

The Chronicler

1 and 2 Chronicles

The books of Chronicles were probably compiled around 350 B.C., a period for which knowledge of Israel's history is otherwise very scarce. Its author is usually known as "the Chronicler", though, like most books of the Old Testament, there may have been several stages in its composition. The Chronicler draws extensively on the books of Samuel and Kings, but he has also included some other material not known from elsewhere: stories of the various Judaeen kings as well as genealogies and lists of Temple staff. Although many passages from the earlier books are repeated virtually word for word, in other passages and in the general arrangement there are significant changes which help to explain why the book was written.

The Temple occupies central place in the story. The account of its establishment by David and Solomon takes up roughly a quarter of the two books and the arrangements made by David for the conduct of worship are given in elaborate detail. Just as in Exodus the tabernacle is made according to the pattern given by God to Moses, in 1 Chronicles the plan of the Temple is given by God to David who hands it on to his son Solomon to put into effect (1 Chronicles 28:19). The intention is to show that Israel's worship follows a perfect God-given pattern. In a period when the restoration of the Davidic dynasty seemed impossible, the establishment of the Temple is seen as David's great achievement and the preservation of established patterns of worship the way of being loyal to his inheritance.

The Chronicler assumes that the Temple replaces the tabernacle, which was in use continually until its dedication. He also assumes an unbroken line of high priests descended from Aaron to the time of writing. Anyone else who had important parts to play in worship, such as Samuel and Obed-Edom the Gittite, are given a proper Levitical ancestry (1 Chronicles 6:33-38; 16:5).

Beyond his attachment to the proper ways of worship, the Chronicler has a distinctive view of the ways of God in human affairs. Over and over again he presents a pattern of failure leading to judgement followed by grace leading to repentance. When kings obey the Lord, he gives them prosperity

and rest from their enemies. When they disobey him, he allows defeat and disaster. But when they repent he restores them again. For the Chronicler, the ultimate disaster which God allowed was the fall of Jerusalem in 587 B.C. This had come about because of the repeated sins of both kings and people. In his own time, living under foreign rule, they were still experiencing the consequences of that disaster. But if they are faithful to the inheritance of David in worship, the Chronicler believes the Lord will be merciful and restore them.

Day 245. Psalm 115; 1 Chronicles 1 - 7

The People of God

Rather than reading the whole passage, I suggest that you use the notes to guide you to the most important passages and skip-read the rest.

Psalm 115

The consciousness of Israel as God's specially chosen people.

1 Chronicles 1

The Temple history begins by tracing the origins of Israel all the way back to Adam, the first inhabitant of the world. Israel has been chosen from the nations to be a blessing to them all (Genesis 12:2-3). The worship of the Temple is to be a demonstration of the holiness and righteousness of God for all nations. Not every nation was to be so blessed, however. The sons of Canaan listed in 1:13-16 were the original inhabitants of the land of Israel (Exodus 3:8; 34:10-14) and were under Noah's curse from before their birth (Genesis 9:25; 10:15-18).

1 Chronicles 2 - 4

The tribe of Judah, as the tribe of the royal house of David, takes precedence. The genealogy mentions briefly some of the historical incidents in Israel's past, such as the episode of Judah and Tamar (2:3-4; Genesis 38) and the sin of Achan (2:7; Joshua 7). Nahshon (2:10) was the leader of Judah at the time of desert wanderings (Numbers 1:7; 2:3; 7:12; 10:14) and is fittingly listed as a direct ancestor of David. Caleb son of Hezron in 2:18 is probably not the same man as Caleb son of Jephunneh, the man who spied out the land (Numbers 13:6) who is listed in 4:15.

David's royal line continues after the exile for 7 or 8 generations, which reflects the late origin of the book. Zerubbabel (3:19) was the centre of brief hopes for a restoration of the monarchy at the time of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah.

Jabez (4:9-10) is not mentioned in the previous genealogy, but there is a town named after him in 2:55 which is a city of scribes. Perhaps the author or authors of the book were natives of Jabez, and used this opportunity to record their claim to their extensive territory.

1 Chronicles 5

Records of the East Jordan tribes. Reuben lost his precedence as first-born because of the incident recorded in Genesis 35:22. Israelites were numerous in the Trans-Jordan at the time of Saul (5:9-10,19-22) but they were exiled at the time of the fall of Samaria (5:6,25-26) and thereafter there were no more Israelite inhabitants in the region.

1 Chronicles 6

The tribe of Levi is given particular prominence, beginning with the descendants of Aaron. They are presented as if they had been high priests, operating in the tabernacle in the wilderness in just the same way as the high priests were operating in the Temple at the time the book was written. No mention is made of the family of Eli, who served before the Ark just before the time of Samuel (1 Samuel 1:3) and who were displaced in the time of Solomon (1 Kings 2:26-27). Samuel, as someone who was known to have served in the Temple and offered sacrifices, is given a Levite ancestry, even though we know from 1 Samuel 1:1 that he came from the tribe of Ephraim (6:25-28,33-38). David is remembered as having organised the music of the tabernacle before the building of Temple (6:31-47).

