

Dr. August Konkell, Chronicles, Session 14, The Divine Presence

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This is Dr. August Konkell in his teaching on the books of Chronicles. This is session 14, The Divine Presence.

In this session, we want to continue pursuing the Chronicler's presentation of the temple.

A big part of that presentation is the installation of the Ark. As we have already emphasized in the function of the temple, the reason that this is so significant is because it represents the relationship between the holy, the creator, the life-giver, and those to whom he gives life, and to those especially who represent him in that life, namely those in his image, we as his people. So, the placing of the Ark in the most holy place is one of great ceremonies and one of great significance.

It is in the placing of the Ark in the temple that we especially see that what this represents is the divine presence in creation, but not the divine presence in the sense that God has somehow limited space and time. Rather, it represents the divine presence in terms of God's rule. Holiness and life are almost synonymous in the Hebrew mind because life can only come from the holy.

Life is not inherent to the common. There is nothing in the elements of the earth as we know them that has the power to generate that which we call life. This is a gift.

It is something that comes from the holy. That is the way the Hebrews conceive of it. So, this life-giving power, this holiness, and in that sense God's presence is especially seen in the installation of the Ark.

So beginning in chapter 5, verse 2, all the way to chapter 6, verse 11, we have the whole ceremony in which the Ark is now moved from the tent in which David had placed it when he brought it up from Kiriath Yarim to it coming into the most holy place in the temple. And, of course, as we have already alluded, this most holy place is an exclusive place outside of the common, the earth that God has created. And so that is then designated by darkness.

It's an appropriate metaphor in the sense that darkness removes us from the concept of God being limited by time, and darkness removes us from the concept of God being limited by space. Because God has created time and space, he is not limited by these things.

So, the way in which to represent this dimension of holiness is darkness. Of course, God can also be symbolized by light. And in Psalm 104, we have that metaphor used in a very dynamic and powerful way that God is the splendor of light, and he's the splendor of all that is life, and that is beautiful.

So it's not that life cannot represent life and goodness and cannot represent God. It does represent God, and it does represent life, and Jesus is the light of the world. But the most holy place in the temple is to represent something else.

It represents the fact that God stands outside of time and space. The best way to represent that is in terms of darkness. Because in the darkness, we do not know anything about space, and in the darkness, we don't know anything about time.

Those people who've been committed to some of the worst of suffering, which is to be held in a dark cell where you don't even have any idea of day or night, or the passing of time, is really illustrative of the way in which for us to function normally we need to know something about time, and we just need to know something about space. That is absolute persecution to put a person into that kind of situation, which has been done many times. But in terms of representing God, it is most appropriate, because it is a reminder that God is in another dimension.

So, the ark is placed inside the most holy place, which indicates God's rule. Now, a little note about dwelling must be said here again. When we hear the word dwelling, where God has placed his name to dwell or the place that God has chosen where he will dwell, we have the tendency to think of dwelling as a location and that there is some kind of special way in which there is the presence of God here.

But Solomon will deny that that is the case. He is going to say, the heaven of heavens cannot contain you how much less this house that I have built. So, then, what does dwelling mean? Well, we actually get a proper sense of what they mean by dwell when we look at the way in which it is used by other ancient kings.

So, a king will place a statue in a certain territory, and when he places that in that territory, it tells you that he dwells there. Now, that doesn't mean that the king, in some physical way, is there. He's not.

This is just a representation of the king. He doesn't dwell there. What it means is that he rules there.

So, this can be demonstrated from many, many inscriptions. When God says, that's where I dwell, it means this represents my rule. That's what the cherubim are all about.

So, we have to get it out of our minds that the Hebrews had some sense that there was a special physical presence of God here. That wasn't the way in which they reduced the holiness of God to their own dimensions. They didn't do that.

Rather, they were making a confession that God is the ruler of all of the earth. And this is a representation of the fact that he rules in all the earth. So, as you know, when the ark is placed in the most holy place, there is the fire, and there is the glory that is absolutely overwhelming.

It represents exactly what happened when Moses dedicated the tabernacle at the end of the book of Exodus in chapter 34. This is a repetition. It is the same thing that happened when David offered the sacrifice on the threshing floor of Arunah when he said, this is going to be the temple site.

God does manifest the fact that he is present among us in the sense that he rules among us. He gives us life. We are dependent on him.

There is a little poem there. It's quite abbreviated in Chronicles and it's quite abbreviated in Kings. But from the various versions of it in all of the scriptural manuscripts, we can reproduce it a little bit more completely.

Not that it matters all that much. It doesn't change the essence of its meaning, but it fills it out a little bit for us. The Lord made manifest his son in the heavens.

He has chosen to dwell in deep darkness, saying, build my house, a house fitting for yourself that you may abide in a new way. As you can see, this has been constructed from the LXX as well as the Book of Kings. So, God is building a house so that he can manifest his presence among us in a new way.

Now, the way in which the Psalms reflect some of this. Here, I've got Psalm 36, verses eight and nine, where it talks about the temple. This really talks about the way in which the temple represents life.

You can look back to see the context of these verses, but they feast on the abundance of your house. You give them drink from your river of the lights, for with you is the fountain of life in your light. We see light.

