

Let Him Go Up

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Date: 26 December 2019

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[0 : 0 0] Now to 2 Chronicles, chapter 36, where we read, and the final few verses of the chapter. From verse 22, Now in the first year of Cyrus, king of Persia, that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus, king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom and also put it in writing.

Thus says Cyrus, king of Persia, the Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah.

Whoever is among you of all his people, may the Lord his God be with him. Let him go up. Especially the final couple of sentences. There, whoever is among you of all his people, may the Lord his God be with him.

Let him go up. We could say that the books of Chronicles, 1 and 2 Chronicles, the same is true of 1 and 2 Kings as well, but you could say that they are essentially a picture gallery of the various reigns that took place in Israel and also in Judah, mostly Judah, in regard to 2 Chronicles.

So as you go through 1 and 2 Chronicles here, you're just imagining yourself that you're going through a portrait gallery and you're studying each of those kings as they're described, and you can see the features that are described there, sometimes more detailed than others.

[1 : 3 1] For example, you find a lot more detail about kings such as Hezekiah and Josiah than, say, others who are not as prominent in the book as they are.

It seems true of the likes of Ahab in the northern kingdom of Israel. It all has to do with what kind of circumstances they lived through, how eminent they were either for or against godliness.

And so as you go through the book, you come to these portraits, you study them, you just imagine yourself walking through this portrait gallery and spending time looking at them, and as you do so, you're really taking in the history that the writers of these books actually had in mind as they wrote these two books and set out these details for us.

But as you come towards the end, you're conscious of something lacking. There is something lacking in these portraits of these kings because there is especially lacking that perfect king that indeed the whole Old Testament age was waiting for and moving towards and making preparation for, the messianic king, the king who is now Jesus.

But he doesn't appear in this gallery because obviously he had not yet come into the world. So you can imagine as you're walking through this portrait gallery, you come to the end of that series of portraits on the wall, and then you come to this frame that's empty.

[3 : 0 6] There isn't a portrait in it. You're waiting for it to be filled with the portrait of the person who is intended as being in that frame. And that, of course, is Jesus.

And in any real sense, that final frame, the messianic king, the perfect king, is not there right through to the end of the Old Testament.

But the Old Testament prepares the way for that in different ways. Now, the interesting thing is, it is, I think, interesting and also significant to some extent, that this book, the 2 Chronicles, is the very last book in the Hebrew Old Testament.

As you know, the Old Testament was written in Hebrew, and the books are arranged differently to the way that they're arranged in English translations. We've become used to the Old Testament being divided up into the five books of Moses, then the historical books, and then the poetic books like Psalms, and then the prophets, the major prophets, then the minor prophets, finishing with the minor prophet Malachi, who also, of course, has his own take on the coming of the day of the Lord.

But in the Hebrew Scriptures, this is the last book of the Old Testament. And so the Old Testament Scriptures in Hebrew actually finish with these words, Whoever is among you of all his people, may the Lord his God be with him.

[4 : 33] Let him go up. They are anticipatory words. They are words which anticipate something else yet to happen. They anticipate moving on from here to something even more significant.

And that's why it's the New Testament that's intended, as you think about this, let him go up. Let's take the next step. Go back to the fulfillment.

Go to the fulfillment. Forward, rather, to the fulfillment. So these are the final words of the Old Testament in Hebrew. And what I want to do tonight, just look at these words, let him go up.

Because going up to God, going up to Jerusalem, going up to the temple, going up, ascending, they are very significant words spiritually right throughout the Bible.

Because whenever you think of coming before God, the Bible always encourages us to think of going up to God. Even when we bow in his presence, we're conscious that he's above us, that he is, in every respect, superior to us, that he is the king.

[5 : 41] That he's the one to whom we actually ascend in our thoughts, in our worship, in our prayers. They ascend to God. Our worship ascends to God. He is there, up above us, enthroned.

And so the whole concept of going up to God, that whole emphasis on going up, that emphasis on our minds being trained by God to think of him as one towards whom we go upwards, that's what we really have, in a sense, built into these words as well.

And there are three features of that that we're going to briefly just look at tonight. Very briefly, indeed. First of all, there is a going up from Babylon to Jerusalem.

Now, we read the last part of the history of the people here, the final days of Judah. And these days of Judah came to an end with the destructive power of the Babylonians under King Nebuchadnezzar.

He came with his forces to Jerusalem. He broke down Jerusalem's walls. He burnt the temple of God. He pillaged the temple. He took all the precious things of the temple that were dedicated to God.

[6 : 50] He took most of them back to Babylon and used them there. And he took many of the people captive back to Babylon virtually as his captives or his slaves even.

