

The Books of Kings and Chronicles

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1. Introduction

Ever since the rise of liberal critical scholarship the historical books of the Bible have been questioned and scrutinized in regard to reliability. This is especially true for Kings and Chronicles, the most extensive sources about the history of Israel from the time of the monarchy until the Babylonian exile. Critical considerations notoriously challenge the evangelical faction to form reasonable opinions and arguments in defence of the books. Without regard to the doctrine of inerrancy, Kings has been given more respect in the academic community than Chronicles.

Before we come to the subject of biblical criticism, we will spend some time on the content and themes of the writings. For the sake of clarity we will briefly outline Kings first before studying the distinct nature of Chronicles in comparison. Proceeding with the question of authorship and date, we will see that the inherent theological purpose is significantly shaped by the historical perspective of the authors. At last, we come to the most crucial point of debate, the historicity of these books. Are the accounts reliable? Some archaeological subjects and especially the recorded numbers have raised some doubts. We will discuss these topics and conclude that there is no reason to doubt that Kings and Chronicles are the inerrant words of God.

2. Content and Themes

a. Book of Kings

The (first and second) Book of Kings is largely a record of Israel's history that covers the time span from King David's death to the Fall of Jerusalem. Insofar it is a sequel to the historical Book of Samuel. The work starts with a long episode about the establishment of Solomon as King over all Israel, the glorious days during his reign, his eventual failure and the resulting split of the nation. (1 Ki 1-11) Kings proceeds with Jeroboam king of the northern region who established the idolatry of the golden calf cult in Bethel and Dan and so further contributed to Israel's spiritual downfall.

The author's concern is not only to preserve history but at the same time to point the reader to the divine reasons that led to the demise of the nation with its end at the fall of Samaria and later Jerusalem. (2 Ki 17:7-23) The work displays not just history but 'salvation history', God's dealing with his people in light of his covenant. The focus is hereby given to the appointed kings who were to serve as the responsible leaders of the nation. Patterson aptly describes Kings as "redemptive and teleological history built around the twin themes of divine sovereignty and human responsibility, particularly as they were operative through God's covenant people, Israel."¹

¹ Richard D. Patterson and Hermann J. Austel, "1, 2 Kings," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, *1 & 2 Kings, 1 & 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Job*, ed. Frank E. Gæbelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), 9.

The development of the political landscape is portrayed from the perspective of the southern as well as the northern kingdom. It is recorded how Egypt attacked Jerusalem (1 Ki 14:25f.), Syria oppressed Israel (1 Ki 20:1-34; 2 Ki 6:8-29) and Moab revolted against Judah (2 Ki 3:1-27). Also mentioned are the treaty relations that Judah and Israel formed with the nations as it was common at that time. Asa King of Judah allied with Syria to overcome Israel. (1 Ki 15:18ff.) Ahab married Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal King of Tyre to raise stronger against Assyria. (1 Ki 16:31) In result, Ahab's foreign wife enforced the establishment of Baal worship in Israel, which was yet another step on the way of spiritual decline leading to Israel's exile.

The historical record is supplemented by prophetic pronouncements. Most important is the long Elijah-Elisha passage that is unique to Kings and lacking in Chronicles. They ministered at the time of Ahab and his sons when Baal-worship was firmly established in Israel. Their miracles were powerful revelation of Yahweh's reality and Israel's idolatry. The following chart compares Baal's claims with the prophets' mighty deeds worked in the name of Yahweh:

Baal controls the rains	Elijah commands drought (1 Ki 17:1) Elijah commands rain (1 Ki 18:41-45)
Baal controls lightning and fire	Elijah commands fire from heaven (1 Ki 18:38 and 2 Ki 1:10-12; 2:11)

Baal ensures the harvests	Ellijah multiplies flour and oil (1 Ki 17:14-16) Elisha multiplies oil (2 Ki 4:3-6) Elisha multiplies bread (2 Ki 4:42-44) Elisha prophesied the end of famine (2 Ki 7:1)
Baal controls life and death	Ellijah raises the widow's son (1 Ki 17:21-22) Elisha raises the Shunammite's son (2 Ki 4:32-35)

