

## EXILE AND BEYOND

### 1 and 2 Chronicles

#### Why Study Chronicles?

Chronicles appears to reproduce much of what we find in the books of Samuel and Kings, with many of the good stories left out (such as David and Goliath, David and Saul, Ahab and Jezebel, and the prophets Elijah and Elisha). Kings covers the history of both the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah, but Chronicles deals only with Judah. Chronicles is replete with genealogies and lists of names, which can prove tedious to the modern reader.

Yet Chronicles is very instructive in what it selects, omits and adds in relation to Samuel and Kings. The genealogies give God's people a clear sense of identity and possession. The focus on Judah is not exclusive, but seeks to represent and include the whole of the people of Israel. The treatment of David and Solomon, selective as it is, gives promise of a revived and positive kingship in Israel. Where Kings is fairly black-and-white in its character assessment of various kings, Chronicles is much more nuanced and true to life (e.g. Rehoboam, Asa, Jehoshaphat). Where Samuel and Kings are somewhat bleak and final (see 2 Kings 17:29–41; 21:10–16), Chronicles holds out the possibility of repentance (e.g. Manasseh). And Chronicles has an unmatched appreciation of the fullness and joy of worship, especially in music and singing.

So Chronicles has new things to teach, both to people in its own day, and to us. In these studies we will not attempt to expound the entire 1 and 2 Chronicles, but rather seek out some lessons for us as followers of Jesus Christ.

#### Beyond the Exile

A key to understanding Chronicles is to appreciate the setting in which it was written. Both Kings and Chronicles deal with the history of Israel up to the time of the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile to Babylon in 586 BC (see **2 Kings 25:1–12, 27–30**; 2 Chron. 36:15–21). Kings leaves it there, but Chronicles goes on to speak of the return from exile (**2 Chron. 36:22–23**). Chronicles also continues the genealogy of the family of David beyond Jehoiachin (see **1 Chron. 3:17–24**) beyond even Zerubbabel, who returned with the exiles to Jerusalem and helped begin the rebuilding of the temple (of Ezra 2:2; 3:8; 5:1–2; see 1 Chron. 3:19); and makes reference to those who returned (**1 Chron. 9:1–34**; compare Ezra 2:1–70; Neh. 11:1–36). So Chronicles is written (around 430 BC?) for a remnant people attempting to reconstruct their lives after a time of violent disruption and displacement.

While these have returned to Jerusalem and their towns, it is not, and cannot be, a return to how things were before. They are still under foreign occupation and oppression (see Ezra 9:5–9; **Neh. 9:36–37**). This was a situation that still pertained in Jesus' day, when there were those who were still 'looking forward to the consolation of Israel' and 'looking for the redemption of Jerusalem' (Luke 2:25–38), when God would come as Deliverer (see **Rom. 11:26**; quoting Isa. 59:20; Psa. 14:7).

How does this speak to us today? There are currently 80 million displaced persons in the world (refugees, asylum seekers).<sup>1</sup> The situation in Chronicles is akin to that of first nations people in Australia over the last two hundred years—having their lands occupied and taken from them, their populations decimated, whole people groups and generations moved to other places, still

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<sup>1</sup> 'The latest figures from the UN reveal a shocking statistic. There are now nearly 80 million people around the world who have been forced to flee their homes because of conflict or disaster. That's more than one in every hundred people on Earth' (Email 'Together we can #EndCOVIDForAll', info@actforpeace.org.au, 10 July 2020).

suffering marked disadvantage.<sup>2</sup> It could be felt that the Christian church in Australia is now in a kind of cultural exile, especially compared with the high days of the 1950s—what do we learn from that, and how do we come out of it? Recovery from the disruptions of Covid-19 can be another similar situation.<sup>3</sup> There is a sense in which all Christians, indeed all humanity, are in exile, awaiting their true home (see 1 Peter 1:1–9; 2 Peter 3:13; **Hebrews 11:13–16**).

Israelites, under pressure in a down time when Chronicles was written, looked to God’s action in their history to learn lessons and instil hope. We can do the same.

