

CHRONICLES' LEVITICAL COVENANT

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The Book of Chronicles presents a version of history, a selective account of times gone by. Its purpose is to revitalize, reinvigorate, and renew Judaism for its audience, namely, the returning exiles from Babylon and their descendants now living in Judah in the fifth-fourth centuries BCE.¹ With neither a Davidic dynasty ruling nor a fully independent state, that community is despondent.² Second Isaiah's glorious future is unrealized; life is difficult. The community needs to reinvent its understanding of its Covenant with God. The old covenants, the Mosaic/Sinai Covenant that created a nation from a group of slaves and the political Davidic/Zion Covenant that created a dynasty, are part of Israel's memory. Yet they are not enough to sustain and revitalize this present community.

Chronicles focuses on the religious system based on the Jerusalem Temple, the cultus, and the attending Levitical personnel as the expression of the Covenant between God and Israel.³ Although this idea is not the sole purpose of Chronicles, it is a major theme of the book. Chronicles is a "general and comprehensive theological stock-taking, striving to achieve a new religious balance in the face of a changing world." As Sara Japhet explains, the goal of Chronicles "is a comprehensive expression of the perpetual need to renew and revitalize the religion of Israel" (emphasis added).⁴

Chronicles' interests are "primarily ecclesiastical,"⁵ and it desires "a rehabilitation of the national-cultic institutions" according to King David's directions (see Ezra 3:10; Neh. 12:45). Yet for Chronicles, this is done without a "specific linking of hope with a kingly figure or with the Davidic house."⁶

Chronicles is content with Cyrus's support of the Temple's construction. "For all his focus on David and his descendants and the everlasting promise

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made by God to David, the Chronicler nowhere explicitly advocates the reestablishment of the Davidic monarchy, let alone a rebellion against the Persian Empire. He seems relatively content with life under Persian suzerainty, provided that the worship at the temple in Jerusalem is able to continue without restraint."⁷

The Chronicler borrows from the Torah (Pentateuch) and what is known as the Deuteronomic Histories (Deuteronomy through Kings, though largely ignoring the Book of Judges). Scholars dispute about the Chronicler's sources. Gary Knoppers thinks it likely that there were different, perhaps older, sources than those which were eventually incorporated in the Masoretic text.⁸ Chronicles' focus on the southern kingdom⁹ and David's role, as well as on the Jerusalem cultus, might reflect different material not found in those other documents.

DAVID SANITIZED

In Samuel and Kings, David has a rich, but morally problematic history. Chronicles seeks to portray a David who has, as a prime purpose, the establishment of the cultus. "For his depiction of David he utilized those materials from the [Deuteronomic History] that would enhance David's qualifications as builder of the temple or highlight his position as a victorious and powerful king. Thus he omitted most of the narrative commonly known as the History of David's Rise (I Samuel 16 – II Samuel 5), in which David gradually gained ascendancy over Saul and kingship over all Israel, and almost all of the Succession Narrative (II Samuel 9–20; I Kings 1–2)."¹⁰

Consequently, in his description of David, the Chronicler deletes the more problematic details of David's life; he selects only those passages that fit Chronicles' positive agenda:

David at Hebron (II Sam. 5:1-3)	Parallel in Chronicles (I Chron. 9:1-3)
David and Philistines (II Sam. 5:17-25)	Parallel in Chronicles (I Chron. 14:8-17)
David and Abigail (I Sam. 25)	No parallels in Chronicles
David and Bathsheba (II Sam. 11)	No parallels in Chronicles

The sanitized David becomes an idealized ruler. In Chronicles "[David is] a gifted and successful warrior (I Chron. 14; 18-20), the recipient of dynastic promises (I Chron. 17), a repentant sinner (I Chron. 21), and an astute administrator (I Chron. 22-29). The writer does not just mention these royal

achievements; he clearly considers them to be critical features of the Davidic legacy."¹¹ More specifically, from a cultic viewpoint, David is the idealized religious ruler.

