

THE BOOK OF CHRONICLES

Those who think that 1–2 Chronicles is just a repeat of 1–2 Kings fail to see the pronounced differences that reflect the different audiences of each work. Kings was written to a nation in exile to explain why they deserved such punishment. Chronicles was written to a remnant who had returned to explain God’s covenant promises to David with its implications for a future Davidic king and glorious house of God in Jerusalem. The writer emphasized that the enjoyment of covenant blessings required faithfulness to the Mosaic covenant. Key verses: 1 Chr 17:11-12; 2 Chr 6:14; 7:14; 15:15.

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

Though a small portion of the Israelites returned from exile in Babylon, God’s glorious promises given through Isaiah, Jeremiah, and other prophets were not fulfilled. The temple was slow to be built, Jerusalem long lay in ruins, and the nations were a persistent threat to Israel’s survival. The Israelites were surely not living in the promised kingdom with the new David on the throne, ruling over the nations, with every man sitting under his own vine and fig tree. The prophets explained that the bleak situation (1) did not indicate that God would not fulfill all of his promises and (2) was the result of the people’s persistent unfaithfulness to the covenant. They also explained that judgment would come before the Lord established his kingdom on earth with a pierced Messiah sitting on the throne.

GOING FURTHER

Trace throughout the post-exilic books just how the people were being prepared for the Messiah.

PREPARATION FOR THE NEXT STUDY

Read and savor Matthew 1-7. How does the OT inform our interpretation of Jesus’ birth, the visit of the Magi, the message of John, the temptation, the announcement of Jesus, and the Sermon on the Mount?

RETURN FROM EXILE, BUT NO KINGDOM

PREPARATION FOR THIS STUDY

Read Ezra 9–10, Nehemiah 13, Esther 8–9, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. Consider: were God’s promises to Israel fulfilled upon the return from exile? Why not? What’s next?

BACKGROUND

Jerusalem was destroyed and the Israelites carried into exile in 586 BC. Ezekiel and Daniel prophesied to the Israelites in Babylon revealing in greater specificity God’s glorious plans for the future. When Persia conquered Babylon, Cyrus issued a decree allowing the Jews to return (in fulfillment of Isa 44–45).

SUMMARY OF POST-EXILIC HISTORY

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| 538 BC | First return, temple foundation laid | Ezra 1–4 |
| 516 BC | Temple finally completed | Ezra 5–6; Haggai, Zechariah |
| 480 BC | Israelites guilty of many sins | Malachi |
| 474 BC | Haman plots to kill the Jews | Esther |
| 458 BC | Ezra leads return and discovers intermarriage | Ezra 7–10 |
| 445 BC | Nehemiah returns to rebuild Jerusalem and lead people in repentance | Nehemiah |

THE BOOK OF EZRA

In chapters 1–6, the first exiles return to Jerusalem and lay the foundation of the temple. But they are defeated by opposition and the temple isn’t finished until God sends Haggai and Zechariah to motivate them. This is indeed a disappointing return: (1) for 20 years there is no temple; (2) then the temple is a faint echo of the glory of the former one; (3) the Israelites are subject to the Persians; (4) there is no son of David sitting on the throne; (5) the deliverance from Babylon is quite unlike the miraculous exodus from Egypt. Why are God’s promises of a glorious return not fulfilled?

The second half of Ezra (chs. 7–10) skips forward 60 years to the time when Ezra the priest leads another group of exiles back to Jerusalem. There Ezra is dismayed to learn that those living in Judah have intermarried with idolatrous foreigners. Ezra leads the people in repentance and sending away the foreign wives so that a God-worshipping remnant would be preserved. Key verses: 3:12; 4:24; 5:5; 6:12; 6:22; 7:10; 7:23; 9:2, 13–15; 10:2.

THE BOOK OF HAGGAI

The Jews in Jerusalem are plagued by curses that were sent by God because of their disobedience (ch. 1). When the people obey and build the (unimpressive) temple, the Lord promises a glorious future (ch. 2), including (1) a temple full of the glory of God and the wealth of the nations; (2) an obedient people worthy of blessing; and (3) defeat of the nations and the establishment of a son of David on Israel's throne. Key verses: 1:9; 2:9; 2:23.

THE BOOK OF ZECHARIAH

A contemporary of Haggai, the prophet Zechariah developed at greater length God's future blessings for an obedient remnant. In a series of 8 visions (chs. 1–6), the prophet saw God's plan to defeat the nations, remove wickedness from the land, rebuild Jerusalem, and raise up a priest-king to rebuild the temple and rule over the nations. These visions of the future should compel present obedience demonstrated in social justice and courageous faith (chs. 7–8). Zechariah concludes with two oracles in which a complicated future is predicted: Israel's king will come on a donkey but be rejected with thirty pieces of silver (chs. 9–11). Israel will grieve bitterly for the one they have pierced so that a fountain of forgiveness will be opened to cleanse them from their sin (chs. 12–13). The nations will rise up to destroy Jerusalem but the Lord will descend to the Mount of Olives to protect his city and become king over the whole earth. Jerusalem will be secure for all time and the survivors of the nations will go up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the Lord Almighty (ch. 14). Key verses: 1:3–6; 2:10; 6:12–13; 8:3; 14:9.

THE BOOK OF MALACHI

The glorious promises of Haggai and Zechariah do not motivate the people to single-minded faithfulness and when the prophet Malachi arises (480 BC?), the priests are corrupt, the people are intermarrying idolatrous foreigners, and the covenant is ignored. Malachi calls the people to repentance and obedience and he warns them of God's coming judgment which will be heralded by a messenger like Elijah. Key verses: 1:10–11; 2:2; 3:1; 3:12.

THE BOOK OF ESTHER

In a book that is something of a “meanwhile back on the ranch (of exile in Persia) account,” the book of Esther reveals the grave dangers that exist for the Jewish people living outside of Israel among the nations. When Haman attempts to exterminate the Jews, the Lord delivers them entirely by “natural” (providential) means without a single miracle (suspension of the natural order). The name of the Lord is intentionally never mentioned in order to show just how God is quietly at work preserving his people and his promises against the schemes of the “seed of the serpent.” Key verses: 4:14; 6:13; 9:24–25.

THE BOOK OF NEHEMIAH

That the Jew Nehemiah occupied a high position in the Persian government and enjoyed the favor of the king shows the possibility of Israel thriving while under subjection. Yet the city of Jerusalem still lies in ruins, with its modest temple unprotected by a defensive city wall. Nehemiah is filled with shame for the deplorable condition of the city where David ruled, God dwelled, and his ancestors were buried. His return shows that faithfulness to God results in blessing, but hostile opposition is close at hand (chs. 1–6). With the godly leaders of the priest Ezra and the governor Nehemiah, the people confess their sins and devote themselves to the covenant (chs. 8–10). They celebrate the rebuilding of Jerusalem's walls (ch. 12), but when Nehemiah returns from a trip to Persia, he is dismayed to see the people have returned to covenant unfaithfulness (ch. 13). Key verses: 1:3, 7; 2:17; 4:2; 5:8; 6:16; 8:18; 9:36–37; 10:29; 12:43; 13:18.