

*Things Omitted: The Importance of Chronicles for  
Preaching and Teaching*

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**Part 2: Preaching the “Seeking the Lord” and “Retribution” Passages**

**I. Introduction: the “seeking the Lord” and the “retribution” passages.**

- A. The “seeking the Lord” passages in Chronicles have to do with the set of the heart towards the Lord.
- B. The “retribution” passages are not mechanical, but show God’s passionate involvement with his people.

**II. The “Seeking the Lord” passages.**

- A. One of the main principles of narrative selection for the Chronicler.
- B. The term “seek” (*dāraš* and *biqqēš*, two different Hebrew verbs) is used 54 times in the book.
- C. Vast majority of seeking the Lord passages are found in the “non-synoptic” sections of the book, meaning they reflect the Chronicler’s agenda in a more direct manner than the synoptic sections.
- D. To the Chronicler, the kings of Judah are judged by the extent to which they “sought the Lord.”

**III. “Seeking the Lord” and the kings of Judah.**

- A. “Seeking the Lord” in the context of observing the law.
  - 1. Uzzah died because they had not “sought the Lord” through observing the law relative to the handling of the ark.
  - 2. David gives instructions to Solomon to seek the Lord through keeping his commandments.
- B. “Seeking the Lord” in the context of consulting the Lord’s will through priests or prophets.
  - 1. 1 Chron. 10:13–14: Saul died because he did not seek the Lord, but sought a medium.
    - a) This passage is the first non-synoptic passage in the narrative section of Chronicles.
    - b) This passage also lays out clearly what the Chronicler’s method and theology will be throughout the work.

2. Other kings: Jehoshaphat (2 Chron. 18:4–7) and Josiah (2 Chron. 34:21, 26).
  3. David, the quintessential king who “sought the Lord,” brings up the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem, because they “did not seek it in the days of Saul (1 Chron. 13:3).
- C. “Seeking the Lord” in the context of worship.
1. 2 Chron. 1:5: Solomon and worship.
  2. 2 Chron. 1:16 and 1 Chron. 16:11: Israel seeking the Lord in worship.
- D. “Seeking the Lord” by setting the heart and mind towards God.
1. David commands Solomon to “set his heart and mind to seek the Lord” (1 Chron. 22:19).
  2. Rehoboam was evil, because he did not set his heart to seek the Lord (2 Chron. 12:14).
- E. What seeking the Lord in Chronicles means:
1. Worship the Lord in song and sacrifice.
  2. Reading his word and doing it.
  3. Consulting his will through counsel and prayer.
  4. Set the intent of the heart and mind upon the Lord.

#### **IV. The “Retribution” passages of Chronicles.**

- A. Definition of retribution.
1. Retribution = “recompense for behavior”: you reap what you sow.
  2. The Chronicler believes in “immediate retribution,” an immediate connection between behavior and recompense.
  3. “Seeking the Lord” is easier for us to appropriate, but consequences for bad behavior is not a bad topic.
  4. The Chronicler wanted his people to see the consequences for bad or good behavior relative to the kings of Judah.
- B. Retribution for bad behavior in Chronicles.
1. I Chron. 10:13–14: The Lord killed Saul, because he did not seek the Lord, but a medium.
  2. All kings, beginning with Saul, who made bad decisions suffered the calamity of their choices.
  3. Some kings began well, but ended badly:
    - a) Rehoboam: righteous for three years, but turned his heart away from the Lord. Result: loss of land, military defeat, short reign.

- b) Asa: A good king, but at the end of his reign “relied” on the king of Aram instead of God (2 Chron. 16); also relied on physicians rather than God for his diseased feet.
- c) Joash: A good king in his youth, but abandoned the Lord so was given over to the army of the Arameans (2 Chron. 24:22–24).
- d) Uzziah: A good king turned bad, when he tried to make incense offerings, which were for the priests alone, so he was smitten with leprosy (2 Chron. 26:16–21).

C. Retribution for good behavior in Chronicles.

1. Most obvious example is David. Because he sought the Lord with all his heart, he is given a long reign, military victories, a large family, and God’s eternal covenant.
2. Hezekiah and positive retribution.
  - a) Not tied as mechanically to behavior as negative retribution is, but seems to follow in due course.
  - b) Restored worship and the Passover, destroyed idols, and organized the priests and Levites.
  - c) Two synoptic passages: Sennacherib’s invasion and the Babylonian envoy (chapter 32).
    - (1) These are not interpreted negatively, as in Kings, but examples of the arrogance of the Assyrians and Babylonians.
    - (2) The only sin attributed to Hezekiah: pride of heart, when he was near death, but he humbled himself, so the Lord averted his wrath.