Chronicles is concerned with religious institutions in Jerusalem, primarily the Temple and cultic tradition. The David connection is that he introduced the musical guilds in connection with the cult service centering about both ark and tabernacle (I Chron. 16:4-6).¹² David sets up the twenty-four watches of priests and the twenty-four watches of Levites (I Chron. 23; 24:1-19). This includes the singing of certain psalms.¹³

David is credited with being the founder of the cultus, despite the fact that it is Solomon who builds the Temple. "As Moses had once received plans for the tabernacle," Jacob M. Myers observes, "so David now received plans for the temple from the Lord (I Chron 22:1, 28:19); and the place was designated by the angel of the Lord (I Chron 21:18 ff.)." While personnel arrangements, such as the Levites carrying the ark, and the positions of the priests and Levites, are connected to Moses (I Chron. 15:15; II Chron. 30:16), "most of the priestly, Levitical, and other personnel appointments in connection with the temple cultus are attributed to David, who was virtually a second Moses," Myers explains (emphasis added).¹⁴ Klein, in reference to I Chronicles 15, makes an even stronger statement: "David in this chapter is a second Moses, who also pitched a tent and blessed the people" (see Ex. 33:7; Deut. 33:1).¹⁵ In terms of status, given the emphasis placed upon the beloved King David, the references to that monarch overshadow those made to Moses. David is mentioned well over 250 times in Chronicles, Moses on less than two dozen occasions. Many of those Davidic references are in terms of his role as warrior or ruler of the state, but again and again, from I Chronicles 9:35 to the end of that book, David is presented as the founder of the cult.

DAVID BECOMES A LATTER-DAY MOSES

Moses is deserving of honor, but for Chronicles "it is the David who ordained the Levites to their office who brought the worship of Yahweh to its highest perfection and its true fulfillment."¹⁶

David is close to a parallel partner with Moses, receiving revelation directly from God. David is therefore entitled to add new elements, innovations, to the religious life of Israel.¹⁷ As well as serving as an additional founder of the

cultus, David appropriates some of Moses' language from the Torah, notably in some of his succession statements. In I Chronicles 22, David's charge to Solomon has a familiar sound, recalling the language with which Moses charged Joshua. In this instance, David creates a link with Moses, since the king first mentions the lawgiver and then both quotes and slightly paraphrases him, but without noting that he does so (See I Chron. 22:13; Deut. 31:7-8).

Chronicles acknowledges that Moses had a special relationship with God (I Chron. 6:34 [6:49]; 23:14; and II Chron. 1:3; 24:6, 9; 30:16). Similar imagery is associated with David (I Chron. 17:3, 4, 7).

DOWNPLAYING MOSES

Even as David is sanitized, so is the role of Moses downplayed. Chronicles twice utilizes the term *Torat Moshe* – the Torah of Moses (II Chron. 23:18, 30:16). Yet "in general no prominence is given to [Moses] by the Chronicler, for whom the great climax of his people's history came with David rather than with the exodus from Egypt."¹⁸

By way of contrast, in the writings of the Deuteronomist Historian in Kings, we are given the formulaic words, For [God] they are Your very own people that you freed from Egypt, from the midst of the iron furnace . . . For You, O Lord God, have set them apart for Yourself from all the peoples of the earth . . . as You promised through Moses Your servant (I Kgs. 8:51-53). When the Chronicler tells this tale, "he cannot accept that the people of Israel became the people of God through a single act at a particular point of history."¹⁹ Israel becomes God's people over many years as they develop a relationship. David is a key character in forming the ongoing bonds with God. As Knoppers writes, Chronicles "neither stresses the Exodus and Conquest nor ties these events to the founding of Israel as a nation . . . [Chronicles] does not associate the Exodus with the crystallization of Israel's corporate identity."²⁰

However, "it does not necessarily follow that the Chronicler had no place for Moses, as various allusions throughout the work indicate."²¹ Yet the references to Moses are limited. Citations mentioning him are sporadic throughout Chronicles; but many are biographical rather than cult-connected (I Chron.

