



Summary of First Chronicles

Introduction

This first volume, attributed to the authorship of the priest Ezra, tells the story of the main events from creation through to the end of King David's reign. Although it does contain many genealogical lists, it also provides much detail of importance to the reader concerning the history of God's concern for his creation and the role of his chosen race Israel.

Chapter One

This first chapter provides the genealogical records from Adam to Jacob and also provides a record of the early kings of Edom.

Chapter Two

Following a summary of Jacob's children, the focus shifts to a more detailed genealogy from the patriarch Judah down as far as David. The author includes some historic details concerning some of the individuals listed.

Chapter Three

The genealogy of Ram is resumed in this composite list of David's descendants, recounted in three distinct sections: David's children (vv.1-9); Solomon and the kings of Judah (vv.10-16); and the postexilic generations (vv.17-24). The literary arrangement of this material is an important indicator of the author's message: just as Judah heads the genealogies of Israel, although Reuben was in fact the firstborn, the line of David's descendants is placed in the centre of the genealogy of Judah as the focus of hope and expectation.

Chapter Four

Information about other clans rounds off the genealogy of Judah and completes the literary inclusio into which all this fragmentary and diverse material has

been arranged: vv.1-20 supply additional details of the descendants of Perez, who was first recorded in 1 Chronicles 2:4-8, while vv.21-23 fill out the lineage of Judah's third son, Shelah, the first to have children after the 'false starts' with Er and Onan, each of whom was referenced in 1 Chronicles 2:3.

The tribe of Simeon is considered next because its allotted territory lay within Judah's borders and was taken from that tribe (vv.28-33), although by David's time (v.31) Simeon had been largely absorbed back into Judah. Nevertheless, some Simeonite clans maintained their tribal identity through genealogical records (vv.34-38), which would have included the historical notes of two military expansions undertaken to relieve the pressures of overpopulation (v.38): one westward into Philistine territory in the days of Hezekiah in the 8th Century BC (vv.39-41), and another into the southern part of the Negeb (vv.42-43). The westward campaign to Gedor, probably Gerar, is depicted in the language of the conquest under Joshua as marked for destruction (v.41), which signifies the religious *kherem* or ban, in which a pagan people and their goods were devoted or wholly destroyed.

Chapter Five

The Transjordanian tribe of Reuben (vv.1-10), the tribe of Gad (vv.11-17), and half-tribe of Manasseh (vv.23-26) are considered next, although by the Chronicler's time these tribes had largely lost their own identities as a consequence of the Assyrian invasions in the 8th Century BC. Nevertheless, the Chronicler still included within his conception of 'all Israel' whatever remnants of the northern tribes still existed.

Chapter Six

This chapter is split into three sections: the descendants of Levi, who would be chosen to serve in the temple; the organisation by David of the Levites for tabernacle and later temple worship duty and a list of the Aaronic priesthood; and the cities that were allocated for the Levites to live in as they received no land allocation along with the other tribes.

Chapter Seven

This chapter contains briefer details of those tribes, including part of Benjamin, that belonged to the old northern kingdom of Israel. They are enclosed within the genealogies as part of the Chronicler's ideal conception of 'all Israel' as a unity that existed in David's time, even though their lands were no longer under Israelite control at the time of the Chronicler's writing.

Chapter Eight

Although Benjamin has already been considered in 1 Chronicles 7:6-12, a second, more detailed genealogy of this tribe is given here that has little in

common with the earlier list and serves a different function. The structure of Judah-Levi-Benjamin is completed here. The other tribes are enclosed within an ideal conception of Israel as a nation led by the royal tribe of Judah in partnership with its neighbour Benjamin, with Levi at the centre to remind the people of their spiritual vocation.

Although most of Benjamin sided with the north in the disruption of the kingdom under Rehoboam, the Benjaminite area around Jerusalem as far as Bethel remained loyal to the Davidic king; refer to 1 Kings 12:21. Judah, including Simeon, and Benjamin formed the southern kingdom, and they are regularly mentioned together in this book. Together they were the legitimate heirs of Israel as it existed under the united monarchy. Judah and Benjamin also formed the core of the postexilic community in Jerusalem and Judah, which is confirmed in Ezra 1:5 and Nehemiah 11:4-9.

