

STUDIES IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Adult Bible Equipping Class
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OLD TESTAMENT FLYOVER:

The message that comes through clearly on a careful reading of Chronicles is that it is not merely complementary to or a slightly different version of Samuel and Kings. Instead it is a composition with its own unique way of presenting God's character and claims. With its openness to the plight of all mankind and yet its insistence on the redemptive role of one man and his dynastic succession—culminating, as Christian theology teaches, in Jesus Christ—the book offers hope of salvation for those who embrace Israel's God.

Eugene H. Merrill, "The Books of 1 and 2 Chronicles," in *The World and the Word: An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2011), 341.

Chronicles

I. Introduction

As important a work as Chronicles is, the book is overshadowed by the accounts of Israel's history in Samuel and Kings. What is more, most lay Christians tend to view the book merely as a supplement to the more "extensive" histories of these other works. For this reason, the book is largely neglected by Christians and preachers alike, yet it has massive theological implications for OT theology and history.

A. *Title and Unity*

In the Hebrew canon, 1 and 2 Chronicles appear as one work under the title, "The accounts of the days." The word "accounts" could also be translated in this context as "annals." Thus, it is proffered as a single work which chronicles the history of Israel from creation, through the kingship of David, and finally to the return of the exiles.

The LXX, however, made two significant deviations from the Hebrew tradition. First, it divided the book into two parts, which has led to the concept of a two-fold work rather than one. And second, it retitled the book *Paraleipomenon*, meaning "The things left out." This unfortunate title has given the inaccurate impression that the overall purpose of the book was merely to supplement the historical details not included in Samuel and Kings.

In reality, the book is far from a mere supplement to Israel's history. It is a unique book (55% of its material is unique from Samuel and Kings) written with a specific historical

and theological purpose, and the material included by the Chronicler was carefully chosen to communicate those intentions. This is why Jerome, in the Latin Vulgate, chose to title the work not according to the LXX designation, but rather as “Chronicles of the Whole of Sacred History.”

B. *Date & Authorship*

As we already discussed in our study of Ezra/Nehemiah, the authorship of Chronicles is tied up in the authorship of this other work. Jewish tradition attributes the authorship of Chronicles to Ezra and Nehemiah, who together were responsible for the production of Chronicles and Ezra/Nehemiah. Their conclusion, which has influenced many evangelical scholars as well, is that Chronicles and Ezra/Nehemiah should be considered as one large literary unit produced by Ezra and Nehemiah, in that order. This conclusion and its underlying evidences are summarized succinctly by J. Barton Payne:

Relationships between the books of Chronicles and Ezra provide the most important single clue for fixing the date and also the authorship of the former volume. Since Chronicles appears to be the work of an individual writer, who was a Levitical leader, some identification with Ezra the priest and scribe (Ezra 7:1-6) appears possible from the outset.... The literary styles of the books are similar; and their contents have much in common: the frequent lists and genealogies, their focus on ritual, and joint devotion to the law of Moses. Most significant of all, the closing verses of 2 Chronicles (36:22-23) are repeated as the opening verses of Ezra (1:1-3a).¹

With this position, Payne and others suggest a date around 450 B.C. However, the issue is not as clear as one might suppose. We have already explored the issues regarding authorship of Ezra/Nehemiah and concluded that the book was most likely the product of an editor who pieced together memoirs from both Ezra and Nehemiah, as well as material from other sources, to compose his history of Israel’s return from captivity.

So too with Chronicles, recent study has moved most scholars away from this traditional view regarding the authorship of Chronicles. Somewhat surprisingly, the editor of the commentary series in which Payne’s work resides makes this editorial note: “The matter of the authorship of Chronicles is more complex and less clear-cut than the way my late colleague, J. Barton Payne, described above. In recent academic circles there is a shift from the traditional view that Ezra wrote the work to the view that the author is unknown.”² Merrill remarks that the works of Japhet, Williamson, and Knoppers and others “have demonstrated quite conclusively that Chronicles differs from Ezra-Nehemiah substantially in terms of literary style, vocabulary, grammar, syntax, outlook, interests, and theology. There seems to be little doubt that Chronicles should be understood as a work completely separate from Ezra-Nehemiah and yet sharing with it a great many things in common.”³

¹ J. Barton Payne, “1, 2 Chronicles,” in *EBC*, 12 vols., ed. Frank E. Gæbelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), 4:305.

