

EXILE AND BEYOND—6

1 and 2 Chronicles

Lessons to be learned from the experience of exile

Mindful that Chronicles was written sometime after the return from exile, we are picking up on lessons learned from that experience, by looking at how the returned exiles viewed their previous history differently from how it was presented in the earlier books of Samuel and Kings. We have seen how the returned exiles regained their sense of identity and belonging through the genealogies, with an enhanced inclusiveness, and an awareness of their place in the whole of humanity. At a time when they were still under foreign domination, with no king on the throne of Israel, their selective recollections of the reign of David, cleared of anything wrong or contentious, held hope of the fulfilment of God's promise of the true king to come. And their experience of God's mercy and favour, coming out of disruption and suffering however justly deserved, generated a more nuanced, mature, true-to-life and merciful assessment of the character of previous kings, making the point that, while faithfulness is required more than ever, the word of God can bring correction and opportunity of repentance to even the worst of offenders.

In this session we conclude with Chronicles' marked emphasis on the central importance and value of worship. Not just because their previous failings in this area eventually gave rise to the exile, but also because their experience of God's sovereign grace amongst the nations gave them so much more to appreciate and acknowledge of the nature of their good and holy God. Most of the extra material in Chronicles has to do with worship.

Worship is the gift of God, not human invention

Chronicles summarises the accounts in 2 Samuel 6 of David's attempts to bring the ark of God to Jerusalem: **1 Chronicles 13:7-14**. But only Chronicles gives the reason for the failure of the first attempt: **1 Chronicles 15:1-3, 11-15**. At whose instigation was the ark previously carried on a cart? The pagan Philistines: 1 Samuel 6:7-12.

God gives worship out of a less-than-satisfactory situation

Chronicles relates the account of the plague sent as a result of David's mistrustful census of Israel in 2 Samuel 24: **1 Chronicles 21:14-27**. Chronicles adds: **1 Chronicles 21:28-22:1**. The plague, and the choice of the site of the temple, came as a result of David's sin. The temple is built on the place where God's wrath came to an end (compare 2 Samuel 24:1 with 1 Samuel 21:1: Satan exposed as an instrument of God's displeasure).

David is as instrumental as Solomon in the setting-up of the temple and its worship

See **1 Chronicles 22:2-6; 11-19**. Chapters 23-27 detail the personnel involved. Then **1 Chronicles 28:11-21**, and David's magnificent prayer after the generous outpouring of gifts: **1 Chronicles 29:10-18**. All of this is only in Chronicles. Details of Solomon's wisdom, and the adverse material about Solomon in 1 Kings 11, is omitted. Solomon's wisdom consists in building the temple. Remember this is written at a time when this temple had been destroyed and a new temple was needed to be built in its place: see **Ezra 3:10-13**—there follow details of the contesting and delays of the temple rebuilding during the reign of Cyrus (from 530 B.C.), and opposition in subsequent reigns, before returning to the rebuilding in the reign of Darius (520 B.C).

God's forgiveness and healing is promised

1 Kings 9:1-5 is expanded in **2 Chronicles 7:12-16** to include a merciful promise to all of God's people (corresponding to Solomon's prayer in 2 Chronicles 6:12-42; 1 Kings 8:22-53).

Worship is full of joy

The Levites, musicians and singers: **1 Chronicles 23:30–31; 25:1, 5–7; 2 Chronicles 5:11–14; 7:6.** (This beats seventy-six trombones, and the Mormon Tabernacle Choir combined!). It is after the exile that it is said, ‘the joy of the Lord is your strength’ **Nehemiah 8:9–12; see 1 Chronicles 29:20–22; 2 Chronicles 7:9–10; 30:21–22, 26; 35:17–18.**

Worship wins battles

See **2 Chronicles 20:13–30**, even though, as we saw, the ‘good’ king Jehoshaphat had his ups and downs.

The humble seeking of God in extremity

All of this relates to the new submission to God that came through experience of the exile. See **Daniel 9:3–20**, note **9, 18**. Compare the Anglican ‘Prayer of Humble Access’: ‘We do not presume to come to this thy Table, O merciful Lord, trusting in our own righteousness, but in thy manifold and great mercies’. (Chapters 9 of Ezra and Nehemiah are also worth reading in this connection.) Knowing God in this way is the motivation for true worship. Though ‘it is actually more important to know that we love God than to know that God loves us, although the two movements are actually the same’.¹

The temple of his body

For us, all of this is now happening in Jesus Christ: **John 2:13–22; 4:19–26**. And with us in him: **Ephesians 2:18–22; 1 Peter 2:5**; individually: **1 Corinthians 6:19–20**; and corporately: **1 Corinthians 3:16–17**. See also: **Revelation 21:22**. Which is why the ‘Prayer of Humble Access’, after we have prayed that ‘our sinful bodies may be made clean by his body, and our souls washed through his most precious blood’, we end up praying ‘that we may evermore dwell in him, and he in us’.

¹ Richard Rohr, Centre for Action and Contemplation, email 9 November 2020; compare Matthew 22:37–38; John 21:15–19.