Verses 1-28 are especially concerned with the location of the Benjaminite settlements in Jerusalem and further afield. Most of the details in this section are probably from pre-exilic sources. They would have reminded the Chronicler's readers of their identity and ancient claim to the land, founded on God's promise and gift.

Chapter Nine

The Chronicler now focuses on the worship personnel who return to inhabit Jerusalem. In addition, there is a list of the heads of families from various tribes who returned and settled in Jerusalem. The chapter concludes with a repeat of the genealogy of King Saul.

Chapter Ten

The account in this chapter is taken mainly from 1 Samuel 31:1-13. Saul's reign is significant for the Chronicler only as a failure. It ends in disaster for Israel at the hands of the Philistines, against whom Saul had originally been raised up as a military saviour (1 Samuel 9:16). Saul's death, together with three of his sons, also marks the end of his royal house: none of his descendants will rule in his place over Israel.

Philistine forces advanced to Shunem from Aphek and prepared to attack the Israelites near their camp in Jezreel. When the Philistines attacked the next morning, the Israelites retreated up the slopes of Mount Gilboa. Saul and three of his sons were killed, and the Philistines triumphantly put their bodies on display in the temple of Dagon at Beth-shean. Later, men from Jabesh-gilead travelled through the night and recovered the bodies.

Chapter Eleven

The Chronicler misses out the struggle that David had with the house of Saul when Esh-Baal was king of Israel to the time after Esh-Baal's assassination to the time when the elders of Israel declared David as their king.

David led Israel against Jerusalem and captured it from the Jebusites. Joab led the attack and was made the commander of David's army. David became more and more secure as the king of God's people.

The Chronicler concludes the chapter with a list of David's mighty warriors, each of whom was dependable, brave, loyal and fearless. Many of their legendary deeds are briefly recounted for the reader.

Chapter Twelve

When King Saul became jealous of David he planned to kill him and so David had to flee from his presence and spent many years as an outcast wandering in the various wildernesses of Israel and even living in neighbouring lands. During this time there were many men who remained faithful to David, even though this made them outcasts from Israel too. These were not just Judæans but were men from several of the tribes of Israel.

Following the death of Saul, even more men joined him in Hebron. He was king of Judah at the time but these men too were from various tribes and they wanted to help him become king over all Israel. Finally, this came to pass and there was a great festival in Hebron to celebrate the accession of the new king.

Chapter Thirteen

During the days of Eli the priest Israel was at war with the Philistines and they took the Ark of the Covenant into their camp believing that it would bring them victory. However, they were defeated and the Philistines captured the ark. Yet the Lord brought plagues upon the Philistines and caused an image of their god Dagon to collapse before it and so the Philistines sent the ark back and it was taken to the house of Abinadab in Kiriath-jearim.

This chapter now tells how David gathered all the people of Israel and they agreed that the ark should be brought to Jerusalem. David led the procession in great celebration as the ark was brought from Kiriath-jearim but one of the bearers Uzzah laid his hand on the ark to steady and God struck him dead. David was both angry with and fearful of God for this and so the ark was left with the household of Obed-edom for three months.

Chapter Fourteen

Some of the events described in this chapter actually preceded the first mission to collect the ark in the previous chapter, but as with 1 Chronicles Chapters 11-12, the writer is not offering an alternative chronology to his source in Second Samuel. The events in question were evidently not confined to the three months that the ark was in the house of Obed-Edom. Rather, these materials have been repositioned here as illustrations of the Chronicler's message that blessings accrued to David because he gave priority to seeking God, and that his reign was the antithesis of Saul's. Although David had not gone about the mission in quite the correct way, his basic intentions were right. The blessings that come to David include a palace, a growing family, military success, and the acclaim and fear of the surrounding nations. Each of these will serve as typical blessings on righteous kings in the subsequent narrative. A subsidiary theme of this chapter is the consolidation of David's power in and around Jerusalem.

