

OT 501--Old Testament Introduction

Lecture Notes—Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah

1 & 2 Chronicles—The Chronicler

I. Chronicles and Kings

--**Sources**—The Chronicler used Samuel and Kings as sources, but he/she also had other sources, probably from priestly circles, since much of the material is centered on the importance of religious matters. Some, however, is clearly from prophetic circles, as the text makes clear (1 Chr. 29:29).

--**Differences between Dtr and Chronicles**

-- For the purposes of this study, a summary of four major differences given by Peter Enns will suffice.¹ First, Chronicles greatly diminishes the sins of David. The author of Chronicles does not David's sin with Bathsheba. David and Solomon are "glorified figures." As such, they have become "'messianic' figures, models of ideal kingship who embodied the hopes of the returnees." Von Rad echoed this sentiment when he wrote, "The David of Chronicles is a spotless holy king who delivers solemn oration. He and his sons do not rule in Israel, but in the 'kingdom of Jahweh' (1 Chr. 23:5)—according to 1 Chr. 29:23 Solomon occupies 'the throne of Jahweh.'"²

--The second difference, according to Enns, is that Chronicles emphasizes the unity of God's people. All the people supported Solomon's succession to power. The need for unity in the post-exilic period was paramount to avoid dividing into factions. Third, Chronicles emphasizes the temple and Solomon's role in building it. The pre-exilic kings failed to live up to their responsibilities to maintain proper worship—a failure that the post-exilic community needed to avoid. Fourth, the Chronicler emphasizes "immediate retribution." Further, this history stresses individual, rather than corporate, responsibility for sin. Von Rad argued that the Chronicler wanted to "hammer home to his readers ... that each generation stands immediately before Jahweh, and stands or falls with its anointed."³ Enns posited that the post-exilic community needed to recognize that they were responsible for their own sins, not the sins of their ancestors.⁴ The present theological study will return to these and other differences between DH and the Chronicler's History, but these will suffice for this introductory presentation.

--**Theological Presuppositions**

--David and Royal Covenant—

--When the reader approaches the Books of Chronicles, the centrality of David becomes even more dominating. Robert North wrote, "The person and dynasty of David forms the

¹ Peter Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation: Evangelicals and the Problem of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 84-85.

² Gerhard Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, Vol. 1 (London: SCM Press), 350.

³ *Ibid.*, 349.

⁴ As a brief rejoinder, however, one should note the emphasis in both Jeremiah and Ezekiel on individual responsibility, suggesting that this was a concern much earlier than the Chronicler. Perhaps the author of Chronicles was a product of his time, reflecting the newfound emphasis upon the individual's role before God.

heartbeat of all of the Chronicler's theology."⁵ North argued that "the Chronicler aimed at nothing less than to *rectify* an existing popular misconception. The primary vehicle of Israel's 'chosenness,' he shows, was not Moses on Sinai at all. No, it was David on Zion!"⁶ Indeed, the role that Moses plays in the history of the Chronicler is lawgiver and founder of the cult of Israel, not as the foundation of Israel's existence and "chosenness." The Chronicler's David was "a man after God's heart." The Chronicler omits David's sin with Bathsheba, the attempted and realized coups-d'etat, and the difficulties in his household. Rather, the Chronicler highlights David's complete devotion to Yahweh, regular worship of the Lord, and care for the holy things and future temple.⁷

--The Mosaic covenant has been absorbed into the Davidic Covenant. One example of this phenomenon can be found 2 Chron. 23:18, where both the Law as given by Moses and the orders of David are cited as precedent for the roles given to the priests and Levites.

--Note the emphasis on the genealogy of David should be noted.

--Temple and Priesthood—

-- Nelson calls the Jerusalem temple the "'stage set' against which much of the action of Chronicles is performed."⁸ While the temple is important in Dtr, it takes on a new centrality in Chronicles. For Dtr, centralized worship at the Jerusalem temple is a requirement for covenant loyalty to Yahweh, for Chronicles that centralized worship is a reality. Nelson calls this "a world of ideological history, ... history as it ought to have been, a visionary history in which divine promise works itself out according to the rules of the doctrine of retribution in the context of the Jerusalem Temple."⁹ Much of the "action" of Chronicles takes place at the temple, with psalms sung and liturgy practiced. In fact, the failure of the first temple is resolved in the transition between Chronicles and Ezra, when Cyrus is "appointed" by Yahweh to build the Lord a temple in Jerusalem.¹⁰ The failure of the guardians of the first temple failed, but God has built a new temple, which is the world of the Chronicler.

--Sara Japhet wrote that Chronicles presents the reader with a "systematic history of Israel's worship, a description of the cultic institutions, and the establishment and functioning of the clergy."¹¹ She recognizes two stages of establishment of the cult of Israel. First, Moses established the laws of the cultus. In fact, the only real role of Moses in Chronicles is the laws governing worship and the establishment of the cultic personnel and attendant paraphernalia. Second, David established the cult in Jerusalem, with Solomon actualizing the plans of David. The temple and the worship conducted there thus becomes the central focus of Chronicles.

