

1 and 2 Chronicles

ORIENTING DATA FOR 1 AND 2 CHRONICLES

- **Content:** a postexilic, positive history of Judah's kings, with emphasis on the temple and its worship
- **Historical coverage:** an opening genealogy goes back to Adam; the narrative itself covers the kingdom of Judah from David (ca. 1000 B.C.) to the decree of Cyrus (539/8)
- **Emphases:** the continuity of the people of Judah (and others) through the exile and beyond; David's and Solomon's covenant loyalty as models for the time of restoration; the central role of the temple and worship for the restoration; true worship as a matter of the heart and full of joy and song; divine blessing and rest for obedience, and retribution for disobedience

OVERVIEW OF 1 AND 2 CHRONICLES

The book of Chronicles is the final book in the Hebrew Bible, taking its place at the end of the Writings. Its present place and division into two books come from the Greek Bible, where it was (perceptively) placed after Kings and followed by Ezra-Nehemiah. Using Samuel and Kings as his basic narrative, the Chronicler adds other materials—genealogies, lists, psalms, speeches—to present the continuous story of Israel (especially Judah) from Adam to the decree of Cyrus, which brought the exile to its official end.

The story itself is in three parts. It begins with the infamous *genealogies* (1 Chr 1–9), which is what has made it one of the more neglected books in the Old Testament. What is crucial here is that the Chronicler takes the line of descent all the way back to Adam, while concentrating finally on Judah and the Levites (which is where his narrative interests lie).

Part 2 (1 Chr 10–2 Chr 9) tells the story of the *united monarchy* under David and Solomon, a section that is longer by some pages than the whole rest of the story from Rehoboam to the end of the exile. Concentrating only on the positive dimensions of their lives, the author also deliberately overlaps their stories. Thus 1 Chronicles 10–21 tells the story of David alone, 1 Chronicles 22–29 introduces Solomon into David's story, whom David prepares for the construction of the temple, and 2 Chronicles 1–9 then picks up the story of Solomon alone, who constructs the temple. The temple and correct worship is the obvious focus of this section. More than half of David's story is concerned with preparations (1 Chr 22–26; 28–29) and over two-thirds of Solomon's with its construction and dedication (2 Chr 2–7).

These same concerns carry over to part 3 (2 Chr 10–36), which relates the story of Judah (only) during the period of the *divided monarchy*. But here you will note a further pattern as

ca. *circa*, about, approximately

well: Success in battle and material prosperity are related directly to obedience to Yahweh, while failure is due to unfaithfulness or lack of trust. The story includes the exile, ending with the edict of Cyrus, king of Persia, who in fulfillment of the prophecy of Jeremiah was “appointed” by Yahweh “to build a temple for him at Jerusalem,” and thus he invites the people to go up (2 Chr 36:22–23).

SPECIFIC ADVICE FOR READING 1 AND 2 CHRONICLES

To read Chronicles well, it will help you to have a sense of the times in which the Chronicler wrote. His era was that of the restoration, a period that began limply at the end of the sixth century B.C. with the repeatedly postponed, yet finally completed, temple project (see “Specific Advice for Reading Haggai,” p. 253; “Zechariah,” pp. 257–58; Ezra 1–6, p. 111), which picked up real steam only with the systematic reforms of Ezra and Nehemiah in the middle of the fifth century. The Chronicler most likely wrote somewhere within this period—a time of identity crisis in the Persian province of Judah. The restoration thus far had been a far cry from the glorious “second exodus” envisioned by Isaiah (e.g., Isa 35:1–10; 40:1–11; 44:1–5). Cyrus had technically inaugurated the new era, which included the initial token rebuilding of Jerusalem and the temple (Isa 44:28–45:5, 13). But in fact only a relative handful of Jews had returned to their “promised land,” and the second temple was neither of the grandeur of Solomon’s (Hag 2:3) nor had it yet attained its promised glory (Hag 2:6–9)—while Jerusalem itself lay in general decay with few inhabitants (Neh 1; 11). So a time of general spiritual malaise had settled in, including, increasingly, a great deal of intermarriage (Ezra 9–10, a sure way to lose national identity).

