

What's In a Name? (1 Chr 1-9)

Building a House for God's Name: Studies in 1 & 2 Chronicles

I. REVIEW: THE SITUATION AND PURPOSE OF CHRONICLES

- A. The books of Chronicles are an important part of the OT canon. Within these books we find a remarkably rich theological telling of Israel's history with a particular focus on the Davidic royal dynasty and the centrality of the Temple in the life of Israel's worship.
- B. These books provide a necessary perspective on Israel's story (and therefore our story as the people of God) and are a needed supplement to Biblical theology. To rightly understand these books, it is important to understand the situation and purpose for which they were written.
- C. As we saw last week, the opening verses of 1 Chronicles 9 give several pieces of information that situate the writing of the Chronicles as after the *Babylonian exile* when the people of Israel were *returning to the land*.
- D. The primary purpose of the author of Chronicles seems to be an attempt to remind the people of God that their distinction is in rightly ordered worship to the Lord. As they returned to the land (without a Davidic king upon the throne and without national sovereignty) they might be tempted to believe that God has failed in his promises toward them. However, the author of the Chronicles wants the people of God to see that the land, the temple, and even the throne were never the *primary things* that gave shape to their identity, purpose, and success as a nation. Rather, their identity was to be built upon the extravagant and wholehearted worship of the Lord that was to exist at the center of their corporate life together.

II. READING GENEALOGIES

- A. Few parts of the Scripture are more difficult for the modern reader than genealogies. Being far removed from the national identities and family histories contained within them, we often fail to grasp their meaning, find ourselves getting bogged down in difficult names that seem pointless to us, and therefore are often tempted to not engage these portions of the Scripture at all.
- B. Yet, the sheer space devoted to genealogies at times in the Scripture (and specifically the extent of the genealogies contained in 1 Chronicles) demonstrate their importance to the Biblical authors. Although this importance may be removed from us as modern readers, we must at least consider the reality that such matters were of great concern to the initial audiences.
- C. To uncover some of the importance related to Biblical genealogies (in general) and these chapters of Chronicles (in specific) we must understand several things that will help us learn to *read them*. These include understanding general purposes, understanding their structures, and understanding their style.
- D. *Understanding the Purposes of Genealogies*
 - 1. Genealogies *tie the present situation to the past*. One of the primary reasons to include genealogies (this is specific in Chronicles as well) is to demonstrate that the present readers possessed a dynamic tie to God's purposes that had unfolded before. To recount these family lines does more than just tell a family history, it reminds people how they are situated within God's story.
 - 2. Genealogies *demonstrate God's fidelity to his purposes*. Closely tied to situating the present reader with God's purposes in the past is the reality that genealogies *implicitly* demonstrate God's faithfulness to his promises and his purposes. The names in the genealogies give rise to stories in the minds of the hearers, and we are to remember that God has been faithful to fulfill his word thus far (in spite of the weakness and sin of people). This is meant to fill us with faith that he will *yet again* be faithful.