So the book of Chronicles, the books of Chronicles, they were actually written for those who 70 years after they had been taken to Babylon, 70 years after that, as you know, they came back to Jerusalem.

And they began rebuilding the temple. And you find in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah especially that they're geared to that as well as the prophecy of Zechariah who as God's prophet encouraged the rebuilding of the temple.

So 1 and 2 Chronicles were written as books of encouragement. They were written as books that described why the people had gone into exile in the first place.

Why did God allow such or purpose, such destructive power to come upon a temple that he himself had actually instructed be built for him? Why did such things happen?

[7 : 56] Well, we're told, of course, in this chapter itself, in the final summing up, that it was because of the gross wickedness and sinfulness and rebellion of the people of Judah against God, the God of their fathers.

They persistently, verse 15 there, rejected the message he sent them through his messengers, the prophets. And they kept mocking the messengers of God, despising God's words, scoffing at his prophets until finally the wrath of the Lord rose up against his people until there was no remedy.

God said, that's it, that's enough. And then he brought the Babylonians on top of them. So, there's a going up intended here from Babylon to Jerusalem.

It's anticipating the return of the people from Babylon to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple. And this is something that God himself initiated and God himself had purpose.

But it lures how in the first year of the Cyrus, king of Persia, the Persians conquered the Babylonians. They then established their own empire. And the Persian Empire was an empire that had a lot of the districts or the nations under their control.

[9 : 14] They allowed them the type of worship that they themselves had been used to or the kind of worship that they wanted. And so that facilitated God in giving instruction through Cyrus to the people who had been taken captive of their descendants to go back to build this house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah.

Now, it says here, Cyrus had said, that God, the Lord of heaven, God of heaven, that he had given him all the kingdoms of the earth. And of course, that's true because the Persian Empire was a very widespread empire.

And he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. So you can see it's God who initiated this movement back to Jerusalem.

After all of these years, what he had prophesied, what had been prophesied through Jeremiah and others, now here it is coming to pass. There's a going up. There's a going back to Jerusalem.

A going up from Babylon to Jerusalem again. And that's fitting in with the conviction of the Old Testament as a whole that this God worshipped at Jerusalem, this God that revealed himself to the people, he is the God of the whole earth.

[10 : 28] He is the Lord. He is the one who controls the movement of empires and peoples all the way through history. And that's really why that passage here is so adamant that it is the Lord who has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem.

And therefore, whoever is among you of all his people, may the Lord as God be with him and let him go up, go back to rebuild this house of the Lord. That's the first point.

The first aspect of the going up is from Babylon to Jerusalem. The second aspect of this going up is from the kings to the king.

In other words, you take all of what we said, imagining that you're walking through this portrait gallery. Here's this collection of kings and what a varied collection it is. What a lot of bad kings there are, although there are some good ones as well.

But even the good ones that you find, even the likes of Josiah and Hezekiah, they're not so good that they're perfect. They're still not the perfect king. And you have all of that series of portraits of kings and of reigns and all that they did and they're marked one after another.

[11 : 43] Even the best of them is not sinless. The best of them still is not the perfect king, not the messianic king. So if you're going through this portrait gallery, it's really, in a sense, the same principle or same emphasis as you find throughout the whole of the Old Testament.

Where is this king? Where is this messiah? Where is this promised deliverer? Where is this one that God promised would crush the head of the serpent? And you're looking for this final portrait.

You're looking to come across this messianic king, this great figure. And all the way through to the end of the Old Testament, he's not there. But he is promised and he is prophesied.

And so you go from these kings, you go up to the promised king of Christ himself. And of course, as far as we're concerned, you're no longer looking at a frame that is empty.

The portrait of the messianic king is now in that frame. That is the great message of Christmas, isn't it? that the Son of God came into the world, filled this empty frame that was left empty at the end of the Old Testament with his own portrait, with his own characteristics, with his own kingship, with everything to do with him as the promised saviour and messiah, the great priest, king, prophet of his people.

[13 : 15] And that place is now above the rest. He's not just the one who comes after all of these kings as you go through the gallery. You can't actually place him just alongside or beside the other kings.

He's up there. He's above them. He is God. He's one to whom all homage and obedience is due. And that's really, in a sense, what's being said by the book of Chronicles here, by the second book of Chronicles.

It's more or less saying to us, well, here are all of these kings and look at them. Look at all their characteristics. Look at how good a king Hezekiah was. Look at his reforms. Look at Josiah who came after and set up further reforms and brought so many things back in of what had been abandoned by his previous, by his predecessors.

