

INTRODUCTION TO THE 13TH AND 14TH BIBLEBOOK

1 CHRONICLES AND 2 CHRONICLES (about 400 B.C.)

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A. THE ORIGIN OF THE BOOKS OF CHRONICLES.

1. The name of the book.

In the Hebrew, the books of Chronicles are called (Dibre ha-Jamim): *The book of the annals or day-to-day events* of the kings. [The Chinese name means “The annals of the past dynasties” of the kings. The Western name “Chronicles” originated with the church father Jerome, who said that the books are a chronicle of the whole divine history.]

2. The separation into four books.

The two books of Chronicles and the books Ezra and Nehemiah were originally one book, which we will call ‘*Great Chronicles*’. This can be clearly seen by the repetition of the closing paragraph of Chronicles (II 36:22-23) in the opening paragraph of Ezra (1:1-3a), except that the closing paragraph of Chronicles is broken off in the middle of one sentence. These four books have the same character. They have genealogy lists, the same language and style, and the same emphasis on keeping the worship life of Israel pure so that Israel may be the true people of God.

3. The writer, the date and the place of writing.

How were the books of Chronicles written?

In the first place it is very clear that the writer is well acquainted with the 5 books of the Law and the historical books of Joshua, Samuel and Kings, because he made much use of these books. The contents and even the order of events are much the same as in the books of Samuel and Kings. In the second place the writer himself mentions an impressive list of sources he used to compile his chronicle. He mentions 17 different sources, like for example, *the book of the annals of king David* (I 27:24), *the records of Samuel the seer*, *the records of Nathan the prophet*, *the records of Gad the seer* (I 29:29), and *the book of the kings of Judah and Israel* (II 16:11). Almost for every fact or king he quoted the source from which he gained that information.

When were the books of Chronicles written?

The writer must have lived during or after the last recorded event in the books. Nehemiah 13:6 mentions the 32nd year of king Artaxerxes, the king of Babylon, which was 432 B.C. And the lists in 1 Chronicles 3:19-24 of the descendants of Zerubbabel, a descendant of king David until the 6th generation of Zerubbabel, goes to about 400 B.C.

Who wrote the books of Chronicles?

The Bible does not say who wrote the books of Chronicles. The writer of the books of Chronicles was very much influenced by *the prophetic-eschatological view of the prophet Ezekiel*. He was waiting for the kingdom of God¹ and the consolation of Israel². *The failure of every attempt to establish the theocratic kingdom within the circle of Israel, of which the book Great Chronicles testifies, made him look forward to what all the prophets said concerning the coming Messiah, who would establish an everlasting kingdom*. Based on the internal facts, we conclude that the books of Chronicles, Ezra and Nehemiah were written not earlier than 400 B.C. by an unknown, but certainly a person inspired by the Holy Spirit.

B. THE DIVISION OF THE BOOKS OF CHRONICLES.

The theme of the book of Chronicles: “In the history of the theocracy the Old Testament covenant with the patriarchs would be continued in David and Jerusalem and fulfilled in the coming Messiah and his kingdom.”

The books of Chronicles may be divided into 4 parts:

1. 1 Chronicles 1:1 to 9:34. The history of the theocracy from the beginning until its establishment in Israel.

The materials come from the books of Genesis, Numbers, Ruth and Samuel. It contains the genealogical records from Adam to David. Its purpose is to throw light on the place Israel occupied within the human race and which structure she had.

- Chapter 1 records the genealogies of Adam, Noah and Abraham.
- Chapter 2 records the genealogy of Judah.
- Chapter 3 records the genealogy of David, through the kings of Judah up to the sixth or eleventh generation of Zerubbabel.
- Chapter 4 records the genealogy of Simeon, who was always closely bound to Judah.
- Chapter 5 records the genealogies of the tribes on the east side of the Jordan.