5:29 [6:3]; 23:13, 14 ff.; 26:24).²² As Japhet writes, "Chronistic allusions to Moses are almost restricted to the 'Law of Moses.'"²³

In principle, the Torah is the ultimate source of the cultus. Yet Chronicles moderates the figure of Moses in terms of his connection to the Torah. Although the text connects the Torah specifically to Moses (*sefer Torat Y-H-W-H be-yad Moshe*; II Chron. 34:14), Chronicles more often refers to the more generic "Torah of the Lord" (I Chron. 16:40; 22:12; II Chron. 12:1; 17:9; 31:3, 4; 34:14; 35:26).

A LEVITICAL COVENANT

To find religious meaning in his own day, the Chronicler reinterprets Israel's collective history. Chronicles recognizes and values the importance of the Exodus from Egypt, and Moses' central role in the Sinaitic revelation. Likewise, Chronicles recognizes and values the creation of the Davidic dynasty. Yet both of these events were in Israel's past; the Chronicler has a different purpose for his contemporary community.

As a result, the Chronicler neither focuses on the [Mosaic] Sinai Covenant nor on the [Davidic] Zion Covenant. The Sinai Covenant was a religious contract mandated between God and Israel, and mediated by Moses. Stated briefly in the words of Jon Levenson, the "focus of the Mosaic covenant sealed at Sinai is twofold: history and morality" (emphasis added). The Zion Covenant established between God and David, focusing on politics and dynasty, is tied to the Land of Israel itself. Again, quoting Levenson, the "Davidic covenant, then, is distinct in kind from the Sinaitic . . . In the case of the Davidic [Zion] covenant, history and morality are no longer the focus . . . Rather, the Davidic covenant [is] a covenant of grant . . . [it is] God's commitment to the Davidic dynasty"²⁴ and, presumably, to the land that they rule. Those covenants were in the past. To achieve his goal, to revitalize, reinvigorate, and renew Judaism in his time, and to (re)establish the Temple and its rituals, Chronicles therefore highlights what might be termed a Jerusalem-based (unspoken but real) Levitical Covenant (Temple and ritual-centered) between God and the people of Israel.²⁵

This implicit Levitical Covenant blends aspects of both Sinai (worship of God/cultic matters) and Zion (the Temple in Jerusalem). In that sense, Chronicles is a "zealous and not too subtle apologia on behalf of the Levites, who,

in [the author of Chronicles'] opinion, have yet to achieve the honor and influence that are rightfully theirs."²⁶

In I Chronicles 23, the number of Levites far exceeds that found in the Torah. As Japhet explains, the Chronicler evidently seeks to portray these Levitical orders as broadly as possible, both in terms of their numbers and their organization.²⁷ There are both traditional and additional duties. In addition to merely guarding the Temple, the Levites are responsible for the musical liturgy: to give thanks and praise the Lord every morning and evening, as well as on Sabbaths, new moons and festivals (vv. 30-31). "Such a mandate for the Levites was previously established by David vis-à-vis the Ark (16:1-38)."²⁸

I Chronicles 15 highlights David's "meticulous preparation" for transporting the ark to Jerusalem. This description was "composed by the Chronicler himself without a biblical Vorlage." David saw to it that "no one but the Levites should carry the ark, in conformity with Pentateuchal legislation and as a correction to the procedure in the first effort to bring the ark to Jerusalem . . . David also commanded the chiefs of the Levites to appoint Levitical singers, and so this additional duty of the Levites, also in the cult of the Chronicler's day, is given the authority of Israel's first king."²⁹ The many verses dedicated to this endeavor, and the literally dozens of names of the Levites involved, are in sharp contrast to the four verse description of the ark's transportation in II Samuel 6:12-15 without a designated Levite in sight. Likewise, the lists of Levites in I Chronicles 23 and 24, as well as Hezekiah's ritual acts supported by the Levites in II Chronicles 29, have no parallels in Samuel-Kings.