**V. Retribution theology and the Modern Church.**

A. The difficulty with this theology.

1. Deuteronomy, Proverbs, and Haggai are parade examples of this theology.
2. It runs counter to the spirit of the age.
3. Perhaps better to think of retribution as the life of *wisdom*, lived under God’s instruction and discipline.

B. One should not attribute simplistic or primitive understandings of retribution to the Chronicler.

1. “Soda machine” retribution, immediate rewards or punishments for behavior.
2. Both good and bad consequences for behavior in Chronicles are under God’s sovereign lordship and compassion. Sin is trumped by God’s mercy and people’s repentance.

## *Seeking the Lord in Chronicles Table*

	Law/custom	Worship/ark/ presence	Enquiring/ consulting	Set or search mind and heart	Search for people/ gods/things	Seek to avenge
1 Chr. 10:13			X (Saul)			
1 Chr. 10:14			X (Saul)			
1 Chr. 13:3			X??			
1 Chr. 15:13	X					
1 Chr. 16:10 b				X		
1 Chr. 16:11 ab		X X				
1 Chr. 21:30		X				
1 Chr. 22:19				X		
1 Chr. 26:31					X	
1 Chr. 28:8	X					
1 Chr. 28:9				X		
2 Chr. 1:5		X (Solomon)				
2 Chr. 7:14 b				X		
2 Chr. 11:16 b		X? (Israel)		X? (Israel)		
2 Chr. 12:14				X (Rehoboam)!!		
2 Chr. 14:4	X (Asa)					
2 Chr. 14:7				X (Asa)		
2 Chr. 15:2				X		
2 Chr. 15:4 b				X (Asa, Israel)		
2 Chr. 15:12				X		
2 Chr. 15:13				X		
2 Chr. 15:15 b				X (Asa, Israel)		
2 Chr. 16:12				X	X	
2 Chr. 17:3					X (Baals)	
2 Chr. 17:4				X (Jehoshaphat)		
2 Chr. 18:4			X (Jeho.)			
2 Chr. 18:6			X (Jeho.)			
2 Chr. 18:7			X (Jeho.)			
2 Chr. 19:3				X (Jeho.)		
2 Chr. 20:3				X (Jeho.)		
2 Chr. 20:4 b				X (Jeho., Israel)		
2 Chr. 22:9 b					X (Ahaziah)	

## *Seeking the Lord in Chronicles Table*

2 Chr. 24:6	X (Joash)				X (Joash)	
2 Chr. 24:22						X (Joash)
2 Chr. 25:15					X (Amaziah)	
2 Chr. 25:20					X (Amaziah)	
2 Chr. 26:5				X (Uzziah)		
2 Chr. 30:19	X (Hezekiah)			X (Hezekiah)		
2 Chr. 31:9					X (Hezekiah)	
2 Chr. 31:21	X (Hezekiah)			X (Hezekiah)		
2 Chr. 32:31					X (envoys, Hezek)	
2 Chr. 34:3				X (Josiah)		
2 Chr. 34:21			X (Josiah)			
2 Chr. 34:26			X (Josiah)			

## Sermon on Retribution

*Sermon Idea for 2<sup>nd</sup> hour by Mark Shipp*

### I. **Retribution, according many, is an immutable, universal law.**

- A. *“There is a law of retribution working in the universe. There is not only retribution but retribution in kind. Pharaoh has murdered the male children of the Hebrews by casting them into the river Nile. Now the angel of death flies across his own kingdom to smite through death the first-born of every Egyptian home. As Maxim Gorky puts it: “Life has its wisdom; its name is accident. Sometimes it rewards us, but more often it takes revenge on us. And just as the sun endows each object with a shadow, so the wisdom of life prepares retribution for man’s every act. This is true, this is inevitable, and we must all know and remember it.” (moreillustrations.com)*
- B. *Story of the thief who stole the collection from a Kenyan church and was immediately killed by a bus.*
- C. *Biblical account in Judges one of Adoni-Bezek, his treatment of captured princes, and then his eventual treatment by the Israelites.*
- D. *Biblical retribution is unsettling to us, and yet it is prominent many places in scripture. An entire book of the Bible, Job, is dedicated to this theme.*