Yet, and yet, there's something yet missing. missing. There's that glory. There's that divine, glorious kingship that's not yet there.

But he is now. And the wonder, really, of Christmas is, isn't it, the wonder of the incarnation is that it's not how Jesus was born. It's not how the Son of God came into this world.

[14 : 38] It's the fact that it was He Himself who came. Who would have expected, as you go through the gallery of 2 Chronicles and 1 and 2 Chronicles, as you look at all these portraits of these kings and you realize that the perfect king has not yet come and that this is all preparing for the coming of this perfect king when he comes.

But who would have thought that that frame was going to be filled by the portrait of God Himself? That it was no one less than the Son of God, the divine God of the Old Testament who would come in the person of His Son, who would Himself take human nature, who would become one of us, who would take the sin of His people and its guilt and who would take their place and who would come to be the one who filled that final frame in a way that far exceeded anything that could be understood in the Old Testament times.

And when you come to the New Testament itself, all the way through that you find an emphasis on Jesus being the fulfiller and the fulfillment of all of those anticipatory kings of the Old Testament.

After all, when you come to the crucifixion, remember what Pilate instructed be put above the cross? Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.

And you remember how the chief priests and the Pharisees, the chief priests especially, said to Pilate, don't write that He is the King of the Jews, but write that He Himself said that He was the King of the Jews.

[16 : 24] And of course, Pilate in his famous statement then said, what I have written, I have written. What I have written, that's how it's going to stay. Now, He didn't know what He was really saying. He didn't know that this Jesus was in fact God in the flesh, that He was the promised Messiah.

He didn't care too much about that. He was just pushing His own authority on the issue. But in the wisdom of God, that title is absolutely relevant.

This is the King. This is Jesus of Nazareth, the King. of the Jews. Let us go up. Let Him go up.

There's the emphasis at the end of the Old Testament, anticipating the New Testament age. Let Him go up. Let all of these kings give way to their fulfillment in the King, in Christ, and in His incarnation, and ultimately His death as well.

There's a going up from Babylon to Jerusalem, literally, in history, but there's a going up from the kings of this portrait gallery to the king, to Jesus Himself.

[17 : 37] And then you follow through with that whole emphasis on going up as it goes through into your own personal Christian experience, because there's a going up in terms of salvation from death to glory.

glory. And Jesus Himself heads up that particular movement from death to glory. That's what we were singing of in Psalm 68, which in English, we sang it in Gaelic, but you know the words very well yourself.

Thou hast ascended on high and led captivity captive. You have received gifts for men, even that the Lord might dwell amongst them. There is the ascension of Jesus.

There is what began at the resurrection, arising from the dead, going up from the dead. And when Jesus rose from the dead, He left death behind Him. He rose up from death.

He rose up, you might say, through death, through the grave itself. And the grave clothes He left behind were themselves evidence that He was now above death.

[18 : 47] His clothes no longer belonged to Him in His risen state. they were not appropriate. They were clothes that covered His dead body, shrouded His dead body. But now He was risen.

And so the clothes belonged to the grave, the place of His dead body, the association with death, but He's not there. As the Shining one said to those who came to the tomb searching for His body, why are you looking for the living amongst the dead?

He is not here. He is risen. He is risen. He has gone up. He's left death behind. It's so important, isn't it, for us to realize that Jesus, from the moment of His resurrection, came to stand above death.

Death was beneath His feet. And His ascension back to the right hand of God simply added more emphasis to that, though it has its own theological importance.

He has gone up. He's risen up from death. And He's gone up from this world where He was up to that point since He came to be born, but He's now gone up to heaven.

[19 : 59] He's at the right hand of God the Father. And for that reason, it's important to note that the ending of Luke's gospel, for example, where Jesus led the disciples out as far as Bethany, then lifting up His hands, He blessed them, and while He blessed them, He was parted from them and was carried up into heaven.

He was taken up. You see, there's the same emphasis on going upwards. And it begins with Jesus Himself. And then when you come to the Acts of the Apostles, which are also written by the same writer as Luke, the Luke, the authorship of Acts, the same authorship as Luke, the gospel, this is how it begins.

As you know, He describes what He had written previously and then how they had come to meet with Jesus after His resurrection. And when, in verse 9, when Jesus had said, these things, as they were looking on, He was lifted up.

And a cloud took Him out of their sight. And while they were gazing into heaven, as He went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes and said, Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up into heaven?

This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw Him go into heaven, as you saw Him taken up.

[21 : 27] see this ascension, this going up, emphasized in Jesus Himself over death. He's gone up over death. He's now victorious over death.

