

Dr. August Konkell, Chronicles, Session 11, Leaders of Israel

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This is Dr. August Konkell in his teaching on the books of Chronicles. This is session 11, Leaders of Israel. A kingdom needs leaders.

The chronicler's focus is not going to be on the leaders that he mentioned earlier in connection with David building his empire. It isn't going to ignore those leaders, but rather the chronicler's concern for the leaders of Israel is the leaders that represent Israel as the kingdom of God. So, he takes a whole series of chapters here, which again might seem to us to be quite uninteresting.

But actually, if we start to probe the details of these chapters, they are quite significant. Who is important as the leaders of the nation? Well, the chronicler is going to use five chapters here, 23 to 26, well not quite five. The chapters from 23 to 26 is going to use to talk about the leaders of Israel as those who conduct the function of the temple, the worship around the temple.

These are the leaders of Israel as a nation for what it really represents. Then, in chapter 27, he's going to talk a little bit more about the administration of the empire. Yes, of course, the empire needs an administration, and he isn't going to leave that part out.

But his first concern is everything that David does to prepare for the temple. One of the things that David does to prepare for the temple is not just choosing the temple site and preparing all of the materials, which he's begun to introduce in chapter 22 in his charge to Solomon. He's got to make provision for the leaders, and these leaders are the Levites.

So now the chronicler is going to not talk about the genealogies of the Levites and the way they're structured in terms of their legitimation. That is how they trace their descendants back to Levi so that they are the ones who are qualified to act as the leaders around the temple. Rather, he's going to talk about the organization and the way David puts these divisions of Levites into their different functions.

And so, he's going to talk about the Levites as a whole. He's going to divide them up. Then, he's going to talk about the priests who are a particular part of the Levites.

Then, the musicians are, as we have seen, critical to the function of the temple. Then, the gatekeepers, another very critical and important role of the temple. And then, finally, he's going to talk about the officers and judges of the Levites who conduct the business of the citizenship of the kingdom.

So, we move on here then to see the way in which David prepares for all of the organization. Now, we've mentioned a couple of times that the duties of the Levites change once you have a centralized temple. And once all of the worship takes place around that temple.

And so, there are several areas of Levitical service that are specifically outlined. And the numbers here represent the proportionality of the Levites in terms of their service. So, in the service of the temple, and this will have to do with all the daily rituals and everything else that goes on and maintaining the presence of the worship of God, the lighting of the candles and the maintaining of the bread and all of the work that goes on with the temple.

That's the main business, and that's 24,000. And then, as we've mentioned, the Levites are the judges and the officers. The officers seem to have a kind of record-keeping role.

These are a group of people who are mentioned in other ancient records as well as who are assistants in some fashion to political leaders or judicial leaders. So, there's 6,000 of those. Then there's the security.

They've got to make sure that no one who shouldn't be there gets into the temple. And there are 4,000. And then there's the musicians.

And there are also another 4,000. They are the ones then who provide for the music of the temple in those times when they have their festivals, their pilgrimages, and their times of praise, some of which are mentioned in the Psalms. So, what the chronicler here then does in Leviticus 23 is he comes back to the three sons of Levi, who we've come to be familiar with already, that is, Gershon, Kohath, and Merari.

And he outlines them in terms of 24 families. The number 24 is going to become significant. As we shall see later on, he actually counts out the assignments of these families in their Levitical duties.

But what the 24 families do is serve one week of the – each family serves two weeks of the whole calendar year, the way the Jewish calendar year worked and operated. They had a calendar year of 12 months. Then, on occasion, on the seventh month, they threw in a 13th month, but their calendar year was always 12 months.

And so, the Levitical families were divided up that way. And as we've noted before, we talk about patriarchalism sometimes in a very negative way. But in the Scriptures, it's not meant to be negative.

Now, it's all about rights and power. Patriarchalism, in its definition, is just a system of organization whereby you understand who holds the titles of property and who is representative of families according to a certain representative of the family. In this case, it was a male.

And it doesn't mean that they were the only ones who had power. And it doesn't mean that if there wasn't a male, that therefore that family fell out and no longer qualified. That's not the way patriarchalism worked.

