

## VISION FOR THE WORD OF GOD

### I AND II CHRONICLES

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#### Introduction

The two books were originally one. They bore the title in the Hebrew Bible, “Acts of the Days.” This title was rendered by Jerome in his Latin version “Chronicon,” and hence “Chronicles.” In the Septuagint version the book is divided into two, and bears the title Paraleipomena, i.e., “things omitted,” or “supplements”, because it contains many things omitted in the Books of Kings.

The genealogies, so uninteresting to most modern readers, were really an important part of the public records of the Hebrew state. They were the basis on which not only the land was distributed and held, but the public services of the temple were arranged and conducted, the Levites and their descendants alone, as is well known, being entitled and first fruits set apart for that purpose.” The “Chronicles” are an epitome of the sacred history from the days of Adam down to the return from Babylonian Exile, a period of about 3,500 years. The writer gathers up “the threads of the old national life broken by the Captivity.”

Many numbers in Chronicles seem exceptionally high. In 1 Chronicles 21:5 Israel had just over a million men and Judah had 470,000. In another example of a remarkably high number, the temple’s vestibule is said to have been 120 cubits or approximately 180 feet in height (2 Chr 3:4). In 2 Chronicles 13:3 Judah’s army had 400,000 men and Israel’s army 800,000. Some 500,000 of Israel’s army were slain (2 Chr 13:17). In 2 Chronicles 14:9 Zerah the Ethiopian had an army of a million men and 300 chariots.

How should such problems with numbers in Chronicles be understood? First, some of the problems in the text as it now stands may have come about from faulty copying. Also, some excessively high numbers may have been used figuratively to indicate a very large army, or perhaps as estimates. Though not all questions have been answered, scholars have found credible solutions to some of the problems. In the meantime, evangelical scholars see such matters as verifying the human side of the Scriptures without necessarily detracting from their divine origin.

#### *Date*

It is not possible to determine precisely when the Book of Chronicles was written. The book ends with a reference to the decree of Cyrus, king of Persia, permitting the Jewish captives in Babylon to return to their homeland. Since Cyrus’ decree is usually dated about 538 B.C., Chronicles could not have been written before that date. But if Ezra—Nehemiah are a part of the same work as Chronicles, the materials could not have been written until Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem in 444 B.C.

Genealogies in Chronicles and Ezra—Nehemiah may shed some light on the dating of the books. In 1 Chronicles 3:10–24 the lineage of David and Solomon is traced through the 6th generation after the exile, which would make the date for Anani (the last person in the list) about 400 B.C.

The language of Chronicles is definitely that of postexilic Hebrew. The use of the Persian word *daric* (1 Chr 29:7), plus a lack of any Greek words, places Chronicles in the Persian period (538–331 B.C.). The word *midrash* appears in the OT only in Chronicles (2 Chr 13:22; 24:27) but is very common in post biblical Hebrew. Around 400 B.C. is probably the best estimate for the date of Chronicles based on evidence now available.

### ***Historical Background***

During the Persian period some of the Jews returned to Jerusalem from Babylon soon after Cyrus' decree. They rebuilt the temple and waited for the Messianic Age to come, but with drought, economic hardships, and moral and spiritual laxness their hopes faded. Judah was stable politically as a part of the large, dominant Persian empire. There was not the slightest possibility of restoring the Davidic kingdom.

If the kingdom of David could not be restored politically, how was a Jew of the early 4th century B.C. to understand history and the place of the Jews in God's plan? The Chronicler, living at that time, found the key to history in God's covenant with David. The first 10 chapters of 1 Chronicles lead up to David; chapters 11–29 detail events of David's rule. Moses is mentioned in Chronicles 31 times, David more than 250 times. David planned the temple and collected money to build it. He appointed Levites, singers, and gatekeepers. He divided the priesthood into its orders. He was responsible for the temple worship, which was tremendously important to the Chronicler and his contemporaries.

The Persian period of Israel's history is largely a silent one, both in other OT materials and in archaeological finds. Of course, all the evidence is not yet in, as archaeologists continue their investigations of the period.

