

1 CHRONICLES: DAVID AND THE ARK OF GOD

by Ray C. Stedman

The books of Chronicles cover the same historical ground that the books of Samuel and Kings do, but from quite a different point of view. These books can be compared to the gospel of John in the New Testament. If you are familiar with the four gospels, you know that the first three -- Matthew, Mark and Luke -- are what we call the synoptical gospels. These three parallel each other and cover the same general incidents, often from the same general viewpoint. But the gospel of John is something quite different. When John sat down to write his gospel, the last New Testament book written (probably about 90 or 95 A.D.), he employed a deliberately selective process. He says, "...Jesus did many other signs...which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God..." (John 20:30,31). He made no attempt to cover the whole of the Lord's ministry. Instead, John carefully selected certain things out of Christ's ministry to illustrate the great point that he wished to make -- here is the one who fulfilled all the divine predictions of the coming of Messiah, the Christ, and furthermore, he is the Son of the living God. This was his purpose. The books of 1 and 2 Chronicles are similar in their selective process.

The central points around which everything in these books gather are the king and the temple. The king was David. In one sense, he is the only king that appears in these two books. He is God's king. The first book centers on him completely. The second book of Chronicles follows the house of David down through the time of the captivity, almost totally ignoring the Northern Kingdom, because this is the book of God's king and the temple.

It is clearly evident that 1 Chronicles was written after the seventy years of Israel's captivity in Babylon. It was probably written by Ezra, the priest, who also wrote the book that bears his name. Ezra was one of the great figures to come back with the captives to re-establish the temple and the worship of Jehovah in Jerusalem. It is with emphasis upon the re-establishment of the worship of Jehovah that this book is written, as well as for the purpose of covering the historical events.

The selective character of 1 Chronicles is evident right in the opening chapters. The first nine chapters are given over to a long list of genealogies. These are not merely the stringing together of a lot of names, however; these genealogies are of great importance. For one thing, they are some of the most helpful material available for anybody attempting to study the problem of biblical chronology. If you are working in this area, you will certainly spend a great deal of time in these opening chapters of Chronicles. But they are far more than that. I know sometimes we are tempted to hurry by these long lists of Bible names. We feel so much like a dear old Scotch preacher who was reading from the opening chapter of Matthew. He started out reading, "Abraham begat Isaac; and Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob begat Judah and his brethren." (Matt. 1:2 KJV) Then he said, "They kept on begatting one another all the way down this side of the page and clear on to the other side." And he picked up the reading and went on from there.

Some of us also would like to dismiss these genealogies, but they are too important for that. If we read them in a hurry, we will miss the point of this whole passage. If you look carefully at them you will see that God is choosing and selecting, excluding and including, working toward an ultimate goal. This genealogy is recorded so that we might see both the goal toward which the Lord works in human history and the principle by which he includes or excludes events. It goes clear back to the dawn of human history and lists the sons and descendants of Adam -- Seth, Enosh, Kenan, Mahalalel. We know the sons of Adam to be Cain, Abel and Seth, but here, immediately, Cain and Abel are excluded. There is no mention of them. The whole focus is upon the descendants of Seth, for from him eventually came the family of Abraham and the Israelites. Here is the principle of exclusion in action. Then the line of Seth is traced down to Enoch and to Noah. The three sons of Noah are given -- Shem, Ham, and Japheth. But Ham and Japheth are dismissed with just a brief word and the attention is focused on the line of Shem. From Shem we trace on down to Abraham and his family. There is this constant narrowing process which then excludes Ishmael, the son of Abraham, and Esau, the son of Jacob, and focuses on Isaac's twelve sons, who became the fathers of the twelve tribes of Israel. As the genealogy goes on, it selects the tribes of Judah and Levi -- the tribes of the king and the priestly line. It traces

the tribe of Judah down to David, to Solomon and then to the kings of the house of David into captivity. The tribe of Levi is traced down to Aaron, the first of the priests, and then to the priests who were prominent in the kingdom at the time of David. In all of these genealogies there is one very choice incident that stands out. It is found in chapter 4, verses 9-10, where we read of Jabez:

Jabez was more honorable than his brothers; and his mother called his name Jabez, saying, "Because I bore him in pain." [Jabez means "pain"] Jabez called on the God of Israel, saying, "Oh that thou wouldst bless me and enlarge my border, and that thy hand might be with me, and that thou wouldst keep me from harm so that it might not hurt me!" And God granted what he asked. {1 Chr 4:9-10 RSV}

That little incident is put right down in the midst of a whole long string of names as a kind of spotlight on this individual.