### The Genealogies

A friend of mine was one of a team translating the New Testament into an aboriginal language in the north of Australia. They had done most of Matthew’s gospel, and had left the genealogy of Jesus (Matt. 1:1–17) till last. They gathered the people together in the church to check the translation of this last bit. As it was read out, the air became electric. At the end the people said, ‘Why didn’t you tell us this before? Now we know that everything you said about Jesus is true!’<sup>4</sup> Genealogies in the Bible are not to be despised, or skipped over. We may not know most of these people, but God knows each one personally, and the Holy Spirit saw fit to record and preserve all their names in the Scriptures.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Joe Young Tjupurrula, in *Every hill got a story*, by men and women of Central Australia and the Central Land Council, compiled and edited by Marg Bowman, Richmond, Victoria: Hardie Grant Books, 2015, p. 248: “Tjupurrula’s family travelled and lived around Tjukurla, Kurultu, Warakuna and Docker River, before his family went to Uluru. From there the department of Aboriginal Affairs took them first to Ernabella, then to Bungalow in Alice Springs and eventually to Papunya and Areonga. From Areonga the family moved back to Papunya, then ‘that government mob been shifting us round in every bore — Yayayi Bore, and Waruwiya — and all the rockholes, till we shift out to Kintore.” Margaret Martin Nungarrayi, p. 251: ‘When I was a young girl we walked from Gordon Downs with Camels all the way to the Tanami, we went to the Granites where some whitefellas came with a big truck and shifted all the Aboriginal people at the Granites to Mount Doreen. We travelled from Yuendumu to Lajamanu. Then I was moving around with my husband’s family. Then we got homesick and went back to Gordon Downs and Lajamanu.’ One other instance: ‘In 1900 the aboriginal people living on the river at Wollar [now a mining town 316 km north-west of Sydney NSW] were moved by force to the mission at Brewarrina 550 kilometres away, never to return. This occurred because of the actions of Jimmy and Joey Governor, protagonists of ‘The Chant of Jimmy Blacksmith’ who had been living there. Only my grandmother was left behind as a young child with the Bailey family at Wilpingjong.’ The Rev’d Glenn Loughrey, a Wiradjuri man, with artwork ‘Journey into exile, never to return’, in Celia Kemp, *A Voice in the Wilderness: Listening to the Statement from the Heart*, Anglican Board of Mission Australia, 2019, p. 89, [www.abmission.org/voice](http://www.abmission.org/voice). See also the eviction of Anangu from Ooldea Soak and Maralinga 24 June 1952: see Christobel Mattingley, *Maralinga’s Long Shadow: Yvonne’s Story*, (2016: Allen and Unwin) pp. 20–21.

<sup>3</sup>Family who moved to Melbourne shortly before the lockdowns began: ‘We feel displaced—we don’t know where home is any more’.

<sup>4</sup> For a number of years our daughter and her family lived and worked in Yuendumu, on the edge of the Tanami desert 350 km north-west of Alice Springs, on Warlpiri country. They were given skin names: she is Napanangka and her husband Jupurrula, so their sons are Jakamarra and their daughter Nakamarra. That makes me Japangardi and Vivien Nampijinpa, and our daughter’s parent-in-law Jakamarra and Napaljarri. So then everyone knows who we are and where we belong (including who we can marry). Another whitefella we know of was ordained in Arnhem land and apprenticed to an aboriginal pastor, who gave him the job first of learning by heart all the names of the complex kinship system—so he would know his way around.

<sup>5</sup> On the basis of ‘those who believe are the children of Abraham’ (Gal. 3:7), and ‘he chose us before the foundation of the world . . . to be his children through Jesus Christ’ (Eph. 1:4, 5), one member of a study group, after reading Jesus’ genealogy in Luke 3:23–38, excitedly declared, ‘I am in the same family with Abraham and David!’

Genealogies are especially important for people in displaced situations, seeking to re-establish their identity and place in the world—who they are and where they belong.<sup>6</sup> The genealogies in Chronicles are of a remnant regrouped people trying to piece together their lives. So they draw on what records they have—some from the holy books that have been kept, some from military and census lists, some from records families have kept, some fragmentary bits and pieces (see e.g. .

The opening genealogies occupy the first nine chapters. This in itself is a massive achievement, with a vast array of names and information. It begins boldly by going right back to the beginnings of humanity: ‘Adam, Seth, Enosh . . .’ (1 Chron. 1:1). Not content with just tracing their own immediate family tree, the returning Israelites, battered and diminished as they are, proudly state their position in the whole human race, and their place among the nations of the world.

Compare this with the genealogies of Jesus in the gospels of Matthew and Luke. Matthew, written particularly with Hebrew readers in mind, traces Jesus’ family back through the exile and David to Abraham (see Matt. 1:1–17). Luke, writing among all the Gentile nations, goes back to Adam, and plants Jesus firmly in the entire human race, in our relationship with God (see Luke 3:23–38).

We get to Abraham in 1 Chronicles 1:24. Families of Ishmael and Esua/Seir/Edom follow (1 Chron. 1:28–53), before settling down to the families Jacob, who in Chronicles is consistently called Israel (the name given to Jacob by God as related in Genesis 32:28 and 35:10. This is significant for the Chronicler. Even though the ten northern tribes of Israel had been exiled and ‘lost’ much earlier by the Assyrians in 721 BC, and those who returned from exile were predominantly from the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, the Chronicler wants to see the returned exiles as the continuation of the whole of Israel under God. This was a consistent hope at the time of the exile (see Ezek. 37:15–28). So close attention is paid to Jacob as ‘Israel’, whose sons were the progenitors of the twelve tribes of Israel (1 Chron. 2:1–2).