1 Chronicles 7

Fragmentary records for the tribes of Issachar, Benjamin, Naphtali, Manasseh, Ephraim and Asher. Zebulun is not listed at all.

Day 246. Psalm 138; 1 Chronicles 8 - 12

David Accepted as King

Psalm 138

The writer thanks God for delivering him from his enemies.

1 Chronicles 8

As Israel's first king, the family of Saul is given an important place.

1 Chronicles 9

9:1-2 introduce an important theme of the whole book: the judgment and mercy of God. The Chronicler was living in a time of restoration after the devastating punishment of exile, and against a background of deep sorrow for the sins for which Israel had been punished (Ezra 9:5-15; Nehemiah 9:1-37). The Temple worship of his time, a model for all nations of the right way to worship God, only existed because of the grace of God towards Israel. This chapter concentrates on the Temple servants in the first generation of the restored community.

1 Chronicles 10

A summary of the events leading up to Saul's death, retold as a prelude to God's choice of David as his successor. It is important to establish that David did not oust Saul. Saul was rejected because he was unfaithful to the Lord.

1 Chronicles 11 - 12

These chapters show that David was chosen as king by the whole of Israel, passing over the seven years during which David ruled over Judah in Hebron (2 Samuel 2 - 4). The first thing he did was to conquer Jerusalem and make it his capital. In the context of his time, David's purpose was to create a capital city outside the territory of any of the tribes, but for the Chronicler the conquest of Jerusalem is the prelude to bringing the Ark of the Covenant to the city and later the building of the Temple.

Chapters 11 and 12 dwell in detail on David's mighty men, using several traditions that are not found in 2 Samuel. All of them show that the best fighting men of all the tribes were loyal to David and chose him as king (12:38). David was chosen as king both by God and the whole people, made Jerusalem his capital and was ready to establish it as the centre of government and worship for a large empire.

Day 247. Psalm 132; 1 Chronicles 13 - 16

David Brings the Ark to Jerusalem

Psalm 132

A psalm to celebrate the presence of the Ark in Jerusalem, remembering how David had it brought up from Kiriath-Jearim and the promise God made to him of a perpetual dynasty.

1 Chronicles 13-16

The first stage in the preparations for building the Temple was the arrival of the Ark in Jerusalem. The story is based on the account in 2 Samuel 6, but the Chronicler has added a great many extra details, which reflect his interests and viewpoint.

- David consults the whole people (13:1-4). Like his own accession, the decision to move the Ark was an expression both of the will of God and of the whole people.
 - The Shihor River and Lebo Hamath (13:5) marked the fullest extent of Israelite territory in the south and in the north respectively. This detail expresses the universal response to David's call. At the time, most of this territory had not yet been conquered.
 - The Ark is given its full title: "The Ark that is called by the Name of the God Yahweh, who is enthroned between the cherubim (13:6)." The cherubim were the winged creatures that adorned the cover of the Ark. From between them the Lord spoke, so the Ark is his throne. The Chronicler thinks of the Ark as described in Exodus 25:10-22. This passage was written long after the Ark had been destroyed, but it probably retains a reasonably accurate memory of what it was like.
 - The reason that Uzzah died is specifically related to the fact that the Ark was not being carried in the right way. The second time around, the Levites are called to carry it on their shoulders in the prescribed manner (15:2,13-15; Deuteronomy 10:8, 31:9,25).
- David's victories over the Philistines are now placed after the first attempt to bring the Ark to Jerusalem (compare 2 Samuel 5:17-25). By reversing the order of his source, the Chronicler shows how blessing follows obedience.
 - In 2 Samuel 5:21 David's men carried the Philistine idols away. Here, in contrast, David orders them to be burned (14:12).
 - The organisation of this final stage is given in exhaustive detail, with the names of all the Levites involved listed. Special emphasis is placed on the music that was to accompany the procession. Obed-Edom is given a Levite genealogy (16:5) and a role as gatekeeper of the tent (15:24; 16:38), but in the original story he was a Philistine from Gath (2 Samuel 6:10-11). Whereas David subdued the Philistines and Canaanites and created an empire of people of mixed race, the Chronicler is concerned for the purity of God's people.
 - The psalm in 16:8-36 is composed of extracts from psalms 96, 105 and 106. It celebrates God's holiness and his mighty deeds, his covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and the way he protected Israel in the wilderness, all of which have led up to the establishment of Jerusalem as his place of worship. All nations are invited to come and worship the God who created the whole earth.
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Day 248. Psalm 144; 1 Chronicles 17 - 21

David's Empire

Psalm 144

The king prays for victory over his enemies and prosperity for his people.

1 Chronicles 17 - 21

Here again, the Chronicler retells the story of David's reign, using 2 Samuel as his source material, collecting and arranging it to concentrate on the events leading up to the establishment of the Temple. His main theme throughout is the grace of God, grace by which he had chosen Israel and set them free from Egypt (17:5), chosen David as king (17:7-8) and promised to provide security for Israel (17:9) and establish David's family on the throne (17:11).