This is a celebration of what the temple represents and the way in which the glory and beauty of all creation around us come from God but are represented by the temple. Or here we have another line, which comes from Psalm 134, the last of the ascent Psalms, as we call them in the Psalter. Lift up your hands in the sanctuary and bless Yahweh.

May Yahweh bless you from Zion, the maker of heaven and earth. So, the maker of heaven and earth and the sanctuary are very closely linked. The sanctuary represents creation, and the most holy place represents the creator.

So, we come then to Solomon's dedication prayer, where Solomon makes a confession of the temple function. This is not God's space; rather, it is the place that represents his rule. It couldn't be God's space because God's throne is the heavens and the heaven of heavens.

So, it's not his space, but it is the place from which he rules. And that is made very clear in this chapter. Heaven is my throne.

The earth is my footstool. Where is the house you will build for me? Where will my resting place be? Has not my hand made all these things so they came into being? Now, in that last closing part of Isaiah, there is a wonderful prophetic declaration of exactly what the temple represents. There's a lot of conflict represented in the last part of the book of Isaiah between different groups of people and the worship of God.

But this is a triumphant declaration that comes from the group that wants to faithfully understand God and his presence. And so, the point is that we can't allow these rituals around the temple to somehow think that they have some implicit power in themselves, that just because you do the ritual, you have accomplished the acknowledgment and worship of God. No, it's just a ritual.

It's just something you do. It has significance if you know what it means. But if you don't know what it means, it's just another action.

Now, we have these kinds of rituals all the time. I have a little story that I can tell. If you look here, you can see on my finger a wedding band.

And when we go to a wedding, there's always quite a ceremony about putting this ring on the fourth finger of the left hand because it symbolizes something about the vow that is being taken. Now, you can put any kind of ring on a finger, and it's just putting a ring on a finger. You can put a wedding band on a finger, but if it's not part of the ceremony, it doesn't mean anything.

However, when it's part of that ceremony, it's no longer just a ritual. It's no longer just an action. And I found out how important that is because through a series of events, somewhat due to my excitement and carelessness, I forgot the rings.

The result was they had to go back to be fetched. The result was that people sat in the sanctuary and waited for about 20 to 30 minutes, listening to the organist and

waiting for the groom to show up with the rings. You just, you can't get along without the ritual.

So, it's, I got a lesson in the fact that it's not that you can be married without a ring. But I challenge you in our context to get married without a ring. I found out you can't do that very easily.

Well, the temple is a little bit the same way. And that's what the Prophet here is saying. What is this building? Well, it's just a building in the realm of the common.

If you don't understand what this building represents and what these rituals are all about, then it's nothing. So, what is this house? Remember what it represents. It represents the one who has made all these things so they come into being.

That's the temple of the chronicler's day. It's passages like this the chronicler has in mind. So, then the chronicler comes to his own conclusions of Solomon's petitions in Psalm chapter 6. Here is where he doesn't just follow the book of Kings, which is his source.

But he goes back to Psalm 132, 8 to 10. And what is Psalm 132, 8 to 10? That is the whole account of David bringing the Ark from Kiriath and placing it in the most holy place so that it may have its resting place and represent God. And that's what these verses specifically say in verses 8 to 10.

They say that God will now rise. He is demonstrating the fact that he is the king. He is the one who reigns because the Ark is in its place, and it represents his power and his presence.

The chronicler combines that with another very important verse from Isaiah 54. Isaiah 54 concludes a very important section in the book by referring back to David and the Davidic promise. As we have seen, the Davidic promise is very, very important to the chronicler.

In fact, his whole concept of who they are as a people depends on this Davidic promise. And Isaiah 54 says, God will remember the sure mercies of David. Now, the sure mercies of David are not the mercies that David performed, but rather, they are the mercies that God assured that David would receive.

That is what it means in Isaiah 54. And that's what the chronicler is referring to here. Now we are seeing God carrying out the sure mercies of David.

So, in 2 Chronicles 7, we have the divine presence, the dedication ceremony, and then the vision. The chronicler doesn't say this was at Gibeon, as it does in Kings, but Solomon has this vision. And really, it has many of the same warnings.

Unfaithfulness and this temple are gone, and people are going to marvel at how it was possible that such a magnificent building could just disappear. But what is really most important here is verse 14. And in many ways, this has all the key vocabulary of the chronicler.

If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves. Now, we haven't referred to that word yet, but that is a very important word to the chronicler. Humbling ourselves.

It's probably one of the hardest things for us as humans to do. Humility doesn't in any sense come natural to us. We like to emphasize our power, our ability, those things that we can do.

But before God, we can only be humble. If my people, which are called by my name, will humble themselves, will pray, and will seek my face, then will I hear from heaven, not just this temple, but I will hear from heaven, and I will turn, and I will heal. Now, this is very key vocabulary.

When the chronicler comes to discussing the kings that we're going to be looking at in these coming sessions, the big question is, do they know how to humble themselves? Do they know how to seek the face of God? And will they experience God's healing? Those are all words that he's going to use repeatedly. Unfortunately, in the very end, what characterizes them is the same thing that characterizes Saul. They were unfaithful.

But the chronicler has some powerful examples of what can happen if you become humble, and if you seek God's face, and if you experience his healing.

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