

## The History, Book 8

### I Chronicles

I Chronicles begins with nine chapters of genealogical records which record in great detail the hereditary line of David; the rest of the book records the history of the united Kingdom of Israel, from the death of Saul to the death of David. During this period David finally conquers the Jebusite fortress at Jerusalem, subdues the pagan enemy nations around the Israelite people, and fully establishes the settlement in the Promised Land. He brings the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem, and gathers materials for the building of the Temple. At the time of his death he leaves the nation secure, prosperous and righteous. Except for the early years of the reign of his son, Solomon, the nation will not be in this state again until the second coming of Christ, "David's greater Son," at the end of the age.

**A. Author.** According to Jewish tradition, Ezra was the compiler of both I and II Chronicles; however, there is reason to believe that Isaiah had already done much of the work on the earlier portion (I Chronicles). Whether done by Ezra alone, or by Ezra and Isaiah, the work was a compilation of all the existing public records. These records are accredited in the Chronicles, including the writings of Samuel, Nathan, Gad, Iddo, Shemaiah, Ahijah and Jehu. The records these men kept no longer exist as separate works, but are now incorporated into the Books of I and II Chronicles.

*NOTE: Ezra was a prominent and very busy man. During the time that the records of the Hebrew People were being summarized and finalized, he also presided over the Great Synagogue, a college of learned Jews, which finalized and closed the Hebrew Canon (our Old Testament), approximately 450 BC<sup>1</sup>.*

**B. Place and Date.** In its present form, I Chronicles was probably written in Jerusalem, about 450 BC.

**C. Occasion.** With the blessing of Cyrus, King of Persia, the remnant of the Hebrew nation had returned from captivity in Babylon, joined by survivors of the earlier Assyrian captivity. Jerusalem and its walls were being rebuilt, the Temple was being restored, and there was once again a sense of a unified people with a unique history. Without a knowledge of its history, a nation cannot have a sense of its identity or a vision for its future, hence the value of these records. The compilation of the Chronicles provided a careful and complete history of the nation, and then pointed clearly to its future.

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<sup>1</sup> Most critical scholars reject this role in Ezra's life; see "Closing of the Canon" in Introductory Material.

**D. Theme.** The Book of I Chronicles begins with nine chapters of genealogies, beginning with Adam and working forward, to the return from Babylonian captivity. And they are more than just genealogies; in many places the basic facts, about who begat whom, are fleshed out with significant details and references to priestly duties and concurrent historical events. Chapter 10 briefly retells the story of the final battle and death of King Saul, and the rest of the book is devoted to the reign of David.

The theme, therefore, is the heritage of God's chosen people, the absolute necessity of obedience to God's Word, the blessings that accompany that obedience, and the pain that results from disobedience.

**E. Prologue.** Since the death of King Saul, 7 1/2 years earlier, the kingdom has been divided. Ishbosheth, Saul's son, has been King of Israel, the northern part of the Promised Land, with his capitol at Mahanaim, east of the Jordan River. During this time, David has been King of Judah, the southern region, with his capitol at Hebron. Ishbosheth is murdered by two of his generals, and the tribes he had ruled ask David to be their king. He consents, and becomes king of the unified Hebrew people. Thus begins the period of about 100 years sometimes referred to as the "golden age of Israel"; the kingdom is unified for two generations of blessed obedience to the Lord, and the prosperity that it brings (marred only by the terrible apostasy of Solomon at the end of his life).