¹ Mark 15:43

² Luke 2:25

- Chapter 6 records the genealogy of Levi, through the descendants of Aaron, Eleazar and Zadok up to the end of the exile. It also includes the three Levitical families of Gershon, Kohath and Merari and the temple musicians Heman, Asaph and Ethan, which David organised.
- Chapter 7 records shortly the other tribes of Israel. Zebulun is missing probably due to a scribal error.
- Chapter 8 records the genealogy of Benjamin, who was always closely bound to Judah.
- Chapter 9 records the inhabitants of Jerusalem after the return from exile (537/538 B.C.).

2. 1 Chronicles 9:35 to 29:30. The history of the theocracy under king David.

- Chapter 9:35-44 records the genealogy of king Saul, the first king of Israel.
- Chapter 10 describes Saul's failure which ends in his death.
- Chapters 11-20 contains a series of narratives and statistics, which are largely parallel with the books of Samuel.
- Chapters 21-29 consists of what David did for the building of the temple, for the reorganisation of the temple service and for the civil- and military administration of the kingdom, materials which has no connection to the books of Samuel.

3. 2 Chronicles 1 to 9. The history of the theocracy under king Solomon.

- The building of the temple and its glory is highlighted. The materials are largely parallel with the book of Kings. Solomon as builder of the temple is no more than the executor of David's plans.

4. 2 Chronicles 10 to 36. The history of the theocracy under the kings of Judah.

- *The kings of the northern kingdom of Israel are only mentioned when they were either allies or enemies of the southern kingdom of Judah.* The materials follow that of the book of Kings almost word by word, but new materials were added from other sources, which often changed the image of a king.
- The destruction of Jerusalem and the temple is noted rather than described. After a short description of the time of the exile, the edict of king Cyrus of Persia is recorded. However this edict is broken off in the middle of a sentence and is repeated as a whole at the beginning of the book of Ezra.

C. THE MAIN MESSAGES OF THE BOOKS OF CHRONICLES.

1. The covenant of God with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the books of Chronicles.

- The covenant is the centre of the books of Chronicles.

The writer of the books of Chronicles views the history of Israel from a very unique point of view, which is not found in any of the other writers of the Bible. Not *the history* of the kings or the history of Israel as a people or even the history of the temple stand in the centre of this book, but *the covenant of God made with Abraham stands in the centre of this book*. God had promised Abraham that he would bless all the families of the earth through Abraham's seed³.

- The covenant is the covenant established with Abraham, not the covenant ratified at Sinai.

Not God's covenant with Moses, but God's covenant with Abraham is regarded as the true covenant and the highest point of Israel's history. *Not God's law to Moses, but God's promise to Abraham regulated the relationship between the Lord and his people!* In 1 Chronicles 16:15-17 the writer says, "The Lord remembers his covenant forever, the word he commanded, for a thousand generations, the covenant he made with Abraham, the oath he swore to Isaac. He confirmed it to Jacob as a decree, to Israel as an everlasting covenant." Therefore, the three patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, are called *the fathers* of the nation (I 29:18). Therefore, no less than 30 times, the Lord is called *the God of our fathers* and the nation Israel is called *the seed or descendants of Abraham, God's friend* (II 20:6-7) and called *the sons of Jacob* (I 16:13).

- The covenant with Abraham is continued in David.

The covenant made with Moses at Sinai is seen as nothing more than a transitional stage. But *the covenant made with Abraham is reconfirmed with king David* and continued in the house of David. In 1 Chronicles 28:4, David says, "The Lord, the God of Israel, chose me from my whole family to be king over Israel forever. He chose Judah as leader, and from the house of Judah he chose my family, and from my father's sons he was pleased to make me king over all Israel."

King David is certainly viewed as the one who completed the work of Moses, because he restored and reorganised the temple worship according to the law of Moses (II 8:14; 23:18-19; 29:24-36). *King David is especially viewed as the one in whom the covenant promises made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob continues.*

About 200 years earlier, the prophet Jeremiah already prophesied that God's covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob would continue with king David and the Levitical priesthood and that it would continue as long as day and night continued⁴.

