

The Episcopal Diocese of Eastern Michigan

THE BIBLICAL WILD

www.thebiblicawild.org

Biblical Wild, pioneers in the Christian wilderness.

WEEK XXI: I Chronicles 7-24 / Psalm 119:
113-144

From Psalm 118. Let us pray.

Open to me the gates of righteousness, that I may enter through them and give thanks to the Lord. This is the gate of the Lord; the righteous shall enter through it. I thank you that you have been answered me and have become my salvation. Amen.

I'm Todd Ousley, bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Eastern Michigan and this is the

This week we consider the books of I and II Chronicles, the first of three parts of consideration of these two books of the Bible that find themselves situated about halfway through the Old Testament in Christian scripture. And precisely at the very end of scripture in the Hebrew Bible. This difference in placement is instructive for our understanding of both the book of I and II Chronicles. Their placement here, and their tedious list of genealogies along with some less benign reasons, make them significantly neglected books in Christian study. Both in individual and group bible study, and in preaching and teaching. They've been lost in the shuffle of time as it were. However, when we note that in the Hebrew Bible that books of Chronicles occupy the very last position could become a bit more interesting. They provide a culminating assertion of faith as we move more deeply into a time of inner-faith dialog, it is important, as Christians that we pay attention to the Chronicles. The books of Chronicles trace the history of the world from the very beginning, beginning with genealogies of Adam. Take it there to the brink of the postexilic restoration in 539 BCE. In so doing, the text makes a wondrous sweep of the entire past history and drives it freely and imaginatively in a very specific, historical context of postexilic Judaism. It is this postexilic Judaism that the text wants to reflect, in which it wants to bear witness. Thus, the books are a revised version of Israel's memory in the context of their restoration under Cyrus of Persia. Following the defeat of the Babylonians by the Persians the key theological assertion is that Judaism's only chance for freedom, thought, faith, and action, is through the maintenance of a liturgical practice and sensibility. One that has been previously centered on the temple in Jerusalem, and now must find a home elsewhere. We see here the same processes as before: a thorough examination of old sources and a reformulation into a fresh, coherent and theological interpretation, accomplished with immense and creative imagination. It is the same process that was seen before, but now with much scriptural material available for use, it becomes a re-traditioning where we see scripture using scripture to interpret and reveal itself. This imaginative process will inform later writers of books of the New Testament, as they draw upon Old Testament stories and images to make sense of an understanding of a first century peasant rabbi, becomes among us as our God and Savior. Of note as one biblical scholar characterization of the books of Chronicles as being such a free and unencumbered replay of the past, that it is not history, it is opera. As you consider the books of the Chronicles this week, I invite you to ponder these two questions:

1. What does it mean for an imaginative telling of the past to be considered opera rather than history?

2. Does the base of your faith need more history than opera? Or more opera than history?

May God bless you, and I will see you next week on the Biblical Wild.