
I & II Chronicles

by Kurtis Peters

Why is Chronicles in the Bible? Doesn't it just say all the same stuff as Samuel and Kings? In fact, yes, there is a lot of overlap with Samuel and Kings, and that's because the author of 1&2 Chronicles (the so-called Chronicler) used both Samuel and Kings as source material. However, that's not the only thing the Chronicler used and much of the material found in Chronicles is not found in Samuel and Kings. In fact, one perspective in early Jewish tradition, even before the first century, saw Chronicles as the "things left out" from Samuel and Kings. Both Chronicles as well as Samuel/Kings spend most of their time covering the rise of Israel's monarchy through to the end of Israel and Judah at the hands of the Babylonians. However, Chronicles opens with an extensive (and difficult to read without falling asleep) set of genealogies – something completely lacking in Samuel/Kings. Here it appears that the Chronicler is trying to situate the story of Israel and Judah within the larger story of God's work in the world. The genealogies begin with Adam and move through Jacob, the ancestor of all Israel, and move through the whole of the Israelite people. This isn't *just* listing people for the sake of making lists, however. Genealogies always have a function and they feature particular peoples and groups. In the case of 1 Chronicles, the spotlight is arguably on the tribes of Benjamin, Judah, and Levi. This makes sense as an introduction to the whole book because Chronicles is intensely interested in the legitimacy of the line of King David (tribe of Judah), which replaced the line of Saul (tribe of

Benjamin), and in the legitimacy of the temple functions and the priesthood (tribe of Levi). The last of these, the priesthood, is really the special focus of Chronicles, and the role of the kings of Judah are seen primarily through the lens of their contribution to the proper functioning of the temple. David brings the ark to Jerusalem and Solomon builds the temple – these are two of their most important deeds. The Chronicler then marks the split of the kingdom under Solomon's son Rehoboam, but then proceeds almost to ignore the northern kingdom entirely in favour of the southern kingdom, Judah. Judah's capital city, Jerusalem, was where the legitimate centre of Yahweh worship was housed. That is where the legitimate priesthood operated. Some of the theological outlook of Chronicles is also different from Samuel/Kings. In Chronicles there seems to be more mercy and hope for restoration. This also makes sense given that Chronicles was written later than Samuel/Kings and reflects a time in the Persian period after the exile and return (maybe in the 4th century BCE) when the people are reforming and attempting to find a new identity. This new identity sits more lightly to the reestablishment of the monarchy and is more interested in the proper priestly service to Yahweh and how to involve all of the people in proper worship. With all that in mind (and much more!) the Chronicler retells a well-known history to offer a new sense of relevance and hope to the people of that time.