Having made these promises, the Lord went on to fulfil them. He gave victory to David wherever he went (18:13). David established a great empire and all the surrounding nations were either defeated or voluntarily accepted David's supremacy and paid him tribute. The rebellion of Ammon and the Arameans was crushed and Ammon subdued (19:19; 20:3).

The stories of David's victories lead up to the establishment of the Temple. The spoils of victory become the gold, silver and bronze used to build the Temple (18:8,11). These victories are seen as the outcome of God's gracious promise. The idea of a census of fighting men is seen as the work of Satan, the adversary. It opens David to the temptation of relying on the strength of his forces rather than on God.

In 2 Samuel, the emphasis was on the succession of Solomon and the story of David's sin with Bathsheba, Amnon's death, Absalom's and Adonijah's rebellions was told in detail. The establishment of Araunah's threshing floor as a place of sacrifice was only included in an appendix (2 Samuel 24). For the Chronicler, the establishment of the Temple was intimately linked with God's promise to David and the blessing which followed. In fact, everything leads up to this point. So although he uses the verse which in 2 Samuel introduces the Bathsheba incident (20:1; 2 Samuel 11:1), he omits the rest of that story and all its consequences entirely. Instead, another

story of David's sin is put in its place, the sin in numbering Israel which led to the sacrifice on the eventual Temple site.

By the time of the Chronicler, the role of Satan as adversary of Israel had become much more defined. We have seen him in Job as the enemy of God's servants, yet a member of God's council. Here he plays a similar role. In Job, God allowed Satan to test Job and then corrected and rescued him. Here, the same thing happens with David. The idea of God being angry with Israel at this point (2 Samuel 24:1) would contradict everything which had been said so far of God's mercy towards them. Instead, God punished Israel only because of David's sin and then had mercy on him (21:7,13-15). The site of the Temple was a place where atonement had been made to avert an outbreak of plague. Throughout the desert wanderings, plague was the punishment for infringing the holiness of God (see Numbers 16:43-48). Perhaps the census was also seen as an infringement of God's holiness. The Temple would become the place where sacrifices would be made to take away the sin both of individuals and the nation.

Like the choice of Abraham, the covenant with David was decisive in Israel's history. Before the exile it was represented by the royal dynasty. After the exile, when there were no more kings, the Chronicler saw the promise to David fulfilled in the worship of the Temple, the house David had built for the Lord with his blessing.

Day 249. Psalm 96; 1 Chronicles 22 - 29

Preparations for the Temple

Psalm 96

Praise to the God of all nations in his sanctuary.

1 Chronicles 22 - 29

For today's reading, I suggest using the notes to draw your attention to the most important features of the passage and skip-reading the detailed lists.

These chapters present David as the true founder of the Temple, carefully following all the instructions given him by God. The Lord had already designated the site on which the Temple was to be built (21:18; 22:1). David had paid for it at enormous cost (21:25) and the Lord had shown his approval in dramatic fashion (21:26). Solomon was the king chosen by the Lord to succeed (22:7-10; 28:5-7) but he was young and inexperienced (22:5; 29:1). David himself prayed that he would receive discernment and understanding (22:12), a prayer which was answered in 2 Chronicles 1.

Under David's supervision, the Levites made the transition from the duties of carrying and caring for the Ark and the tabernacle, described in Numbers 4:1-33, to the duties of the Temple (23:25-28). Priests, Levites, singers, prophets and gatekeepers were all organised on a rota of 24 divisions (24:7-19), which was still in use in the time of Jesus (Luke 1:5,8; see 1 Chronicles 24:10) and may be the origin of the 24 elders in the vision of Revelation 4.

In 25:1 the ministry of prophesying is virtually identified with the work of the musicians. From earliest times, prophets were to be found in groups associated with the various shrines throughout Israel and using a variety of musical instruments to accompany their "prophesying" (1 Samuel 10:5). Prophecy of the kind exercised by the great prophets such as Isaiah seems to have died out in the centuries before Jesus. and just as the "seers" of earlier times had become known as "prophets" (1 Samuel 9:9) in later times the musicians took on the title. In 2 Chronicles 20:14-17, God's message was given by one of the musicians.

The plans for the Temple were dictated by God to David (28:11-19) just as the plans for the Tabernacle had been dictated to Moses (Exodus 25:9).

Everything to do with the worship of God had to be done correctly according to the instructions he himself had given. David urged Solomon to be strong and courageous (28:20), just as God had urged Joshua (Joshua 1:6-9).

Just like the Tabernacle (Exodus 36:2-7), the Temple was provided for by free and wholehearted giving (29:2-9). Everything was done in response to God's grace. However magnificent the Temple was to be (22:5) it could not compare with the magnificence of God himself (29:10-13). There is no room for the idea that anything in the project was done to win God's favour. Rather, because he graciously allows human beings to worship him, he was the provider and director behind it all.

Day 250. Psalm 122; 2 Chronicles 1 - 4

Building the Temple

Psalm 122

A song of pilgrims as they enter Jerusalem on their way to worship in the Temple.

