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# 1

## INTRODUCTION TO FIRST AND SECOND CHRONICLES

### WHAT ARE THE BOOKS OF CHRONICLES?

It may seem strange to begin a study of 1 and 2 Chronicles with such a question as that. The question, however, is an important starting point because, at first glance, the exact nature of these books is puzzling. Almost from the very start, they have had to endure an “identity crisis” because of their relationship to the other historical books of the Bible. Since they cover the same history as other biblical books, the question often arises, Why were they written? What was the purpose of retelling the same story?

This identity crisis is reflected in the various titles given to the books throughout their history.

### THE NAME “CHRONICLES”

The earliest title known for the books of Chronicles is *The Things Left Behind*. It is not clear exactly why that title was given. It seems to mean simply that these books contained material not included in the other historical books. Some have suggested that the title was derogatory, that is, it viewed the books as merely a collection of bits and pieces of historical data with no real significance. Very early, however,

that title was taken more positively to mean that the books contained important summaries of other biblical books. They were a condensed version of the rest of the Old Testament historical books.

Those two interpretations of that early title reflect two major opinions about 1 and 2 Chronicles. They have been ignored by many as merely an incomplete version of the biblical historical books, but have been prized by others as a much needed summary of the wealth of biblical history. There are few today who would not welcome such a condensed version of the Bible.

The books of Chronicles have another name in most copies of the Hebrew Bible: *Daily Matters*, which is a way of saying that they are like the official annals mentioned by the same name throughout the other historical books (Esther 2:23; 1 Kings 14:19). It is from that title that the English title *Chronicles* is derived. By naming the books *Chronicles*, emphasis is put on the nature of the subject matter: the recounting of important affairs in the lives of Israel's kings.

The titles of the books point in two important directions for understanding their nature. The title *Daily Matters* points out that the primary subject matter is the history of Israel's kings. The title *The Things Left Behind* points out that the books are largely concerned with retracing the same historical events covered in other biblical books.

#### THE PURPOSE OF THE BOOKS

The fact that 1 and 2 Chronicles covers so much of the same territory as the other biblical historical books raises the question of purpose. Why retell the same events? There are two basic answers to that question. The first is that the writer wanted to give his readers another version of those events. Anyone who has both witnessed an event and read a news report of it knows how much the meaning and sense of that event lies in the reporting. By providing a second picture of

Israel's history, therefore, a fuller appreciation and understanding of those events is given by the chronicler. In that respect, his purpose can be compared with the four gospels in the New Testament. Each gospel gives a picture of Jesus Christ. Each has its point of view and presents the life and teachings of Jesus from that perspective. The result of the four gospels is a deeper and richer picture of Jesus.

There is, however, another answer to the question. It is possible that the writer's purpose was not simply to retell these events but to explain and expound on their meaning in Israel's history. Just as there are commentaries today for the books of the Bible, so also within the Bible itself are commentaries. First and Second Chronicles may then be a commentary on the historical books.

In the final analysis, the author's purpose is perhaps best stated as a combination of those two approaches; that is, to give his readers another view of the history of Israel, and to provide further explanation of the events already recorded in Genesis through 1 and 2 Kings.

#### THE LITERARY STYLE OF THE BOOKS

There are many kinds of literature in the Bible. However, nearly all the books of the Bible can be grouped into two basic styles: historical narrative and poetry. Although 1 and 2 Chronicles contain some poetic texts, their primary style is historical narrative.

Historical narrative has several distinct features that contribute to its use by the biblical authors. Its most basic feature is its concern to recount God's great working in past events. Though its concern is to recount past deeds and events, the writers of historical narrative are never interested merely in what happened. Their interest in the past stems from the significance those past events have for the present and future. Historical narrative then contains not only a record of past events, but also a lesson for the present.

How does the author of a historical narrative develop and deliver his message? He does it by making his history tell a story, which is able to teach his lesson.

The biblical writers were skilled in the art of weaving the facts and figures of history into a story that pulsed with life. They were gifted writers and their historical stories still surpass the greatest of the world's literature.

In attempting to understand the biblical historians' craft, two essential components of their historical narratives must be kept clearly in view. The first is the principle of selectivity. It is not possible or desirable to record every event from the past. As the apostle John said, "And there are also many other things which Jesus did, which if they were written in detail, I suppose that even the world itself would not contain the books which were written" (John 21:25). The historian must select what events to include and exclude. That selection determines the message his story will convey. Again the apostle John illustrated this dimension of historical narrative when he said, "Many other signs therefore Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these things have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name" (John 20:30-31).

