

CHRONICLES: THE NEGLECTED BOOKS OF THE BIBLE

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The Talmud (Bava Batra 15a) tells us that the Books of I and II Kings were written by the prophet Jeremiah (640-588 BCE), and the Books of I and II Chronicles were written by Ezra (495 BCE) and Nehemiah (397 BCE). Yet, many readers of the Bible tend to pay little attention to the Books of Chronicles, because they feel that much of them merely repeats historical material that is in other biblical books.¹ However, as will be seen, the Chronicler drew upon his historical source materials to add information not included in other books, including I and II Samuel and I and II Kings, and even Genesis. Where the Chronicler's history includes stories not told in earlier historical books, or differs from them in some points, the additions and differences should not be interpreted as a product of the Chronicler's imagination.

For example, Genesis 22 gives the story of the Akeda, wherein God tells Abraham to bring his son to the land of Moriah, and present him there as a sacrifice on a mountain which God will show him. There is a long-held tradition that the site of the Akeda was on Temple Mount, but this association of Moriah with Temple Mount rests entirely on II Chronicles 3:1:

Then Solomon began to build the House of the Lord in Jerusalem on Mount Moriah, where the Lord had appeared to his father David at the place which David had designated at the threshing floor of Ornan, the Jebusite.

There are also items of royal history not included in the Books of Kings. In II Chronicles 17, King Jehoshaphat of Judah is described not only as a king who engaged in many building projects, and defeated the Philistines and other non-Israelites in the area from whom he received much tribute, but also as a king who had his *kohanim* [priests] and Levites go around the country teaching Torah (17:9). In II Chronicles 20, we find Jehoshaphat conducting a religious service with his troops, stressing their faith and loyalty to God so that God will be with them in their forthcoming successful battle against in-

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vaders from Ammon, Moab, and Seir. This is followed by an account of the King and his troops returning to Jerusalem with joy and gratitude to God.

In II Chronicles 21, we find the story of how Jehoshaphat's son King Jehoram committed mass fratricide, murdering all of his brothers. This was such a heinous crime that even the prophet Elijah,² who lived in the Northern Kingdom of Israel and usually upbraided only its own kings, writes a letter to this King of Judah condemning him for his crime, and predicting that because of it he, his family, and his people will suffer from plagues and invaders will plunder his possessions.

Farther on (II Kg. 14), we read that Amaziah, King of Judah, initiated a war against Joash, King of Israel, in which Amaziah was defeated. The account in II Kings does not tell why Amaziah wanted this war, but material in II Chronicles 25 may give a clue. Amaziah – described as one of the righteous kings – had scored a victory over the Edomites, that made him bold enough to suppose he could also be victorious over Joash of Israel.

When comparing what we read about King Hezekiah of Judah in II Kings and in II Chronicles, we find a more extensive record of his reign in the latter account. It includes many verses on the various reforms and observances Hezekiah initiated in the Temple. In addition, we learn here that he reinstated the national observance of the holy day of Passover, which apparently had not been observed at all for a long time, or was not observed properly (Ch. 29-30).

Both I Samuel 31:8-13 and I Chronicles 10:9-10 record the death of Saul at the Battle of Gilboa, and how the Philistines beheaded his remains. They hung the body from the walls of Beth-shean, and the men of Jabesh-gilead – remembering how Saul had once saved them – recovered it and gave it honorable burial. But the Philistines displayed his head among their towns and finally deposited it in the temple of their deity Dagon. It is only from Chronicles that we learn the King's head was never recovered.

A particularly salient instance of material omitted from the Book of Kings but preserved in the Books of Chronicles relates to King Manasseh of Judah. He was the most sinful and pagan monarch of the House of David, guilty of establishing idolatrous centers throughout the country and also of spilling much blood. His wickedness and idolatry and eventual punishment appear in both accounts, but only II Chronicles reports how, after being punished by

the Assyrians, he repented and became a *baal t'shuvah*. According to Chronicles, Manasseh thereafter spent his time praying, destroyed the idolatrous centers he had originally built around the country, and ridding the Temple of idols which he had earlier placed there. The accuracy of the Chronicler's story about Manasseh's penitence is questioned by many Bible scholars. However, the Chronicler had no reason to invent such a story, and his use of the story supports the thesis that he must have had access to certain records which were not known to the compilers of the Books of Samuel and the Books of Kings.

