Chronicles: Responses to Questions

*Why did “The Second History” in Chronicles exclude Deborah, Gideon, and the other judges while including others Adam, Moses…?*

*Why does Chronicles not document in a more narrative form the stories of Abraham, Noah, Moses, etc in the same manner as it does the reigns of the Kings of Israel.*

*Why does Chronicles not document more from the kingdom of Ephraim? How did the two kingdoms differ? Why were they treated separately during this time period? How did they interact during this time period with one another. Were they allies?*

\*\*Chronicles focuses on the story of Judah and leaves out much of what Judah had in common with Ephraim—whose embodiment in Chronicles’ time, in the Second Temple period, is the Samarians, with whom the Judahites are in conflict. You can read about the interaction between the two nations in Kings, which speaks of how Ephraim was more inclined to apostasy than Judah. They were sometimes allies, but often enemies. On the other hand, Chronicles stresses “all Israel,” north and south.\*\*\*

*It seems troublesome that Chronicles changed and added to the earlier books long after they were written, though I guess it’s similar to Matthew and Luke adding material to Mark to make their own Gospel.*

\*\*Maybe it is also similar to the way in our culture books can get revised and expanded by the original author or by someone else after the author’s death. It doesn’t mean there was anything wrong with the first edition..

*How was documenting the stories from David’s time going to shape the people under Persia’s control? What are the connections or how should we relate the two time periods involved? How would our take home message from Chronicles differ from than those in the current Jewish community?*

\*\*Do you mean the Jewish community at the time? See the previous answer! But if they did read it, it would encourage them to rejoice in their privilege of being involved in the worship of Yahweh in the temple in Jerusalem, which David set up (and which the Samarians rejected), even though in worldly terms they were so insignificant, and it would encourage them to trust in God’s power and God’s grace to protect them, and to be responsive to the challenges of the Torah and of their prophets—most of which might be significant for the Jewish community today, and for us.

*What are we to make of the Chronicler’s references to the written accounts of extra biblical sources (i.e. Chronicles of Nathan, Chronicles of Gad the Seer, and the Chronicles of Samuel the Seer)?*

*Are there many people that would have had access to the resources and knowledge available to write 1 and 2 Chronicles?*

*Does the history provided in Chronicles align with other histories provided from different cultures and peoples?*

*How consistent is the Bible with a timeline of history? It would be interesting to see if the bible ever mentions something that a historic timeline never mentioned. An example would be the mentioning of a war in the Bible when that war is never mentioned in any historical text or scriptures.*

\*\*Most of what is mentioned in Chronicles is unmentioned outside the Bible. Most of their hard data comes from Samuel-Kings. Other material comes from the Psalms, as they would be known in worship. Data such as lists would presumably be kept in the temple records. Some comes from creative imagination and reflection. Presumably the chronicles are annals kept in the temple. So people in Jerusalem with an official position and some imagination (e.g., Levites) could undertake the work.

*What is midrash?*

\*\*In this context, it’s the retelling of a story in such a way as to answer the questions that might be raised for a later audience and to indicate how it is significant for them. So Matthew has been called a midrash on Mark.

*Was there a hidden agenda when Cyrus permitted groups of former inhabitants of Judah to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple? What were the Persian intentions behind this?*

\*\*Yes, it looks as if the Persian policy was to be good cop after the Babylonians had been bad cop, to use local leaders such as Sheshbazzar, Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah, and to let the Judahite community’s internal life be ruled by its own laws (the Torah Ezra brings).

*God seems to control the rise and fall of leaders such as Saul, David, and Solomon. What does this imply about will, autonomy, and therefore theodicy?*

\*\*I’m a bit puzzled about the sense in which you think God controlled these events. In Chronicles, Saul’s death happens because the Philistines decide to make war; David comes to the throne through people’s coming to support him; he make Solomon king. So God works through human processes, through the exercise of human wills. On the other hand, I don’t think God is too bothered about human autonomy, as the story of the rise of Saul (not in Chronicles!) and the call of Jonah and the conversion of the other Saul (and the argument of Romans 9—10) show! And maybe what that says about theodicy is that God sometimes intervenes in the world but doesn’t do so very often, because part of the point of the world is for it to be a stage on which human beings have responsibility for what happens.