² *Ibid.*, 4:3-6.

³ Eugene H. Merrill, “The Books of 1 and 2 Chronicles,” in *The World and the Word: An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2011), 336.

As for dating the book's composition, the latest historical event referenced is that of Cyrus' decree (ca. 538 B.C.). Thus, the book could not have been composed earlier than this date. However, certain internal details in the book's genealogies as well as other cultural references suggest that a date between 400-375 B.C. is reasonable.⁴

C. *Correlation with Samuel/Kings*

Another specific issue which deserves attention in any study of Chronicles is the book's correlation with Samuel and Kings. On the one hand, the similarities between these two parallel accounts of Israelite history led the LXX translators to title the book as "that which is left over." Apparently, they were convinced that the book merely served to augment the material already included in the longer history of Samuel and Kings. As Merrill observes, "Such a simplistic notion has unfortunately plagued at least popular expressions of Judaism and Christianity with the result that Chronicles has been sadly neglected as an independent and indescribably rich source of historical and theological understanding."⁵ He then notes that only recently is Chronicles "coming into its own as literature worthy of careful study."⁶

On the other hand, this new interest in Chronicles has led to other questions regarding its relationship to Samuel and Kings. As Merrill summarizes, "Such new attention [to Chronicles] has raised a plethora of problems and questions about Chronicles and its relationship to Samuel-Kings. These include issues of common and unique sources, similarities and differences and how to explain them, and various attempts at harmonizing the two traditions in such a way as to preclude contradictions and other problems."⁷

1. *Priority of Samuel/Kings*

At the outset, it must be clarified that the overall scholarly consensus is that Chronicles is a later composition than Samuel and Kings. As such, if there is any dependence evidenced in these books, the priority must be given to Samuel/Kings. In other words, where similar material exists, the Chronicler depended on Samuel/Kings as an historical source and not the other way around. This is clearly evident in the numerous references to Samuel and Kings throughout Chronicles (1 Chron 9:1; 29:29; 1 Chron 16:11; 20:34; 24:27; 25:26; 27:7; 28:26; 32:32; 33:18; 35:27; 36:8).

2. *Other Sources for Chronicles*

However, it is equally apparent that the Chronicler also relied on other literary sources for historical information:

- "the Historical Record of King David" (1 Chron 27:24)
- "the Prophecy of Ahijah, the Shilonite, and the Visions of Iddo the Seer" (2 Chron 9:29)

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid., 337.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

- “the Events of Shemiah the Prophet and of Iddo the Seer” (2 Chron 12:15)
- “the Writings of the Prophet Iddo” (2 Chron 13:22)
- “the records of Hozai” (2 Chron 33:19)
- “the Dirges [of Jeremiah]” (2 Chron 35:25)

What is clear from these references is that, while modern scholarship does not have access to these historical documents, the Chronicler invited his readers to reference them for further information, indicating their general accessibility as corroborating documents (2 Chron 9:29; 12:15; 13:22; 16:11; 20:34; 23:18; etc.).

3. *Similarities and Differences*

Because Chronicles shares overlapping material with Samuel/Kings, the book has come under scrutiny as to its historical reliability. In general, these issues can be summarized into two overarching topics: (1) differences in factual data; (2) differences in perspective and/or ideology.⁸

a. General Issues

There are certain differences in details given between “factual data” given in Samuel/Kings and Chronicles. These include items like population figures, building dimensions, the spelling of names.

b. Material Unique to Samuel/Kings

Some material that appears in Samuel/Kings is conspicuously absent from Chronicles. These include the accounts of Saul’s reign (1 Sam 9-31; 1 Chron 10), the account of Mephibosheth (2 Sam 9), and David’s adultery (2 Sam 11-12). Also apparent is the overall emphasis on northern Israel in Kings which is lacking in Chronicles, as well as the ministries of prophets such as Elijah and Elisha.

c. Material Unique to Chronicles

Chronicles contributes little new information concerning the political life of Israel before the division of the kingdom. However, what it does add is immense detail concerning the temple building project, David’s bureaucracy and Solomon’s succession to kingship. The Chronicler emphasizes the history of Judah, and provides substantially more material concerning Hezekiah and Josiah.

d. Material Present in Both

Samuel/Kings and Chronicles share some commonality in material. However, there are sometimes differences either in the order in which events occur or the interpretation of the events.

