

Introduction to Chronicles

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MAJOR THEMES: KING AND TEMPLE

The institutions of David's throne and the temple in Jerusalem form the Chronicler's second major theological concern. In the Chronicler's view these political and religious structures formed a two sided institutional center for the restored community. We will summarize his outlook by drawing attention to six motifs: 4) *Royal and Levitical Families*, 5) *Religious Assemblies*, 6) *Royal Observance of Worship*, 7) *Divine Kingship*, 8) *Music*, and 9) *Temple Contributions*.

4) *Royal and Levitical Families* *Original Israelite Readers:*

The Chronicler's dual concern with Judah's throne and temple becomes evident in the detailed attention he gave to identifying the members of royal and Levitical families. His history reveals that God established specific families to fill these services. 1) The genealogies give more attention to David's lineage (1 Chr 2:10-17; 3:1-24) and the families of the priests and Levites (1 Chr 6:1-81) than any other matters. 2) David's permanent dynasty over the nation (1 Chr 17; 2 Chr 13:5; 21:7; 23:3b) is described as a benefit, not a burden for Israel (1 Chr 11:4-8, 10-11a, 18-19; 14:2; 18:14; 22:18; 2 Chr 2:11; 7:10; 9:8). 3) The specific duties of particular priestly and Levitical families appear in a number of passages (1 Chr 15:2; 23:28; 26:20; 2 Chr 19:8, 23:7; 30:27; 31:2; 34:13). At times the instructions are very detailed, even specifying the ages of Levites who served (1 Chr 23:3-5). These Levitical arrangements were to be observed in the post-exilic community (see 1 Chr 6:48-53; 9:10-13; 16:39-42; 23:13; 29:22; 2 Chr 29:34; 34:10).

These motifs spoke directly to concerns that troubled the post-exilic community. Judah's royal family bore a heavy responsibility for the destruction of Judah and the exile of her citizens (e.g. 2 Kgs 21:10-15;

23:31-25:26). For this reason, at least some returnees must have wondered what role the family of David should play in their day. The Chronicler's focus on the David's lineage asserted that David's sons belonged on Jerusalem's throne.

Moreover, disarray among the priests and Levites raised another important issue for the post-exilic community. When the Zadokite priest Joshua returned from Babylon to bring reforms to Levitical arrangements, other Levitical families did not immediately accept his leadership. The Chronicler, however, confirmed the teachings of other prophets by insisting on Zadokite leadership (see Ezk 40:46; 44:10-16; 48:11; Zech 1-4). In this way, the Chronicler's focus on the priests and Levites had many practical implications for his readers.

Contemporary Christian Readers:

The New Testament shares this concern with royal and priestly offices. In the first place, it plainly teaches that both of these offices are fulfilled in Christ.

Countless passages indicate that Jesus was the King of Israel (Mt 2:2; 27:11; Lk 23:38; Jn 1:49; 12:13; 18:37; Rev 17:14). He was acknowledged at his birth as the rightful heir of David's throne (e.g. Mt 2:2). Beyond this, Christ continues to reign as King while subdues his enemies and rules his people through his Word and Spirit (1 Cor 15:25; Heb 10:12-13). Moreover, at the consummation of the Kingdom every knee will bow to Christ's royal dominion and all people will submit to him (Rom 14:11; Phil 2:10-11). The enemies of the divine King will be punished forever and the followers of the King raised to glory (Rev 7:14-17; 20:7-15).

Christ's ministry as priest also began at the inauguration of the Kingdom. Belonging to "the order of Melchizedek" (Heb 5:6), Christ endured the sufferings of this world without sin and graciously sacrificed himself on behalf of his people (Heb 4:15). Moreover, Christ's priestly role continues throughout our time. He intercedes

before the Father on behalf of the redeemed, looking after their interests and pleading their case (Heb 4:14). Christ remains our advocate and representative before the Father (1 Jn 2:1). Moreover, priestly images of Christ also appear in association with the consummation. Christ is portrayed as the sacrificial lamb who stands at the center of the celestial throne room (Rev 7:17). Christ will be exalted as our high priest throughout eternity (Heb 7:3).