2 Chronicles 1 - 4

Throughout this passage, the emphasis is on Solomon's obedience and God's provision. Solomon asked for wisdom to rule God's people well and God answered by providing everything else he needed, in particular the wealth to pay the workmen and to adorn the Temple, and peace to enable trade and co-operation with Tyre. He is an example of someone seeking God's kingdom first, to whom God adds everything they need in abundance (Matthew 6:33).

The Chronicler has greatly elaborated the reasons which brought Solomon to Gibeon to fit in with his concept of worship at the time. The story in 1 Kings admits the existence of various shrines throughout the country, of which Gibeon was the most important (1 Kings 3:2-4). For the Chronicler, the only reason Solomon could be worshipping elsewhere than before the Ark of the Covenant was that Gibeon was the site of the tabernacle and Bezalel's bronze altar. It was this altar on which he sacrificed a thousand offerings. The account of Solomon's wealth in 1:14-end has been moved here from 1 Kings 10:26-29 to show how God answered Solomon's prayer by granting him the wealth he needed to build the Temple.

The Israel of Solomon's day was a very cosmopolitan society in which people of several different cultures lived side by side. The Temple was built on a site donated by a Jebusite (3:1), designed by an inhabitant of Tyre, the son of a mixed marriage (2:13-14) and built by Canaanite inhabitants of the land (2:17-18). By the time of the Chronicler, however, the purity of God's chosen people had become of paramount importance. According to this account, the forced labour Solomon used in building the Temple was all drawn from the non-Israelite population.

There is an ambivalence about the magnificence of the Temple. On the one hand, it must befit the greatest of all gods, but on the other no earthly

building is great enough to reflect the greatness of God (2:5-6). It is emphatically not God's dwelling place, since he dwells in the heavens, but simply a place of sacrifice.

The Chronicler identifies the site of the Temple as Mount Moriah (3:1), the place where Abraham had prepared to sacrifice his son Isaac (Genesis 22:2). Thus it is not only the place where the Lord appeared to David but also where he appeared to Abraham and where he was called "The Lord who provides" (Genesis 22:14). The construction of a Temple is not a new departure in the history of Israel's worship but linked with the past by God's express direction.

Day 251. Psalm 84; 2 Chronicles 5 - 7

The Dedication of the Temple

Psalm 84

Pilgrims on their way to Jerusalem look forward to worshipping God in the Temple.

2 Chronicles 5 - 7

With the new Temple built, it now had to become the centre of Israel's worshipping life. People would have been used to worshipping elsewhere and the shrine at Gibeon had previously been the most important place of worship. Now there was to be a major change and this change needed to be marked with a magnificent celebration.

In chapter 5, the Chronicler describes in detail the ritual which accompanied the procession of the Ark to its final resting place. He emphasises the part played by the Levites as the official carriers of the Ark until they hand it over to the priests to be taken into the Holy of Holies (5:4,7). He also emphasises the continuity with Gibeon, from where the Tent of Meeting was brought up to Jerusalem (5:5). The expression "they are still there today" in 5:9 is imported from 1 Kings 8:8. There was no Ark in the Temple which the Chronicler knew, but the phrase emphasises the permanence of the Ark's final position.

The cloud of the Lord's glory, known as the "Shekinah," filled the Temple (5:13-14) and reminded Solomon and all the people of the tradition of God appearing in a cloud on Mount Sinai (6:1; see Exodus 19:16; Psalms 18:11; 97:2). Solomon's introductory words of praise (6:4-11) emphasised the sovereign grace of God, who chose Israel as his own people and rescued them from Egypt, chose Jerusalem as the place of the Temple, David as the founder of the royal dynasty and Solomon to build and dedicate the Temple. His dedication prayer (6:14-39) emphasised the justice and mercy of God, asking God to judge between the parties in a dispute (6:22-23) and to forgive all those who pray in or towards the Temple in repentance (6:21,24,27,30 etc.). There is a clear recollection of the exile in verses 36-39, a reminder to the community of the Chronicler's own time of their dependence on God's grace and mercy.

At the end of the dedication prayer are three short psalm-like extracts, loosely based on Psalm 132, the psalm which celebrates the journey of the Ark to Jerusalem (6:41-42). They include prayers for the Ark, the priests and people and the king.

The outcome of the whole event was firmly to establish the Temple in the hearts of the people as their central place of worship. Fire fell from heaven to burn up the sacrifices (7:1), just as it had for David when he offered the first sacrifice on the Temple site (1 Chronicles 21:26). The dedication is taking place at the Feast of Tabernacles (5:3) so the worshippers are drawn from all over Israel (7:8). The dedication celebrations double the length of time for the festival (7:9) and the people go home with their hearts filled with joy (7:10).

God's reply to Solomon emphasises both his acceptance of the Temple and the importance of repentance (7:12-16). Some of the later stories in 2 Chronicles tell how God answered prayer in the Temple at Israel's time of need (20:5-12; 33:10-13). But there is a warning to Israel that they must not repeat the error which they made before the exile of believing that the mere existence of the Temple guaranteed God's favour. Only if they kept the law would their prayers be effective (7:17-end).

