

First Chronicles

Scripture: 1 Chronicles

Code: MSB13

Title

The original title in the Hebrew Bible read “The annals (i.e., events or happenings) of the days.” First and Second Chronicles were comprised of one book until later divided into separate books in the Greek OT translation, the Septuagint (LXX), ca. 200 B.C. The title also changed at that time to the inaccurate title, “the things omitted,” i.e., reflecting material not in 1, 2 Samuel and 1, 2 Kings. The English title “Chronicles” originated with Jerome’s Latin Vulgate translation (ca. 400 A.D.), which used the fuller title “The Chronicles of the Entire Sacred History.”

Author and Date

Neither 1 nor 2 Chronicles contains direct statements regarding the human author, though Jewish tradition strongly favors Ezra the priest (cf. Ezra 7:1–6) as “the chronicler.” These records were most likely recorded ca. 450–430 B.C. The genealogical record in 1 Chr. 1–9 supports a date after 450 B.C. for the writing. The NT does not directly quote either 1 or 2 Chronicles.

Background and Setting

The immediate historical backdrop encompassed the Jews’ three-phase return to the Promised Land from the Babylonian exile: 1) Zerubbabel in Ezra 1–6 (ca. 538 B.C.); 2) Ezra in Ezra 7–10 (ca. 458 B.C.); and 3) Nehemiah in Neh. 1–13 (ca. 445 B.C.). Previous history looks back to the Babylonian deportation/Exile (ca. 605–538 B.C.) as predicted/reported by 2 Kings, Esther, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, and Habakkuk. The prophets of this restoration era were Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi.

The Jews had returned from their 70 years of captivity (ca. 538 B.C.) to a land that was markedly different from the one once ruled by King David (ca. 1011–971 B.C.) and King Solomon (971–931 B.C.): 1) there was no Hebrew king, but rather a Persian governor (Ezra 5:3; 6:6); 2) there was no security for Jerusalem, so Nehemiah had to rebuild the wall (Neh. 1–7); 3) there was no temple, so Zerubbabel had to reconstruct a pitiful semblance of the Solomonic temple’s former glory (Ezra 3); 4) the Jews no longer dominated the region, but rather were on the defensive (Ezra 4; Neh. 4); 5) they enjoyed few divine blessings beyond the fact of their return; 6) they possessed little of the kingdom’s former wealth; and 7) God’s divine presence no longer resided in Jerusalem, having departed ca. 597–591 B.C. (Ezek. 8–11).

To put it mildly, their future looked bleak compared to their majestic past, especially the time of David and Solomon. The return could best be described as bittersweet, i.e., bitter because their present poverty brought hurtful memories about what was forfeited by God’s judgment on their ancestors’ sin, but sweet because at least they were back in the Land God had given Abraham 17 centuries earlier (Gen. 12:1–3). The chronicler’s selective genealogy and history of Israel, stretching from Adam (1 Chr. 1:1) to the return from Babylon (2 Chr. 26:23), was intended to remind the Jews of God’s

promises and intentions about: 1) the Land; 2) the nation; 3) the Davidic king; 4) the Levitical priests; 5) the temple; and 6) true worship, none of which had been abrogated because of the Babylonian captivity. All of this was to remind them of their spiritual heritage during the difficult times they faced, and to encourage them to be faithful to God.

Historical and Theological Themes

First and Second Chronicles, as named by Jerome, recreate an OT history in miniature, with particular emphases on the Davidic Covenant and temple worship. In terms of literary parallel, 1 Chronicles is the partner of 2 Samuel, in that both detail the reign of King David. First Chronicles opens with Adam (1:1) and closes with the death of David (29:26–30) in 971 B.C. Second Chronicles begins with Solomon (1:1) and covers the same historical period as 1 and 2 Kings, while focusing exclusively on the kings of the southern kingdom of Judah, thus excluding the history of the northern 10 tribes and their rulers, because of their complete wickedness and false worship. It ranges from the reign of Solomon (1:1) in 971 B.C. to the return from Babylon in 538 B.C. (36:23). Over 55 percent of the material in Chronicles is unique, i.e., not found in 2 Samuel or 1 and 2 Kings. The “chronicler” tended to omit what was negative or in opposition to the Davidic kingship; on the other hand, he tended to make unique contributions in validating temple worship and the line of David. Whereas 2 Kings 25 ends dismally with the deportation of Judah to Babylon, 2 Chronicles 36:22–23 concludes hopefully with the Jews’ release from Persia and return to Jerusalem.