**F. Highlights.** Because I Chronicles is a recapitulation of David's reign, already recorded in II Samuel, much of the material is the same. To avoid unnecessary repetition, highlights selected for I Chronicles, therefore, will be restricted to summaries, those events not recorded in II Samuel, and passages shedding additional light on those which are. Thus, highlights of I Chronicles include the following:

1. How Joab Becomes Captain of the Host. After Ishbosheth is killed and the kingdom is unified, David consolidates his control of the rest of the tribes; but there is a long-standing problem to be dealt with: the Jebusite fortress at Jerusalem has never been conquered. David attacks, and proclaims that the man who first gets into the fortress will be made commanding general of his army ("captain of the host"). The parallel passage in II Samuel 5:8 reveals that the way into the city, without breaching its 24-foot-thick walls, was through its water supply ("Whosoever getteth up to the gutter and smiteth the Jebusites..."). Joab, who will play such a significant role in the future, succeeds and is made captain of the host. He will hold that position for the rest of David's life. (11:1-9)

*Note: from the time of Joshua until David, a period of 400 years, the fortress of Jerusalem had never been conquered; it was called Jebus, and its people were the Jebusites. It was a natural fortress, surrounded by a wall 24 feet thick. A sloping tunnel with stair steps, cut through solid rock, led down to Gihon Spring at the*

southeast base of the hill, providing a water supply for the fortress within the walls. It was apparently through this tunnel that David and his men gained entrance to the city. The tunnel was discovered and reopened in 1866 by Charles Warren of the Palestine Exploration Fund. David refortified the city, and walled it "round about" (11:8); some sections of David's wall have been uncovered, with portions on the old Jebusite foundations beneath it.

2. The Bitter Fruit of Suspicion. Nahash, King of Ammon, dies and his foolish son, Hanun, takes his place. This Nahash had been kind to David, when he was being persecuted by Saul, and David remembers his kindness<sup>2</sup>. He sends an ambassador, with a delegation, to express his sympathy. Hanun's advisors convince him that David actually plans to attack him, and that his ambassadors are actually spies. As a result, he has them humiliated by shaving their heads and cutting off their skirts, and sends them back home. Hanun soon realizes that he has done a foolish thing, assumes that David will attack him for it, and hires a mercenary army to help him<sup>3</sup>. When David learns of the mobilization in Ammon, he sends Joab and part of his army to deal with it. Joab defeats the Ammonites and the mercenaries, and the situation escalates: Hanun hires the Syrians to come and help him. Now the situation is spiraling out of control. Hearing about the Syrians, David personally leads his entire army against them, defeats them and makes Syria his vassal state.

And all this bloodshed is completely unnecessary! It occurs only because of irrational suspicion, foolish pride, and escalating assumptions based on earlier assumptions. There are lessons here for all of us. (Chapt 19)

3. "This Is the House of the LORD God." In chapters 21 and 22, additional light is shed on David's sin of numbering Israel, and the consequences. Here, on the threshing floor of Ornan (Araunah) the Jebusite, David not only offers the famous sacrifice, but we are told two interesting things about it:

a. David offers the sacrifice there because he is "afraid" to go to Gibeon where the Tabernacle is; and he declares of the threshing floor, "This is the house of the LORD God, and this is the altar of burnt offering for Israel." David is probably afraid that if he stopped interceding there and traveled to Gibeon, the angel might resume the killing of the people of Jerusalem.

b. Whatever the reason for David's fear, in declaring that the threshing floor was the house of the LORD, and its altar the altar of burnt offering, he is prophetic. On that very spot Abraham had offered Isaac, and on that very spot will be the altar of burnt offering in Solomon's Temple, and in its replacement built by Herod. (21:14-22:1)

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<sup>2</sup> One of David's better traits was that he never forgot those who helped him when he was in trouble.

<sup>3</sup> He had indeed done a foolish thing, for Ammon posed no threat (or even a challenge) to David. If he wanted to attack Ammon he would have no need of spies; he had more than enough force simply to run over them.

