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**Core Seminar**

**Old Testament**

**Class 24: 1st & 2nd Chronicles**

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**Introduction**

Think of a wedding where you watch a slideshow of pictures that tell a person’s story from birth. What do you get out of them? Well, more than just some cute baby pictures. They highlight what that person has tried to do with her life. And that’s a good analogy for our study this morning. We’ve been following the development of God’s plan of redemption through the Old Testament all the way up to Judah’s exile into Babylon. Last week, in the book of Daniel, we saw the prophet Daniel rejoicing that the end of the exile was near. Today, we arrive at a book that was written *after* the exile, when the people had returned to Jerusalem. And this book, the book of Chronicles, functions like a giant slideshow of the whole Old Testament. Reaching all the way back to Adam and focusing especially on the monarchy, Chronicles is a deliberate retelling of the people’s history. It’s a grand retrospective, to help them make sense of who they are now that the exile’s over. Let’s pray, and then we’ll begin.

**[PRAY]**

**Context**

Like Samuel and Kings, first and second Chronicles were originally one book, and that’s how we’ll treat them today. The Hebrew name for the book translates to “the events of the days”—it’s a historical record. One of the early church fathers, Jerome, called it the “chronicle” of Judah’s history when he translated the Bible into Latin, and title stuck. We don’t know who the actual chronicler was who assembled this book. Some suggest Ezra, the priest we’ll study next week.

Regardless of who the author was, the historical context of *when* he wrote helps us understand *why* he wrote. To get a sense of this context, let’s turn to 1 Chron. 9:1-2, starting in the second half of verse 1:

“And Judah was taken into exile in Babylon because of their breach of faith. Now the first to dwell again in their possessions in their cities were Israel, the priests, the Levites, and the temple servants.”

***So are we during or after the exile?*** [After] Right! After seventy years, they’re back!

And this fact is key to appreciating the message of the book of Chronicles. As you remember, the history of Israel was one of hope and tragedy. Hope God’s promise that one of David’s sons would rule forever. But tragedy as king after king failed to live up to God’s righteous. Tragedy seemed to win as the northern tribes of Israel were exiled to Assyria in 722 BC, never to return. And as the southern kingdom of Judah was defeated by Babylon in 586 BC. Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed, and the people exiled. But hope wasn’t crushed completely; a remnant was preserved in Babylon, and David’s line survived through king Jehoiachin. Ezra and Nehemiah, which we’ll study next week, complete the story by showing us what happened when the people finally returned to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple and the city walls.

***What are some similarities between these people and our situation as Christians today?*** *[one key similarity: we both live in the middle of the “already, not yet” fulfillment of God’s promises.]*

**Purpose of Chronicles**

That’s all context. But before we dive into Chronicles, we need to answer an important question that gets to the purpose of Chronicles. Why does the author retell a history that’s already been told once in the Old Testament. After all, much of Chronicles overlaps with the books of 2 Samuel and 1 and 2 Kings. The answer is that Chronicles was compiled with a different theological purpose. Kings was composed *during* the exile, so its main concern is to show that God didn’t break his promise when he allowed the exile. For the chronicler, though, the exile is over. His aim is to remind the people of faith that God still has a future for them. So he leaves out stories that were prominent in Kings, and features content that Kings lacks. He’s got a different end in mind.

So what’s his purpose? Well, whereas Kings is about why the people had to go into exile, Chronicles is about where their hope is to be now that they’re back. Put yourself in their shoes for a moment. You’re part of this community that’s returned to Jerusalem. You’ve got some big questions to answer, don’t you? Like, “Is God’s promise of a Messiah still valid? Are we still his covenant people? Does God still care about us?” The chronicler’s purpose in retelling their history is to answer those questions. Like a wedding slideshow, he’s carefully picked out a few photos (that is, historical vignettes) to show them who they are now that they’re back in the land.