### II. **Retribution in 1 Chron. 10 and 13 and the Chronicler’s world.**

- A. *The writer of Chronicles begins his narratives with the story of the death of Saul in battle.*
  - 1. For most of the chapter, it tracks well with the synoptic account in 1 Samuel 31 until vv. 13–14. Saul dies in battle against the Philistines, his body and those of his sons are put on public display, the men of Jabesh-Gilead succeeded in taking back the bodies.
  - 2. But the warrant for the death is different in the 1 Chronicles account: Saul did not “seek the Lord,” but sought instead a medium.
  - 3. Here, Saul’s “seeking” meant that he went to the medium for oracular wisdom from a dead person as to whether he would prevail in battle. This seeking had nothing to do with the set of the heart towards God and the things of God.
- B. *David is presented in 1 Chronicles as the polar opposite of Saul.*
  - 1. After being acclaimed by all Israel, north and south, and gathering a massive army of supporters in chapters 11 and 12, David sends word to all Israel in chapter to go get the ark, because they “did not seek it in the days of Saul.”
  - 2. David seeks the Lord in worship, counsel, and the set of his heart above all else, and prospers in all ways in the book of Chronicles.
- C. *Why all this attention on retribution, both positive and negative, in the book of Chronicles?*
  - 1. It is easy to look at the idea of “retribution,” think only of primitive or childish ideas of payback for behavior, and attribute poor theology to the author.
  - 2. Indeed, bad decisions, sin, and faithlessness results in negative retribution, generally immediate in the book.
  - 3. Payback for faithfulness is much more nuanced. There is no real attention

- in the book to single acts of goodness, resulting in reward. Saul consulted a medium; he paid with his life. He did not “seek the Lord.”
4. David, on the other hand, set his mind and heart to seek the Lord in all areas of his life.
  5. In the post-exilic world of the Chronicler, the Jews had no independence, no king, no self-determination, were weak and of little international account. They were in that sad state because of the idolatry and failure to seek the Lord of their forebears. On the other hand, if they in their distressed state would seek the Lord as David, Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah, and Josiah did, the Lord would restore them as he had done so many times in the past.

### **III. Retribution and the modern world.**

#### *A. It is too simple to write retribution off as a sub-Christian doctrine.*

1. We too easily go to the New Testament and read grace and privilege into its pages, but grace is only meaningful if consequences for sin are real! Just ask Ananias and Sapphira.
2. Failure to account for consequences dishonors the perpetrator and the victim.
3. Retribution, according to Job’s friends, was an immutable law. Where they erred was not in insisting in God’s judgment and justice; it was in thinking God’s justice is always apparent and timely, and one can know it. The point of Job is that God’s retribution—his justice—is mysterious.

#### *B. Two old ideas that need renewing in the modern world.*

1. Our age has not only lost the concept of sin, but that there are consequences for bad behavior and faithlessness.
2. The direct connection between act and retribution is often mysterious, however, and God’s distribution of justice is often unclear; we, like Job, often see the wicked thriving (Hugh Hefner comes to mind!).
3. The second thing which must be re-captured in our age, as in the Chronicler’s, is that faithfully seeking the Lord in prayer, worship, study, and the set of the heart.
4. For us, like the Chronicler, faithfulness should not be counted as a single act, or even acts, of goodness. It is to set the heart and mind to seek the Lord. In God’s own time he will recompense our faithfulness with success as he counts it.

## **“A Tale of Two Kings: What It Means to Seek the Lord”**

Texts: 2 Chron. 10:13–14, 13:1–4.

### *I. Examples and consequences of failure to seek the Lord.*

A. Have you not heard of the madman who lit a lamp in the bright morning and went to the marketplace crying ceaselessly, “I seek God! I seek God!” There were many among those standing there who didn’t believe in God so he made them laugh. “Is God lost?” one of them said. “Has he gone astray like a child?” said another. “Or is he hiding? Has he gone on board ship and emigrated?” So they laughed and shouted to one another. The man sprang into their midst and looked daggers at them. “Where is God?” he cried. “I will tell you. We have killed him—you and I. We are all his killers! But how have we done this? How could we swallow up the sea? Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the horizon? What will we do as the earth is set loose from its sun?” (Friedrich Nietzsche, 1889). Nietzsche’s point was not that God does not exist, but that God has become irrelevant. Men and women may assert that God exists or that he does not, but it makes little difference either way. God is dead not because he doesn’t exist, but because we live, play, govern, and die as though he doesn’t (C. Colson, *Kingdoms in Conflict*).

B. Example of seeking education and wealth more than seeking God.

1. Example from education: A mentor of mine said he worked for many years to achieve greater levels of academic achievement, but when he reached the top of those academic mountains, he realized his achievement was vacuous.
2. Example of Roomy Khan, indicted for insider trading. She made millions, but lost it all, because she pursued what was ephemeral and illegal, rather than what was good and right.

### *II. Saul: Seeking for all the wrong things in all the wrong places.*

A. Saul failed to seek the Lord, but sought power and security in other ways.

1. He offered worship in his own way, in his own time, when he personally offered sacrifice rather than waiting for Samuel (1 Samuel 13).
2. He broke the statute of *Torah* relating to devotion to destruction regarding the Amalekites (1 Samuel 15).
3. He consulted (Hebrew *dāraš*, “seek”) a medium to receive a word from Samuel, but did not seek the Lord (1 Samuel 28; 1 Chron. 10:13–14).

