

A Survey of 1 & 2 Chronicles

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In the Chronicles we find an overview of the history of Israel from the nation's inception through the Babylonian captivity, emphasizing primarily the period of the monarchy. As we approach these books, we must obviously ask why God saw fit to reiterate in them much of the history narrated in Samuel and Kings. The answer to this question will be discussed following a few introductory facts.

Facts about the Chronicles

Meaning of the Name

The Chronicles apparently owe their name to Jerome, a fourth-century theologian. He “suggested that a more representative title . . . would be *Chronicon totius divinae historiae* or ‘a chronicle of the whole of sacred history.’ . . . Modern versions in English and other languages have adopted the title ‘Chronicles’ that Jerome proposed.”¹ The term *chronicle* literally means a “detailed historical account of events arranged in order of time without analysis or interpretation.”

The Unity of the Book(s)

The books of the Chronicles form a cohesive unit. They are truly a single book that was divided into two early in the history of Bible translation.² The thematic unity of the books will be discussed later in this outline.

Authorship

Most conservative writers believe 1 and 2 Chronicles were composed approximately 400 BC. Some, such as Gleason Archer, suggest that Ezra authored the books: “It is quite possible that the Talmudic tradition (*Baba Bathra*, 15a) is correct in assigning the authorship to Ezra. As the chief architect of the spiritual and moral revival of the Second Commonwealth, he would have had every incentive to produce a historical survey of this sort.”³ However, there is by no means agreement among biblical scholars on this point. R. K. Harrison represents the opposite view: “The present writer . . . would assign the composition of Chronicles to an anonymous writer in the closing decades of the fifth century B.C. or slightly later. Attempts to identify the Chronicler with Ezra appear inadvisable. . . .”⁴

Sources of Information

The Chronicler availed himself of numerous sources of historical information, including both biblical books (particularly Samuel and the Kings) and extra-biblical sources. The Chronicler often alluded to these sources when concluding the description of a given king's reign. A sample of such sources includes the following:

- ❖ The book of Nathan the prophet (2 Chr 9.29)
- ❖ The prophecy of Ahijah the Shilonite (2 Chr 9.29)
- ❖ The book of Shemaiah the prophet (2 Chr 12.15)
- ❖ The book of Iddo the seer concerning genealogies (2 Chr 12.15; cf. 9.29)
- ❖ The book of Jehu (2 Chr 20.24)
- ❖ The sayings of the seers (2 Chr 33.19)

¹ R. K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1969), 1152.

² *Ibid.*

³ Gleason L. Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, rev. ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 450.

⁴ R. K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 1157.

Regardless of the human sources that may have been available to the Chronicler, we recognize that God superintended the composition process, ensuring its accuracy.

Focus of the Chronicles

The Chronicles differ from the other Old Testament historical books in their historical perspective, as explained in the following quote:

The Chronicler is not a historian in the strict Western sense. To him Israel's history was pregnant with spiritual and moral lessons. . . . He is not concerned so much with the bare facts of Israel's history as with their meaning. If all valid historical writing is interpretative, the Chronicler's is highly interpretative.⁵

The following chart contrasts the emphases of the Chronicles as compared to Samuel and Kings:⁶

Samuel/Kings	Chronicles
Both Israel and Judah	Primarily Judah ⁷
Throne	Temple ⁸
Prophets	Priests ⁹
Political history	Spiritual history ¹⁰
Indictment	Encouragement ¹¹

Lessons from the Chronicles

Chronicles highlights the importance of maintaining a straight spiritual course, both individually and corporately. At least three major lessons emerge from its pages:

- ❖ *Take advantage of the privilege of prayer:* When God inhabited the Jerusalem Temple, He promised that his ears would be attentive to prayer made there (2 Chr 7.14).

⁵ William Sanford LaSor, David Allan Hubbard, and Frederic William Bush, *Old Testament Survey: The Message, Form, and Background of the Old Testament*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1996), 543.

⁶ The information in this chart is gathered from the author's reading of the Scripture as well as a variety of secondary sources: Paul N. Benware, *Survey of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1988), 123; Norman L. Geisler, *A Popular Survey of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977), 147, 156-157; Eugene H. Merrill, "1 Chronicles," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*, edited by John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Colorado Springs: ChariotVictor Publishing, 1985), 590-591.

⁷ "Though there are sporadic references to Israel, the Northern Kingdom, the whole thrust of 2 Chronicles 11-36 is centered in the Southern Kingdom. The history of the divided kingdom is always viewed in that light. David and the Davidic descent is the great theme" (Eugene H. Merrill, "1 Chronicles," 590).

⁸ The Chronicler's "purpose is to show that the true glory of the Hebrew nation was found in its covenant relationship to God, as safeguarded by the prescribed forms of worship in the temple and administered by the divinely ordained priesthood and the divinely authorized dynasty of David. Always the emphasis is upon that which is sound and valid in Israel's past, as furnishing a reliable basis for the task of national reconstruction which lay before them" (Gleason L. Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, 449).

⁹ See the accompanying chart for data concerning the emphasis of Chronicles on the priests.

¹⁰ "Chronicles was written . . . from a religious point of view, while Kings was compiled . . . from a prophetic perspective. . . . Chronicles stresses more strongly the divine activity in national events as well as their religious implications" (Norman L. Geisler, *A Popular Survey of the Old Testament*, 156-157).

¹¹ "The chronicler's emphasis on David, the priesthood, and the temple would have been a source of great encouragement to postexilic Judah. The nation had fallen into captivity, a comparatively small remnant had returned, and the restored temple was meager compared with its former splendor. . . . But God's promises will not fail. In His time the temple will be filled with His own glory. And the Davidic line once more will be established and the Messiah will rule on David's throne in the kingdom" (Eugene H. Merrill, "1 Chronicles," 591).

- ❖ *Value the reading of God's Word:* Through a process of spiritual decay, the kingdom of Judah actually lost one of the books of Moses--presumably Deuteronomy. When the book was found in the time of King Josiah, its teachings brought needed reform (2 Chr 34.1-3, 8, 14, 18-19).
- ❖ *Maintain spiritual vitality through public worship:* It is quite difficult to stay on fire for God without the fellowship and encouragement of likeminded souls. When Judah and Israel failed to congregate as God had commanded, their spiritual enthusiasm dwindled quickly. On the other hand, revivals were always accompanied by a renewed interest in Temple worship (2 Chr 35.1, 17-18).