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The Books of Chronicles

In this chapter we will see how the distinctive themes and interests of the Chronicler stand in contrast with those of the Deuteronomistic History.

The books of 1–2 Chronicles constitute an alternative account of the history in 2 Samuel and 1–2 Kings. The secondary character of these books is recognized already in the Septuagint, where they are given the title *Paralipomena*, which means “things omitted” or “passed over.” The title in the Hebrew Bible is *dibre hayyamim*, “the events of the days.” The title “Chronicles” can be traced back to St. Jerome, who referred to the books as “the chronicle of the complete divine history.”

The two books provide a continuous history, which can be divided into three parts:

- Chronicles 1–9: Introduction
- Chronicles 10—2 Chronicles 9: the reigns of David and Solomon
- Chronicles 10–36: the history of Judah from the separation of the northern tribes.

Since 2 Chronicles concludes with the restoration after the Babylonian exile (2 Chron 36:22–23 = Ezra 1:1–3a), this account was completed in the postexilic period. The genealogy of the house of David points to a date after 400 B.C.E.

The character of Chronicles can be seen most readily by comparison and contrast with the books of Samuel and Kings. Most scholars see Chronicles as a rewriting of these books. A minority view holds that both histories drew on a common source, and so that Chronicles preserves independent traditions about the period of the monarchy.

1 CHRONICLES 1–9

The introductory material in 1 Chronicles 1–9 consists of extensive genealogies, beginning with Adam and continuing down to postexilic times. The lists in the opening chapter



Assyrian scribes; relief from North Palace, Nineveh; now in the British Museum, London.

derive primarily from the P edition of Genesis. Most interesting here is the continuation of the genealogy after the end of the monarchy. The descendants of Jehoiakim are listed for seven generations, with Zerubbabel as his grandson. The inclusion of the northern tribes shows that the Chronicler conceived Israel as including them, and did not equate it with the southern state of Judah.

The genealogical introduction concludes with a list of those who returned to form the postexilic community of Judah (9:1-44). The bulk of the list is made up of priests, Levites, and various temple functionaries. The temple cult is given great prominence in the history that follows.

THE REIGNS OF DAVID AND SOLOMON (1 CHRONICLES 10—2 CHRONICLES 9)

David (1 Chronicles 10–29)

The Chronicler omits David's reaction to the death of Saul but adds his own evaluation: Saul died for his unfaithfulness, and because he had consulted a medium. He skips over the civil war between David and the house of Saul, and proceeds directly to the anointing of David as king at Hebron and the capture of Jerusalem. The decision to bring the ark up to Jerusalem is reported in more detail than in 2 Samuel 6, with emphasis on the involvement of priests and Levites. The procession with the ark is interrupted when the unfortunate Uzzah touches it and dies (as in 2 Samuel 6–7) and is only resumed in 1 Chronicles 15.

The interruption of the ark narrative allows time for David to prepare a place and pitch a tent for it. David decrees that no one but the Levites are to carry the ark. The Chronicler then provides lists of priests and Levites who are entrusted with this task, and also of the singers and cultic musicians. The installation of the ark is followed by the singing of praise, illustrated by a medley of passages from the Psalms (cf. Psalms 96; 106).

The report of Nathan's oracle, promising an everlasting dynasty to David, in 1 Chronicles 17 closely follows 2 Samuel 7, but with some differences. There is no mention of punishment in the event of sin, as there was in 2 Sam 7:14. The oracle concludes with an emphatic promise to "confirm him in my house and in my kingdom forever, and his throne shall be established forever" (1 Chron 17:14). "My house," spoken by God, can be understood as the temple. In that case the promise to the Davidic line may be linked to the temple in a way that was not at all the case in 2 Samuel 7.

There follows an account of David's wars in 1 Chronicles 18–20, drawn from 2 Samuel 8; 10; and 19–22. Most notable are the omissions. The entire episode with Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11–12) is passed over, as is the rape of Tamar by Amnon and the subsequent rebellion of Absalom (2 Samuel 13–19). There seems to be a clear tendency to avoid stories that might detract from the portrayal of David as an ideal king.

