

## 2 CHRONICLES (Chapters 1-36)

In its introduction to 2 Chronicles, *The New American Bible* states: *The Second Book of Chronicles takes up the history of the monarchy where the First Book breaks off. It begins with the account of the reign of Solomon from the special viewpoint of the Chronicler. The portrait of Solomon is an idealized one; he appears as second only to David. The great achievement of the building of the temple and the magnificence of Solomon's court are described in detail while the serious defects of his reign are passed over without comment. All this is in keeping with the Chronicler's purpose of stressing the supreme importance of the temple and its worship. He wishes to impress on his readers the splendor of God's dwelling and the magnificence of the liturgy of sacrifice, prayer and praise offered there. Judah's kings are judged by their attitude toward the temple and its cult. To this ideal of one people, united in the worship of the one true God at the temple of Jerusalem founded by David and Solomon, the restored community would have to conform.*

*In part two of this book (chaps 10-36), the Chronicler gives practically all his attention to the kingdom of Judah. His omission of the northern Israelite kings is significant. In his view, the northern tribes of Israel were in religious schism as long as they worshiped God in a place other than the temple of Jerusalem. The Chronicler makes no mention of the important sanctuaries of the Lord at Dan and Bethel – as though they had never existed (pp 409-410).*

### Division of chapters

**Part 1: Solomon and the Temple.** Seven of these chapters are given to liturgical matters.

**Part 2: The Kings of Judah – chapters 10-36.** We will notice that the Chronicler gives most attention to the kings who lavished most time and attention upon the Temple and its worship: Asa (chs. 14-16), Jehoshaphat (chs 17-21), Hezekiah (chs 29-32) and Josiah (chs. 34-35).

### PART 1: Solomon and the Temple (Chs 1-9)

The account of Solomon's reign is idealized in a way similar to that of David. There is no mention of how Solomon eliminated his rivals or forced some of his

people into forced labor or of his weakness for foreign women. The bulk of chapters 1-9 focus mainly on the construction of the temple and its dedication.

### COMMENTARY

#### CHAPTER 1: God appears to Solomon

2 Chronicles opens with Solomon at the beginning of his reign gathering together all the leaders of Israel for a great act of worship at Gibeon.

*Verses 7-12* describe how God appears to Solomon and asks him to “*make a request of me and I will grant it to you*” (v.7).

Because Solomon has asked God for wisdom and not for riches, God blesses him not only with wisdom but also with great material wealth. “*Silver and gold were as common in Jerusalem as stones*” (v.15).

#### CHAPTER 2: Preparations for the building of the temple

This chapter is similar to 1Kings 5:15-32. Solomon seeks the help of Hiram, King of Tyre, who gives him wood and craftsmen. He conscripts the Ammonites and other non-Israelites for slave labor. Chronicles makes no mention of the fact that Solomon recruited his own people into forced labor.

#### CHAPTERS 3-4: Building of the temple

The temple is built on Mount Moriah, the place where Abraham almost sacrificed his son Isaac (Gn 22).

The detailed description of the building is intended to draw attention to its richness. While Solomon acknowledges that no one can build God a worthy home (2:5), he plans to build God the best that humans could build. The “*holy of holies,*” where the Ark of the Covenant is kept, is the holiest part of the temple.

## CHAPTERS 5-7: Dedication of the temple

**Chapter 5** describes the moving of the Ark from the City of David to the temple. When the Ark is laid in its new resting place, the presence of the Lord fills the temple (v.13). For the Israelites, the temple is a symbol of God's presence and of his covenant with Israel, the place where the tablets of the Ten Commandments are kept. The temple is also a symbol of God's mercy and forgiveness, and of course a place of prayer.

**Chapter 6.** *Verses 1-11* show Solomon addressing the gathered assembly. *Verses 14-42* contain the text of Solomon's prayer which is almost identical to that found in 1Kings 8:22-53. (See commentary in article 29.)

**Chapter 7.** *Verses 1-11* describe the conclusion of the dedication ceremony. Fire from heaven consumes the offering—a sign of divine approval.