In one case Elisha prophesied and “the land was filled with water.” (2 Ki 3:20)

His proof of Yahweh’s divinity contrasted the inability of the Pharaohs who claimed to be under control of the ground-water to rise.² Other prophets judged the idolatry of Jeroboam. (cf. 1 Ki 13:2; 14:6-16) An unnamed prophet revealed Ahab’s disobedience. (1 Ki 20:42) Micaiah spoke against Ahab and predicted his death. (1 Ki 22:14-23) The writing prophets Jonah (2 Ki 14:25) and Isaiah (2 Ki 19-20) appear in the records, too. The prophetic ministries form an important part of Kings and provide spiritual insight beyond the external historical events. In comparison to Chronicles, the Books of Kings are assigned to the ‘Former Prophets’ in the Jewish Tanak, whereas Chronicles is set among the ‘Scrolls.’

Some authors pay special attention to the geographical aspect of the prophets’ ministries. Elijah’s journey to the border of Tyre at Mt. Carmel shows that Yahweh

² Roger Dalman, *Yahweh’s Song: A Handbook for Understanding Old Testament Historical Theology* (Trinity Online Learning Center, 2006), 305.

continued to regard this area as his chosen land of Israel despite the political and religious influence of the neighbouring nations.³ In fact the prophetic ministry is not at all confined to Judah but comprises Israel and areas beyond. Elijah was sent to the widow in Sidon and Elisha healed Naaman the Syrian, as Jesus later reminded his audience in Nazareth. (cf. Lk 4:26-27) There are more hints to Israel's call as a witness for the nations, another theme emphasized in Kings. (e.g. 2 Ki 8:7ff.)

Elijah and Elisha are followed by Jehu who was chosen king to destroy Ahab's family together with the idolatrous Baal worship. (2 Ki 9-10) Followed by a description of the ongoing political, economical and religious development of Israel and Judah, emphasis is then given to Assyria's invasion and the fall of Samaria. (cf. 2 Ki 15:19.29; 17:5f) The exile is finally commented in light of Israel's apostasy (cf. 2 Ki 17:7ff.). The account ends with a record about the last kings of Judah and the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC. In Kings, Manasseh's evil reign is seen as the last big step towards the fall. (2 Ki 21:10-15; 23:26f.; 24:3f.)

Thus in summary we find emphasis on Solomon's time, the retribution motif, prominence of the prophets, some predictive links to the Gentile mission and above all a progressive historical development towards Israel's exile. It remains to be noted that the author also recalls the everlasting bond between God and Israel that provides

³ Magnus Ottosson, "The Prophet Elijah's Visit to Zarephath," in *In the Shelter of Elyon* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1984), 185-198.

for the message of hope and consolation.⁴ Kings often shows that God forgives and restores, again. (cf. 1 Ki 13:1-10.33f.; 21:27-29; 2 Ki 13:1-5.22-24) Solomon's prayer was an encouraging message for the repenting exiles. (cf. 1 Ki 8:47f.) As we will see, such positive outlook is also found in Chronicles, yet the perspective is different.

b. Book of Chronicles

"Adam, Seth, Enosh." (1 Chr 1:1) Chronicles begins not with David and Solomon but with Adam the first man created. The long genealogies that follow in chapter one to nine are unique to Chronicles. Key figure is David (1 Chr 2:15) with his ancestors, relatives and descendants within his Judean tribe in chapter two and three. Among the tribes of Israel, space is devoted to the tribe of Judah (1 Chr 4:1-23) and even more to the tribe of Levi. (1 Chr 6:1-81) The links to David and Levi introduce the author's themes of kingship and priesthood. The genealogies' beginning with Adam reminds the reader that he is part of the one continuous tree of mankind and in this sense the "name-lists are all about the binding together of the generations in the one gracious plan of the covenant-keeping God."⁵ The reader becomes involved in Israel's history and learns about God's principles by way of a review.

⁴ Gershon Galil, "The Message of the Book of Kings in Relation to Deuteronomy and Jeremiah," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 158 (October 2001): 408f.

