When there is a church attendance crisis,
we make it our chief aim to get numbers up.
If Hezekiah had responded to a military threat in a military way,
the Assyrians would have understood that.
Army would have been matched against army, with dire consequences for Judah.
But instead he first looked up to God.
Were he and his people right with God?
Was God's temple open, clean, glorious with offerings and praise?
The result was that when the invaders did reach Jerusalem
the presence of God filled it, and it was impregnable." (p247)

Rejoice, O people of God!
Because your King sits at the right hand of the Father.
And no earthly power can dethrone him.

And one day he will return, and all his people will gather with him to celebrate the great Feast
in his holy, purified city.
And nothing unclean will enter!

Finally, things will be the way they should be!

But until that day, he rules as head over all things for the sake of the church.
I make you no promises about what will happen to America!
But I do promise you this:
the gates of hell will never prevail against the church of our Lord Jesus Christ!
The Kingdom of God will continue to advance and go forth
(perhaps not the way you expect! –
after all, the way of Jesus is the way of the cross!.)
but we live as elect exiles of the dispersion –
as citizens of a heavenly city who rejoice in the midst of trials
because we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken –
an inheritance that is imperishable.

When that vision grips you,
then not even the mighty power of Assyria can frighten you.

And you can sing for joy.