

2 Chronicles 30-32 • The Testing of Hezekiah

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2 Chronicles, and we're getting toward the end of it here now. Chapter 30. Last week we began the rule and reign of Hezekiah, which was a time of revival and restoration in Judah. We're going to continue with that tonight. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, use this time to speak to our hearts and direct us Lord, according to Your Word. A lot of what we're covering tonight, Father, is historical in nature but I trust that all of the devotional content that You want us to see here this evening, we would see. Guide and direct us in this study and open our hearts and minds to receive. We ask it in Jesus name, amen. Amen.

The last seven chapters, and that's what we have left here to finish up 2 Chronicles, but the last 7 chapters of this book cover the reigns of 8 kings, one of whom we're already dealing with. Let me put the list of the kings up on the screen for you so that you can see the ones that we're going to cover.

- **Hezekiah 29 years**
- **Manasseh 55 years**
- **Ammon 2 years**
- **Josiah 31 years**
- **Jehoahaz 3 months**
- **Jehoiakim 11 years**
- **Jehoiakim 3 months, 10 days**
- **Zedekiah 11 years**

And I've also put there the amount of time that they ruled on the throne in Judah. Hezekiah, who we are dealing with right now ruled for a total of 29 years. Manasseh, his son, an unprecedented 55 years. Wow! Ammon, his son, 2 years. Josiah, 31 years, even though he died a very young man because he took the throne as a very young boy.

Jehoahaz, his son, 3 months. Jehoiakim, who was originally named Eliakim, had his name changed and he reigned for 11 years. And then Jehoiakim reigned only 3 months and 10 days. And then finally, Zedekiah reigned 11 years, and he was the last of the kings of Judah.

And it was during the reign of Zedekiah that the Babylonian army came and mounted its attack against Jerusalem, laid siege to the city, and ultimately took it.

As I said before, we're within the rule of Hezekiah, and Judah is in the midst of a rather exciting spiritual revival, in fact a revival really like nothing has been seen before. And you'll remember that Hezekiah took over the rule of Judah after his faithless father Ahaz spent all of his time as king leading the kingdom of Judah into deeper and deeper pagan idolatry.

But even though Hezekiah was 25 years old when he took the throne, he just was like immediately got busy cleaning up the kingdom. I mean cleaning up the temple, restoring the temple, throwing away stuff that they did, pagan idols and altars and things in the temple and so forth. And in fact we were, we saw last week, and we'll see a little bit of that this week as well, that Hezekiah moved so quickly that the priests couldn't keep up.

He wanted to restore the sacrificial system immediately in the temple as soon as they got it cleansed, and the priests who had been living under paganism and who hadn't functioned in their role as priests, relaxed their consecration. In other words, the things that were required for them to be eligible to function as priests, and they weren't fit to minister, and many of the priests had to be replaced by Levites who were more diligent than the priests were for service.

We saw in our previous study how Hezekiah restored the temple, reinitiated the daily sacrifices and the musical worship that was so important to Israel, that David and Asaph had established so many years before. Now here in chapter 30 we begin to see Hezekiah desiring to have the nation, the kingdom observe Passover. We're going to look at Passover here tonight a little bit but look with me beginning in verse 1. It says,

“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.”

Now stop there for just a moment. This is a very interesting thing that we're seeing here comment in Chronicles because it shows that Hezekiah was not just establishing Passover for the southern kingdom of Judah, but he wanted all of the Jews that were remaining, even in the land of Israel to the north, to be able to come. Now remember, that at this time, the northern kingdom of Israel was really no more. They were, they'd been conquered. They'd been literally, well, let's put it this way, they had fallen to the Assyrian army.

And yet there were pockets of Jews that had somehow evaded capture and that was the Assyrian army's m.o. to come into a territory and relocate its people, basically send them to other countries. But there were people who had hidden or, who knows how they had actually avoided capture, but Hezekiah was aware of them. And so, he even wanted to send messengers up into the area that was Israel to invite them down, to be a part of this Passover celebration, and it says in verse 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 (in the first month) 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.”

Stop there. Let me explain a little bit about what's going on here. When God originally established the Passover celebration with Israel, He told them to do it in the first month of the year. And that was the time that God brought them out of their slavery in Egypt. But during the first month of the year, that was when they were just cleaning up the temple, they were getting the priesthood back and organized, and very few of the priests were eligible to serve and so they couldn't, the temple wasn't ready.

The men weren't ready. The nation wasn't ready. Now they've spent the whole first month getting it ready and now it's the second month, or it's coming up on the second month of the year, and Hezekiah says, let's celebrate the Passover now. Why wait an entire year for this thing to come back in the first month of the year? Let's celebrate it now. And it says that they, in verse 5,

“So they decreed to make a proclamation (then notice this) 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. (and that's rather an understatement)

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, ...”