Day 252. Psalm 99; 2 Chronicles 8 – 12

The End of Israel's Golden Age

Psalm 99

Praise to God who is holy and forgiving.

2 Chronicles 8 - 9

The dedication of the Temple ushered in the Golden Age of the kingdom of Israel, a high point in its history which was never attained again. Solomon expanded his borders (8:1-6) and brought the remaining Canaanite peoples of the land into submission (8:7-10). In the Temple, everything was done according to the instructions laid down by David, the "man of God" (8:14). The result was unparalleled wealth and wisdom. Solomon's kingdom was a wonder of the world. The Queen of Sheba spoke for the nations when she acknowledged the greatness and goodness of the Lord (9:8).

The stories of Solomon's failures recorded in 1 Kings 11 are entirely omitted from the Chronicle, as those of David's failures had been. Instead, the reign of Solomon is portrayed as a period of blessing, to which later generations could aspire through obedience to God's law.

2 Chronicles 10 - 12

In 1 and 2 Kings each of the kings of Israel and Judah is introduced with a judgement on his faithfulness or otherwise to the law of the Lord and in the case of Judah whether or not he walked in the ways of his father David. The Chronicler, however, does not present the kings of Judah as either good or bad, faithful or unfaithful. He portrays them as at times obedient and at times disobedient. Some of his good kings suffer from pride, while some of his bad kings repent and are restored.

The apostasy of Israel, in which Jeroboam was a prime mover (10:2-3), is presented as virtually inevitable, a turn of events which was from God in fulfilment of the words of Ahijah the prophet (10:15). Its effect was to separate out the faithful and the unfaithful in Israel. While Jeroboam's subjects worshipped calf and goat idols, the Levites from the northern kingdom and other faithful people moved to Judah and strengthened Rehoboam's kingdom (11:14-17).

Rehoboam showed his faithfulness by heeding the words of the Lord and turning back from fighting Israel (11:1-4). Instead, he successfully built up the defences his kingdom now required against the new nation of Israel to the north (11:5-12). Although not as wealthy as his father Solomon, he was powerful enough to maintain a large harem, and, like his father, he ruled the kingdom wisely (11:18-end).

The Egyptian attack came only when Rehoboam abandoned the law of the Lord (12:1) and God punished him for his unfaithfulness. But when he repented, God was merciful. Although he had to learn a hard lesson and the kingdom suffered, God continued to protect Judah.

Day 253. Psalm 21; 2 Chronicles 13 - 17

Abijah, Asa and Jehoshaphat

Psalm 21

The King gives thanks to the Lord for granting him victory.

2 Chronicles 13

The story of Abijah's war against Jeroboam is not given in 1 Kings 15. Whereas the account of Abijah's reign in 1 Kings emphasises his fall from the standards of his ancestor David, the Chronicler highlights his faithfulness in contrast to the apostate Jeroboam. Abijah's speech to Jeroboam (13:4-12) is a summary of the way the Chronicler saw the situation. Judah was loyal to the house of David, whom the Lord placed on the throne, while Israel followed its rebel kings. Judah had the true worship: the Temple which the Lord established, priests of the family of Aaron and all the divinely appointed sacrifices, while in Israel worship was offered before the calf images by priests drawn from any family. A "covenant of salt" (13:5) means an inviolable covenant (see Leviticus 2:13; Numbers 18:19). Because of Judah's obedience, Abijah says, "God is with us," and despite being ambushed and outnumbered two to one, Judah was victorious and Jeroboam routed.

But despite the rosy picture the Chronicler presents, there are indications in 14:3,5; 15:8,16-17 and 17:6 that all was not well in Judah even under its "faithful" kings.

2 Chronicles 14 - 16

As in the case of Rehoboam, instead of making a single blanket judgment on Asa's reign, the Chronicler traces the results first of Asa's faithfulness and then of his unfaithfulness. When Asa set out to keep Judah faithful to the Lord in worship the Lord gave him "rest" (14:5,7). Here, the word means simply protection from enemies but there are overtones of the use of the word "rest" in Deuteronomy to mean the land itself (Deuteronomy 12:9; Psalm 95:11) when in 14:7 Asa emphasises to his people that "the land is still ours." The prophecy of Azariah refers to the time of the Judges, remembered not only as a period when Israel was continually unfaithful

but when they lacked the proper divinely ordained forms of worship. 15:5 is an echo of Judges 5:6-8.

Whereas in 1 Kings 15:16-22 the story of Asa's campaign against Baasha and alliance with Syria is told as an example of the Lord's blessing, for the Chronicler it represents a fall from grace. Instead of relying on the Lord, as he had against the previous invasion from the south (14:11), Asa relied on strategy and foreign alliances (16:7). As a result, Asa forfeited the rest he had previously enjoyed, began to harden his heart and was punished with a disease of his feet.

2 Chronicles 17

Jehoshaphat was remembered by the Chronicler as an outstandingly good king because of the Levitical teaching mission which he set up. It was important to him that not only the religious professionals but the whole people knew the law and could follow it from their hearts. The results of Jehoshaphat's faithfulness were even more outstanding than Abijah's and Asa's as the fear of the Lord fell on all the surrounding kingdoms (17:10).

