

# OLD TESTAMENT BIBLICAL LITERACY

## *Lesson 29*

### 1 AND 2 CHRONICLES

#### I. BACKGROUND

The books of Chronicles have certain similarities to what we have studied so far, yet there are distinct differences as well. Like Kings and Samuel, these two books were originally one in the old Hebrew Bible. With the translation of the Hebrew text into Greek around 200 B.C. (the “Septuagint”) that one text become two. The two books remained in the Latin translation (the “Vulgate”), and eventually toward the end of the Middle Ages, made itself into two books for the Hebrew Bible as well.

#### A. Why is the book called “Chronicles?”

The Hebrew name for these books is *dibre hayyamim*, literally meaning “words of the days.” This Hebrew expression is conveying the idea that the books are the words (or writings) of the Days in the Hebrew sense that “days” often denotes an “era” or “time period” as opposed to just 24 hours. The Septuagint translators used the title *paraleipomenon* which means “the things omitted.” This title was premised on the (what I believe is false) premise that the Chronicles at their core were written to convey history and theology that was missing from Samuel-Kings as a sort of supplement. The church father Jerome did not follow the Septuagint title. Instead he chose to title the books after the Hebrew title, but with a little more clarity into how the words were used. Jerome (in his *Prologus Galeatus*) titled the work *Chronicon totius divinae historiae*, which translates into: A Chronicle of the Whole of Sacred History. Luther and others took from Jerome, hence our current title of Chronicles.

#### B. Where did the book come from?

No one knows for certain who wrote Chronicles. Many suggest that the writer of Chronicles is the same as the writer of Ezra. The main impetus for this position is the fact that the concluding verses of 2 Chronicles (36:22-23) are repeated as the opening

verses of Ezra (1:1-3a). Of course, this may also mean that the writer of Ezra used the book of Chronicles when writing his account.

Other reasons for accepting common authorship with Ezra include more subjective things. For example, some critics believe the different works have similar literary styles. (Of course, other critics claim the books have differing literary styles.) Certainly, it seems both Chronicles and Ezra share frequent inclusion of genealogies, a focus on religious ritual, and a clear devotion to Mosaic law.

Just as no one knows for certain **who** wrote Chronicles, neither is anyone able to affix a date of composition. The content alone indicates that the book was finished in final form somewhere after 500 B.C. This comes from the last recorded event in Chronicles dating 538 B.C. (the decree of Cyrus allowing Jews to return to Jerusalem from Babylon). The genealogies then contain the names of two grandsons of the leader who brought the Jews out of exile, hence the earliest date of completion seems around 500 B.C.

Good arguments are made that the book was completed before 420 B.C. These arguments include the assertions that the Hebrew canon was completed in that time period, and that the Aramaic language found in Ezra (which arguably quotes from Chronicles in the first chapter) indicate a date for Ezra in the 400's B.C. The most compelling argument to me for composition around the earlier dates (480 to 500 B.C.) is that the purpose of the writer is to place Hebrew history (including genealogy) and experience in a theological perspective. The writer would naturally bring that history up to "current." Hence, we can look internally into the book and find the date range for composition.

**C. How did the writer know the truth of what was written (*i.e.*, where did the writer get the material for the book)?**

Core orthodoxy accepts the truth of the material because the books meet the criteria of "inspiration." By this term, we mean that the book is properly considered canonical, or part of the canon of holy writ. Additionally, the books themselves reference a number of sources for their materials. For a number of the genealogies, the writer explains that

there were written records used (1 Chr. 4:33; 7:9; 7:40; 9:1; 9:22, etc.). The books also reference letters from the Assyrian king, Sennacherib, with excerpts from those letters quoted (2 Chr. 32:17-20). Similarly, a written decree of the Persian king Cyrus is used (2 Chr. 36:22-23). Other references indicate that the author may have had some of the plans for the temple as well as other written sources, including poems, written prophecies and other available histories.