Chapter Fifteen

David's second attempt to bring the ark to Jerusalem is successful because, as well as preparing a suitable place to receive the holy object, this time he instructs and organises the Levites and priests in the right way of transporting it. The relatively brief account of the second mission in 2 Samuel 6:12-19 has been expanded here to show it as the climax of a carefully planned religious procession. Into the account of these preparations the Chronicler has inserted lists of the Levites involved and descriptions of their musical duties. David emerges as the decisive figure in determining the new role of the Levites as the leaders of music and worship, once the ark has come to its permanent rest in Jerusalem and would no longer be borne about by them. Just as Moses set out the duties of the Levites for the wilderness days, so David does the same for the more settled period of his kingdom. At the same time, he is very solicitous about the Law of Moses as the foundation for his own innovations in worship.

Chapter Sixteen

The ark was placed in the tent that David had prepared for it. After giving offerings, David appointed Levites to minister before the ark. David blessed the people of Israel and they then offered song worship to the Lord with a psalm that David had compiled from various psalms for the occasion.

The brief account in 2 Samuel 6:17-20 of the ark's arrival in Jerusalem and the festivities that followed is greatly expanded by details of David's provisions for worship (vv.4-7 and vv.37-42) and a psalm of praise (vv.8-36). Worship before the ark as the primary symbol of God's presence and power (see v.11 and Numbers 10:35) is the principal theme of this chapter.

The implicit message for the Chronicler's own audience is that such worship, diligently undertaken, will transform and embolden them as they call upon God's strength. This chapter also leads up to the first high point of Chronicles, the dynastic promise to David in 1 Chronicles 17:10-14. A reciprocal relationship of divine blessing and human obedience can be seen in this arrangement:

- Chapters 11-12 - God raises David to kingship over Israel.
- Chapter 13 - David's first attempt to retrieve the ark.
- Chapter 14 - God exalts David in Jerusalem and over the Philistines.
- Chapters 15-16 - David's second and the successful attempt to retrieve the ark.
- Chapter 17 - God promises David a perpetual dynasty.

Chapter Seventeen

David's wish to build a house or temple for the Lord meets with refusal, but God promises that he will build a perpetual house or dynasty for David and that one of David's sons will build a temple for him. The promise to David has the nature of a covenant and is central to the message of Chronicles. The twofold manifestation of this covenant will be the Davidic dynasty and Solomon's temple, and henceforth the Chronicler will show that Israel's identity as God's people will be expressed through these two institutions.

The promise to David is similarly the seedbed of the OT's messianic hope, which the NT will show is fulfilled in Jesus as the descendant of David. The Chronicler's immediate interest, however, is more focused on Solomon as the chosen heir and temple builder.

Chapter Eighteen

This chapter summarises the many military campaigns in which the Lord gave David success. Many led to their enemies becoming vassal states and pay tribute to Israel. Others agreed peace treaties with David. The chapter concludes with a summary of the officials under David.

Chapter Nineteen

When King Nahash of the Ammonites died David sent a diplomatic mission to the new king but he humiliated and abused David's men, believing they had come as spies. When the new king found out that he had become an enemy of David he bought in mercenaries from other lands and called on the Aramæans to help him.

David sent Joab with the Israelite army to face these two major armies. Joab's plan was to divide his army into two, one facing each opposing army, so that if

one of the Israelite divisions began to fall then the other could turn and assist them. However, both prevailed and their enemies fled.

The Aramæans then reinforced their own army and came against Israel once more, but again they were defeated. They now made peace with David and would not support the Ammonites again.

Chapter Twenty

The chapter starts by concluding the campaign against the Ammonites with the fall of Rabbah and its king. This is followed by brief summaries of three battles against the Philistines.

Chapter Twenty One

David foolishly requested that Joab undertake a military census, which the Lord had not commanded. Despite Joab's protests, David insisted so Joab did as his king had commanded. The Lord was angry with David for this sin and, through the seer Gad, David was offered the choice of three years of famine, three months of defeats by his enemies or three days of a plague sent by the Lord. David chose the plague. Eventually the Lord told his angel to stop the devastation of the land. David called upon the Lord to show mercy on his people for it was he that was at fault and not they.

The site where the plague was halted was the threshing-floor of Ornan the Jebusite. Despite being offered the site for free, David insisted on purchasing it from Ornan and he built an altar there and made burnt-offerings to the Lord and thus the plague was ended. This was the site where Solomon will later build the temple.