Day 254. Psalm 20; 2 Chronicles 18 - 20

The Victory of Faith

Psalm 20

A prayer for the king.

2 Chronicles 18

This chapter is copied almost verbatim from the source in 1 Kings 22, with one significant change in verse 31. During the battle Jehoshaphat escaped because the Lord helped him (18:31) but Ahab, even though disguised, was killed (18:33-34).

Jehoshaphat had advised Ahab to seek counsel of the Lord before going into battle because he was unhappy with the advice given by the court prophets (18:4-6). Micaiah stood out as a true prophet both because he had access to the Lord's counsel and was party to a secret which Zedekiah and the others did not know about (18:23-24) and also because his words came true (18:27).

2 Chronicles 19

Like Asa, Jehoshaphat was condemned by one of the prophets (this time known as a "seer") for acting in alliance with an ungodly ruler rather than relying on God alone (19:1-3). The account of how Jehoshaphat appointed judges to go with the teaching mission he organised in chapter 17 is placed here to illustrate his response to Jehu's warning and lead in to the story in chapter 20.

2 Chronicles 20

This time when he was attacked Jehoshaphat relied on the Lord alone (20:12). With all the people, he went to the Temple to pray for help, remembering the promise made by the Lord in answer to Solomon's dedication prayer (20:8-9). The Lord's reply was given through a prophet, not like one of Ahab's court prophets with their elaborate frenzied rituals, but a Levite and member of the Temple staff (20:14). The message was that the king did not need to seek political help. He could safely rely on the Lord to save him.

Going into battle with the singers in the front rank was not done as a way of winning it, but as a demonstration of faith in God who had promised that Judah would not have to fight (20:17). Like many of the psalmists, Jehoshaphat and his people were thanking God in advance for the answer he had promised (see Psalm 6:8-10; 20:6-9). In the same way, after the plunder, they gathered to offer praise (20:26).

After this victory the fear of the Lord fell on the surrounding nations just as it had early in Jehoshaphat's reign (20:29; 17:10). But the Chronicler knew that even the most faithful kings could still go wrong. The high places were not completely removed, the people's hearts were not completely turned to the Lord (20:33) and Jehoshaphat still had time to make another ill-fated alliance with Israel (20:35-37).

Day 255. Psalm 4; 2 Chronicles 21 - 24

Idolatry and Defeat

Psalm 4

To trust in God brings joy and inner peace even in a time of trouble.

2 Chronicles 21

Jehoshaphat had pursued a policy of peace with Israel and married his eldest son, Jehoram, to Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel. This policy and the marriage brought the infection of Israel's style of politics and religion right into the centre of Judah's national life. Jehoram began his reign in the same way as many of the previous kings of Israel, by murdering all possible rivals to the throne, even his own brothers (21:4; 1 Kings 15:27-29; 16:8-11). The result was immediate and devastating: judgement on the nation in the form of the revolts of Edom and Libnah and then judgement on the king himself. He had killed his own brothers, and his sons and wives were carried off by the invading Arabs. Finally he died of a painful disease.

The Chronicler records a letter to Jehoram from Elijah the prophet. If he was really the author, Elijah must have been very old. The Chronicler would know him as the greatest of prophets and associated with the reign of Ahab. In the time of Elijah, prophecy was almost always spoken, but the Chronicler lived in a time when the written record of prophecies which had been ignored in their time was becoming more important. This passage reflects a belief in the power of the written word.

2 Chronicles 22:1-9

The Chronicler is confused about Ahaziah's age at the start of his reign: 2 Kings 8:26 confirms that he was 22 rather than 42. As the son of Athaliah, Ahaziah was a descendant of Jezebel and his fate became linked to his mother's side of the family rather than his father's. With his uncle Joram king of Israel he could hardly have resisted the pressure to combine with Israel in war, and this led him to his God-ordained death at the hands of Jehu (22:7).

2 Chronicles 22:10 - 24:end

For the Chronicler, the coup against Athaliah which put Joash on the throne was the work of the priests and Levites. They rather than the royal bodyguard carried it out (23:4-5) and the Chronicler adds the characteristic notes about the singers (23:13) and doorkeepers (23:19). There is also more stress on the restoration of the true Davidic succession (23:3). The restoration of the Temple was carried out according to the true design given to David (24:13; see 1 Chronicles 28:19) and paid for with the tax imposed by Moses for the support of the tabernacle in the wilderness (24:6; see Exodus 30:11-16).

At a time when there was no king and high priests had considerable power, Jehoiada was remembered as a high priest who was outstanding for his faithfulness and for all the good he had done in Israel (the whole united nation: 24:15-16). He lived to a truly patriarchal age and was buried with the kings, in sharp contrast to the fate of Jehoram (21:20).

The unfaithfulness of Joash, forsaking the counsel of the prophets and priests for that of the officials, was immediately punished with invasion. Joash embraced alien gods (24:18) and his fate was to be murdered by foreigners (24:25-26).

As part of the Writings, the books of Chronicles came towards the end of the Hebrew Bible, so that whereas Abel is the first martyr in the Bible, Zechariah is the last (see Matthew 23:34-35).

