

Remember His Covenant Forever (1 Chr 16.7-36)

Building a House for God's Name: Studies in 1 & 2 Chronicles

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. The song of 1 Chronicles 16 is situated within the broader narrative of David bringing the ark back to Jerusalem. In chapters 15-16, we see the painstaking preparations that David makes to return the ark (15.1-24), the triumphal procession of Israel's true king into the city (15.25-29), the installation of the ark into the tent (16.1-3), and the appointing of Levitical music and song to minister before the Lord perpetually (16.4-7).
- B. David had installed the Levites with purpose for them to *invoke* (put the Lord in remembrance by invoking his promises), *thank* (remember the mighty works and deeds of the Lord), and *praise* (ascribe to the Lord the worship and glory that was due his name). In this song, we see each of these ideas highlighted and expanded. In some ways, this song is a portrait of what the Levites were appointed to do — giving voice to their tasks of worship before the Lord. As such, this song is instructive for us in giving language to our own worship.
- C. This song is a composite song made up of lengthy quotations from three Psalms. This song is a remarkable synthesis of Biblical theology, designed by the writer of Chronicles to instruct his readers in the vocabulary of worship, as well as strengthen them through the rehearsing of God's great covenant faithfulness.
 1. **Psalm 105.1-15** (1 Chr 16.8-22): This Psalm is a glorious retelling of God's mighty works toward his people. It recounts the sojourning of the patriarch, the generations of captivity in Egypt, and the mighty things that God did to fulfill his word and bring redemption for his people. For a people returning from exile, this Psalm was a mighty reminder of God's *patient work to fulfill his promises* even in the moments when it appears that he has cast them off.
 2. **Psalm 96** (1 Chr 16.23-33): This Psalm is a song of pure *exaltation of the Lord of all the earth*. This song contains within it the understanding that Yahweh's worship was to come from the whole of the earth. There is a universal call to forsake the idols of the world and ascribe glory to the living God alone.
 3. **Psalm 106.1, 47-48** (1 Chr 16.34-35): This Psalm is a long, extended *confession of the sins of Israel* before God and their desperate need for him to renew his works toward them and deliver them in his redemptive mercy.
- D. Together, these psalms are knit in a way by the Chronicler to tell a specific story (one that outlines a great deal of OT Biblical theology). They recount the mercy of God to elect for himself a people with a vocation to be a "light to the nations" so that the whole world would ascribe to the Lord the glory due him. However, rather than seek him continually, the people had failed and turned aside (committing treachery before him) and were yet again in need of his glorious power of deliverance through new acts of mercy and salvation.

II. SEEK THE LORD CONTINUALLY (1 CHR 16.8-II)

- A. The opening of the song is a string of short commandments to the people. Together, these give a portrait of orienting their lives (both through action and their attitude) toward the right pursuit of the Lord.
- B. **Give thanks** (v. 8): The people are to come before the Lord in a posture of thanksgiving. To give thanks to the Lord is to call to remember his gracious acts and his merciful deliverance. Rightly rehearsing the history of his actions is designed to bring us to a posture of humble thanksgiving.
- C. **Call upon his name** (v. 8): To call upon the name of the Lord is shorthand throughout the Scripture for worship and prayer. In calling upon the name of the Lord, we remember his gracious and holy character (worship) and remind him of his glorious promises (prayer).

- D. **Make known his deeds** (v. 8): We are to recount and remember the specific activity of the Lord in history. Throughout the Scripture, we are called to delight in and remember the **steadfast love** (*hesed*) of the Lord. This speaks of concrete actions in history where the Lord demonstrated faithfulness to his own character and mercy toward those who were undeserving.
- E. **Seek** (v. 11): God desires communion with his people. Because of this, they are called to **seek his face** continually. Throughout Chronicles, the call to seek the Lord is the call to live in humble trust of his ways and to orient our lives around pursuing him.
- F. These initial verses of the song give a clear portrait into the posture of **thanksgiving** that was to mark the worship of the Levites and their ministry to the Lord.

III. ASCRIBE TO THE LORD (I CHR 16.23-34)

- A. The second major element of this song gives a view of **praising** the Lord for who he is. Because the Lord is great above all other gods, he is worthy of praise befitting his greatness.

²⁵For great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised, and he is to be feared above all gods. (I Chr 16.25)
- B. This section of the song reminds us that God is the holy one, the creator of all the earth, and therefore he alone is worthy to be praised.
- C. To ascribe the Lord the glory due his name is to offer allegiance and complete submission to his sovereign lordship over all things. This means that we must humbly acknowledge that all other allegiances are idols and are not worthy of the worship we give to them. Rather, we must turn the whole of our allegiance to him alone through submission and faith.