Chapter Twenty Two

David's designation of the temple site leads directly into the next major unit of the work in Chapters 22-29, which describe David's preparation for building the temple. Although David was prevented from taking part in the actual construction, he stands alongside Solomon in this chapter as the one who provided the materials, personnel, and conditions essential for the task. Chapter 22 has the form of a private commissioning of Solomon, while Chapters 28-29 include a public commissioning "in the sight of all Israel". Their reigns are presented as a complementary unit, both being essential for the fulfilment of the task: what David begins, Solomon completes. The presentation of events is modelled in part on the transfer of leadership from Moses to Joshua.

Chapter Twenty Three

The aging David appoints Solomon as his coregent so that he can start to prepare for the task of ruling the country after David's death. The Levites are

then enumerated in family groups in order to allocate them the various tasks they are to undertake once the temple is built. David organises the Levites according to their traditional clans: the Gershonites (vv.7-11), the Kohathites (vv.12-20), and the Merarites (vv.21-23).

Chapter Twenty Four

The priesthood is divided into twenty four family groups: sixteen descended from Eleazar and eight from Ithamar because of the number of descendants. These twenty four groups were then allocated to perform their duties on rota basis. Other Levites are then listed to conclude the chapter.

Chapter Twenty Five

David's organisation of the Levitical musicians, initiated in Chapters 15-16, was to prepare them for leading worship in the temple. Like the priests, the musicians were arranged into twenty four divisions for their duties, according to the number of sons of the three main family groups. Their service accompanied the regular offerings of the priests. The Chronicler was probably seeking to encourage a similar ministry among the Levitical singers of the second temple, whose service, authorised by David, would also connect the community of their day with the pre-exilic Davidic kingdom.

Chapter Twenty Six

The primary duty of the Levitical gatekeepers was to safeguard the sanctuary from trespass by unauthorised persons and from defilement by idolatrous practices. They were also responsible for the temple treasuries and the maintenance of the building and its equipment. The gatekeepers played a vital role in aiding the high priest Jehoiada in opposing Queen Athaliah in 2 Chronicles 23:4-19, and in the reforms by Hezekiah (2 Chronicles 31:14) and Josiah (2 Chronicles 34:9).

Chapter Twenty Seven

The Chronicler concludes this section on David's provision of leadership for Solomon with details derived from four lists of the non-Levitical military and political officials serving the kingdom.

David established a militia twelve divisions, each with its own commander. Each division consisted of either twenty four thousand men or twenty four units, and were on duty for one month of the year.

There follows a list of the chief officers of each of the twelve tribes. David had not counted the men aged under twenty and it is again noted that Joab did not complete the census with which he disagreed and which so angered the Lord.

The chapter concludes with the names of a number of administrative and operations officers.

Chapter Twenty Eight

David calls together his government, advisors and military leaders and announces to them that although he had wished to build the temple for God, the Lord had forbidden him to do so because of the bloodshed during his reign. However, the Lord had chosen Judah as the lead tribe and David to be the king of all Israel with a promise that his line would rule forever. Furthermore, it was the Lord who had chosen Solomon to reign after him and it was he who would build the temple that David had planned and provided for.

David then gave instruction to Solomon that he should follow the ways of God; if he did so then he would prosper, if not then the Lord would take the kingdom away from him. David then gave Solomon the plan for the temple and its contents. He encouraged Solomon to be courageous in building the temple and that God would be with him.

Chapter Twenty Nine

In addition to the provision that David had made for the Temple, he also announces that he is donating a significant amount of his own personal wealth to the project. Inspired by his generosity, the other leaders present also gave freewill-offerings to the Lord from their own wealth.

David then gave a heartfelt and rousing blessing to the Lord, acknowledging his greatness and the fact that everything they had to offer him had been given to them by him in the first place. He acknowledges also that his people are but transient and insignificant in comparison to his awesome presence. He asks for the Lord's blessing and guidance for Solomon in undertaking the building project of the Lord's temple. The following day there were many sacrifices to the Lord and a joyous festival for all those present.

Solomon was then anointed as the king of all Israel, acknowledged as such by all the elders and leaders that were present. The Book of First Chronicles concludes with a brief summary of David's mostly successful reign as king.