

Dr. August Konkell, Chronicles, Session 25, Future of Israel

© 2024 Gus Konkell and Ted Hildebrandt

This is Dr. August Konkell in his teaching on the books of Chronicles. This is session 25, Future of Israel.

We ended our last talk with Josiah and his death at the hands of the Egyptians.

The Egyptians, at that point, take control and establish who it is that's going to reign in Judah, but the Egyptian control is rather short-lived because it is the Babylonians that are going to rise and come into power and are going to determine the fate of Jerusalem. This isn't a surprise. Jeremiah, when he was called, and this would have been, we assume, before the discovery of the law in the temple, was told by God that his mission was to give the message of uprooting, pulling down, and destroying.

In other words, there was a judgment coming. But there was another dimension to Jeremiah's prophecy, and that was that there's a new covenant and that there's hope. Now, I think Chronicles is very much in keeping with the vision of Jeremiah.

So, I think that in Chronicles, what we have is not the sad end of the kingdom of Judah but rather the question about the future of all Israel. The Chronicler now lives 100 years after these events—well, 200 years after the events of the fall of Jerusalem.

And here they are, a small community, and they are around the temple. They're in no sense a political state or a nation, but they are the nation of God. And the Chronicler sees them as being the kingdom of God.

So, if this is what they are, the question is about the future, which the Chronicler doesn't try to describe. I think he's probably a proper eschatologist in that way. Not too many details about the future, just we know that God's kingdom is going to come and God is going to restore his creation and ruin his creation the way that he intended.

And the Chronicler wants us to know that we can be a part of it. That's pretty much the limit of the specifics of his eschatology. And I think we may do well sometimes to limit our understandings and speculations about eschatology to something about that same generic kind of level.

But in any case, what the Chronicler does do for us is tell us about the last kings of Judah. After Josiah, the kingdom of Judah does continue to survive as a subservient vassal state. None of these kings are independent.

They're all paying taxes to either Egypt and then mostly again to Babylon. And then, every time they resist or join some other alliance, the result is that they are punished. And so, the final punishment is the end of the nation.

The first king that we have after the death of Josiah is his son Jehoahaz, who the people of the land appoint. But that's not very satisfactory to the Egyptians. They don't want somebody else's appointment in Jerusalem.

They want their king there. So the Egyptians depose him and levy tribute, and they put his younger brother Eliakim and make him a vassal ruler and, of course, change his name. He ruled for about 11 years and was exiled.

And Jehoiachin, his son, becomes exiled to Babylon. The Babylonians put another son of Josiah on the throne, whose last name is Zedekiah. And it is under Zedekiah that we have the terrible siege of Jerusalem by the Babylonians and the terrible end of the family of Zedekiah as they are pursued by the Babylonians and killed, all of these things done in Zedekiah's presence.

It is all of the horrors of war. But for the chronicler, the emphasis is on the nation was unfaithful, which means that they have violated God's covenant. It's not just another way of saying they sinned because failure and sin is one kind of thing.

It's a failure of faith. It's a failure of trust that is so critical. The last kings of Judah had never manifested that trust and we see this especially in Jeremiah.

We see this especially with the way Jeremiah was treated and the way his life ends with the destruction of Jerusalem and eventually with him being exiled into Egypt. But Jeremiah doesn't end without hope. In the same way, the Chronicler wants to give us hope.

So, Jeremiah, in chapter 25, tells us that after 70 years, there is going to be a restoration. And Jeremiah talks about a new covenant that God is going to have with his people. The chronicler concludes with a theology about all of this.

It's a theology of the Sabbath. The book of Leviticus, back in Moses's Torah, declared that the land was to have rest every seventh year. But in all the time that the Israelites had lived on the land, which was approximately 490 years, they had never observed the Sabbath the way that they were supposed to, according to Moses' instruction.

So, the 70 years of the Babylonian exile are a kind of theological statement. God gave the land rest from the Israelites for all of the years that they had neglected it during

the 490 years that they were there. This is the explicit statement of the chronicler, but he doesn't invent it.

He gets it from the book of Leviticus itself. So, we can count the 70 years in different ways because there was a process of the people going into exile and there was a process of the people returning. So, we can look at that process from the beginning of the people who went into exile.

The first of them is Daniel, and that really begins with about 609 at the death of Josiah. It ends with the decree of Cyrus, which is what the chronicler refers to at the end of his book in the year 539. Or, we can count the 70 years from the destruction of the temple, which is 586, to the laying of the foundation as we find it in Ezra and Nehemiah, which is 516.

The main point is that the 70 is the representative number to talk about the consequences of the failure to observe and to keep God's covenant. Jeremiah talked about a new covenant. I want to conclude these thoughts about chronicles by saying that this new covenant and its restoration in the mind of the apostle Paul is in no sense apart from what the chronicler calls all Israel.

