

Introduction to Chronicles

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MAJOR THEMES: PEOPLE OF GOD

The post-exilic community faced a variety of challenges as they sought to re-establish the Kingdom of God in their day. These difficulties must have raised many important questions. "Are we still heirs to the promises which God gave our forebears? What political and religious institutions should we embrace? How may we find the blessings of security and prosperity?" The Chronicler addressed these kinds of questions throughout his book.

The Chronicler wove together many theological motifs in order to respond to these questions. We will summarize his central theological concerns under the following headings:

- 1-3) People of God*
 - 1) All Israel*
 - 2) Northern Israel*
 - 3) International Relations*
- 4-9) King and Temple*
 - 4) Royal and Levitical Families*
 - 5) Religious Assemblies*
 - 6) Royal Observance of Worship*
 - 7) Divine Kingship*
 - 8) Music*
 - 9) Temple Contributions*
- 10-27) Divine Blessing and Judgment*
 - 10-12) God and History*
 - 10) Divine Activity*
 - 11) Name of God*
 - 12) Divine Presence and Help*
- 13-22) Israel's Responsibilities*

- 13) *Covenant*
- 14) *Standards*
- 15) *Prophets*
- 16) *Motivations*
- 17) *Prayer*
- 18) *Humility*
- 19) *Seeking*
- 20) *Abandoning/Forsaking*
- 21) *Unfaithfulness*
- 22) *Repentance*
- 23-28) *Divine Responses*
 - 23) *Victory and Defeat*
 - 24) *Building and Destruction*
 - 25) *Increase and Decline of Progeny*
 - 26) *Prosperity and Poverty*
 - 27) *Disappointment and Celebration*
 - 28) *Healing and Long Life / Sickness and Death*

References to these *Major Themes* appear throughout the commentary.

1-3) People of God

Throughout his history, the Chronicler explained who belonged among the people of God. The identity of God's people posed many difficulties for the post-exilic community. Whom should they count as heirs of God's promises? What geographical hopes were appropriate for the tribes of Israel? How inclusive or exclusive should they be? We will explore the Chronicler's answers to these questions under three rubrics: 1) *All Israel*, 2) *Northern Israel*, and 3) *International Relations*.

1) All Israel ***Original Israelite Readers:***

The Chronicler's concern with clarifying the identity of God's people becomes evident in his frequent use of the terminology "all Israel" and

other closely related expressions (see commentary on 1 Chr 11:1; 2 Chr 10:1; 29:24). Six times the Chronicler simply copied this terminology from parallel passages in Samuel and Kings (1 Chr 18:14; 19:17; 2 Chr 7:8,9; 10:16; 18:16). Four times he modified the text of Samuel and Kings to read “all Israel” (1 Chr 11:1; 14:8; 15:28; 2 Chr 10:3). Beyond this, however, the expression occurs nineteen times in passages which are unique to Chronicles (1 Chr 11:10; 12:38; 15:3; 21:5; 28:4; 28:8; 29:21; 29:23,25,26; 2 Chr 1:2; 12:1; 13:4; 13:15; 24:5; 28:23; 29:24; 30:1; 35:3).

The Chronicler's emphasis on "all Israel" reflected his deep commitment to including all the tribes of Israel among God's people. To be sure, the representatives of Judah, Benjamin, Ephraim, Manasseh, and Levi who had returned to the land were the chosen people (see commentary on 1 Chr 9:3-9). As such, they played a seminal role in the restoration of the Kingdom.

At the same time, however, the Chronicler believed that God's people included more than the small population of the post-exilic community. He also identified the tribes of Israel who still remained outside the land as the people of God. In his view, the returnees in Judah needed to remember that the restoration was incomplete so long as some of the tribes remained exiled from the land. To express this broad vision of God's people, the Chronicler included both northern and southern tribes in his genealogies (1 Chr 2:3; 4:24; 5:1,11,23; 6:1; 7:1,6,13,14,20,30; 8:1). He presented the ideal of all twelve tribes under David and Solomon. He spoke of both the North and South as the people of God (2 Chr 10:3; 12:1; 13:4,15; 24:5). He also celebrated the reunification of the northern and southern kingdoms in the days of Hezekiah (see commentary on 2 Chr 30:1-31:1). Finally, the Chronicler was so strongly committed to the return of all tribes to the land that he often pointed to geographical locations that belong to various tribes (see 1 Chr 4:10,11-23; 5:23; 6:54-81; 7:28-29; 8:1-7; 8:8-13; 9:1-2; 2 Chr 31:1b).

After the exile it was easy to settle for small results. Few exiles had returned; few districts of the land had returned to the appropriate tribes.

The Chronicler insisted, however, that the blessings of God awaited his readers as they devoted themselves to the goal of re-establishing all the tribes of Israel to their rightful place in the land of promise.