There is a second component to the message of a historical narrative. It is the work of arranging the events of history into the shape of a story. A historical story, like any story, must carry its reader along the most meaningful path to its conclusion. The reader must be given an introduction to the main characters of the story. Since stories consist of plot elements such as conflict, tension, anticipation, and resolution, the biblical historian had to be sensitive to those elements in the events themselves to ensure that in the formation of his story all the meaningful elements would be given their proper place.

The skill of the biblical writers in building their stories of history is attested in the appeal those histories have had

through the ages. A story can travel through nearly any cultural barrier and can be appreciated by young and old alike.

#### THE MESSAGE OF THE BOOKS

The message of 1 and 2 Chronicles is derived from the development of several important biblical themes.

#### THE DAVIDIC KINGSHIP

The writer is very explicit about the importance of the Davidic kingship. It is through the house of David that God has chosen to bring about His promise of blessing for all men. The formula for blessing is also clear: when the king trusts and obeys God, God gives His people rest. Just as in the other historical books of the Bible, it is taken for granted that when the king is faithful and obedient, the people will also trust and obey. The chronicler goes to great pains to show the importance of godly leadership. Without a leader the people will perish. David and his house are the channel through which God's appointed leader is to come.

The message of Chronicles is "messianic"; that is, it looks forward to the coming King who will rule over God's people forever. In the historical books, the Psalms, and the prophets, the term *Messiah* stands for the Davidic King. The centrality of the Davidic king in the narrative therefore makes this story "messianic." It is the Messiah, the Christ, the Son of David, who will bring peace to His own people and blessing to all men. In the New Testament we learn that this King's name is Jesus.

#### THE COVENANT

The covenant was a bond that united God and His people. It was an agreement of loyalty and a commitment of love. Out of that bond arose certain responsibilities. Israel was to

trust God and to obey His will. God, on His part, promised to remain faithful and give the people rest. As a father, the Lord punished His sons when they rebelled, stood close by them when danger threatened, and sought their obedient submission to His own all-knowing will.

For the chronicler, nothing was as important as trust and obedience; nothing was so hazardous as doubt and rebellion.

#### THE TEMPLE

The covenant between God and Israel meant that the Lord Himself had chosen to dwell among His people. Provision for the presence of the Holy God among His people had been the concern of much of the early writings of Scripture. God was to dwell among His people by being present with them in the Temple. His presence was a gift of grace and Israel was always to treat God as holy.

Because the Temple was the focal point of God's presence, the establishment and preservation of the Temple and the order of worship were important elements. Both David and Solomon were instrumental in the establishment of the Temple, and its preservation was the concern of every good king to follow. If there was one outstanding trait of a good Davidic king, it was his zeal for the Temple of the Lord. Through the Temple, God was present with His people.

#### THE NATIONS

Behind the themes of Davidic kingship, the covenant, and the Temple, a larger theme is being set into motion. That larger theme is the notion that God's dealings and promises of blessing do not end with the one nation Israel, but extend to all the nations of the earth. God's purpose is to bless all nations through the establishment of His kingdom in Jerusalem.

The Davidic king is to reign in Jerusalem, the presence of God is to be manifest in the Temple, and there the covenant people are to worship Him. For the chronicler, however, this

scene is incomplete without the nations of the earth also participating in the praise. He, like his near contemporary Zechariah, awaits the time when “many peoples and mighty nations will come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem and to entreat the favor of the Lord” (Zech. 8:22).

#### THE DATE AND AUTHORSHIP OF THE BOOKS

Neither the date of writing nor the identity of the author is given in either 1 or 2 Chronicles. An early Jewish tradition names Ezra as the author of the books, but there is no evidence to support or refute that tradition. Some have argued that 1 and 2 Chronicles were at one time a part of the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, but that, too, cannot be sufficiently supported. Certainly in the present editions of the Hebrew Bible, 1 and 2 Chronicles are treated as one book, distinct from Ezra and Nehemiah.

There is also no agreement today about the date of the book. It seems safe to say, on the basis of the genealogies in the book, that the book was written during the second or third generation after the exile. That would put the date of the book somewhere in the fifth century B.C.