In a secondary way, the New Testament also applies the royal and priestly offices to all believers. As those who are in Christ we have been joined to his resurrection (Rom 6:1-14). For this reason, we will reign with Christ when he returns (2 Tim 2:12; Rev 22:5). Moreover, we serve as priests today as well (Rev 1:5). The body of Christ fulfills the sufferings of Christ (1 Cor 1:5; Col 1:24). We also form a spiritual temple for sacrifice (1 Pet 2:1-4). The Church has become “a royal priesthood” (1 Pet 2:9). In these ways, the Chronicler’s focus on kingship and priesthood not only applies to Christ himself, but to all believers as they are joined to Christ by faith.

5) *Religious Assemblies* *Original Israelite Readers:*

The Chronicler’s focus on kingship and temple also comes to the foreground in his attention to religious gatherings called by Israel’s monarchs. Usually he identified these events by the terminology of “assemble” or “assembly” (1 Chr 13:2,4-5; 15:3; 28:1,8; 29:1,10,20; 2 Chr 1:3,5; 6:3,12-13; 7:8-9; 20:5,14,26; 23:3; 24:6; 28:14; 29:23,28,31-32; 30:2,4,13,23-25; 31:18). The NIV occasionally translates related Hebrew expressions as “summoned” (2 Chr 5:2), “came together” (2 Chr 5:3), “mustered” (2 Chr 11:1) and “community” (2 Chr 31:18).

The Chronicler stressed religious assemblies as examples of mutual support between the king and temple. A number of assemblies served this function in the United Kingdom. 1) David’s assembly to bring the ark into Jerusalem was a model for post-exilic worship reforms (1 Chr 13:2,4-5; 15:3). 2) David called assemblies to encourage devotion to the temple

(1 Chr 28:1,8; 29:1,10,20). The Chronicler's readers were to do the same. 3) Solomon received wisdom as Israel's temple builder at an assembly; this event exalted Solomon's construction efforts as an ideal to be imitated (2 Chr 1:3,5). 4) The assembly at Solomon's temple dedication spoke explicitly of the importance of the temple in Israel's future (2 Chr 5:2-3; 6:3,12-13; 7:8-9).

During the Divided Kingdom a number of religious assemblies took place. 1) Rehoboam halted his unjustified attack on Israel in an assembly (2 Chr 11:1-4). 2) Jehoshaphat responded to a serious military threat by calling for an assembly (2 Chr 20:5,14,26). This exemplary gathering in worship led to great victory. 3) In addition, the importance of assemblies at the temple is evident in the reign of Joash. His national covenant renewal took place in an assembly (2 Chr 23:3). Similarly, the exemplary account of Joash's reforms involved an assembly as well (2 Chr 24:6).

The Reunited Kingdom also demonstrated the Chronicler's concern with religious assemblies by stressing worship events during Hezekiah's reign. The theme of assembly appears no less than eleven times in his largely positive record of Hezekiah (2 Chr 29:23,28,31-32; 30:2,4,13,23-25; 31:18). These accounts were designed to inspire the Chronicler's post-exilic readers to emulate Hezekiah's assemblies.

Contemporary Christian Readers:

The Chronicler's concern with religious assemblies finds fulfillment in Christ and his Kingdom. Jesus came to earth to build his Church, a sanctified assembly belonging to God (Mt 16:18). The apostles and prophets of the New Testament age form the foundation of the church for all time (Eph 2:20).

The New Testament also calls for God's people to assemble with their King throughout the continuation of the Kingdom. Jesus said that he would be present whenever two or three are gathered in his Name (Mt 18:20). God's people are called to fellowship by gathering as the church (Acts 14:27; 1 Jn 1:3). Assemblies of Christians are to devote

themselves to worship and prayer, singing and giving thanks to the Lord (Eph 5:19-20). Such assemblies are not to be forsaken (Heb 10:25).

Religious assemblies in our times are but foretastes of our eternal gathering to God. The consummation of the Kingdom is described in terms of all believers joining countless angels in joyful heavenly assembly (Heb 12:22). The return of Christ will mark the final call to worship as people from all ages are assembled in praise and adoration for their King (Rev 21:1-4).

6) *Royal Observance of Worship*

Original Israelite Readers:

The Chronicler also pointed to the centrality of David's throne and the temple by frequently noting how honorable kings of Judah devoted themselves to proper observance of temple worship. These notices appear in at least five different ways.

