

Dr. August Konkell, Chronicles, Session 23, Faithful King

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This is Dr. August Konkell in his teaching on the books of Chronicles. This is session 23, Faithful King.

In our last session, we left Hezekiah with the celebration of the Passover, and as we pointed out, that was a most significant event because, in some ways, it was a restoration of the covenant with all Israel. The new situation is that Israel is no longer present. It went into exile during the reign of Ahaz, the father of Hezekiah.

So, the shrines at Bethel and Dan were no longer operative. Hezekiah was free to appeal to everyone in the northern tribes to return to the temple at Jerusalem. They were not impeded by any political divisions.

So, the messengers went out with the invitation to come to Jerusalem, which was enormously successful and enabled them to celebrate the redemption of the Passover, the coming out of Egypt, and that which would make them a people as they moved on to Mount Sinai and there received the divine covenant. So, this renewal in which all Israel is now brought together as a redeemed people by the Passover under Hezekiah is followed by the restoration of the temple itself and Hezekiah's faithfulness in spite of the adversaries, and here is where the chronicler is going to talk a little bit more about that which we are so familiar with in Kings and Isaiah. Kings calls Hezekiah a most faithful king, more faithful than any of the other kings before him.

That's in 2 Kings 18, verses about 4 through 6. That's really a remarkable statement that Hezekiah should be more faithful than any of the other kings before him because, of course, in Kings, there are two stories that end with the ways in which Hezekiah was really quite unfaithful and which resulted in the fact that Judah itself was going to go into exile. But the chronicler tells the story of Hezekiah in a way that really does portray the faithfulness of Hezekiah not only in the realm of bringing the nation together at the Passover, not only in the realm of the restoration of the temple but also in the realm of his political activities. So, the next aspect of the story of Hezekiah that the chronicler is going to tell us about is his restoration of the temple.

Hezekiah had restored the Passover in a way that had never been observed previously, and now he restores the temple in a way that no other king before him had done, and restores the temple so that it represents really what it was supposed to represent under Solomon. Much like David and Solomon, Hezekiah provides for all of the contributions to the temple, he provides for all of the administration of the

contributions, and then we get a summary of the way in which the whole temple was restored. Now, when you read this chapter, think back to the way in which the temple of Solomon was presented.

What David did is make all the preparations in gathering together the materials. Then what David did is organize the Levites into all their different functions, the musicians, the gatekeepers, the priests, so that Solomon could come along and build the temple because the provisions were there for all the materials, and the organization was there for all of the supporting personnel. This is duplicated in Hezekiah.

This king does what David and Solomon have done. He makes all the necessary contributions, and he provides for all the administration. The temple now begins to be what it was supposed to be under the days of Solomon without compromise. Now, after all of these good things, we come to the story that is most prominent in Kings and Isaiah, namely the attack of Sennacherib in 701.

So, after all of these good things, Sennacherib comes along as the king of destruction, as the one who is to undo all of this. So, the first 23 verses of this chapter really rehearse in a much-abbreviated fashion all of what is related in about three chapters in Kings and repeated in Isaiah. Namely it's the preparations which Hezekiah made in provision for water in time of a siege.

It's the provisions that he made in relation to defending against the attack of the Assyrians and the way in which he especially trusted God, and this is what makes him so faithful. So if we go back to the story in Kings, we are told how the taunters came along to the wall, did what invading armies always do, tried to persuade the citizens of the besieged city that they should just surrender, that if they submit to their captivating armies, it's going to be the best for them, and maybe some of them will become slaves, but this is going to be what's peace. Conquerors always claim that what they're really doing is making peace, and that's what these taunters around the wall of Jerusalem in the days of Hezekiah were doing, and there we know the story of how Hezekiah, when he's left with no defenses, whatever, takes the letters of Rabshakah, and he takes them before the cherubim, which are in the temple, and he spreads them out, and he says, Lord, you see these letters, and you see all of these threats.

And, of course, in the story of Kings, we know how, in one night, the angel of the Lord came along and slew 185,000 of the Assyrian armies. A whole lot of energy has been put into trying to understand what might have happened at this event that prevented the Assyrians from taking the city of Jerusalem captive. The one thing that's not doubted, in any sense, whatever, is that Sennacherib did not succeed in taking Jerusalem captive, and we know that Sennacherib did not succeed in taking Jerusalem captive because he himself says so.

