

Introduction to 1-2 Chronicles

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Name

A single book in the Hebrew Bible, Chronicles has three names. In Hebrew, its name means "the events of the days," viz., a history. In the Septuagint (LXX), the Greek version of Hebrew Bible, its name means "things omitted," perhaps intending to suggest that it is a supplement to earlier histories. The name "Chronicles" comes from Jerome, who in the Vulgate gave it the title "a chronicle of the whole divine history."

Place in the Canon

The Hebrew Bible has three parts: the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings. Chronicles (a single book in the Hebrew Bible) is the also the last book in the Hebrew Bible. Its place in Christian Bibles reflects its placement in the LXX. It is placed after Samuel and Kings because it parallels much of the content of those books; Chronicles ends the Edict of Cyrus, setting the stage for the content of Ezra and Nehemiah, the return from the exile. As we have these writings, the last two verses of 2 Chronicles are the same as the first verses of Ezra, almost certainly an editor's deliberate intent to have the books arranged as they are in our Old Testament.

Date of composition/editing: after the Exile and Return, perhaps 400-350 BCE.

A quick review of Israel's history:

Creation

Stories of Revolt

Covenant with Abraham

Exodus

Giving of the Law on Sinai

Wilderness Wandering

Entry into the Land

Establishment of the Kingdom

Division of the Kingdom into North and South

Fall of Israel, the Northern Kingdom

Fall of Judah, the Southern Kingdom

The Babylonian Exile

The Edict of Cyrus and the Return from Exile

Chronicles is the third history in the Old Testament

History	Section of OT	Books	Content
Patriarchal	Law (Torah)	Gen - Dt	creation to death of Moses
Deuteronomistic	Prophets	Josh - 2 Kings	entry into Land to fall of Southern Kingdom
Chronicler's	Writings	1-2 Chron	creation to Edict of Cyrus*

*Everything preceding the history of United Kingdom/Judah is done in summary fashion, mostly with genealogies

The Chronicler's Purpose: offer hope in the wake of the Exile.

The two sides of the Covenant: for their part, Abraham and his descendants would obey God; for God's part, God would provide descendants and a land for them to live in.

Dt (through the voice of Moses) introduces the theological perspective which dominates Israel for centuries, reward and retribution (R & R): reverence and obey God, and God will bless you; ignore or disobey God, and God will punish you.

David brings the Ark to Jerusalem, and Solomon builds a Temple to house the Ark. The people come to think of the Holy of Holies as the dwelling place of God, and Israel's geographical boundaries and political power expand. All of promises seem to be coming true: the number of descendants and the size of the land are greater than ever; in the midst of Israel is the magnificent Temple and the very presence of God. Through the lens of R & R, the Israelites are doing everything right.

In 586, the Babylonians conquer the Southern Kingdom. They lose the land. The Temple, which presumably contains the throne of YHWH, is destroyed. Their number is dramatically diminished, and those who remain are scattered into exile, separating them from YHWH (see Psalm 137). It is complete and total disaster; through the lens of R & R, it is interpreted as a complete lack of reverence and obedience.

So the Chronicler retells the history of Israel (including its earliest human ancestors) with a renewed emphasis on the importance of faithfulness to YHWH. The author intends the message to be hopeful: *just as we were a great nation under David and Solomon, we can be so again if we return to the land, rebuild the Temple, and return to faithfulness (including proper worship).*

In the simplest terms, the Chronicler says: *our hope for the future requires that we learn from our past.* The lesson is not only true but timeless—it has application for almost every person and every culture. This, then, is the paradox of Chronicles: on this side of Jesus, we completely reject the Chronicler's theological perspective (R & R); but on the other hand, Jesus echoes and reinforces (1) the lesson about the importance of learning from the past and (2) the ultimate importance of faithfulness to God.

Also of note:

With its emphasis on the past, the Chronicler puts the most emphasis on the reigns of David and Solomon: David gets the last half of 1 Chronicles, and the Solomon gets the first half of 2 Chronicles. Especially the life of David is told selectively, omitting David's worst moments, most notably his adultery with Bathsheba and the murder of Uriah. By way of analogy, the Chronicler is like a modern movie producer or director: events are based on true stories, but they are shown in a way that accentuates the best traits of the heroes. (Interestingly, the David and Goliath story is also absent in Chronicles, so it lacks arguably the two most famous David stories.)

The Chronicler focuses on the history of the Southern Kingdom, virtually ignoring the Northern Kingdom. The Chronicler also puts a great deal of emphasis on Temple, worship, and music, so much so that scholars speculate that the Chronicler was a Levite.

God's words to Solomon in 2 Chron 7:14 are among the most quoted in the Bible.

Chronicles (and Bible) trivia:

1 Chr 20:6 tells of a Philistine "with six fingers on each hand and six toes on each foot, twenty-four [digits] in all."