²⁶For all the gods of the peoples are worthless idols, but the Lord made the heavens (I Chr 16.26)
- D. Throughout this section it is clear that the Lord alone is to be worshiped and he alone is to be feared. This is the only response due him — and it is one day to be given to him by his people, by all the nations, and by all of creation itself.

IV. REMEMBERING GOD'S COVENANT FAITHFULNESS (I CHR 16.12-22)

- A. The final aspect of this song is its instruction to the people on what it means to **invoke** the Lord. Both in verse 12 and 15 the song invites the people to “remember” (the same word as invoke in 16.4). Therefore, these verses give us an important window into what it means to “put the Lord in remembrance”.
- B. In essence, we see that the nature of remembering is designed to call to mind the covenant faithfulness of the Lord. His covenant faithfulness speaks of his unfailing commitment to perfectly fulfill his word.
- C. In this song (and in Psalm 105), the people are exhorted to remember that God had made a covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and that he had been faithful to watch over his word to establish and fulfill it throughout every season.
- D. This happened through God’s sovereign care even in seasons where it appeared that it could not come to pass, or it appeared that God had somehow overlooked or forgotten his promises.

¹⁹When you were few in number, of little account, and sojourners in it... ²¹he allowed no one to oppress them; he rebuked kings on their account, ²²saying, “Touch not my anointed ones, do my prophets no harm!” (I Chr 16.19-22)
- E. The act of remembering God’s word and his care over his word (including remembering that in seasons of apparent failure the word of the Lord is *testing* his people — cf. Ps 105.19) is meant to invigorate us with faith that God will continue to accomplish his word and bring all of his purposes to pass.

F. Knowing the storyline of the Bible:

1. **Genesis 1-3:** God created all things in order to fill the whole world (*kosmos*) with his glory. In order to accomplish this, he created man and woman in his image with the ability to commune with him (*intimacy*) and gave them the task to fill the earth and subdue it (*dominion*). He created a Garden-Temple in Eden and put the man and woman there to work and keep it, with the intent purpose to fill the whole world with the glory of the garden. However, the man and the woman rebelled against God's commandment causing sin and death to come into God's good creation. Now, separated from communion with God they were no longer able to fill the earth in accordance with his glorious design — but rather, filled the earth with a spirit of wickedness and violence (cf. Gen 6.5-11).
2. **Genesis 12-22:** In the wake of man's rebellion, God came to a pagan, idol worshiper named Abram (Josh 24.2-3) and made a covenant promise to him. In calling Abram, God promised that he would give him (1) offspring; (2) land; and (3) a king (this is implicit in the covenant to Abraham and expanded further in promises to Judah and David). The choice of Abraham would be how God sought to bring redemption to the whole world — as all the families of the earth would be blessed in him (cf. Gen 12.2; 22.8). God later came to Abraham's son Isaac (not Ishmael) and his son Jacob (not Esau) to confirm his promises.
3. **Exodus:** After 400 years in Egyptian slavery, God rescues the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in order to fulfill his promises to them. He breaks the yoke of their Egyptian captivity and brings them into the land of promise, fulfilling his words to them. In doing so, he makes a covenant with the nation of Israel (giving them the Law). It is clear from the Scripture that Israel is to function like a “new/corporate Adam” and the land of Canaan is to be like a “new Eden”. The purpose of the covenant is that God will dwell with his people (like Adam in Eden) and they are to fill the earth and subdue it as a “light to the nations”.
4. **Israel's failures:** The whole remainder of the Old Testament is a witness of Israel's inability to fulfill its vocation before the Lord. Because of this, God sends chastisement (in the form of oppressing armies), redemption (deliverers, judges, kings, etc.), and prophets (calling the people to return). The failures of Israel result in two waves of exile — first under the Assyrians (the 10 Northern Tribes in 722 BC) and finally under the Babylonians (the 2 Southern Tribes in 586 BC).
5. **Jesus' life, death, and resurrection:** After several centuries of prophetic silence, God sent his own son to his people. In the ministry of Jesus, we see that the “kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matt 3.17), meaning that the day of the fulfillment of God's promises was dawning for God's people. However, the *manner* in which God was to fulfill his promises did not come in the way anyone expected. Rather than come and restore the glory of the kingdom of Israel, God's people rejected him leading to Jesus' execution as a criminal. After three days, Jesus was resurrected as the firstfruits and inauguration of the eschatological age to come having broken into this world. The resurrection validated that he was God's son, the offspring of Abraham, and the king from the line of David. He had come to pay the ransom penalty for sin and death, to be the “last Adam” who would restore humanity to its created place before God. Now, those who join themselves to him by faith partake in his restoration of all things.
6. **Pentecost and the inclusion of the Gentiles:** In the book of Acts, Jesus births his church by sending the Spirit upon 120 believers on the day of Pentecost. This ushers in the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy of the last days (the days when God's redemptive purposes would be fulfilled in the earth). However, this is also accomplished in a *manner* not expected before. Rather than usher in the age to come in fullness, God inaugurates his kingdom and the age of fulfillment *in part* by giving the Holy Spirit to his church. This, we see from the rest of the book of Acts (and the letters of the NT) will include the welcoming of the Gentil nations as full members into the family of God in and through Jesus Christ. Much of Paul's theological writings (particularly Galatians, Romans, and Ephesians) are an attempt to work out how God is demonstrating his covenant faithfulness to his promises through the work of the crucified and risen Messiah, even in places where it may look like the word of God has failed (cf. Rom 9.6; 11.1).