- The covenant with David will reach its ultimate pinnacle with the Messiah King.

³ Genesis 12:3; Genesis 22:17-18

⁴ Jeremiah 33:17-26

The writer of the book of Chronicles clearly saw the election of king David in the light of the Messianic expectation. *King David is clearly a type, that is, an example or symbol, of the coming Messiah King.* In 1 Chronicles 17:10-14, God says to David, “When your days are over and you go to be with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, one of your own sons, and I will establish his kingdom. ... I will establish his throne forever. I will be his father and he will be my son. I will never take my love away from him ... I will set him over my house and my kingdom forever; his throne will be established forever.” In 2 Samuel 7:11-16, the prophet Nathan prophesied to king David, “Your offspring will come from your own body”. But in 1 Chronicles 17:10-14, the inspired writer said, “Your offspring will come from among your sons or descendants”. The inspired writer of the books of Chronicles thus left room for the coming Messiah-King.

Therefore according to the books of Chronicles, not even the covenant made with king David is regarded as the final end or fulfilment. The inspired writer of the books of Chronicles *presents the history of Israel as a theocracy that would finally manifest itself on a much higher plane and emancipate itself from all the legal and national institutions of the nation of Israel. With the coming of the Messiah-King, the theocracy in the nation of Israel would become the kingdom of Christ in the whole world.*

About 200 years earlier, the prophet Jeremiah already prophesied that God would make a righteous Branch sprout from David’s line. He would be a King who reigns wisely and do what is just and right in the land⁵. And about 400 years later, Jesus proclaimed, “The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news”⁶.

2. The theocracy in the books of Chronicles.

- The theocracy is the real nucleus of Israel’s history.

The writer of the books of Chronicles views the theocracy as the real nucleus of Israel’s history. Everything in Israel’s history leads to the election of David and Jerusalem. That is why the first 9 chapters place Judah, Jerusalem and David in the centre. *The northern kingdom of Israel had put herself outside the theocracy by following Jeroboam and his idolatry.* That is why the kingship of Saul and even of David in Hebron is passed by quickly in order to show that David’s kingship really began when he became king in Jerusalem. *That is why the tribes of Judah and Benjamin can function as the true Israel and are often called Israel rather than Judah* (II 12:1,6; 15:17; 23:2; 24:16; 28:23). That is why fellowship with the kingdom of northern Israel is regarded as sin (II 12:1,6; 15:17; 23:2; 24:16; 28:23). Northern Israel had left the God of the covenant, and therefore they have no place in the description of God’s history with his covenant people, no place in the history of the theocracy.

- The theocracy is a divine kingdom, in which God himself rules by means of fixed institutions.

God is regarded as the real King of Israel. 2 Chronicles 9:8 says that the king’s throne is *God’s throne* and that king Solomon sits on God’s throne and *rules as king on behalf of the Lord his God.* That is why the kingdom of Judah is called *the kingdom of the Lord*” (II 12:1,6; 15:17; 23:2; 24:16; 28:23). That is why everything belongs to the Lord: the land, its people, its kings, prophets and priests. The land is given as *God’s inheritance* to Israel (II 6:27); the cities *belong to God* (I 19:13); the army *is the Lord’s forces* (II 14:13); and the battles *are the Lord’s battles* (I 5:22; II 32:8).

- *God rules by means of the kings of Judah, the prophets and the priests.* While the prophets are prominent in the books of Chronicles, the priests function more and more in the background. Although the priests moved to the background, the religious life of Israel did not. The religious life of Israel was the outward form of the theocracy⁷. That is why the books of Chronicles emphasise what certain of the kings of Judah did to keep the religious life of Israel pure. They built the temple, reorganised the tribe of Levi and even developed the service at the temple.

- In this divine kingdom or theocracy, the temple is deliberately called “the house as a *place of rest for the ark of the covenant of the Lord*” (I 28:2) and “the *castle or stronghold (palatial structure)*” of the Lord (I 29:1).