3. Genealogies *give a history of how the nations were situated in relation to God's people*. Not only do the genealogies situate God's people with what God had done in the past, they also help to situate them among the nations. Israel was always to remember that their story was only a part of the broader story of God's redemptive purposes in the world. They were tied to the nations of the earth, and though they were called out by God to be a people for his possession, in many ways they were *just like the nations* and their calling was meant to be *for the sake of the nations*.
 4. Genealogies *highlight important historical, vocational, and ethical realities*. Through different stylistic cues (see below), the composers of the genealogies seek to shape the way that the readers think about events in history, about different vocations (in Chronicles — the king and the priests), or ethical realities (responding to God, disobedience, etc.). These realities give subtle insights into the author's worldview, their intentions, and even the narrative structure.
- E. **Understanding the Structure of Genealogies:** Broadly speaking, there are two types of genealogy in the OT Scripture. These each follow a specific pattern and are intended to highlight different things.
1. **Linear:** these arrange the lists of names through one line (i.e., Adam to Abraham in 1 Chronicles 1.1-27).
 2. **Segmented:** these move laterally through family lines by highlighting several siblings. In Chronicles this type is often used to demonstrate *primacy* among a particular brother.
- F. **Understanding the Style of Genealogies:** There are several reading practices that can help us along as we read through the genealogies.
1. **Narrative comments:** As you read the genealogies, take note of times when the author breaks the flow of the list of names to highlight and make comment on a particular name. These comments are often instructive toward catching elements of the author's intentions and worldview that will be expressed later in the narrative (e.g., the prayer of Jabez in 1 Chr 4.9-10 reinforces the author's purpose to call the people of God to seek the Lord's presence and strength continually).
 2. **Break in birth order:** This style is utilized often in the genealogies of Chronicles. Often the author will introduce a group of siblings in birth order and then trace their genealogies out of birth order. This is likely done for several reasons. First, in order that the author to call attention to a specific line that is important for his narrative purposes (e.g., Judah is highlighted first, although he is the fourth born of Israel, because of the importance of the Davidic royal line in Chronicles). Second, this demonstrates a theological truth that God does not choose to accomplish his purposes according to the ways that man would choose (cf. 1 Sam 16.6-7).
 3. **Space given:** The author is attempting to highlight the importance of certain families and lineages through the amount of space and attention given to them. In Chronicles, for example, most of the emphasis is placed on the lines of Judah and Levi, while the line of Naphtali receives one verse.

III. THE STORY OF I CHRONICLES I-9

- A. The first nine chapters of Chronicles serve as an introduction for the work as a whole. These chapters introduce the situation, the worldview, the intentions, and the main themes of the work that is to follow.
- B. **From Adam to Israel (1 Chr 1.1-2.2)**
1. The book begins with the father of all humanity, Adam. This demonstrates the *global* scope of the author's work. He desires to situate the people of God with the purposes of God that have been unfolding since the creation of the world.
 2. The author traces the line of Adam to Abram through Seth, following closely the genealogies of Genesis.

3. It is important for the purposes of the Chronicler for us to recognize that many of these names would be filled with a world of meaning behind them. The author assumes that his hearers are familiar with the Scripture — not only the stories themselves, but the theological meaning and shape of the stories.
4. Beginning with Adam, we are brought back to the *fundamental purpose* for humanity — both in its priestly and kingly dimensions. It is clear from the Scripture that Adam was intended to serve in a priest-like manner (*communion with God*) and subdue the earth as God's vassal-king (*dominion over the earth*).
5. The breach of faith of Adam has led to a loss of the ability for mankind to fulfill its vocation before the Lord. The story of God's redemption as it unfolds is the story of how he is seeking to re-establish his image bearers into a place where they can experience his *presence* (communion) and partner with his *purposes* (dominion).
6. The line of God's purposes passes from one generation to the next until it comes to Abraham (notice the break in the pattern of names, highlighting the importance of Abraham in God's purposes in only a few words). Abraham was to be the father of many nations, and the one through whom the seed would come that would bless the whole world (cf. Gen 12.3).

²⁷Abram, that is, Abraham (1 Chr 1.27)

³¹I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed. (Gen 12.3)

7. From 1 Chronicles 1.28—2.2 the lines of Abraham are followed until they are narrowed through his son Isaac to Israel (it is important that he is called Israel throughout the genealogies and not Jacob).

C. *The Tribe of Judah: David's Royal Line (2:3-4.23)*

1. The first of the twelve sons of Israel to be traced by the Chronicler is through the fourth-born son, Judah. Telling of Judah first (as well as its length) demonstrates the importance of following the line of Judah in order to establish the Davidic royal dynasty.
2. The author presumes that his reader was familiar with the promise given to Judah that God's true and rightful king would come from his line.

¹⁰The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him; and to him shall be the obedience of the people (Gen 49.10)

3. The entire structure of this section is intended to put the line of David (1 Chr 3.1-24) at its center, highlighting the importance of the *rightful king* in the worldview of the Chronicler.

D. *The Tribes of Simeon, Reuben, Gad, and the Half-tribe of Manasseh (1 Chr 4.25-5.26)*. Beginning with Simeon (likely because of its proximity to the land of Judah in the land allotment), the author of Chronicles traces the lines of the tribes that had settled east of the Jordan River. Both in structure of the genealogy and in the geographic movement, the author wants to demonstrate the centrality of the Levites at the heart of God's people.

