

Dr. August Konkell, Chronicles, Session 1, Introduction to Chronicles

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This is Dr. August Konkell in his teaching on the book of Chronicles. This is session 1, Introduction to Chronicles.

Welcome to a course on Chronicles.

As you can see, my name is Gus Konkell. My connection to Chronicles goes back to Westminster Seminary, where Professor Raymond Dillard was the mentor of my dissertation, which was focused on Hezekiah, and of course that dealt largely with 2 Chronicles, along with Isaiah and Kings. So, I was privileged to take Chronicles from the master, the man who's written one of the finest books on Chronicles that we have to this day.

My teaching career was actually at Providence Theological Seminary in Winnipeg, Manitoba. I began teaching there in 1984, and if you think that that must make me very old, you are correct. But I'm still able to do this taping, for which I am very grateful.

We moved to Ontario almost 10 years ago now, after I retired from Providence. And so, I now teach at McMaster Divinity College. I'm privileged to be mentoring doctoral students myself at this point in time, and to be teaching courses like this one.

So, the books that we are interested in are called Chronicles, which are a to most people. The name is quite meaningless because it is not common in English. And the moment you start to read nine chapters of genealogies, you immediately feel quite lost.

And so, Chronicles tends to become ignored. It is in fact, one of the last books of the Old Testament to be written. So, we want to talk just a little bit about Chronicles, and we want to talk a little bit about its canonical history.

The book of Chronicles, as we have it in our Hebrew Bible and our Protestant Bibles, is a companion more or less with Ezra-Nehemiah. And normally our Bibles are arranged so that Ezra-Nehemiah immediately follows Chronicles. That sort of seems to make sense because if you read the last verses of Chronicles, you find that this is exactly the way in which Ezra-Nehemiah begins, with precisely these same words about the decree of Cyrus that the temple at Jerusalem should be restored.

And that decree would have been issued in about 539 BC. So, the two seem to be related, and what furthermore seemed to connect Ezra-Nehemiah and Chronicles

was a book that we don't have in our Bibles but was always in the Bible of the church, which we call the Septuagint. It's the Greek Bible.

It was the Bible of the church up until the time of the Reformation. What is interesting about the book called First Esdras is the fact that it begins with the story of Josiah in 2 Chronicles 36, and then ends with Ezra, chapters 7:33 to 8:12, which is about Ezra reading the law. So, the assumption was then that Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah, at some point, formed one continuous work.

So in the Septuagint, we have Chronicles, we have First Esdras, and we have Second Esdras, which is just our Ezra-Nehemiah. However, this idea that Chronicles was really simply once a part of a longer work of Ezra-Nehemiah has now come into disrepute, for good reason. Now, First Esdras was never included in the Hebrew canon.

It wasn't regarded as a different kind of writing altogether. The Reformers, who tended to follow the Hebrew canon of the scriptures and who put the Bibliography off to the side as a secondary canon, also omitted the First Esdras. But you will still find it in Catholic Bibles and in Orthodox Bibles, and so they are familiar with it.

However, First Esdras really has quite a different kind of emphasis than Chronicles and a different kind of emphasis than Ezra-Nehemiah. And in more careful studying of these books, it's come to be realized that these were entirely separate compositions. They never belong to one single composition, as you will read in many of the older commentaries from the 80s and the '90s.

Chronicles was written with a very specific goal of addressing the worshipping community around the city of Jerusalem. Ezra-Nehemiah was telling a different story altogether, and First Esdras also had a completely different purpose. So, what is the purpose of Chronicles? Well, we could begin by asking about the time when Chronicles, as we have it in our Bibles, was written.

Chronicles in our Bible, the way we have it, could not be earlier than at least six generations after Zerubbabel. Zerubbabel is the Jewish leader who is present in Haggai and Zechariah in about the year 522. And in the genealogies of Zerubbabel, in 1 Chronicles 3:17 to 24, we have at least six further generations.

