

Aquifer Open Study Notes (Book Intros)

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1 Chronicles

The books of 1–2 Chronicles were written to inspire hope. Exile had robbed the people of Israel of their wealth, and their return to the land created resentment among their neighbors. Despondency and apathy threatened to destroy them entirely. The Chronicler's task was to establish and validate the people's links with the past. In writing this history, he organized the past in a way that provided meaning and value for the present. He believed that his community, Judea, was critically significant in representing the Kingdom of God. He knew that the community needed to retain its distinctive sense of identity in order to fulfill its purpose.

Setting

The Babylonians had conquered the kingdom of Judah between 605 and 586 BC. Within a generation, Babylonian power eroded because of its own internal decay (see [Dan 5](#)). Meanwhile, to the east, the Persian king Cyrus the Great (559–530 BC) established a new empire that united the Medes and the Persians. In October 539 BC, Babylon fell without resistance, and Cyrus's empire extended westward to include Babylonia (see [Dan 5:30–31](#)).

In keeping with his imperial policy, Cyrus provided for the Jewish exiles to return to Judea and establish a province around the city of Jerusalem. The account of this period is told in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah and by the prophets Haggai and Zechariah. The community experienced spiritual restoration, physical protection, and a measure of economic independence. Yet there was virtually no hope of political autonomy. The besieged community bore little resemblance to the former kingdom. They also faced scorn, opposition, and humiliation from surrounding peoples as they rebuilt the Temple and later the wall of Jerusalem. They struggled to maintain their identity, faith, and way of life as social and political forces threatened to absorb them completely. They needed a sense of purpose and hope.

The people of Judea faced some profound questions at this time: How could they remain true to their ancestral faith while living under the domination of an imperial power? How could a subordinate people be the people of God? What did the promise of the eternal throne of David mean under these circumstances? Some Jews in later Greek and Roman times (e.g., the Maccabees and the “zealots” of the New Testament era) answered these questions with a nationalism that sought to rebel and establish independence. Other Jews, perceiving their situation as inescapable, focused on covenant faithfulness to God within the context of empire. The book of 1 Chronicles was written to address these questions and concerns.

Summary

The text of 1 Chronicles divides into two distinct sections: the portrayal of Israel's identity through genealogies ([1 Chr 1:1-9:44](#)), and David's preparing of Jerusalem for the Temple and the rule of Solomon ([10:1-29:30](#)).

The first chapter of genealogies ([ch 1](#)) moves along the line of God's selection of specific people from Adam to Jacob (= Israel). [Chapters 2-8](#) deal with the Israelites from Jacob until the exile to Babylon. This section first details the tribe of Judah ([chs 2-4](#)), discussing the house of David in the central section ([ch 3](#)), and then describes the other tribes of Israel ([chs 5-7](#)), including those east of the Jordan River (in Transjordan). At the midpoint in these additional genealogical lists comes Levi ([ch 6](#)), a tribe with central significance. The record then continues with the tribe of Benjamin ([ch 8](#)). The genealogies are completed down to about 400 BC, with a list of the chief representatives of the community who returned from exile and began restoring Jerusalem ([ch 9](#)).

Saul's genealogy ([9:35-44](#)) introduces the founding of the monarchy. When Saul died because of his unfaithfulness ([10:1-14](#)), David became king ([11:1-12:40](#)). The chapters on David's reign explain his organization of officials and his preparations for the Temple ([chs 13-27](#)). The transfer of the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem ([chs 13-16](#)) served as a major event in the establishment of David's kingdom. The remainder of 1 Chronicles traces the steps taken toward building the Temple. These chapters include the identity of the builder ([ch 17](#)), the necessary political conditions ([chs 18-20](#)), the site ([ch 21](#)), the personnel ([chs 23-27](#)), the materials, and the plans ([chs 22, 28-29](#)). The account of David's reign closes with a great public assembly and Solomon's commissioning as the king of peace who would build the Temple ([chs 28-29](#)).

Authorship and Date

The books of Chronicles are traditionally ascribed to Ezra, but the author left no indications about his own identity apart from the content of his writings. The Chronicler lived in or near Jerusalem and was an ardent supporter of the Temple and its services. The prominence he gives to the Levites in his writing might suggest that he was among their number. (This would explain his access to the material he used to compose his history.)

