

Dr. August Konkell, Chronicles, Session 8, An Eternal Kingdom

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This is Dr. August Konkell in his teaching on the books of Chronicles. This is session 8, An Eternal Kingdom.

We left the Chronicler's story with his affirmation that God's plan was that David should be the king of all Israel.

He's quite aware of all the conflicts that there were between the tribes, but those things weren't a part of God's plan. Those things were all part of the way history works out in all of its ugliness. You have to see beyond the details of history and some of its ugliness, the wars, and everything else to what it is that God's plan is beyond all this and how God works this plan out.

And so, the Chronicler now is interested in demonstrating absolutely and clearly that this is not David's kingdom, but it is an eternal kingdom. This is illustrated immediately in the reign of David, according to the Chronicler, by talking about the Ark. Now in the story of Samuel, the Ark had been deserted in Keriath-Jearim for 20 years because it had been captured by the Philistines.

The Philistines discovered that it wasn't very healthy for them to have the Ark of God in their presence, and so they wanted it out. They got it as far as the westernmost area of the tribe of Judah, the territory of Judah at that time, which is Keriath-Jearim, which is to the west of Jerusalem, and that is where it remained. Now, this is not the worship that the Ark is supposed to represent.

This is not the Ark as the place where the covenant tablets rest, the testimony to the fact that God has a covenant with Israel and that this really is the footstool of God's throne, as Psalm 132 says, a psalm that the Chronicler is going to refer to in terms of establishing the significance of this Ark. So, David's immediate task is to prepare a place for this Ark in Jerusalem and to bring the Ark there. However, the story and the story include the way in which David's attempt to transfer the Ark was not at all according to the protocol that he should have known from the instructions that God had given in the Torah.

Namely, the Ark is always to be carried by the four poles that are permanently affixed to this box and is never to be transported in any other way. So what David has done is placed this Ark on a cart, an ox cart of some kind, and he is transporting it to Jerusalem. Now, there's a favorite word again that the Chronicler uses here, and I'm going to write it down here.

It's the word parash, which means something like break out, but it's got a whole lot of senses in the sense of breaking out. One of those senses is the way in which people can burst out in terms of their numbers, their power, and their loyalty. And so that's the way it's used at the start of this chapter.

The people burst out in terms of their support for David. Yes, we should bring the Ark to Jerusalem, but in the process of inappropriately transporting the Ark, the wagon becomes unstable and the Ark could fall. And so a priest named Uzzah stretches out his hand to steady the Ark, and God, parash, bursts out.

A few months ago, I was involved in a debate at McMaster University, actually sponsored by the Muslims, in which they wanted to feature the Ahmadiyya faith and the Imam, which they brought out from Toronto. But in order to do that, they wanted to have a Christian representing a Christian point of view, and they wanted to have atheists or humanists representing a humanist point of view, and they wanted to have a Muslim presentation. So, there were four of us on this panel.

Of course, it was an incredible turnout of students. I mean, they had this largest, one of the largest classrooms and auditoriums at McMaster University. There must have been at least 200 people there all the way up the stairs, and they were all sitting in the aisles.

That was before Corona when you could sit in the aisles and sit close together. They represented about as broad a spectrum as there could be. I think the most interesting part of the whole debate was when the Muslims argued with the Muslims over the meeting of Torah.

That got so heated so quickly that the moderator really had to act quickly to shut it down. But another portion of it was this whole gang of people over to my left as I was speaking to them, who had come there to ridicule the Bible. Now, I didn't go there to try to defend their notions about the Bible, but one of the passages that was read was this one about Uzzah and God striking him down because he had touched the Ark.

And this person's point was, why would anyone want to serve a God like that? Well, of course, what that is a complete ignorance of the Hebrew concept of the holy. It's a complete ignorance of what the Hebrews mean when they say God, which is what I had been talking about. My point was that when you say God, you have no idea what you mean.

When we say God, we know what we mean. And we mean that God is holy, which means that he stands outside of the created universe. And therefore, that which represents him doesn't simply belong to the created universe.

It is holy. You have to, therefore, respect it according to the rules because it represents something much more than just another box within the whole of the common world. I didn't try to explain too much of that to this taunter.

I just said, you know, passages don't always seem, don't always mean what they might seem to mean. And I think you need to go home and do your homework. Which I got very mixed replies: those who were supportive and those who wanted to ridicule me.

But in any case, the whole thing turned out quite well because they, in the end, came to realize, oh, when you talk about God, you're not just talking about some abstract power. You're actually talking about someone who has revealed himself as the holy. Well, that's what this is all about.

And so, for David, this is a shocking reminder that those things that represent God in the world of the common are not ever to be tampered with. And the rules must always be followed. And David is now fearful because God can break out, palash, just like that when we're moving the ark for a very good cause, but we don't respect it the way that it's supposed to be respected.

So this, of course, disrupts the whole procession and procedure of the ark getting to Jerusalem, at which point the chronicler then moves on to say a little bit more about Jerusalem. What has David done to prepare for the ark to be moved there? And how is David actually establishing the worship of God in Jerusalem? So, the chronicler then, in this next chapter, goes on to talk about the royal family in Jerusalem, to talk about the support that David had in terms of the building of the temple. So, he brings in here the support of Hiram, the king of Tyre.