Return to the Lord, that's basically the definition of repentance. If you're saying, if you're speaking of repentance you're talking about returning to the Lord. Turn around. Make a 180 and come back to the Lord. Change your mind. Come the other direction. He says,

“...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.”

And I want you to notice that Hezekiah is specifically addressing those who escaped the notice of the Assyrian army. He's saying, listen you guys, I know that some of you have escaped. You're living in the land. I want to invite you down. He says here in verse seven, look at this.

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.”

What is Hezekiah saying? He's telling the people up in the northern, well, I say the northern kingdom of Israel, again, it's gone. It's under Assyrian occupation. But he's saying to them, return to the Lord, come back to God. He's not going to hold out on you guys forever. What's going on right now is because of disobedience. So, don't be stiff necked. Don't keep holding back from the Lord.

Come to Him, return to Him, and he says, if you do, your family members who have been carried away by the Assyrians, God will be gracious to them, and not only will they find compassion among their captors, but God will eventually return them to their land if they are faithful. Hezekiah is doing everything he can in this thing to encourage the people to return to the Lord with all of their hearts. But look what happened in verse 10. Look at the very interesting. It says,

“So the couriers went from city to city through the country of Ephraim and Manasseh, and as far as Zebulun, (But look at this) but they laughed them to scorn and mocked them.”

This is really incredible. These mocking Jews are essentially without a nation. They're living in the, in what now belongs to the Assyrian Empire. They've seen their nation literally fall apart, and yet, when they receive an opportunity, an invitation to return to the Lord, what do they do? They mock and scorn those who even give the invitation. But here's what we're not told, at least not in these verses yet. We're not told why. We're not, and you might say, well, why?

That's easy. It's because they're stiff necked and stubborn and all those other things. Well, yeah but specifically, why did they mock? Verse 11 tells us in an interesting sort of a way. It says in verse 11,

“However, some men of Asher, of Manasseh, and of Zebulun humbled themselves and came to Jerusalem.”

Now these are again from the tribes up in what was the northern region of Israel that is now been conquered by Assyria. They're Jews who have hidden up there, kept themselves from capture, and it says that some of them, from these various tribes, humbled themselves. Now I want you to think about that for just a minute and what that means for them to humble themselves. What does that essentially mean?

Well, it means they had to admit that it was because of their own disobedience that their nation was in ruins. It means they had to admit that they had not had a wholehearted devotion to the Lord, in fact, not even a halfhearted to the Lord. They had rejected the Lord for so many years, over such a protracted period of time, they had to admit that they were personally to blame for their circumstances, and that takes humility.

And that tells us why some of the men up in the northern area refused to receive that invitation. It's because they refuse to humble themselves, and they refuse to admit that they were to blame for their current circumstances. And by the way, I wanted to bring this to a modern-day application. I don't know if you've ever, I don't know if anybody's ever mocked you.

I don't know if you've ever received a snide remark, or even a roll of the eyes when you've invited someone to church or you've talked to someone about God, or the Bible, or something of that nature, and somebody just laughed and snickered or whatever. But I want you to know what's behind it. It's pride. It's really very simple. It's pride. It's the unwillingness to say, I need that. What you're talking about right there, I need that.

I need to be there, I need to hear what God's Word has to say, I need to confess that I am culpable. I am responsible for the stupid decisions that I've made throughout my life and the circumstances I've gotten myself into. I need to personally lay claim to those things and say, I need Him in my life. People love to say all kinds of things to try to deflect what we tell them about the Lord.

Things like, well, Christianity, that's just a crutch. The Bible, it's just a crutch. You know what I say when people, I haven't had somebody say that to me for a

long time, but I was, I used to just say, yeah, it is, what's yours? To think that we don't need something to lean on, which is what a crutch is, to think that we don't need something to lean on is arrogance at the height of human pride.

We all lean on something and we either lean on ourselves or we lean on any number of other things that the world has to offer. The fact of the matter is our crutch is the only one that isn't going to break under our weight and it's the only one that isn't going to cause us additional problems. But listen, the bottom line is that in back of every mocking comment is pride. A refusal to humble oneself. And that's what happened to these people. Verse 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. ¹³ And many people came together in Jerusalem to keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread in the second month, a very great assembly.”

All right, now stop there for just a moment. You'll notice here that suddenly the Feast of Passover gets a new name. Did you notice what they said here in verse 13, *“and many people came together to keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread...”* And you're thinking to yourself, wait a minute, I thought Hezekiah wanted to keep the Feast of Passover. What is now, why are we talking about the Feast of Unleavened Bread?

Well, actually Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which are 2 separate Feasts, technically speaking, but they are back-to-back. Passover lasts 24 hours and the Feast of Unleavened Bread comes right on its heels and goes for another 7 days and the 2 feasts back-to-back; Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread, take a total block of 8 consecutive days.

And you'll remember that Passover is a festival celebrating the deliverance of the Jews from their slavery in Egypt, and if you want to go back and anytime read the history of that, just go back to the Book of Exodus, because that's where the Bible records the fact that Moses was sent to Egypt by God to bring the Israelites out of their bondage.