Genealogies of the tribes of Israel follow: Judah (1 Chron. 2:3–4:23; the longest of all, since most of those who survived the exile were Judeans), with particular attention to the family of David (3:1–24; continuing on well after the exile); then the trans-Jordan tribes of Simeon (4:24–43; note **33**), Reuben (5:1–10), Gad (5:11–17), and the half-tribe of Manasseh (5:23–26), with interesting snippets of their exploits and demise (5:9–10, **18–22**, 25–26). These are briefer, reflecting the longer time since they were around, but drawing on older records (**5:17**). The priestly tribe of Levi follows in more detail, including their geographical spread<sup>7</sup> throughout the other tribes (6:1–81)—significant for the later emphasis on right worship. Issachar (7:1–5) and Benjamin (7:6–12) follow briefly, drawing particularly on military records (see also **7:40**); then Naphtali (**7:13!**); the rest of Manasseh (7:14–19); Ephraim (7:20–29); and Asher (7:30–40); again with another little snippet (**7:21–23**). A more detailed genealogy of Benjamin (8:1–40; since many of the exile survivors were Benjaminites) makes special reference to the family of Saul (8:33–40)—the Chronicler wants later to emphasise reconciliation between the estranged families of Saul and David. A summary sentence making reference to ‘all Israel’ (9:1) leads into a

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<sup>6</sup> How many Australian families have compiled genealogical family histories going back to forbears who arrived in Australia from elsewhere on a ship? (E.g. Shirley J Porter-Sampson [my second cousin once removed], *Porter . . . they be thy people: An historical and genealogical record of the Porter Families who settled in South Australia from 1839 to 1987*, Adelaide, 1988, Revised and updated 2015. See also [ancestry.com.au](http://ancestry.com.au))

<sup>7</sup> There is a concern in these genealogies to trace not only the family trees, but also the family homes—the lands they occupied. Compare: ‘Alec Peterson Apetyarr . . . was recognized throughout eastern central Australia for the depth of his cultural knowledge, his tuition of the younger generations and the information he provided for several land claims.’ *Every hill got a story*, p. 240.

list of the returned exiles (9:2–44), with particular reference again to the priests and Levites (9:10–34), concluding with a repeat of the family of Saul (9:35–44; compare 8:29–40) to lead into the account of the death of Saul in chapter 10.

What do we notice about these genealogies in 1 Chronicles 1–9? They are quite uneven in their coverage, largely dependent on those who were still extant to some extent after the exile (see particularly Naphtali, 7:13). Two of the northern tribes, among the earlier exiles in 721 BC, are omitted altogether—Dan and Zebulun (but see Matthew 4:12–17; quoting Isaiah 9:1–2—not forgotten by God!). Some of the material is fragmentary and unrelated to its context: supplementary material on the sons of Perez (4:1–20) in the genealogy of Judah appears to be quite random (but with a God-affirming snippet, **4:10**), and some of the bits and pieces do not always fit with each other (e.g. **2:31 and 34**). Some of the difficulties of reconstruction may be reflected in **4:22**, ‘(now the records are ancient)’, if this meant they were fragmentary and somewhat indecipherable.

Nevertheless, what we do see is a brave attempt to include everybody they come across. This is in contrast to an attitude that prevailed earlier among the returned exiles, where some who showed up without the proper proof or complete genealogies were initially excluded from the congregation (as in **Ezra 2:59–63**; Nehemiah 7:61–65)<sup>8</sup>. Perhaps the returned exiles, once they realised the still precarious sparseness of their situation, recognised the importance of more generous inclusion and unity, over against old divisions (compare **Numbers 11:26–29**; **Luke 9:49–55**). And the Chronicler is intent to emphasise that the returned exiles were indeed the continuation of ‘all Israel’—see **1 Chron. 9:3**; 12:8, 16, 19 (David); 2 Chron. 10:1; 11:14 (Rehoboam); **15:9** (Asa); **19:4** (Jehoshaphat); **30:1, 5–13** (Hezekiah); **35:18** (Josiah). Could this be in anticipation of Romans 11:25–27; **Revelation 7:1–8, 9–17**?

We will go on to consider other aspects of Chronicles that anticipate the Messianic age: David and the true kingship; faithfulness to God, with compassionate and nuanced flexibility, and opportunities for repentance; and David, Solomon and the true worship.

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<sup>8</sup> As some refugees arrive these days without personal papers. ‘Rather, their aim is to paint a portrait of the people of God in its ideal extent as a symbol of both the particularity of his election and the breadth of his grace.’ H. G. M. Williamson, *1 and 2 Chronicles*, The New Century Bible Commentary, London: Marshall Morgan & Scott, 1982, p. 39.