*Were the second temple and the first temple alike and in the same place? Do you think that people respected the second temple more than the first?*

\*\*Yes, the second temple was a rebuilt version of the first temple. It’s usually assumed to have been less glorious, though I don’t know what hard evidence there is for that idea. It was more respected in the sense that in due course it was less affected by idolatrous worship. (Herod vastly expanded the second temple, and it was certainly then more impressive.)

*How did a king’s obedience and faithfulness with the Lord parallel Israel’s freedom or hardship. How much is due to the king’s leading, and how much is due to the people’s loyalties themselves?*

\*\*I guess the assumption is that whatever the leadership does, usually that is decisive in the life of the people as a whole. So the king decides whether the nation trusts in Yahweh or in other gods and whether it trusts in Yahweh or in military resources, so he is key to the nation’s destiny for good or ill. I guess it’s the same as with churches. If the pastor gives good teaching, there’s a chance that people may grow and experience blessing. If he preaches falsehood, he leads them astray and they pay a price.

*The question of the authority of a text is approached differently in ancient Jewish traditions than today. For example, today we tend to decide on the “authority” of a text based solely on its author, usually one person who sat down and wrote it themselves. Our evaluation of this person’s expertise determines how much weight we give to the text, its value, and accuracy. My question is, since the authority of the text of Chronicles (for its audiences) is not determined by the author himself or herself, what is it determined by? Is it believed to be imbued with divine inspiration itself, and that is what makes it authoritative? Is it authoritative because it is spoken or written down? Who decides what makes certain texts authoritative over others?*

\*\*That’s an interesting contrast, and it draws attention to the reason why questions of the authorship of biblical books trouble us in a way I don’t think they troubled Israel. We don’t have information on how (say) Chronicles got accepted, but the impression one gets from the Prophets is the assumption that people are expected to and can recognize the truth when they hear it. Jeremiah 23 is the lengthiest discussion. Jesus’ equivalent account comes in John 7:17. Calvin’s way of thinking about it is indicated by the term for the internal testimony of the Spirit. Theories about authorship, inspiration, writing down, and canonization follow on the awareness that one has been addressed by God, that what has been said is the kind of thing that God would say; the “decision” about the text being authoritative is the formalizing of a community sense of recognizing that one has heard God speak in this text.

*In this modern day, what can we learn from the genealogical records other than Israelite family lineage? Are there any hidden insights within these chapters of 1 Chronicles that people today too often miss?*

\*\*Maybe a starting point is that people today commonly want to know their genealogy—it’s part of our identity, of knowing who we are. Then as Gentile believers in Jesus, we are adopted into Israel, so this is our genealogy, too. It signifies that we are part of the people God chose and made promises to in Abraham. Further, it reminds Israel and us that we are part of a people that goes back to the very beginnings of humanity, and that God’s work for us and with us is part of his fulfilling his purpose for all humanity. Those implications emerge from the way these genealogies are picked up in Matthew and Luke, which also add that the genealogies indicate that Jesus can be the Messiah—he belongs to the right line.

*How are we to relate to the people of Israel? Chronicles seems to be about God’s interaction with the world as a whole and with the people of Israel specifically. Where does the church in its current form fit into this picture? Where does the individual Christian fit into this picture? It seems that is the modern evangelical question, but that the Bible generally only comments on where the church or the people of God fit into this picture.*

\*\*I think it’s right that Chronicles doesn’t talk so much about the individual, but other books do (e.g., Genesis, Exodus, Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes). But the Bible’s focus on the community shows us that we need to be asking this different question! Then see the previous question—theologically speaking, the church is Israel expanded by the addition of other peoples (Rom 9—11), or is two peoples that has become one new humanity (Eph 2). Israel is the family into which we have been adopted.

*Chronicles emphasizes the Jerusalem temple system. How should this affect our worship to God today? How can the “post-modern”/emergent/emerging church learn to honor and revere God in worship as the Israelites had done?*

\*\*We tend to think of worship as involving mind and emotions. Temple worship also involved doing things, bodily things. It involved movement, processing, feasting. It was sacrificial—you didn’t do it for what you got out of it. David would not offer worship that cost him nothing (1 Chron 21:24). But note that for most people, you would likely be there only once or twice a year—but you would then be there for a week.

