

Living Messages of the Books of The Bible

GENESIS TO MALACHI

G. Campbell Morgan, D. D.

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CHAPTER THIRTEEN

THE MESSAGE OF I CHRONICLES

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B. THE LIVING MESSAGE

The importance of the Recognition of God in the Life of a Nation

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II. Because of the Effect upon the National Life

- i. Moral Standards.
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IN order that we may understand this book, and discover its permanent value and living message, it is important that we should know when it was written, for in the discovery of the when, we shall in all probability find the answer to the why.

There is internal evidence that it was written in close association with the time of Ezra and Nehemiah. In the section at the commencement which deals with the genealogies, names occur which clearly indicate this. In the sixth chapter it is written: **“Azariah begat Seraiah, and Seraiah begat Jehozadak; and Jehozadak went into captivity, when the Lord carried away Judah and Jerusalem by the hand of Nebuchadnezzar.”**

This was evidently written by one looking back upon the captivity. If that is borne in mind, we shall begin to see the reason of the peculiarities of both this book and the one which follows it. There is the closest connection between the story contained in Chronicles and that told in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah; a much closer connection than that between Kings and Ezra and Nehemiah.

II Chronicles ends with a proclamation of Cyrus, King of Persia, which made possible the rebuilding of the house of God in Jerusalem. That proclamation is the commencement of the book of Ezra. There can be little doubt that the story in Chronicles was written at the return from captivity, in order to encourage the people to build the house of God, for its central subject is the temple of God. Thus we find the key to these two books of Chronicles.

Notice the peculiarities without entering into details.

In the books of Chronicles, Israel, the Northern Kingdom, is out of sight. There are references to it, but only when it is absolutely necessary to show relationship to Judah. Judah is in view, only to fix attention upon David. David is the central personality. Judah the nation; David the personality. Yet the purpose of the writer was not that of dealing with Judah or with David, but of dealing with the temple of God. David is referred to in order that there may be brought into clear vision the master passion of his life, the building of the temple.

It has sometimes been said that the books of Kings are of prophetic origin, because of their prophetic outlook; and that the books of Chronicles are of priestly origin, because of their priestly outlook. That is quite true, but it is only a secondary truth.

The deeper truth is that in Kings we have history simply, while in Chronicles we see the relation of the nation to religious life; the writer's one object being to bring into prominence all the facts concerning the temple, in order to show how absolutely important was that temple to the life of the people. The sub-titles, which I suggested in our previous study of the contents of the books, suggest this; the Temple desired and approached; and the Temple possessed and abandoned.

The first book has one preeminent value. It reveals the supreme importance of the recognition of God in the national life of the chosen people. Other books have taught the fact of the relation of God and the nation, but this book reveals the importance of the recognition of that fact by the people.

We shall notice first how the genealogies demonstrate the importance of recognizing God; and secondly, how the story of David illustrates the same truth.

If we take the first ten chapters, and consider them carefully, we see that their value does not consist in the stringing together of names. Through all there is evidence of a Divine movement, persistent and startling, which compels us to pause and enquire. They begin with Adam and end with Nehemiah; and there is constant selection, election, choice; the turning aside of the current; the starting of a new movement.

Beginning with Adam, we remember the names of his sons, Cain, Abel, Seth. Of these, neither Cain nor Abel is mentioned. There is selection, and the name chosen is that of Seth. From him the Divine procedure moves through Enoch to Noah; then on through Shem to Abram and Isaac; then through Judah to Jesse and David; then Solomon and Rehoboam, to captivity. Among the tribes of Levi there is distinct selection to purpose. Three sons of Levi, Kohath, Gershon, Merari, are chosen.

From Adam to Zedekiah the writer reveals the fact that God made successive selections, ever starting the stream on a new course by choosing individuals.

The principle of inclusion was always that of character, based upon obedience; and wherever there was such character based upon obedience, all disability was cancelled. The principle of exclusion was that all rights and privileges are cancelled by disobedience. Privileges of descent, of relationship, never count in the economy of God. The one thing that counts is obedience, and the character that grows out of it.

The purpose of selection, as revealed in these genealogies, is that from the beginning the ultimate is in view. It is perfectly evident as one studies at all carefully these new beginnings and new developments, that the apparently crooked way is yet the straight way to the goal. The straight way would have followed the inheritance through the first-born, and that would often have been the straight way to failure and defeat. Whenever God made a new selection, setting aside rights and privileges in which men made their boast, choosing men who were not in the line of ordinary human expectation, He did so because His mind was set upon the ultimate goal. All the details of Divine selection led to the ultimate goal.

All this demonstrates the necessity for the recognition of God in the national life.

To gather up the history suggested in the genealogies is to see confusion, disaster, failure. It is a picture that fills the heart with heaviness, and the spirit with sorrow. To look higher, and see how through all, God is moving; selecting, changing, making perpetual progress towards His goal, is to see that the ultimate fact in all the centuries is the fact of God; and these genealogies show that the way of permanence for human life, and the way of stability for national life, is the way of recognition of Him. God moved onward in spite of human failure. Men were ruined or made, in proportion as they recognized Him. Thus, before the story of the king in whose heart was a passion for the temple is told, there is this strange and almost weird section of ten chapters, filled with names.

Through all the generations of men, through century after century, God is seen selecting, changing, interfering, moving quietly onward towards the ultimate goal.

Turn from this demonstration of the fact of the Divine interference and government to the illustration afforded by the story of David.

The king is presented in all his strength.

There are four pictures of him:

The first is that of the national crowning. All the story of the preparation has been told - the shepherd life, the period at the court of Saul, the long, weary exile as outlaw hiding in Adullam, the seven preparatory years reigning over the Southern Kingdom of Judah. Now at Hebron all Israel crowns him.

