

## **Dr. August Konkell, Chronicles, Session 5, Rally Round the Temple**

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This is Dr. August Konkell in his teaching on the books of Chronicles. This is session 5, Rally Round the Temple.

We left off with talking about the relationships of the tribes of Israel, pointing out why Reuben has become subordinated, why Joseph has become elevated with Ephraim and Manasseh being the rites of the firstborn, but how Judah comes to be the leader.

This was very significant to the chronicler, which is why he gave the tribe of Judah so much prominence in chapters two and three. Now we come to his second real concern, and his second concern is the function of the temple, because as he is going to say repeatedly, this is not the kingdom of David. David in chapters 22 and in chapter 28 is going to say, this is the kingdom of Yahweh.

It is not his own kingdom. It is an eternal kingdom. So if this kingdom is not actually the kingdom of David, if David is merely the means by which God fulfills his promise to redeem his people, then the center of the kingdom must be Yahweh, God, the name of the God of Israel.

For the kingdom to represent what it really is, there must be proper due recognition of the way in which God demonstrates and represents his rule within his kingdom. So, he does that by means of one particular tribe. This tribe gets a very long and detailed description of who its members are, how they are organized, what they do, and why they are so central to the kingdom, though they don't actually have any properties in the kingdom at all.

They have only cities, places where they reside, and places where they can make a living, but they don't, as a tribe, have any property. Simeon at least had certain designated areas within Judah that were their territory as a tribe, but not so the Levites. Rather, their role is entirely different.

So, the Chronicler wants us to understand who is at the center of the kingdom of God. Who is it that matters the most to us knowing what the significance of Israel is all about? And there what we have is the description of the Levites. The Chronicler begins with Levi, and in the first 15 verses, he gives the priestly lineage all the way to the time of the exile.

So, this is those people who had a prominent role within the tribe. They were the ones who were the priests. One of the differences that must be noted here is that in

the books of Numbers and Leviticus, the descendants of Aaron, the descendants of Kohath, are the priests.

But the Chronicler doesn't seem to view priesthood quite that way. For the Chronicler, if you are a Levite, you are in the tribe from which priests come. And so, as in Deuteronomy, so also in Chronicles, we have the term the Levitical priests.

That is, these people are priests, but they belong to the tribe of Levi. So, what the Chronicler then does in the next section of his giving of this genealogy is to repeat who the sons of Levi are. There are three of them, especially in verses 16 to 19.

Then, he lists the sons of Gershom, the sons of Kohath, and the sons of Merari. Now it's the sons of Kohath who get more prominence here. If we go back to the book of Numbers, what we see is that the sons of Kohath had a very particular role in relation to the temple.

They were, in relation to the tabernacle, the ones who were responsible for its transportation and maintenance, and that was called their *avoda*, their work, and their particular assignment. But of course, once the temple is built, that function and that role changes, which is something that the Chronicler makes very clearly a distinction when David makes his preparations for the temple. The whole function of the Levites and their role is going to change.

Now, I mentioned earlier that genealogies can be fluid, and one of the things that we see here is the way in which the Chronicler makes Samuel one of the priests because he did function as a priest. And so, he is one of the sons of Kohath, the son of Elkanah. And the Chronicler gives the whole genealogy of who Samuel was.

In the Hebrew Masoretic text, there are actually a number of textual issues, but they're quite discernible, and the translations portray this exactly the way the Chronicler intended it. So, we see Samuel as among the sons of Kohath. So, there are the sons of Gershom, Kohath, and Merari.

Then what we have is this whole change of role so that we are no longer concerned with the transportation of the tabernacle, but rather with the function of the temple. A very important part of the function of the temple is worship, and a very, very important part of worship is music. So, the Chronicler gives us a whole section here on how David designates the musicians and assigns them.

Now, you will be familiar with some of these from the Book of Psalms. There's the Guild of Heman, the Guild of Asaph, the Guild of Ethan, and then he concludes again with the lists of the priests. So, you see how this whole thing is structured.

The priests are prominent. He begins with the priests, and he ends with the priests. These are the ones who conduct the ceremonies of the way in which we recognize the presence of God.

We're going to discuss the recognition of the presence of God when we get to Solomon and the actual structures and functions of the temple. But here, the Chronicler makes it very important that the priests are the ones who are the leaders, but around them are the musicians. They are the ones who are responsible.

The musicians are going to play a huge role in Chronicles. Not only in worship around the temple, the musicians are going to be the ones who win the battle for Jehoshaphat because they are the ones who act essentially as prophets. As a matter of fact, the Chronicler even uses the term prophets to describe the musicians.