#### **D. Why is the book in the canon?**

Orthodoxy has considered the work canonical for a number of reasons. First, the work was canonical in the compilation of the Old Testament itself. This came from people moved by the spirit of God to compile scriptures for all time. There is no question that Chronicles was considered part of scripture at the time of the New Testament. Thus, it also bears the imprimatur of canonicity from the apostle Paul who wrote “All scripture [including Chronicles] is inspired by God and useful for teaching....” (2 Tim. 3:16). The New Testament itself quotes from Chronicles (exm. 1 Chr. 16:35 in Acts 26:17).

## **II. MATERIAL**

#### **A. Why was Chronicles written?**

The book was written to convey the flow of God’s actions throughout the Jewish history up to the return from the Babylonian exile by certain Jews as a persuasive manner to best insure a proper response to the call of Yahweh. Therefore, the books contain genealogies properly denoting the ethnic and religious purity of the returning Jews as the people of promise. The books also show that God was working in history including in the deportation and return of the Jews. The Mosaic covenant and laws are emphasized along with the responsibility of the people. Finally, the books are no doubt written to motivate the returning Jews by inspiring them with great moments of their history, while also cautioning them with historical lessons of sin and its consequences.

## B. What is in Chronicles?

Chronicles begins with genealogies that trace the heritage of the Jews back to Adam and Eve. While each generation is not mentioned, enough is mentioned to show the lineage.

Chronicles then goes through the history of the monarchy going all the way back to its establishment with Saul. The whole nation of Israel is included in this history as the stories of Saul, David, and Solomon are given additional detail and explanation beyond that which we read in Samuel and Kings. At the point of the divided kingdom under Solomon's son Rehoboam, Chronicles takes a turn from the history given in Kings. Chronicles leaves the Northern Kingdom of Israel with its history OUT. Chronicles just follows the history of Judah.

Many of the events from Kings are given the spiritual explanation in Chronicles. For example:

### Events in Kings

Shishack invades (1 K. 14:25)

Asa gets ill (15:23)

Uzziah gets leprosy (2 K. 15:5)

### Chronicle's Spiritual Explanation

because of Rehoboam's sin (12:1)

b/c of distrust and oppression (16:7f)

Invading the temple (26:16-21)

In Chronicles, God takes center stage. Yahweh himself is the cause of events whether political, sociological, military, or economic. For example, God puts Saul to death and gives the kingdom to David (1 Chr. 10:14).

Chronicles also resound the theme of consistency. God is faithfully consistent with his covenant, but the people are not. That brought about the retribution of God as promised in the original covenant (blessings flow from obedience but curses from disobedience).

Certain phrases are used over and over in Chronicles. “Seeking God” is oft repeated. Needless to say, the words are in the context of GOOD things people did with an encouragement that all should do similarly (1 Chr. 16:10-11; 22:19; 28:9, etc). Other repeated vocabulary includes “pure heart,” “faithfulness,” and “forsaking Yahweh.”

Some of these repeated phrases fall into place where the author spends extra time on issues like worship. Chronicles emphasizes worship in a number of places. The emphasis is not just on who does what where, but worship is clearly tied to the heart of the worshipper. While the phrase “perfect heart” is used 15 times in the Old Testament, nine of those times are in Chronicles.

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Also, Chronicles pointedly leaves out certain historical aspects of the nation of Israel. The writer failed to include certain blocks of David’s life, including his sin with Bathsheba and its bad fall out. During the reign of Solomon, Chronicles is silent on the material dealing with His foreign wives and the resultant spread of idolatry. The reason for this may be that the stories and data were already present in the Samuel/Kings accounts with plenty of explanation of the curses that accompanied the sin.

### **III. CONCLUSIONS AND POINTS FOR HOME**

1. God is the author of history. There is NOTHING beyond his control.
2. A good heart and a faithful life lead to much happiness and good.
3. A life of rebellion and sin lead to much unhappiness and pain!