⁵ Robert North, "Theology of the Chronicler," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 82 (1963), 376.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 377.

⁷ David Howard, *Introduction to the OT Historical Books* (Grand Rapids: Baker), 258.

⁸ Richard Nelson, *The OT Historical Books*, in *Interpreting Biblical Texts* (Nashville: Abingdon), 154.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 155.

¹⁰ 2 Chron. 36:22-23; Ezra 1:1-3.

¹¹ Sara Japhet, *I & II Chronicles*, Old Testament Library (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1993), 45.

- The center of everything is the temple and the priesthood. In many parallel accounts the role of the priesthood and the temple is emphasized in Chronicles (2 K 11 & 2 Chr 23).
- There is an emphasis on ritual. The student should note the numerous psalms, rituals, and sacrifices detailed in the text.
- There is an emphasis on confession/repentance/revival. One should note the emphasis on Hezekiah and Josiah. In fact, the author(s) of Kings gives the religious reforms under Hezekiah only a few verses (2 K 18:1-6), while Chronicles details these reforms (2 Chr 29:1-31:20).

Ezra-Nehemiah

I. Historical Context

- 538/536 **Return of exiles**
- 520-516 **Temple Rebuilt**
- 458 **Ezra Returns to Judah**
- 445 **Nehemiah Travels to Judah**

II. Structure of the Books

- Ezra 1-6 **The Exiled Jews allowed to return to Judah** (note that 4:8-6:18 is in Aramaic)
- Ezra 7:1-10:4 **Ezra's Ministry in Judah** (Much of it in the form of personal memoirs, problems of purity and mixed marriages)
- Nehemiah 1:1-7:73a **Nehemiah's Memoirs** (Building of the walls of Jerusalem)
- Nehemiah 7:73b-10:39 **Ezra's Continuing Ministry** (What happened to the 13 missing years of Ezra's ministry? This has caused problems for many in understanding the chronology, leading some to date Ezra to Artaxerxes II, coming to Judah in 398.)
- Nehemiah 11:1-13:31 **Nehemiah's Continuing Ministry**

III. Theological and Historical Themes

--God's Work in the World

- God uses unexpected sources to accomplish His will. Cyrus' new type of leadership was used by God to bring about a reversal of fortunes for Israel. Persian policy restored exiled nations to their homelands and allowed the rebuilding of religious temples. He did have tight control, however, through a thorough administrative policy.
- God places leaders in strategic places and prepared them for their work. Ezra was a gifted leader, and Nehemiah was strategically placed to have the ear of the king. God is sovereign over all things.
- Redemptive History (*heilsgeschichte*= "salvation history")—A continuity with the origins of God's people is evident through the themes of Passover, Booths, and exodus. Ezra reviews this history and links his generation to those who went before them.

--Temple and Torah

- The importance of the temple & Jerusalem is underscored in Ezra/Nehemiah, and in Haggai and Zechariah. The temple was the place where the people met with their God, the renewed presence of God in the midst of people after a long, dismal exile.

--The Torah became the guide for life in post-exilic Judah, esp. as seen in Ezra's use of it. He read it for hours, and this reading led to the repentance of the people before God.

Chronicles, Malachi, and the Close of the Canon

Second Chronicles ends the Hebrew canon with these words:

He carried into exile to Babylon the remnant, who escaped from the sword, and they became servants to him and his sons until the kingdom of Persia came to power. The land enjoyed its sabbath rests; all the time of its desolation it rested, until the seventy years were completed in fulfillment of the word of the LORD spoken by Jeremiah. In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, in order to fulfill the word of the LORD spoken by Jeremiah, the LORD moved the heart of Cyrus king of Persia to make a proclamation throughout his realm and to put it in writing: "This is what Cyrus king of Persia says: 'The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and he has appointed me to build a temple for him at Jerusalem in Judah. Anyone of his people among you--may the LORD his God be with him, and let him go up.'" (2 Chr 36:20-23)

This ending brings up several questions. First, why does the Hebrew Bible not end with Ezra-Nehemiah, which clearly follows Chronicles chronologically. Since this question is beyond definitive answer, the question to be answered is, "What does this text say at the conclusion of the Hebrew canon?" Brueggemann tentatively argues that the emphasis upon the *land and Torah*, while Malachi ends with a messianic promise that anticipates, in a sense, the gospel presentations of the NT.

See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse. (Mal 4:5-6)

The gospel presentations tie together this promise with the coming of Jesus immediately following the coming of John of Baptist. The message of the NT is first to the Jews, but then clearly to the Gentiles as well. As Brueggemann concludes, "Both Malachi 4:5-6 and 2 Chronicles 36:22-23 end in anticipation" (Brueggemann, *Introduction*, 382). Thus, both the similarities and differences between the Christian and Jewish canons are emphasized, as are perhaps the differences in Christianity and Judaism.