

A Heart for Worship

Bill had memorized the verse when he was in Sunday school years ago: “I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord” (Ps. 122:1, KJV). He had probably recited it dozens of times when he was younger.

But this Sunday morning, as he left for church, the words of that familiar verse were bothering him—especially that word glad. Was he truly glad to be going to church this morning, or even most mornings? For some reason he had developed almost a belligerent attitude toward God and church. He often thought something like, *God, I showed up today. Let’s see what You can do for me. Can you make the Sunday school lesson interesting? Can you liven up the sermon? Can we sing songs I know? Can I leave church feeling good this morning?*

The Scripture verse continued to bother Bill through the morning. The class lesson was about preparing your hearts to worship, and the teacher quoted someone named Richard Foster, who said, “If worship does not change us, it has not been worship. To stand before the Holy One of eternity is to change. Worship begins in holy expectancy [and] ends in holy obedience.”

As Bill left class to attend the coming worship service, he already was feeling changed—surprisingly glad to be in church this morning, and ready to worship God with all of his heart.

Write **agree** or **disagree** next to each statement. Briefly explain your answers.

_____ **1.** *My main reason for going to church is to worship God.*

_____ **2.** *I have felt my life changed at past worship experiences.*

_____ **3.** *All believers should worship God passionately during a worship service.*

Renewal of the Passover Celebration

2 Chronicles 30:1-4, KJV

1 And 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 unto the LORD God of Israel.

2 For the king had taken counsel, and his princes, and all the congregation in Jerusalem, to keep the passover in the second month.

3 For they could not keep it at that time, because the priests had not sanctified themselves sufficiently, neither had the people gathered themselves together to Jerusalem.

4 And the thing pleased the king and all the congregation.

2 Chronicles 30:1-4, NIV

¹Hezekiah sent word to all Israel and Judah and also wrote letters to Ephraim and Manasseh, inviting them to come to the temple of the LORD in Jerusalem and celebrate the Passover to the LORD, the God of Israel. ²The king and his officials and the whole assembly in Jerusalem decided to celebrate the Passover in the second month.

³They had not been able to celebrate it at the regular time because not enough priests had consecrated themselves and the people had not assembled in Jerusalem. ⁴The plan seemed right both to the king and to the whole assembly.

Hezekiah became king of Judah in a time of great turmoil in the Middle East. The Assyrian Empire had recently gobbled up the northern kingdom of Israel and taken many of its people into captivity, a direct result of their turning away from God (2 Kings 17). As the prophet Hosea predicted, Judah survived because most people still served the Lord (Hos. 1:7), a trait exemplified in Hezekiah's leadership. Early in his reign, the king purified the temple and restored its sacrifices and offerings (2 Chron. 29). Later, he announced the renewed celebration of the Passover and invited those Israelites left behind in the old northern kingdom (represented by "Ephraim and Manasseh," 30:1) to join Judah in keeping this feast.

The king announced that the Passover would be observed in the second month, rather than in the first month as prescribed by law. The Lord had earlier allowed Moses to celebrate the Passover in the second month because several of the priests were ceremonially unclean (Num. 9:6-13). Hezekiah followed that precedent in allowing the delay because many of the priests were

not yet “consecrated” (2 Chron. 30:3, NIV) in large enough numbers to handle all the sacrifices required at the Passover celebration. The delay also gave time for the entire nation to gather in Jerusalem for the feast.

4. *What was significant about this time in the history of Judah and Israel?*

5. *Why was the celebration of the Passover delayed by one month?*

Proclamation of the Passover Celebration

2 Chronicles 30:5-6, 8-9, KJV

5 So they established a decree to make proclamation throughout all Israel, from Beer-sheba even to Dan, that they should come to keep the passover unto the LORD God of Israel at Jerusalem: for they had not done it of a long time in such sort as it was written.

6 So the posts went with the letters from the king and his princes throughout all Israel and Judah, and according to the commandment of the king, saying, Ye children of Israel, turn again unto the LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, and he will return to the remnant of you, that are escaped out of the hand of the kings of Assyria. . . .

8 Now be ye not stiffnecked, as your fathers were, but yield yourselves unto the LORD, and enter into his sanctuary, which he hath sanctified for ever: and serve the LORD your God, that the fierceness of his wrath may turn away from you.

2 Chronicles 30:5-6, 8-9, NIV

⁵They decided to send a proclamation throughout Israel, from Beersheba to Dan, calling the people to come to Jerusalem and celebrate the Passover to the LORD, the God of Israel. It had not been celebrated in large numbers according to what was written.

⁶At the king's command, couriers went throughout Israel and Judah with letters from the king and from his officials, which read: "People of Israel, return to the LORD, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, that he may return to you who are left, who have escaped from the hand of the kings of Assyria. . . . ⁸Do not be stiff-necked, as your fathers were; submit to the LORD. Come to the sanctuary, which he has consecrated forever. Serve the LORD your God, so that his fierce anger will turn away from you. ⁹If you return to the LORD, then your

KJV

9 For if ye turn again unto the LORD, your brethren and your children shall find compassion before them that lead them captive, so that they shall come again into this land: for the LORD your God is gracious and merciful, and will not turn away his face from you, if ye return unto him.

NIV

brothers and your children will be shown compassion by their captors and will come back to this land, for the LORD your God is gracious and compassionate. He will not turn his face from you if you return to him."

The princes, along with Hezekiah, agreed to send a proclamation throughout all Judah and Israel inviting people to the Passover. This would be the first time since Solomon, centuries earlier, that those from the northern tribes of Israel would celebrate the Passover with Judah. As the couriers went out with letters from the king, they carried a special message for the surviving Israelites in the north to join in the celebration.