G. What does remembrance look like in the new covenant?

1. ***God' covenant faithfulness accomplished in Christ:*** The summary statement of the New Testament expression of God's fidelity to his covenant is that all of God's promises have been accomplished and fulfilled in Christ Jesus. Every promise contained in the Old Testament has found its fulfillment exclusively and wholly in the man Jesus Christ.

²⁰For all the promises of God find their Yes in him [Christ Jesus]. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory (2 Cor 1.20)

²¹But now the righteousness [justness, covenant faithfulness] of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and Prophets bear witness to it — ²²the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: ²³for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. ²⁶It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. (Rom 3.21-26)

2. ***Jesus is the full inheritor of the promises to Abraham:*** All that was promised to Abraham finds its locus and terminus in Jesus Christ. Paul clearly understands that the promise given to Abraham was intended to be oriented in *one seed*.

¹⁵To give a human example, brothers: even with a man-made covenant, no one annuls it or adds to it once it has been ratified. ¹⁶Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, "And to offsprings," referring to many, but referring to one, "And to your offspring." who is Christ. (Gal 3.15-16)

3. ***Christ's people — Jew and Gentile — are now the offspring of Abraham:*** One of the remarkable realities of Christ's work is that it has torn down the wall of separation that had existed between Jew and Gentile and welcomes them all into the family of God to be the children of God. Paul declares that all who are in Christ are now "one new man", equally his body, and co-heirs of the promises he has received (and fulfilled).

⁴When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, ⁵which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. ⁶This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. ⁷Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace... ⁹to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God, who created all things, ¹⁰so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might be made known to the rulers and authorities in heavenly places (Eph 3.4-10)

¹³For the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith... ¹⁶That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring — not only to the adherent of the law but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all (Rom 4.13, 16)

¹³Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us — for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree" — ¹⁴so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith. (Gal 3.13-14)

4. ***Israel was intended to be a type (new Adam) that is fulfilled in Christ:*** The national role of Israel was always intended to be a portrait of a corporate Adam intended to be the vessel of God's redemption to the world. However, Israel was not able to fulfill this role because of disobedience. Because of this, the Messiah, Jesus Christ, is the fulfillment and representative of True Israel in the redemptive purposes of God (this is the purpose of the temptation narratives in the Gospels).

I am the true vine [picture of Israel], and my Father is the vinedresser. (John 15.1)

5. ***The land was intended to be a type of the new heavens and new earth:*** the New Testament writers are abundantly clear that the parcel of land called Canaan was never to be the full extent of God's promise to Abraham. Rather, the land was always to function as a ***type*** (a picture, or foreshadowing) of the new heavens and the new earth that will be experienced for all eternity by God's people.

¹³For the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world [*kosmos*] (Rom 4.13)

²⁵Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia; she corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. ²⁶But the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother (Gal 4.25-26)

⁹By faith [Abraham] went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. ¹⁰For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God... ¹³These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. ¹⁴For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. ¹⁵If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. ¹⁶But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city. (Heb 11.9-16)

6. ***Christ is coming again to fully realize God's promises in perfect consummation:*** Jesus will return again — bringing with him the New Jerusalem where there will be no more temple (the whole *kosmos* will be the dwelling place of God). At this time, the dead will be raised, the wicked will be judged, and those who are in Christ will enter into the eternal Sabbath rest of the eternal God. For all eternity we will be with the Lord, enjoying the blessings of God's created design as we partner with him to image his glory throughout all created order.

- H. As the people of the new covenant, we are to remember the covenant faithfulness of the Lord by rehearsing, delighting in, and proclaiming the life, death, resurrection, and coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is to be the anchor for our hope — that which enters into the veil of God's very presence, in order that we might find help and assistance to remain steadfast by his grace in times of difficulty.

⁸Now in putting everything in subjection to [man], he left nothing outside of his control. At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him. ⁹But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone. (Heb 2.8-9)

¹⁹We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain, ²⁰where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek (Heb 6.19-20)