You see, things weren’t exactly as they expected them to be. Remember back to Daniel chapter 9 last week. The seventy years are over—and so the exiles are returning. But the seventy weeks have just begun—the seventy “sevens” that must pass until the Lord’s Anointed One—the Messiah—begins his rule. And so while the physical exile is over, the spiritual exile continues. That’s why when the people return to Jerusalem, they’re not yet enjoying all the new covenant promises that we read of in places like Jeremiah 31 and Ezekiel 37. Chronicles is written telling the people that they are *not* to place their ultimate hope in their return to the land, but in God’s greater fulfillment of promises that’s yet to come.

Well then, how does this work out in Chronicles? Let’s dive in and find out.

**[TAKE QUESTIONS]**

**1 Chronicles 1-9 -- Genealogies: The Roots of the Postexilic Community**

Turn with me to 1 Chronicles 1:1-4. “Adam, Seth, Enosh; Kenan, Mahalalel, Jared; Enoch, Methuselah, Lamech;Noah, Shem, Ham, and Japheth.” If you allow your eyes to drift, you’ll notice that the lists of names goes on for *quite* a long time – 9 chapters to be exact. Now, to modern sensibilities, such genealogies may seem irrelevant. The prospect of ending up in 1 Chronicles during your personal devotions might not seem too thrilling!

But if we remember the context, we’ll see how fundamental these genealogies are to the chronicler’s purpose. He’s demonstrating that the postexilic community are God’s chosen people—just like these saints of old! That comes across in how the genealogies are structured. You see there in 1:1 that the chronicler starts all the way at the beginning of time, with Adam. And as he progresses through history, the chronicler always zeroes in on the line of promise. You see in chapter 1, verses 5-16, he briefly mentions the two descendents of Noah who are *not* ancesters of Abraham. But in verse 17 the account shifts to the line of Shem, Noah’s son who *does* lead to Abraham. The same thing happens with Abraham’s sons. The line of Ishmael only goes for one generation. But then he focuses in on the line of Isaac beginning in 1:34.

Now, look at 2:1-2. Here we see the twelve sons of Israel. Interestingly, the record starts with Judah, instead of the oldest son, Reuben. Why? Because through Judah’s line we watch for the coming king David, and beyond David, the Messiah. David appears in 2:15, and if you look over to chapter 3 you’ll see the list of David’s sons. Amazingly, David’s royal lineage is traced *all the way through to the other side of the exile*. Verse 19 mentions a man named Zerubbabel who is the Davidic descendant governing Jerusalem *after* the return from exile. It’s as through the chronicler really can’t wait to the end of the book to say, “Look! We’re back from exile and Yahweh’s promises are still intact!”

Moving ahead, Chapters 4-8 contain the genealogies of some more of Jacob’s sons. The point here is to show what happened to the North because of their unfaithfulness. Unlike those who returned to Jerusalem, the northern tribes of Israel were lost in exile. Still, turn to 1 Chr. 9:1. There you see the summary statement, “So all Israel was recorded in genealogies, and these are written in the Book of the Kings of Israel.” That phrase, “All Israel,” is one that the chronicler repeats a dozens of times throughout the book. Yes, he’s mainly concerned with Judah. But his inclusion of most of the northern tribes here and his emphasis on “all Israel” tells us something. It tells us that the spiritual core of the people isn’t found in the national identity of the southern kingdom, but in the promises that Yahweh made to David. Those promises are for anyone in Judah *or* Israel who would repent and believe.

One final point on these genealogies. Because this is a unique genre of literature in scripture, it often gets misinterpreted. For example, folks might argue that if you pray the same prayer Jabez prayed in 1 Chr. 4:9, you’ll get blessed the same way he did. Beware this kind of interpretation. For one, it brushes aside the differences between the ways God worked in the nation of Israel and the ways he works in his church today. And second, that interpretation brushes past the author’s main intent in including the material. The main point here is that the people are still connected to God’s promises and that David’s line is still intact. To be valid, any secondary point will have to line up with that main point.