But of course, the story Pharaoh refused to let them go, and so through Moses, God began to bring plagues upon the nation of Egypt, a total of 10 of them. The final plague being the worst of all, the plague of death to all the firstborn males, and we're told in the Bible that on that night, God told the Israelites to gather in their homes, and there they were to sacrifice a lamb, and they were to find a lamb, specifically, that was without spot or blemish.

A year old lamb, and then they were to take the blood from that lamb and they were literally to paint it on the, over the doors of their homes, marking the doorway with the blood of the lamb. And the Jews were told that when this final plague came upon Egypt, the destroyer who was passing through Egypt that night, would see the blood of the Passover lamb painted upon the doorway of the homes of the Jews, and he would pass over those homes and would spare that home from death.

And obviously, thus the name Passover, because the destroyer passed over those homes where the blood of the Lamb was seen. And of course, we get to the New Testament, and we find a much larger meaning and connection between the Feast of Passover and the work of Jesus Christ on the cross. In fact, we find out in the New Testament that Jesus is the fulfillment of the Passover event, and just like those Jews on the very first Passover who sheltered under the blood of the Lamb, as Christians we're doing the same thing, aren't we?

We're sheltering under the blood of the Lamb, and we know that death cannot touch us in the sense that the Bible speaks of the second death that separates us from God. It cannot touch us because we are literally sheltered under the blood of the Lamb. That is the reason why the Apostle Paul connected the dots for us between the Passover celebration of the Old Testament, and Jesus and his work on the cross. Let me show you a passage on the screen from 1 Corinthians chapter 5. Listen, this is really a cool passage. Paul writes to the church there and says,

1 Corinthians 5:6-8 (NIV)

Your boasting is not good. Don't you know that a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough? Get rid of the old yeast, so that you may be a new batch—as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Therefore let us keep the Festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

Your boasting is not good. Don't you know that a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough? Get rid of the old yeast, so that you may be a new batch—as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Therefore let us keep the Festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

Now I want you to notice here that not only does Paul connect Passover, the Feast, and the work of Jesus on the cross, by calling Jesus our Passover lamb, right? But did you notice he also makes the connection between the Feast of Unleavened bread, which follows Passover. Why did God tell the Jews after the

day after Passover, start a seven-day celebration called the Feast of Unleavened Bread? Do you remember what God told them? He told them during that time that they were not to eat bread made with yeast.

In fact, they weren't even to have yeast in their homes. They had to rid their homes of yeast during that 7 day period. Why? Well, we understand as the Scriptures as we read them, that yeast is associated with sin. It's a picture of sin, and so we have this idea of removing yeast from their homes, which corresponds to you and I who have come to the Passover lamb, sheltered under the blood of the lamb, found salvation in that sheltering, and now we begin to walk out the reality of that life in Christ, which is what?

Which is putting away sin. See that's the reason why God put Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread back to back, because it not just speaks of our salvation but it speaks of what we are saved to. We are saved to a life of holiness. That's our calling, is to walk that out. We don't do it perfectly. In fact, most of us are riddled with issues, but it's our calling nonetheless, to put away sin from our lives. If we can put 1 Corinthians back up on the screen for a moment again.

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Again, look at all the references here to yeast, which is that picture of sin. He says, he asked the question. Don't you know that a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough? Doesn't take very much. He's talking about if you allow sin into your life, even a little, it's going to work its way both through your life and through the body of Christ. What does he say?

Get rid of the old yeast. Get rid of it. Get it out of the house. What is the house, by the way? You're the house. Remember? We are the temple of the Holy Spirit, right? Get, he says, get the yeast out of the house. Get it out. And so that you

might be a new batch without yeast. Right? He, and look what he goes on to say here, as you really are, as you really are.

he says, “...*Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Therefore let us keep the Festival, ...*” The Feast of Unleavened Bread, right? Let us keep that festival. Do you guys understand that as we say no to sin, we're keeping the Festival of Unleavened Bread? There's so many people who are so bound up in the things of the Old Testament.

Why are we Christians not keeping the feasts? Israel was commanded to keep the feasts. We are keeping the feasts, you guys! By faith we keep, remember what Jesus said about the things of the Old Testament? He said, don't think that I've come to abolish the law. I haven't come to abolish anything. I've come to fulfill it. Jesus is the fulfillment of these things. He fulfills the Passover celebration.

And His work in our life, is the fulfillment of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. How? Through His Holy Spirit living within us, enabling us now to say no to sin and to yield instead to the Holy Spirit. That's how we keep those things, the same way we keep the Sabbath, right? What was the Sabbath all about? Resting. When you rest in the finished work of Jesus Christ, you're keeping the Sabbath, right? You Christians, you guys don't keep the Sabbath. Oh, yes, we do, 7 days a week.

