

Book of 1 Chronicles

The books of Chronicles were originally one book in the Hebrew text.

They became separated into two books by the translators of the Greek version of the Old Testament and were given a title meaning “Things Left Behind”.

That is, details not included in Samuel and Kings.

The Hebrew title, “Daily Matters,” like the English title “Chronicles,” indicates that the material in these two books recounts the most important affairs in the lives of Israel’s leaders, especially the kings.

The original title in the Hebrew bible read “The annals (i.e., events or happenings), of the days.”

First and Second Chronicles were comprised on one book until later divided into separate books in the Greek Old Testament 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 and 2 Samuel and 1 and 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.”

“Historical setting”:

The books of Chronicles trace the history of Israel from the beginning of the human race until the fall of Jerusalem and the subsequent return of the Jews during the reign of the Persian king, Cyrus the Great (559 – 529 B.C.)

The books appear to have been written at the end of the Old Testament era in the fifth century B.C.

Since the major thrust of the books is to trace the record of how God’s people stewarded their responsibilities as heirs of the Davidic covenant, the person of David is central to the material selected for inclusion by the author.

The narrative of 1 Chronicles begins with a list of names that gives prominence to the Davidic line.

The genealogies end with a consideration of the house of Saul, so after the account of his death, the rest of the book can deal with Israel’s greatest king, David (chapters 11 - 29).

The time stretches from the beginning until the early part of the tenth century B.C.

“Background”:

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, 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.; Ezra 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 Chron. 1:1), to the return from Babylon (2 Chron. 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.

“Authorship”:

Jewish tradition; assigns the authorship of the two books of Chronicles to Ezra.

The basic theological emphases of Chronicles in which:

1. The divine evaluation of how the people of God, and Judah in particular, responded to the revealed standards of a holy God is recorded; and
2. There is a concentration on the covenant with David, would suggest Ezra as the author.

Ezra's priestly descent and Levitical training would be in harmony with the viewpoint of Chronicles.

His leadership in the establishment of the new state of Israel after the return from exile would furnish him with the proper perspective for seeing God's hand in the long history of His people.

Moreover, Jewish tradition indicates that Ezra's compatriot, Nehemiah, owned a considerable library of books and documents from which Ezra, under divine guidance, could draw his source material for writing these two books.

“Date”:

Although liberal scholars suggest a date for the composition of these books as late as the third century B.C., neither the text nor the details of the book warrants a date of Chronicles beyond the traditional time assigned at the close of the Hebrew Canon in the late fifth century B.C.

Like the author of Kings, the author of Chronicles had a number of official and non-official sources at his disposal (compare 2 Chron. 16:11; 20:34; 25:26; 28:26; 32:32; 33:18; 35:27; 36:8; see the note on 1 Chron. 29:29).

As well, the biblical books of Samuel and Kings were doubtless available to him.

These records were most likely recorded (in ca. 450 – 430 B.C.).

The genealogical record (in 1 Chronicles chapters 1 – 9), supports a date after (450 B.C.), for the writing.

The New Testament does not directly quote either 1 or 2 Chronicles.

“Historical and Theological Themes”:

First and Second Chronicles, as named by Jerome, recreate an Old Testament 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.

1 Chronicles opens with Adam (1:1), and closes with the death of David (29:26-30; in 971 B.C.).

2 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 or 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 Chron. 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 and spiritual failure for which the people paid dearly under God's wrath.

1 and 2 Chronicles could be briefly summarized as follows:

1. A Selected Genealogical History of Israel (1 Chron. Chapters 1 to 9);
2. Israel's United Kingdom under Saul (1 Chron. Chapter 10); David (1 Chron. Chapters 11 to 29); and Solomon (2 Chron. Chapters 1 to 9);
3. Judah's Monarchy in the Divided Kingdom (2 Chron. Chapters 10 to 36:21);
4. Judah's Release from Their Seventy Year Captivity (2 Chron. 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 Chron. 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 Old Testament, namely, obedience brings blessing, and 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.

Several seeming discrepancies between Chronicles and the record in Samuel and Kings have caused liberal critics to doubt the historical trustworthiness of Chronicles.

However, a careful examination of each of these cases results in a satisfactory resolution of the problem, either by the processes of textual criticism or by a sound critical explanation or interpretation of the context.

The details included in Chronicles are not intended to be exhaustive, but are distinctively selected in accordance with the author's purpose of writing a spiritual history of God's people.

Again and again God's faithfulness and sure hand upon the basic flow of history are seen.

From start to the closing note, Israel's hope (and that of all men), is seen to lie in God's promise to sum up all things in the coming One, Israel's Messiah and the Savior of the world (1 Chron. 17:11-17 with Acts 17:26-31; Col. 1:20).