Regarding (a), in the majority of cases, these differences are the result of textual transmission issues. However, in other instances, they are simply reflective of the Chronicler’s unique perspective. Many works have been written addressing these

⁸ The following is a summary of Merrill’s discussion, *ibid.*, 338-9.

various problems, and those that remain have no effect on the historical reliability of the OT.

As for (b), (c), and (d), the differences in material stem mainly from the unique theological and ideological perspectives of the writers. Kings, for instance, is concerned primarily with the northern kingdom, while Chronicles focuses on the reigns of David and his descendants. The overall theological perspective of Samuel/Kings is negative—Israel failed to obey the covenant, which brought about their exile in Babylon. The Chronicler, on the other hand, has positive thrust to his work—God’s faithfulness to David and the temple. While he does omit certain events in David’s life, it was not for the purpose of hiding them from his readers. After all, they were encouraged to review the other histories for a fuller account.

Rather, “Chronicles is a history that avoids repetition of certain facts already well known through 2 Samuel [and Kings] but retells or amplifies events in David’s life and career that are essential to the Chronicler’s own purposes.”⁹ In other words, the ultimate reasons behind the differences are theological and ideological.

II. Major Themes

A. *Israel, Judah, and the Nations*

In one sense, the book of Chronicles encompasses the entire nation of Israel. This fact is evident in the broadness of the book’s opening genealogies. Apart from Dan and Zebulun, all the tribes of Israel are included, and the phrase “all Israel” appears some 34x throughout the work.

At the same time, there is no getting around the fact that the Chronicler’s particular focus throughout the book is the tribe of Judah. The genealogies feature it more than any other tribe (2½ out of 9 chapters concern Judah).¹⁰ After the conclusion of the genealogical section, the focus narrows considerably. Though Israel as a whole is acknowledged and discussed, it is only within the context of David’s assumption of kingship over the entire nation. No doubt, David’s central place in the Chronicler’s theology is the reason for Judah’s emphasis throughout the book. In contrast to Kings, which tends to focus on northern Israel and its disloyalty to Yahweh and to the covenant, the Chronicler focuses most of his attention of the events and people of Judah. This is seen in no uncertain terms in the rather glaring omission of any explicit reference to the Assyrian conquest of Israel that swept the northern kingdom into exile in 722 B.C. The book gives only vague hints of this event in passages like 2 Chronicles 28:12 and 30:6.

Nonetheless, the Chronicler includes a distinct universal perspective in his account of Israel’s history. Far from a history of Israel, it is a history of a nation whose hopes and aspirations are wrapped up in the Davidic dynasty and what it will bring to the world. The detailed genealogies of the book stretch back far beyond the birth of the nation, harkening

⁹ Eugene H. Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests: A History of Old Testament Israel*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 249.

¹⁰ Merrill, “1 and 2 Chronicles,” 340.

back to the initiation of human history. Utilizing the Genesis genealogies, the writer summarizes the development of the nations before introducing Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the recipients and mediators of God's intended universal blessings. He then introduces not Reuben, Jacob's firstborn, but Judah, for it from his line that David and his descendants would come and realize the salvific intents of God for the world.

B. *The Davidic Dynasty*

The clear objective of the Chronicler is to highlight and exalt the reign of David and his descendants. The story of David's rise to kingship is told as a *fait accompli*. The drama and intrigue of David's pre-coronation years which dominate the book of Samuel is conspicuously absent. The narrative proceeds with the death of Saul and David's solidification of his kingship over Israel. Never is there any doubt that David will be king, for the author has already announced his thematic intentions in his well-crafted genealogies.

Also absent from the book is any real sense of Davidic failure. As Merrill puts it, "The rule of David is presented as being virtually without fault and flaw."¹¹ No mention is made of David's indiscretions and little emphasis is given to his moral failings. His adultery with Bathsheba, his murder of Uriah, the rape of Tamar, and the rebellion of Absalom—all the events that undergird the Deuteronomist's perspective of Israel's failed leadership—they are not the concern of the Chronicler. As we observed previously, this is not to say that the Chronicler wished to hide the events. He directs his readers at numerous times to fill out their understanding of events by referencing Samuel and Kings (1 Chron 9:1; 29:29; 1 Chron 16:11; 20:34; 24:27; 25:26; 27:7; 28:26; 32:32; 33:18; 35:27; 36:8). All of the intrigues of David's life and line were well documented and publically available.