Day 256. Psalm 3; 2 Chronicles 25 - 28

Recovery and Relapse

Psalm 3

Peace of heart that comes from trusting in God for protection.

2 Chronicles 25

Amaziah dismissed his hired Israelite soldiers, relied on the Lord and was successful. He brought back the idols from the defeated Edomites and was defeated.

2 Chronicles 26

Uzziah began to rebuild the strength of the kingdom. He restored the borders to their widest extent since the reign of Solomon, subduing the Philistines and the Arabs in the south and imposing tribute on the Ammonites. He increased the prosperity of the countryside by digging cisterns so that livestock could be kept in the dry season. He also built up the strength of the army and improved the fortifications of Jerusalem.

But according to the Chronicler, pride was his downfall. Uzziah trespassed on the rights of the priests and was struck with leprosy. Although continuing to govern he retired from public life during the closing years of his reign and Jotham his son had a long period as co-regent.

2 Chronicles 27

Having reigned alongside his father for so long, Jotham continued his father's policies after his death, although he did not attempt to suppress the worship of gods other than the Lord.

2 Chronicles 28

This chapter fills in some details of the Syro-Ephraimite war, which is described in Isaiah 7 and 8 as well as 2 Kings 16:5-9. However, it still does not give a clear picture of the political situation of the time. After a long period of relative weakness, during which Judah and Israel thrived under kings Uzziah and Jeroboam II, Assyria began to expand in the west again. Rezin of Syria and Pekah of Israel were trying to force Ahaz to join an alliance against Assyria, which he refused. In fact, the advance of Syria and

Ephraim on Jerusalem was only stopped when Ahaz turned to Assyria for help. In return for Assyrian help, he had to acknowledge the Assyrian emperor as his overlord, paying tribute and adopting the worship of Assyrian gods.

The Chronicler contrasts the Israelite soldiers, who listened to one of the Lord's prophets, with Ahaz, who turned to Assyria for help. Since he refused to rely on the Lord, the cycle of defeat and more unfaithfulness became a vicious circle (28:22-23).

Day 257. Psalm 81; 2 Chronicles 29 - 31

Hezekiah

Psalm 81

A psalm for the Passover. The call to praise includes mention of the music to be used. Then follows a prophetic section reminding Israel of God's goodness and their own fickleness and calling them to renewed faithfulness.

2 Chronicles 29 - 31

The Chronicler emphasises that Hezekiah's reform began as soon as he ascended the throne. Not only was it in the first month of the first year (29:3) but the consecration of the Temple began on the first day of the first month (29:17) and when it was finished everyone rejoiced that it had been completed so speedily (29:36). The consecration took eight days for the Temple courts and eight days for the Temple itself (29:17), which suggests that the priests and Levites were working hard.

Having cleansed the Temple the way was clear for it to be used for sacrifices once again. The first is the sin offering for the kingdom (29:21). This was to atone for the guilt of the kingdom as a corporate entity after the years of unfaithfulness (29:24). As usual, the writer dwells on the music which accompanied the sacrifice (29:25-28). With the kingdom cleansed the way was clear for individuals to bring their own sacrifices (29:31).

The celebration of the Passover followed as soon as possible. Rather than wait a whole year for the proper time to come round again, Hezekiah arranged the festival for the second month (30:2). In addition, he sent out invitations to the people still living in the northern kingdom of Israel, which had just been destroyed by the Assyrians and its leading citizens taken into exile. The king's letter of invitation echoes the appeals of Hosea to the Israelites to "return" to the Lord (30:6; Hosea 14:1) and his promise of healing and restoration if they did so (30:9; Hosea 14:4-8). Hosea had been active until only a few months prior to Hezekiah's invitation and may even still have been alive. But like Hosea, Hezekiah found few of the Israelites willing to respond (30:10-11).

This first Passover saw a good deal of bending of the rules. Not only did it take place in the second month, but the people from Israel were allowed to celebrate it without first going through the elaborate rituals of consecration (30:17-20) and an extra seven days were added to the celebration (30:23). Nevertheless, the enthusiasm that the movement of renewal generated quickly spread from Jerusalem to the other towns of Judah (31:1). The generosity of the people in bringing their tithes (31:5-8) echoes the generosity of those who contributed towards the building of the Temple (1 Chronicles 29:6-9) and the tabernacle (Exodus 35:21; 36:3-7).

Day 258. Psalm 48; 2 Chronicles 32:1 - 34:13

The Relapse into Paganism

Psalm 48

God defends Jerusalem, his holy city, against the attacks of her enemies.

2 Chronicles 32

From this point onwards the Chronicler no longer incorporates passages directly from 2 Kings. Instead, he carefully rewrites them to provide a coherent account of the events leading up to the destruction of Jerusalem. He wanted to be sure that the people of his day learned the lesson of its fall and eventual restoration correctly.