In *verses 12-22*, God appears a second time to Solomon and tells him that fidelity to the Lord will ensure the continuation of the dynasty, but idolatry will lead to the temple's destruction and exile from the land.

**Pause:** What image of God do you have when you pray?

## CHAPTER 8: Public works; Solomon's piety

*Verses 1-10* list other building projects of Solomon.

*Verses 12-15* speak of Solomon as the model worshipper. During his life, Solomon became known for his three "Ws"—wisdom, wealth and worship.

## CHAPTER 9: The Queen of Sheba visits Solomon

The queen is so impressed by Solomon's wisdom that it "took her breath away." Verse 23 states that "*all the kings of the earth sought an audience with Solomon, to hear from him the wisdom which God had put in his heart.*" We can see why the reign of Solomon was seen as the 'Golden Era' in Israel's history.

## PART 2: THE KINGS OF JUDAH

### (Chapters 10-36)

Chapters 10-36 retell the history of the kings of Judah from the time of Rehoboam, Solomon's successor to the Babylonian exile.

### CHAPTERS 10-12: Reign of Rehoboam

Chapters 10-12 focus on the division of the kingdom and the reign of Rehoboam.

**Chapter 10** is similar to 1Kings 12 which deals with true grievances (v.4) and Rehoboam's foolishness in not listening to the advice of the older members of his community (vv 6-8).

**Chapter 11** characterizes the first three years of Rehoboam's reign as a period of prosperity but, more importantly, a time when the king "*walked in the way of David*" (v.17).

**Chapter 12.** The second part of Rehoboam's reign is marked by infidelity to the Lord: "*After Rehoboam had consolidated his rule and had become powerful, he abandoned the law of the Lord, he and all Israel with him*" (v.1).

### CHAPTER 13: War between Abijah and Jeroboam

Whereas 1Kings 15:3 states that Abijah is *not* faithful to the Lord, the chronicler chooses to highlight his positive characteristics. In this chapter, Abijah defeats Jeroboam even though he has a much bigger army. Abijah wins because he places his trust in God.

### CHAPTERS 14-16: King Asa

In Kings, Asa merely receives fifteen verses (1Kgs 15:8-24) whereas in Chronicles he occupies three chapters. In chapters 14 and 15, Asa is presented as a faithful king who "*did what was good and pleasing to the Lord*" (14:1). In chapter 16, Asa's reign meets with political, personal and religious disaster. Asa turns from trusting God to trusting human forces. For protection against Israel, the northern kingdom, he makes an alliance with the King of Aram instead of trusting God. Instead of listening to Hanani, the Lord's representative, he throws him in jail (16:7-10).

**Pause:** What can cause leaders to lose their bearings, to go from being God-fearing to ignoring God and his ways?

## CHAPTERS 17-20: King Jehoshaphat

The chronicler devotes the next four chapters to Jehoshaphat.

**Chapter 17** introduces Jehoshaphat as one who is faithful to God, who seeks God like his father. Because of his faithfulness he is rewarded, enjoying “great wealth and glory” (v.5).

**Chapter 18.** Jehoshaphat missteps when he marries into Ahab’s family which leads to a military alliance with the unfaithful northern kingdom. The action in this chapter is very similar to 1Kings 22. (See 1Kings 22 for commentary.)

**Chapter 19.** Jehoshaphat is rebuked by Jehu for entering into an alliance with Ahab, a rebuke which he seemingly takes well. Verses 4-11 show him amongst his people calling them to be faithful to God.

**Chapter 20.** Jehoshaphat experiences his biggest challenge from the mighty Edomite army. In a panic, Jehoshaphat turns to the Lord (v.3). God answers his prayer by giving him an impressive victory (vv 22-30). The chronicler’s purpose may have been to contrast Jehoshaphat going into battle in right relationship with God with his failure to do so when he joined himself to Ahab (ch. 18). The theme of humbling oneself before God in the face of huge odds, together with a resultant victory, is central to Chronicles.

## CHAPTERS 21-22: Two wicked kings

We now turn to two kings whose reign is in stark contrast to the two previous kings. Jehoram’s first big mistake is marrying Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel. Athaliah brings her mother’s wicked ways to Judah. After Jehoram becomes king, he murders his brothers, except one, Ahaziah.