We never stop resting in the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross. We keep the Sabbath every day of the week. We keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread, we keep the Passover, because we're sheltering under the blood of the Lamb. And on and on it goes throughout the feasts and the rituals and the ceremonial aspects of the law, and so forth.

Now, as we go on, look at verse 14 and look at, in preparation for the feast, look what they did. It says,

“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.”

And so, we see here, there was a further removing of all pagan idols or shrines or just anything, altars or incense areas that were apart from the temple. And it says in verse 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.”

The Spirit of the Lord is moving so powerfully during these celebrations that the priests and the Levites recognize how much they've just neglected their duties, and the holiness of God, and it says that they were ashamed and it says that,

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.”

Stop there. Do you understand what's going on here? Remember, Hezekiah put out an invitation even up into the northern kingdom. And those people came, they were like, yes, we want to return to the Lord. But they weren't clean. They weren't ceremonially clean. These people, you see, according to the Passover regulations, each family was to sacrifice their own animal. They were to do it themselves, for their family, but these people couldn't do it because they were ceremonially unclean.

And so, it says the Levites had to step in and actually sacrifice the Passover lamb for some of these families. Now here's the problem. If you're too unclean to sacrifice the Passover lamb, you're too unclean to eat it too. You see, you know what that means? It means you don't get to, you don't get to participate, but that's not what it says here. It says here that they, they weren't clean, so the Levites did it for them, okay and then we're told in verse 18, if you look with me here, it says,

“For a majority of the people, many of them from (the north) Ephraim, Manasseh, Issachar, and Zebulun, (Right? They) had not cleansed themselves, yet (Look at this) they ate the Passover otherwise than as prescribed. (In other words, they weren't clean, they ate it anyway. Look what it says here. Look what it says) 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.” ²⁰ And the LORD heard Hezekiah and healed the people.”

Now this is amazing. We look at the Old Testament sometimes and we think, man it's so legalistic, and yet here's a situation where people didn't live up to the

law, to the demands of the law in the sense that they weren't clean. They came down to participate in the Passover, but they were disqualified from participating.

They couldn't even sacrifice the animal. The Levites stepped in and said, okay, we'll do it for you. They weren't supposed to. But they said, we'll do it for you, and these people from the north said, sweet, and then they went ahead and took the sacrificed animal and ate it, which again, they weren't supposed to do. But Hezekiah understood that they were in a unique situation here, that these people were just returning to the Lord, and when people are just returning to the Lord, they don't have time to get themselves all put together, right?

How many times have you invited somebody to church and they said to you, well, once I get myself put together, once I get my life back on track, I'll start coming back to church but I'm just, and there's this, we understand, we get it. People are a mess when they're, when they need to return to the Lord, that's why they need to return to the Lord. But if you're going to wait to not be a mess before you come to God, you got a long wait ahead of you.

And the point about these people from the north is that their hearts were in the right place. They wanted to worship God. They wanted to participate in Passover. They weren't clean. They were not ceremonially clean. They were disqualified, and yet, Hezekiah knew instinctively as a leader, God is a God of grace and mercy, and I'm going to pray for these people, because their hearts are right, and I am not going to be the one to point the finger at them and say, you can't do this, because you're not good enough.

No, in fact, we're going to open the doors to these people. We're going to take care of this thing for them and we're going to invite them in. And the Lord heard Hezekiah's prayer and he responded, on behalf of the people, even though they were violating the law related to cleansing. I just think that's a fascinating section of Scripture. Verse 21 says,

*“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 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.*

23 Then the whole assembly agreed together to keep the feast for another seven days. (They're having such a good time they said let's do this again, let's just, let's do it again) 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."

That's a lot of barbecues. I mean, listen, you understand, don't you, the sacrificial animals, the food then would, they're giving these animals people are offering freewill offerings and stuff and fellowship offerings to the Lord with these, and so the priests would take some and some of this would be burned on the altar and then the people would have a barbecue with the rest.

They're getting together for another seven days, and you've got to feed all these people and the king and the princes offer up all of these animals, and they're just having this major huge barbecue, and they're having just a great time. It says in verse 25 that,

"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."

Isn't that a wonderful way to end that chapter? There's just great rejoicing, the people are enjoying the presence of the Lord, and it says that, the priests and the Levites bless the people, and their voice was heard in heaven.

Now, chapter 31 is really largely about maintaining the temple services on an ongoing basis. Now I want you to think about what has happened since Hezekiah took his position as king.

He said, we're going to return to the Lord. He cleaned up the temple. He got the temple services back running. They were now a month late for the Passover, so they said, let's just go ahead and do the Passover anyway, a month late. They kept the Passover. It was a huge success. They kept the Feast of Unleavened Bread. They had so much fun. They kept another 7 days of the Feast, but it's got to end. I mean, eventually, right? I mean, the barbecue has to end eventually, and people need to go home, and here's the point.

