

## Cleansing the Temple

This article on 2 Chronicles 29 is edited from the Ligonier Ministries

Expiation, i.e. the removal of sin and its pollution, was the goal of the sin offering, and it served to cleanse the tabernacle and temple that was polluted when the people sinned (Lev. 4:1–5:13). Sins committed with a high hand could not be expiated (Num. 15:22–31), but those members of the visible covenant community who sinned with a high hand — recklessly and impenitently — had no desire to sacrifice the sin offering anyway (see also Matt. 12:22–32). Yet for those Israelites whose hearts were set on the Lord, the sin offering served as a tangible way to represent the cleansing God promised to His people and was a manifestation of His grace in that it allowed believers to maintain fellowship with their Creator.

As was true of all the sacrifices offered under the old covenant, the sin offering would not be effectual if the heart of the worshiper was not in it. Unfortunately, the history of Israel proves that, more often than not, the hearts of most of the people were not devoted to God as they presented their sin offerings. This was especially true of most of the kings, starting with Saul (1 Sam. 15:1–23). There were occasional exceptions to this rule, and, one of the most notable being Hezekiah of Judah.

Hezekiah ascended the throne following the death of his father, Ahaz, who had been devoted to idol worship to the extent that he all but ruined the temple in Jerusalem (2 Chron. 28:22–27). Ahaz's son was much different, being a follower of the Lord from an early age. One of the first things he did was to restore the temple and its liturgy, as described in today's passage. Hezekiah made sure that the job was done thoroughly and made no moves to hasten the process when the priests took fifteen days to cleanse the Lord's house (29:17). The king also made sure to sacrifice many sin offerings to cleanse the royal house, the priesthood, and the common people from the sin that had defiled God's holy sanctuary (vv. 20–24).

We should not underestimate Hezekiah's faithfulness, but we must also note that even his sin offerings were not enough to cleanse Israel of sin. Even he, as we have seen from other parts of the Scripture, could not maintain his purity (Isaiah 39). The blood of the sin offering could not finally achieve true expiation for the people, and a new lamb would have to be offered to cleanse the hearts of God's children (John 1:35–36).

Hezekiah's sin offerings did not affect the cleansing the people needed, but we can still learn much from his zeal to restore true worship. The most important reformation that ever takes place in the life of the church is a reformation of her worship, because worship is the most important work we offer to God. May we always encourage our leaders to remain committed to Scripture as they order the worship services of our churches.