**[TAKE QUESTIONS]**

**1 Chronicles 10-2 Chronicles 9—The United Monarchy: The Messianic Hope of the Postexilic Community**

The next major section covers the united monarchy under David and Solomon. If you turn to 1 Chr. 17:11-13, you’ll see the reason why David in particular features so prominently in the book. God says to David, “When your days are fulfilled to walk with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, one of your own sons, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for me, and I will establish his throne forever. I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son.” In this passage, God makes a covenant with David. Yes, one of David’s sons will build a “house,” a temple for God – but God himself will build a “house” for David – a dynasty from which will come an eternal king. You’ll remember that from 2 Samuel.

It’s this promise that the chronicler wants to impress on his readers. We can see how he does that through two important ways his account differs from the account of David and Solomon in Samuel and Kings.

**1)** The first way difference: unlike Samuel and Kings, **Chronicles presents a vision of what the Messiah will be like by highlighting the *positive* aspects of David and Solomon.**

To see one example of what I mean, turn back quickly to 2 Samuel 11:1-2: “In the spring of the year, the time when kings go out to battle, David sent Joab, and his servants with him, and all Israel. And they ravaged the Ammonites and besieged Rabbah. But David remained at Jerusalem.It happened, late one afternoon, when David arose from his couch and was walking on the roof of the king's house, that he saw from the roof a woman bathing; and the woman was very beautiful.”

Well, you may know where that story ends up: with David committing adultery and even murder. 2 Samuel reminds us that David was far from perfect.

But now, turn over to 1 Chron. 20:1-2: “In the spring of the year, the time when kings go out to battle, Joab led out the army and ravaged the country of the Ammonites and came and besieged Rabbah. But David remained at Jerusalem. And Joab struck down Rabbah and overthrew it. And David took the crown of their king from his head. He found that it weighed a talent of gold, and in it was a precious stone. And it was placed on David's head.”

Whoa! Talk about whitewashing history! Nothing at all about adultery and murder. In Samuel, David’s exposed as a sinner. In Chronicles, he’s wearing a crown of victory! This is one instance of many in Chronicles where David’s described as the king *par excellence*. Was the chronicler trying to cover up the facts? Not at all: David’s sins had been recorded in Samuel precisely so the people wouldn’t forget them.[[1]](#footnote-1) But the chronicler has a different agenda. By portraying David in an overwhelmingly positive light, he’s painting a picture of the sort of king the postexilic people were to hope for.

It’s the same thing when we get to Solomon: his sin of idolatry, which you can read about in 1 Kings 11, is notably absent in Chronicles. The chronicler describes these two kings of the past in such a way as to give a preview of *the* King of the future.

For us today, we can marvel at how the history of David and Solomon teach us so much about Jesus. Jesus is the King who rules in justice; Jesus is the warrior who brings us victory over sin, Satan, and death; Jesus is the shepherd of our hearts who leads us to worship and pray to God; Jesus is the owner of all wealth, riches, and splendor; Jesus is the supreme wisdom of God. Read of David and Solomon in this book, and delight in how they foreshadow the greatest King of all.

**2)** The second thing to note in this section: unlike in Kings, **in Chronicles, the accounts of David and Solomon revolve around the temple of God.**

In 1 Kings (5:7), Hiram, king of Tyre, praises God for Solomon’s wisdom. “Blessed be the Lord this day, who has given to David a wise son to be over this great people.” In Chronicles (2 Ch 2:12), Hiram is again quoted: “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, who made heaven and earth, who has given King David a wise son, who has discretion and understanding, who will build a temple for the Lord and a royal palace for himself.” In Kings, wisdom is for ruling; in Chronicles it’s for building. So as you read this section, you can’t help but notice how much attention the temple receives. If you just scan with your finger along 1 Chr. 22-26, you see the amount of space given to David’s preparations for the temple Solomon would build. From the organization of the priests to the assignments of the musicians and gatekeepers. And that continues into 2 Chronicles.

