

# 1 CHRONICLES

## (Chapters 1-29)

St. Jerome, an early Father of the Church gave us the title for these two books of the Bible when he said that they were “a chronicle of the whole of divine history.” The books of Chronicles are intended as a series of lessons in the divine plan for history.

Just as Joshua, Judges, 1-2 Samuel and 1-2 Kings are said to belong to one school of writers called the Deuteronomist, 1-2 Chronicles and the books of Ezra and Nehemiah are also said to belong to another school of writers called the “Chronicler.” This writer is believed to have lived in the fourth century B.C. and to have intended his writings for post-exilic Jews who were seeking to restore their lives, religion and nation after the devastation experience of the Babylonian exile. The “chronicler” is from the priestly class. In his books, we notice heavy emphasis on all aspects of Israel’s worship life and how important it is for the future existence of the nation.

**Purpose.** The purpose of 1-2 Chronicles was to strengthen the Jews of fourth century Judah in their love for God’s law and to teach them that obedience to God was their only hope for survival.

In his book *A Catholic Guide to the Bible*, Fr. Oscar Lukefahr, C.M., writes: “*The Chronicler wanted to say to the ‘remnant,’ the Jewish community of the restoration: ‘Remember what God has done for you. Look at the great heroes of our past. See how evil has always been punished and good rewarded. Realize that the Temple must be the focal point of our lives.’ He painted an ‘idealized’ picture of the past in order to give the Jews an ‘ideal’ for the future. That is why his works are called ‘idealized salvation history’*” (p.70).

The idealization of Israel’s past is mainly achieved through a retelling of Israel’s history from the time of David. While large chunks of 1-2 Chronicles are quite similar to the books of Samuel and Kings, we notice that the author omits the faults and sins of David and Solomon.

For the Chronicler, David was a holy and dedicated leader who followed the ways of God faithfully. The writer stresses David’s role in composing the psalms and establishing guilds of Levites to serve at the temple. In Chronicles, David prays a lot. He is shown to be fully consumed with zeal for the right worship

of God. In Chronicles, the destruction of the nation is blamed on the failure of the people to give God true worship. Finally, the kings in the northern kingdom of Israel are totally ignored because of their failure to worship God in Jerusalem.

### Division of chapters/ 1 Chronicles

**Chapters 1-9:** Genealogical tables. Israel’s family tree is traced all the way back to Adam

**Chapters 10-29:** Reign of David

### COMMENTARY

#### Chapters 1-9: Genealogical tables

Modern readers of the Bible are amazed or confounded that a biblical book would dedicate nine chapters to genealogies. In his commentary on 1-2 Chronicles, J.F. McConville writes: “*Broadly speaking, genealogies show that the promises and purposes of God continue*” (p.8). Having noted that the genealogical tables were written for the exiles returning from Babylon, McConville states that they were intended to make a theological statement, namely, that the exile was not the end of the history of Israel. Rather, with it behind, the Israelites came again to “ *dwell in their cities, to repossess the territory, or at least part of it which the Lord had given them centuries before, and of which the exile had seemed to deprive them forever*” (p.11). Also, genealogies were used by the Israelites to show that they did belong to the family of Abraham, God’s chosen people. Genealogies also stress the importance of a spiritual heritage. “*The Christian will value these chapters as a basis and foreshadowing of those genealogies of Jesus, Son of David.... Monotony and inconsistencies of this literary form must not blind a modern reader to its indispensable role replaced nowadays by parish and civil record offices, in vindicating legitimacy of both family and faith*” (Jerome Bible Commentary p.408).

A close look at the nine chapters of genealogical tables will lead us to see that most of the chapters (2-8) are given to the twelve sons of Jacob, who of course are the fathers of the twelve tribes of Israel. Secondly, we will note that *three* of the tribes—Judah

(David's tribe), Levi (the priestly tribe) and Benjamin (the smallest tribe but also Saul's tribe) receive much more attention than the other nine tribes. David's family line is the focus of the whole of chapter three.

**Prayer of Jabez.** In 4:10, Jabez prays to the God of Israel. "Bless me and enlarge my territory. Help me and make me free of misfortune, without pain." And God granted his prayer. Some years ago, a minister wrote a small book called *The Prayer of Jabez*. It was very popular. The author encouraged readers to think big and not to be afraid to ask God for big blessings. I once prayed the prayer, and shortly after, my bishop called me to move to my current parish which is a lot larger than my previous one. When I prayed *The Prayer of Jabez*, I was not thinking about a larger parish. My prayer is a good example of the saying: "Be careful what you pray for!"