In this divine kingdom, the priests and Levites function as *the Lord’s bodyguards* (II 23:6-7).

The temple service, which consists in sacrifices, songs and music, have as goal to glorify *God the King* and to rejoice in his presence and nearness in the temple⁸. The meetings of Israel at the temple, in which they experienced the presence of God, are highlights in the history of Israel (II 7:3; 29:27-28).

- The theocracy is in its nature *a kingdom of peace* (II 7:3; 29:27-28). The king in this theocracy will be “a man of peace and rest” (I 22:9). That is why the temple must be a place far removed from the shedding of blood (I 22:8; 28:3). Already in Deuteronomy 17:14-20, the future establishment of the divine kingdom or theocracy was recorded. When Israel found ‘rest’ in the land of Canaan (I 17:9; 23:25), the time of this divine kingdom or theocracy had arrived. Under the house of David the theocracy received a fixed form (II 6:5-6). The theocracy under David was by God’s will (I 10:14; 11:3,10). King David was the Lord’s anointed king and Jerusalem was the place of God’s dwelling.

⁵ Jeremiah 23:5; 33:15

⁶ Mark 1:15, cf. Matthew 12:28

⁷ cf. Ezekiel 40-48 the theocracy must be expressed visibly/outwardly in the lives of the believers and their institutions.

⁸ Ezekiel 3:11; Nehemiah 12:24

3. The theocracy under the Messiah King will be the culmination of the covenant.

God's promises to David in 1 Chronicles 17 is viewed as *a covenant*, which God made with David (cf. II 6:16; 7:18;)⁹. However, it is viewed as a covenant in the light of God's continued revelation that started with the patriarchs.

God's promise to David in 2 Samuel 7 viewed this covenant as continuing in his direct descendant, Solomon and the kingdom of Judah. But *his promise to David in 1 Chronicles 17:10-14 viewed this covenant as it reaches its fulfilment in the coming Messiah and his eternal kingdom*. The writer changed the expression "your offspring, who will come from your own body" to "your offspring, who will come from your sons", and he changed the expression "I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever", to "you shall never fail to have a man to rule over Israel" (II 6:16; 7:18). Thus, he changed the references to king Solomon in the books of Samuel to be references to the coming Messiah King in the books of Chronicles!¹⁰ *Thus, the inspired writer of the books of Chronicles revealed that the Old Testament covenant would be fulfilled in the coming Messiah and his kingdom, that is, in Jesus Christ and the kingdom of Christ* (cf. 2 Corinthians 6:16)¹¹.

2 Chronicles 6:42 says, "O Lord God, do not reject your anointed one. Remember the great love promised to David your servant." This reminds one of Isaiah 55:3, "I will make *an everlasting covenant* with you, my faithful love promised to David." Both the prophet Isaiah and the writer of the book of Chronicles waited for the fulfilment of God's covenant promise to king David.

2 Chronicles 13:5 speaks of God's covenant with David as *a covenant of salt*, which points to the unbreakable character of God's covenant with David. On the basis of that covenant, David became "the king over *God's* house and over *God's* kingdom forever" (1 Chronicles 17:14). On the basis of that covenant, Solomon became king and "sat on the throne of the kingdom *of the Lord* over Israel" (1 Chronicles 28:5) and he was "placed on *God's* throne as king to rule on behalf *of the Lord* (II 9:8)¹². On the basis of that covenant, Judah is "the kingdom *of the Lord*", that is, the Lord exercises his kingship through David's descendants (II 13:8).

In summary: The throne of David is nothing less than the throne of God. That is why the kings in the line of David are the all-important personalities in the theocracy. That is why they have the responsibility to be aware of their high calling, just as David was.

But while the kings in the line of David failed to realise the theocracy, the coming Messiah King, Jesus Christ, would not fail!

⁹ Psalm 132:11-12; Psalm 89:3-4

¹⁰ Micah 5:1

¹¹ 1 Peter 2:9-10

¹² cf. 1 Kings 10:9!