Contemporary Christian Readers:

The ideal of “all Israel” anticipates a number of motifs that run throughout the New Testament. The inauguration of Christ’s Kingdom was characterized by an inclusive focus. Jesus was emphatic in ministering to the rich (Mt 27:57) and poor (Mt 11:5), the religious (Lk 7:36) and profane (Lk 7:36-38), the noble (Jn 4:46) and the despised (Lk 5:27; 17:12). From the announcement of the Kingdom to poor shepherds (Lk 2:8,9) to Christ’s ministry to women and children (Lk 8:1-3; 23:55-56), the Kingdom of God included all of God’s covenant people.

Jesus also expected the continuation of his Kingdom in the Church to emphasize the inclusiveness of the New Covenant. As Paul insisted, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:28). In a similar vein, James forbade any favoritism leading to discrimination in the Church (James 2:1-7).

The totality of God’s people comes into focus throughout John’s Revelation (see Rev 19:6,7; 21:3,24). The Chronicler’s desire that “all Israel” constitute the restored Kingdom in his day will be fully realized when Christ returns.

2) *Northern Israel* ***Original Israelite Readers:***

Chronicles gives special attention to the place of northern Israelites in the post-exilic community. The situation of the northern tribes was complex in the Chronicler’s day. Most people from these tribes remained outside the land where the Assyrians had exiled them. Some Northerners had stayed in their traditional territories, but were mixed

with exiles from other nations (see 2 Kgs 17). Moreover, on several occasions in Judah's history, groups of Northerners joined themselves to Judah. Some descendants of these defectors had returned from the Babylonian exile with the first returnees (1 Chr 9:3-9).

The book of Chronicles offers a balanced assessment on this complex situation. On the one hand, it strongly favors the political and religious structures of the South over those of the North. This loyalty to Judah becomes apparent by comparing the record of Kings and Chronicles. The Chronicler omitted large portions of Kings that dealt exclusively with events in the North. With one exception (2 Chr 13:1 // 1 Kgs 15:1-2), he omitted all North-South synchronizations from the book of Kings (see Asa, 2 Chr 14:2 // 1 Kgs 15:9; Jehoshaphat, 2 Chr 17:1 // 1 Kgs 22:41; Jehoram, 2 Chr 21:4-5 // 2 Kgs 8:16; Ahaziah, 2 Chr 22:1 // 2 Kgs 8:25; Joash, 2 Chr 24:1 // 2 Kgs 12:1; Amaziah, 2 Chr 25:1 // 2 Kgs 14:1; Jotham, 2 Chr 27:1 // 2 Kgs 15:32; Ahaz, 2 Chr 28:1 // 2 Kgs 16:1; Hezekiah, 2 Chr 29:1 // 2 Kgs 18:1). This nearly exclusive focus on events in Judah reveals that the institutions and peoples of the South were the heart of the Kingdom of God.

Along these same lines, the Chronicler asserted a strongly negative assessment of certain aspects of life in the North. This outlook appears in a number of ways. 1) Although the Chronicler acknowledged the legitimacy of Israel's initial political separation from Judah (2 Chr 10:1-11:4), he strongly condemned northern worship practices and other forms of wickedness (2 Chr 13:4-12; 19:2; 21:6,12-15; 22:3; 22:10-23:21; 24:7; 25:7; 30:6-9). 2) The book makes it very plain that Judah was not to make political alliances with the wicked from northern Israel. To form such agreements was to reject reliance on God (2 Chr 19:1-2; 20:35-37; 21:5,6, 12-15; 22:3-6; 25:7-10). 3) On several occasions, the Chronicler lamented that Judahite kings behaved like Israelite kings (2 Chr 21:6,13; 22:4; 28:2-4). These comparisons also indicate a largely negative assessment of the North. 4) 2 Chr 21:4-24:27 focuses on the corrupting influence of the North on Judah. This period was

characterized by waywardness and the source of this trouble was too much involvement with northern Israel.

On the other hand, however, the Chronicler also sought to broaden the vision of his post-exilic readers to include the tribes of the North among the people of God. This emphasis becomes apparent in a number of ways. 1) Northern tribes appear in the opening genealogies and lists (1 Chr 4:24-5:26; 7:1-40; 9:3). 2) At least twenty-three times the Chronicler's inclusive terminology "all Israel" refers to the northern tribes. 3) The Chronicler noted that the division of Israel was by divine design (2 Chr 11:1-4). 4) He reported approvingly several times that the faithful in the North defected to the southern kingdom (2 Chr 11:17; 15:4,8; 30:11,18,21). 5) He once contrasted the North and South by pointing out that the Northerners obeyed God's prophet when Judah was in rebellion against God (2 Chr 28:6-15). 6) Similarly, the Chronicler equated the moral conditions of Judah and Israel in the days of Hezekiah (2 Chr 29:8-9). By this means, he indicated that Judah was not inherently superior to the North. 7) The exemplary religious reforms of three Judahite kings extended into the northern territories (2 Chr 19:4; 31:1; 34:6-7) and the Chronicler condemned Asa's failure to reform the North (2 Chr 15:17). These events pointed out that post-exilic Judahites should be concerned with religious reforms in the north. 8) The Chronicler also highlighted Hezekiah's symbolic reunion of the North and South at his Passover celebration (2 Chr 30:1-31:1). His extraordinary patience toward the Israelites modeled the kind of actions the Chronicler's post-exilic readers were to exhibit toward their northern neighbors.

