

Dr. August Konkell, Chronicles, Session 6, The Nation of Israel

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This is Dr. August Konkell in his teaching on the books of Chronicles. This is session 6, The Nation of Israel.

We have been looking at the Chronicler's portrayal of the history of Israel in terms of its people, and he so far has focused on Judah, then on the Levites.

Now, he's going to focus on the rest of Israel, which takes us to his time, where he brings the explanation as to why these relationships matter so much in his time. Actually, in all histories, we have a role for people and their relationships, something akin to what we might call a genealogy because we cannot understand present relationships if we don't understand something about past relationships. Now, maybe we see this more explicitly in royalty, where you've got a succession of kings and that sort of thing, but really, we see it in all sorts of elements of society in which we have to know who served what position in what time and what they did, whether they were the mayor of the city or the premier of a province here in Canada or the governor of a state in the United States.

All these relationships matter. So, these relationships of ancient times were very important to the Chronicler. Ancient histories all had genealogies of this type because these genealogies helped them understand who they were in the present time.

So, in the Chronicler's present time, it was very necessary to know who is a Levite, and it was very necessary to know who belongs to the tribe of Judah and to the sons of David. But for the Chronicler, all Israel is all Israel. It is all the tribes of Jacob, and what he wants to show us in this next section, which is the complement to Judah and the Levites, the concluding section of his genealogies, what the Chronicler is adamant to declare is that there are no ten lost tribes.

That's a completely concocted myth of history. Nobody in Israel was lost, and if we're going to talk about all of Israel, then we need to know who all of Israel was. And so now he's going to talk about the fact that these other tribes are vital and are a part of all Israel, and they are here, and they are present.

They're in Yehud, and they're here in Jerusalem, and they all constitute a part of God's promise to all Israel. Now, excuse me if I sound like I'm preaching, because actually, I am a preacher. That's what I do.

However, I have so often come across this notion that once the northern tribes were deported by Sargon II or Shalmaneser V in the year 722, that somehow or another they were dispersed and they were lost. Nothing could be more contrary to the Chronicler's history, to his way of thinking, and to his records. So we now come back to these records, and here we start with Issachar and Benjamin.

If you remember our map, Issachar and Benjamin are now tribes on the west side of the Jordan, and they are to the south of the Sea of Galilee. As a matter of fact, Benjamin is the tribe that is adjacent to Jerusalem, and as we shall see, Benjamin was such a significant tribe because Saul, the first king of Israel, came from that tribe. What David did in establishing Jerusalem as the capital was essentially unite two warring factions of tribes.

He established Jerusalem as the capital, and the boundary of Benjamin and the boundary of Judah run right through the city of Jerusalem. So, in the new capital city, both north and south were included. The Chronicler here gives us huge numbers for Benjamin and for Issachar, which is a tribe just to the north under the Sea of Galilee because of their prominence.

For the Chronicler, these huge numbers of tribes always represent a blessing. They represent that you are God's army. This is not just Israel's armies.

These are God's armies. Then the Chronicler moves on to the other tribes that we have on the west side of the Jordan. He's already dealt with Reuben and Gad and the Manasseh on the east side of the Jordan.

So here he deals with Dan, Naphtali, Zebulun, and Manasseh. Now, we don't actually find all of these names. The Chronicler does not mention Zebulun, and it's not altogether clear why he doesn't mention Zebulun.

Maybe it was not something that came up in his records, but in any case, Zebulun is not there. Dan is there at least by implication because the city of Dan and Naphtali are listed together, and these are both the sons of the same mother. And so they are related tribes, and both of them are brought together so that they are included.

Then, we have the records of Manasseh in verses 17 to 19. Of course, as we noticed earlier on, Manasseh was the tribe that was to the west and east of Jordan. So,, it had a huge territory on both sides, part of the blessing that was given to Joseph.

Now, we have the tribe of Ephraim. The tribe of Ephraim is always remembered as being a prominent and leading tribe. Joshua was from the tribe of Ephraim, and the fact that Joshua is from the tribe of Ephraim is noted by the Chronicler.

Now, here's where there is a little bit of a puzzle because if we go back to the patriarchs, we know that Ephraim and Manasseh were both in Egypt, and we don't have any record of either of them ever having been in the land of Palestine. What we have, though, is the linear genealogy, that is, the heads of fathers given for their presence in the land of Israel. And then we have the description of a raid in which two brothers are killed.