Into this context stepped Haggai and Zechariah to urge on the work of a priest (Jeshua) and a governor (Zerubbabel). A generation later it was a priest (Ezra) and a governor (Nehemiah) who themselves stepped in with their reform movement—and with greater results. Into the same overall context also steps the Chronicler, with a brilliant retelling of the story of Judah intended to give the present generation a sense of continuity with its great past and to focus on the temple and its worship as the place where that continuity could now be maintained.

As you read, you will note that several emphases stand out: The Chronicler is interested altogether in the Davidic dynasty, and in the northern kingdom only as she is in allegiance with Judah. About Judah his interest focuses on two concerns: the Davidic dynasty (David and Solomon) and the temple in Jerusalem. About the temple his interest focuses altogether on the nature and purity of the worship (over 60 percent of the story). Combine these emphases with the fact that the book ends with Cyrus’s edict that the temple be rebuilt, and you can see where our author thinks the hope for the future lies, namely, in getting it right this time around with regard to the temple.

But getting it right for the Chronicler is not a matter of mere ritual. Be watching for his repeated emphasis on devoting “your heart and soul to seeking the LORD [Yahweh] your God” (1 Chr 22:19; cf. 29:17; 2 Chr 6:38; 7:10; 15:12), plus an accent on singing “joyful songs” (1 Chr 15:16), which is where the emphasis on the Levites comes out. The book abounds with the language of praise, thanksgiving, and joy in God’s goodness and love. Note especially the thrice-repeated “He is good; his love endures forever”—(1) when the ark is brought into Jerusalem and then (2) into the temple, and (3) when the temple is consecrated (1 Chr 16:34; 2 Chr 5:13; 7:3). The presence of God (from the exodus) is thus renewed in Israel.

The Chronicler's focus on the southern kingdom, however, is not over against the north as such; rather he tells the story of the north only in terms of its failure to worship at the place of God's choosing, namely, the temple in Jerusalem. For example, the Chronicler regularly uses the expression "all Israel," by which he means north and south together in allegiance to temple worship in Jerusalem. In this regard you will see how his two main themes (the authenticity of the Davidic dynasty and the temple in Jerusalem) merge in Abijah's speech in 2 Chronicles 13:4–12 as the real point of condemnation against Jeroboam and his successors. And watch further for Hezekiah's invitation—and acceptance by some—to the north (now no longer functioning as a nation) to join once more in the worship in Jerusalem, after he had purified the temple (2 Chr 30:1–31:1).

It is also in this regard that you should understand the Chronicler's presentation of David and Solomon. What may appear to some as a kind of whitewash job on their lives is best understood as his concentrating only on those dimensions of their stories that serve as ideals both for the people as a whole (when they no longer have a king) and for the appropriate emphases as they live for the future (proper worship at the temple). The Chronicler knows that his readers are well aware of the faults of these kings (see Neh 13:26). His interest is in how their positive accomplishments can inspire hope for a new day.

This is also how you should understand the emphases in the narrative of the divided kingdom—that God blesses those who obey and punishes those who do not. Although life is not quite that simple, the Chronicler knows that this is a biblical pattern established from the beginning. And so he retells the story to encourage such loyalty in a new generation who live in and around Jerusalem (1 Chr 9).

Finally, you should also note the Chronicler's interest in the role of "the nations." In the midst of his readers' present sense of insignificance, he reminds them that not only are the nations ultimately under the control of Yahweh (e.g., Shishak king of Egypt, 2 Chr 12:5–9; Cyrus king of Persia, 2 Chr 36:22–23), but by placing Psalm 105 in the midst of the narrative of David (1 Chr 16:8–36), he emphasizes that God's goodness to Israel will be the source of making Yahweh known among the nations (recall the blessing of Abraham, Gen 12:3).¹

¹ Gordon D. Fee and Douglas K. Stuart, [*How to Read the Bible Book by Book: A Guided Tour*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 99–102.