Then, he brings in the account of David's family in Jerusalem and the children who were born to him there. He then talks about that incident he had referred to earlier, which was the raid of the Philistines at the valley of Rephaim, which is just to the south of Jerusalem and gives the story of how David was faithful. Unlike Saul, he consulted.

He consulted Yahweh. He consulted God. And he asked God, what do I do in relation to the Philistines? And when do I attack? And he received direction from God.

So, the outcome for David is completely different from what it was for Saul in the war against the Philistines. Then, the Chronicler comes back to bringing this ark to Jerusalem. So here we have David doing things the way that they're supposed to be done.

So, chapter 15 talks about how David organizes the Levites. He organizes all of the temple personnel so that the right authorized people are carrying the ark in the manner that was prescribed. So, there is no need for the palash.

There's no need for God to break out. They simply need to allow God's symbols, that which represents the Holy One of Israel, to be empowered in that representation so that it's clear these are not just other items. These are holy and they tell us about God.

So, then we have the whole festive processional that David brings about in order to install the ark. And, of course, at this point in time, he's only installing the ark in the tent that he has prepared for it at Jerusalem. And what we're going to find out is that the tabernacle itself was still residing at Gibeon.

But the ark had not been part of the tabernacle at Gibeon. David is moving the ark to Jerusalem, and he's got a tent there, which is a place for the ark in Jerusalem. So, really, there is now a double place of worship and a double division of the security personnel and the Levites, one at Jerusalem around the ark and one back at Gibeon.

Now, here is where we come to what is so important to the chronicler: the use of music and hymns. Now, I don't know that the chronicler knew that David particularly used these songs and these hymns in terms of the installation of the ark. What the chronicler was doing was choosing hymns from the Psalter, the kinds of things that they sang around the temple, which told them, which made confession of who God is, of who the Holy One of Israel is.

These are psalms you want to go back to. I used to teach Psalm 105-106 because they're parallel psalms, one of them talking about the covenant promise that God makes with Israel and the second one talking about all of the judgments that came upon Israel because of their disobedience in relation to the covenant. They're related to each other.

Well, the psalmist starts off then with Psalm 105, and in Psalm 105, we have the only time that he actually uses the name Jacob because it's part of the psalm. God made a beret, he made a covenant with Abraham, and he made a covenant with Jacob, and it is to that point in the psalm that the chronicler gives the quotation, all of the verses of the psalm. And then he breaks out in this praise, which is so much a part of the Psalms, namely to say that God who made this covenant with Abraham was making a covenant that all nations of the world should be blessed.

There's nothing partial about this. This is the center of the world and though it may not look like it, don't ever mistake what is happening here. This is the universal kingdom and so we know Psalm 96 and Psalm 98 as being those what we call sometimes enthronement songs.

Let the Lord reign or the Lord reigns and then we have several parts to this song, which tells us about the way in which God is present in his rule and the way he exercises his justice and his rule over all of the earth. This is what the chronicler wants us to know: the universal reign of God. It's all nations, and all nations are going to come and bow down.

Then he comes back to Psalm 106 but uses only the very last verses from this psalm of confession to talk about the blessing of the Lord that comes upon those people who seek him. This is really the point that he's been wanting to make. It's not that Israel or David hasn't ever failed, but the kingdom will be theirs because they are the ones who are faithful, and they are the ones that God is going to honor and bless.

This brings us to this very, very famous passage of Nathan coming to David. We know that in Samuel, David is now on his throne, and he says, I have peace. I have rest from the enemies all round about. The word rest is a word that comes from Joshua.

It means that God has brought about his salvation. He's brought about his deliverance, and now they have rest. They're in God's kingdom, and so David says, here I am in a palace, and God's ark dwells in a tent.

I'm going to build a house for God. And Nathan says you should do that, but then Nathan receives a word from God, and God tells Nathan, you got this all backward. David is not building a house for me.

I am building a house for David. Now, here's a bit of a play on the word house, and we see it in Psalm 127, 1 and 2. A psalm that many of us know very well, a part of the pilgrim songs in which, except the Lord guard the house, the watchman watches in vain, except the Lord build the people or the city, the protectors watch in vain. Now, in the play on the word house, there is not a building; the play on the word city is not a physical structure.

It goes on to talk about family. Blessed is the person who has a family whose quiver is full. In other words, the house is the people.

The city is the people and the house that God is building for David is the people. It's the people who are going to be part of this promise. So, David now comes to realize through the message of this prophecy that his is an eternal kingdom and that he represents the people who are God's people and they are a people that will go on forever.

So, we have David's response. It's a response of humility. Lord, says David, there's no reason why I should be the man after your own heart.

There's nothing I have done that makes me worthy of you having chosen me. He then goes on to talk about Israel. He says, you know, this is the smallest of all nations.

They're the least worthy of having some sort of significance in this world, but you have chosen them. Then, David goes on to affirm that what the chronicler wants us all to know is true. This is God's kingdom.

And so, these people who are gathered together here are the ones who represent the one and only kingdom that really matters. And the process has begun because the ark is now stationed in Jerusalem, the place that God had chosen for his name to dwell. And there is where the people are going to gather to worship God and to be his kingdom.

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