The temple services have to go on, right? I mean, the priests still have their work to do, the Levites still have their work to do, and even when it's not exciting, it has to go on. So, this chapter is largely about keeping it moving, and I think we all understand this. I think we all know that it's one thing to get everybody on board with something when you get them all lathered up and excited, but it is a different thing altogether to keep people heading where they need to go.

It's funny when this nation goes through crises, whether it was 9/11 or some of the things that followed 9/11 that went on. We watched, and I know churches around the country experienced the very same thing we did here at Calvary Chapel. We watched as people came to church who had not been in church for maybe all their lives, or maybe 10 years, 20 years, or whatever. They came back, because life was very uncertain, and they were afraid.

And I remember, when it happened, and I remember thinking to myself, oh, that's cool. They came back to church, but they didn't stay. None of those people who came, whether it was 9/11 or Desert Storm or whatever was happening in our country that drew people out of their homes, drew people back into church for a period of time, none of them stayed. You see, that's the point of this whole thing. You can get people excited. You can get people scared.

There's a lot of different motivating factors that can draw people back to the Lord for a period of time. Here's the question. Will they stay? Will they make a determination in their life? This is where I live. This is now the new normal in my life because, I was actually talking to a brother just earlier this week who shared with me that his marriage was a mess because he'd gotten out of fellowship, he and his wife and they just developed different priorities.

And so he comes back to me and says, now what do I need to do, and I give the counsel that I feel like the Lord would have me to give, well, you need to repent, you need to go to your wife and tell her you're an idiot for not being a good spiritual leader and you need to get back into fellowship, and you need to tell the Lord that you're sorry that you wiggled out on Him, and you decided that other things were more important than He was in your life.

And you need to take control, or you need to take responsibility for your circumstances and where they are right now and say, please Lord, forgive me, and then you need to make a determination. This is now the new normal in my life, because see, the point is anybody can call when life is hard. And I've learned over 35 years of ministry that people will come, and they will sometimes even be in tears, and it's like, I just, I've just gotten away from the

Lord, and I need to come back, and I just, oh I'm so glad to be here, and oh, just pray for me, because I'm just, I'm, and this is my church.

I've learned, and if anybody ever says that to me I'll probably never see them again. I'm serious. I've had more people say that to me, this is my church, and that's the last time we see them. It's easy to get all lathered up. Can you continue? Here I am preaching to the Wednesday night crowd. You guys are usually the faithful of the faithful, but you know my point, you know what I'm saying, and I'm not saying this for you. I'm saying for the people that you're praying for and the people that you're encouraging, and that sort of thing, because, you can't trust what somebody says when their eyes are full of tears and their heart is full of sorrow.

You just can't. You can't because what they're saying is coming out of tears and sorrow. See, this is what Hezekiah knew and understood. We got the people all excited about getting the temple going again, getting the sacrificial system cranked up, we had the Passover, everybody had a great time, they even wanted to double the Feast of Unleavened Bread but now they're going to go home, and what is going to happen to the spiritual life of Judah when they go home? And that's how this chapter begins. It says,

“Now when all this was finished, all Israel who were present went out to the cities of Judah (on their way, this is kind of cool) and (they) broke in pieces the pillars and cut down the Asherim and broke down the high places and the altars throughout all Judah and Benjamin, and in Ephraim and Manasseh, until they had destroyed them all. Then all the people of Israel returned to their cities, every man to his own possession.”

Went back to his job, started punching the clock and just doing what he did before all this stuff happened. Do you get the point? They're all excited, and they're going home, and they're like, wow, God is so good, and on their way home, there's a Shira pole. Let's get it, you know, and hacking it, and throwing it away, and there's another altar to some pagan deity, and see, they're just all jazzed, but they're also on their way home, and we know what happens when people go home.

² *“And Hezekiah appointed the divisions (Okay, here's where Hezekiah takes steps to keep things going. He appointed the divisions) of the priests and of the Levites, division by division, each according to his service, the priests and the Levites, for burnt offerings and peace offerings, to minister in the gates of the camp of the LORD and to give thanks and praise.”*

So, he's basically, appointing priests and Levites to carry on, to keep it going, to keep the sacrifices going, to keep the worship going, to keep this heart toward the Lord going. Now, I need to move quickly here. Really, the rest of the chapter, verses 3, 4, and following talks about the contributions. One of the things that Hezekiah knew and understood was that God had commanded the people of Israel to give contributions in the way of tithes and offerings to keep the priesthood going.

That's how the priests would be freed up to continue to do what they were doing, was by the people being faithful to give tithes and offerings. So, in these following verses there's a lot of information about Hezekiah establishing the tithe and offering system so that the priest can keep doing what they're doing so they can keep going with the Lord. Do you get it? Okay, so and the people responded very, very well.

