



1 Chronicles





Cyril J. Barber, D.Litt., D.Min., D.D., has authored more than thirty books including commentaries on Judges, Ruth, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles, Nehemiah, and Habakkuk and Zephaniah. He taught for twenty-five years on the faculties of the Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Talbot Theological Seminary/Biola University, and the Simon Greenleaf University (now a part of the Trinity International University). Now retired, he lives in Hacienda Heights, California, with his wife Aldyth.





1 Chronicles

*The Faithfulness of God to His Word
Illustrated in the Lives of the
People of Judah*

Cyril J. Barber



CHRISTIAN FOCUS





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Introduction

This is a devotional commentary on the First Book of Chronicles; I have also written, for this series, a commentary on the Second Book of Chronicles. Both commentaries are intended for lay people and leaders of lay Bible study groups (and perhaps pastors who, after they have done research in scholarly expositions, may find a fresh perspective in these pages).

The Book of Chronicles was written to encourage the Israelites who had returned to Judah after seventy years of captivity in Babylon. They had returned to their homeland with high hopes. On seeing the devastation of their cities and homes their spirits were crushed. The Temple was in ruins and their fields were uncultivated. And perhaps uppermost in their minds was the nagging fear that God had forsaken them.

In responding to these fears the Chronicler assured them of God's faithfulness to His word. But how much did they know of their history and of the covenants God had made with His people? Was their zeal purely patriotic, or were they aware of their spiritual heritage? To inspire hope in the hearts of the returned exiles the Chronicler quickly surveyed the history of the Israelites before dealing at length with the covenant God had made with David.

Bible commentaries generally fall into three broad groups (though each group is subject to subdivision and overlap). These are: exegetical, expository, and devotional. **Exegetical** commentaries are scholarly works that focus primarily on the grammar and syntax of the original text. Examples of such works are E. L. Curtis and A. A. Madsen's *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Chronicles* in the International Critical Commentary series, and J. M. Myers' *1 Chronicles* and *2 Chronicles* in the Anchor Bible. **Expositional** studies build on the work of the exegete using the insights gained from such study to expound the biblical writer's theme or purpose. Examples include J. G. McConville's *I and II Chronicles* in the Daily Study



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Bible series, the recent volumes by M. J. Selman entitled *1 Chronicles* and *2 Chronicles* in the Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries series, and J. A. Thompson's excellent *1, 2 Chronicles* in the New American Commentary series. **Devotional** commentaries build upon the contributions of the exegete and the expositor, and seek to apply the teaching of the Word of God to the life of the believer. A recent example is M. Wilcock's *The Message of Chronicles*.¹

Readers of commentaries need to be aware of the biases of commentators. The different points of view are best represented by marks on a horizontal continuum. Liberal and moderately liberal contributions are placed to the left of center and conservative works to the right. Liberal theologians are prone to find discrepancies in the Bible, and contemporary students of religious history have identified them with different negative schools of biblical interpretation. Conservative students of God's Word are more inclined to defend the Bible's accuracy. In the past, conservatives have often exhibited a shallowness in their thinking, paid little or no attention to exegetical matters, worked solely from an English translation, ignored problems, concentrated on the application of truth to the life of the believer, and have often resorted to typology or allegorism. To no one's surprise but their own, they have made little or no lasting impact. And the reason? Their works have given evidence of superficiality, inaccuracy in explaining the nuances of the text, and do not possess the quality of content that would lift them above the ephemeral.

Realizing this danger, I have tried to be thorough in my research. I have read widely, though I have not quoted from all the works I have consulted. Footnotes have been purposeful, for I have not wanted useful information to detract from the explanation of the biblical text – something that a discussion of critical issues is prone to do. However, having already contributed commentaries on the Book(s) of Samuel and the Book(s) of Kings, I have *not* duplicated here references to the works I consulted while preparing these earlier volumes.

Throughout this book I have provided my own translation of the Hebrew text. This does not mean that I lack appreciation for modern translations. I have provided my own translation (which I admit is a literal one) to bring out as clearly as possible the emphases of the original. The reader, with his or her own preferred translation in hand, can then compare the two. In addition, because very few writers have discussed “David’s Mighty Men” I have devoted a few chapters to them.

A lay person may find the opening and closing chapters of First Chronicles a drawback. I have purposely treated these sections *briefly* so as not to bore my readers. A more extensive discussion can be obtained from any number of scholarly works.