Chronicles does, however, pick up the story of the census from 2 Samuel 24. Here, it is Satan who incites David to count the people. Satan is not yet here the devil, but he is an adversary who puts people to the test. In 2 Sam 24:1, David was incited by "the anger of the

LORD.” The story has a happy outcome in the purchase of the site for the future temple. In 2 Samuel David got it for 50 shekels of silver. By the time Chronicles was written, inflation had taken its toll. The price now was 600 shekels of gold.

The last days of David in Chronicles have quite a different character from the account in I Kings 1–2. There is no intrigue surrounding the succession. Solomon is the only heir apparent. In I Kings 2, David’s parting instructions had a Machiavellian character, advising his son to eliminate potential enemies such as Joab. In Chronicles his thoughts are entirely on the task of building the temple. The organization of the Levites and of the temple cult occupies chapters 23–26. We are told that 24,000 Levites are given charge of the work in the house of the LORD. There are 6,000 officers and judges, 4,000 gatekeepers, and 4,000 musicians. These numbers seem inflated to the point of absurdity (I Chron 12:28 says that 4,600 Levites came to make David king at Hebron; in Ezra 8:15–20 fewer than 300 Levites return from Babylon).

Two factors are noteworthy in the organization of the clergy. First, the role of the Levites is to attend the Aaronide priests. The subordination of Levites to priests was a consequence of the centralization of the cult in Jerusalem (see especially Ezekiel 44). Second, the priests are divided into twenty-four courses, to take turns at the temple service—a new development after the Babylonian exile. It was made necessary by the number of priests in Jerusalem in the Second Temple period. It should also be noted that the musicians are said to “prophesy” (25:1). Prophecy seems to be subsumed into liturgy in the Chronicler’s vision. In contrast with this elaborate organization of the priests and Levites, the organization of the temporal affairs of the kingdom is described quite briefly in chapter 27.

Solomon (2 Chronicles 1–9)

The account of Solomon’s reign is idealized in a way similar to that of David and focuses on the building of the temple. It begins with

Temple Mount, dominated by the Dome of the Rock, Jerusalem, by tradition the site of Solomon’s temple.



Solomon's dream at Gibeon, in which he asks for wisdom. Nothing is said of Solomon's elimination of his rivals (I Kings 2). Solomon is presented in Chronicles as a model of piety, and so his worthiness for building the temple is not jeopardized.

In 2 Chronicles 2, Solomon turns his attention to building the temple. Chronicles makes no mention of forced labor from Israel and has Solomon take a census of aliens before he embarks on the temple building. In Chronicles, then, all the forced labor is imposed on aliens, whatever their origin.

The construction of the temple (2 Chron 3:1—5:1) is the centerpiece of the Chronicler's account of Solomon. Chronicles attaches great importance to the location of the temple. He identifies it with Mount Moriah, scene of the near-sacrifice of Isaac, and with the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite, which David had designated as the site for the temple.

The account of the dedication of the temple in 2 Chron 5:2—7:22 proceeds as follows:

1. The introduction of the ark into the temple (5:2—6:2). This section derives largely from I Kgs 8:1-13.
2. Solomon's address after this event (6:3-11), blessing the assembly and thanking God for fulfillment of some of the promises to David.
3. Solomon's prayer (6:12-42), closely following I Kgs 8:22-53. The temple is not the dwelling place of God, but the place where people may bring their petitions.
4. The conclusion of the ceremonies (7:1-11). Chronicles has fire come down from heaven to consume the sacrifices.
5. Finally, the LORD appears again to Solomon at night, as he had at Gibeon (7:12-22), confirming the choice of the place as a house of sacrifice, and affirming that he will establish Solomon's throne "if you walk before me as your father David walked." This passage follows I Kgs 9:1-5.