And when you come to the believers going up, then that same emphasis follows through into that. Remember at Ephesians, again, we mentioned it recently, somewhere that in Ephesians and chapter 2, you'll find Paul emphasizing there, verses 4 to 6, that in a spiritual sense and a personal sense in our union with Christ, God's people are already set there in heaven in Him.

Because this is what he's saying, God being rich in mercy because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ, by grace you have been saved, and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.

In Christ, God's people already share in His triumph over death. They are raised up together with Him, so that they are established over death in Christ Himself.

There's that going up already, as you can see it, as they are united to Him in His victory. That's how it is for you as well tonight, as you share in that victory of Christ, as you've come to place your faith in Him, your trust in Him, as you know yourself united to Him.

[23 : 08] Well, this is what He's saying with regard to where you're at in terms of your status and your spiritual status in relation to God.

You are lifted up in Him. You are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. And of course, that's an emphasis that carries on into a present experience, isn't it?

Because the life that we currently are living is a life that is seeking daily to rise up, to rise above sin, to rise above self, to rise above the world, to rise above the devil, to rise above temptation, to rise above ultimately, to rise above death itself.

And as we know that in principle, we already are there in Christ, where He is in heaven, but still this life is one in which we have to strive to overcome and to persevere, and not just to meet, but rise above those things which are at enmity with us.

That's why Jesus, that's why God in 2 Thessalonians, we can conclude with what he wrote there through Paul, where we find in 1 Thessalonians in chapter 4, the apostle is addressing the concern of the Thessalonian church at the time, who had questions and serious questions and doubts, indeed, about what had happened to those of their number who had died, and Jesus had not yet returned.

[24 : 49] where were they going to be in relation to Jesus when he did return? What would their relationship be to that return of Christ? Were they going to miss out on it?

Were they going to be left behind? These kind of things were obviously in the mind of those Christians in Thessalonica, and this is why Paul says, but we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others too, who have no hope.

For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so through Jesus God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep.

And this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, with the sound of the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.

See, they're coming up first out of death, just like Jesus himself did. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.

[26 : 05] And so we will always be with the Lord. Therefore, encourage one another with these words. So you see at the end of 2nd Chronicles, were words of great encouragement to those people of Judah who had come back from the captivity of Babylon.

They were being encouraged to go up to Jerusalem, to rebuild the temple, to reestablish God's community there, and his worship there.

And at the same time, encouraged to wait for the messianic king, to go up to the next stage, to the next age, to the New Testament age.

And now we who are in the New Testament age, we are being encouraged. We are being encouraged not only to go up in our worship of God, but also to think of stepping up at the next stage of the resurrection.

Whoever is among you, of his people, let him go up. May God bless these few thoughts on his word. Let's pray. Almighty God, we do give thanks tonight that you have gained victory for your people over all that stands between them and heaven.

[27 : 22] We give thanks, O Lord, that in your own persons you have come to establish that victory for them. We bless you tonight as we come to trust in you, and as you have united us to your Son, Jesus Christ, so you have already given us to share in that victory, so that we have come through being born again to enter into a new relationship with God.

We thank you for the sense of anticipation that you give to your people in their hope, for their hope encourages them to go upwards and to look beyond the present life into the next age of redemption at the coming of the Lord himself, that final age that will last for eternity.

Lord, we give thanks for the way in which your word encourages us in our thoughts and seeks to be a meaningful power in our lives in seeking to fulfill in our practice what your word sets out in its teaching.

So help us, we pray, as we come to the end of this year, that we may think as we go up another step to another year in our lives. Help us, we pray, to look upwards to you and to be able to sing with your church of old.

I enjoyed when they said to me, let us go up to the house of the Lord. Receive our thanks, we pray. Hear the prayers of your people for Jesus' sake.

[28 : 48] Amen. Let's now conclude by singing the words of Psalm 24. Psalm 24 on page 230 7-10 Ye gates lift up your heads on high, ye doors that last foray be lifted up, that so the King of glory enter me.

But who of glory is the King? The mighty Lord is this, even that same Lord that great and might and strong in battle is. Verses 7-10 of Psalm 24 to God's praise.

Ye gates lift up your heads on high, ye doors that last foray, be lifted up, that so the King of glory enter me.

He is the King, the mighty Lord is this, in the same Lord that great in might.

I'm strong in battle in battle is. Ye gates lift up your heads, ye doors, doors that do last foray be lifted up, that so the King of glory enter me.

[31 : 01] But who is he that is the King of glory, who is this?
The Lord of the King of Cella■■■■ is commencer