The next picture is that of the capture of Jebus. David takes a stronghold which was thought to be impregnable, and makes it forevermore the earthly center of Hebrew national life and aspiration.

The third picture is that of the mighty men, in which is revealed David's influence on personal character. He had gathered to Adullam men in debt, in danger, discontented; and when we read the story of the mighty men in Chronicles, we see the mightier man, David, who made them what they were.

The last picture is that of the multitudes as they march to the standard of the new king.

- they were men who “**could use both the right hand and the left,**” which speaks of the careful training they had received.
- they were “**mighty men of valour, men trained for war,**” which suggests disciplined strength.
- they were men who “**could handle shield and spear,**” which means they were experts in offensive and defensive warfare.

This is the picture of people influenced by a great and mighty king. The book is not so much dealing with the greatness of the people in itself, as revealing it in order that the greatness of David may be seen.

All this has been told in order to lead to something else.

Beginning with the story of the ark, there is revealed David's attitude towards the temple. There we touch the deepest thing in his life. He was a king, a warrior, a poet; but none of these tells the story of the deepest thing in his heart, or reveals its master passion.

Notice his care for the ark of God.

Notice his desire to build the temple of God.

These are not the master passions of his life, but they are expressions thereof. The master passion of this king, warrior, shepherd is that of a profound recognition of the relation of the nation to God, and of the necessity that it should never forget God. That is why he cared for the ark. That is why he desired to build the temple.

The strength of that master passion is revealed in his submission to God. When he said it was in his heart to build a house for God, Nathan the prophet said, “**Do all that is in thine heart.**” But neither King David, nor Prophet Nathan, great as was their desire for the temple, understood the full meaning thereof. God forbade his building, but revealed anew to him how he had been led by God.

Immediately David began to do something for God, and the very thing he wanted to do, even though he did not build the temple.

The actual last work was, in the wisdom of God, committed to Solomon, but from that moment David was at the work he longed to do. His willingness not to begin the building was a revelation of his recognition of the importance of his work, and of his absolute abandonment to the will of God. Yet he worked in gathering treasure, in making arrangements, in choosing the site, in appointing the Levites, in setting in order the service of song, in appointing the porters, and the keepers of the treasure.

Ezra, or whomsoever the author of this book may have been, wanted to show the importance of that of which the temple was but the outward symbol - the nation's recognition of God. David became for the moment in his eyes the embodiment of the national idea, the national purpose. The master passion of David was that of recognizing God, and expressing the recognition.

Paul summarized the whole story of David's life in the sentence so often quoted, “**He . . . served his own generation by the will of God.**” He was shepherd, warrior, poet; but in all these things he answered the master passion.

- as king he reigned always under the conviction of the throne of God, and the supremacy of the Lord.

- he was a warrior, carrying out the Divine purpose.

- he was a poet, and “**The Lord reigneth**” is the very key-note of his poetry.

Because he knew the national importance of this recognition, he cared for the ark, and desired the temple.

The living message of this book is quite patent if we have discovered its permanent value.

With no uncertain sound it speaks to us to-day of the absolute importance of the recognition of God in the life of the nation. If you are inclined to say that this book is applicable to the Hebrew nation, and to no other, I pray you think again of the wonderful prophecy of Amos. The mistake Israel made was that of thinking that God governed the Hebrew nation, and had no care for others.

The message of Amos was that of national accountability; and ere he delivered his message to Judah and Israel, he swept the ever-decreasing circles around them, beginning with all the distant nations, and showing how God governed them also. If that be true of the nations long ago, it is equally true to-day.

It is important that the nation should recognize God, because of the fact of the Divine activity.

Begin wherever you will, and look at the centuries, and you discover the same principle at work in all human history, God choosing, selecting, lifting up, casting down. The great word of the prophet of old is the word of to-day. Speaking to Cyrus, the man outside the covenant, He said, **"I will gird thee, though thou hast not known Me."** That is the story of all human history. God is lifting up and casting down.

Another word of one of the old Hebrew prophets declared, **"I will overturn, overturn, overturn until He come whose right it is."**

God has not given up overturning. The Divine hand is at work now as surely as in the first ten chapters of Chronicles, selecting a new man and making a new start; and if he fails, selecting another, and again moving forward. If the firstborn son in the proper succession is not ready for the work, he is flung aside; and if the man of privilege does not answer his opportunity, he is cast away upon the scrap-heap, and God finds an obscure man, and marches on towards the ultimate. That is a gospel to my heart. That is comfort to my soul. That is the thing that cures the heart of its panic. God is still choosing, selecting, guiding, controlling. That is why the nation should recognize Him. Oh, the madness of trying to arrange without Him, of shutting Him out of view.

It is important that the nation should recognize God, not merely because of the fact of His government, but because of the effect of the recognition of God upon national life.

Take God out of the national life, and the national thinking, and what will happen? You will have no moral standard at all.

Talking quite recently to one of the responsible Ministers of the Crown on the subject of the teaching in the Day Schools of this country, speaking not from the standard of a Christian man, but from the standpoint of a statesman, he said: "If there is no Bible, where is your text-book of morals? There is the supreme difficulty. We must teach morals, and there is no text-book or standard in the world if we take the Bible away."

When the nation has lost its moral standard, it has lost the strength of individual character; it has lost its conception of social relationships. It is useless to talk of a new social order unless at its very basis is the conviction and the consciousness of the throne of God and the government of God. That is the supreme message of this book.

The thing of importance in any nation is the building of the temple, the creation of the opportunity for the people to deal with God.

The political propaganda which begins by attacking or neglecting God, and a national recognition of Him, is absolutely pernicious. The man who worships is the true patriot, whether he be a king, a statesman, or a commoner.

The man who loves his nation and serves it, is the man who serves God.

~ end of chapter 13 ~

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