First, the strikingly positive record of David and Solomon draws attention to their exemplary devotion to the temple and its worship. Out of twenty one chapters devoted to David, seventeen concentrate on his preparations for Solomon's temple (1 Chr 13-29). In fact, the largest uninterrupted addition the Chronicler made to David's reign is exclusively concerned with his efforts on behalf of temple worship (1 Chr 22-29). Similarly, Solomon's principal activity in Chronicles was the construction of the temple (2 Chr 2-8).

Second, in the Divided and Reunited Kingdom the Chronicler focused on the extensive renovations and reforms of worship. Jehoshaphat (2 Chr 17:3-6; 19:11) Asa (2 Chr 15:8-15), Joash (2 Chr 24:4-11), Hezekiah (2 Chr 29:1-31:1), Manasseh (2 Chr 33:16-17) and Josiah (2 Chr 34:3b-35:19) are honored for their extensive worship reforms.

Third, to stress the importance of devotion to proper temple worship the Chronicler highlighted the numbers of sacrifices and offerings which honorable kings made (see 2 Chr 1:6; 5:6; 7:4-5; 24:14; 29:32-35;

35:8-9). In each case, his intention was to convey that righteous kings enthusiastically supported the temple and its services.

Fourth, the Chronicler drew attention to the ways in which honorable kings often acknowledged the sanctity of the temple. This motif appears powerfully on many occasions in which kings insisted that temple personnel and the people consecrate themselves before approaching the temple (see 1 Chr 15:4,12,14; 23:13; 29:5; 2 Chr 5:11; 7:7,16,20; 23:6; 26:18; 29:5,18,19,33,34; 30:2,3,14,17,24; 35:3,6).

Fifth, Chronicles also notes the failure of some kings to give proper attention to temple worship. Two kings were not consistent in maintaining their reforms (2 Chr 15:17; 20:33). Three kings actually built high places to other gods (2 Chr 21:11; 28:4; 33:3). Beyond this, some kings defiled the temple (e.g. 2 Chr 16:2) and its services (2 Chr 26:16-21). The Chronicler condemned these actions in the strongest terms.

These aspects of Chronicles spoke directly to the needs of post-exilic Judah. In the early years of return from Babylon much work had to be done to rebuild the temple. After that task was completed, the worship practices of the post-exilic temple were still in need of reform. The reforms of Judah's kings in the past indicated not only the importance of the temple, but also stressed that proper temple worship was one of the chief responsibilities of the house of David in every age.

Contemporary Christian Readers:

The perfect example of the royal observance of worship comes from the great King Jesus. Christ ushered in the Kingdom of God with a passion for holy worship. Even as a child, he was devoted to the temple practices (Lk 2:46). In his confrontation with Satan, Christ stated triumphantly that the only proper object of worship is God (Mt 4:10). He drove out thieves from the temple courts (Mt 21:12-13; Jn 2:14-15). Jesus' passion for worship becomes clear in his conversation with the Samaritan woman. There he explained that genuine worship is not

confined to a geographic location, but must be done in Spirit and in truth (Jn 4:20-24).

The importance of worship extends throughout the continuation of the Kingdom as the church seeks to follow the teaching of Christ. Paul urged all believers to present themselves as “living sacrifices” as a “spiritual act of worship” (Rom 12:1). It is the atoning work of Christ that enables believers to draw near and worship (Heb 10:10). Paul also identified the New Testament church as those “who worship by the Spirit of God” (Phil 3:3).

The royal observance of worship becomes the great motif of the consummation of the Kingdom. John’s revelation repeatedly portrays the worship of Christ the King (Rev 5:14: 21:22). The command to “worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea, and the springs of water” will be the unbroken exercise of the children of God (Rev 14:7). The angelic hosts are portrayed as serving him “day and night in his temple” (Rev 7:15).

7) *Divine Kingship* *Original Israelite Readers:*

The Chronicler emphasized the necessity of re-establishing the throne of David by developing a strong connection between David’s dynasty and the reign of God. It was common in the ancient Near East to see a close relationship between the status of earthly human thrones and heavenly divine thrones. The peoples surrounding Israel believed that as their gods reigned, they established their chosen kings as powerful vice-regents. Unless a god was punishing his king, a weak or empty throne on earth called into question the power and authority of that king’s god. Similar concepts are found throughout the Old Testament, but the Chronicler brought these beliefs to the foreground. Once God had ended the punishment of exile, the re-establishment of David’s throne was a necessary demonstration that Israel’s God reigned in heaven.