The messengers also encouraged the people of Israel to turn away from the stubbornness and idolatry of their fathers and relatives who had been carried away into captivity. This was a chance for the survivors to show obedience to God. Furthermore, the proclamation message stated that if the remaining Israelites repented and returned to the Lord, even their families in captivity would be shown mercy and allowed to return to the land. Hezekiah sought to give hope to the people of the former northern kingdom and to show many reasons for them to join in the Passover celebration.

6. *Why would this Passover celebration be so significant?*

7. *What encouragement did Hezekiah give to the people of the former northern kingdom?*

Reception of the Passover Invitation

2 Chronicles 30:10-12, KJV

10 So the posts passed from city to city through the country of Ephraim and Manasseh even unto Zebulun: but

2 Chronicles 30:10-12, NIV

¹⁰The couriers went from town to town in Ephraim and Manasseh, as far as Zebulun, but the people

KJV

they laughed them to scorn, and mocked them.

11 Nevertheless divers of Asher and Manasseh and of Zebulun humbled themselves, and came to Jerusalem.

12 Also in Judah the hand of God was to give them one heart to do the commandment of the king and of the princes, by the word of the LORD.

NIV

scorned and ridiculed them.

¹¹Nevertheless, some men of Asher, Manasseh and Zebulun humbled themselves and went to Jerusalem.

¹²Also in Judah the hand of God was on the people to give them unity of mind to carry out what the king and his officials had ordered, following the word of the LORD.

Despite suffering a humiliating defeat at the hands of the Assyrians and existing on the brink of disaster, many people in the former northern kingdom ridiculed Hezekiah's appeal for repentance and obedience. However, as a result of the message, some people from even the most northern parts of Israel responded to the proclamation. The humble attitude of these people (vs. 11) indicates that they accepted the invitation to return to the Lord as well as to the Passover. They were ready to set their hearts right with God as well as take the step of obedience in observing the feast.

In response to the people's obedience, God worked in a mighty way to unite the people in carrying out all the planning and celebration of the Passover. A large crowd eventually gathered to observe the feast (30:13-27).



King Hezekiah had this 1,700-foot tunnel chiseled through solid rock to bring the waters of the Gihon Spring from outside the walls of Jerusalem into the city (see 2 Kings 20:20). This reduced the city's chances of being taken by siege—and an Assyrian siege did occur in Hezekiah's time, in 701 B.C. (see 18:13–19:36). In A.D. 1880 an inscription in ancient Hebrew script describing the tunnel's construction was found just inside the tunnel's entrance. Photo: © dlp Studios

8. *Despite their desperate situation, how did many in the former northern kingdom react to the invitation to the Passover?*

9. *How did God show His favor toward the renewed Passover celebration?*

A Change of Hearts

During the 1930s and 40s, the Japanese military committed terrible acts of cruelty against different peoples throughout Asia. One such crime occurred in Korea when Japanese soldiers nailed boards across the doors and windows of a Korean church and then set the church on fire while Korean Christians were worshipping. All of the people inside the church perished in the flames.

Word of this atrocity eventually reached the Japanese homeland, but many refused to believe that it had happened. After all, there were so many accounts of atrocity—how could one know what was true and what was false? When a group of Japanese Christians heard this story, however, they were struck with shame. They knew that Japan had done horrible things in Nanjing (Nanking), China; Manila; and many other places, so this news was quite believable.

After the war, the hearts of those Japanese Christians continued to agonize over this tragic incident, so they decided to go to that Korean village, beg the forgiveness of the people there, and help rebuild their church. Despite the understandable hatred that those Koreans felt toward the Japanese, when they saw the tears and heard the sincere words of remorse, God changed the Koreans' hearts, and they were able to forgive and receive the Japanese Christians as their brothers and sisters in Christ.

Together they rebuilt the Korean church and then joined in worshipping the Lord, praising Him for the bond that transcends all human sins. Only Christ can change the heart in this way, and when He does, we can't help but come together and worship Him.

10. *How did God affect the hearts of the Japanese and Korean Christians? Why did this transformation lead them to worship Christ?*

11. *In what ways does the power of Christ's love affect human relationships in this world?*

12. *Do you immediately want to worship Christ when He touches your heart? If so, why?*

Praise Him!

King Hezekiah invited God's people from both the former northern kingdom and from Judah to assemble in Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. Those who accepted his invitation came to worship God because He had touched their hearts. It is still true today—when the Lord touches our hearts, we immediately want to revere Him with praises and with our gratitude.

► *Identify three times or ways that Christ has touched your heart recently. Then write a prayer that praises Him for what He has done.*

KEY VERSES

But Hezekiah prayed for them, saying, The good LORD pardon every one that prepareth his heart to seek God, the LORD God of his fathers.
—2 Chronicles 30:18b-19a, KJV

But Hezekiah prayed for them, saying, "May the LORD, who is good, pardon everyone who sets his heart on seeking God—the LORD, the God of his fathers."
—2 Chronicles 30:18b-19a, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS

(See *The Quiet Hour* for devotionals on these passages.)

September 2 through September 8

- Mon.** 2 Chronicles 33:1-6—Manasseh Does Much Evil.
- Tues.** 2 Chronicles 33:7-13—Manasseh Repents and Is Restored.
- Wed.** 2 Chronicles 6:36-42—Solomon's Prayer.
- Thurs.** 2 Chronicles 7:11-16—If My People Will Pray.
- Fri.** 2 Chronicles 33:14-20—Manasseh Sacrifices to God.
- Sat.** Luke 18:9-14—A Tax Collector's Prayer Is Heard.
- Sun.** 2 Corinthians 7:5-13—Repentance That Leads to Salvation.