B. In Chronicles, these are subsumed into the Chronicler’s simple synopsis: he failed to seek the Lord.

1. “Seeking the Lord” in Chronicles means to seek him in appropriate worship, in keeping with the *Torah*, and in setting the heart and mind to the Lord and his ways.

- a) He neglected the ark of the covenant, leaving it abandoned at Kiriath-Jearim.
  - b) He conducted worship when and as he wished.
  - c) He broke the statutes of *Torah* by breaking the law of the ban and by consulting a medium.
  - d) He did not set his heart and mind to seek the Lord in first place.
2. Of all the ways that Saul disqualified himself in Scripture, the final evaluation of the Chronicler is that he did not “seek the Lord.”

*III. David, on the other hand, began his kingship with seeking the Lord, by bringing the ark of the covenant into prominence again.*

- A. Chapters 11–16 of 1 Chronicles deal with the all-important task of putting the Lord in first place in Israelite society. This meant, first of all, to restore the ark to prominence.
  1. Chapters 11–12 deal with David’s anointing as king over all Israel and with representatives of all 12 tribes supporting his kingship.
  2. Chapters 13–16 deal with the bringing of the ark of the covenant into Jerusalem.
- B. After David’s kingship is confirmed by “all Israel” in chapters 11–12, the first thing David does is to “seek the Lord” by returning the ark of the covenant, which had not been “sought” during the reign of Saul.
- C. David’s reign is characterized by “seeking the Lord,” the opposite of Saul’s failure to seek him.
- D. Almost every subsequent king in the Chronicler’s history is evaluated by whether they sought, or failed to seek, the Lord.
  1. Solomon is encouraged by David to seek the Lord in 1 Chron. 21:19, by setting his heart on the Lord: “Now set your mind and heart to seek the Lord your God. Arise and build the sanctuary of the Lord God...”
    - a) Perhaps a theme verse of Chronicles is delivered by David to Solomon: “If you seek him, he will be found by you” (2 Chron. 28:9).
    - b) The first act by Solomon as king was to “seek the Lord” by worshipping at the bronze altar (2 Chron. 1:5).
  2. One negative example will suffice: “And [Rehoboam] did evil, for he did not set his heart to seek the Lord” (2 Chron. 12:14).

*IV. Seeking the Lord in the Chronicler’s day.*

- A. The Chronicler lived in an age far different from that of David and Saul, but which their stories could serve as important object lessons.
  1. They had lost their political independence, their political system, and their tribal structure.
  2. They had gone into exile because they had “stiffened their necks against turning to the Lord,” and mocked, despised, and scoffed at the prophets (2 Chron. 36:13–16).
  3. Now, after return of some Judeans from exile, there was a question about their legitimacy (were they the true heirs of the promises and covenants,

- or not?), their worship (were their priests and their worship legitimate?), And whether God would still honor his covenant with David.
4. The Chronicler retells the history of Judean kingship in order to persuade his readers that God was still able to restore their corporate life and community of faith, if they would seek the Lord, like David and Solomon had done.
- B. How was this to be accomplished? To the Chronicler, seeking the Lord meant:
1. First of all, setting the heart and mind to the things of the Lord.
  2. Seeking the Lord in worship.
  3. Seeking the Lord through reading and obedience to God's *Torah*, his righteous instruction.
  4. Seeking guidance through prayer and counsel of spiritual leaders.
- V. *What does it mean to "seek the Lord" today?*
- A. We live in a post-Christian world in every bit as much chaos and loss of spiritual direction as the Chronicler did.
1. G. K. Chesterton: "The first effect of not believing in God is to believe in anything" (*The Laughing Prophet*, p. 211).
  2. We live in a world that, for now, tolerates our faith, but does not buttress or embrace it.
  3. It is easy, as in the Chronicler's day, to fade into the culture's values, or to cease believing in the promises and covenants, or to adopt the idols of the age.
- B. It is important for us, as it was for the Chronicler, to set our hearts and minds to seek the Lord in first place.
1. To set the heart and mind is first of all to make the Lord and his kingdom our *priority*, before politics, entertainment, jobs, money, weddings, funerals, friends, and security.
  2. Seeking the Lord involves prayer. If we are not a people committed to prayer,
  3. Seeking the Lord involves worship. Worship, in 1 Chronicles 16, involves remembering the Lord's mighty acts on our behalf, thanking him for deliverance, and praising him for who he is and what he has done.
  4. Seeking the Lord involves immersion in Scripture. Every king in Judah's history who was a good king began a "back to the Bible" movement of devotion to reading and doing God's instructions.