If the Chronicler has a flaw as an historian, it is his bias in favor of King David, shown in his omission of material that does not reflect well on his hero. Among David's acts that the Chronicler does not mention are:

1. He turned over two sons and five grandsons of King Saul to the Gibeonites, to hang them in vengeance for their grievances against Saul (II Samuel 21).
2. He committed an atrocity in killing two-thirds of the captured Moabite soldiers (Ch. 8).
3. He committed adultery with Bathsheba and subsequently ordered that her husband Uriah the Hittite be sent to certain death on the battlefield (Ch. 11-12).

The Chronicler also omits any mention of Absalom's rebellion and the resulting humiliation of King David (Ch. 15ff.). He also omits David's broken health in his last days, how he had to be warmed by the beautiful young maiden Abishag, and his vengeful death-bed charge to his son Solomon (I Kg. 1-2.).

In contrast to his method of omission, there may be at least one place where the Chronicler added something to the story of David's victory over Goliath (I Sam. 17). In II Samuel 21:19 we read: *Again there was fighting with the Philistines at Gob and Elhanan son of Jaar-oregim the Bethlehemite killed Goliath the Gittite . . .* What does this version of the death of Goliath do to the traditional story of David killing Goliath in the Valley of Elah? The Chronicler solves this problem: *Again there was fighting with the Philistines, and Elhanan son of Jair killed Lahmi, the brother of Goliath the Gittite . . .* (I Chron. 20:5). Having Elhanan slay not Goliath but the brother of Goliath keeps the traditional version of David's victory intact. However, even here we must not necessarily conclude that the Chronicler deliberately invented some-

thing, for it is possible that he based his account on a more accurate source than the one used by the author of II Samuel 21:19. Nor is it unreasonable to suppose that Goliath had a brother who was killed by Elhanan in a place called Gob.

The Chronicler may also have used a source different from that of II Samuel 24, where we read: *The anger of the Lord flared up against Israel; and He incited David against them saying, 'Go and number Israel and Judah.'* After the census, David reproaches himself for having numbered the people and confesses to God that he is guilty: *'I have sinned grievously in what I have done.'* Reading this, one may wonder why David thinks he sinned. Does not this text make it clear that God commanded him to take the census? Here, the Chronicler writes: *Satan arose against Israel, and incited David to number Israel* (I Chron. 21:1). David's offense then would be that he did not resist the temptation that Satan put in his way. The question is: Did the Chronicler simply change the text to read the word Satan instead of the word God, or did he find Satan [Tempter] in a different source from the one used by the author of Samuel? In keeping with my thesis, I find it more reasonable to accept the Chronicler's version with the word Satan, because it eliminates a theological problem presented by Samuel's version which has God ordering the census and then punishing David for obeying God's order!

Another instance where the Chronicler solves a problem presented by the text is found in II Samuel 24:22ff. David purchases property from Araunah, planning to build the future Temple upon it. In describing the transaction the verse reads: *Araunah, the king, gave everything to the king* [David] (v. 23). All modern scholars note here a scribal error, since Araunah does not otherwise appear as a king, but as a Jebusite subject of the King of Israel. This mention of "king" in relation to Araunah does not appear in the version of the Chronicler (I Chron. 21), where he is called by the name Ornan. Did the Chronicler simply delete the problematic word, or did he have a more accurate source?

Let me cite another example which supports my thesis that the Chronicler had some other sources besides those used in the composition of the Books of I and II Kings. This is in the description of how the Northern Kingdom of Israel lost its independence, when it was conquered and many of its people sent into exile by the Assyrians. The story in II Kings 15 and 18 has many

verses with theological explanations of why God chose to punish the Northern Kingdom in such a harsh manner. One might have thought that this would have been a fit opportunity for the Chronicler to mention the destruction of Judah's sinful neighbor and the reasons for Israel's punishments which soon after its founding began to defy the will of God. (Its sins were mostly idolatry and at times violence, rather than ritual infringements.) To the Chronicler, the Northern Kingdom was an illegitimate state from its very founding, and he does not even mention that it was the prophet Ahijah of Shiloh who made Jeroboam its first king (I Kg. 11: 26ff).

Had the Chronicler the information about the destruction of North Israel he would probably have been only too glad to publish the account and even expand upon what the author of II Kings wrote about its destruction. The fact that the Chronicler does not say one word about this crucial historical event is additional evidence that he simply did not have the source which describes the destruction of the Northern Kingdom of Israel.

NOTES

1. In its 37 years of publication the *Jewish Bible Quarterly* has had only one article on Chronicles.
2. Elijah here is a problem since according to II Kings 3:11, he was no longer among the living during Jehoram's reign. Some contend Elisha is intended or some other prophet.