A generation in actual human biology is about 20 years. It's true that in biblical chronology, a generation is 40 years, but that's more or less a representative number, the generation that died in the wilderness. Forty years is a little too long for most of us to begin our families.

We begin them more in our 20s. So, if we consider the actual years that would be reflected in the genealogy of Zerubbabel, it's probably about 120 years after

Zerubbabel, which would put us somewhere around the year 400. In the bigger scheme of history, 400 is approximately the end, the very end of the Persian Empire.

It's already falling into chaos, and it's not too long after that when it will collapse altogether under the influence of Greek. So, what was this writing? Well, Jerome called it a *chronikon*. A *chronikon* is a Latin word that refers to a certain kind of history writing that was done by the Greeks and others in the beginning of talking about human society.

And what *chronikons* did was begin with the earliest of humans, which in Greek writings or other histories usually was a period of time when the gods and the humans weren't quite distinct from each other, and then eventually, the humans came to be their own society, and they would tell that story of the details they wanted up until the time of the writer. Now, that is more or less what *Chronicles* does, because it begins with Adam. Adam, Seth, Enoch.

So, you're back at the beginning, and it tells the story from that point on, and then leads us on the story of Judah and of Jerusalem all the way down to the time of the chronicler, which is in Persia at about 400. Now, *Chronicles* is written to the people of Yehud, and what I want to do here is show you on a map the state of Yehud in the Persian empire. Yehud was a state that was created by the Persians.

It is not Judah. It is not a restoration of Judah. It doesn't actually have any connection politically to the Judah that went into exile.

The boundaries of the state of Yehud are determined more or less from Ezra and Nehemiah and the references to various cities. They're somewhat conjectural, as Ezra and Nehemiah don't give us all of the cities that were a part of the Persian state, but they're quite representative, and we can approximately form the boundary the way that we see it here on this map. So, it goes as far west as Gerar, near to the Philistine territory of earlier times.

It goes to just about Engedi, which is the middle of the Dead Sea. At that point, the whole state of Edumea begins, which is more or less the former Edom. And then, across on the other side of the Dead Sea, we have Moab, and then we have Ammon, and of course, what's quite noticeable in Ezra and Nehemiah is the hostility between Jerusalem and Yehud and Ammon and Samaria.

These are rival states that are very much adversarial with the work of Nehemiah, especially. So, the chronicler lives in the state of Yehud, a Persian state that is subjected to the rule of the Persians, and in many ways dependent upon them. And the center point of Yehud is Jerusalem and the restoration of the temple, and that is the chronicler's interest.

So, he really doesn't directly talk too much about the other cities of Yehud. He talks more about the whole history of Israel in the land of Palestine, but he tells that history so that these people can understand who they are at his point in time in Jerusalem. That is the political circumstance that we have as we come to the book of Chronicles.

So, that takes us back to where we left off. Now, the point for the chronicler as to who they are in this Persian state, this small, seemingly insignificant group of people, is that they are the heirs to a promise, and that really is the key thing. The whole book is built around the promise to David, which is why David and Solomon form the greatest part of the history of the chronicler.

But we especially see this promise in focus at the end of the reign of David, in chapter 22, where David gives his commission to Solomon regarding the promise of the kingdom of Yahweh, the kingdom of God. This is the phrase that Jesus is going to begin with in the New Testament, the kingdom of God. Well, it wasn't a phrase that Jesus invented.

It was one that grew out of this concept of what it meant to continue as the people of God after the political state of Israel and Judah was gone and would never be revived again. Never was a political state until 1948, when it was revived by the United Nations. So, what they are is the people of promise.

What are they supposed to be as the people of promise? Well, it focuses around the temple. So, in chapters 28 and 29, we have the public commissioning of Solomon by David, where he repeats the promise that Nathan has given to him. Then, in 29, the blessing that David gives to Solomon is to assure him that he is most significant in all the history of the world.