⁵ Michael Wilcock, *The Message of Chronicles*, The Bible Speaks Today, ed. J.A. Motyer (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 16.

Kings begins with Solomon's reign, his failure and death. Chronicles, in contrast, records the division of the monarchy after Solomon not before the second book, chapter ten. Instead, the reign of David is given much more emphasis. Freedman goes so far to say that "the principle objective of the Chronicler was to write a history of the dynasty of David, ... its accomplishments in the religious and specifically cultic areas."⁶ In fact the legitimacy of the Davidic monarchy (as well as the Levitical priesthood) might be seen as one of the distinct themes of the book. (e.g. 2 Chr 13:4-12) In addition, David and Solomon are the double ideal foreshadowing Christ⁷, not 'idealized' by omissions but portrayed as real humans.⁸ Indeed the author of Chronicles and his audience already know about David and Solomon from sources like Kings. The Chronicler *reminds* the reader of Israel's history and hereby carefully *selects* (and omits) historical parts to form his distinct theological message.

Another contrast to Kings is that Chronicles concentrates on the kings of the southern kingdom but excludes the records about the northern kings, apparently because in the kingdom of Judah "David's throne and Solomon's temple are."⁹ Despite this 'pan-Israelite theology', the position of the Chronicler towards the north

⁶ David Noel Freedman, "The Chronicler's Purpose," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 23 (October 1961): 437.

⁷ Michael Wilcock, *The Message of Chronicles*, 55, 153.

⁸ Contra William F. Stinespring, "Eschatology in Chronicles," 211.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 166.

is not as 'anti-northern' as traditionally assumed.¹⁰ Braun points to the passages that show a rather positive attitude.¹¹ Priests from the north came to Jerusalem in Rehoboam's time after the division of Israel. (2 Chr 11:16) Israel defeated Judah but released the captives and took care of them. (2 Chr 28:8-15) Hezekiah invited the north to participate in the Passover festival and some came to Jerusalem. (2 Chr 30:11) Josiah's reform was not confined to the Judean region but affected "all who were in Israel." (2 Chr 34:33) Whereas Kings exposes the ongoing struggles between Israel and Judah, Chronicles lays some emphasis on the 'all-Israel' motif. Even the term 'Israel' is used inconsistently for both the north and the south.¹²

Probably the most dominant theme found in Chronicles is that of 'immediate retribution' or, as it is elsewhere called, the 'coherence of action and effect.'¹³ In comparison to Kings we find this motif especially revealed in their records about the Judean kings Asa and Manasseh. It is noteworthy that Asa's failure as well as Manasseh's repentance are lacking in Kings. (2 Chr 16:7-14; 33:12-16) Manasseh's case is of special significance since in Kings, as mentioned, his evil reign is revealed

¹⁰ E.g. Wilhelm Rudolph, "Problems of the Books of Chronicles," *Vetus Testamentum* 4 (1954): 404.

¹¹ Roddy L. Braun, "A Reconsideration of the Chronicler's Attitude toward the North," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 96 (March 1977): 60ff.

¹² Michael Wilcock, *The Message of Chronicles*, 172.

¹³ Raymond B. Dillard, "Reward and Punishment in Chronicles: The Theology of Immediate Retribution," *Westminster Theological Journal* 46 (Spring 1984): 164-172; with reference to B.S. Child, *ibid.*, 165, n.2.

to be the final cause for God's – delayed – judgment on Judah culminating in the exile. In Chronicles, Manasseh himself suffers for his own sins when he is brought to Babylon with a hook in his nose. (2 Chr 33:11) Chronicles complements Ezekiel's principle, "The soul who sins is the one who will die." (Ez 18:4.20) Likewise in King Asa's case, his disease is shown to be the result of his treaty with Syria in the Chronicler's account but merely mentioned in Kings without reference to his conduct. (2 Chr 16:12; 1 Ki 15:23b) The motif is not reduced to its logical extreme, however. An enemy's attack is not always the effect of sin. (cf. 2 Chr 16:1; 25:13; 32:1)

