

# Introduction to Chronicles

by Richard Pratt

## MAJOR THEMES: GOD AND HISTORY

### *10-28) Divine Blessing and Judgment*

A third major pillar in the book of Chronicles is the dynamic of divine blessing and judgment. The Chronicler's perspective on this matter was remarkably different from the writer of Kings. The book of Kings dealt with the judgment of God primarily to explain that the exile to Babylon was God's just judgment against his people. As a result, the author of Kings frequently pointed to the accumulation of divine wrath against Israel as the cause of the captivity (e.g. 2 Kgs 17:1-41; 21:10-15). The recipients of Chronicles, however, had already returned to the land and needed to know how to avoid divine wrath and receive God's blessing in their time. The Chronicler met this need by repeatedly demonstrating that each generation of Israel faced choices which led to blessing or judgment.

The Chronicler's outlooks on divine judgment and blessing entailed many interrelated motifs. We will summarize his views in three major categories each of which will consist of smaller themes: *10-12) God and History*, *13-22) Israel's Responsibilities*, and *23-28) Divine Responses*.

### *10-12) God and History*

The Chronicler's outlooks on divine blessing and judgment rested on his convictions that God was intimately involved with his people. Israel and Judah had been the special object of redemption and judgment in the past. The post-exilic community to which he wrote was also the object of special divine attention. This perspective on Israel's relationship with God comes to expression in at least three important ways: *10) Divine Activity*, *11) Name of God*, and *12) Divine Presence and Help*.

## 10) *Divine Activity*

### *Original Israelite Readers:*

God is very active in the book of Chronicles, but this divine activity takes a variety of forms. On one end of the spectrum, the Chronicler depicted God as dramatically intruding into history (1 Chr 21:14-15; 2 Chr 12:12; 18:31; 21:16; 28:5; 36:16-17). On the other end of the spectrum God often remained entirely in the background of events. His participation was merely implied by the remarkable nature of some incidents (2 Chr 18:33; 20:23; 35:23).

Between these extremes, the Chronicler also described historical events in naturalistic terms and then added that God was actually behind them. He clarified that some incidents took place because God caused them (1 Chr 10:13-14; 11:4; 2 Chr 14:6; 22:7; 24:24; 25:20; 32:31). Similarly, he also noted David's assurance of God's activity in his life (1 Chr 11:9-10; 29:10-13). Chronicles also points out that many incidents occurred because they were fulfillment of the Word of God (1 Chr 11:1-3; 11:10; 12:23; 2 Chr 10:15; 36:22).

The Chronicler's purpose for drawing attention to this variety of divine activities was at least twofold. On the one hand, mentioning God's involvement in particular events indicated how his readers should evaluate those ancient events. When God caused something to happen the occurrence was to be approved or accepted by the readers. For instance, the Chronicler pointed out that Davidic claims to the throne were legitimate because God himself had caused Saul's death and transferred royal authority to David (1 Chr 10:13-14). Similarly, the duties of priests and Levites were divinely ordained (1 Chr 24:1-5). Likewise, God ordered Solomon to take the responsibility of temple building (2 Chr 7:12).

On the other hand, the Chronicler wrote about the various ways God directed Israel's past to teach his post-exilic readers that God

directed their history with similar variety. The activity of God in the book of Chronicles helped the readers see the many ways in which God was at work in their day. God acted in ordinary human efforts as well as extraordinary interventions. The post-exilic community needed to remember the full range of God's actions as they sought to rebuild the Kingdom.

### ***Contemporary Christian Readers:***

The New Testament describes divine activity in ways that parallel the Chronicler's concerns. The inauguration of the Kingdom of Christ took place in the context of spectacular miraculous events. The virgin birth of Christ, his grand miracles, the death and resurrection of Christ and the work of the apostles stand out among these mighty acts of God.

The New Testament also emphasizes the activity of God for the continuation of the Kingdom. Throughout the ministry of the Holy Spirit, the Church experiences the presence of God with power (Jn 14:15-21). Even so, day by day the Church must build the Kingdom even in ordinary times. God's actions often take place through normal means. In this sense, the providential activity of God continues for the Church's benefit in all ages (Rom 8:28).

Finally, the consummation of Christ's Kingdom is the ultimate intrusion of God into human history. At the return of Christ, the entire cosmos will be destroyed and renewed (Rev 21:1). This act of God will bring all the enemies of God to their knees and will grant great blessings to the people of God (Rev 20:11-15).

## *11) Name of God*

### *Original Israelite Readers:*

The activity of God also comes to expression in the Chronicler's doctrine of the Name of God. On two occasions, he mentioned God's Name simply to refer to his reputation or glory (1 Chr 17:21,24). This use, however, was not his main interest. Instead, the Chronicler built upon a special theology of the divine Name that stemmed from earlier biblical traditions.

Simply put, Chronicles stresses that God's Name was the way of access to divine power. This concept appears no less than forty three times (1 Chr 13:6; 16:2,8,10,29,35; 21:19; 22:7-8,10,19; 23:13; 28:3; 29:13,16; 2 Chr 2:1,4; 6:5-10,20,24,26,32-38; 7:14,16,20; 12:13; 14:11; 18:15; 20:8-9; 33:4,7,18; 36:13). The Chronicler believed that God Himself is transcendent and unapproachable in his heavenly dwelling (2 Chr 6:18). As a result, God had to condescend to Israel by putting his Name in the temple (2 Chr 6:20). The presence of God's Name meant that God's "eyes" and "heart" were in the temple (2 Chr 7:16).