At this point a word needs to be said about biblical references. Citations of Scripture in parentheses without mention of the book of the Bible are from 1 or 2 Chronicles (e.g., 20:4). Where references to both 1 and 2 Chronicles occur in the discussion, I have used Roman numerals (e.g., I:4:10 or II:12:8) to differentiate between these two books. Other books of the Bible are cited in full (e.g., Psalm 11:3). Quotations from non-canonical sources like the Apocrypha are identified accordingly (e.g., Apocrypha. Ecclesiasticus 25:6).

What’s in a name?

A question naturally arises, “How did the Book of Chronicles get its name? Other books are called ‘Joshua’ or ‘Judges’ or ‘the Books of Samuel’ or ‘the Books of Kings’.” The name “Chronicles” seems inconsistent.

The Old Testament books were known to the ancient Hebrews by their opening line. Genesis, for example, was known by its first word *Beresit*, “In the beginning,” and Exodus as *Weelleh shemot*, “And these are the names of.” The Book of Chronicles was called *Dibere hayyamim*, “The annals of the days” or “The words of the days.” When the Hebrew Old Testament was translated into Greek, the text of Chronicles was divided into two books. The reason? The Hebrew text was printed without vowels. Greek required vowels and this added significantly to



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the length of each book. At this time the Books of Chronicles were given the dubious title *Paraleipomenon*, “Things Omitted.” Such a title conveyed the impression that the Books of Chronicles comprised addenda to the Books of Samuel and the Books of Kings. This caused them to be relegated to a subordinate position and it became easy to neglect them. It was not until the time of Jerome (4th century AD) that the title *Chronicon totius divinae historiae*, “A Chronicle of the Whole of Sacred History,” was suggested. In the course of time Jerome’s suggestion was adopted, and it has come to be preferred to either the Hebrew or the Greek titles.

Who wrote Chronicles?

It is important for us, whenever we take up a study of a book of the Bible, to find out all we can about the author, when he wrote his book, for whom, and why. These issues can be boring (and, in the hands of some writers, tedious to the point of curing the worst cases of insomnia). I shall attempt to make them easy to understand and, hopefully, interesting.

The question, “Who wrote the Book of Chronicles?” has puzzled many people. Though the work is anonymous, Jewish tradition from the earliest times has claimed that the compiler of this *selective* history was Ezra.² The evidence is not conclusive, but Ezra remains the most likely author. He was a lineal descendant of Phineas, the grandson of Aaron (Ezra 7:1-5), and through his diligent study of the Scriptures he had become a skilled interpreter of the Word of God (Ezra 7:6, 12). It is specifically stated that he “had set his heart to seek the law of Yahweh, and to do [it], and to teach in Israel [His] statutes and judgments” (Ezra 7:10). A careful reading of the Books of Chronicles indicates that only a person of such commitment, and possessed of such knowledge, could have compiled this historical record.

Ezra had been born in exile. While living in Babylonia he gained the favor of King Artaxerxes and, in 458 BC, he was given permission to lead a group of exiles back to Judah. His



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ministry in Jerusalem overlapped the governorship of Nehemiah, who was sent to the “Land Beyond the River [Euphrates]” by Artaxerxes in 445 BC.

The priests in Jerusalem were lax in their observance of the Law, and certain ceremonies (e.g., Passover) had not been performed for many years. The Levites, however, were more devout, and they became the ones whom Ezra used to teach God’s Word to the people.

In addition to being a devoted student of the Scriptures, Ezra was also a man of integrity. On his arrival in Jerusalem he was installed as chief judge with power to settle all disputes arising from the practice of the religion of his people.

All of this is very commendable, but if Ezra did indeed provide a history from the beginning of time to his own era, what sources did he have to draw on? There is data in the Book of Chronicles that indicates that the writer had access to a large library that contained many works of antiquity including the histories of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah. Now it just so happens that in the Apocrypha we are told that Nehemiah, the governor of Judah during the time of Ezra, had a large collection of books that he turned into a “national” library.

The same things are reported in the records and the memoirs of Nehemiah, and also that he founded a library and collected the books about the kings and prophets, and the writings of David, and letters of kings about votive offerings (Apocrypha. 2 Maccabees 2:13).