AFTER THE TEMPLE'S DESTRUCTION

New conditions bring about new emphases. The Second Temple was destroyed in 70 CE. Eventually, after a couple of centuries perhaps, it became clear that the Temple would not be restored, at least within the foreseeable future. Consequently, Judaism changed its focus once again. The Chronicler's notion of something like a Levitical Covenant, to connect God and the people of Israel, became moribund. Levenson's description of the relationship between the Sinai Covenant and the Zion Covenant became true also of the Levitical Covenant: "Mount Zion fell heir to the legacy of Mount Sinai. Zion

became the prime locus of theophany, the home of YHWH, the seat of his government, from which he promulgated decrees and at which Israel renewed her partnership in covenant with him . . . The early traditions emphasize Sinai; the latter ones, those of David's time and after, emphasize Zion . . . [yet] the truth is, a quick reading of the Hebrew Bible leaves one with a larger awareness of Sinai than Zion. The notion of a Mosaic revelation at Sinai endured . . . In fact, tradition came to canonize the Mosaic movement, as it did not canonize the Davidic-Solomonic."³⁰

Part of the canonization of the Sinai Covenant/Mosaic movement is the convention that the chain of tradition reaches back to Sinai (Mishnah Avot 1:1). It is also true that Jews continue to read the Torah "given at Sinai" as part of the weekly, festival, and High Holy Day liturgies. Nonetheless, in Judaism the Temple and Mount Zion retain a central role in ritual and theology, despite their having been destroyed 2000 years ago. Even today, as has been the case for millennia, the physical direction of prayer is toward Jerusalem, toward the place where the Temple once stood (Sifrei Deuteronomy, Piskah 29).

Levenson suggests that religiously and culturally, the "presence is the presence of Zion, but the voice is the voice of Sinai."³¹ We contend that the presence is the presence of Zion, but unlike the days of the Chronicler, it is a Zion without a Temple and a Levitical cult; so in effect, by default, the voice is the voice of Sinai. Nonetheless, in the Chronicler's time, nearly 2,500 years ago, it was a Temple-centered Levitical Covenant with David's prominent role in its creation that captured his imagination.

CONCLUSION

For Chronicles, the pinnacle of Israel's history is the establishment of the cult associated with the Temple in Jerusalem rather than the Exodus and the revelation at Sinai or the establishment of the Davidic dynasty. The Chronicler privileges the Davidic dynasty, but does not call for an independent monarchy. He selectively revises and rewrites the history he knows from the Torah and from the books of Samuel and Kings. A major feature is a sanitized version of David's legacy with a stress on David's importance as champion of the Levitical cultus. King David, the servant of God, is the person who transmits those traditions and records the directions, which must now be

scrupulously followed. The Chronicler's primary concern is a Jerusalem-based Levitical Covenant, Temple-centered and focused on ritual. The new covenant would be through the Levites, who by their efforts connect the people with God. For the Chronicler, this revisionist religious approach is purposeful; it is the best way to revitalize Judaism for his audience, the exiles returning from Babylon and their descendants now living in Judah.