That's what this chapter talks about, and in fact, they had way more than they needed so Hezekiah even commanded them further in verse 11 and following to create Here the ESV, it says "*chambers.*" Your Bible may say "*storerooms*" where they could store this stuff, and it names all of the Levites and so forth that were charged with storing and distributing these things for the Levites, for the priests and those sorts of things. Skip all the way down if you would to verse 20 of that chapter. It says,

"Thus Hezekiah did throughout all Judah, and he did what was good and right and faithful before the LORD his God. ²¹ And every work that he undertook in the service of the house of God and in accordance with the law and the commandments, seeking his God, he did with all his heart, and prospered."

All right, chapter 32. Well, you'd think after all that, things are going to just sail, wouldn't you? But it says,

"After these things and these acts of faithfulness, Sennacherib king of Assyria came and invaded Judah and encamped against the fortified cities, thinking to win them for himself."

Now stop there for just a minute. I want you to put yourself in the position of King Hezekiah would you? You have been faithful to the Lord your God. You have established the Passover celebration feast of unleavened bread like it hasn't been done, probably ever. You have gotten the people jazzed for the Lord. You have re-established the worship in the temple with the priests and the Levites, the sacrifices and all this stuff. You have done it, and you have been very diligent and meticulous about doing it.

What is your expectation? Probably not that King Sennacherib of Assyria is going to invade your country. That's probably not your expectation. Do you know we live largely by expectations? Do you understand that? Do you understand that when our expectations are dashed, we become very disappointed and discouraged because our expectations aren't met. Now, sometimes we have unrealistic expectations, and somebody has to point that out to us and say, hello, you raised the bar above anybody's head on that one.

But God had promised the Jews that if they were faithful to him, their enemies would not stand against them. Now, you can have an expectation of that too because God promised it. Here you are Hezekiah, you've done everything you've done. You've been very faithful, you've been very diligent, you've been very honorable to the things of the Lord, and now you get word that some of your outlying cities, towns are falling to the approach of an invading army which you know has already taken the northern kingdom of Israel into exile. What would your response be?

Verse 2.

“And when Hezekiah saw that Sennacherib had come and intended to fight against Jerusalem, ³ he planned with his officers and his mighty men to stop the water of the springs that were outside the city; and they helped him. ⁴ A great many people were gathered, and they stopped all the springs and the brook that flowed through the land, saying, “Why should the kings of Assyria come and find much water?””

Let me just explain very quickly what's going on here because ancient warfare is very, very different from how we fight our battles today. In those times, an approaching army would basically come to the capital city of a particular nation, and they would just camp. They'd camp right in front of the city, and they would refuse to allow anyone to leave the city and they would refuse to allow anyone to enter the city with goods and services.

That was called a siege, or it was called laying siege to a city, and a siege could last years. An army could literally encamp there for years, depending on how long the city could hold out. But eventually, a city is going to starve, and whether they succumb to starvation or whatever the thing is, or they just go stir crazy, eventually the attacking army is going to be able just to waltz in and take the city with little or no fighting, and that was literally a means of warfare back in those days.

Interesting that these verses tell us that Hezekiah and his men worked to divert the waters that were flowing around Jerusalem so that the approaching army wouldn't have easy access to water. In other words, Hezekiah wanted to make it difficult for the king of Assyria to stick around. Which I think is incredibly smart. I mean it doesn't mean that he's not depending on the Lord, but he's also using his smarts and I like this idea because if you can think of Hezekiah as an attacking enemy in your life, here's a question that we need to ask.

Is there anything in your life? Now think of the attacking enemy as sin. Okay? Some sin that's going on in your life. Are you making that sin easy to stick around? Are you, have you created an environment where it's easy for that sin to set up a siege around your life and just wait you out, until you become so weak that they can break through your walls of defense and get in and overtake you. What is the environment of your life like as it relates to that? Here's some other things that Hezekiah did.

Verse 5, he said,

“...to work resolutely and built up all the wall that was broken down (That's a good idea. You've got some walls in your life that are broken down, build them up in the Lord, build them up with the Word of God. And he says he) raised towers upon it, and outside it he built another wall, and he strengthened the Millo in the city of David. (A Millo is another protective wall, just another name for it. It says,) He also made weapons and shields in abundance.

⁶And he set combat commanders over the people and gathered them together to him in the square at the gate of the city and spoke encouragingly to them, saying, ⁷“Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or dismayed before the king of Assyria and all the horde that is with him, (Look at this) for there are more with us than with him.”

What does he mean by that? Well, read verse 8.

“With him is an arm of flesh, (meaning his army) but with us is the LORD our God, to help us and to fight our battles.” And the people took confidence from the words of Hezekiah king of Judah. (Boy, good commander. Good commander. A good commander goes to his troops and says, do not be afraid. Do not be dismayed. Trust in the Lord. Right? And it says in verse 9 that) ⁹After this, Sennacherib king of Assyria, who was besieging Lachish with all his forces, sent his servants to Jerusalem to Hezekiah king of Judah (in other words, they hadn't set up the siege yet, around Jerusalem) and to all the people of Judah who were in Jerusalem, saying,

¹⁰ “Thus says Sennacherib king of Assyria, ‘On what are you trusting, that you endure the siege (of Jerusalem or) in Jerusalem?’ ¹¹ Is not Hezekiah misleading you, that he may give you over to die by famine and by thirst, when he tells you, ‘The Lord our God will deliver us from the hand of the king of Assyria’¹² Has not this same Hezekiah taken away his high places and his altars and commanded Judah and Jerusalem, ‘Before one altar you shall worship, and on it you shall burn your sacrifices?’”