Now we said that the don't have a property within Israel, so what they had was various cities that were spread throughout the whole territory of Israel. Here the Chronicler's source is actually quite clear. The Chronicler uses Joshua in chapter 21, where Joshua assigns all the Levitical cities, but the Chronicler has chosen to revise his source in very significant ways.

So, he doesn't start at the beginning of Joshua's assignment as we have it in Joshua chapter 19, or sorry, Joshua chapter 21, but rather he starts with the cities of Kohat, sorry with the priestly cities of Simeon and Benjamin, which for him are the leading cities in Judah, the ones around Jerusalem. Then he moves on to the cities of Kohat, Gershon, and Merari, and then he gives a whole summary of the Levitical cities and the cities in all of Israel. Now, one of the functions of the Levitical city was to serve as a place of refuge.

The Levites were very much a part of the judicial system. As a matter of fact, when David comes to assign the Levites one of their specific assignments is to act as judges. So, the Levites function in the judicial system.

Now, the judicial system always has a certain degree of complexity. It's fine for the covenant to say thou shalt not kill, but of course, the question always comes to be at what point and in what ways someone becomes culpable of having deliberately planned murder, and those other situations where someone is responsible for another person dying, but that was not their intent. Now, that's made clear right within the covenant itself.

For instance, a man has an ox, a bull as we used to call it, on the farm in Saskatchewan where I grew up, and those bulls were to be respected. We kept them tied up all the time. We let that bull out only on a ring with a rope when the cow needed him, and as soon as his job was done, we tied him up back in his stall because you didn't want that guy on the loose.

You never knew what he was going to do. So, I have a pretty vivid picture in my mind of what this passage in Exodus means when it talks about a man owning a bull, and the bull gets loose and kills somebody. Now the question is, does this make the owner of the bull a murderer because his bull has gotten loose and someone has died? Well, there were a whole lot of circumstances around that decision, so the city of refuge was especially the place where the person who owned the bull, in this instance, could flee.

It was the judicial city, and there the whole situation could be determined, and you could begin to decide whether or not the person was liable, to what extent they were liable, what the damages should be, and what the penalties should be, and sometimes as we know from the records, the city of refuge actually permanently became that person's place of residence simply for his own safety. Now, in Joshua, there are specific cities that are designated as Levitical cities, but the chronicler doesn't quite follow that description that we have in Joshua. He refers twice to the Levitical cities, always in the plural, once in verse 55 and again in verse 67, and in both instances, you get the impression that from the chronicler's point of view, and perhaps this was something that was true at a later point in time, or maybe in some sense true in his own time, all Levitical cities were regarded as cities of refuge, as the place where judicial activities could be carried out.

But we should perhaps take a look at a map to see the places of residence that the chronicler is talking about. What we see here is a portion of the whole of the city of Israel, sorry, the whole of the country of Israel, in which there are the designations of Levitical cities. And what you will observe is exactly what the chronicler describes, namely that here in the area of Judah, right around Jerusalem, was the greatest concentration of the Levites, probably because that gave them some function of proximity in relation to the temple.

But there were Levitical cities all the way north of the Sea of Galilee, all the way to the north because the whole country did need to be covered by a Levitical city. But when the chronicler in his descriptions talks about the cities of refuge, he essentially is talking about the description that we have in Joshua, and he's essentially talking about those places. So that gives us an idea of the history of the chronicler as he sees it in relation to the Levites and their function.

They function as musicians, they function in terms of worship, but they also function very prominently in terms of the whole exercise of teaching, so that's all that can be understood. And along with that, quite necessarily goes the whole function of exercising the covenant in daily life, which sometimes meant that people had to be brought under the judgment of a whole judicial system, which was administered by the Levites. So, for the chronicler, the kingdom of Yahweh is the promise of God for the redemption of his people.

But the second thing about the kingdom of God for the chronicler is human relationships. How do people get on with each other? It's got nothing to do with the size of their territory, which is partly why he's trying to tell all the people of Yehud in his time. The size of territory that we have and control is not really the big issue here.

The issue here is we represent the kingdom of God, and here are the Levites, and here's the way David appointed them, and this is the way they're supposed to function, and this is the way they should function now, rally around the temple, is the way that this has been described. But there's a good reason for that. It's because the kingdom belongs to God, and if the kingdom belongs to God, then it's about structural relationships between people and how they get along with each other.

They need to learn and understand God's teaching, his Torah. They need to live according to that teaching in all their daily relationships, and the key role there is the function of the Levites, especially in teaching, especially in leading in worship. Those are the main kinds of tasks, but then other kinds of tasks that go along with it in terms of how do we get people to live with each other in circumstances that become conflicted.

The Chronicler is aware of all of this and uses Joshua to show how this is working in the time of David.

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