

SESSION TWENTY-FOUR

I AND II CHRONICLES

Lessons From the Past

INTRODUCTION

The two books of Chronicles originally composed one volume. The LXX divided it into two divisions, and in AD 1448 the division was made in the Hebrew manuscripts. Although the similarities to Samuel-Kings are obvious, Chronicles does have a contribution to make in its own right. This becomes more obvious as one considers the book from the standpoint of the Israelites who returned from the Babylonian exile (note 1 Chr 9:1).

Many scholars believe that Ezra-Nehemiah forms a continuation with Chronicles, and that Ezra the scribe is responsible for Chronicles as well as the book bearing his name.¹ The authorship of Ezra is supported by the Jewish Talmudic tradition (Baba Bathra 15a), although not all scholars agree with this conclusion.² Though our conclusion regarding the authorship must be cautious, Hasel has observed, "Both works manifest a central emphasis on Jerusalem and its cult, on God's law, on the 'all Israel' concept, and on the theocracy."³

If Ezra is the true author of Chronicles (which we cannot be sure of), then the work would probably have been accomplished after he returned to Jerusalem in 457 BC. The manuscript evidence from Qumran has led scholars to posit a date for Chronicles of about 400 BC, and this is further substantiated by the Davidic genealogy of 1 Chr 3:10-24.⁴ All that we can safely say is that Chronicles was written during the period 500-400 BC, in the century following the rebuilding of the Temple.

THE USE OF SOURCES

A casual reading of Chronicles will underscore the fact that the author was very dependent on a number of source materials. In addition to genealogical lists and official documents and letters, S. J. Schultz identifies the following other sources:⁵

A. Official Records

1. The record of the Chronicles of King David (1 Chr 27:24)

¹For a consideration of the connections with the Ezra-Nehemiah material, see William J. Dumbrell, "The Purpose of the Books of Chronicles," *JETS* 27:3 (Sept 1984): 257-266.

²Against the authorship by Ezra, see Derek Kidner, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, Tyndale OT Commentaries, 136ff.; and R. K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1969), 1157.

³*International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Chronicles, Books of," by G. F. Hasel, 1:667.

⁴*Ibid.*, 1:670.

⁵*The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, s.v. "Chronicles, Books of," by S. J. Schultz, 1:810.

2. The Book of the Kings of Israel and Judah (2 Chr 27:7; 35:27; 36:8)
3. The Book of the Kings of Judah and Israel (2 Chr 16:11; 25:26; 28:26; 32:32)
4. The Book of the Kings of Israel (1 Chr 9:1; 2 Chr 20:34)
5. The words (affairs or records) of the kings of Israel (2 Chr 23:18)
6. The Commentary (Midrash) on the Book of the Kings (2 Chr 24:27)
7. The decree of David the king of Israel and the decree of Solomon his son (2 Chr 35:4)

B. Prophetic Writings and Records

1. Samuel the Seer (1 Chr 29:29)
2. Nathan the prophet (1 Chr 29:29; 2 Chr 9:29)
3. Gad the Seer (1 Chr 21:9)
4. Ahijah the Shilonite (2 Chr 9:29)
5. Iddo the Seer (2 Chr 9:29; 12:15; 13:22)
6. Shemaiah the prophet (2 Chr 12:15)
7. Jehu, the son of Hanani (2 Chr 20:34)
8. Isaiah the prophet (2 Chr 26:22; 32:32)
9. The Chronicles of the Seers (2 Chr 33:19)

THE OCCASION

The exiles who returned to Jerusalem in 538 BC faced the bitter struggle of rebuilding their devastated land and cities. By 516 BC, the temple had been rebuilt in Jerusalem (although not near as glorious as the temple of Solomon had been). Other Jews had chosen to remain in their new communities of Babylon. In 457 BC, Ezra returned to Jerusalem, and by 444 BC Nehemiah returned to serve as governor. Under Nehemiah's leadership, the city walls were rebuilt. This seems to have been a step forward (Neh 6:16), and was followed by a renewed interest in worship with gatekeepers, singers and Levites being appointed (Neh 7:1). The restored postexilic state under the leadership of Ezra and Nehemiah made a renewed emphasis of genuine religious involvement, and this was culminated in a renewal of the covenant with YHWH (Neh 9:38; 8:1ff).

Schultz comments, "This extensive community-wide involvement under the leadership of Ezra and Nehemiah may have been the occasion for Ezra to provide for his people an account of their past which gave them the religious and political background for the re-established state."⁶ The audience was the returned remnant which had its focal point at the temple in Jerusalem.

