

Reading Chronicles, Part I

First and Second Chronicles pose a unique challenge to contemporary readers. In particular, why does 1 Chronicles begin with nine chapters of genealogies, and why are they laid out this way? Perhaps, at this point, you are, at best, tempted to skip over these chapters, or at worst, tempted to give up on the reading plan altogether. Don't give up. Keep reading. Here are a few thoughts on why these genealogies are included and how they are laid out...

First, the author began his history (written sometime between 515-390 BC—after the Babylonian exile) with genealogies in order to answer some key questions raised by the confusing post-exilic experience of his audience: *who are the people of God? What privileges and responsibilities do they have?* They deal with their potential crisis of identity, resulting from exile. The genealogies not only point to their past connection with the promises of God, but also point forward to certain theological themes that are developed throughout 1-2 Chronicles.

Second, there is a structure and symmetry to chapters 1-9. It begins with a prelude of sorts—briefly summarizing the historical roots of Israel, in terms of the ancestors of the twelve tribes (1:1-2:2). At the center of these chapters, there is a focus on the extent and order of the twelve tribes (2:1-9:1a). Lastly, it concludes with a brief account of the descendants of the twelve tribes who were among the returned exiles, including a brief reiteration of Saul's line as a lead into chapter 10 (9:1b-34).

Third, there seems to be a special focus on two tribes: Judah and Levi. Richard Pratt sums this up well:

This focal point in the postexilic community stemmed from a concern for kingship and temple—that is, the search for a true king and a true priest to lead and intercede for God's people in the restoration period. Of course, this search does not cease until we come to the genealogies of Matthew, when we discover that Jesus is both the King and the Priest anticipated by these lists ("1-2 Chronicles," in *A Biblical-Theological Introduction to the Old Testament*, 530).

Lastly, we need to remember that genealogies found in the Bible do not necessarily function the same way as modern genealogies. Whereas modern ones tend to function like family trees, with every generation listed, biblical ones follow a variety of forms and served many different functions. For example, some purposely skip generations and highlight certain individuals and events relevant to the author's purposes and concerns.

I hope these considerations have been a help. Keep reading!

Jason Hunt

Reading Chronicles, Part II

Last week, we sought to answer the question, *why are there nine chapters of genealogies at the beginning of 1 Chronicles?* This week, we will seek to answer the question, *why do we have 1-2 Chronicles at all, since they largely cover the same events as 2 Samuel and 1-2 Kings?* There are at least two important considerations in answer to this question.

First, 1-2 Chronicles was written later than 2 Samuel and 1-2 Kings. The former was probably written sometime between 515-390 BC, whereas the latter were written and compiled prior to and during the exile. 1-2 Chronicles had a later audience with a different set of circumstances than 2 Samuel and 1-2 Kings. Hence, they answer different questions. The earlier books sought to answer the question, ‘why did this [exile] happen to us?’ Chronicles answers the question, ‘are God’s promises to Israel, David, and Jerusalem still valid for us?’ This brings us to our next consideration.

Second, while there is a more negative tone in Kings, there is a more *positive* tone to Chronicles. For example, there is an omission of Solomon’s downfall due to intermarriages, and the inclusion of Manasseh’s repentance – which are not found in Kings. The general purpose of Chronicles was to provide a theological analysis of Israel’s history in order to *encourage the restoration of the post-exilic community*. This was needed for a number of reasons: many had not yet returned to the land, the reforms had small beginnings, Israel was still under foreign power, the rebuilding efforts were not as glorious as those in the past, and there was concern over the establishment of a new Davidic-king. Considering all of this, the theme of Chronicles could be summed up as follows: *The Lord of history will fulfill his promises regarding the future Kingdom of God, just as He has done in the past.*

These two considerations help us to understand some of the reasons why Chronicles was written and included in the Bible. Keep reading and be encouraged by the hopeful message of God’s word!

Jason Hunt

Reading Chronicles, Part III

Chronicles and Christ

Whenever we read the Old Testament (OT), we should look for how it speaks of Christ. This is not reading into it what may not be there, because Jesus himself told us He *is* there—not just in a few places, but throughout (cf. Luke 24:25-27, 44-47; John 5:39, 46; 1 Pet 1:10-11). So, the question is not ‘where is he in the OT?’ but ‘*how* is he spoken of?’

That brings us to Chronicles. Some OT books are perhaps more obvious in how they speak of Christ (e.g., Isaiah), but what about an historical book like Chronicles? Indeed, there are a variety of ways that Christ is spoken about in a given book. In light of the beautifully complex tapestry of God’s word, where should one begin? One helpful rule of thumb to rightly connect an OT book to Christ is to identify its main themes and ask, *how does Jesus fulfill these themes in his person and work (both, in his first coming and second coming)?*

Some important themes in Chronicles include:

1. The Davidic Covenant
2. The Temple
3. The People of God

Note that each of the above have further sub-thematic connections by which one could explore more Christ connections. For example, the ‘Davidic Covenant’ contains promises regarding kingship and kingdom. The kingdom is also connected to ‘land’ and ‘inheritance’ and so on. In addition, we should ask how the covenant promises associated with the Davidic Covenant are consistent and connected with other covenant promises in Scripture (e.g., Abrahamic, Mosaic, etc.)

With each of these themes, you could begin asking the rule of thumb question mentioned above. Also, look for New Testament (NT) passages which speak to these themes and ask: ‘how do the NT authors connect them to Christ?’ ‘How do they use the OT to do so?’

One of the most exciting things about reading and studying God’s word is being freshly captivated by the depth and beauty of Christ displayed throughout Scripture. Keep reading.