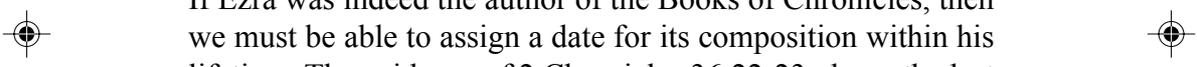
We are pleased to note, therefore, that Ezra had access to material that he cited in the Book(s) of Chronicles. This data included “The Book of the Kings of Judah and Israel,” the “Story of the Book of the Kings,” the “Words of Uzziah composed by Isaiah,” the “Words of Shemaiah the Prophet, and of Iddo the Seer,” a “Midrash of the Prophet Iddo,” the “Words of Jehu the son of Hanani,” the “Words of Hozai,” and the “Book of Nahum the Prophet.” And in the Temple (that had been rebuilt in 516 BC) he had available to him the genealogical records of the different tribes and their families that had been kept for millennia.



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Of interest in this discussion is the fact that 2 Chronicles ends with reference being made to the decree of Cyrus, king of Persia, allowing all Jews to return to Judah (2 Chronicles 36:22-23) and the Book of Ezra begins with the same information (Ezra 1:1-4). Ezra-Nehemiah was obviously intended to continue Ezra's history to his own day. And so, lest someone pick up and read "volume 2" (i.e., the Books of Ezra-Nehemiah) without first reading "volume 1" (i.e., 1 and 2 Chronicles that in his day was one book), he repeated the same event. And, inasmuch as no one seriously disputes Ezra's authorship of the book that bears his name, there is no real reason why we should doubt that he also gave us the Books of Chronicles. Because there is no absolute proof that Ezra was not the author of Chronicles (though we believe he was), we will refer to him as "the chronicler".³

When was Chronicles written?



If Ezra was indeed the author of the Books of Chronicles, then we must be able to assign a date for its composition within his lifetime. The evidence of 2 Chronicles 36:22-23 places the last recorded event at 538 BC. These books, therefore, must have been written after that date. Some writers have raised an objection to Ezra's authorship by pointing to 1 Chronicles 3:19-24 and claiming that it records six generations of Zerubbabel's family. Allowing 20 to 30 years for each generation, it would have been impossible for Ezra to have knowledge of them all.⁴ The books, they claim, could not have been finished before 400 BC. Such evidence, if it were true, would be incompatible with Ezra's authorship.

But we must question whether those who dispute Ezra's authorship have not read into the text the kind of information they want to find in order to support their theories. Zerubbabel is of importance because he was a descendant of King David. The way in which his children are recorded implies that they were brothers and sister, not six successive generations.⁵ There is no reason, therefore, why the Books of Chronicles could not have been completed before 400 BC.

What is the theme of Chonicles?

The Books of Chronicles contain a history that is highly selective.⁶ Obviously everything that had happened from the dawn of time could not be included. Nor could all of the events of each era (from the time of the Patriarchs to the kings) be contained in a single book. Ezra, as a capable historian, singled out certain events that were important to those for whom his work was intended. He was not a historian in our western sense of the word. To him Israel's history was pregnant with spiritual and moral lessons. These he presented in a way that would edify and encourage his readers.⁷

Ezra's readers had returned from captivity in Babylonia to find the city of Jerusalem in ruins. They had tried repeatedly to rebuild its walls, only to be hindered by those who lived in the northern province of Samaria. For the Jews to live in a city without a protecting wall was to endure the reproach of all the people who lived about them. They were also an easy target for whoever wanted to plunder their possessions. Each time they suffered from a predatory raid they were left clinging to life and eking out a meager existence. And these experiences caused them to feel forsaken by the Lord who in times past had protected them. It was natural, therefore, for the Jews to question God's continued involvement in their national life. Were they still His chosen people? Could they still rely on Him for His help? With no king of David's line sitting on his throne, what had become of the Davidic covenant? To be sure, David's descendants were living among them, but had God's promise of an enduring dynasty been abrogated by their disobedience?

Ezra wrote to assure the people of God's faithfulness to His Word. He explained to them the reason for the exile and assured them of the Lord's continued involvement in their lives.⁸ He also sought to encourage them in the pursuit of godliness in spite of their circumstances. While the monarchy might no longer be in effect, the theocracy was. The Lord still had His representatives (administrative/judicial, priestly/spiritual, and prophetic) whose task it was to rule on His behalf. By living in



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obedience to His Word (something their ancestors had failed to do), they could honor Him and be the recipients of His blessing.