Second Chronicles 8 summarizes the other building projects of Solomon. Only at this point do we learn incidentally of his marriage to Pharaoh's daughter. Chapter 9 recounts the visit of the Queen of Sheba and emphasizes Solomon's wealth (cf. I Kings 10). There is no mention in Chronicles, however, of his love for foreign women or of the multitude of his wives (I Kings 11).

THE HISTORY OF JUDAH (2 CHRONICLES 10–36)

In the older history, the LORD decided to tear the kingdom from Solomon because he had turned away, under the influence of his many wives. This apostasy is not acknowledged in Chronicles. Neither does the Chronicler recount the reason for Jeroboam's original rebellion (the forced labor). He does follow Kings in recounting Rehoboam's refusal to lighten the load of the people. The conclusion, however, places the blame primarily on the northerners who seceded: "So Israel has been in rebellion against the house of David

to this day” (10:18). Thereafter Chronicles pays little attention to the northern kingdom, except insofar as it impinges on Judah. It does not share the Deuteronomist’s obsession with “the sin of Jeroboam.”

Rehoboam

The account of the reign of Rehoboam (11:5—12:16) illustrates the Chronicler’s understanding of history. At first the king abides by the law of the LORD, under the influence of the priests and Levites. During this period he prospers (he takes eighteen wives and sixty concubines, and begets twenty-eight sons and sixty daughters). But then he abandons the law of the LORD, and so the LORD sends Shishak of Egypt to punish him. Then Rehoboam humbles himself, and so the wrath of the LORD turns from him.

In the history of the subsequent kings of Judah, I note only major departures from the account in 1–2 Kings.

Jehoshaphat

In 1 Kings, Jehoshaphat is overshadowed by Ahab of Samaria. He receives much more extensive treatment here (2 Chron 17:1—21:1). Chronicles credits him with extensive reforms. He allegedly sent officials, priests, and Levites to all the cities of Judah “having the book of the law of the LORD with them” (2 Chron 17:9). This would not have been possible in the Deuteronomistic History, since the book was only discovered later, in the reign of King Josiah. Because of this virtuous conduct, the fear of the LORD fell on neighboring kingdoms, and they did not make war on Jehoshaphat.

1 Kings 22 reports that Jehoshaphat was allied with Ahab of Samaria in the campaign against Ramoth-gilead. This episode is the occasion of the prophecy of Micaiah ben Imlah, which is repeated in full in 2 Chronicles 18. In Chronicles, when Jehoshaphat returns to Jerusalem, he is met by a seer, who asks, “Should you help the wicked and love those who hate the LORD?” (2 Chron 19:2). Jehoshaphat repeats his mistake later by joining with Ahaziah of Israel (20:35–37). The account of Jehoshaphat also includes a report of a spectacular victory over Moabites and Ammonites that has no parallel in Kings. The story drives home the point that victory in battle is by the power of God, not of human armies. First, Jehoshaphat prays for divine assistance (20:6–12). Then he is reassured by a prophet, Jahaziel son of Zechariah, a Levite. All Jehoshaphat has to do is stand still and see the victory of the LORD on his behalf. Singers go before the army, giving thanks to the LORD. Then the Ammonites and Moabites attack the inhabitants of Mount Seir, and end up not only destroying the people of Mount Seir but themselves as well. Jehoshaphat and his army have only to collect the booty and return to Jerusalem with much fanfare. The emphasis, then, is on ritual, and the battle is entirely miraculous. The story must be regarded as a theological fiction, designed to display the Chronicler’s ideas about the proper conduct of a battle. (Compare the highly ritualized story of the fall of Jericho in Joshua 6.)

Jehoram

Chronicles expands the account of Jehoram and portrays him as the first entirely negative figure in the Davidic line. The main embellishment of the account comes in the form

of a threatening letter from the prophet Elijah. This is the only mention of Elijah in Chronicles (Elisha is not mentioned at all). The reference to a letter is anachronistic. The use of letters only becomes common in Israel after the Babylonian exile.