**Verses 12-15.** The prophet Elijah sends a letter to Jehoram telling him that because of his evil ways, his family will be destroyed and he himself will die a painful death, prophecy fulfilled in verses 16-20.

**Chapter 22.** Ahaziah follows the sinful ways of his wicked mother Athaliah. He is murdered by Jehu (see 2Kings 9-10).

**Verses 10-12.** When Athaliah hears that her son has been killed, she grabs on to power and proceeds to kill all of the royal offspring. Due to the intervention of Jehosheba, one son, Joash, was spared. During the seven-year reign of Athaliah, Joash stays hidden in the temple.

## CHAPTER 23: Athaliah is overthrown

After seven years of reign by the wicked queen mother, the priest Jehoiada finally gets the courage to organize a coup d’état to rid Judah of the idolatrous ruler. Having declared Joash king and executing Athaliah, Jehoiada orders his fellow priests to destroy the temple of Baal. Then the priest Jehoiada installs the seven-year old Joash as king of Judah.

## CHAPTERS 24-26: Three partly faithful and partly unfaithful kings

As we read about the reign of kings Joash, Amaziah and Uzziah (called Azariah in Kings) we notice a similar pattern in all three kingships. All three are faithful to the Lord during the first half of their lives. But subsequently, all three turn away from the Lord, for which they are punished.

**Pause:** What happens to leaders (or to us) that they can lose their religious bearings after years of fidelity to the Lord?

## CHAPTER 27: King Jotham

The sixteen-year reign of Jotham receives a positive rating from the Chronicler: “*Jotham continued to grow strong because he lived resolutely in the presence of the Lord, his God*” (v.6).

## CHAPTER 28: King Ahaz

After a brief high point reached by Jotham, Judah now plunges to an all-time low under the dreadful reign of Ahaz who “*proved utterly faithless to the Lord*” (v.20). As we will see in Isaiah (chs 7-9), a big failure of Ahaz is entering into an alliance with the Assyrians rather than trusting in the Lord.

## CHAPTERS 29-32: King Hezekiah

In Chronicles, Hezekiah is portrayed as the most faithful king of Judah since David. Whereas Kings spends only one verse (2Kgs 18:4) on Hezekiah’s religious reforms, the chronicler devotes three chapters.

## CHAPTER 29: Rededication of the Temple

The king summons the priests and gives them a pep talk on how they must sanctify themselves for the enormous and important task of cleansing the temple (vv 4-19) to prepare for a service of atonement (vv 20-36).

## CHAPTER 30: Reintroduction of the Passover

Having cleansed and rededicated the temple, Hezekiah reintroduces the great celebration of Passover which, of course, commemorates Israel's escape from Egypt. A big piece of this event is Hezekiah's desire that the celebration be attended by the entire nation and not just his own people of Judah. Hence, he sends invitation letters to Ephraim and Manasseh asking them to come to the house of the Lord in Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover (v.7). While most reject Hezekiah's invitation, some humble themselves and come (vv 10-11). Verses 14-27 describe the glorious celebration of Passover, planned to last seven days. The people are having such a good time that they decide to extend the celebration for another seven days (v. 23).

## CHAPTER 31: Liturgical reform continues

After the celebration of the Passover, Hezekiah sets out to destroy all places where idolatrous worship occurred. Then he works on reforming the worship life of Judah and finding a way to provide for the income of the clergy.

## CHAPTER 32: Assyria attacks Jerusalem

When the powerful Assyrians come to attack Jerusalem, we might think that the people would be scared to death. But Hezekiah builds up their confidence saying: *"Be brave and steadfast, do not be afraid or dismayed of the King of Assyria.... For he has only an arm of flesh, but we have the Lord, our God, to help us fight our battles"* (v.7). In verses 9-20, we read of the Assyrians' attempts to intimidate the people of Judah. The Assyrian king sends the message that it is foolish for the people of Jerusalem to place their trust in their God (vv 13-15). Their threats only move Hezekiah and his prophet Isaiah to call out to God for help (v.20). Then follows the account of how God defeats the mighty Assyrians sending them home humbled and disgraced.