The closing words of 2 Chronicles are the same as the introducing words of Ezra. Such a link is missing in Kings. Some find the Chronicler's purpose in light of this context: "Chronicles were theologically preparatory for the work of Ezra-Nehemiah that followed. Thus the purpose of Chronicles was traditionally assumed to be supportive of the community reforms that Ezra and Nehemiah had endeavoured to implement."¹⁴ Recent criticism that rejects this view has been disproved with reference to the Chronicler's temple-focus.¹⁵ Though a historical connection between the books cannot be denied, we will see that one also has to consider the huge difference between the portrayed glory of the first temple and the sobering reality of

¹⁴ William J. Dumbrell, "The Purpose of the Book of Chronicles," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* (September 1984): 257.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 258, 261.

the second temple after the exile. The question arises for what purpose the Chronicler recalls the glory of the past and how this should be related to Ezra-Nehemiah. We thus proceed with the historical backgrounds of Kings and Chronicles.

3. Biblical Criticism

a. Authorship and Date

In short, evangelicals uphold that 1 & 2 Kings were written early in Judah's captivity, whereas 1 & 2 Chronicles were probably written some time *after* the exile.¹⁶ Tradition claims that Kings was composed by Jeremiah and Chronicles by Ezra. In regard to Kings, Noth with his idea of the 'Deuteronomistic History' has challenged this view and suggested that Kings was the work of the so-called 'Deuteronomist.' The fact that there is a significant difference of emphasis between Kings and Deuteronomy may suffice to reject his opinion.¹⁷ Overall there is no evidence to deny that Jeremiah indeed was the author of Kings. He was in Jerusalem as the prophet of that time who had access to the source materials he refers to. He could preserve the demise of his nation as an eyewitness, and the history in Kings complements the prophetic warnings in the Book of Jeremiah.¹⁸

¹⁶ Roger Dalman, *Old Testament History* (Trinity Online Learning Center, 2006), cassette no. 18, side A.

¹⁷ Richard D. Patterson and Hermann J. Austel, "1, 2 Kings," 5.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 6.

In regard to Chronicles, the traditional view that Ezra the scribe wrote Chronicles together with the books of Ezra-Nehemiah is more difficult to maintain. Again, some follow the spirit of ‘Documentary Hypothesis’ and ‘Deuteronomistic History’, even claiming that Ezra wrote the Pentateuch and consequently the Chronicler (!) wrote also Ezra and Nehemiah.¹⁹ The theory falls together with the disproof of the ‘Documentary Hypothesis’ as a whole. On the other hand, those who uphold Ezra as the author are at pains to show the literary unity of the works.

Dumbrell claims that the purposes of Ezra-Nehemiah and Chronicles are essentially the same. The concerns of the reforming kings in Chronicles accord well with Ezra’s law reading and the covenant renewal movement in Nehemiah 9-10. Chronicles’ ‘all-Israel’ motif is met by Ezra’s commission to “all the people beyond the river” (Ez 7:25), and the common second-exodus theology is found in the edict of Cyrus. (cf. 2 Chr 36:23; Ezra 1:2-4) McCarthy notes that Chronicles-Nehemiah in regard to the concern of covenant-renewal “constitute some sort of unity as a position” and “reflect a common form and ideology.”²⁰ Both Dumbrell and McCarthy in result disprove the liberal position based on the ‘Documentary Hypothesis’ which suggests that a deuteronomistic editor formed Chronicles during (or after) the exile.

¹⁹ Sara Japhet, “The Historical Reliability of Chronicles,” 89.

²⁰ Dennis J. McCarthy, “Covenant and Law in Chronicles-Nehemiah,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 44 (January 1982): 25.

Though the traditional view of Ezra's authorship has been maintained on similar grounds by Payne, his colleague Samir B. Massouh adds to his standpoint with a call for caution.²¹ Apart from the problem of differing vocabulary, there are differences in ideology as well. The issue of mixed marriages is significant in the Ezra-Nehemiah reforms, but Solomon is not denounced for his many foreign wives in Chronicles. Also, Ezra's and Nehemiah's conflict with the Samaritan opponents is contrasted by the 'all-Israel' motif in Chronicles. Finally, the Chronicler's doctrine of retribution is unimportant in Ezra-Nehemiah.