Rather, his concern was to emphasize God's gracious *choice* of David and his line. Thus he speaks of David's military conquests (1 Chron 14:8-17; chaps. 18-20), his administration of the kingdom (26:29-27:34), his successful retrieval of the ark (chaps. 13; 15-16), and his preparations for the construction of the temple (ch. 22). But this is most clearly seen in the extended presentation of the Davidic Covenant (ch. 17), where God promises to build a house (i.e., dynastic succession) for David that will last forever (17:9-14).

All of these details—both omissions of material in Samuel/Kings and inclusion of unique details—all undergird the Chronicler's theology that David is *God's* king, and that God has been gracious to him despite his well-known failings. And because God has established not just David but his *line* as the means by which he will rule his people and realize his covenant promises, God's divine grace extends to Solomon and the lineage of kings that comprise the Davidic dynasty. Interestingly, Solomon receives the same glowing review as David, with little or no attention given to his covenant failures that led to the collapse of the united monarchy. Additionally, the Chronicler devotes 17 out of 27 chapters to the "good" kings of Judah, and his accounts of Hezekiah and Josiah are 20-30% longer than their corresponding treatments in Kings, and ideologically reflective of the Chronicler's perspective.

¹¹ Ibid.

What is the Chronicler's intent in all of this? He is establishing David and his line as a crucial factor in the fulfillment of Israel's covenant hopes for the future. As he ends his narrative with Cyrus' decree to return and rebuild the temple, he is inviting his readers to anticipate with him the return of David as well, whose centrality in God's promises will bring hope to the nation.

C. *Worship and the Temple*

Concurrent and inherently related to the Chronicler's focus on the Davidic dynasty is his concern with the temple and its services. "Its importance," Merrill writes, "lies in its being the material and visible expression of God's residence among His people as well as the focus point of their worship, praise, service, and even national existence."¹² Thus the Chronicler devotes a great amount of material narrating the retrieval of the Ark of the Covenant, the establishment of the tabernacle in the political center of Jerusalem, the planning and building of the temple, the roles and activities of the priests, and the assignments of the Levites to their temple duties. In fact, so important and so central to Israel's religious and covenant life was the temple that the genealogical account of the Levites exceeds in length that of the line of Judah.

As we look at the account in Chronicles, we see again and again the temple as the foundational element of Israelite religious life. Every major reformation effected in the history of Israel after the temple's construction was centered on the temple and its services. Part of the reason for the extended and augmented narratives of Hezekiah and Josiah was because of their recognition of these facts.

Yet here the nexus between David and the temple receives clarity. Israel's religious structure had been established as such that only one tribe had the privilege and responsibility for priestly mediation. Israel's religious leaders before David clearly understood this reality:

Throughout Israel's history until David, the lines of demarcation between civil and religious leadership had been carefully drawn. Even Moses had his Aaron, and Joshua and all the judges stayed strictly within the limits of nonclerical responsibility. On more than one occasion Saul had tried to usurp priestly prerogatives, but he paid dearly.¹³

With the selection of David as king, the priestly/monarchical demarcation became increasingly blurred. As Psalm 110:4 proclaimed, the Davidic ruler had been installed as a ruler of a different order—the order of Melchizedek, that ancient priest-king who reigned over Jerusalem a millennium before. David recognized this and early in his reign began to coalesce the religious and political centers of the nation. Ultimately, this transition to a united political/cultic center would not occur until nearly the end of David's reign,¹⁴ and even so we see hints within the narrative (1 Chron 15:29) that the former religious tradition were deeply entrenched in Israel's religious psyche:

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests*, 259.

¹⁴ Ibid., 265.