Consequently, the Name of God was the source of power upon which God's people called when they were in trouble (1 Chr 16:35; 2 Chr 6:24,26; 14:11). His Name was the object of their praise for displays of God's power (1 Chr 16:8,10,29; 29:13). The Name was also the authorizing power behind speeches on God's behalf (1 Chr 16:2; 21:19; 23:13; 2 Chr 33:18). Solemn oaths were to be taken in the Name of God for the same reason (2 Chr 18:15; 36:13).

The Chronicler asserted this doctrine of God's Name not only to describe the past but to draw attention to the way of accessing divine power in the post-exilic period. Access to God and the hope of his blessing was available only for those who called on God's Name. This belief necessitated the reconstruction and full service of the temple which was the place of God's Name.

### ***Contemporary Christian Readers:***

As the Chronicler claimed that Israel could only be strong by drawing upon the power of God's Name, so Christ taught that his Kingdom would succeed only by access to the Lord's power through his Name. Jesus established that his Name was central to life in the Kingdom. Salvation is only acquired by believing in the Name of the Lord (Acts 2:21; 4:12). Christians are "justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor 6:11). Kingdom tasks are to be exercised in the Name of God: preaching (Lk 24:47), baptizing (Mt 28:19), praying (Jn 14:13), fellowship (Mt 18:20), driving out demons (Mt 7:22) and worshipping in song (Rom 15:9). The power behind these great works is located in the Name of Christ.

The consummation of the Kingdom will bring the great day of judgment upon humanity. Only those who have the Name of Christ written on their foreheads will be secured in the New Heavens and the New Earth (Rev. 22:4).

## ***12) Presence and Help***

### ***Original Israelite Readers:***

The Chronicler often spoke of divine activity by means of the older biblical vocabulary of divine presence and help. These concepts touched vital aspects of the post-exilic experience.

First, Chronicles speaks of God being "with" people. This language stems from Moses (e.g. Gen 21:20,22; 28:20; 31:5; Ex 3:12; 34:9) and also appears in prophetic literature (e.g. Isa 7:14; 8:10; Zeph 3:17; Zech 8:23). In 2 Chr 13:12 Abijah indicated that for God to be "with" someone meant he would fight for them. In line with this perspective, the Chronicler stressed that success is guaranteed when God is "with" his people (1 Chr 4:10; 9:20; 11:9; 17:2,8; 22:11,16,18;

28:20; 2 Chr 1:1; 13:12; 15:2,9; 17:3; 19:6; 20:17; 25:7; 32:7,8; 35:21; 36:23).

Second, the Chronicler expressed a similar concept by referring to “help” from God. He derived this vocabulary from a number of earlier biblical traditions (Gen 4:1; 49:25; Ex 4:12; Dt 33:29; e.g. Ps 12:1; 18:6; 22:19; 30:10; 46:1; 54:4; 79:9; 86:17; 115:9-11; 118:7; 121:2; 124:8; 146:5). In one passage the help of God is explicitly tied to the concept of God being “with” his people (2 Chr 32:8). Put simply, the Chronicler believed that God helped Israel by intervening on her behalf in times of opposition and trouble. With only two exceptions (1 Chr 15:26; 2 Chr 16:12), the Chronicler associated divine help with military crises. On many occasions the people of God called out in prayer and God responded with help (1 Chr 5:20; 2 Chr 14:11; 18:31; 20:4; 26:7). For this reason, Amaziah assured David of God’s help (1 Chr 12:18) and Hezekiah assured Jerusalem of the same (2 Chr 32:8). All human efforts were in vain without the help of God (2 Chr 25:8).

The Chronicler employed these beliefs to inspire faithful dependence on God. He pointed to times when God was with his people and helped them in remarkable ways. He also noted that God sometimes withdrew from his rebellious people and gave them no help. These variations called the post-exilic community to seek God’s presence and help in their day as they faced countless obstacles and threats.

### ***Contemporary Christian Readers:***

The motif of God’s presence and help in Chronicles speaks to Christian experience in a number of ways. The greatest expression of God’s help came in the sending of Jesus Christ. Jesus came to save his people from sin and intervene on behalf of the redeemed through his incarnation. He became “God with us” (Matt 1:23). Luke records that the people were filled with awe at the works of Jesus and proclaimed,

“God has come to help his people” (Lk 7:16). The presence of God in Christ marked the onset of the Kingdom of God.

Throughout the continuation of the Kingdom, Christians must pray for the help of God (1 Tim 5:5). As the risen Lord Jesus reigns over his Kingdom, he gives the Spirit of God to believers as a constant source of help (Acts 1:8; Phil 1:19). The Christian experience is marked by the indwelling Spirit’s protection, provision, power, and comfort.

The hope of every Christian lies in the consummation when God will be with his people forever (Jn 14:3). When God’s presence with his people reaches its fullness, they will experience no more trouble (Rev 21:2-4).