Based on the assumption that Ezra is Chronicle's author Payne suggests a date about 450 BC. Even in case of a different author his notion that, according to tradition, the OT canon was finalized before 420 BC is worth to be considered.²² Finally, "manuscript evidence from Qumran points to a date as early as around 400 BC."²³

In line with the liberal thought world Rudolph says that the Chronicler's "work has been expanded in the course of time, even as late as the Maccabean period,

²¹ J. Barton Payne, "1, 2 Chronicles," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, *1 & 2 Kings, 1 & 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Job*, ed. Frank E. Gæbelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), 305-7.

²² Ibid.

²³ Jeffrey L. Townsend, "The Purpose of 1 and 2 Chronicles," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 144 (July 1978): 278; he refers to Bruce K. Waltke, "The Samaritan Pentateuch and the Text of the Old Testament," in *New Perspectives on the Old Testament*, ed. J. Barton Payne (Waco: Word Books, 1970): 212-39.

by a whole series of additions with differing viewpoints.”²⁴ Whereas some argue from the absence of Greek elements that a late date has to be ruled out, Knoppers disproves this point with his argument that “the closest counterparts to the phenomenon of 1 Chr 1-9 may be found in works of the Greek genealogists.”²⁵ Yet he at the same time points out that the process of Hellenization began long before Alexander the Great conquered Palestine in the middle of the fourth century BC.²⁶ Levin equally assumes that the Chronicler lived before the Macedonian conquest. Besides he argues that the message of Israel’s unity by way of using the introducing genealogies is best understood by a tribal, village society.²⁷ His point would add to the significance of the Chronicler’s ‘all-Israel’ theme.

To sum up, though the exact date of composition is disputed, in any case Chronicles is to be placed after the completion of the second temple in 515 BC. From this perspective the record about the *first* building of the temple under David and Solomon certainly also points the reader to the *second* building under Zerubbabel.²⁸ The Jerusalem temple surely is one important concern in Chronicles²⁹ as well as in

²⁴ Wilhelm Rudolph, “Problems of the Books of Chronicles,” 402.

²⁵ Gary N. Knoppers, “Greek Historiography and the Chronicler’s History: A Reexamination,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 122 (Winter 2003): 633.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 650.

²⁷ Yigal Levin, “Who was the Chronicler’s Audience? A Hint from his Genealogies,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 122 (Summer 2003): 229 and 245.

²⁸ See also David Noel Freedman, “The Chronicler’s Purpose,” 439.

²⁹ See esp. Donald F. Murray, “Dynasty, People, and the Future: The Message

the people's real life-setting of those days. Even though, the historical reality after the exile was rather discouraging. The temple was not at all glorious, and the ark was gone. Instead of a Davidic king that ruled over a powerful nation, the tiny Judean province was governed by Persia. We agree with Wilcock who writes:

The time *of* which the Chronicler writes is a day of great things, but the time *in* which he writes is a 'day of small things.' What then is the point of his harping on the great days of old? Is it simply nostalgia, a vain harkening after past splendours? Or does he have in mind some sort of restoration of the old 'land of hope and glory'...? In his time the royal power of David seems not to exist. Yet if his depiction of it is intended as sermon material, a yearning for it as it once was can hardly be serious, and an urging that it might again be striven for can hardly be realistic.³⁰

Thus only to some limited extent we agree with Dumbrell that Chronicles proclaims the message of hope for the restoration of the (temple-centered) theocracy, either at the author's time in this world or in an eschatological sense, possibly both.³¹ From a similar historical standpoint also Dyck posits that "the Chronicler's history anticipates, ideologically, the success of the Maccabeans in establishing Jerusalem as a city and Temple without rival in the region."³² Dyck points more to the significant role of Jerusalem 'as the centre of all Israel' rather than the Temple. Stinespring

of Chronicles," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 58 (June 1993): 85.

³⁰ Michael Wilcock, *The Message of Chronicles*, 81.

³¹ William J. Dumbrell, "The Purpose of the Book of Chronicles," 266.

