

Dr. August Konkell, Chronicles, Session 2, Israel and Chronicles

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This is Dr. August Konkell and his teaching on the book of Chronicles. This is session 2, Israel and Chronicles.

We ended our last session on Chronicles, talking about the concept of Israel.

Our point was that the history of Chronicles, the way that it is written for its time, is to create an identity for this small group of people who are so hated by Ammonites and Samaritans and others all around them who don't want them building walls around their city or protecting their temple. The question is: who they are why are they important, and why do they matter? So that really is the question that the Chronicle needs to answer, and in order to answer that question, he begins at sort of a logical place.

What he does is start at the beginning of the human race. So, what we want to do here is get in our minds a little bit about the way the chronicler progresses in his outline of this history. He, first of all, gives us the most abbreviated possible way that you can write a history.

The shortest possible way that you can write a history is just to give the names of the people. What is history? Well, it's the story of people's relationships, how they interacted with each other, and what they did. So, the chronicler then reduces all of that to just the names.

Now, these people are all very significant. They're especially significant in the story of the chronicler, but the name means absolutely nothing if you don't know their story, which is why the chronicler assumes that his readers know all about the story and know it in quite a bit of detail. He assumes that the people who read him and understand him have access to the same written records that he is using, and so he gives that story from Adam right to his point in time in the first nine chapters all the way to chapter 9, verse 34.

Then, once he has identified who Israel is amongst all the nations of the world and why their position at this point in time in Yehud is so important, he goes on to give the salient points of what defines Israel. That means he's going to give us the account of David, the account of the founding of the kingdom, and the account of the preparation of the temple. After all, what was Israel? Israel was to be a representation of the people of God, and the presence of God was represented by the temple, and the presence of God was represented by the people worshiping around the temple.

So, the story, his story of the history of Israel to identify Israel, begins with David, and his whole focus is on David and the function of the temple. Now he describes the function of the temple very much the way that it is in his day but describes this as having been organized by David in his time, and so he tells the story of how the kingdom of David came about and then he tells the story of how David makes way for the preparation of the temple. Then, he gives us Solomon's account because Solomon is the temple builder.

So, the second large section of his history is Solomon. After the genealogies and the account of David, he tells us about Solomon's reign, Solomon's building of the temple, and then the fate of Solomon's kingdom. So, essentially, he focuses only on the kings of Judah.

There is no mention ever of the north being a second kingdom. It's not that the chronicler doesn't know this and that his readers don't know this. As a matter of fact, there are various allusions that demand that you know that the kingdom of Israel was taken into captivity by the Assyrians in about the year 722.

But the chronicler doesn't find any of that particularly relevant to telling the story of what we mean by Israel because what we mean by Israel depends on the temple and David and the promise and what Solomon did in establishing the kingdom. So, after he has told the story of Solomon and his temple building he tells a little bit about the story of Judah under its various kings using them as an example of what Israel should be. That story does not end in a happy way.

It ends with Ahaz and it ends with the temple having been compromised completely by syncretism and no longer serving as a place of worship. The chronicler finds his story most notably continued in the person of Hezekiah. Now Hezekiah is a very important person in kings as well.

In fact, Hezekiah is a very important person in the scriptures. He gets three chapters in Kings, four chapters in Isaiah, and four chapters in Chronicles. Hardly any king in Israel gets more space than Hezekiah, especially in three different books.

Well, the chronicler finds Hezekiah to be a most significant king in that he represents Solomon in restoring the temple. The story of Hezekiah in Chronicles is a complete contrast to everything you read in Kings and Hezekiah. We shall talk about that because, for the chronicler, what Hezekiah did is the key to understanding the kingdom of Yahweh.

He restored the temple and he gives us three long chapters on Hezekiah's restoration of the temple. But of course, after Hezekiah, the story isn't all that happy either

because, in the end, Judah also and the temple are destroyed. The people go into exile and the temple is left completely in ruins by the Babylonians.

So, what does the chronicler think is the future of Israel? Well, that's going to be our question, and that is the question for most of the people who read Chronicles. As we come to the first part of Chronicles we want to talk about genealogies and what they are. Now, don't think of the chronicler's genealogies as family trees.

When we write genealogies we normally write them in terms of what we call segmented genealogies. So, we start with an individual, and we cover all of his descendants, maybe on the spouse's side as well, and just extend it all the way from whatever point we start to our present time, and the genealogy gets bigger and bigger, focused on one particular family. This is part of what the chronicler sometimes does.