Why this focus? It’s not to get the people to hope in a mere building; after all, Solomon’s prayer in 2 Chron. 6 admits that God doesn’t need a physical place to dwell. No, all this attention to the temple reminds us that in order to enjoy a reconciled relationship with God, the returning exiles must respond to God in repentance and faith. *The chronicler focuses on the temple because the temple, where the atonement sacrifices were made, represents God’s willingness to forgive all who seek him with repentant hearts.* Listen to 2 Chron. 6:24-25: “If your people Israel are defeated before the enemy because they have sinned against you, and they turn again and acknowledge your name and pray and plead with you in this house, then hear from heaven and forgive the sin of your people Israel and bring them again to the land that you gave to them and to their fathers.” To approach God at the temple was to approach him humbly, pleading for forgiveness. And that is the approach to God these returning exiles needed.

**[TAKE QUESTIONS]**

**2 Chronicles 10-36—The Kings of Judah: Examples of Rebellion and Repentance**

The rest of Chronicles gives a record of the kings of Judah, presenting the nation’s descent into sin, division, and finally exile. To understand the significance of this final section of the story, we need to look at a crucial passage: 2 Chr. 7:13-15. Do you remember how we used Solomon’s prayer dedicating the temple in 1 Kings as a kind of “rosetta stone” to discern the entire topography and meaning of Kings? We can do the same with Chronicles—specifically, by looking at what’s been added in. Solomon has just dedicated the temple to God, and now God appears to Solomon – and speaks. This happens in Kings too, but the chronicler includes something God says that’s absent from Kings. As we’ve seen already, this is a good sign that the chronicler is highlighting something special.

“When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command the locust to devour the land, or send pestilence among my people,if my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land. Now my eyes will be open and my ears attentive to the prayer that is made in this place.”

So Solomon’s prayer in Kings highlights that the downfall of the nation is merely the working out of the Deuteronomy curses (with hope in God’s mercy). But God’s words here in the corresponding section of Chronicles show a focus on this plea for repentance. In that sense, verse 14 there is really a theme verse for the whole book. Chapters 10-36 cover 19 different kings, from Rehoboam to Zedekiah. All of them are evaluated by how they live up to that verse. Do they humbly seek God and turn from sin? Or do they stubbornly rebel, serve idols, and nurse their pride? This verse establishes an important concept that the chronicler wanted to communicate to the postexilic community. It’s the idea of *immediate retribution*. You might imagine, since so many generations were sinful and wicked before the people went into exile, these returning exiles might think: “we can do whatever we want, and God won’t punish us right away!” That complacency was a real danger. But the chronicler fights against this mindset. Throughout this section, he points out how when the kings and people sinned, they experienced the consequences of their sin *right then*, in their own generation. But when the kings and people obeyed and sought God like this verse instructs them to, he “heard from heaven,” “forgave their sin,” and “healed their land.”

Now, 7:14 is an important verse for Chronicles, but I should note that it’s also a terribly misapplied verse today. It’s a verse given to God’s national people, Israel, the people who were set aside by God to display his character and give birth to his Messiah. You may hear folks apply this verse to the nation of America, but that misapplication rips this verse—painfully!!—out of its original context. America is *not* the chosen land of God – it carries noneof the redemptive-historical significance that the ancient land of Israel did. When the Messiah came, God concluded his work of a special people in a special, physical, land. So, this particular promise to “heal their land” thus no longer applies directly to any place or nation. But the *pattern* of repentance and blessing we see here is one that endures. It instructs us as God’s people to continually turn from our sin and seek the Lord.

Well, having established the principle of immediate retribution that’s so important for Chronicles, let’s look at some examples of this principle at work in this final section.

First, a few positive examples:

Look at 17:9-10, where King Jehoshaphat dispatches teachers of God’s Word: “And they taught in Judah, having the Book of the Law of the Lord with them. They went about through all the cities of Judah and taught among the people. And the fear of the Lord fell upon all the kingdoms of the lands that were around Judah, and they made no war against Jehoshaphat.” You see – immediate blessing. The king and people listen to God, and then they enjoy peace.