³² Jonathan Dyck, "Dating Chronicles and the Purpose of Chronicles," *Didaskalia* 8 (Spring 1997): 26.

teaches a strong eschatological outlook of Chronicles. In simple terms he says that since the Davidic dynasty was not ruling, the Chronicler “was surely thinking eschatologically of the new David and the new kingdom that would shortly or eventually rise in God’s good time.”³³ All these views, however, are as simplified as the statement that Chronicles solely teaches ‘immediate retribution.’

The theological idioms taken together as a whole form an important message to the Chronicler’s original audience in their particular situation. We tend to agree with Townsend who defines the Chronicler’s purpose as follows: “To rally the returned remnant to hopeful temple worship by demonstrating their link with the enduring Davidic promises.”³⁴ God’s everlasting promises are the anchor of all hope. History has shown that God’s reign is powerful. The Davidic throne in fact is the Lord’s (1 Chr 28:5; 29:11), and his throne always remains as powerful as it was in David’s era.³⁵ At the same time God’s chosen leaders are responsible for their conduct before God. The principle of retribution remains the same after the exile as it was before. Israel’s postexilic leaders are encouraged but also instructed for a new beginning. The people are led to commitment and revival, temple-centered or not.³⁶

³³ William F. Stinespring, “Eschatology in Chronicles,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 80 (September 1961): 211; a similar messianic focus is attributed by Jeffrey L. Townsend, “The Purpose of 1 and 2 Chronicles,” 291.

³⁴ Jeffrey L. Townsend, “The Purpose of 1 and 2 Chronicles,” 283.

³⁵ Michael Wilcock, *The Message of Chronicles*, 118.

³⁶ Donald F. Murray, “Retribution and Revival: Theological Theory, Religious

Kings, in comparison, is written from the exilic perspective. Though the recorded history is overall the same, the emphasis is different. The reader is certainly encouraged by God's promises. Those who repent may have hope for restoration. Different from Chronicles, however, the whole nation is called to understand the exilic situation as God's final judgment for the preceding idolatry and apostasy.

b. Historical Reliability

*No fact of Old Testament criticism is more firmly established than this; that the Chronicler as a historian is thoroughly untrustworthy.*³⁷

Comparing to Kings, Chronicles was written rather late. Japhet aptly shows how scholars from the beginning were preoccupied with scepticism concerning the book's historical reliability since the writer of Chronicles lived some time after the historical events he describes. Its status grew worse when critics were engaged with the 'Documentary Hypothesis' and the question of dating the Pentateuch. Even today most liberals assume that the Pentateuch was composed late. In result Israel's early history could not be based on the Law of Moses. Since in fact the historical books

Praxis, and the Future in Chronicles," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 88 (June 2000): 96; he also sees a strong temple-focus in Chronicles.

³⁷ C.C. Torrey, *The Composition and Historical Value of Ezra-Nehemiah* (Giessen: 1896), 52; quoted in Sara Japhet, "The Historical Reliability of Chronicles," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 33 (October 1985): 88.

record law-based religious events like ceremonial worship, the only way to accept the liberal thesis is to completely reject Chronicles as a reliable historical source.³⁸

Apart from Israel's religious history, those who uphold the late dating of the Pentateuch are confronted with yet another problem in regard to content. Since Chronicles was written after the exile, one might assume theological similarities to a late Pentateuch. Contrary, the liberal wonders why the exalted status of Moses of the Pentateuch is contrasted by the exalted status of David in Chronicles. The search for a solution leads to the classification of the work as "apologia on behalf of the Levites" whose "overriding concern is to legitimize the Levites."³⁹

Essential element of the 'Documentary Hypothesis' is the assumption that the Pentateuch developed out of various sources. The Book of Chronicles is studied in the same spirit. The assumption that the work 'developed' or 'evolved' out of various other materials in some way opposes the doctrine that the biblical canon is inerrant. That Chronicles is a kind of development of Kings which served as *Vorlage* has been argued by scholars like Williamson. His suggestion about Josiah's death in Chronicles is one good example representing the liberal thought world:

It would thus appear that the passage has been composed by someone who was aware of the difficulties of the narrative in Kings and who reflected on

³⁸ Sara Japhet, "The Historical Reliability of Chronicles," 85.