During that period of Israel's history, the ancient world was in the hands of the powerful Persian Empire. All that remained of the great Israelite kingdom under David and Solomon was the small province of Judah. The Davidic kingship had been replaced by a provincial governor appointed by the Persian king. The Temple, once destroyed, had been rebuilt, but not with the splendor of the former Temple of Solomon. By anyone's standards, the fifth century was hardly a golden age for the people of God. Their future as a kingdom and a distinct people of God, in fact, seemed bleaker at that moment than perhaps ever before. To make matters worse, it followed on the heels of the excitement of the return from exile and the anticipation of the coming messianic kingdom that accompanied the return.



To their own generation, the books of Chronicles were a vivid reminder of the hope that rested in the faithfulness of God. They were reminders that the Lord had made a promise to the world and to the house of David. The promise was of peace and prosperity, and the channel of the fulfillment of the promise was the covenant people of God, Israel. The books, in that setting, were a call for trust and obedience on the part of God's people: "If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land" (2 Chron. 7:14, KJV).\*

#### SUMMARY OF THE CONTENTS OF THE BOOKS

Chronicles begins with the first man, Adam, and ends with the first great ruler of mankind, the Persian king Cyrus. At the heart of these books, however, are two other great men: the Israelite king David, and his son Solomon. Thus, the content of the books is framed within the names of four great men. Two of those men, David and Solomon, play leading roles in the drama of redemption and blessing that binds together the events of Israel's history. The other two men, Adam and Cyrus, formed, in the author's day, the beginning and culmination of all the families of the earth for whom God's redemption and blessing was intended.

#### 1 CHRONICLES 1-9

First Chronicles opens with a long list of names and descendants (genealogy). The list begins with Adam and is carried through to the writer's own day. In biblical books, as the gospels of Matthew and Luke show, those lists of names and descendants were considered an important starting point for

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\*King James Version.

serious histories. The lists are of various kinds, and care must be given to the significance of each list of names. If they were not important, they would not have been included in this historical narrative.

1 CHRONICLES 10-29

The remainder of 1 Chronicles is concerned with the events and accomplishments in the life of David the king. Following the account of the death of Saul in chapter 10, the writer centers his attention on two important areas of David's career: his military victories, and his preparation for the building of the Temple in Jerusalem. David fought wars with Israel's enemies so that his people could dwell safely in the land. When he had won the peace, David turned his attention to the provision for the worship of God. He moved the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem and made the necessary preparations for building a permanent Temple. It was God's plan, however, that Solomon, not David, build the Temple. So David ended his days content in making the final preparations for his son Solomon's construction of the Temple.

2 CHRONICLES 1-9

Second Chronicles opens with the narrative of the reign of Solomon. The central concern of Solomon's activities in these chapters is his building and dedication of the Temple. Not only was Solomon the one who built the Temple, he was also the one known throughout the ancient world for his wisdom. The chronicler concludes his account of Solomon's reign with the visit of the Queen of Sheba, showing that the report of Solomon's wisdom had reached the ends of the earth.

2 CHRONICLES 10-36

The writer devotes the last chapters of his book to the history of the Davidic dynasty. After Solomon, the kingdom

built by David all but fell to ruin. Solomon's son Rehoboam began his reign with a crisis that left the house of David in control of only the tribe of Judah and a few remaining tribes. The bulk of the kingdom lay in the hands of Solomon's rival, Jeroboam. Because that Northern Kingdom lay outside the province of the Davidic dynasty, the author bypasses most of its history in favor of a more detailed treatment of the Southern Kingdom, Judah. The history of the Southern Kingdom is recounted to its end: the Babylonian captivity. Second Chronicles ends with the edict of the Persian king Cyrus, which he announced after the exile and the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem.

#### OUTLINE

- I. Names and Genealogies (1 Chron. 1:1—10:14)
  - A. The Lineage of David (1:1—3:24)
  - B. The House of Israel (4:1—7:40)
    1. The family of Judah (4:1-23)
    2. The family of Simeon (4:24-43)
    3. The families of trans-Jordan: Reuben, Gad, the half-tribe of Manasseh (5:1-26)
    4. The family of Levi (6:1-81)
    5. The remaining families of Israel (7:1-44)
  - C. The House of Saul (8:1—9:44)
  - D. The Death of Saul (10:1-14)
- II. David (1 Chron. 11:1—29:30)
  - A. David Becomes King over Israel (11:1-3)
  - B. The Capture of Jerusalem (11:4-8)
  - C. David's Mighty Men (11:9—12:40)
  - D. David and the Ark of the Covenant (13:1—16:43)
    1. Removing the Ark from Kiriath-jearim (13:1-14)
    2. Restoring fellowship with God (14:1-17)
    3. The Ark rests in Jerusalem (15:1—16:43)