NOTES

1. Recent discussions of current thinking about when Chronicles was written, whether the book had one or more authors, as well as its relationship to Ezra-Nehemiah, can be found in Ralph W. Klein, *I Chronicles: A Commentary* [Hermeneia: A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible] (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006), "Introduction," pp. 13-17; as well as in Gary N. Knoppers, *I Chronicles 1-9* (Anchor Bible 12; New York: Doubleday, 2003) pp. 72-89.
2. Earlier prophecy was not fulfilled, cf. Haggai 2:20 ff.; Zechariah 4:6 ff.; 3:8; 6:12 ff.
3. "Compared with the parallel histories of Samuel and Kings, the redactor of Chronicles has a great tendency to dwell on the details of Temple worship, on the arrangements of the Priestly vestments, and on the Levites as well," *JPS Guide – The Jewish Bible* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2008) p. 215.
4. Sara Japhet, *I and II Chronicles: A Commentary* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1993 [The Old Testament Library]) pp. 44, 49; "The Chronicler shaped his material to highlight the continuity within the community of faith": Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979) p. 655.
5. John Bright, *A History of Israel*, fourth ed (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2000) p. 401.
6. Bright, p. 453..
7. Klein, *I Chronicles*, p. 47.
8. Knoppers, *I Chronicles 1-9*, pp. 69-71. For a chart that offers Chronicles' parallel citations to the Masoretic text, see Jacob M. Myers, *II Chronicles*, AB 13 (Garden City: Doubleday, 1965) pp. 227-231.
9. The history of the northern kingdom is almost completely absent in Chronicles, as are the narratives about Elijah and Elisha (1-2 Kgs.)
10. Ralph W. Klein, "Chronicles, Book of 1-2," in David Noel Freedman, ed., *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1996) c1992, S. 1:996.
11. Knoppers, *I Chronicles 1-9*, p. 82.
12. Jacob M. Myers, *I Chronicles* (Anchor Bible, 12; Garden City: Doubleday, 1965) p. 121.
13. Gary N. Knoppers, *I Chronicles 10-29* (Anchor Bible; New York: Doubleday, 2004) pp. 856-857.
14. Myers, *I Chronicles*, pp. lxxviii, lxxix.
15. Klein, *I Chronicles*, p. 358.
16. Simon J. De Vries, "Moses and David as Cult Founders in Chronicles," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 107/4 (Dec. 1988) p. 639. De Vries notes that "the book of Chronicles seems to make relatively little of Moses while strongly promoting David as a cult founder alongside Moses," pp. 619-638, here 619.

17. While Sara Japhet does not say this specifically, she implies it in *The Ideology of the Book of Chronicles and its Place in Biblical Thought*, revised edition (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1997) pp. 230-232: "David virtually displaces Moses . . . For the Chronicler . . . David was the key person . . . [who] was responsible for the whole of Temple worship" (I Chron. 16:37-43). See also Myers, *I Chronicles*, p. 122. "David's authority now stands both behind the role of the Levites and the use of psalmody in worship." Klein, *I Chronicles*, p. 363.
18. R. J. Coggins, *The First and Second Books of Chronicles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), p. 119.
19. Japhet, *I and II Chronicles: A Commentary*, p. 600.
20. Knoppers, *I Chronicles 1-9*, p. 81.
21. Coggins, p. 119.
22. Knoppers, however, points out that "Mosaic legislation consistently occupies an important place in Chronicles and should not be overlooked in any study of Chronicist theology," *I Chronicles 1-9*, p. 83.
23. Japhet, *I and II Chronicles: A Commentary*, p. 526. References to the Law/Torah of Moses (Torat Moshe) can be found in II Chronicles 23:18; 30:16. In like manner, there are only two references to the Book of Moses/Sefer Moshe (II Chron. 25:4; 35:12). Only once is Moses associated with the Ten Commandments, and there it is because he placed the tablets in the Ark (II Chron. 5:10).
24. Jon D. Levenson, *Sinai and Zion: An Entry into the Jewish Bible* (Minneapolis, Chicago: Winston Press, 1985) pp. 100-101.
25. The term Levitical Covenant is one that the authors of this article propose as descriptive of the Chronicler's viewpoint; it is not of general usage in the relevant literature.
26. De Vries, p. 636. De Vries goes on to suggest that it is not unreasonable to speculate that the Chronicler was a Levite. Klein, however, states that this seems "only a possibility rather than a probability," *I Chronicles*, 17.
27. Japhet, *I and II Chronicles: A Commentary*, p. 412.
28. Gary N. Knoppers, *I Chronicles 10-29*, p. 825.
29. Klein, *I Chronicles*, p. 358.
30. Levenson, p. 187.
31. Levenson, p. 188.