Joash

The assassination of Joash is explained by the story that he had murdered a prophet, Zechariah son of Jehoiada (2 Chron 24:25-27).

Hezekiah (2 Chronicles 29–32)

In the Deuteronomistic History, Hezekiah ranks second only to Josiah among the kings of Judah. In Chronicles he surpasses the later ruler. First he repaired the doors of the temple. Then he enlisted the Levites to cleanse the temple. When this was completed, he offered sacrifices and restored the Levites to their liturgical tasks, as prescribed by David. Then “Hezekiah sent word to all Israel and Judah, and wrote letters also to Ephraim and Manasseh, that they should come to the house of the LORD at Jerusalem, to keep the passover to the LORD” (chapter 30). There is a famous letter from Elephantine in Egypt in the late fifth century B.C.E. regarding the observance of the Passover, but letters are anachronistic in the time of Hezekiah, some 300 years earlier. The fact that emissaries are sent to Ephraim and Manasseh presupposes that the northern kingdom of Israel is no more. Yet, amazingly, the Chronicler has not even mentioned the destruction of Samaria by the Assyrians.

According to 2 Kings, it was Josiah who first celebrated the Passover as a centralized feast in Jerusalem; no such passover had been kept since the days of the judges (2 Kgs 23:22). Chronicles claims that Hezekiah kept the festival in this way, and also prolonged the festival for seven days, presumably incorporating the observance of Maṣṣoth, or Unleavened Bread. It is unlikely that the Chronicler was drawing on ancient sources here. The tendency to project the full cult of the Second Temple back into earlier history is evident throughout his work.

The account of the invasion of Sennacherib is presented in condensed form. There is no mention of stripping the temple to pay tribute to Sennacherib, as in 2 Kgs

Inside Hezekiah's Tunnel, the water channel cut through the bedrock under Jerusalem.



18:I3-16. Even the miraculous deliverance by the angel of the LORD is presented in a terse, matter-of-fact way, as a response to the prayers of Hezekiah and Isaiah (2 Chron 32:20).

The glowingly positive account of Hezekiah contains one discordant note. According to 2 Chron 32:24-26, Hezekiah did not respond properly when he was healed from his illness. Therefore “wrath came upon him.” When he humbled himself, however, the wrath was deferred to a later time. There is only an indirect basis for this in 2 Kings. There, when Hezekiah shows his treasury to the Babylonian envoys, Isaiah prophesies that all that is in his house will be carried off to Babylon. Hezekiah is not troubled, since there will be peace in his days. In 2 Kings he is guilty at most of imprudence. The Chronicler requires a more theological explanation. The wrath of God must be punishment for a sin—in this case, pride.

Manasseh (2 Chron 33:1-20)

In the Deuteronomistic History (2 Kgs 21:I-18), Manasseh is the bad king par excellence. He is guilty of all sorts of idolatry, and even of human sacrifice. It is specifically because of his sins that Jerusalem is destroyed. Chronicles repeats all the charges against Manasseh but then continues with a surprising narrative. The king is taken captive to Babylon by the king of Assyria. There he is moved to repentance and recognizes the LORD. Accordingly, he is restored to Jerusalem. He proceeds to fortify the city and remove the pagan cults that he himself had installed. The concluding summary (33:I9) makes reference to his prayer to God. A composition called “The Prayer of Manasseh” is preserved in Greek and Latin, and included in the LXX and in Protestant editions of the Apocrypha, but this is certainly a much later prayer, inspired, no doubt, by the references in Chronicles.

Josiah (2 Chronicles 34–35)

The account of Josiah differs from that of Kings in several ways. In Kings the first reforming activity of the young king is dated to his eighteenth year. In Chronicles he begins to seek the LORD already in his eighth year, when he becomes king, and he begins to purge Judah and Jerusalem of the high places in his twelfth year. The repair of the temple, in his eighteenth year, is viewed as part of an ongoing reform. Chronicles, typically, emphasizes the participation of Levites, some of whom were musicians and scribes. The account of the discovery of the book follows 2 Kgs 22:8-20. The novelty of Josiah’s Passover has been preempted by Hezekiah in the Chronicler’s account, yet the Chronicler echoes Kings in saying that no Passover like Josiah’s had been kept since the days of Samuel.