The theme of the Books of Chronicles, therefore, is the continued faithfulness of God to His Word; and the way in which His people could enjoy His blessing was to obey and serve Him.⁹

When was Chronicles placed in the canon?

The term “canon” comes from the Greek *kanon* which means a “straight rod, ruler.” In the course of time the word came to be applied to literature and intimated that a person’s writings conformed to a specific rule or standard. In the case of the Scriptures, the words “canon” and “canonicity” apply to those books that bear the marks of divine inspiration (2 Timothy 3:16). In the Old Testament the usage of the word “canon” is restricted to the 39 books that the Jewish community considered to be inspired. It does not include the books of the Apocrypha, even though these writings are included in some Bibles.

The Old Testament canon was divided into sections: *The Law* (Genesis–Deuteronomy); *The Former Prophets* (Joshua–2 Kings); *The Latter Prophets* (Isaiah–Malachi); the *Writings* (including both poetic and wisdom books – Psalms, Proverbs, Job, including Rolls [Song of Solomon, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, and Esther]); and concluded with the historical books (written after the close of the Law and the Former Prophets) – viz., Daniel, Ezra–Nehemiah, and 1 and 2 Chronicles. The first part of the canon closed after Moses finished writing Deuteronomy. The second part likewise closed when Jeremiah had finished penning the history of the kings of Israel and Judah. When the writings that comprised the third part of the canon were completed, this part of the canon was likewise closed. And information not included in the other sections, but which the Jews desired to preserve because of its intrinsic quality, namely, *The Writings*, was closed with the addition of the single scroll containing Chronicles.¹⁰

OUTLINE

An outline of the contents of the Books of Chronicles will reveal the scope of the material we shall cover.

I. THE ROYAL LINE OF DAVID (1:1–9:44)

- A. The Genealogy from Adam to Abraham (1:1-27)
- B. The Genealogy from Abraham to Jacob (1:28-54)
- C. The Genealogy from Jacob to David (2:1-55)
- D. The Genealogy from David to the Captivity (3:1-24)
- E. The Genealogy of the Twelve Tribes (4:1–8:40)
- F. The Genealogy of the Returned Remnant (9:1-34)
- G. The Genealogy of Israel's First King (9:35-44)

II. THE REIGN OF DAVID (10:1–29:30)

- A. The Enthronement of David (10:1–12:40)
 - 1. The Death of King Saul (10:1-14)
 - 2. The Anointing of King David (11:1-3)
 - 3. The Conquest of Jerusalem (11:4-9)
 - 4. David's Mighty Men (11:10–12:22)
 - 5. The Men of Israel Who Came to Hebron to Make David King (12:23-40)
- B. The Enthronement of the Ark (13:1–17:27)
 - 1. Improper Transportation of the Ark (13:1-14)
 - 2. Digression: God's Blessings (14:1-17)
 - 3. Proper Transportation of the Ark (15:1-29)
 - 4. Celebration in Jerusalem (16:1-43)
 - 5. Institution of the Davidic Covenant (17:1-27)
- C. David's Military Victories (18:1–20:8)
- D. David's Preparation and Organization of Yahweh's Worship (21:1–27:34)
- E. David's Last Days (28:1–29:30)
 - 1. Final Exhortations (28:1-10)
 - 2. Final Provision for the Temple (28:11–29:9)



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3. Final Prayer and Thanksgiving (29:10-19)
4. Coronation of Solomon (29:20-25)
5. David's Death (29:26-30)

III. THE HISTORY OF KING SOLOMON (2 Chronicles 1:1–9:31)

- A. Solomon's Wealth and Wisdom (1:1-17)
- B. His Building and Dedication of the Temple (2:1–7:22)
- C. His Various Activities and Death (8:1–9:31)

IV. THE HISTORY OF THE KINGS OF JUDAH (10:1–36:23)

- A. From Rehoboam to Zedekiah (10:1–36:21)
- B. The Edict of Cyrus (36:22-23).

Other matters will be treated in the exposition of the text.

In closing, I would like to thank Mrs. Kevin (Jan) Hussey for her kindness in reading through the manuscript and making many suggestions for its improvement. Her labor of love is greatly appreciated!

