

Title: New Generation

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Text: 2 Chronicles 29-30

Fresh Start

First Move:

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In just 12 months the United States of America will have a new president-elect. In a little less than 3 months the president will be sitting in the Oval Office facing the first big test of their presidency: the First 100 Days. The term was coined by Franklin Delano Roosevelt, and has come to represent a unique time for a leader: a time of great power, influence and opportunity.

On Day One, F.D.R. closed all the banks in America! How's that for starters? Why such drastic action? In February of 1933 the U.S. and the world were in the throes of the Great Depression. Banks were failing and people were losing their life savings. F.D.R. was determined to get the banking system back on its feet. He sent inspectors to every single bank, and 4 days later allowed 500 of them to re-open.

King Hezekiah would have well appreciated F.D.R.'s urgency in seizing the moment provided by those first 100 days of leading his country. But for Hezekiah, the first move was to *open* doors that had been long closed.

We read in 2 Chronicles 29:3

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2 Chronicles 29:3 NIV

In the first month of the first year of his reign, he opened the doors of the temple of the LORD and repaired them.

Open Door:

Hezekiah's father, King Ahaz, had been a wicked ruler. When he had been defeated by a neighboring kingdom, he abandoned the worship of the LORD,

choosing instead to put his faith in the gods of those who had defeated him. We read:

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2 Chronicles 28:24-25 NIV

Ahaz gathered together the furnishings from the temple of God and cut them in pieces. He shut the doors of the LORD's temple and set up altars at every street corner in Jerusalem.

So when Hezekiah commanded that the doors to the LORD's temple be opened, he was announcing that a new day had dawned – one in which he and his people would put their trust in their God.

Fresh Start:

Like King Hezekiah, you and I live in a culture in which for many people the doors of access to God have been shut. People of faith are increasingly marginalized by the cultural elites. Some of the most basic human institutions have been redefined, with assurances that these changes are “on the right side of history.” The media and entertainment industries bombard us with ever more crude and offensive offerings.

D. C. McAllister, writing for The Federalist, explains that America's greatest crisis is a crisis of morals. Quoting C.S. Lewis, she says:

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This election season is part of that narrative—a drama about human progression, but not in the dualist, leftist sense that leads to a delusional utopia. It's a story, as C.S. Lewis said, of becoming either heavenly creatures or hellish ones: "Each of us at each moment is progressing toward one state or the other." (thefederalist.com/2015/11/04).

It would all too easy to throw up our hands in despair at the chaos around us. And that would be precisely *the wrong response!* Instead, *this is the time to re-open the doors to God's Presence.*

A New Time

New Leaders:

Restoring the culture of his people would take more than unlocking the temple doors. In order to turn the corner, the king knew that he had to bring a radical transformation to those who would lead the people in the worship of the LORD. For that reason, Hezekiah gathered all of the priests and Levites who would once again lead the people in worship once the temple had been put in order.

His first command to these leaders was a challenge for them to clean up themselves and become fully committed to the LORD they served.

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2 Chronicles 29:5 NIV

"Listen to me, Levites! Consecrate yourselves now and consecrate the temple of the LORD, the God of your ancestors. Remove all defilement from the sanctuary."

Moral change had to begin with people who had moral authority. And that moral authority can only be found in people who are authentic and true.

The same is true today. Do you see things in our culture that you find evil and destructive? Do a self-check to see if *you are tolerating those things in your own life*. Moral transformation begins at home.

Sins of the Fathers:

The next thing Hezekiah addresses is the failure of the previous generation – the “sins of the fathers.” Moral transformation can only happen when we see how far down we have sunk into the quagmire of immorality.

Listen to the litany of charges Hezekiah brings against the previous generation:

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- They were unfaithful to the covenant with God.
- They did evil in God’s sight.
- They forsook the LORD.
- They turned their backs on the LORD’s dwelling place.

- They *shut the doors* of the temple, put out the lamps, and stopped offering prayers or sacrifices to God.

As a result, they suffered defeat and humiliation both at home and abroad. You can't let your culture go to hell without suffering the consequences.

A New Time:

But the most important thing that Hezekiah had to say that day focused not on the past, but on the future.

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2 Chronicles 29:10-11 NIV

"Now I intend to make a covenant with the LORD, the God of Israel, so that his fierce anger will turn away from us. My sons, do not be negligent now, for the LORD has chosen you to stand before him and serve him, to minister before him and to burn incense."

Hezekiah was determined to turn his culture and his kingdom around. But in order for that to happen, he had to be "all in." He committed himself to *renew* the covenant with the LORD. He would not be unfaithful like his father.

Turning to his leaders, he reminds them that God *chose them for this time and this new purpose*. It is no accident that king and priests are standing in front of a defiled, but newly opened temple. Bringing the nation back to the LORD is what God had intended for them to do.

God is calling you and me to do exactly the same thing: to renew our covenant with Him and embrace the challenge He has put before us. It starts with you.

- No one else is going to make the success of your marriage their priority.
- No one else is going to step in and give your children the moral foundation they so desperately need.
- No one else can go into a voting booth and cast your vote for moral integrity.
- No one else can decide what you do or do not look at on your phone or computer.

- No one else can make you spend your hard-earned money on filth.
- No one else can make you an agent of change for God.
- It starts with you.

“The LORD has chosen you to stand before him and serve him.”

New Generation

A Job Done Quickly!

Did you ever tackle a project like cleaning out a garage full of things you don't need anymore? The mess may have accumulated over many years. After a while, the piles of junk are so intimidating that you can't even imagine what a cleaned out garage would look like!

But then you decide *now is the time*. You put on your work gloves and start hauling stuff to the dump. In a matter of days, or even hours, the garage is transformed!

This is what happened when the priests and Levites went to work cleaning up the temple. We read that in just 2 weeks' time they were able to clean out the pagan trappings and purify the temple for worship.

Think of what happens in our own lives. The process of drifting away from God doesn't happen overnight. We “cool off” gradually, giving Him a little less of our time and resources. We compromise in little steps, allowing impure things to take root in our lives. But coming back to God begins the moment we commit ourselves, or re-commit ourselves to Him. He shines His light into the dark places, challenges us to take out the garbage, and His House comes to life again.

New Generation:

The moral transformation that Hezekiah began when he opened the long-shut temple doors came to full expression with the celebration of Passover. Hezekiah invited his subjects and his Hebrew neighbors to come and celebrate the festival at the newly restored temple.

And the celebration was a huge success!

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2 Chronicles 30:21 NIV

The Israelites who were present in Jerusalem celebrated the Festival of Unleavened Bread for seven days with great rejoicing, while the Levites and priests praised the LORD every day with resounding instruments dedicated to the LORD.

In fact, the celebration was so wonderful that Israel extended it another 7 days!

Why such joy? Passover was, and is, the Independence Day of the Jewish people. It marked their deliverance from slavery and their birth as a nation. To celebrate Passover was to remember, or even rediscover, who you truly are as God's child.

On that day a new generation proclaimed to the whole world that they were God's people, and that their city and their culture were God's home.

Can we do any less?