In the book of Romans, one of the things that Paul turns to is his thoughts of God's plans for Israel, God's future for Israel, in Romans 9 through 11. So, the whole argument of Paul here is the question: if the Gentiles have all turned to the gospel, has God forgotten about all Israel? Has God forgotten about his people? To which his answer, in short, is, well, may it never be. I am an Israelite.

Now, here becomes the key question. How do we define Israel? We talk about Israel and use the term as if we know what we meant, but the fact of the matter is that if you go through the scriptures, the term Israel has many different what we might call references. That is, it has many different specific entities to which it refers.

As we know, in the very beginning, Israel is just the man Jacob. The chronicler makes that point because, right from the beginning, he says that the sons of Abraham were Isaac, Esau, and Israel, not Jacob. So, that's one of the references of Israel.

But another reference to Israel is the northern kingdom as opposed to the kingdom of Judah in the south. So, if you're reading the Book of Kings and you read the name Israel, you have to know, yeah, but Israel there doesn't mean Jerusalem. It only means Ephraim and Manasseh and all of those territories that had their capital at Samaria.

So, that's another designation of Israel. Actually, if you start to read in detail, you begin to multiply the references that Israel can have. But the chronicler describes all of Israel in none of those terms.

He defines it in terms of promise. He defines it in terms of ethnicity. And he defines it in terms of those people through whom God is going to bring about his kingdom.

Now, it is so interesting to me that when Paul uses the term Israel in Romans 9 to 11, he really follows completely the idea of Israel the way that we find it in Chronicles. This is Israel. And yes, there is a future for this Israel.

So, in order to understand that future, we need to understand the nature of the gospel. And the nature of the gospel here, Paul kind of follows the book of Deuteronomy. In Deuteronomy 29, we see how Israel comes under the curse of the covenant for its failure to have faith and its disobedience.

But in chapter 30 of Deuteronomy, how God restores them and brings him his word and that they have his truth. Paul follows that argument to say that this is the process that is happening. And he applies it to Israel as he knows it in his time.

God is going to bring Israel to himself through the gospel. In chapter 11, he explains how this is going to happen, that the Gentiles aren't the root of the tree.

They've been grafted in. And if they could be grafted in, surely the original root is still there. And that Israel and that promise is still there.

And so, for Paul, all Israel, and by that, he means the Israel of faith. He doesn't mean a state. He doesn't mean some political entity.

He doesn't mean some genetic descendancy. As we've seen in Chronicles, Israel never was limited to some specific genetic descendancy. Nor does the Chronicle ever define Israel as a political state.

No, rather, it's a people. It's a people. And at points in time, they have a king.

And at points in time, they do function as a state. But all Israel is all of the people so at his point in time, he can still talk about all Israel as being the people of faith. The ones that God has redeemed.

And you know that because they're worshipping. And they're worshipping around the temple. This kind of brings me to, I think, the one closing point important for Christians in Chronicles.

How should we manifest the kingdom of God? We pray the Lord's Prayer. Our Father who art in heaven, may your name be held holy. May your kingdom come.

May your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. And God's will is done on earth as it is in heaven. Insofar as we, as citizens of his kingdom, know how to live according to his purpose and his will.

And what is God's purpose and his will? Well, that we manifest his glory. That we represent him. And how does that happen? The Chronicler is clear.

It happens in our giving of praise, in our collective giving of praise, and, frankly, it happens in church, where God's people gather together.

The notion that Christians don't need church is simply contrary to absolutely everything that there is in the Scriptures. And it's certainly contrary to the concept of belonging to the people of God as we see it in Chronicles. What's the most important thing we can do? The most important thing we can do is to show our praise.

We gather together in worship to show our faith and to confess what we believe about life.

Yes, that includes music and singing. Actually, I'm a preacher, and I like to think that good sermons are at the heart of worship.

And that's what is compelling to everybody. But you know, the Chronicler isn't so high on big sermons and good sermons. He's got lots of them.

They come from the prophets. They come at different times. The sermon's got its place.

But don't appreciate the way in which worship is expressed. Through music. Through all of these rituals and activities which we do.

Because they're showing our faith in God and they are his testimony to his kingdom. And that kingdom, says the Chronicler, that kingdom is ours. That's the kingdom that is coming.

And so, with the Chronicler, there can be nothing but hope. If we are the ones who are rallying around God's temple. Of course, Jesus said that he was the temple.

The book of Hebrews presents Jesus as the temple. So, as Christians, of course, we rally around Jesus. And that is how we show our worship.

And Paul says, that is all Israel. It will also include the people that the Chronicler was talking about. They're here.

They're present. And they shall come to be part of this great redemption that God began in Egypt. And that Jesus said was fulfilled in his work at the cross.

And demonstrated it by taking the signs of redemption. The Passover. The bread and the wine.

And saying, this now represents me as the temple. My body. The new covenant.

This is going to be the redemption of God's plan for his world. For all of us and all of Israel. That is the Chronicler's view.

This is Dr. August Konkel in his teaching on the books of Chronicles. This is session 25, Future of Israel.