

Surveying the Text: Chronicles

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INTRODUCTION:

Like Samuel and Kings, the books of 1 and 2 Chronicles were originally one book. While it covers much of the same material as Kings, the purpose and point of the book is decidedly different. Written over century after Kings, the book covers down to the post-exilic period, where the Jews were faced with the great challenge of rebuilding Jerusalem. The story, as told here, is encouraging and inspiring.

THE TEXT:

“If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land” (2 Chron. 7:14).

BACKGROUND OF THE BOOK:

According to Jewish tradition, the author of Chronicles was Ezra. Given the theme of the book, and the period that produced it, I take this surmise as *likely*. The book of Kings emphasized the interaction of kings and prophets. This book emphasizes the interaction of kings and priests. The great interest of this book is Temple building. We have David’s preparation for Temple-building. We also have Solomon building and dedicating the Temple. We have Hezekiah insisting on a cleansing and refurbishing of the Temple, and then holding a great celebration of Passover there. And a few generations later, we see Josiah restoring the Temple. On top of that, this book was written in the post-exilic period, when one of the great tasks facing the people was the rebuilding of the Temple.

The structure of Chronicles is very detailed, and it would be tedious to get into all of it here. But just a few things are worth pointing out. One is that the book does break into four parts, easily identifiable. The first is the Book of Genealogies. The second is the Book of David. The third is the Book of Solomon. The fourth is the Book of the Kings of Judah. The second thing is that if we look at just the first of these books, we can tell that the whole has been assembled very carefully, and with the main theme in mind. The genealogies are—of course—a chiasm (Dorsey), and they emphasize the importance of worshiping God rightly.

1. Ancient (non-tribal) past—(1 Chron. 1:1-54)
2. The royal tribe of Judah (1 Chron. 2:1-4:23)
3. Incidental tribes (1 Chron. 4:24-5:26)
4. Tribe of Levi, the *priestly* tribe (1 Chron. 6:1-81)
5. Incidental tribes (1 Chron. 7:1-40)
6. The royal tribe of Benjamin (1 Chron. 8:1-40)

7. Present (non-tribal) situation (1 Chron. 9:1-34)

SUMMARY OF THE TEXT:

After Solomon had successfully built the Temple, the Lord appeared to him by night and said that He had chosen “this place” as His house of sacrifice. He promises that if the land is afflicted, if His people pray to Him, He will hear their prayer. “Now mine eyes shall be open, and mine ears attent unto the prayer that is made *in this place*” (2 Chron. 7:15).

TIMING AND ENCOURAGEMENT:

The people of God in the Chronicles narrative are blessed with a short feedback loop. When they disobey, *wham*, judgment. When they obey, God is immediately kind to them. The book of Kings ended with Israel running at full speed into the brick wall of judgment. The point of the book was to issue covenantal warnings and explanations of that curse. The book of Chronicles ends with the people brought back to the land, and they needed to be *told the same story*, but with an emphasis that encouraged them. The material is selected accordingly. For example, the story of Bathsheba is absent, and the story of the Queen of Sheba is told.

SURVEILLANCE CAMERA HISTORY?

The perennial temptation faced by man is the temptation to “be as God.” We think we have a need to reconstruct with precision “the way it was” at the battle of Gettysburg or Waterloo, but in actual fact, if we held to such rules strictly, we could not reconstruct the story of our own life beginning with breakfast this morning. That is not how we are supposed to do it.

We cannot be God, and so we cannot write or think about history from the vantage point of omniscience. But often, when we are denied this, like frustrated perfectionists, we say that if we cannot attain to omniscience, we will pitch a tantrum and collapse into nihilism. This is the story of the modern and postmodern projects respectively. If we cannot know absolutely, we will pretend that we cannot know at all. If we cannot be as God, well then, we will just be matter in motion.

But there is such a thing as creaturely knowledge about history that is true knowledge, despite the fact that it functions from a distinct and finite perspective. We are men, created in the image of God, and we have therefore been given *authority to name*. When you name, you look at an array of ten thousand things and select one, and say that the whole “means this.” This is what finite men do in Scripture (protected there by the Holy Spirit), and this is what uninspired finite men must do, without the guarantee of infallibility—though they still may function honestly and speak the truth. The only way this could be done is *by faith*.

Think for a moment. Is it not striking to you that God gave us four gospels?

SO READ THE STORY RIGHTLY:

God is not a perfectionist, but He is *perfect*. How many times have you read the words of our text on “take back America” brochures, touting conferences with detailed action plans? And how many of those conferences insisted on the restoration of true worship in the first instance? Ah, exactly so. But that is what the verse is talking about.

And yet . . . God is perfect, but He is not a perfectionist. When Hezekiah summoned all Israel to celebrate the Passover, including Jews from the northern kingdom, what happened then? A bunch of them showed up ceremonially unclean and ate the Passover anyway (2 Chron. 30:18-2).

GREAT GLADNESS:

The historian underscores his point about the centrality of worship by showing us repeated situations where music, gladness, joy, and worship all come together. “And the children of Israel that were present at Jerusalem kept the feast of unleavened bread seven days with great gladness: and the Levites and the priests praised the Lord day by day, singing with loud instruments unto the Lord” (2 Chron. 30:21; cf. 1 Chron. 16:1-42; 23:5; 25:1-31; 2 Chron. 5:12-13; 7:6; 23:13,18; 29:25-30; 34:12). It is important that the Temple be cleansed because the Temple is where our cleansing is to occur. The joy of the Lord is our strength. The Lord inhabits the praises of His people. The music in our mouths, if it is also in our hearts, is a spear in the hand.



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