*Am I missing it, or is the call for justice and care for the powerless that is so prominent in the prophets missing in Chronicles? If the call for justice is missing, why might that be the case?*

\*\*It’s prominent only in some of the prophets—e.g., not in Isaiah 40—55, Joel, Obadiah, Nahum, Haggai, Malachi. I assume it’s because the community in Chronicles’ day needs encouragement and the problem those earlier prophets focused on is not so much of a problem.

*Why is Chronicles included in the canon as well as Samuel-Kings? Why is Chronicles in the Writings while Kings and Samuel aren’t? How does Christianity understand this difference in histories as compared to Judaism?*

\*\*I imagine it is similar to there being four accounts of the story of Jesus. That is, different accounts are addressed to different audiences and they bring out different truths. The emphases in Samuel-Kings and in Chronicles are different as the emphases of Mark and John are different. I imagine Chronicles is in the Writings because it is later in date—the Genesis to Kings came into existence earlier and was widely accepted earlier. The Writings came into existence later, in their final form.

*I would be interested to hear your thoughts on how music was understood to function as a means of prophecy as 1 Chronicles 25:1-3 seems to imply.*

\*\*Have a look at Exodus 15:1-21—it looks as if such praise was an act of prophesy in the sense of inspired speech. Also 1 Samuel 10:1-13.

*I don’t quite understand God’s relationship to the Israelites, given contrasting verses (1 Chronicles 28:9 and 2 Chronicles 30:9). When does God choose to forsake the Israelites? When does God choose to never leave them? Are these statements addressed to two different people groups? Are these statements referring to different types of actions?*

\*\*I would think Chronicles as a whole (and other parts of scripture assume that

1. Our relationship with God issues from God’s grace and God’s choice
2. It requires us to respond by turning to God and serving him
3. If we turn away from God, God reserves the right to turn away from us (1 Chron 28:9)
4. If we turn back, God will turn his face back to us (2 Chron 30:9).

*In 1 Chronicles 16:8 and 16:24 and, I think, in other places, there are exhortations for people to make known what God has done among the nations or to declare his glory above the nations. I am wondering what nations these passages are referring to. Are they the nations of Israel, outside nations or both?*

\*\*The term nations will refer to nations other than Israel—the song also refers to all the earth (the song comes from Psalms 96, 105, and 106). But I wouldn’t exactly call it an exhortation to the people to make it known among the nations. It’s more a way of saying that Yahweh’s deeds need to come to be acknowledged there.

*Where exactly in Chronicles does the exile in 587 happen? Multiple times it mentions “people were carried off,” but the 80 years of being in exile is not clear to me. How does the transition work from Chronicles to Ezra-Nehemiah?*

\*\*See 2 Chronicles 36 and Ezra 1 (the two chapters overlap).

*In many books in the OT I struggle with the violence and war, and how it appears at times that God shows his blessing or approval for this violence. I do not know if it is just the culture and time that these books were written that make it hard for me to understand. However, it is hard for me to understand the war, death, destruction that takes place and at times in the name of the Lord. Yet there are times, in David’s case, when they Lord would not let him build the temple because of all the killing David had been a part of. Even now there is a lot of death and destruction I do not understand. I realize our world is an evil place and the Lord is not the cause of this destruction and mourns for it, yet it is still a contradiction I have a hard time reconciling.*

*If God despised David for shedding so much blood, why does he allow Israel to have an army?*

*How do we theologically, intellectually and emotionally hold the God of (seeming) violence in the OT with the God of self-surrender in the NT?*

\*\*See #511 on “War in the OT.” A couple of specific comments.

1. That point about David having blood on his hands is indeed interesting, given that God commissioned and/or approved much of his bloodshed. It hints at the fact that God indeed hates bloodshed, yet gets involved in our world as it is, with its bloodshed.
2. Your point about culture is also interesting, though we need to see that out culture is the odd one out. A concern about violence has become important in Western culture in the last century or two. It’s not distinctively Christian today, and in the past Christians didn’t have that unease.
3. The God of the NT is a God of violence—here is much talk of his violent judgment in the NT. Conversely the God of the OT is a God of self-surrender—he is continuously surrendering himself to Israel. So God has both characteristics in both Testaments, and in both the self-surrender is the center of God, but God is also capable of acting in judgment.