Now there is always one principle that God follows in this process of selectivity. He includes a man whenever he finds an obedient heart. All the native disability of that man is canceled out and he is immediately made an effectual instrument for the working of God in human history. When God excludes a name, when he turns from a line or a family, it is always on the basis of the appearance of a disobedient heart. On that basis God excludes a man, regardless of rank or ancestry or privilege of any kind. Wherever there is an obedient heart God begins a new line with him. Wherever disobedience occurs, that name is dropped. You can trace this principle throughout this entire genealogy.

This sets the pattern for the rest of the book. In chapter 10 there is a brief account that completely covers the life of King Saul, the first of Israel's kings. Saul is dismissed in only fourteen verses. The reason is given in verses 13 and 14:

So Saul died for his unfaithfulness; he was unfaithful to the Lord in that he did not keep the command of the Lord, and also consulted a medium, seeking guidance, and did not seek guidance from the Lord. Therefore the Lord slew him, and turned the kingdom over to David the son of Jesse. {1 Chr 4:13-14 RSV}

The rest of the book is all about David. David was a king after God's own heart -- a king with an obedient heart. The book traces the whole course of David's life from the moment he was anointed king. In other words, this is the book that emphasizes God's king. David's first act after coming to the place of kingship in Israel is to take over the pagan stronghold of the Jebusites, the city of Jerusalem -- God's city. This is the place where God had chosen to put his name among the tribes of Israel. Immediately following is a flashback to the time of David's exile and to the mighty men gathered around him there. These were men of faith and passion who were attracted to David by the character that he displayed. (One of my favorite Bible stories occurs here in chapter 11, verse 22. This is the story of Benaiah, Jehoiada's son, who, among other things, slew a lion in a pit on a snowy day.) These mighty men who gathered about David and shared his exile eventually became the leaders in his kingdom. All of this is a picture for us of the reign of the Lord Jesus in his coming to earth again. We are promised that we who share his sufferings now will also share his glory when he comes to rule over the earth to establish his kingdom of righteousness. Then the righteousness of God shall cover the earth as the waters cover the sea. In the beautifully descriptive language of the prophets, "...they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks...neither shall they learn war any more" and "They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain..." (Isa. 2:4, 11:9) This is pictured for us by the magnificence, glory, and majesty of the reign of David as he gathers his mighty men and brings them to the throne to share his kingly power and glory.

The second emphasis of this book is on the ark of God. In chapter 13 we are told how David went down to the Philistine city where the ark was being held captive, took it upon a cart and tried to bring it back to Jerusalem. The unwitting departure of David from the principle of obedience is recorded for us here. He knew the law commanded that the ark be carried only by the Levites, but in the exuberance of his joy and his zeal for God's cause, he thought God wouldn't mind if the ark was carried in another way. And what was the result? When Uzzah, walking along beside the ark, saw it shaking as it passed over a rough spot in the road, he reached out to steady it. When his hand touched the ark, he immediately dropped dead. David was tremendously shaken by

this. But as he thought it over and prayed about it, he realized that it was all his own fault. He had neglected the word of the Lord. There is no incident from the Old Testament that teaches more clearly the importance of a careful, precise obedience to what the word of God says. I think it also teaches us that God is able to take care of his own cause. There are many today who, like Uzzah, are trying to steady the ark of God. They think it is going to be defeated by some challenge that is issued against it, and they become self-appointed defenders of the faith, little realizing that God is quite able to defend his own cause.