In chapter 32 the story of the Assyrian attack on Jerusalem provides a shorter and consistent narrative. Instead of an attempt to fortify the city which failed (2 Kings 18:13-16) followed by two attacks by the Assyrians, the first foiled by a rumour from Egypt (2 Kings 19:7-8), the second by miraculous divine intervention (2 Kings 19:35-36), in Chronicles we have one coherent account in which Hezekiah both made military preparations and relied on the Lord, and the Lord intervened to deliver him.

The Chronicler also knew the traditions of Hezekiah's illness and the visit from the Babylonian envoys over which he had been rebuked by Isaiah (2 Kings 20) and he has provided an interesting interpretation of both these episodes. He associates Hezekiah's illness with pride (32:24-26), as in the case of the otherwise faithful kings, Asa and Uzziah (16:7-12; 26:16-21) and he interprets the visit of the Babylonians as a test of his faithfulness (32:31).

2 Chronicles 33

Manasseh was the worst king in Judah's history. Not only did he return the country to idolatry and paganism, but he made it worse than any of the nations which had preceded Israel (33:9). But even at this low point, the Chronicler saw the grace of God at work. Manasseh reaped the consequences of his unfaithfulness and was carried into exile in Assyria. Whilst in exile, he repented and God moved even the powerful Assyrian empire on behalf of this, the worst of kings, to return him from exile (33:10-17).

2 Chronicles 34:1-13

In contrast to Hezekiah, who embarked on his reform programme from the first day of his reign, the Chronicle emphasises the gradual nature of Josiah's reforms. It was not until the eighth year of his reign that he began to seek the Lord, not until the twelfth year that the reform began and not until the eighteenth that a start was made on the repair of the Temple (34:3,8). However, in contrast to 2 Kings 22 and 23, Josiah's reform reached as far as the territory of the former nation of Israel before the Book of the Law was found. Unlike the writers of the Deuteronomic history, for whom the discovery of the Book was a decisive turning point, the Chronicler looked back from a point further removed in time, aware that judgement on Jerusalem had already been decreed (34:23-25).

Day 259. Psalm 79; 2 Chronicles 34:14 - 36:end

Josiah and the Exile

Psalm 79

The remnant of the people of Judah left in the land after the exile pray for God to deliver them from the shame of Jerusalem's fall and the destruction of the Temple and the taunts of the neighbouring countries.

2 Chronicles 34:14 - 36:end

The emphasis in the final chapters of the Chronicle is on the continuity between the First and Second Temple. The exile is portrayed as a God-ordained interlude in the worship of Jerusalem caused by his people's unfaithfulness, whose end had been prophesied by Jeremiah before it began (36:21). This verse also refers to the passage in the priestly "Holiness Code", which also portrays the exile as a God-given period of rest (Leviticus 26:27-45). This continuity was important for the Chronicler, whose purpose was to portray the worship of his own day, about 350 B.C., as the direct and legitimate successor of the worship first established by David and Solomon (see, for example, 35:3-4).

The discovery of the Book of the Law during Josiah's repair of the Temple is not portrayed as a spur to thoroughgoing reform throughout both Israel and Judah as in 2 Kings, since Josiah had already embarked on these (34:4-7). What the Book did was to indicate the penalty for Judah's past unfaithfulness, which was confirmed by the prophetess Huldah. Josiah renewed the covenant and made all the people do the same, but nothing he could do could prevent the judgement that was to come.

Just as Josiah's reforms did not get off the ground with the same speed as those of Hezekiah, Josiah's Passover did not reach the heights of Hezekiah's, despite the comment of 35:18. The Chronicler has omitted the comment of the author of 2 Kings on Josiah's outstanding faithfulness (2 Kings 23:25), another reflection on the fact that nothing he could do could prevent the coming judgment. Instead, his decision to fight the king of Egypt is put down to disobedience (35:22).

The result of Josiah's defeat at the hands of Egypt was to bring Judah into the Egyptian empire. Despite being younger than his brother (36:2,5),

Jehoahaz had been put on the throne as an act of defiance, but the only result was to bring down Pharaoh's wrath on his head. Jehoahaz was exiled to Egypt and Jehoiakim appointed puppet ruler in his place.

Unfortunately for Jehoiakim the tide in international affairs was turning in favour of Babylon. In 2 Kings 24:6 his death is recorded at the height of the siege of Jerusalem. The Chronicler assumed that this must have been at the hands of the Babylonians, who at least intended to take him into exile, even if the passage is not clear about whether he actually went (36:6). His son Jehoiachin was quickly replaced with another puppet king, Zedekiah.

Zedekiah summed up the failings of Judah's kings which led to the exile: he was proud, he refused to listen to the prophets and he allowed the people to become more and more unfaithful (36:12-16). Eventually the judgement which the prophets had foretold arrived and Nebuchadnezzar devastated the city and destroyed the Temple, carrying off the sacred vessels to Babylon.

The importance of these vessels for Israel's worship is shown by the fact that their removal to Babylon is mentioned three times (36:7,10,18). When the exile was over they were returned to Jerusalem and a full list is given in Ezra 1:7-11. Although Solomon's Temple had been destroyed, the sacred vessels provided continuity with the Second Temple. The building of the second Temple following the return from exile is the subject of the book of Ezra.