Contemporary Christian Readers:

The outlook of Chronicles toward Northern Israel is confirmed for the Christian community in the teachings of the New Testament. Jesus inaugurated his Kingdom by ministering not only to Jerusalem (Lk 19:28), but to the Northern Israelites in Nazareth (Lk 4:16), Galilee (Lk 4:14), and Samaria (Jn 4:1-42). His commission to his apostles

specifically mentioned Samaria (Acts 1:8). Moreover, descendants of northern Israel were among the “Jews from every nation under heaven” (Acts 2:5) who were present at Pentecost.

In many respects, the Chronicler’s emphasis on Northern Israel parallels Paul’s insistence that every part of the body of Christ is essential to the edification of the Church (1 Cor 12:12-26). Just as the post-exilic community needed true believers from the North, the Christian Church needs every part of the covenant community to be active and contributing to the work of the Kingdom today.

The inclusion of the northern tribes also appears in the consummation. At the end of this world, the Kingdom of Christ will include “144,000 from all the tribes of Israel” (Rev 7:4). The Chronicler’s desire for the return of the northern tribes will be fulfilled when the names of all twelve tribes are placed on the gates of New Jerusalem (Rev 21:12). Every tribe will be represented in the consummation.

3) *International Relations* *Original Israelite Readers:*

In an attempt to define the people of God even further, the Chronicler also focused on relations between Israel and other nations. During the early post-exilic period, practical political realities forced the struggling community in Judah to deal with other nations (see for instance Ezra 3:7; Neh 2:1-10). Questions as to the extent and nature of this involvement were of great importance. Chronicles touches on these matters in two important ways.

First, the book exhibits an openness toward foreigners to demonstrate that the post-exilic community should not entirely isolate itself from other nations. 1) The opening genealogies and lists include non-Israelites among the people of God. Kenites held a rightful place within the tribe of Judah (1 Chr 2:55). Similarly, there may be Ishmaelite names in the records of

Simeon (1 Chr 4:25). Foreigners assisting the Levites were known as “temple servants” (see Num 31:30; Ezra 8:20); they were among those who first returned from exile (1 Chr 9:1-34). 2) In much the same way, the Chronicler indicated that his ideal kings, David and Solomon, had economic ties with foreigners. David employed Hiram and foreign masons (1 Chr 22:2). Solomon had many economic interactions with foreign nations (2 Chr 8:17-9:26). 3) Beyond this, the Chronicler noted that foreigners were not to be excluded from Israel’s religious life. For instance, he repeated material from Kings in which Solomon prayed that foreigners who come to the temple may know the God of Israel (2 Chr 6:32-33). The amazement of the Queen of Sheba accordingly appears in his history as well (2 Chr 9:1-12). In these ways, Chronicles displays a very positive outlook on foreign nations; total isolation was not an option for the restored community.

Second, a strong warning balanced these positive outlooks. On several occasions, the Chronicler insisted that Israel should never join in alliances with other nations. To do so was to turn from dependence on God. Dire consequences always followed for those who relied on foreign powers (2 Chr 16:1-9; 28:16-21). The Chronicler believed that fidelity to God implied an exclusive reliance on him instead of other nations. In line with this belief, Chronicles adds that David did not help the Philistines when he was in their company (1 Chr 12:19). Moreover, he demonstrated that only trusting in God caused the foreign nations to fear and to cease aggression against God’s people (1 Chr 14:17; 2 Chr 9:1-12; 17:10; 20:29; 26:8). These passages reminded the post-exilic community to avoid relying on foreign human powers to sustain their newly restored nation; only divine power could secure the Kingdom.

Contemporary Christian Readers:

The New Testament portrait of the Kingdom of God shares dual emphasis of openness and caution toward those outside of the covenant community. The faith of the Roman centurion (Mt 8:5-13) and the fidelity of the Syro-Phoenician woman (Mk 7:24-30) exemplify this

outward focus. Jesus even rebuked apostate Jews by warning them that people of Nineveh and the Queen of Sheba will judge them (Mt 12:39-45). At the same time, however, Jesus warned against the evil influences of gentile religions (Mt 6:7).

Paul described the continuation of the Kingdom in terms of reaching foreign nations with the gospel (Acts 14:1,8; 17:12,34; 28:31). Paul was quick, however, to condemn any relationship with unbelievers that leads believers into apostasy (2 Cor 6:14).

The themes of inclusion and separation find their greatest expression in the consummation of Christ's Kingdom. The final stage of the Kingdom will be a gathering of believers from all the nations of the earth. At that time, however, the wicked of all nations will be separated from the righteous and will suffer the eternal judgment of God (Rev 21:24,26).