THE STRUCTURE

The suggestion above regarding the occasion does make sense in light of the structure of the book. A careful observation of the structure and contents of the book does seem to shed light upon the author's purpose (see chart in the supplement to this session).

⁶Ibid., 1:811.

A. Genealogies from Adam to David (1 Chr 1:1—9:44)

The genealogical information is quite extensive, but this serves to legitimize the Israelites as the lineal descendants of the chosen people of God and indicates that they are the center of God's plan of salvation for the world with other peoples or tribes being grafted into those chosen by God.⁷

The genealogy of Judah is placed first, before that of the other tribes, which reflects her cherished status as the tribe of the Davidic kings. The Davidic dynasty is accorded all of 1 Chr 3. Extended discussion is also given to the Levites (6:1-81). The author's interest seems to be particularly concerned about the Davidic line of divinely appointed rulers and those connected with the national worship. The author is careful to establish a legitimate linkage to the covenant promises by tracing the Davidic line into the postexilic period.

B. The Reign of David (1 Chr 10:1—29:30)

This section dealing with David receives more consideration than any other topic of the book. Interestingly, the reign of Saul is omitted (except for his failure and death which serves as an introduction to David). In fact, David's early life is omitted and even his great sin with Bathsheba; it is David's kingship that is of vital concern to our author. Townsend observes,

Most of the omitted material is either derogatory to or in opposition to the Davidic line. The chronicler's burden is to present the endurance of the Davidic line, in spite of its faults.⁸

This concern would be of fundamental importance to the postexilic community because of the throne promised to the line of David and the kingdom which was to eventuate from David's seed (the Davidic covenant). Townsend notes,

The key that unlocks Chronicles is the Davidic Covenant, which the chronicler referred to no less than seven times (1 Chron. 17:11-14; 22:8-13; 28:6-7; 2 Chron. 6:8-9,16; 7:17-18; 13:5; 21:7). The Davidic Covenant connects David's line and the temple, since in the covenant it is David's descendant who will build a house for Yahweh (cf. 1 Chron. 17:11-12; 22:9-10; 28:6; 2 Chron. 6:9).⁹

Furthermore, a great deal of the Davidic material concerns the religious life of the nation, particularly as it is centered around the temple plans. David was also set forth as a model king, the standard by which other kings of Judah could be measured.

C. The Reign of Solomon (2 Chr 1:1—9:31)

Like the previous section dealing with David, this section is obviously not meant to focus on the full personal history of Solomon. His apostasy and idolatry are noticeably absent (contrast 1 Kgs 11). The Solomonic material centers on the temple that was actualized during his reign and dedicated for the glory of God by him. It is interesting how the temple motif is fortified by two visions that Solomon received: one at Gibeon (1:1-13) and the other at Jerusalem (7:12-22). Benware explains the significance of these visions:

⁷Hasel, 1:669.

⁸Jeffrey L. Townsend, "The Purpose of 1 and 2 Chronicles," *BibSac* 144:575 (Jul-Sep 1987): 282.

⁹*Ibid.*, 284.

Because of his first vision, Solomon is given unusual wisdom from God, thus enabling him to build the Temple and lead Israel in God's path of righteousness. The second vision took place in the Temple itself. God promised blessing and prosperity for obedience, but discipline for disobedience.¹⁰

The postexilic community must seek to reconfirm and faithfully pledge themselves to the nation's temple responsibility.

In one sense, Solomon modeled the ultimate Davidic temple-builder. Townsend observes his positive features that become a paradigm of the needed leadership for the people:

Solomon was wise and prosperous (2 Chron. 1; 8—9), he built and dedicated the glorious temple (chap. 2—7), and he received the wealth of the Gentiles who sought his wisdom (chap. 9; cf. Hag. 2:7; Isa. 2:3).¹¹

D. The Kings of Judah (2 Chr 10:1—36:23)

Another of the striking features that characterizes Chronicles is the virtual omission of the kings of the North. The author concerns himself only with the kings of Judah, except for a few passing comments. This is most likely due to his concern with the Davidic line with whom the postexilic community shares a continuity. The author is concerned with recounting God's faithfulness to the Davidic promises throughout the reigns of his sons. There is also a concern to evaluate the kingship of each Davidic descendant. Sailhamer writes,

He in effect asks: How did the promise to David fare? Did the promised seed come? Was God's promise [of a priestly temple-building King who would reign forever] fulfilled?¹²

Townsend has pointed out the retributive method involved in the Chronicler's evaluation:

As any particular king obeyed (especially with regard to the temple, the most immediate element of the promises for the postexilic remnant), he prospered and so embodied the blessings of the Davidic Covenant. As any king disobeyed, he was disciplined and eventually died, thus indicating that he was not the ultimate Seed of David. This pattern is often referred to as the retributive method of the chronicler.¹³