Jason Hunt

Reading Chronicles: *Making Sense of the Census...*

In 1 Chronicles 21:1, we read, "...*Satan stood against Israel and incited David to number Israel.*" David proceeds to do just that, taking a census of the people. The context clearly directs the reader to see this action as a sin (v.1, 3, 6, 7, 8, 17). Why was it sinful? It would seem that David is acting out of pride and presumption concerning military power, tending toward dependence on resources rather than the Lord. However, when we read about the same incident in 2 Sam 24:1, things get complicated: "*Again the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and He [the Lord] incited David against them, saying, 'Go, number Israel and Judah.'*" Interpreting Scripture with Scripture, *how do we make sense of this?*

First, we know that Scripture doesn't contradict itself. Hence, it appears that Chronicles clarifies 2 Sam 24:1 – "that God did not directly tempt David to sin; he did this through the instrumentality of Satan" (Pratt, *1-2 Chronicles*, 231). The two descriptions are not contradictory, but complementary, looking at the same event from different angles. This brings us to our second point.

Second, we know that God uses sin, even Satan himself, to accomplish his purposes. For example, what Joseph's brothers meant for evil, God meant for good in and through the life of Joseph (Gen 50:20). Moreover, Christ's crucifixion was carried out by the hands of sinful men, but also according to the predestined plan of God (Acts 4:27-28). In fact, this is quite common in Scripture—think of God's sovereign use of sinful nations to punish and discipline His people for their sins. Clearly, God does not tempt anyone (James 1:13), but He permits temptation (and 'inciting') to test believers, even Christ himself (e.g., Matt 4:1-10). While Satan tempts for destructive purposes, God tests us for *constructive* purposes.

This leads us to consider the doctrine of *providence* revealed in Scripture. In particular, David's census raises the issue of *concurrency*. Concurrency is God's providence, with respect to man's activity. It affirms that God, as the primary cause of all things, works through man's actions (secondary causes) in such a way that man's actions are not undermined, but rather established. There are two common errors to avoid in thinking about concurrency. First, the Bible does not teach a 'division of labor' idea—that God does 'his part' and man does 'his part,' independently of God. Rather, God is involved in all our actions. Second, the Bible does not teach that God is the 'Author' (i.e. 'doer') of sin. Rather, the Holy One actively permits and uses man's sin to accomplish His holy purposes. This is certainly the case with the greatest evil and injustice in human history—the crucifixion of Christ. Indeed, there is mystery involved in understanding concurrency, but because of who our God is, it is not a mystery to be afraid of, but one to embrace with wonder and faith! For a good, concise summary of providence, see: Westminster Confession of Faith, chapter 5 (cf. chapter 3).

You see that in order to properly address the questions raised by 1 Chron 21:1 we must appeal to a host of other passages which shed light on it. Not only do other passages help answer these questions, they also help us to understand what the answers to those questions *cannot* be. Keep reading!

Jason Hunt

Reading Chronicles: *How should we apply the prayer of Jabez (1 Chron 4:10)?*

First Chronicles 4:10 records a very brief prayer by Jabez which was answered by God. This prayer became well-known through a popular book written about it in 2000. To many, this prayer became one of the most important prayers to pray, as a formula for personal blessing and prosperity. To others, it was dismissed as merely a health-and-wealth gospel tool. However, it is part of Scripture and must be dealt with accordingly. So, the question for us is: *how do we rightly apply the prayer of Jabez to our lives today?*

First, we begin by considering the immediate context. We read in verse 9 that Jabez's name (meaning 'pain' in Hebrew) is highlighted, tied to his mother bearing him in 'pain.' He is described as 'more honorable than his brothers.' It would seem that he was honorable in that he *called upon the name of the Lord* (v.10). In the midst of a long list of the descendants of Judah, why report this extra information? It was directly related to the needs of the author's audience—they had experienced much 'pain' in exile, and Jabez's prayer touched on the issue of land / territory of post-exilic Judah. The author *highlights the way of finding relief from pain, suffering, and territorial expansion: seeking the Lord in prayer!* Indeed, throughout 1 Chronicles, the author highlights that there is reward in seeking the face of the Lord in prayer (5:20-22; 16:35-36; 17:16-27; 20:6-12; etc.). Furthermore, the genealogies in chapters 2-4 focus on David's line, which evoke past covenant promises related to the content of his prayer.

Second, we should consider the larger context of the Bible. Jabez prays for relief from 'pain' and for land expansion. In essence, he is pleading the promises of God. His prayer is not in a vacuum, but rather in the context of the covenant relationship between God and His people, including covenant promises. He is *not* praying merely for his own desires, divorced from what God had previously promised (cf. 'enlarge your borders' [Exod 34:24]; 'rest from pain' [Isa 14:3]). Moreover, relief from 'pain' is tied to the curse of the Fall (Gen 3:16 [same word used in 1 Chron 4:10]), which is ultimately remedied by Christ.

Lastly, we seek to answer the question, *what does it mean for us today?* In name and example, Jabez functions as an encouragement in the midst of suffering to pray to God according to His promises. This is a key principle for biblical prayer. Even the model prayer, the Lord's Prayer, merely pleads the promises of God. Also, we know that Christ is the fulfillment of all of God's covenant promises (they are 'yes' and 'amen' in Him [2 Cor 1:20]). We too, in our sojourning and exile (1 Pet 1:17; 2:11), away from our true home (Phil 3:20), should pray for God's kingdom to come—that it might be enlarged and expanded through gospel proclamation, knowing that one day we will inherit not merely a piece of land, but the New Heavens and New Earth. We should also pray for God's provision for our daily bread, according to His promises.

The bottom line is that rightly praying Jabez's prayer must be rooted in Christ and the promises of God, *not* our own worldly desires severed from those promises. This is what it means to pray according to God's will. He hears and will answer those kinds of prayers.

Keep reading and *praying the promises of God.*

Jason Hunt