³⁹ Simon J. De Vries, "Moses and David as Cult Founders in Chronicles," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 107 (December 1988): 636 and 638.

them within the wider context of the Deuteronomistic History as a whole, and probably also with fuller knowledge of the actual course of events.⁴⁰

It is true that both Kings and Chronicles are based on various sources from which the authors gained their historical knowledge for their compositions. Kings refers to:

1. The Book of the Annals of Solomon (1 Ki 11:41)
2. The Book of the Annals of the Kings of Israel (e.g. 1 Ki 14:19)
3. The Book of the Annals of the Kings of Judah (e.g. 1 Ki 15:23)

These sources were from the royal court or the temple archives. Additional sources might also have been some of those mentioned in Chronicles:

1. Genealogical records (e.g. 1 Chr 4:33)
2. Letters and official documents (e.g. 1 Chr 28:11-12)
3. Poems, prayers, songs (e.g. 1 Chr 16:8-36; 29:10-22)
4. Prophetic records (e.g. 1 Chr 29:29; 2 Chr 9:29; 12:15; 20:34; 32:32)
5. Other histories (e.g. 2 Chr 27:7; 27:24; 2 Chr 16:11; 24:27; 35:4)

It is a matter of presupposition and interpretation whether one regards these references as proof for a 'Documentary Hypothesis' that the historical books emerged into a kind of more or less reliable 'patchwork' or, contrary to that, the sources are seen as further evidence for the historical reliability of the texts. Especially in the case of Chronicles,

⁴⁰ H.G.M. Williamson, "The Death of Josiah and the Continuing Development of the Deuteronomistic History," *Vetus Testamentum* 32 (April 1982): 246.

the argument that the author lived late after the events counts for nothing in light of the many materials he had access to. Evangelicals, of course, also hold firm to the doctrine that the writer was led by the Spirit while composing his work.

It is important to see the implications of the discussion. As mentioned above, the Chronicler selects the historical events he records in order to form his theological message. In other words, he is preaching from facts, not fiction. Wilcock writes:

If the lesson to be conveyed is that ‘the Lord is the kind of God who deals with men in such-and-such a way’, and if then the preacher can find no actual examples of the Lord’s acting in this way, and is compelled to invent them, what sort of a lesson is that?⁴¹

If the Chronicler’s records are historically wrong, his message is pointless.

The liberal critical view was refuted by Albright who found ‘archaeological evidence ... in increasing abundance’ that supported the reliability of Chronicles.⁴²

The discovery of the Siloam inscription and tunnel confirms 2 Chr 32:30. Certain seals could be connected with 1 Chr 4:23 and the genealogies of Judah.

Archaeological surveys in the Judean desert provided evidence for the recorded constructions of the kings of Judah, and the increased understanding of the historical

⁴¹ Michael Wilcock, *The Message of Chronicles*, 26.

⁴² Sara Japhet, “The Historical Reliability of Chronicles,” 93; she refers to W.F. Albright, “The Judicial Reform of Jehoshaphath,” *Alexander Marx Jubilee Volume* (New York, 1950), 62.

geography led to a new evaluation of the geographical data in Chronicles.⁴³ Moreover, Albright also reconsidered the literary methods of the Chronicler and claimed that he “was a cautious editor, who described the history of Israel by means of collecting and reworking ancient sources which he handled with great respect.”⁴⁴ Thus with Albright a change of attitude towards Chronicles took place.

Archaeological reasoning has also been used by the critics, however. Na’aman seeks to prove or disprove the historicity of Kings by way of archaeological study of royal inscriptions.⁴⁵ Na’aman’s first subject is the campaign of Shishak. (cf. 1 Ki 14:25-28) Pharaoh Shoshenk left a list of places he conquered which “shows that the campaign was directed against Israel and the non-Judahite parts of the Negeb, avoiding entirely the kingdom of Judah. The city of Jerusalem is missing...”⁴⁶ Since Shoshenk’s list differs from the King’s record, Na’aman concludes that the interpretation of the author’s source “is incomplete and even misleading.”⁴⁷ In response, the present author holds to the historicity of biblical Shishak and tends to agree with those who deny his identification with Shoshenk.⁴⁸

⁴³ Sara Japhet, “The Historical Reliability of Chronicles,” 94.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 95.