In 2 Kings, the manner of Josiah’s death is obscure. We are simply told that when Pharaoh Neco met Josiah at Megiddo, he killed him (2 Kgs 23:29). Chronicles clarifies the situation by saying explicitly that Josiah was fatally wounded in battle. (The account in Kings could be interpreted as an execution.) More surprisingly, Chronicles faults Josiah for fighting against the pharaoh. Neco pleaded with him not to oppose him, because God had commanded him to hurry. But Josiah did not listen to Neco’s words, which were from the mouth of God (2 Chron 35:22). Josiah’s death, then, is not merely an act of divine mercy, so that he would not see the fall of Jerusalem, but is also in some part a punishment for his own disobedience.

The Conclusion

The desecration and despoliation of the temple provides an appropriate conclusion to the Chronicler's history. Yet the book ends on a hopeful note, pointing forward to the restoration under Cyrus of Persia. The last verse of Chronicles is also the first verse of the book of Ezra.

THE DATE AND PURPOSE OF THE CHRONICLER

The central concerns of Chronicles should be evident from the preceding summary. The covenant with David is foundational, and northern Israel is culpable for failing to respect it. The focus of that covenant is on the temple, at least as much as on the kingship. The proper care of the temple is the responsibility of the priests and Levites, and the Chronicler never tires of emphasizing the roles of the clergy. When the cult is properly maintained and practiced, all is well. There is a strict principle of retribution in history. So the peaceful death of Manasseh must be explained by his conversion, while the violent death of the reformer Josiah betrays disobedience on his part. Prophets figure prominently in the story, but their function is limited to reminding people of what they already know through the Torah. Some of the prophets are identified as Levites. The music of the temple is associated with prophecy, and prophets are credited with compiling historical records. The Chronicler is concerned with "Israel," which includes the northern territory, but he shows little interest in the northern kingdom and does not even bother to report its destruction. Judean kings are faulted for making alliances with their northern counterparts, as these alliances lead only to apostasy.

The purpose of the Chronicler's History depends in part on the date. The concluding reference to Cyrus of Persia requires a postexilic date. The extension of David's genealogy in I Chronicles 3 points to a date after 400 B.C.E. Several scholars, however, have argued for the existence of earlier editions of the Chronicler's History. Some have proposed that a form of the history was drafted in the time of Hezekiah, in view of the prominence accorded to that king. But the portrayal of Hezekiah seems quite anachronistic. In large part the Chronicler seems to have assumed that Hezekiah, as a good king, would have done all the things Josiah is said to have done. The suggestions of earlier editions of the Chronicler's work remain hypothetical. The language of Chronicles is generally regarded as Late Biblical Hebrew—later than P and Ezekiel. There is no clear Hellenistic influence, which would point to a date later than the fourth century B.C.E.

Much of the Chronicler's History can be seen to derive from biblical materials, especially from 2 Samuel and 1–2 Kings. While he may have had occasional access to independent historical information, the great bulk of the cases where he departs from the Deuteronomistic History can be explained by his theological and ideological preferences. Chronicles describes history as the author thought it should have been.

Some suggest that the Chronicler cherished messianic hopes for the restoration of the Davidic kingdom, but the author seems much more interested in the temple cult than in the monarchy. The primary role of the king is to provide for the temple and its

cult, whether by building the temple and organizing the cult, in the case of David and Solomon, or by maintaining or restoring it, in the case of later kings (cf. the role of the king in Ezekiel 40–48). No doubt, the author would have welcomed the restoration of the Davidic line, but the proper functioning of the cult was much more important than political independence.

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