Because this is not his throne, this is the throne of the kingdom of Yahweh. And the kingdom of Yahweh is forever.

So, the Persians might not think much about this little state of Yehud. They're more or less a military buffer to protect them against invasions that might come up from Egypt. That's all they are to the Persians.

But to the chronicler, they are something much more than that. To the chronicler, these are the people of promise. And that's why he wrote his book.

So, Chronicles, then, is a history. In fact, unlike any of the other books of the Old Testament, Chronicles is a history. It calls itself the V'rim Hayyim, the events of the times, a history.

So, it's the chronicler's own way of writing the history of Israel and Judah as he found it in the prophetic accounts of this history, namely, Joshua through 2 Kings. But the chronicler looks at this history in quite a different way. And so, tells the story in his own way.

Kings is coded most extensively, though there is something we need to notice about the chronicler's extensive quotations from Kings. There are two things that happen when the chronicler uses the story as we find it in the prophetic history of Kings. One of them is that the chronicler sometimes, in quite subtle ways, shifts words or expressions or the times of events, chronology.

We're going to see some of this as we go through Chronicles. So that he can tell the story the way he believes it needs to be known to reflect what it really is, the kingdom of Yahweh, not a political state that died with the exile of the Babylonians. But the other thing is that the version of Kings that the chronicler is using is not a version that we have had up until 1948.

Even after that, it wasn't really understood very much until these scrolls, which were discovered at the Dead Sea, began to be deciphered and identified and published. So, we now realize that sometimes when the chronicler is different from our version of Kings, it's nothing other than his version of Kings did not say the same thing as our version of Kings does. The prophetic books from Joshua all the way through Second Kings, we realize themselves had quite a long history.

After all, they cover centuries of time. And they used many different kinds of sources. My own belief is that they began as various collections and that there was more than one edition of Kings.

I think the first edition of Kings is at the latest in the time of Hezekiah. So there was a book of Kings that was written in the time of Hezekiah, but then developed after that until it became what we have today in the Masoretic text. The chronicler also has other sources.

We can see that because he's quite faithful to his sources. He doesn't like to deviate from what is written; he wants his history to be true.

He wants it to be accurate. He wants it to portray precisely what the Kingdom of Yahweh is all about. So the Chronicles, then, is a history that is written for its time for the people of Yehud.

It gives us an entirely new interpretation of the story as it might have been known up until that time. One of the things that the chronicler assumes is that you know the prophetic story. As a matter of fact, we shall see that his use of the Bible in writing

his history is so intense that you can't possibly derive significance from it if you don't know something about it.

He begins with Adam, Seth, and Enoch. Now, most of us did not get along too badly at that point in time. Oh yeah, I know who Adam is.

Yeah, I remember who Seth was. He came after Cain. And yeah, I know who Enoch was.

Soon after that, we started to get lost. Well, as Jerome said so appropriately, you don't really know your Bible until you know Chronicles. And if you understand Chronicles, then you really do know your Bible.

Because you can't understand Chronicles until you know the history that he used in a great deal of detail. But it also is a history that is written for our time because he essentially chronicles concept of Israel. And that's his main point, Israel.

He uses the term Jacob only when quoting Psalm 105. Other than that, from the very beginning he refers to the sons of Abraham as Esau and Israel. What these people in Yehud need to know is what God intended for Israel starting back in Genesis.

Now, that Israel is precisely the background of what is meant by Israel in the Gospels and especially in Paul. When you go to Romans 9 to 11, and we shall conclude on this point, Paul's understanding of Israel is exactly what the chronicler portrays. So Chronicles is quite relevant to us because it's telling us what we should understand by the term Israel.

Israel is very much in the news. Everyone thinks they know what is meant when we talk about Israel. But the fact is, Israel has multiple meanings within the Bible itself.

The one that's relevant to the kingdom of God is the Israel of the chronicler. So that's our introduction to the book. Thank you.

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