So, for example the story of David is what we call a segmented genealogy. In other words, it takes the family of David, and it expresses who this family is in its time. But sometimes the genealogy is simply listing a series of descendants, what we call a linear genealogy, and so 450 years of history are covered by just a few verses in naming the sons of David who became kings of Judah.

The other thing about genealogies is that they take more than one form and here we're going to use Samuel as an example. When you read 1 Samuel, we find that Elkanah is an Ephraimite, but when we come to Chronicles, we find that Samuel is a Levite. So can Samuel be both an Ephraimite and a Levite? Well, actually, if you stop to think about genealogies, of course, that's possible.

I mean, he could have been a Levite who lived in Ephraim, and he can be both an Ephraimite and a Levite. But the genealogy that you read in Samuel, which uses many of the same names that Chronicles uses, goes in a different direction than the Chronicler does because the Chronicler wants us to understand Samuel as a Levite and as a priest. He doesn't want us to understand him as the Prophet the way that we know him, mostly in the books of Samuel.

So, the way that this history unfolds is to, first of all, tell us about the importance of Israel among all the nations of the world. In the Chronicler's time, the nations of the world were mostly those of what we now call in English the Middle East. So, the Chronicler starts with Adam, and he takes us to Noah.

That's in the first four verses. Essentially, he just takes Genesis chapter 5 and gives us a list of the names of the people who lived before the flood. That takes us to Noah.

Then when we get to Noah we have Shem, Ham and Japhet. And that takes us to Genesis chapter 10 and the nations after the flood. Now, this is also very, very significant because after the flood Genesis chapter 10 is meant to be comprehensive.

Ham is all the nations of Africa. Japhet is all the nations of Greece. And Shem is all the nations of what we today call Iraq and Syria.

The territories along the Euphrates River that we know as Semites. So once the Chronicler has given us Genesis 10 in his version and yet reflects pretty precisely what Genesis chapter 10 is, he leads us to Semites. Now, let me just say that Genesis chapter 10 contains precisely 70 nations.

In Deuteronomy chapter 32 verse 8, that long poem of Moses, we read that God assigned all the territories of the world according to the number of the sons of Israel. So, what happens is in Genesis 46 the number of the sons of Israel is made to be exactly 70. It isn't that in all the traditions because you can have a representative list in different ways.

That's why Stephen says there were 75 in the book of Acts. But in the Old Testament text number 70 was very important and is very important to the Chronicler because it represents as the number seven all the nations of the world. And then we get to Shem and that leads us to Abraham.

And, of course, here, the Chronicler makes a theological statement the way he often does. He says, Abraham that is the one who is Abraham. Now that's all he says.

He notes that the name has changed, but for him, that matters a whole lot because, for him, that's the promise. God changed Abraham's name because he was going to be the father of a great nation—not just an exalted father but the father of a great nation, and that's the nation the Chronicler wants to talk about.

So, it's just an addition of one word at that point, but when you read the Chronicler, you find out that's very significant. Now, he leaves nothing out. He starts with Ishmael and Keturah.

The descendants of Ishmael are mostly Western Arabia and the descendants of Keturah are mostly the far south and East Arabia. So, Esau he gives us then in some detail using a little portion of Genesis 36, not too much, and then talks about Seir. Now in history and in Genesis Seir which is ruddy, which is red, is always linked with Edom and it's always linked with Esau.

So, Esau and Seir are linked etymologically in that way. Genealogically we don't have in our Bibles anything about Seir but to the Chronicler this was very important and he had some kind of record about that and then he gives us a list of kings of Seir which

you need to think of as basically princes who ruled over a fairly small territory and then a list of chiefs of Edom and of Seir which takes us to the end of Abraham's descendants through Esau. This brings us to Israel.

Chronicles tells us that the sons of Abraham were Esau and Israel. The name Jacob doesn't show up because it's Israel that matters. And when he gives us the sons of Israel, which is now the story that he wants to tell us, he's showed us who they are in the terms of the nations; he gives them in his own order, the sons of Leah and of Rachel and then the sons of Bila and of Zilpah.

So, the names are all there in the text in Genesis, but they are in the Chronicler's own order to give Leah and Rachel prominence and prominence to their sons. Here, we will pick up the story to see who these Israelites are.

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