The Chronicler wrote in the latter years of the Persian Empire, probably around 400 BC. The genealogy of the descendants of Jehoiachin ([3:17–24](#)) suggests a date that is eight generations later than Zerubbabel, who served as governor around 520 BC, during the days of Darius, king of Persia ([Zech 1:1; 4:9](#)). The Chronicler probably wrote some time after Nehemiah traveled to Jerusalem in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes (445 BC) to repair the walls of the city ([Neh 2:1](#)). Chronicles was not written as late as the Greek period, beginning with Alexander the Great (332 BC), because the writing contains no linguistic or ideological evidence of Greek influence. These considerations point to a date around 400 BC.

Historical Situation

Little is known about the situation in Judea after Nehemiah, although Nehemiah reveals some of the difficulties of the community. The temptation to marry outside of Israel was great, and mixed marriages remained in the days of Malachi (400s BC; see [Mal 2:14–16](#)). Foreign marriages gave access to land and wealth that were not available within the community. This practice was contrary to the law, however, which Ezra brought back with him from Babylon. The self-sufficiency and exclusivity enjoined by Ezra and Nehemiah aroused the ongoing resentment and hostility of the surrounding peoples, particularly as the Jews sought to reestablish the Temple as the social and economic center of the community.

Genre and Composition

The title of Chronicles also defines the genre of the work. In Hebrew, the term refers to “the events of the days.” In the prologue to the Latin translation of Samuel and Kings, Jerome calls Chronicles the chronikon, or “annals,” a register of events, a record book of ancient times. In other words, it is written as a history. Meanwhile, the Greek translation of the Old Testament (the Septuagint), calls this history “the left-over things.” This title regarded Chronicles as a secondary complement to Kings, an attitude that likely would have horrified its author. This work is a unique creation from many different sources.

In writing this history, the Chronicler organized Israel’s past in a way that provided meaning and value for its intended readers. He included genealogies because they answered two critical questions of history: *Whose story needed to be told?* and *Where did these people live?* The Chronicler’s work explains why a people with no influence or recognition considered their existence and way of life to be of profound significance for the future.

The book of 1 Chronicles covers essentially the same time period as 2 Samuel. Accordingly, there are numerous parallel passages with similar wording. But the authors had different purposes in writing, and these differences can be highlighted by comparing the various parallel passages.

Meaning and Message

God's promise to David ([17:1-27](#)) occupies the center of the Chronicler's message. When David determined to build a house for God's Ark of the Covenant, Nathan the prophet had a vision informing him that David had it backwards: David would not build a house for God, but God would build a house for David. This house would be a dynasty ([2 Sam 7:11-14//1 Chr 17:10-14](#)), and the eternal Kingdom of God would come about through David's lineage. Psalm 2 expresses the importance of this promise: God held the nations in derision because they rejected his kingdom and thought that they could establish their own rule. They ignored the fact that God had already anointed his king on Mount Zion, a king who would shatter the nations and receive the earth as his inheritance. The Chronicler took this promise very seriously. The Kingdom of God would come through the promised son of David. The community around Jerusalem represented that promised Kingdom, the hope of the future.

The Chronicler had a double task. First, he needed to explain why the kingdom of David had failed. Second, he needed to establish that this small, struggling province of the mighty Persian Empire would become the kingdom that God had promised to David. The explanation for the failure of David's kingdom begins with Saul's failure: God rejected Saul as king over Israel because he was unfaithful. Saul did not obey God, and he violated the covenant to the extent of consulting a medium ([10:13](#)). Later kings repeated the essence of Saul's failure: They rebelled against God's covenant, and they sought security from foreign powers and pagan gods rather than from their Rock, the Lord (see [Deut 32:4, 15-39](#)). Thus *unfaithfulness* is a key word in Chronicles; the Chronicler uses it repeatedly to document the reasons for judgment against the kings of Judah.

The rationale for hope, on the other hand, comes from Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the Temple: "Then if my people who are called by my name will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sins and restore their land" ([2 Chr 7:14](#)). This promise reminds the people of the conditions necessary for restoration: humility, prayer, repentance, and healing.

The book of 1 Chronicles establishes the necessary premises for restoration. The promise to David did not disappear during the Exile; the community that was reestablished in Jerusalem carried the promise. Even the division of the kingdom after Solomon's reign had not put any of the tribes outside of Israel's future. For the Chronicler, all the tribes were present in the restoration, including those of the northern kingdom (see [1 Chr 9:3](#)). The Chronicler understood Israel as a people of faith, not as a political entity. Israel was not a sovereign nation in his day but was a small ethnic province in the mighty empire of Persia. Yet he wanted to show that the unity established by David and Solomon had endured and that the promise made to David gave them hope for the future.