Now you won't get that message very much in a lot of the activist writing that goes on, especially the activist writing in relation to the Scriptures these days. But here were the daughters of Mali, a Levite who didn't have sons, and they were represented through their husbands. Something that is very carefully noted by the chronicler.

So, this change of role is one in which there is a much less sharp distinction between Levites and priests. Back in the Book of Numbers, Levites do the duties that are called avodah. They're all the physical work that goes on in the care and transportation of the tabernacle.

And that's what's called in the Hebrew language their service or their avodah, their work. Now, the definition of work, of course, is always something that changes. And this especially changes in relation to Levites.

So, whereas previously priests were very distinguished in their actual work of the care of the tabernacle itself, which was much smaller and much less elaborate and needed much less work in that sense, but it needed work in another sense because it had to be taken down, had to be moved, had to be cared for, all sorts of repairs of the canvases and everything else. That changes. And now the chronicler speaks of their avodah as Levitical priests.

In other words, they work alongside the priests. And probably that had to do with the regular baking of the bread, which had to be changed every day, on the table of showbread, the producing of the oil, the gathering of the oil for the candelabras and for the menorahs, as they called them. And the numerous other functions that they would have needed to maintain the incense, the fires, the utensils, and everything else.

So, all of that was greatly increased. And the priests can't do all of this. So, the Levites work alongside the priests in the service of the temple as an avodah.

They also cared for the storerooms to maintain the purity of the sacred objects. After all, the old tabernacle was stored in the temple, along with various other artifacts that had to be protected and stored. So, those became the duties of the Levites.

The chronicler then goes on with their divisions. And here he numbers them from 1 to 24. There is sometimes quite a bit of discussion about the origin of what is called the 24 orders of the Levites.

Now, we do know that by the time we get to the New Testament, there is a very distinct order of Levites, in which all of the families of the Levites are divided into 24 different orders. And each of these orders serves a week in turn. One order serves two weeks of the calendar year of 12 months.

That's well established in New Testament times. The question is, when did this begin? Now, Chronicles really helps us to begin to answer that question. Some would use this as a way of dating the book of Chronicles.

And so, because they believe that they have some external means of judging when the order of 24 courses and rotations of Levites came into being, that must be the time when Chronicles was written. But of course, that's a bit of a circular argument because that in itself doesn't establish when Chronicles was written. When did the 24 orders begin? Well, there are many signs in Chronicles that the practices of the orders as we know them, when we get to the temple in the time of Jesus, had its origins in the beginning of the time of the chronicler.

If we take the time of the chronicler according to the information it gives us, which is in the book of Chronicles itself, namely the genealogies and its history, which puts us in the Persian Empire about the end of the 5th century, 400 or so, maybe the beginning of the 4th century in the 300s, this is when some of these things are already established. Now, in the chronicler's depiction of things, its origins really go back much further than that. This is what David did when David organized all the musicians, the Levites, and the temple servants around the temple.

Of course, we don't have any historical means of knowing independently what David really did. But from that point of view, of course, there's no reason for us to say that the chronicler was wrong in saying that this was David's idea right from the start. Now, there's a repetition here.

We sometimes talk about the use of sources that the chronicler had. Well, here's an instance where we very clearly see his source. His source of Levites was 23, chapter 23, verses 3 to 23.

And in verses 20 to 31, he takes exactly that same list and extends it by a couple of generations. So, it's a repetition of who the Levites are but now extended to 40 or so, 50 years later. So, the chronicler is giving us, in this sense, a very historical picture of what is going on.

And now, after all of that, we come to the organization of the national officials. And here is where we have the administration of the empire. So, the chronicler doesn't leave this out, but he talks about the military commanders in all the different portions of the empire: the tribal officers, the civil administrators, and then the royal council.

So, it's not that the kingdom of David lacked in terms of the administration of an empire. It's just that the chronicler can put all of that into one chapter because what's really important to him is for us to understand and see how David made preparations for what he knew was the most important thing of all, namely the function of the temple in representing the kingdom of God.

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