

5748U

Mid-Atlantic Christadelphian Bible school - 2000

THE HOUSE OF ASAPH - FAMILY OF FAITH AND MASTERS OF MUSIC

Speaker: Bro. Roger Lewis

Study #1: The Founding of the House of Asaph

Reading: 1 Chronicles 16

Well, thank you brother chairman, and good morning brethren and sisters. May I just make a slight adjustment to the chairman's remarks this morning, the full and proper title for this study is, THE HOUSE OF ASAPH - FAMILY OF FAITH AND MASTERS OF MUSIC, because one of the great features, of course, about this family was their contribution to the music and the story of worship in the history of Israel, and that's one of the things, God willing, that we hope to take a look at, in the course of these studies. You may not know much about Asaph or think that there is much about him in the divine record, but hopefully by the time we've finished this particular story, you will find just how remarkable this man was, and in fact, how remarkable his family was!

I'm going to suggest to you, this morning, and I ask you to reserve judgment in the matter until you've heard the balance of the studies, but I'm going to suggest to you this morning, that this is the story of the most remarkable family in the history of Israel! and I've used those words carefully, and I do not think that they're an overstatement, I think that this family, this family of Asaph, was absolutely unique in the history of the nation. What we're going to do, God willing, in the course of these studies, is to try and get into the heart and soul of this family. To understand their passion for the truth, to see what it was that moved them for so many generations of this one single family; what was the secret of this house, that kept them faithful for almost 600 years of history? one family - 600 years of absolute faithfulness!

Now there must have been a secret, b&s, to this family, and we want to try and discover what it was! because if we want to build faithful families in the truth today, then there's no better family to look at than the house of Asaph, down through their several generations, because here was a family of extraordinary commitment to the things of the truth. So that's what we're going to try and do, God willing, in these studies, is to discover the secrets of this family, and secondly, to try and look at their musical contribution to the history of worship in the nation of Israel. We want to try and see what it was, what the guiding principles were of this family and their singing of praise to the Father, as a basis for how we should worship the Father, even in these last days.

Well, this morning, as our title suggests, we're going to look at the founding of this particular house, and that's really the story of how Asaph came about to be in the role that

he was to play. That story begins for us this morning, in 1 Chronicles chapter 15.

So, if you'll turn please to 1 Chronicles 15, we take up the record, and here we see that this is the moment of time, you'll recall, that David brought the ark of God to Zion. There, in 1 Chronicles 15 we read these words, verse 14, 'So the priests and the Levites sanctified themselves to bring up the ark of Yahweh God of Israel. And the children of the Levites bare the ark of God upon their shoulders with the staves thereon, as Moses commanded according to the word of Yahweh. And David spake to the chief of the Levites to appoint their brethren to be the singers with instruments of music, psalteries and harps and cymbals, sounding, by lifting up the voice with joy. So the Levites appointed Heman the son of Joel: and of his brethren, Asaph the son of Berechiah; and of the sons of Merari their brethren, Ethan the son of Kushaiah'.

So here, at the time of the bringing of the ark of God to Zion, the leaders of the singers were appointed, and they were selected by the Levites out of their own ranks. And the Levites chose 3 men in particular, says 1 Chronicles 15 and verse 17; they chose Heman the son of Joel, they chose Asaph the son of Berechiah and they chose Ethan the son of Kushaiah; and, Ethan, of course, is later to be known in other passages as Jeduthun. So Ethan and Jeduthun are interchangeable terms. So these 3 men were selected out of the ranks of the Levites, and presumably they were chosen because of their musical ability; but, they were not just chosen at random, b&s, because if you come back to the 6th chapter of 1 Chronicles, this was not just the selection of 3 men out of the whole house of Levi at random. NO, there was something more specific about the selection, because when we come to 1 Chronicles chapter 6, we'll find that each of these men, in fact, represented one of the three great branches of the tribe of Levi.

So notice verse 33, here's our first man again, 'These are they that waited with their children. Of the sons of the Kohathites: Heman a singer'. Now Heman of verse 33 is a man, verse 38, of Kohath, the son of Levi. Then in verse 39 we have our second man, Asaph, and he, verse 43, is a son of Gershom, the son of Levi. Then we have our third man in verse 44, Ethan the son of Kishi and he, verse 47, is the son of Merari, the son of Levi. So you see, each of the three men that were selected by the Levites, in turn, represented one of the three great divisions of the tribe of Levi itself. So we have Heman of the Kohathites, we have Asaph of the Gershomites and we have Jeduthun of the Merarites. So here then, is the whole house of Levi represented in the selection of these three men.