Furthermore, most of the kings are treated lightly except for five. Rehoboam is given considerable attention because of his connection to the division of the monarchy and the significant effect that this has on the nation and its religious welfare. However, the other four kings who are given considerably more attention than others are Asa, Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah, and Josiah. Interestingly, these kings were all good kings who had significant reforming influence on the kingdom of Judah. Hence, it seems to be our author's intention to call attention to those faithful kings who took the initiative to establish a pure worship of YHWH among the people and under whose reigns the nation was able to experience her greatest moments of blessing. Enough attention is given to the remaining kings to demonstrate that there are divine curses for the failure to worship YHWH faithfully.

¹⁰ Paul Benware, *Survey of the Old Testament*, 127.

¹¹Ibid., 288.

¹²John Sailhamer, *First and Second Chronicles*, Everyman's Bible Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1983), 68.

¹³Townsend, 288-89.

E. Return Under Cyrus (2 Chr 36:22-23)

The closing verses of 2 Chronicles bear testimony to the author's postexilic perspective. These verses connect the postexilic community with that of the monarchy in Judah before the exile. In addition, these verses form a very natural bridge to the books of Ezra-Nehemiah (cf. Ezra 1:1-3). In summary, they present Cyrus' decrees as Yahweh's provision for the restoration of the temple (and therefore hope in the Davidic promises).

PURPOSE OF CHRONICLES

A thorough study of Chronicles reflects that the material is not a repetition of the Samuel-Kings narratives, nor is it an attempt to simply gather together what his predecessors had not covered. Rather, he is seeking to demonstrate a point to the postexilic community and arouse a commitment to faithful worship of YHWH. Hasel writes,

It is evident that the Chronicler's stress of certain motifs is aimed at guiding the Israelite community of his day. He focuses on major leaders, events, and institutions of the past to draw lessons to guide God's true people in their decisions in the present and the future.¹⁴

Sailhamer adds,

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.¹⁵

Dr. Bruce Waltke identifies four key purposes for the book of 1 and 2 Chronicles:¹⁶

1. To show this postexilic community their historical linkage with the past!
The author wanted to show them that they are the same "people of God" as before the exile. Hence, he provides the genealogies, in effect saying, "Here's who you are . . . the same people of God." There is no mention of the Northern Kingdom because that is not part of their past heritage.
2. To show them their glorious heritage!
The author places a great deal of emphasis upon the covenant, and he virtually makes no mention of the sins of the patriarchs (even David's sin with Bathsheba is omitted). To call attention to their sins is not part of his purpose. Rather, he omits that which taints their history in order to show them what a glorious history they have. "You are the recipients of the covenant promises . . . you are the people of God."
3. To show them that this heritage can only be preserved through the God-given ecclesiastical institutions!
The author tells them that if they are to survive, then such survival can only be maintained through this temple and this priesthood. The postexilic community must be loyal to both.

¹⁴Hasel, 1:670.

¹⁵Sailhamer, 9.

¹⁶Bruce K. Waltke, "Old Testament Survey," (tapes of lectures delivered to CCC IBS).

4. To show that this heritage can only be sustained through individual response and decision!

Each Israelite must now decide whether he is going to identify with that heritage or not. Hence, he will pick out things in the life of each king to show that each king had to make his own personal decision. That is why Chronicles alone mentions the conversion of Manasseh.

Townsend has expressed the overall purpose statement for Chronicles in the following way:

To rally the returned remnant to hopeful temple worship (effective purpose) by demonstrating their link with the enduring Davidic promises (expressive means).¹⁷

A LESSON FOR OUR LIFE

What Christian worker is there who does not get discouraged and overwhelmed at times? Have you had a day like that lately? Of course, there can be numerous reasons for discouragement. Sometimes, we may feel that the task is too immense and the opposition to our ministry too strong. In such times, we need to remember that we have not been called to fight the battle in our own strength. When Hezekiah was threatened by the mighty forces of Assyria under the command of Sennacherib, he encouraged his people with these words:

"Be strong and courageous, do not fear or be dismayed because of the king of Assyria, nor because of all the multitude which is with him; for the one with us is greater than the one with him. With him is only an arm of flesh, but with us is the LORD our God to help us and to fight our battles." And the people relied on the words of Hezekiah king of Judah" (2 Chr 32:7-8).

Hezekiah was a great leader, because he relied on the LORD, and he could point his people to the One who would fight on their behalf. In this regard, may God make us all more like Hezekiah!

¹⁷Townsend, 283.