- a. The centrality of the priest and the Levites (15:1-15)
  - b. The joy of God's presence (15:16—16:6)
  - c. "Tell of His glory among the nations" (16:7-43)
- E. David and the Promise (17:1—29:30)
- 1. The first account of God's promise to David (17:1—21:30)
    - a. The promise (17:1-15)
    - b. David's response (17:16-27)
    - c. The defeat of the enemy (18:1—20:8)
    - d. "I will establish a place" (21:1-30)
  - 2. The second account of God's promise to David (22:1—27:34)
    - a. Preparation for the Temple building (22:1-19)
    - b. The administration of the Temple and the kingdom (23:1—27:34)
      - (1) The organization of the Levites (23:3-32)
      - (2) The organization of the priests (24:1-19)
      - (3) The remaining Levites (24:20-31)
      - (4) The organization of the musicians (25:1-31)
      - (5) The organization of the Levitical officials (26:1-32)
      - (6) The organization of the princes of Israel (27:1-34)
  - 3. The third account of God's promise to David (28:1—29:30)
    - a. The public announcement of Solomon's kingship (28:1-10)
    - b. The Temple plan (28:11-29)
    - c. Work on the Temple commissioned by David (28:20—29:9)
    - d. David's blessing (29:1-19)
    - e. The coronation of Solomon (29:20-25)
    - f. The death of David (29:26-30)

- III. Solomon and the Descendants of David (2 Chron. 1:1—36:23)
- A. Solomon (1:1—9:31)
    - 1. Solomon's preparation (1:1-17)
    - 2. Preparations for building the Temple (2:1-18)
    - 3. The Temple is built (3:1—5:1)
    - 4. The dedication of the Temple (5:2—7:11)
      - a. The ceremony of the Ark (5:2-14)
      - b. Solomon's speech (6:1-11)
      - c. Solomon's prayer (6:12—7:3)
      - d. The dedication ceremony (7:4-11)
    - 5. Solomon's night vision (7:12-22)
    - 6. Solomon's kingdom is established (8:18)
    - 7. Solomon's wealth and wisdom is acclaimed (9:1-28)
      - a. Solomon's wisdom and the Queen of Sheba (9:1-12)
      - b. Solomon's wealth (9:11-28)
    - 8. Solomon's death (9:29-31)
  - B. Rehoboam (10:1—12:16)
    - 1. The rebellion of the northern tribes (10:1—11:4)
    - 2. Rehoboam's kingdom (11:5-23)
    - 3. Shishak's invasion (12:1-12)
    - 4. The conclusion to Rehoboam's reign (12:13-16)
  - C. Abijah (13:1—14:1)
  - D. Asa (14:2—16:14)
    - 1. The invasion of Asa's kingdom (14:9-15)
    - 2. Asa's revival (15:1-19)
    - 3. The war with the Northern Kingdom (16:1-10)
    - 4. The conclusion of Asa's kingdom (16:11-14)
  - E. Jehoshaphat (17:1—20:37)
    - 1. Introductory summary of Jehoshaphat's reign (17:1-6)
    - 2. Jehoshaphat's administration of the kingdom (17:7-19)
    - 3. Jehoshaphat and King Ahab (18:1-34)

- 4. Jehoshaphat's appointment of judges (19:1-11)
- 5. Jehoshaphat's war with the Moabites and Ammonites (20:1-30)
- F. Jehoram (21:1-20)
- G. Ahaziah (22:1-12)
- H. Athaliah (23:1-21)
- I. Joash (24:1-27)
- J. Amaziah (25:1-28)
- K. Uzziah (26:1-23)
- L. Jothan (27:1-9)
- M. Ahaz (28:1-27)
- M. Hezekiah (29:1—32:33)
  - 1. The Temple rededication (29:1-36)
  - 2. The Passover (30:1-27)
  - 3. The priests and the Levites (31:1-21)
  - 4. The invasion of Sennacherib (32:1-33)
- O. Manasseh (33:1-20)
- P. Amon (33:21-25)
- Q. Josiah (34:1—35:27)
  - 1. The law of Moses (34:14-33)
  - 2. The Passover (35:1-19)
  - 3. The death of Josiah (35:20-27)
- R. The conclusion (36:1-23)
  - 1. The last kings (36:1-13)
  - 2. The chronicler's sermon (36:14-21)
  - 3. The edict of Cyrus (36:22-23)