The genealogical introduction concludes with a list of those who returned to form the post-exilic community of Judah (9:1-44). The bulk of this list is made up of priests, Levites and various temple functionaries. This is because the worship life of Israel is the main focus of 1-2 Chronicles.

**Pause:** Have you or a family member done any research on your family tree? What person stands out most in your family tree? Discover any 'black sheep'?

## CHAPTER 10

The chronology of chapters 1-9 covers Israelite history from Creation to the exile in Babylon (586 BC). At this point, the narrative goes back to the beginning of Israel's kingdom period, picking up with Israel's first king, Saul. 1Chronicles 10 begins with Saul's death. To learn about his reign, read 1Samuel.

Whereas 1Samuel lingers for twenty-three chapters (9-31) over the story of Saul, the chronicler author gives him only one chapter. His main interest is to point out that Saul died and was a failure because he was unfaithful to the Lord, did not keep the Lord's commandments, and did not seek guidance from the Lord (v.13).

The phrase "the Lord slew him" (v.13) can be interpreted as meaning, in the mind of God, that Saul's time was up. It was time to transfer the kingdom to a man after God's own heart.

## CHAPTER 11: David, king of Israel, and his warriors

We get some sense of how important David and Solomon were to the chronicler when we see that they occupy the stage from this chapter until 2 Chronicles 9, i.e., twenty-eight of the sixty-five chapters. The chronicler's aim was to present his people with two models of what life could be like in their nation if the people would follow the ways of God and pay proper attention to worship. Central to the chronicler's idealized picture of what the nation could be is the worship life of Israel. Hence, many of the upcoming chapters will focus on the Temple, the Ark of the Covenant, and the organization of right worship.

**Verses 1-4.** These verses are one illustration of how the chronicler uses his material to slant history in a way that suits his purposes. 2 Samuel states that only "the men of Judah" anointed David king of their tribe following Saul's death. David ruled over Judah *seven* years before the elders of Israel chose him as king over the rest of the tribes (2Sam 5:1-5). In the opening verses of 1Chronicles 10, we notice how the chronicler states that "all Israel" made David king immediately following Saul's death.

**Verses 10-47** give us a list of David's warriors.

## CHAPTER 12: David's early followers

This chapter is a flashback to the time David was on the run from Saul.

**Verses 1-22** list David's mighty men who supported him during this difficult time in his life. We are told that these warriors are the "best of the best." "*The archers could use either the right or the left hand, both in slinging stones and in shooting arrows with a bow*" (v.2). Also see verse 23 which compares David's soldiers to an army of angels. This is another example of the chronicler's way of idealizing everything connected with David.

**Verses 24-41** tell of a united Israel acclaiming David king at Hebron.

## CHAPTER 13: Plans to bring the Ark to Jerusalem

This chapter is very similar to 2Sam 6. The narrator states that under Saul, the people fail to seek God (v.3). Seeking the Ark is tantamount to seeking God. Uzzah is struck dead for touching the Ark (v.10). This

incident is a reminder to the people not to be careless with the holy things of God. Also, only the Levites are allowed to touch the Ark (see Nm 4:5-15).

**Pause:** How can we show lack of reverence for the holy things of God?

#### **CHAPTER 14: David, seeker of God and blessed by God**

This chapter paints a picture of David who seeks God before making any move against the Philistines (vv 10, 13). Verse 16 tells us that “David did as God commanded him.”

#### **CHAPTER 15: The Ark is brought to Jerusalem**

On this second attempt to bring the Ark to Jerusalem, David is much more careful to do things liturgically correct. The Levites are ordered to sanctify themselves (v.12). When the procession with the Ark arrives in Jerusalem, everyone is chanting and all the musicians make a joyful noise unto the Lord.

#### **CHAPTER 16: Psalm of thanksgiving**

David assumes a liturgical role. He organizes the worship, blesses the people and shares bread with them. Then he appoints some “Levites to minister before the Ark of the Lord, to celebrate, thank and praise the Lord, the God of Israel” (v.4).

*Verses 8-36* are a beautiful psalm of thanksgiving.

*Verses 37-42* describe how David commissions certain men to remain with the Ark and offer appropriate sacrifices, while others serve as gatekeepers and musicians.

**Pause:** Have you fulfilled any liturgical ministry in your parish? If so, how was/is that experience for you?

#### **CHAPTER 17: Oracle of Nathan**

This chapter is almost identical to 2 Samuel 7. See article 26 for commentary on this important chapter.