⁴⁵ Nadav Na’aman, “The Contribution of Royal Inscriptions for a Re-evaluation of the Book of Kings as a Historical Source,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 82 (March 1999): 3-17.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁴⁸ See, e.g., David Rohl, *A Test of Time. Volume I: The Bible – From Myth to*

Next Na'aman notes that the campaigns of Shalmaneser III against Ahab and later Joram are not recorded in Kings and Chronicles and that 'Adad-idri' was king of Damascus, not 'Ben-Hadad'. (1 Ki 20:1) We reply that the Bible is not composed for the sake of a complete historical record. Missing events do not imply that the recorded ones did not take place. Besides Kitchen notes that 'Adad-idri' is commonly identified with 'Ben-Hadad', meaning "son of (the god) Hadad." 'Adad-idri' also might have been a king who ruled between two kings named 'Ben-Hadad.'⁴⁹ In any case the Shalmaneser III inscription does not provide real evidence contra Kings.

Na'aman proceeds in the same spirit with regard to the Mesha stele, the Tel Dan stele and Adad-Nirari III. Two things are noteworthy concerning his arguments: (1) The biblical records unlike the royal inscriptions are not valued as a reliable historical source; (2) though the biblical author had access to a variety of historical materials about his own epoch, Na'aman conceives to prove him wrong based on few inscriptions studied from a distance of more than two and a half millennia. Na'aman concludes that "some inferences do not fit the historical reality."⁵⁰ A closer look however exposes his presuppositions and refutes his 'evidence.'

Another crucial point of debate concerning validity is about the numbers

History (London: Arrow Books, 1995), 134-146.

⁴⁹ Kenneth A. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 11.

⁵⁰ Nadav Na'aman, "The Contribution of Royal Inscriptions," 16.

recorded in Chronicles. Payne cites Meyers: “The only valid objection ... could be his numbers which, by any interpretation, are impossibly high. This fact perhaps more than any other had made the Chronicler’s work suspect.”⁵¹ Whereas some conclude that Chronicles is unreliable, others interpret the numbers as hyperbolic with heavy emphasis on eschatology.⁵² Payne responded to this issue with a thorough analysis of the recorded numbers. He shows that whereas a few of the parallel passages contain scribal errors, most are correct and original. In some cases the parallel records relate to differing identifications given to the objects counted.⁵³ Among those passages with numbers unparalleled in the Old Testament (57.8%), only two are extraordinary high but not impossible, and both are related to the temple. (1 Chr 22:14; 29:4) We agree with Payne who “would prefer to attribute the historical reliability of the eight large numbers in these two passages to the special providence of God, in bestowing on His servant David a weight of riches commensurate with their intended employment for the house of His glory. Such confidence at least consorts well with the validity that is attributable to the other 621 figures that appear in 1 and 2 Chronicles.”⁵⁴

⁵¹ J. Barton Payne, “1, 2 Chronicles,” 309.

⁵² E.g. William F. Stinespring, “Eschatology in Chronicles,” 213.

⁵³ J. Barton Payne, “The Validity of the Numbers in Chronicles, Part I,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 136 (April 1979): 109-128.

⁵⁴ J. Barton Payne, “The Validity of the Numbers in Chronicles, Part II,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 136 (July 1979): 220.

4. Conclusion

The crucial concern of this paper revolves around inerrancy. If Kings and Chronicles are historically unreliable, the books are studied in vain. Even more, since the whole Christian religion is anchored in historical facts, a postulation that parts of the canon are invalid would in effect destroy the Christian faith. This study, however, has shown that nothing really hinders us to trust the biblical records. The theological themes are indeed shaped by the recorded historical facts. The distinct messages of Kings and Chronicles bring about rich blessings for those willing to receive.

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