

## Right heart trumps wrong day

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

*II Chronicles 30:2-4*

In the wake of the preceding events where the new king Hezekiah had promoted the repair and re-consecration of the temple in Judah, as well as the priests and Levites, for the worship of the Lord, our text describes his subsequent plan to celebrate the passover feast there. After the northern kingdom of Israel had been devastated by the Assyrians, and Judah had suffered many losses from their attacks during the reign of wicked Ahaz, Hezekiah's clear desire to turn back to the true worship of Jehovah reached not only to his own jurisdiction of Judah, but also initially to the border region of Ephraim and Manasseh. While Judah had nationally departed from the temple worship under the recent reign of Ahaz, who had imported the idolatry of his neighbors to his land, the northern kingdom had long departed from the Lord, and was now populated only by a remnant of Israelites, as well as displaced foreigners, left there by the Assyrian army. Yet Hezekiah's zeal for the Lord reached out also to the northerners, not only in the border tribes, but eventually far into the others.

The prevailing issue also identified here is that there was not sufficient time to prepare and keep the passover feast in the prescribed first month of the Jewish religious year. As a result, they made the plan to keep the feast in the second month of the year. To a sanctimonious Israelite, this plan may have been regarded as unacceptable, but the people who had been neglecting or starved for proper worship of the only true God were pleased with the plan. Their desire for true worship understood that the timing was not its predominant aspect. Thus, though many in the north scorned the invitation, the hearts of those that did respond in north and south rejoiced. The balance of the account reveals a number of things about the ritual that were not quite up to standard, but it also demonstrates a spirit of true worship and focus on the Lord God that could overcome the shortfalls. The commentary on this is recorded: "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, though he be not cleansed according to the purification of the sanctuary. And the LORD hearkened to Hezekiah, and healed the people" (vv. 18-20).

The lesson is obvious. Better it is to have a heart zealous for the Lord and His worship in an alternate month than to have a dead heart in the right month. Centuries later, Jesus would instruct the Samaritan woman in the north that "the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him" (John 4:23). Let us always seek to be such.