These two books were written to the repatriated Jewish exiles as a chronicle of God’s intention of future blessing, in spite of the nation’s past moral/spiritual failure for which the people paid dearly under God’s wrath. First and Second Chronicles could be briefly summarized as follows:

- I. A Selected Genealogical History of Israel (1 Chr. 1–9)
- II. Israel’s United Kingdom Under Saul (1 Chr. 10), David (1 Chr. 11–29), and Solomon (2 Chr. 1–9)
- III. Judah’s Monarchy in the Divided Kingdom (2 Chr. 10–36:21)
- IV. Judah’s Release From Their Seventy Year Captivity (2 Chr. 36:22, 23).

The historical themes are inextricably linked with the theological in that God’s divine purposes for Israel have been and will be played out on the stage of human history. These two books are designed to assure the returning Jews that, in spite of their checkered past and present plight, God will be true to His covenant promises. They have been returned by God to the Land first given to Abraham as a race of people whose ethnic identity (Jewish) was not obliterated by the deportation and whose national identity (Israel) has been preserved (Gen. 12:1–3; 15:5), although they are still under God’s judgment as prescribed by the Mosaic legislation (Deut. 28:15–68). The priestly line of Eleazar’s son Phinehas and the Levitical line were still intact so that temple worship could continue in the hopes that God’s presence would one day return (Num. 25:10–13; Mal. 3:1). The Davidic promise of a king was still valid, although future in its fulfillment (2 Sam. 7:8–17; 1 Chr. 17:7–15). Their individual hope of eternal life and restoration of God’s blessings forever rested in the New Covenant (Jer. 31:31–34).

Two basic principles enumerated in these two books prevail throughout the OT, namely, obedience brings blessing, disobedience brings judgment. In the Chronicles, when the king obeyed and trusted the Lord, God blessed and protected. But when the king disobeyed and/or put his trust in something or someone other than the Lord, God withdrew His blessing and protection. Three basic failures by the kings of Judah brought God’s wrath: 1) personal sin; 2) false worship/idolatry; and/or 3) trust in

man rather than God.

Interpretive Challenges

First and Second Chronicles present a combination of selective genealogical and historical records and no insurmountable challenges within the two books are encountered. A few issues arise, such as: 1) Who wrote 1 and 2 Chronicles? Does the overlap of 2 Chr. 36:22–23 with Ezra 1:1–3 point to Ezra as author? 2) Does the use of multiple sources taint the inerrancy doctrine of Scripture? 3) How does one explain the variations in the genealogies of 1 Chr. 1–9 from other OT genealogies? 4) Are the curses of Deut. 28 still in force, even though the 70 year captivity has concluded? 5) How does one explain the few variations in numbers when comparing Chronicles with parallel passages in Samuel and Kings? These will be dealt with in the notes at the appropriate places.

Outline

I. Selective Genealogy (1:1–9:34)

A. Adam to Before David (1:1–2:55)

B. David to the Captivity (3:1–24)

C. Twelve Tribes (4:1–9:2)

D. Jerusalem Dwellers (9:3–34)

II. David's Ascent (9:35–12:40)

A. Saul's Heritage and Death (9:35–10:14)

B. David's Anointing (11:1–3)

C. Jerusalem's Conquest (11:4–9)

D. David's Men (11:10–12:40)

III. David's Reign (13:1–29:30)

A. The Ark of the Covenant (13:1–16:43)

B. The Davidic Covenant (17:1–17:27)

C. Selected Military History (18:1–21:30)

D. Temple-Building Preparations (22:1–29:20)

E. Transition to Solomon (29:21–29:30)

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