

FIRST CHRONICLES SECOND CHRONICLES



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Model of Herod's Temple, Jerusalem

This lesson looks at the books of First and Second Chronicles. These books duplicate much of the information found in Genesis through First Kings. Originally the books of Chronicles were one book. Greek scholars divided them into two works much later. Like the Book of Ruth, the books of Chronicles appear in the third part of the Hebrew Old Testament. The Hebrews call the third part the Writings. The Writings represent books written rather late in the history of the chosen people.

If the books of Chronicles duplicate what we find in Genesis through Second Kings, why did someone write them? Ancient scholars also thought about this question. Their answer is partially seen in the name they gave the books. The Greek and Latin Bibles call them “the books of the things left out.” They contain information left out of the earlier books.

First and Second Chronicles were the work of Jews living in the period after the Exile—a period when the nation, although

politically dependent, enjoyed some measure of self-rule by favor of the overlords to the East. The priesthood guided the nation, and the Law was its charter. The Temple and its ritual in Jerusalem were the center of national life. In addition to this framework of law and ritual, great interest existed in personal devotion, in wisdom doctrines, in the memory of past glories and failures, and in the promises of the prophets.

FIRST CHRONICLES 1-10

The first nine chapters of First Chronicles are primarily lists of ancestors. These chapters, which begin with Adam, summarize the books of Genesis through Judges, but only by listing names. They present history in a genealogical nutshell. These chapters show a special interest in the ancestors and descendants of David, including some that lived after the Exile.

Chapter 1 tells us about the people who lived from Adam until the time of Jacob, whom the writer calls Israel. Beginning with 1 Chronicles 2:3, we have the descendants of the tribe of Judah. Turning over to Chapter 3 we see the names of persons from the house of David. In Chapter 4 we have an account of the southern tribes. In Chapter 5 we find a record of the tribes who live across the Jordan. Chapter 6 gives the lineage of the high priests. Chapter 7 tells us about the northern tribes, while Chapter 8 describes the tribe of Benjamin. Chapter 9 discusses families of Jerusalem and their tasks. Chapter 10 describes the death of Saul.

1. Early in First Chronicles we are given evidence that the book was written after the Babylonian Exile and return. Read 1 Chronicles 9:1-2. Summarize the evidence below.

2. Read 1 Chronicles 10:13-14. What was the main reason that Saul died?

3. List the three specific proofs that Saul had been unfaithful to the Lord.

a.

b.

c.

FIRST CHRONICLES 11-20

Chapters 11 through 29 introduce the history of David who is the main figure in the rest of First Chronicles. First Chronicles 11:1-9 narrates David's accession to the throne in Hebron. Chapters 11 through 14 describe David as a strong king. Warriors surround him and ensure his kingdom. These chapters tell us about David's palace at Jerusalem, about his children, and about his victories over the Philistines. Read 1 Chronicles 14:16-17.

Chapter 15 tells about the preparations for the moving of the ark from a place called Kiriath-jearim to Jerusalem, and then Chapter 16 describes the service the Levites perform in front of the ark.

First and Second Chronicles give us a very idealized picture of David. These books do not record many of David's weaknesses found in the books of Samuel. First Chronicles omits any account of the hostility between Saul and David, as well as David's sin with Bathsheba. The book does not mention David's domestic disputes or the dissension within his household. Chapter 17 gives prominence to the prophecy of

Nathan in which the prophet tells David that one of David's sons will build the Temple.

Chapters 18, 19, and 20 describe some of David's military victories. David and his army defeat the Philistines, the Moabites, the Arameans, the Edomites, and the Ammonites.

1. Turn to 1 Chronicles 18, and read verses 5-11. Then answer these two questions.

a. Who is responsible for all of David's victories? (18:6)

b. How does David acknowledge that God is the one responsible for his victories? (18:10-11)

2. How did God help David establish a strong kingdom among the other nations? (14:17)

FIRST CHRONICLES 21-29

Chapters 21 through 29 discuss the organization of worship in the Temple. Chapter 21 tells about David's numbering of the Israelites and the plague that God sends on Israel because of God's displeasure with the census. In the remainder of Chapter 21, we read about David's purchase of the land where his son will build the Temple.

In Chapter 22, David makes the preparations necessary to build the Temple. He charges his son Solomon with the responsibility for its construction. Chapters 23 through 26 tell about the organization of the

Levites, the priests, the musicians, and the gatekeepers. Chapter 27 gives the division of the people into armies and lists the leader of each army. In Chapter 28, we read that David leaves to his son Solomon the task of putting all these plans into effect. In its final verses, 1 Chronicles 29 tells about the end of David's reign and the succession of Solomon. Read 1 Chronicles 29:26-30.

SECOND CHRONICLES 1-6

When we turn to the Book of Second Chronicles, we find in the first nine chapters an account of Solomon and his reign. A few paragraphs ago we referred to the prophecy of Nathan, which is found at the beginning of 1 Chronicles 17. In 1 Chronicles 17:12 Nathan tells David that David's son will build a house for God. So the Book of Second Chronicles begins with an account of Solomon's building of the Temple. In 2 Chronicles 6 we read Solomon's prayer of dedication.

Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the Temple begins in 2 Chronicles 6:14 and ends in verse 42. In this prayer, Solomon asks God for forgiveness in seven different situations. Read the verses below, and list the seven situations.

a. (6:22)

b. (6:24)

c. (6:26)

d. (6:28)

e. (6:32)

f. (6:34)

g. (6:36)

SECOND CHRONICLES 7-36

As we continue our survey of Second Chronicles, we see that Chapters 7, 8, and 9 give us additional information about the reign of King Solomon. The last two verses of 2 Chronicles 9 tell us about Solomon's death.

Just as in the case of David, the writer of Chronicles presents Solomon in all his glory. In Chronicles, we find none of Solomon's problems and none of the negative evaluations of him that we saw in Second Kings.

At the close of 2 Chronicles 10, the kingdom of Solomon becomes the two separate states of Israel and Judah. Read 2 Chronicles 10:17-19.

The writer does not tell us very much about the reasons for this division of the kingdom. From this point on, the Book of Second Chronicles deals only with the history of the tribes in the South. The writer believes that the king of the southern tribes is the legitimate successor to David and that the ten tribes of the North are rebels against this legitimate lineage. So the remaining twenty-seven chapters of Second Chronicles deal only with the kingdom of Judah. Much of the history in these chapters duplicates the events in 1 Kings 12 through 2 Kings 25.

SUMMARY OF CHRONICLES

Let us summarize now what we have discovered about the books of Chronicles. First, we see why they are called "the books of things left out," that is, things left out of the books that come before Chronicles—from Genesis through Second Kings. The books of Chronicles are also a "retelling" of the earlier historical books. The characters are more religious, more pious, and more idealized.

Second, we see that David is the real hero of the books of Chronicles. His heroism passes on to his son Solomon and to the other kings of Judah who are a part of his house and lineage.

Third, we see that the writer's concern is not so much with history, but with helping the people at a later time gain a sense of national pride as they struggle to preserve themselves, their identity, and their religion.

Fourth, the books stress that the important thing in the people's past is not so much their history, as their religion and their response to the will of God. The writer also wishes to demonstrate the supremacy of the Jews and their religion over all other people and cults. He accomplishes this by showing how God dwells in the Temple at Jerusalem.

Although the tiny kingdom of Judah seems insignificant in the eyes of the great peoples of the world, to the writer of First and Second Chronicles Judah is a kingdom with a noble past and a glowing future. Further, these books show that those who worship God exclusively and obey God's laws are rewarded, and those who do not find punishment.

Books in the ancient world usually end on a happy note somewhat like our fairy tales, where everyone lives happily ever after. The books of Chronicles are no exception. They jump across the period of the Exile to tell the reader about the Persian king, Cyrus, who issues a decree that allows the Jews to return home from exile. We will examine this part of Jewish history in the next lesson.

1. According to the writer of Second Chronicles, why was Judah invaded and defeated by another nation? (Read 2 Chronicles 36:16-17.)

2. According to the writer of Chronicles, what is the reason that Judah could prevail over its enemies? (Read 2 Chronicles 12:6-7; 13:18; 14:11-12.)

3. Second Chronicles 15:1-2 mentions prophets, the messengers of God. What message did Azariah bring to Asa, king of Judah?

4. Second Chronicles 16:7-9 mentions Hanani the seer. What point did he stress in his message to the king of Judah?

SUMMARY

Four main events in Israel's history, which are found in First and Second Chronicles, are listed here.

- (1) The death of Saul and David's succession to the throne (1 Chronicles 10-11)
- (2) The military victories under David's rule (1 Chronicles 18-20)
- (3) The building and dedication of the Temple in Jerusalem (2 Chronicles 1-6)
- (4) The division of David's kingdom into the separate states of Israel and Judah (2 Chronicles 10)

The end of Second Chronicles prepares the way for the return from the Exile, which we will study in the next lesson.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Ecclesiastes 3:1 states: "For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven." A few verses later the point is made that there is "a time to keep silence, and a time to speak." The writer of Chronicles chose to keep silent about King David's fateful sin—his adultery with Bathsheba. Why do you think the writer of Samuel told the story in full while this writer was silent about it? Think of examples from your experience where the repetition of a story may be appropriate at one time but not at another. Share your examples with the group. How might this situation in the Bible provide instruction for us today?

2. In the workbook questions on page 49, you learned that God slew Saul because of Saul's disobedience. (See 1 Chronicles 10:13-14.) Now read 1 Chronicles 10:1-7, which tells how Saul takes his own life. How can we reconcile these two parts of 1 Chronicles 10?

3. Compare 2 Chronicles 32:32-33 with 33:1-6 and 33:18-20. How can you explain that Hezekiah, the father, was such a godly person while Manasseh, the son, was such an ungodly king? Are you aware of similar examples today? What are some possible explanations of such unexpected and opposite characteristics in fathers and sons, or mothers and daughters? How can we respond to children or parents who disappoint us?

DAILY READINGS FOR EZRA, NEHEMIAH, AND ESTHER

- Day 1: Ezra 1:1-11
Day 2: Ezra 6:1-12
Day 3: Ezra 7:1-10
Day 4: Nehemiah 1:1-11
Day 5: Nehemiah 8:1-8
Day 6: Esther 2:1-11
Day 7: Esther 9:23-32