Well, this is just, he just didn't get it. This commander of the Assyrian army thinks that what Hezekiah did was a bad thing. He's saying, hasn't this Hezekiah broken down all of your other altars in high places and gotten rid of them and said, no, you must worship only at the temple. Well, yeah, he did, but you know why he did it because that's what God commanded. Stop though. Think about this for a minute, Hezekiah knew and understood that what he did was out of obedience to God, but not all the people were convinced of that.

You've got to understand that the Assyrian commander knows that there are people on the wall who are not so convinced, and they still have a very pagan mindset, and just because Hezekiah's had a huge turnaround doesn't mean that they necessarily have. So here's, what is he doing? He's injecting doubt. Are you sure that it was a good thing that Hezekiah broke down all those altars? Listen, those people believed in those pagan gods. They put their faith in those pagan gods.

They put their hope in those pagan gods, and all of a sudden Hezekiah comes along and goes, we're not going to do that anymore. Smash, bang, boom, out it goes with the trash, but these people, some of them probably aren't so convinced. This is what the enemy does, and that's why I'm pointing this out. This is what the enemy does. After you and I have made a determination to follow the Lord our God, he comes back, and he whispers in our ear about our old ways of dealing with our problems.

Are you sure you should have forgotten, let that one go? Are you sure that was a good idea to repent of the old way you used to deal with your issues, because I remember several times when you actually solved some problems the old way. And now you've come to the Lord, and you've said, no more am I going to depend on this or that, I'm going to depend solely on the Lord. Well, I don't know, that sounds like a stretch to me. You know, that's the voice of the enemy. And that's what we're hearing out of this Assyrian commander.

Verse 13,

“Do you not know what I and my fathers have done to all the peoples of other lands? Were the gods of the nations of those lands at all able to deliver their lands out of my hand?”

Now, stop there. This is another tactic of the enemy, and this is a very common tactic, people. He will get you to compare your situation with someone else's, and you don't know all the circumstances of somebody else's situation, but he'll get you to compare anyway in order to strike fear into your heart. And so, the commander of the Assyrian army says, don't you guys know what we did to all these other countries that we attacked? We decimated them! You think we're going to get stopped here? That little measly Judah. You think you guys are going to be able to stand up against us? Common tactic of the enemy.

Verse 14.

“Who among all the gods of those nations that my fathers devoted to destruction was able to deliver his people from my hand, that your God should be able to deliver you from my hand?”

He shouldn't have said that. In fact, he's going to put his foot in it even more. Check this out,

“¹⁵ Now, therefore, do not let Hezekiah deceive you or mislead you in this fashion, and do not believe him, for no god of any nation or kingdom has been able to deliver his people from my hand or from the hand of my fathers. (Look at this) How much less will your God deliver you out of my hand!”

You can just see this guy just fading away while he talks, can't you? If I was Hezekiah, I'd say, let him keep talking. He's hanging himself with every word, right? And it says that,

¹⁶ “.... his servants said still more against the Lord God and against his servant Hezekiah. (basically adding insult to injury) ¹⁷ And he (even) wrote letters to cast contempt on the LORD, the God of Israel, and to speak against him, saying, (things like) “Like the gods of the nations of the lands who have not delivered their people from my hands, so the God of Hezekiah will not deliver his people from my hand.”

¹⁸ “And they shouted it with a loud voice in the language of Judah to the people of Jerusalem who were on the wall, to frighten and terrify them, in order that they might take the city.”

Do you understand that this is, these are the tactics of the enemy, fear and intimidation. Has he been ringing that bell in your life lately? A little fear and intimidation. It's a very powerful tool and the enemy knows it. If he can get you and I to be afraid, oh boy, he's won a victory, right? Can I remind you of something God says? Let me show you a passage. This is out of the New King James on the screen from 2 Timothy 1:7. It says,

2 Timothy 1:7 (NKJV)

For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.

For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.

Okay? You know what that means? God's not using that kind of fear as a tactic in your life. He's not giving you a spirit of fear, He's given you a spirit of soundness and power. Verse 19,

“And they spoke of the God of Jerusalem as they spoke of the gods of the peoples of the earth, which are the work of men's hands.” In other words, they compared Yahweh to their own gods.

“²⁰ Then Hezekiah the king and Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz, prayed because of this and cried to heaven. ²¹ And the LORD sent an angel, who cut off all the mighty warriors and commanders and officers in the camp of the king of Assyria. So, he returned with shame of face to his own land. And when he came into the house of his god, some of his own sons struck him down there with the sword.”