And then, we have a second linear genealogy that leads to Joshua. So, we would wonder, well, how does Ephraim have a presence in the land of Palestine, in the land of Israel, when there's no record that he was ever there? The rabbis had various ways of trying to deal with this, but I think that the Chronicler doesn't really make a statement to say that the Ephraim, of whom Joshua is a descendant, is the same Ephraim that he has listed before as being in Egypt. This raid account disrupted the whole account.

In the second genealogy, which leads us down to Joshua, we aren't given the connection of who his father was, who was the patriarch Ephraim, from whom Joshua actually descended. So, it seems to me we need to accept the Chronicler's ambiguity at that point. What he wants to show is that Joshua was from this leading tribe of Ephraim, but he's not actually showing a direct connection to the patriarch.

Then, we finally come to the tribe of Asher. The tribe of Asher was very near to the country of Lebanon. It was just to the south of the country of Lebanon.

It was sort of on the fringe, sort of on the edge. So it's above Manasseh and it's west of Naphtali. It's up there in the north.

And these are the usual traditional place of Asher. Now, here's another interesting thing about the history of the Chronicler. That's Asher, as we know it from the other historical books.

But in Chronicles, it seems Asher also had a more southern presence. Now, we have the military record of Israel. And here is where we come, especially to the family of Benjamin.

And this, of course, is where we get to the story of Saul and where we get to the way in which the militia operated at an earlier point in time. So here we have the family of Benjamin given briefly. Then the militia first that was stationed in Jerusalem.

And then we have the militia that was stationed in Gibeon. Now, the militia in Jerusalem is the sons of Ehud and then the militia of Sha'arayim. The text that we have, our Masoretic text, is a little bit difficult at this point.

And it disappoints me that both of the translations don't take the direction of following the other versions of Chronicles at this point, which makes it much more clear. Namely, in verse four, what we have is the militia of Ehud and then the militia of Sha'arayim. Then we come to the militia at Gibeon.

In due time, the territory of Benjamin really wasn't separate from the territory of Judah. It kind of was amalgamated. So Ephraim was to the north of the territory of Judah and Benjamin.

The family of Saul derives from this genealogy, which gives the descendants down to Saul's time in some detail. So, this brings us to his conclusion.

These two verses are very, very significant in the book of Chronicles. So, chapter nine, verse 1a says that all of Israel was registered. The Chronicler wants everyone to know that Israel is present in Yehud.

And we have the records. They were all registered. We've got them in the book.

So, this is the conclusion to chapter two, verses one and two. These were the sons of Israel. The Chronicler has taken us all the way back to his time in the late Persian Empire in the state of Yehud.

All Israel was registered. Now, the second point he wants to make is the continuity. There's a little bit of a question here about the translation of verse two.

The Hebrew uses the word Rishon. That's the word you have in Genesis. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.

Now, this word has a certain semantic range and a certain flexibility. And we kind of have to determine what it means in this verse. But it sometimes means that which is the head or that which is the principle.

Sometimes, it can mean that which is the first, that which is in the beginning. But I think here, the Chronicler means to emphasize continuity. These families belonged in Jerusalem, and they knew that their property was in Jerusalem.

These are the principal residents of Jerusalem. They never lost track of who they were and who their properties were. If there's one thing that's an emphasis in Chronicles, it is to show that the people of Israel at this point in time are continuous in an unbroken fashion with all of Israel from the past.

And so now he wants to say, who are we in Yehud? Who are we? Well, Jerusalem is in the center. And then there are the priestly families. And then there are the Levites and all of their duties.

Now, a big part of the Levites that we haven't mentioned to this point in time is security. You know, the temple has got a place with a lot of valuables in it. And there's a lot of people always wanting to take advantage of these things, or maybe violate the sacred and holy premises that the temple represents.

And so, the gatekeepers were a very, very important function of the Levites. They had to provide security. So, the Chronicler then describes his community.

Jerusalem is at the center. There are the priestly families. Then, around them are the Levites.

Then it concludes with the gatekeepers, and then with the summary of all Israel. So here we are. And now we are ready to tell the story of the promise to David and what God is doing so that we understand truly and fully, this is the kingdom of Yahweh.

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