Michal's reaction (2 Sam 6:16-20) may not be so much a matter of pettiness, as is usually alleged, as a representative reaction to the novelty of David's undertaking. He had earlier attempted to bring the ark to Jerusalem, only to be frustrated by the irreverence of Uzzah. Then, after a three-month delay, David finally succeeded. Dressed as a priest and functioning in that capacity, he led the procession himself. This must have caused a great deal of consternation not only to Michal but to the population as a whole.¹⁵

Nevertheless, David's goal of a united cultic and civil center was finally realized, and although he was disqualified from the construction of the temple itself, he devoted a great amount of time, energy, and resources in to preparing the way for his son, Solomon, to accomplish the task. From the Chronicler's perspective, Solomon's main accomplishment was the construction of the temple, and the great feature of Judah's good kings was a concern for the temple, for the priesthood, and for the services they performed.

III. Purpose

There is an assumption on the part of the Chronicler that the reader is already familiar with the Torah, and Former Prophets, and even with Ezra/Nehemiah. These books and theological histories become the subject of what we might consider the first "exposition" of Scripture—an exposition of the entire OT. Chronicles deals with the entirety of human history from Adam to Ezra/Nehemiah.

Undergirding the narratives of the book are the distinct promises made to the patriarchs—promises which flow out and inform not only Israel's role as a kingdom of priests but the Davidic dynasty as God's choice for accomplishing his covenant purposes. As the godly Israelite in the post-exilic age opened the pages of Chronicles, he is invited to trust and hope in the faithfulness of Yahweh. God has made promises—promises to the patriarchs, to Israel, and to David—and he does and will keep his promises. It's no wonder the book ends with the pronouncement of Cyrus' decree to return and rebuild the temple—what better way to instill in the reader an eager anticipation for what God will do for post-exilic Israel? As Merrill so succinctly puts it,

The revelation of God in Chronicles is clearly designed to demonstrate His love of the whole world (the genealogies) and His intention to effect salvation through His servant people Israel under the messianic leadership of David's royal offspring (1 Chronicles 10-29) who, with the nation, live out their role on the earth by faithful attention to the covenant apparatus that provides the framework for their work and witness.¹⁶

Thus, the purpose of the book can be summarized as follows: *In showing Yahweh's faithfulness to the house of David and the Temple in Israel's history, Israel was encouraged to hope that the Son of David will come and build His Temple.*

¹⁵ Ibid., 263.

¹⁶ Merrill, "1 and 2 Chronicles," 341.

IV. Literary Structure

Despite numerous attempts, scholars have not formed a consensus on an overall macrostructure for Chronicles. Obviously, the major units of the book include (1) genealogies (1 Chron 1-9), (2) David's reign (1 Chron 10-29), (3) Solomon's reign (2 Chron 1-9), (4) the history of the divided monarchy (2 Chron 10-28:11), (5) the history of Judah alone (2 Chron 28:12-36:21), and (6) the decree of Cyrus (2 Chron 36:22-23). Apart from these basic structural units, the task of outlining the book remains somewhat enigmatic.

For instance, should the reigns of David and Solomon be viewed as separate, or should they be seen as one? The former represents more of a traditional approach, while the latter attempts to recognize the significance of 2 Chronicles 7:10, 11:17, and 35:4 and their unique emphasis on "David and Solomon."

Another unique approach has been proffered by D. A. Dorsey, who attempts to identify a chiasmic structure to the book based on parallel statements throughout:

- A Beginning: genealogies from Adam to the Babylonian exile and return (1 Chr 1:1-9:44)
- B Establishment of David's kingdom (1 Chr 10:1-22:1)
 - C David assembled all Israel to make preparations for Solomon's building of the temple (1 Chr 22:2-29:30)
 - D **CENTER:** Solomon, the temple builder (2 Chr 1-9)
 - C' Division of Israel: Judean kings from Rehoboam to good King Jehoshaphat (2 Chr 10:1-20:37)
- B' Seven kings: Jehoram to Ahaz (2 Chr 21:1-28:27)
- A' End: Judah's final kings: good King Hezekiah to the Babylonian exile, and a note about the return (2 Chr 29:1-36:23)

Whether or not Dorsey's arrangement is legitimate and intended by the Chronicler, what this structure highlights is the centrality of the temple in the Chronicler's theology. To this Dorsey remarks, "This structural highlighting of stories about the temple and its servants helps the Chronicler establish and emphasize the pattern that throughout history, when Israel did right with regard to the temple, priests, and Levites, it always prospered; conversely, when it did wrong in these areas, it always suffered."¹⁷

¹⁷ D. A. Dorsey, *The Literary Structure of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 155.