It's kind of almost anticlimactic, isn't it? I mean, Chronicles tells it so quickly. Just hang on right there. Can I just read you this very quickly out of, just listen, okay? This is out of 2 Kings.

“Then Isaiah the son of Amos said to Hezekiah, saying, Thus says the LORD the God of Israel.” Wouldn't you want to have Isaiah there when you're having a messed-up time, to pray and give you the Word of the Lord. Here's what he said,

“Thus says the Lord the God of Israel. Your prayer to me about Sennacherib king of Assyria, I have heard. This is the word that the LORD has spoken concerning him. She despises you. She scorns you, the virgin daughter of Zion. She wags her head behind you, the daughter of Jerusalem. Whom have you

mocked and reviled? Against whom have you raised your voice and lifted your eyes to the heights? Against the Holy One of Israel. By your messengers you have mocked the LORD and you have said with my many chariots I've gone up to the heights of the mountains (and on and on and on...)"

And the Lord begins to speak about how, and this is a long prophecy, and I don't have time to read the whole thing for you, but here's what it goes on, this is the crux of it.

"Therefore, thus says the LORD concerning the king of Assyria, he shall not come into the city. Or even shoot an arrow there or come before it with a shield or cast up a siege mound against it. By the way that he came, by the same he shall return. And he shall not come into this city, declares the LORD, for I will defend this city to save it for my own sake and for the sake of my servant David.

(And it says here that) *On that night the angel of the LORD went out and struck down 185,000 men in the camp of the Assyrians. And when people rose early in the morning, behold, there were all the dead bodies."*

And Hezekiah probably said, man, I made all those shields. Didn't even have to use them. No, anyway. It says,

"Then Sennacherib king of Assyria departed, went home, and lived in Nineveh. And as he was worshipping in the house of Nisroch his god, Adrammelech and Sherezer, his sons struck him down with the sword and escaped into the land of Ararat, (which is obviously in Turkey today) And one of his sons reigned in his place." Anyway, pretty cool. All right.

Verse 22. I got to do this very quickly. We're told,

"So the LORD saved Hezekiah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem from the hand of Sennacherib king of Assyria and from the hand of all his enemies, and he provided for them on every side. ²³ And many brought gifts to the LORD to Jerusalem and precious things to Hezekiah king of Judah, so that he was exalted in the sight of all nations from that time onward."

And, oh, we read that, and you go, oh, really? He was exalted in the sight of all nations? That's not good, because whenever somebody gets exalted in the sight of all nations, they start doing dumb things, and so did Hezekiah. It says,

²⁴ *"In those days Hezekiah became sick and was at the point of death, and he prayed to the LORD, and he answered him and gave him a sign.(that he would*

be healed) ²⁵ *But Hezekiah did not make return according to the benefit done to him, for his heart was proud. Therefore, wrath came upon him and Judah and Jerusalem.* ²⁶ *But Hezekiah humbled himself for the pride of his heart, both he and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the wrath of the LORD did not come upon them in the days of Hezekiah.*

(And then it basically ends that) ²⁷ *And Hezekiah had very great riches and honor, and he made for himself treasuries for silver, for gold, for precious stones, for spices, for shields, and for all kinds of costly vessels;* ²⁸ *storehouses also for the yield of grain, wine, and oil; and stalls for all kinds of cattle, and sheepfolds.* ²⁹ *He likewise provided cities for himself, and flocks and herds in abundance, for God had given him very great possessions.*

³⁰ *This same Hezekiah closed the upper outlet of the waters of Gihon and directed them down to the west side of the city of David. And Hezekiah prospered in all his works.* ³¹ *And so in the matter of the envoys of the princes of Babylon, who had been sent to him to inquire about the sign that had been done in the land, God left him to himself, in order to test him and to know all that was in his heart.”*

You see, when Hezekiah was sick, the Lord gave him a sign that he would recover. And it was a sign that Hezekiah had the option of picking. And he asked Him to literally make the sun go backwards, and God did. And some envoys from Babylon came to, because they figured out that this incredible sign in the heavens was accomplished for Hezekiah, and that's what caused Hezekiah to become proud.

And so. these envoys from Babylon came. Do you understand that Babylon is the nation that will end up conquering Judah? These envoys come and Hezekiah brags in front of them because he's gotten proud and it was a bit of a downfall, and that's why we're told here that God left him to test him. Verse 32,

“Now the rest of the acts of Hezekiah and his good deeds, behold, they are written in the vision of Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz, in the Book of the Kings of Judah and Israel. ³³ *And Hezekiah slept with his fathers, and they buried him in the upper part of the tombs of the sons of David, and all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem did him honor at his death. And Manasseh his son reigned in his place.”*

And the blessing comes to an end with that, because Manasseh is a major creep, and we'll talk about that next time.