This theological conviction appears in a number of passages. 1) When speaking of the throne of Judah, the Chronicler shifted the wording from "your (David's) house and kingdom" (2 Sam 7:16) to "my (God's) house and kingdom" (1 Chr 17:14). This change exhibited the Chronicler's belief in a close connection between the divine and Davidic throne. 2) Similarly, the Chronicler changed the language of 1 Kgs 10:9 ("on the throne of Israel") to "on his (God's) throne as king to rule for the Lord your God" (2 Chr 9:8). This variation also displayed the Chronicler's belief that a strong link existed between the throne of God and throne of David. 3) In material which the Chronicler added, King Abijah proclaimed that northern Israel was about to make war on "the kingdom of the Lord ... in the hands of David's descendants" (2 Chr 13:8). Abijah's words reflect the Chronicler's belief that the throne of David was the earthly representation of divine Kingship. 4) In two places (1 Chr 29:1,19) the Chronicler designated the temple as God's "palatial structure." This royal terminology also revealed his view that God was Israel's King whose palace stood in Jerusalem alongside the human palace.

Chronicles stresses the relationship between the Davidic and divine thrones to meet a vital need in post-exilic times. Soon after the early returnees arrived in Jerusalem high hopes for the restoration of the Davidic line were put in Zerubbabel (see Hag 2:20-23; Zech 4). Despite these hopes, however, Zerubbabel never became king and disappeared from public life. Moreover, the lack of attention to royal matters in the ministries of Ezra and Nehemiah indicates that hopes for an immanent restoration of the line of David had faded. Messianic hopes were cast into the indefinite future along with other aspects of Israel's full restoration.

The Chronicler's outlook implied serious responsibilities in these situations. From his point of view, the restoration of Israel was not complete so long as the throne of David remained unoccupied. To lose hope for the restoration of David's throne was to deny the sovereignty of God himself.

Contemporary Christian Readers:

The Chronicler's viewpoint on David's throne provides an essential background for understanding the New Testament teaching on the Kingdom of God (Heaven) (Matt 12:22-28; Acts 2:22-36; 7:45-50). The darkness and discouragement of the post-exilic setting was dramatically reversed by the arrival of the great King. The divine and human Christ represents the conjoining of the divine and human thrones.

The apostles announced that Christ was “exalted to the right hand of God” (Acts 2:22-36). There he sits on “the throne of his father David” (Lk 1:32-33).

Christ is portrayed as the “Most High” (Acts 7:45-50) who will reign until all his enemies are subdued (1 Cor 15:25). The kingship of Christ is “eternal” (1 Tim 1:17). Upon his return, Christ will be acknowledged by all as the “King of kings” (1 Tim 6:15; Rev 17:14; 19:16). The consummation will display his perfect human and divine kingship.

8) *Music*

Original Israelite Readers:

The Chronicler's intense interest in the re-establishment of the temple and its services also appears in his extraordinary focus on music. Chronicles concentrates on the music of worship more than any other narrative portion of Scripture. For this reason, some interpreters have even suggested that the Chronicler himself was a Levitical musician. We will summarize his outlooks under two headings: the responsibility of music and the blessing of music.

First, the Chronicler took many opportunities to focus on the responsibility to perform music properly in the worship of God. 1) He made it clear which families of priests and Levites were to play instruments and sing (1 Chr 6:33; 15:16,19,22,27; 16:4,7,42; 25:1-31; 2 Chr 5:12; 7:6; 23:18; 29:25,26,27,30; 30:21,25; 31:2; 34:12; 35:15). 2) He noted that divine will was discerned in these matters by casting lots (1 Chr 25:9). 3) Beyond this, he gave attention to such practical matters

as the skills and training of Levitical musicians (1 Chr 15:22; 25:7; 2 Chr 34:12), as well as their rotation of responsibilities (1 Chr 25:9-31). 4) The Chronicler also noted the wide range of instruments to be used in worship (e.g. 1 Chr 13:8; 15:16). 5) He described some details of how and when music was performed in worship (2 Chr 5:11-14; 7:6; 23:18; 29:27,28; 30:21). 6) Finally, the Chronicler noted that Levites and priests performed music to lead Israel into battle (1 Chr 25:1; 2 Chr 13:12,14; 20:21-22) and to celebrate victory (2 Chr 20:28).