### ***Origin and Purpose***

The Chronicler must have lived in Jerusalem and written for the Jewish community there. He refers to Jerusalem about 240 times and to Judah more than 225 times. A negative feeling toward the northern kingdom of Israel can be seen in almost total lack of references to any northern king. The Chronicler's attitude toward the north is clearly expressed in the two following verses: "So Israel has been in rebellion against the house of David to this day" (2 Chr 10:19) and "Ought you not to know that the Lord God of Israel gave the kingship over Israel for ever to David and his sons by a covenant of salt?" (2 Chr 13:5).

### ***The First and Second Books of the Chronicles***

- I. Genealogies from Adam to Saul (1 Chron. 1:1-9:44)
  - A. Adam to the sons of Israel (Jacob; 1 Chron. 1:1-2:2)
  - B. Genealogies of the twelve tribes (2 Chron. 2:3-8:40)
  - C. List of returned exiles dwelling in Jerusalem (1 Chron. 9:1-34)
  - D. Repetition of Saul's genealogy (1 Chron. 9:35-44)
- II. The reign of David (1 Chron. 10:1-29:30)
  - A. Saul's demise and David's accession (1 Chron. 10:1-11:3)
  - B. Military events and religious concerns characterizing David's reign (1 Chron. 11:4-20:8)

- C. David's preparations for building the Temple (1 Chron. 21:1-28:21)
- D. Solomon's accession and David's death (1 Chron. 29:1-30)
- III. The reign of Solomon (2 Chron. 1:1-9:31)
  - A. Solomon's endowment with wisdom (2 Chron. 1:1-17)
  - B. Building and dedication of the Temple (2 Chron. 2:1-7:22)
  - C. Other activities of Solomon; his death (2 Chron. 8:1-9:31)
- IV. The Davidic monarchy to the Exile (2 Chron. 10:1-36:23)
  - A. Division of the kingdom and reign of Rehoboam (2 Chron. 10:1-12:16)
  - B. Abijah, Asa, Jehoshaphat, and Jehoram (2 Chron. 13:1-21:20)
  - C. Ahaziah, Athaliah, and Joash (2 Chron. 22:1-24:27)
  - D. Amaziah, Uzziah, Jotham, and Ahaz (2 Chron. 25:2-28:27)
  - E. Hezekiah: reform and Assyrian invasion (2 Chron. 29:1-32:33)
  - F. Manasseh and Amon (2 Chron. 33:1-25)
  - G. Josiah: reform and discovery of the law book (2 Chron. 34:1-35:27)
  - H. The last kings of Judah: Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah (2 Chron. 36:1-21)

### ***Content***

The books may be divided into four sections: 1 Chronicles 1-9, by genealogies and lists, the story from Adam to the period of restoration after the exile; 1 Chronicles 10-29, the reign of David, prefaced by a presentation of Saul's failure and culminating in Solomon's commission to build the Temple; 2 Chronicles 1-9, the reign of Solomon centered on the building of the Temple; and 2 Chronicles 10-36, the monarchy of the Davidic line to its downfall in the exilic period.

Other Lessons from Chronicles:

One of the great truths spoken by **an illustrious minister from the northeast** is that we must not read scripture too fast, but slowly, lest we miss out on some great truth. The Books of Chronicles are demonstration of profound statement (I Chr. 4: 9-10). In other words, reading scriptures is often like mining; we never know when we will run upon a great diamond or a great deposit of gold.

The books of the Chronicles also verify the truth of Romans 15: 4 and II Timothy 3: 16

Sometimes what we may interpret as biblical contradictions are efforts of various writers to fill in omissions. Therefore to truly understand the Bible we must concentrate on more than one part but seek to learn "the whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27) because so much damage to the word of God, the cause of Christ, to the unity of the church, and to individual believers because of partial and out of context teaching. Therefore all serious Bible study must be done with prayer, the guidance of the Holy Spirit, proper guidance by qualified teachers, and an appreciation for the historical, cultural and theological contexts and perspectives of the biblical writers.