For a brief moment, Hezekiah feels proud, *"failing to discharge his debt of gratitude"* (v.25)—a reference to Hezekiah's failure to thank the Lord sufficiently for the way he routed the Assyrians. After he humbles himself in repentance, the Lord changes his mind about venting his anger against him.

*Verse 31* speaks of a visit from Babylonian ambassadors (the new world power), an event also described in 2Kgs 20:12-18. Hezekiah's behavior in this incident causes God to forsake the king *"and test him that he might know all that was in his heart"* (v.31). As explained in the commentary on this incident in 2Kings, the prophet Isaiah did not appreciate Hezekiah's hospitality to the Babylonians and his bragging about his material possessions. Having said that, the chronicler thought very highly of Hezekiah because he *"did what was good, upright and faithful before the Lord, his God"* (31:20).

**Pause:** How have you experienced spiritual reform in your parish? How have you experienced resistance to spiritual reform? How hard is it for you to trust God when life becomes very testy?

## CHAPTER 33: Sinfulness and conversion of Manasseh

2 Kings 21 tells us that Manasseh was Judah's worst king, period. There is no account of any conversion. The chronicler narrates in verses 1-9 all the evil deeds of Manasseh, but then describes his conversion while he was in exile in Babylon (vv 11-20). Scholars tell us that authors of biblical books omit and insert events to suit their purposes. In the case of Manasseh, the chronicler may be using his experience to give hope to the exiles after they returned from Babylon. If the restored community was inclined to think that past sins blighted future hopes, Manasseh's story should have been very helpful.

**Chapter 33** ends with a brief mention of Amon's reign. Because he does evil in the sight of the Lord, his son Josiah has to work to restore faithful worship in Judah.

## CHAPTERS 34-35: Josiah's reforms

Alongside Hezekiah, Josiah is seen by the chronicler as a four-star king. At sixteen he "began to seek after the God of his forefather David." Four years later, he begins his work of cleansing Judah and Jerusalem of

false forms of worship. While some of the details of Josiah's reforms are different from the account in 2 Kings 22-23, the essentials are the same. Hence, I refer the reader to my commentary on 2Kings 22-23 in article 32. One important fact that the Chronicler's account gives us about Josiah's reign (omitted in Kings) are the details of Josiah's death (35:20-25). Josiah ignores Neco's message because he is a pagan king. The mistaken assumption that Neco cannot be part of God's plan costs Josiah his life. The last two verses of 2 Chronicles tell us that God used a pagan king to release Judah from exile.

#### **CHAPTER 36: The last four kings, exile and hope**

**Verses 1-14—Last four kings.** These verses briefly describe the reign of the four last kings of Judah. All four of them "did what was evil in the sight of the Lord." During the reign of Jehoiachin, the first major deportation to Babylon takes place. Zedekiah's refusal to listen to the counsel of Jeremiah leads to tragic consequences for him, his sons and Judah.

**Verses 15-21—Exile.** This section begins with a reminder of how the people refuse to listen to God's word spoken through the prophets. "*They mocked the messengers of God and despised their warnings...*" (v.16).

As a result of their defiance, God allows the king of the Chaldeans (the Babylonians) to invade Jerusalem and destroy the city and the temple. All who escaped the sword are carried into exile. The exile lasted seventy years.

**Verses 22-23—Hope.** 2 Chronicles ends with a word of hope when it makes mention of the Decree of Cyrus, King of Persia. This pagan king is inspired by God to issue a proclamation allowing the exiles to return to their devastated homeland.

**Conclusion.** The theological purpose of the chronicler is to say to the returned exiles: Learn from the past for the present. Leaders and people alike must observe covenant fidelity and listen attentively to God's word spoken through the prophets.

**Pause:** Are there examples today of God using non-Christian leaders to do good? What do you think might be the most painful part of being exiled from one's homeland?

#### **RESOURCES:**

- Collegeville Bible Commentary
- The Daily Bible Study Series – I & II Chronicles, J.G. McConville