In his records of the Taylor Prism or any one of the others that we want to use of the Assyrian annals, Sennacherib boasts of how he took 200,000 captives from the province of Judah and how he conquered every fortified city, and then he says, I left Hezekiah caged up like a bird in his capital city of Jerusalem. Now, of course, Assyrians are never defeated, so Sennacherib is never going to admit in his annals that he was defeated, but in fact, of course, he was defeated because he didn't take the city of Jerusalem. Jerusalem not only remained standing as a city, but it went on to thrive as a province and would, in fact, outlive the Assyrian nation and would survive until the time of the Babylonians.

So, Sennacherib was, in reality, the loser, but of course, that's not the way that the Assyrians wanted to present it. The chronicler only says that Hezekiah was simply being faithful and that God preserved Jerusalem because of Hezekiah's faithfulness. Now, it's not that Hezekiah was without trial, and the chronicler alludes to these things, though he says Hezekiah was faithful even in these trials.

Now, the story in Kings concludes with two short stories. These two short stories took place during the reign of Hezekiah. They didn't take place in the chronological sequence that's given in Kings.

We know that from the historical reference to Merodach-Baladan, who sent his tribute to Hezekiah and sought Hezekiah's alliances in trying to ally Babylon against the Assyrians at that point in time. And so, we know that that was before Sennacherib. But that is the time in which Hezekiah became ill, and he was told by the prophet Isaiah, you're going to die.

Hezekiah found this very painful, and he prayed because he seemed to him that this was not the appropriate time for him to die. And so, the prophet Isaiah comes back to him with the message that the Lord has granted you a reprieve, and you're going to have 15 years added to your life, and there's going to be a sign that you receive with this. So, here's where Hezekiah is contrasted with Ahaz.

Ahaz, when he's offered a sign by the prophet, says, no, I don't need any signs. Hezekiah says, ask for a sign, no, well then, okay, if that's the promise, what is the sign? So, Hezekiah is here completely contrasted again with his predecessor Ahaz. The sign is that the shadow moves back in the dial of Ahaz, whatever it was they used to measure time by the moving of the shadow, 15 degrees, 15 steps.

No other explanation is given, and we don't need any other explanation for exactly how this phenomenon, this sign, took place. The whole point is that Hezekiah was here faithful. And then, of course, there was this matter of the Merodach-Baladan and the embassy where Hezekiah really acquiesced to the messengers of Merodach-Baladan, and for which he is severely condemned by Isaiah.

But the chronicler only goes on to say that in the matter of Hezekiah being tested, in the end, he was found faithful. Now, that's a true, proper way to represent Hezekiah because though the story in Kings ends on the note of Merodach-Baladan, its conclusion in relation to the attack of Sennacherib, which came some years later, makes it very clear that Hezekiah did not allow that failure to become a defeat in his life. From that point on, he became faithful, and his faithfulness was particularly shown in the way that he relied on God in the time of the attack of Sennacherib.

So, the Chronicler has interpreted the story of Kings perfectly correctly. Kings said Hezekiah was the most faithful king ever, and Chronicles says, yes, he was the most faithful king ever, and look what he did. He restored the Passover, he restored the temple, and when this great test of Sennacherib came upon him, he was found faithful, and in these other matters he could humble himself, and he showed his faithfulness.

So, the Chronicler really gives us a summary of someone who is a faithful king. Faithfulness does not mean without failure, and that is something we always need to remember. There's not a question of whether we're going to fail.

We're human. We all fail, every one of us. In one way or another, we fail, we get caught off guard, we do what we wished we hadn't done.

The question is, what are you going to do when you fail? How do you respond to your failure? And in both Kings and Chronicles, the point is the same. Hezekiah could acknowledge his failure, but that wasn't going to be the end of his story. And failure was going to be the thing that characterized him.

Failure to be faithful to God and trust God were what would characterize him. And Hezekiah is an example of how you can fail, of how you can be tested, but how you can be remembered for something quite different than this failure. So that Hezekiah is remembered, not for what happened with Merodach Baladan.

Hezekiah for Kings and Hezekiah for Chronicles is remembered because he was faithful. That's his legacy. We need to ask ourselves, what will be our legacy? And we need to say that our highest ambition is to make our legacy of faithfulness to God.

That doesn't mean it's without failure, but it does mean that we are remembered for our faithfulness.

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