Now (if you come back to 1 Chronicles 15) therefore, we see now the story of how these singers were involved in this very special day, when the ark of God was brought to Zion by David. In verse 19 we read, 'So the singers, Heman, Asaph, and Ethan (or Jeduthun), were appointed to sound with cymbals of brass', and then we're told in the 20th verse that they were the players on the psalteries, and at the end of the verse we're told they played with, or on, Alamoth; and, Alamoth, we believe, is the female choir. They were a choir of female singers, of female voices. Then, in verse 21, we have the players on the harps and with them is the choir known as Sheminith, and the word 'Sheminith' means '1/8th or an

octave lower' (8067), and it represented the male choir, who accompanied the players on harps. Then we have Chenaniah, in verse 22, who is responsible for the lifting up and the carriage of the ark on the shoulders of the Kohathites. Then we've got two doorkeepers in front of the ark, verse 23; seven trumpeters who play before the ark, verse 24; two doorkeepers behind the ark, verse 24. So we have this whole procession that travels now to Jerusalem on this occasion. Who is at the forefront? who's right at the front of the whole procession of them all? and the answer is, why! the three singers, Heman, verse 19, Asaph and Jeduthun, all there at the beginning of the story of the bringing of the ark to Zion.

So chapter 16 verse 1 says, 'So they brought the ark of God and set it in the midst of the tent that David had pitched for it: and they offered burnt sacrifices and peace offerings before God. And when David had made an end of offering the burnt offerings and the peace offerings, he blessed the people in the name of Yahweh. And he dealt to every one of Israel, both man and woman, to every one a loaf of bread, and a good piece of flesh, and a flagon of wine'. So now, you see, this tremendous celebration has come to an end: all the singers have sung their songs; all the choirs have sung, the psalteries and the harps have played; the trumpeters have blown; and, the whole procession has brought the ark into Zion; and now, all the people are about to depart and to go home their several ways after this wondrous day of praise and celebration. Now this chapter is going to tell us exactly what David did once this ark had been brought to Zion.

Now, I just want to show you something interesting about 1 Chronicles 16. If you hold your hands in 1 Chronicles 16 and come back to the parallel record which is in 2 Samuel chapter 6, I want to show you something interesting about the way 1 Chronicles 16 is constructed; because, in 2 Samuel 6 which is the same story, let's just see if we can compare notes between the two records. In 2 Samuel 6 and verse 19, you'll notice that it says there, 'He dealt among all the people, even among the whole multitude of Israel, as well as to the women as men, to every one a cake of bread, and a good piece of flesh, and a flagon of wine'. Now where is that in Chronicles? and the answer is, why that's 1 Chronicles 16 verse 3, isn't it? So that's the same reference! Now look again at 2 Samuel 6 and verse 19 and see how the verse ends; and you'll notice the verse ends with this phrase, 'so all the people departed everyone to his house', now where's that in Chronicles? and the answer is, why it's the very last verse of 1 Chronicles 16 at verse 43, 'And all the people departed every man to his house'. So you see, what this tells us is that, in 1 Chronicles 16, the balance of the verses in between represent a special interpellation, an extra section that's only found in the Chronicles record from verse 4 to verse 42. If we were to ask what is this special section found in the Chronicles record? the answer is that this is the original story of the appointment of Asaph to his responsibilities as leader of the music in the celebration of the ark being brought to Zion.