4. Gathering Material for the Temple. David, who longs to build a temple for the Lord, but knows that he can't, decides to gather and prepare the materials; he can at least do that much. He issues a command "to gather the strangers" (foreigners) in the land; apparently meaning those who possessed specific skills needed to shape and perfect the materials. He wants the temple to be exceedingly magnificent, such as to glorify God throughout the World. It seems that he gathers, prepares, and stockpiles all the materials "abundantly," so that Solomon will only have to assemble the parts. (22:2-5)

5. David's Charge to Solomon. With the materials for the Temple prepared, David calls for Solomon. He tells Solomon how he has longed to build the Temple, but will not be allowed to build it, and how the Lord had told him that he would have a son, a man of peace named Solomon, and that he will build the Temple. David charges him with the responsibility for the construction, and adds the admonition to keep the Lord's commandments. (22:6-16)

6. And He Provides for Assistance. Finally, David commands all the subordinate princes of Israel to give Solomon whatever assistance he may need in the construction of the Temple. He reminds them that he has fully conquered the pagans, possessed the entire land of promise, and given them peace and prosperity. He tells them that they, too, are responsible to see that the Temple is completed, and that the Ark of the Covenant is brought into its permanent home, with the other holy furnishings. (22:17-19)

**Epilogue.** At the end of his life, David's mind is focused on the Temple; the man after God's own heart ends his life preoccupied with the Temple, the final desire of his heart. The last seven chapters of I Chronicles are devoted to this.

1. David Organizes those to Serve in the Temple and Appoints Leaders. Chapters 23-27 are devoted to the establishment of organization, in both the operation of the Temple, and in the political functioning of the government. He establishes Solomon as his successor on the throne, and gathers all the priests and Levites to a meeting in Jerusalem; because spiritual and political leadership are inseparable, he also gathers all the princes of Israel<sup>4</sup>. Because Israel's place of central worship will no longer be moved from place to place as it has been for 400 years, he reorganizes those who will serve in it. There are 38,000 priests and Levites; he assigns specific duties for them, and ages of active service. Some will be priests, divided into 24 "courses" (shifts), with each course serving a week at a time, from one Sabbath to the next. Some will be ordained as musicians and singers; some of these will prophesy with music. Some will be porters to do the

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<sup>4</sup> In Israel, the political life of the nation was never separated from the spiritual life of the nation; the two halves of national leadership made one harmonious whole. This is the way it will again be in the millennial reign of Jesus on Earth.

physical work in the Temple. Some will oversee the treasury of the Temple, and in charge of them will be one Shebuel, grandson of Moses<sup>5</sup>. David also organizes his soldiers, plus overseers for the care of livestock, and overseers for those who work in the crops, vineyards, olive trees, and in the storage of oil and wine in cellars. David appoints king's counselors and scribes, and a supervisor of the king's sons. Ahithophel is appointed chief counselor to the king, Hushai is to be companion to the king, and Joab will continue as commanding general of the army ("captain of the host").

*NOTE: From Luke 1:5 we learn that Zachariah, father of John the Baptist, was a priest of the course of Abijah (Abiah). Because the periods of duty assigned by David had not changed, we know that he served in the 8th week of each 24-week cycle. From this we can calculate that John the Baptist was probably conceived by Elizabeth in June. Since the angel who spoke to Mary told her that Elizabeth was 6 months pregnant (Luke 1:36), we can calculate with considerable certainty that Jesus was conceived in late December, and born the following September.*

2. David's Final Instructions. In Chapters 28 and 29, David assembles all his subordinate rulers and military commanders in Jerusalem, and addresses them personally. He repeats to them his desire to build the Temple, and how the Lord told him that his son Solomon would be its builder. He then addresses Solomon, charges him to be faithful to the Lord, and delivers to him the written plans for the Temple. He then tells how he has given his own gold and silver in great amounts for the Temple, and challenges those assembled to do the same. They do so willingly, and David closes the mass meeting with praises to the Lord and prayer for Solomon. After the assembly there follows a time of sacrificing to the Lord, feasting and celebration, during which Solomon is anointed king, and Zadok high priest. David dies, "in a good old age, full of days, riches and honor." And I think it is safe to assume that he dies with a smile and a final, peaceful sigh, pleased and satisfied with it all.

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<sup>5</sup> Shebuel was the elder son of Gershom, son of Moses and Zipporah, his Midianite wife. Only 2 generations removed from Moses and the Exodus, Shebuel must have been quite old. He is the last direct descendant of Moses of whom there is any known record.