But David learned his lesson. He returned to obedience and asked the Levites to bring up the ark according to the law; then the ark came into Jerusalem. Now here is a most remarkable and significant point: the tabernacle, which had been the home of the ark through all the journeyings in the wilderness, and the central place of worship for Israel during the time of the judges and the reign of Saul, was not located in Jerusalem. The tabernacle was located in the city of Gibeon. One would think that the ark should be returned to that tabernacle, since it had been taken from there. The ark belonged in the Holy of Holies in that tabernacle. But when David brings the ark back, he doesn't return it to the tabernacle. He brings it to the city of Jerusalem, the city of the king, and, by his own authority, he sets up a center of worship on the very site where later the temple was to be built. Thus he replaces the authority of the priests by the authority of the king.

These Old Testament books are beautifully designed by the Holy Spirit to be an application to our own spiritual life. They cover the warfare that we engage in, the battles, the kingdom over which we rule, the difficulties which we encounter, and the spiritual principles by which victory is won. These events are very significant to us. The tabernacle was of course movable. It followed the people wherever they went throughout the wilderness journeys. It is a picture of God's grace that is ready to follow the believer despite the fact that he may be wandering about sometimes in a wilderness, sometimes in the land, sometimes in the desert -- sometimes up and sometimes down. God's grace is still ready to follow, ready to support, and ready to minister in the priestly ministry of confession and forgiveness of sin. Inevitably, in every Christian's experience, there is this up-and-down, trial-and-error time when we are so grateful for the priestly ministry of confession, of cleansing and forgiveness. But at last, as we are led by the Spirit of God, we come to the place where we recognize the problem. The reason for this wave of up-and-down experience is that we have refused to allow the Lord Jesus to exercise his kingly lordship in our life. When at last we are led by the Spirit to the place where our stubborn will is broken, and we give up once and for all our insistence on running our own affairs, we recognize that this is the principle of God by which we must live. Now we may not always follow it faithfully even from there, but at least we realize that God is ruler over our life and Jesus Christ is Lord. In other words. "You are not your own, you are bought with a price." (1 Cor. 7:23) Your life is no longer yours to plan, to program, or to work out in advance. You belong to the Lord and he becomes king in your life.

At that very moment, what is pictured here is fulfilled. When the king comes, the ark is fixed in the temple and is immovable from then on. All the blessing of God then flows to the heart that is in full submission to the lordship of Christ. The result is that the temple is a new beginning. It is no longer a continuation of the tabernacle -- though much of the temple is like the tabernacle in its plan and design. As David made the new temple furniture, it was different in many ways from the furniture in the tabernacle. This was a new beginning, a total change of government, resulting in a total change of behavior. Beginning in chapter 18, where the ark is brought back and placed at the site of the temple, David's conquest over all his enemies throughout the whole of the kingdom of Judah is immediately recorded. Chapters 18, 19, and 20 are devoted to the victories of King David, beautifully describing what happens in the heart if Christ is crowned king.

The only dark picture in the book is in chapter 21. One interlude is brought before us of David's sin; that of numbering the people of Israel. It is remarkable that the double sin of David -- when he took the wife of Uriah the Hittite in an adulterous relationship and arranged the murder of her husband by sending him out in the forefront of battle -- is passed over in total silence. That was David's personal sin as a man. That sin was his own weakness, his foolish willfulness as an individual. It had nothing to do with his reign as a king. But this sin of numbering Israel is an abrupt departure from the principle of dependence upon the strength and glory of God. Why did he number the people? He wanted to glory and gloat in the number of people that were available to him as king. He wanted to see his strength.