You know, one of the interesting things about these verses, from verse 4 onwards, is this: that this was David's first and greatest concern after bringing the ark of God to Zion. It's not until chapter 17 and verse 1, that David will take any concern for where the ark of God will dwell. His greatest concern was this, that on this day, the very day that he had brought

the ark of God to Zion, he was concerned about those who would minister before the ark. David wanted someone who would explain to Israel the true power and importance of what the ark represented. He wanted someone who could explain to the nation, the significance of what they had done this day; that the ark of God, which represented the presence of God amongst His people, had been brought to them in Jerusalem. David said, 'we never ever want to lose this precious moment in the history of our nation, I need someone who can celebrate this principle before the nation. This is the first thing that must be done!' So he chose a man, he chose a man who understood what that ark was all about; he chose a man who would be able to recount before Israel, in the songs of worship and praise, the real significance of the ark of God's presence amongst His people; and, verse 4 says, 'He appointed certain of the Levites to minister before the ark of Yahweh, and to record, and to thank, and praise Yahweh God of Israel: Asaph the chief'. So you see, isn't that interesting? because back in chapter 15, the Levites had chosen 3 men, hadn't they? The Levites had chosen Heman, and Asaph and Jeduthun, but when David comes to make his appointment in 1 Chronicles 16, he says, 'NO, I want Asaph; I want Asaph especially to take responsibility for this matter of worship'.

Why do you think that David chose Asaph? b&s; do you think he had more musical ability than the others? NO, I don't think so. I think he chose Asaph because in this man he found a truly kindred spirit; they shared a common understanding of divine principles. David said, 'this is the man who will be able to explain the significance of these things before the nation. And as we will find in our subsequent studies, we believe absolutely, that David put his finger on just the right man; he put his finger on the very person who would be able to celebrate those principles, that were so dear to David's own heart. In fact, you'll notice in verse 5, it says, 'he chose Asaph the chief, and next to him Zechariah, Jehiel, and Shemiramoth, and Jehiel, and Mattithiah, and Eliab, and Benaiah, and Obed-edom: and Jeiel with psalteries and with harps; but Asaph made a sound with cymbals'. Do you know why Asaph made a sound with cymbals? b&s; well, he did so because he was to give leadership to the choir; and, they all sang in harmony to the beat of his heart and to the rhythm of his time; and, as Asaph tapped the cymbals, the choirs all took their leadership from this man. And do you notice this, b&s, that it was a cymbal that he played and not a drum. This was not the heavy beat of the drum of paganism! This was not the heavy pounding of the music of the heathen. Funny thing, but do you know that they have never in archaeology diggings in Israel, they've never dug up drums, did you know that? they've never discovered a drum! Israel didn't use drums, the nations did, but Israel used the cymbal; and the cymbal that Asaph played gave leadership to all the choir, who followed in sequence after him. Oh, yes, he's the leader, b&s. This man was going to be the leader!

Verse 7 says, 'Then on that day David delivered first this psalm to thank Yahweh into the hand of Asaph and his brethren'. Now by the way, you'll notice that the words 'this psalm' in verse 7 are in italics; the NASB says, 'then on that day David first assigned Asaph and his relatives to give thanks unto the LORD', or as the RSV says 'then on that day David first appointed that thanksgiving be sung to the LORD, by Asaph and his brethren'. So what the 7th verse is telling us, is that David gave the responsibility of leading the nation in song to this man. On what day did he do it? On the very day, b&s, that the ark of God

came to Zion — David singled out Asaph and made him chief. So you see, I think we can safely conclude from this, that this man, therefore, Asaph, was the original chief musician. Now, you will have heard of that phrase, it's a famous phrase in the book of Psalms, and I think that Asaph was the first of the chief musicians. Now, we're just going to look quickly at a couple of references in this regard; so come, if you would, to 2 Chronicles chapter 29 and notice what it says there in the 30th verse: 'Moreover Hezekiah the king and the princes commanded the Levites to sing praise unto Yahweh with the words of David, and of Asaph the seer'. Now do you notice this, b&s, do you notice how that Asaph and David are brought together, they stand as equals in the matter of divine worship, David and Asaph, Asaph and David.

Now when it says that they were to 'sing praise to God with the words of David and Asaph', there are only 12 psalms that are related to Asaph in the book of Psalms; but, I think that the reference here is to the fact that Asaph as the chief musician, had the responsibility for all the songs of worship that the nation would sing. He was the collector, he was the organizer of all the spiritual material that would be used for worship. So that when it says here, that they were to sing with the words of David and the words of Asaph, the reason is, because as chief musician, all the words of the songs of worship belong to him as the leader of the choir. Now this is a long time after David, isn't it? 2 Chronicles chapter 29 is, in fact, in the days of Hezekiah, and yet Asaph is seen to rank alongside David himself in these things.