Or consider another good king, king Hezekiah. Near the end of us life, he sins. And look what happens in 32:25-26. “But Hezekiah did not make return according to the benefit done to him, for *his heart* was proud. Therefore wrath came upon him and Judah and Jerusalem. **26**But Hezekiah *humbled himself* for the pride of *his heart*, both he and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the wrath of the Lord did not come upon them in the days of Hezekiah.”

But unfortunately, bad outweighs good in Chronicles. Let’s look at some of those examples.

First, in 12:1-2: “When the rule of Rehoboam was established and he was strong, he abandoned the law of the Lord, and all Israel with him. **2**In the fifth year of King Rehoboam, *because they had been unfaithful to the Lord*, Shishak king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem.” You see the pattern: the nation abandons Yahweh, and suffers immediate consequences.

Second example: king Amaziah, Chap. 25:27: “From the time when he turned away from the Lord they made a conspiracy against him in Jerusalem, and he fled to Lachish. But they sent after him to Lachish and put him to death there.” As soon as he leaves the ways of God, Amaziah is killed by his own people.

The book is full of examples like these—both positive and negative—where each generation is judged for its own behavior.

Well, if we fast-forward to the end of the book, we’ll see where this sort of disobedience led. Let’s read 2 Chron. 36:15-20: “The Lord, the God of their fathers, sent persistently to them by his messengers, because he had compassion on his people and on his dwelling place. But they kept mocking the messengers of God, despising his words and scoffing at his prophets, until the wrath of the Lord rose against his people, until there was no remedy. Therefore he brought up against them the king of the Chaldeans… [now look at verse 19,] And they burned the house of God and broke down the wall of Jerusalem and burned all its palaces with fire and destroyed all its precious vessels. He took into exile in Babylon those who had escaped from the sword.”

But by God’s grace, that’s not where Chronicles ends. In verses 22-23, God moves a foreign king, Cyrus of Persia, to free the people to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem. But the principle of immediate retribution still stands. If these people, like their fathers, refuse to seek God, they will reap the bitter fruit of rebellion. And though they’re back in the land, their hearts are no better than their ancestors’.

**[TAKE QUESTIONS]**

**Conclusion**

So, at the end of Chronicles, is there no hope for God’s people? No: the genealogies show that David’s seed is still alive. The focus on the temple reminds the people that God will build his house – the house of David’s son. As 2 Chron. 21:7 says, “Yet the Lord was not willing to destroy the house of David, because of the covenant that he had made with David, and since he had promised to give a lamp to him and to his sons forever.” So Chronicles leads us directly to Christ, the fulfillment of all God’s promises. Jesus is the one who rescues his people from spiritual exile. He is the promised son of David *and* the true temple. And so the end of Chronicles is not a question mark of doubt about the people’s future. It’s a giant arrow pointing to the King of Kings, the one who “heals the land” of God’s people in the most ultimate sense.

Because Chronicles points us to Jesus, it’s a wonderfully encouraging read. Here are a few ways we might apply it:

* First, I’d encourage you *not* to read Chronicles as mere history – but to treasure it as a pointer to the Messiah. We should use Chronicles to bolster our trust in Christ as we see the centuries-old promises he fulfilled.
* Second, as we read Chronicles we sympathize with the postexilic people of God. Just like them, we live in the middle of the “already and not yet,” waiting for Christ’s return. So like the Chronicler was instructing these people, our hope shouldn’t be in how optimistic our circumstances make us. It doesn’t come from earthly rulers or great church leaders. It comes from God’s word of promise. Just like them, we need to look back to redemption history so we can have confidence that God will make good on his future promises. ***[if time, flesh this out in discussion]***
* Finally, we should let the chronicler’s focus on immediate retribution direct us to the cross. If we sinfully choose disobedience instead of God’s ways, we will reap what we sow. Sin *always* has consequences. But praise God that if we are in Christ, Jesus absorbed God’s judgment against us at the cross! Knowing and savoring that gospel truth will help us to flee sin and embrace the repentant life that honors God.

**Any final questions?**

1. It’s also worth noting that the chronicler does include David’s error of counting the troops against God’s will in chapter 21. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)