E. *Levi: Song at the Center of it All (1 Chr 6.1-81)*

1. Again, with Levi, the Chronicler slows down his genealogy to give emphasis and importance on the function and purpose of their work at the center of Israel's life.
2. Through this chapter we see that the roles of the Levites — functioning as priests over the altar ministry, stewarding the teaching/instruction of God's people, and those who function to steward and maintain the purity of Israel's holiness — are essential within the worldview of the Chronicler.

3. The longest narrative comment in this section is found in verses 31-33, highlighting the importance of David's institution of song at the heart of Israel's worship.

³¹These are the men whom David put in charge of the service of song in the house of the Lord after the ark rested there. ³²They ministered with song before the tabernacle of the tent of meeting until Solomon built the house of the Lord in Jerusalem, and they performed their service according to their order. ³³These are the men who served and their sons. (1 Chr 6.31-33)

- F. **The Tribes of Issachar, Benjamin, Naphtali, Manasseh, Ephraim, and Asher (1 Chr 7.1-40).** The author works quickly through the remaining tribes that settled west of the Jordan.
- G. **The Genealogy of Saul (1 Chr 8.1-40; 9.35-44).** The author returns to Benjamin at the end of the lists of genealogies (and again at the end of chapter 9) to highlight the line of Saul. It is likely that he returns to it twice to highlight the beginning of where his narrative is to start — with Saul, who will serve as an anti-type of the king who sought the Lord and established right worship in Israel.
- H. **The Returnees and the Post-Exilic Community (1 Chr 9.1-33).** Before starting the narrative, the author of Chronicles situates the post-exilic community within the story arc of God's purposes. It is important to note that almost the entirety of this chapter highlights the decedents of the Levites and their roles within Israel. This is important to the author, because although the post-exilic community does not have national sovereignty, they still possess the capacity to rightly seek after the face of the Lord because of the priestly ministry in their midst.

IV. THE THEOLOGY OF I CHRONICLES I-9

- A. **The Mission of God:** The Chronicler begins his story with Adam because this is the story of God's purposes for his creation. The God of Genesis 1, the one who in the beginning created, is the one who is overseeing and accomplishing his purposes through history. To rightly understand the theology of God's mission, we must understand his purpose for creation: to give himself in communion with mankind and through mankind to establish his purposes throughout the earth. After the fall, God did not discard his purpose for creation, but rather set out to bring redemption to Adam's race in order that he might re-create the earth.
- B. **The "Liturgical Destiny" of all Human History:** Several commentators rightly note that unique perspective of the Chronicler (both in starting the genealogy with Adam and the focus on the Levitical priesthood) is that humanity is designed with a liturgical destiny. This means that at the center of the purpose of humanity is rightly ordered worship before God Almighty — to live in communion with him in order that all his life and destiny would flow out of the place of worship.
- C. **A Kingdom of Priests:** Israel had been called out of the nations to be a *kingdom of priests* before God. This means that the priestly ministry of God's people was intended to be more comprehensive than just the ministry of sacrificial cleansing (forgiveness, placating God's wrath). These were essential aspects of stewarding God's presence among them, but God's people were always to live offering themselves to their Lord (ministering to him) through rightly ordered worship and lives of holiness.
- D. **Awaiting a King:** Although the post-exilic community did not possess national sovereignty, and there was no son of David who sat on the throne, the author of Chronicles seems to possess a future hope that David will once again be restored. Although he emphasizes the reality that Israel can return to God in rightly ordered worship without national sovereignty, there is a hope for a future son of David who will order and establish God's kingdom upon the earth.
- E. **Importance for Christian Interpretation:** With the emphasis on the king and the priesthood in Chronicles, Christians can recognize that what was future for the author is now fulfilled in Christ. In Jesus, God has sent the true son of David (cf. Matt 1.1-17) and the great high priest (Heb 8-10) who offered himself to God in order to bring forgiveness and reconciliation. Through the ministry of Christ, his people are made to be an eternal kingdom of priests (1 Pet 2.9; Rev 1.6) to worship him (*communion*) and reign with him (*dominion*).