Come and have a look at Nehemiah chapter 12. In the book of Nehemiah we have a similar phrase in chapter 12 and verse 45, and it says, 'Both the singers and the porters kept the ward of their God, and the ward of the purification, according to the commandment of David, and of Solomon his son. FOR in the days of David and Asaph OF OLD', oh, do you see now how these two men are brought together again in the record? 'in the days of David and Asaph of old'. Now I'm going to read from the RV, it says, 'In the days of David and Asaph of old, there was a chief of the singers and there were songs of praise and thanksgiving unto God'. So from the days of Asaph there was always a chief of the singers, says Nehemiah chapter 12, and I think the first of those singers was none other than Asaph himself, he was the first of the chief singers. In fact, do you see the word 'chief' there in verse 46, the word 'chief' there is the word 'rosh' (7218) the head of all the singers. Do you know, that that's the very same word used in 1 Chronicles 16 and verse 5, when it says, 'that David appointed Asaph and that Asaph was the 'chief'. Yes, I think we can safely assume, b&s, that indeed, Asaph was the beginning of this order of men in Israel who would lead the principals of spiritual worship; he was the first of the chief musicians who would ever after be responsible for the organization of the spiritual material of worship and the leader of the choir, down through the ages.

So, coming back to 1 Chronicles chapter 16 (therefore, we read these words in verse 8, that David appointed Asaph but he did also give him this psalm, that they might celebrate the principles of the ark of God being brought to Zion), verse 8, 'Give thanks unto Yahweh, and call upon His name'; and, now we have the balance of this special psalm that goes from verse 8 right through to verse 36 in 1 Chronicles 16. This psalm was

special! it belonged to the house of Asaph; it was written, I believe, to be sung in front of the ark, and it was written to celebrate the significance of the presence of God amongst His people. Now I don't know if you all have got the same sort of margin as my bible, but the common explanation of the words of Chronicles is as follows: that 1 Chronicles 16 verses 8 to 22, the margin says are the same as Psalm 105 verses 1 to 15; now just before you mark all of this in, just be careful because I'm going to tell you what I think of this at the end, so you might find it's already in the margin, but the common explanation is, therefore: verses 8 to 22 of Chronicles is drawn from Psalm 105 verses 1 to 15; then, 1 Chronicles 16 verses 23 through to 33, the margin says is drawn from Psalm 96 verses 1 to 13; 1 Chronicles 16 verse 34 is drawn from Psalm 106 verse 1; and, finally 1 Chronicles 16 verses 35 to 36 is drawn from Psalm 106 verses 47 to 48.

So now, let me tell you, b&s, that I think that's absolutely wrong! I think, in fact, that the real truth of the matter is that it is the exact opposite; I believe that the Psalms are drawn from Chronicles, not Chronicles from Psalms! Now, let me give you a couple of proofs of that, shall I? just hold your hand in 1 Chronicles 16 and come to Psalm 106 which is one of the Psalms that does make reference to the same phrases; so, the question here is, 'which one comes first?' Is the Chronicles' record of this psalm first or is, in fact, Chronicles a composition from other psalms as is suggested in our margins? Let's then read verses 46 to 48; but, first let's read 1 Chronicles 16 verse 35: 'And say ye, Save us, O God of our salvation, and gather us together, and deliver us from the heathen, that we may give thanks to thy holy name; and glory in thy praise. Blessed be Yahweh Elohim of Israel for ever and ever'. Now have a look at Psalm 106 and verse 46: 'He made them also to be pitied of all those that carried them captives. Save us, O Yahweh our God, and gather us from among the heathen, to give thanks unto thy holy name, and to triumph in thy praise. Blessed by Yahweh Elohim of Israel from everlasting to everlasting'. Oh yes, it's the same phrase, isn't it? but you notice this, that Psalm 106 verse 46 says these words, 'He made them also to be pitied of all those that carried them captives'; now, was that David's experience? The answer is, NO, it wasn't! When did the captivity occur? when was Israel carried captive? and the answer is, much later on in their history and, in fact, if you look really carefully at Psalm 106 and verse 47 you'll notice that there's one word that's been added to the text of 1 Chronicles 16 verse 35, whereas 1 Chronicles said, 'gather us together and deliver us from the heathen', the Psalm says, 'gather us from among the heathen'. Now, I believe, that that word 'among' was added when the words of 1 Chronicles were adapted for this Psalm, that related to a time of Israel's captivity and distress. So, in other words, which one comes first? and the answer is, Chronicles comes first! but the book of Psalms later took up the words of Chronicles and adapted them to a later moment in the history of Israel.