These descriptions of music indicated the importance of re-instituting proper musical practices in the post-exilic period. The Chronicler's emphasis suggests that his readers needed guidance in several matters. Who was to take responsibility for leading music? When and how was music to be used? He answered that direction in the matters could be found in Israel's past arrangements.

Second, Chronicles also drew attention to the wonder and joy associated with music. On many occasions, the Chronicler stressed that Israel rejoiced enthusiastically over the blessings of God. These celebrations nearly always involved music. At times the magnificence of the scenes overwhelm even modern readers (1 Chr 15:16; 2 Chr 5:12; 29:25-30; 30:21; 35:15).

The Chronicler repeatedly described scenes of musical celebration to offer positive incentive to his readers. For the most part, the post-exilic period was not characterized by rejoicing, singing, and dancing. Yet, Chronicles shows that when Israel served God faithfully in the past, God blessed them with the wonder of music. These scenarios encouraged the Chronicler's readers to move forward in the restoration of the Kingdom. The splendor of music awaited those who did not take their eyes off this goal.

Contemporary Christian Readers:

As music and song were to be joyful expressions of devotion and celebration within Israel, so music plays an important role in the New

Testament. Mary sang with joy when she realized her son was the Messiah (Lk 1:46-55). Angels announced the birth of the King in song (Lk 2:13-14). In many respects, the first coming of Christ's Kingdom was a musical event.

Musical responses from God's people also characterize Kingdom life for the New Testament Church. Believers are to make music in their hearts to the Lord with Psalms and Spiritual songs (Eph 5:19; Col 3:16). All of God's people are to celebrate the greatness of God in song (Rom 15:11).

Music will also play a central role in the consummation of the Kingdom. When Christ returns, God's holy creatures will sing a new song unto the Lord (Rev 5:9). Christians too will share in Christ's victory and sing the song of Moses and of the Lamb (Rev 15:2-4).

9) *Temple Contributions* *Original Israelite Readers:*

One of the practical matters facing the post-exilic period was the need to fund the temple and its services. Although Cyrus had supplied the early returnees (Ezr 1:7-11), the prophecies of Haggai indicate that the people failed to contribute to the temple (Hag 1). Malachi later rebuked the people for not fulfilling their tithes (Mal 3:8-12). As a result of this kind of neglect, the Chronicler taught his readers the importance of supporting the temple by negative and positive examples from Israel's history.

First, Chronicles emphasizes a number of occasions when the treasuries of the temple were robbed. 1) Judah's king withdrew from the temple treasuries (e.g. 2 Chr 16:2). 2) Moreover, the enemies of Judah took from the temple treasuries (e.g. 2 Chr 12:9). The impoverishment of the temple represented judgment against God's people which the post-exilic community should avoid.

Second, the Chronicler also directed attention to occasions when the people of God devoted great quantities of money and materials to

the temple. 1) He noted David's large contributions (1 Chr 29:2-5) and the gifts of Israel (1 Chr 29:6-9). 2) Solomon devoted resources to the temple construction (2 Chr 2:1-5:1). 3) Joash collected and used much money for temple renovations (2 Chr 24:5). 4) Hezekiah also gathered funds for temple services (2 Chr 31:3-21). 5) Josiah raised temple finances as well (2 Chr 34:9). In each case, such devotion to the temple led to times of great blessing and joy for the people of God. The same blessings would result for the post-exilic community, if it would devote financial resources to the temple.

Contemporary Christian Readers:

The New Testament elaborates on the motif of temple contributions in a number of ways. Jesus was showered with gifts by the Magi as he was recognized as the great King of Israel (Mt 2:11; Jn 12:3). This event exemplified enthusiastic and sacrificial giving to Christ as the final temple (Mt 21:1-4).

The necessity of gifts and offerings to the temple of God continues in the Kingdom after Christ's ascension. Now, however, contributions are made to the Church as the temple of the Holy Spirit. Early Christians zealously gave money to their brothers and sisters in Christ as well as to the poor (Acts 4:34-35; 11:29-30). The apostle Paul echoed the Chronicler's program by instructing Christians to set aside a sum of money "in keeping with his income" that the Kingdom might be adequately financed (1 Cor 16:1-4). Along these lines, he commended the Philippian Christians for their gifts and used temple language as he designated these gifts as "an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God" (Phil 4:18).

The consummation of the Kingdom will also be a time when great gifts are given to Christ. The "honor and glory of the nations" will come to Christ and the Father who are the temple of the New Jerusalem (Rev 21:26).