This is always the problem in any Christian circle when men begin to depend upon numbers. One of the great principles that runs through the Bible from beginning to end is that God never wins his battles by majority

vote. When we think that the cause of Christ is losing because the number of Christians is decreasing in proportion to the population of the world, we have succumbed to the false philosophy that God wins his battles by numbers. He doesn't need numbers. He needs quality. Many, many times that is taught to us in the word of God. Thirty-two thousand men respond to Gideon's call to the army. When Gideon looks out at them, he says, "That is a good number. I think we ought to be able to do something with that." But God says, "I am sorry Gideon, there are far too many. I can't work with that many." So Gideon sends those home who have just recently been married and the ones who are afraid. Neither of them are any good for battle. Twenty-two thousand went home. They had a large number of weddings! It must have been the middle of June or July in Israel. Gideon said, "Well Lord, you have whittled me down to ten thousand men. I guess that will be enough." God said, "No Gideon. It is still too many." They were put to the test until the army was whittled down to three hundred men. And with three hundred men, God delivered the nation. (Judges 7:2ff) How many times we are taught this. Once the whole army of Israel stood in gloom and despair before the tauntings and the struttings of the giant Goliath as he paraded up and down before the camp, mocking the soldiers of Israel. But one little shepherd boy came with his sling, and with a single rock from the brook, God delivered the people. With the jaw of an ass in the hands of Samson, God slew the Philistines. All through Chronicles this same principle is repeated again and again. God's method is quality -- never quantity.

As a result of David's departure from this principle and because the whole nation looked to him as king for an example by which they learned the principles of God, judgment was exceedingly severe upon David. A prophet was sent to David (21:10-17) and he said, "I will give you three choices. God has said that you can have three years of famine or three months for your enemies to overcome you and run rife through the land or three days of the plague and pestilence." David did the wise thing. He said, "Who am I to determine anything like this. I will simply cast myself into the hands of the Lord. God is a God of great mercy. Let him do what he thinks is best." The angel of the Lord came into the midst of the people and for three days he slew with pestilence throughout the nation. David saw the angel with his sword stretched out over the city of Jerusalem ready to slay there also, but David pleaded with God: "It is my fault. Why do you take vengeance upon these others? I am the one to blame." Then God instructed him to buy the cattle and the threshing floor of Ornan and on these he erected an altar and worshipped God. The temple was later built on that site and the altar was placed where the angel of God stayed his hand from judgment. So the grace of God, you see, came even at a time of disobedience, and turned the judgment that fell upon David into grace and blessing.

The rest of the book tells of David's passion for the building of the temple. Because he understood that a nation without a temple could never be a nation, he longed to see this temple built. A people without God in their midst will never amount to anything. But David was a man of war, and God wanted a man of peace to rule over the nations of the earth. (22:6-19) So God said to David, "No, it is your son who will build the temple. He will be a man of peace and he shall build it." David had learned the principle of obedience so well that he said, "Yes, Lord, if that is what you want. Much as it is a disappointment to me, I will accept that."

In grace, however, God allowed David to do everything for the temple but actually build it. He drew the plans. He designed the furniture. He collected the materials. He made the arrangements. He set up the order and ritual. He brought down the cedar poles from Mt. Hermon and Mt. Lebanon in the north. He dug up the rock and quarried the stones. He gathered in the gold, the silver, and the iron. He gathered it all together and then the book closes as the anointed Solomon and David reign side by side -- a complete picture of the ministry of the Lord Jesus. Christ is both the mighty warrior, David, and the man of peace, Solomon.

What is the message of this book? It is the supreme importance of the temple in our lives; the authority of God. Over the three great doors of the cathedral in Milan, Italy, are three inscriptions. Over the right hand door is carved a wreath of flowers and over it is written, All that pleases is but for a moment. On the left hand door is a cross and over it is written, All the trouble is but for a moment. Over the main entrance are simply the words. Nothing is important save that which is eternal. This is the very lesson of the book of Chronicles. It is the lesson of the whole of the Bible, "Whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of [by the authority of and by the ability of] the Lord Jesus [king in his temple]." (Col. 3:17)

Prayer:

Our Father, may the lesson of this Old Testament book be written deeply in our hearts. May

we recognize that the marvel of this book is that it conveys in human language and through human institutions the revelation of thy workings in history, in individual lives and in our lives. May we, like David, be kings after thy own heart, ready to walk in obedience to the very words of scripture itself that we may demonstrate, as he demonstrated it, the glory of the kingdom over which Jesus Christ is king. In his name we pray, Amen.

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