So, I'll give you another example in 1 Chronicles 16; now, we need to have Psalm 96 open as well. Now, you'll notice this in 1 Chronicles 16 and verse 27, it says, 'Glory and honour are in His presence; strength and gladness are in His place', says the record. Now you see what Psalm 96 says in the 6th verse: 'Honour and majesty are before Him; strength and beauty are in His sanctuary'. So, whereas Chronicles says 'they are in His place', Psalm 96 says, no, no, 'they are in His sanctuary'. Now, have a look again at 1 Chronicles

16 and now verse 29, 'Give unto Yahweh the glory due unto His name: bring an offering, and come before Him: worship Yahweh in the beauty of holiness'; now Psalm 96 says this time reading from verse 8, 'Give unto Yahweh the glory due unto His name: bring an offering, and come into His courts'; but, that's not what Chronicles said. Chronicles said 'come before Him'. The Psalm says, no, no, 'come into His courts'. B&S, why would it be that Chronicles would say, 'strength and gladness are in His place, Come before Him with an offering', but the Psalm would say, 'strength and beauty are in His sanctuary, come into His courts with an offering'? but that the Psalm reflects a later time in the history of Israel, where now there is a temple for worship. So, there is a sanctuary and there are courts; but, when David wrote his psalm, in 1 Chronicles 16, there was no such place in Zion, he'd only just brought the ark there and pitched it underneath some curtains — the temple had not yet been built; so, you see, I think 1 Chronicles is the original version of the Psalm and that this Psalm was written by David expressly for the house of Asaph to be sung in front of the ark, almost, you see, as if David gave Asaph and his family this song and said, 'Look, I want you to read this, I want you to understand the principle of this Psalm, and then I want you to lead the worship of Israel, after the story of this Psalm. Well, I can tell you, b&s, and I'm going to prove it to you, God willing, in the course of these studies, that this family absolutely devoured the spirit of this psalm and they lived it for 600 years. They lived this psalm for 600 years, did the house of Asaph!

In fact, if you'll notice what it says, if we just skip over the psalm for a moment and come to the end, verse 37 of 1 Chronicles 16 says, 'So he left there before the ark of the covenant of Yahweh, Asaph and his brethren, to minister before the ark of God continually, as every day's work required'; but, we're told in verse 39, 'Zadok the priest and his brethren the priests, they stayed before the tabernacle of Yahweh in the high place that was at Gibeon'. Verse 41 tells us that with them 'were Heman and Jeduthun, and the rest that were chosen, who were expressed by name, to give thanks to Yahweh'. So you see, what we're being told in these verses, b&s, we're being told that the musicians were divided now into two groups: the house of Asaph and only the house of Asaph were left in front of the ark of God at Jerusalem, verse 37; but, the singers of Heman and Jeduthun of verse 41, were sent to the tabernacle at Gibeah where Zadok the priest ministered and where the relics of the Mosaic system of things, as yet remained. So now we have two groups of singers in two different locations, and only the house of Asaph are left in front of the ark of God in Jerusalem. You know, it's interesting, because, you see, what we're being told here is that there were 2 tabernacles: there was the tabernacle of Moses in Gibeah that related to the spirit of the Law, and there was the tabernacle of David of which Amos speaks, in Jerusalem, which related to the true spirit of worship (It's the tabernacle of David that James shall refer to in Acts 15, when he gives his summation at the Jerusalem conference); and there, at the tabernacle of David, which is the things concerning the Law of Christ, is Asaph and his family, singing this psalm with all their hearts before the ark of God.