*I don’t know what to make of “high places”. Sometimes people’s hearts are after God but the “high places” aren’t removed. Sometimes “high places” are removed. What is the significance of that? And what is “high places” anyway?*

\*\*The high places were local sanctuaries, whereas the temple was like a cathedral miles away that you could go to only once or twice a year. The trouble is that they were often originally traditional (Canaanite) sanctuaries still affected by the traditional religion of the country.

*In 2 Chron. 31:1, they showed their allegiance to Yahweh by destroying all other objects of worship in their land. What are the implications for us regarding idols and temples in the US to gods other than Yahweh? Hindu, Buddhist, Zoroastrian, Satanic, etc.?*

\*\*It’s such objects of worship in Judah itself that they destroyed—they didn’t go off and destroy the Moabites’ images. So I’d say it’s things within the church you should think about.

I am curious about the importance and place of music in worship. Why is it such a big deal?

\*\*I guess because music has a capacity to express and heighten perception and emotion. Music is a big deal in worship because it is a big deal in life.

*What did the Levites do by “ministering to the Lord” (1Chr.15:2)?*

*What was the role of a gatekeeper? Is it enough today for someone’s role in the Body of Christ to be focused on singing and worship of God through music? You can’t then engage in works of mercy or hospitality etc.*

\*\*For the Levites, see Numbers 18. They were essentially assistants to the priests, who had special responsibilities in connection with the actual offering of sacrifices. The Levites were music ministers and teachers (gatekeepers made sure that people with uncleannesses did not come into the temple—they would advise them about the implications of their condition. Israel thought that the community as a whole must engage in works of mercy, but roles could be distributed through the community.

*It seems that God’s glorification was wrapped up in the story of Israel. Why was God willing to associate his greatness with a people who were not so great?*

\*\*If “great” means powerful, then maybe God’s greatness comes out through working through something unimpressive (like someone who gets crucified). If “great” means “faithful, moral,” then there haven’t been any better ones.

*It seems that before worship and the sacrifices could begin, the leaders had to sanctify themselves, cleanse themselves and the temple before it began. Do you think this is still practiced in some way in the modern evangelical Christian church? What would be its equivalent? It seems that the sanctified place of worship has somehow been lost in post-modern Christianity. Or I would like to hear the argument of how that concept hasn’t been lost.*

*While I understand in part the difference between the OT Temple setting and the NT concept of Church, I am continually struck by the importance of the physical construction, procedure, and specificities concerning the construction of the temple. Furthermore, I am struck by the extraordinary material cost of the Temple. Why was the appearance and luxury of the building so important? Perhaps I have been influenced by the often barren and utilitarian structures that house many of our churches today.*

\*\*The complicating question is that the NT tried to abolish the idea of sanctifying or cleansing people or places, but the subsequent church reestablished the idea—so we do dedicate churches and people, we have things called sanctuaries, and so on. I think that’s because the idea of the sacred and of cleansing is deeply ingrained in our humanness. And thus “making something beautiful for God” seems logical.

*What did the daily, weekly, yearly rhythm of worship look like during that time period?*

\*\*See Leviticus 23 and Numbers 28.

*The Biblical worldview is that God is behind all events that happen. If you fight someone and get hurt (Saul) it’s because God is punishing you. What of our daily living now? A broken car, an accident, a loss of job, a sickness, loss of wallet? Should we interpret these events with the same spiritual paradigm as that of the writers of the Chronicles? Is God orchestrating every detail of our lives?*

\*\*Several questions raised here.

1. Yes, that’s the biblical worldview, but the Bible sometimes portrays God as right behind events that happen, sometimes as miles behind. So (e.g.) Esther doesn’t refer to God’s involvement at all. I’m sure it presupposes it, but there are various degrees or levels of God’s involvement. The seminary president is responsible for everything that happens in the seminary, he is behind everything that happens, but some things are his ideas, some things are other people’s ideas that he deliberately takes up, some things he consciously allows. The Bible doesn’t picture God as orchestrating every detail of our lives.
2. Chronicles does especially emphasize the link between wrongdoing and trouble in order to urge people to take responsibility for their lives, but the Bible as a whole doesn’t assume that all bad things that happen mean that God is punishing you. See Job.