#### **CHAPTERS 18-20: David’s wars**

Introducing these chapters, J.G. McConville writes: “The main point of chapters 18-20 is to confirm that the previous chapter identifies the role of David, in

contrast to Solomon, as the warrior who by his victories achieved the peace which was to characterize his successor’s reign. That David is not blamed for being a man of war is clear from the comment that appears twice in chapter 18: ‘And the Lord gave victory to David wherever he went’ (vv 6, 13). Indeed David’s warlike exploits, paradoxically, contribute to the final success of the Temple project, since the booty acquired in them is used in the beautification of the building” (2Chr. 5:1) (ibid p. 63).

These chapters are drawn from various parts of 2 Samuel 8-21.

#### **CHAPTER 21: David sins by taking up a census**

We said in the introduction that in the books of Chronicles, we find an idealized picture of David. His sins and failures are omitted. The census issue is an exception to that picture. Not only that, but in this chapter, Satan is mentioned (one of the few times he is mentioned in the Old Testament).

*Verse 1* states that “a Satan...enticed David into taking a census of Israel.” 2 Samuel 24:1, describing the same incident, says that the “*anger of the Lord enticed David to take up the census.*” The former reflects a more developed post-exilic theology which no longer directly attributes evil to God. David’s census is condemned because unlike the census taken in 1-2 Numbers which *God* ordered, this one is carried out so that David will take pride in the strength of his army—which is seen as taking attention away from God who, in reality, is the reason Israel is winning victories on the battlefield.

*Verse 8.* David sees his mistake and he repents of his sin.

**Pause:** What are some ways Satan entices our leaders today?

#### **CHAPTER 22: Solomon gets his orders**

We learned in chapter 17 that it was not God’s will for David to build a temple for the Lord. Rather, that task would fall to his son Solomon. In this chapter, David reveals to Solomon God’s plan for him to be the one to build the temple.

## CHAPTERS 23-27: Temple personnel

David foresees that the Temple to be built by his son will require considerable personnel to maintain it. We have in these five chapters a list of the various ministries needed for the smooth and proper functioning of the Temple.

### CHAPTER 28: David's address to the leaders

*"If you seek him, he will let himself be found by you."* (v.9)

David assembles all the leaders of Judah and addresses them. He begins by sharing how it is very much his desire to build a house for the Ark, but that God has other plans (vv 2-7).

- Then David urges the people *"to keep and carry out all the commandments of the Lord, your God, so you may possess this good land..."* (v.8).
- In full view of all the leaders, David calls upon Solomon *"to serve God with a perfect heart and a willing soul..."* (v.9).
- Finally, in this chapter, we read a beautiful exhortation to seek God and he will allow himself to be found by us—but also a warning that if we abandon him, he will cast us away forever (v.9). This verse reminds us how much God desires a relationship with us. But then follows the distressing admonition that if we dismiss God, he will cast us off forever. The verse is troublesome because it seems to imply that God is ready to banish us forever for only one sin. Is this true? Of course not. This is an example of pre-Christian writers going overboard as they sought to emphasize the importance of fidelity to God. To do this, they borrowed examples from past experiences as, for instance, a case where close family relationships were forever broken on account of *one* incident involving insult or injury. A troubling verse like this should be placed beside the glorious Psalm 136 that enthusiastically talks about God's mercy which endures forever.

**Verses 11-19.** David hands over to Solomon the plans for the Temple.

**Verses 20-21—Final exhortation.** All of us would do well to listen to and take to heart this beautiful exhortation found in verse 20:

*"Be strong, stand firm;  
Be fearless, be dauntless, and set to work  
because God, my God, is with you.  
He will not fail you or forsake you  
before you have finished  
all the work to be done  
for the house of the Lord."*

(v. 20, J.B. translation)

### CHAPTER 29: David's prayer; Anointment of Solomon

*"Blessed may you be, O Lord,  
God of Israel our father  
From eternity to eternity."* (v.10)

**Verses 1-9—Offerings for the Temple.** The Temple, or the House of the Lord, deserves the most exquisite adornments. Therefore, as a statement of David's wholehearted commitment to the Lord and his dwelling place, David freely gives his personal treasury to enhance the future Temple. In so doing, David becomes a model for all wealthy Israelites.

**Verses 10-22—David's prayer.** David's prayer is one of the most beautiful prayers in the Bible. It marks two great events in David's reign: transporting the Ark and commissioning of Solomon to carry out his plan to build the Temple.

**Verse 14** reminds us that because all things come from God, we cannot, in any real sense, give materially to him.

**Verses 23-25—Solomon is anointed king.** David names Solomon his successor (1Chr 23:1). In contrast with the first chapters of Kings, this account presents no struggle. Here, there are no contenders for David's throne. Here, no enemies or potential conspirators need be removed. This latter supposition is, of course, an idealization. Anything that would show either David or Solomon in less than favorable light has been omitted.

1Chronicles closes with the death of Israel's greatest king, David.