You know what it says in verse 37, it says they were left there to 'minister before the ark'. How do you think they ministered before the ark, b&s? They didn't take it out and polish it, they couldn't parade it around; well, 1 Chronicles 6 and verse 32 says, 'They ministered

with singing', that's how they ministered; and, I believe that every day they celebrated the significance of the ark of God amongst the people of Israel, by standing in front of the ark and singing the words of this psalm. Their praise was offered on a daily basis in this particular place and verse 37 goes on to say, 'that David left Asaph and his brethren there to minister before the ark continually', and the word 'continually' here means 'that which is perpetual' (8548), that which shall be forevermore; and, I think this was the other reason why David chose Asaph: firstly, because he was musical; secondly, because he had the same spirit of the truth; but, the third reason why David chose Asaph was because, he said, 'I never want these principles to be lost'; and, this man, Asaph, was able to guarantee that those principles would be perpetuated. I'll tell you why! because this man began a dynasty in Israel that forever stood for the principles of their father Asaph. One of the burdens of these studies, God willing, is going to be to try and discover, how it was that that was done. You see, what Asaph did was he founded an entire dynasty that would follow him: he faithfully fulfilled the charge given to him by David, by insuring that his sons captured his spirit. Standing with him, they learned responsibility and commitment by watching their father every day before the ark. The instruction of his family in the songs of the LORD, effectively founded the house of Asaph, whose influence upon the nation for spiritual good was enormous. Every generation that followed upheld the same family standard of education and excellence in the things of the truth. I think David chose the right man, b&s, and I think he chose him with wisdom, and that that choice was blessed by Almighty God. He kept the spirit of these things burning.

Now, one of the things, God willing, that we're going to try and do in the course of these studies, is to try and discover what we believe were the benchmarks by which the house of Asaph conducted their songs of praise. Now that's a bit of a challenge by the way, because we haven't got a single note, we haven't got a single chord, we haven't got a single sound that Asaph sang, and yet we want to know all about their singing and their music; but, even though we don't have their music, b&s, we do have their words, and I believe, that we can trace the key principles that guided the house of Asaph in their spiritual worship before the Father. God willing, in the course of each of our studies, we're going to look at one of these principles, by way of illustration, as a benchmark for our own singing and our own songs of worship to the Father. Let me just briefly review them for you now, because here are the keys that we're going to look at.

I think there were five key principles that the house of Asaph stood for in their music of praise. They were not only a family of faith, b&s, but they were truly masters of music of the very best sort, as far as Israel was concerned.

1. Well, the first thing was that the music of the house of Asaph ascribed thanks and praise to the Deity and, therefore, consistently promoted the supremacy of God. Everything they did and everything they sang celebrated the supremacy of God. We're going to try and come back and have a look at that, God willing, in one of our subsequent studies.

2. The second thing that was important for the music of the house of Asaph was

that they showed a reverence for the divine majesty, and they, therefore, carefully maintained the solemnity of worship in all their singing. We don't know, b&s, what the music was, but we do know the spirit with which they sang; and, we know that their spirit was one of tremendous reverence for the majesty of the God whom they came before.

3. The third principle was that the music of the house of Asaph would elevate the beauty of spiritual thought; it was the words that were important and not the music. The music was subservient to the words; the key to the songs of the house of Asaph was that they emphasized the preeminence of spiritual principle; and, these are the benchmarks that we believe we should test our own songs of worship against.

4. The fourth thing that this family stood for was, that what they sang represented an offering of dedication to the Father and, therefore, continually demanded the excellence of endeavour. We're going to be amazed, b&s, in the course of these studies, at just the marvellous spirit this house had, as they never gave up in their spirit to offer the very best that they could, in their service to the Father and in their singing of praise unto Him.

5. The fifth principle that characterized their worship was, that they expressed the joy of eternal truths and, therefore, they unceasingly proclaimed the virtue of constancy — their words and their thoughts never deviated for 600 years; they never changed. It's one of the keys to this family because they believed what they were singing about was eternal truth that, therefore, never needed to be changed, never needed to be altered.

Now these five things, b&s, become a marvellous benchmark for our own songs of praise to the Father, and we believe that these things contributed to the tremendous spiritual tone and spiritual faithfulness of this family. Well, b&s, that's the beginning of this story, the founding of the house of Asaph which all begins in 1 Chronicles 16, with the appointment of Asaph to office by David; David in his wisdom, we believe, selecting absolutely the right man for the job. In the course of our subsequent studies, we are now going to move down through history from this moment of time, from 1 Chronicles 16, and for the next 600 years, we're going to trace that family as they appear in the history of this nation. We're going to marvel at their faithfulness, and marvel at their zeal, and try, if we can, to learn the secret that kept this family faithful, so that we can build those principles, into our families today.