

Jerome once wrote

“The book of Chronicles, the epitome of the old dispensation, is of such importance that without it anyone who claims to have a knowledge of the Scriptures makes himself a fool.”

I believe that is true –

but I also concur with Ray Dillard, who added a caveat:

“anyone who claims to know Chronicles without having a thorough knowledge of Scripture would be making an even bigger fool of himself, for least of all books of the Bible can it be studied in isolation.” (Dillard, ix)

The genealogies in Chronicles begin with Adam and run through the whole of history down to the Chronicler’s own day.

Do you remember who got the most attention in the genealogies?

The house of David and the priests.

The Chronicler has been concerned with kings and priests –

with the temple and the throne –
both are now destroyed.

Dillard points out that the Chronicler weaves together the language of throne and temple in such a way that you might begin to think that even as they fall together, so also will they rise together.

The events of 2 Chronicles 36:1-21 take 23 years –
from the death of Josiah in 609 to the destruction of the temple in 586.

Josiah was only 39 years old when he died –
cut down in the prime of his manhood.

No doubt the people of Judah had hoped that he would reign for decades more –
but in the span of 23 years, Jerusalem went from the pinnacle of hope
to utter obliteration.

And as the Babylonians continued to push back the Assyrians,
many in Jerusalem hoped that Judah, as a loyal ally of Babylon,
would be rewarded.

But others feared Babylon’s increasing power,
and they looked southward to Egypt as their deliverer.

And so for twenty years the pro-Egypt and the pro-Babylon parties vied for control.
In retrospect, we cluck our tongues and wag our heads:
didn't they know better?

They should have trusted the LORD – not the nations around them!

But how do we do at trusting the LORD?

We have the same tendency to put our hope and trust in the nations.

Where do we find our confidence and our hope?

When you face uncertainty and confusion, where do you turn?

Music, sports, medication, politics?

Do you make the LORD your trust?

We have the same tendencies as our fathers –

and we need to repent and believe the good news that Jesus is King!

A better king than Josiah is on the throne!

1. “The Abominations of the Nations” and the Sons of Josiah (36:1-14)

a. Jehoahaz: Deposed by and Carried off to Egypt (v1-4)

36 The people of the land took Jehoahaz the son of Josiah and made him king in his father's place in Jerusalem. ² Jehoahaz was twenty-three years old when he began to reign, and he reigned three months in Jerusalem. ³ Then the king of Egypt deposed him in Jerusalem and laid on the land a tribute of a hundred talents of silver and a talent^[a] of gold. ⁴ And the king of Egypt made Eliakim his brother king over Judah and Jerusalem, and changed his name to Jehoiakim. But Neco took Jehoahaz his brother and carried him to Egypt.

As we go through these three sons and one grandson of Josiah,

I want you to notice some things:

for one, the Chronicler never mentions the *death* of any of these kings!

We know from Kings about these details,

but the Chronicler is not interested in this point.

For him, once the king is exiled – once he is captive –

he abruptly drops out of the narrative.

Jehoahaz gets four verses.

We don't even know whether he was good or evil!

Just that he reigned three months – was deposed by Pharaoh Neco and carried off to Egypt.

Jeremiah says that Jehoahaz (also called Shallum) would die in exile:

In Jeremiah 22:10, the prophet spoke concerning Josiah and his son Shallum

“Weep not for him who is dead, nor grieve for him,

but weep bitterly for him who goes away,

for he shall return no more to see his native land.”

The prophet goes on to explain:

“For thus says the LORD concerning Shallum the son of Josiah, king of Judah, who reigned instead of Josiah his father,

and who went away from this place: ‘He shall return here no more...’”

Neco had killed his father, Josiah, in battle.

The people of the land wanted Jehoahaz to be king
(rather than his older brother, Eliakim),
but Neco will have none of that!

And so Neco removes Jehoahaz and replaces him with his older brother, Eliakim,
and to demonstrate that he (Neco) is really the one in charge,
he changes Eliakim's name to Jehoiakim.

It may seem odd that he would choose a Yahweh name.

But it's a clever move.

He would have alienated more people by giving him an Egyptian name.

Eliakim means "God has set up."

Jehoiakim means "Yahweh has set up."

Undoubtedly Neco's point is that every time Judahites say "Jehoiakim" –
they will be reminded that Egypt is in power,
because it was Pharaoh who set him up in Jerusalem.

But Neco also took Jehoahaz into captivity in Egypt.

And when he is taken captive, the king of Egypt

"laid on the land a tribute of a hundred talents of silver and a talent of gold."

As goes the king, so goes the land.

**b. Jehoiakim: Did Evil in the Sight of the LORD and Was Carried off to
Babylon (v5-8)**

⁵ *Jehoiakim was twenty-five years old when he began to reign, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. He did what was evil in the sight of the LORD his God. ⁶ Against him came up Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and bound him in chains to take him to Babylon.*

⁷ *Nebuchadnezzar also carried part of the vessels of the house of the LORD to Babylon and put them in his palace in Babylon. ⁸ Now the rest of the acts of Jehoiakim, and the abominations that he did, and what was found against him, behold, they are written in the Book of the Kings of Israel and Judah. And Jehoiachin his son reigned in his place.*

The next son of Josiah (Jehoiakim) reigns for 11 years.

But he also gets four verses.

He did what was evil in the sight of the LORD his God –

the Chronicler focuses on the abominations of Jehoiakim,

but Jeremiah will add a litany of moral and economic sins as well.

It is pretty clear that Jehoiakim reverses course and pursues a pro-Egyptian policy.

We get additional information from Kings and from Jeremiah –

which suggests that the sons of Josiah came from different mothers –

and that these different mothers were connected to the pro-Egyptian
or pro-Babylonian factions.

But the sons of Josiah are pursuing their course according to political exigency – rather than according to the Word of the LORD.

And this brings the wrath of Babylon upon him
and so Nebuchadnezzar came against him and bound him in chains
to take him to Babylon.

The language is ambiguous – did he actually *go* to Babylon?
Or just symbolically bound by Babylonian envoys?
Kings says nothing about Jehoiakim going to Babylon –
and seems to suggest that he died in Jerusalem.

But either way, Kings and Chronicles agrees that Nebuchadnezzar
gains control of Jerusalem through his strong-arm tactics with Jehoiakim.

But when Jehoiakim is taken to Babylon,
Nebuchadnezzar also “carried part of the vessels of the house of the LORD to Babylon” –
as goes the king, so goes the *temple*.
This would also coincide with the exile of Daniel and Ezekiel in 605 BC.

c. Jehoiachin: Did Evil in the Sight of the LORD and Was Brought to Babylon (v9-10)

⁹ *Jehoiachin was eighteen^[b] years old when he became king, and he reigned three months and ten days in Jerusalem. He did what was evil in the sight of the LORD.* ¹⁰ *In the spring of the year King Nebuchadnezzar sent and brought him to Babylon, with the precious vessels of the house of the LORD, and made his brother Zedekiah king over Judah and Jerusalem.*

Jehoiakim’s son, Jehoiachin, then came to the throne.
He would have been seven in the year that his grandfather Josiah died,
and when his uncle and his father became king.
Now at age 18, he becomes king.

Apparently he followed the same pro-Egyptian policies as his father,
resulting in Nebuchadnezzar’s wrath.
Nebuchadnezzar didn’t bother sending an army.
He just had Jehoiachin brought to Babylon and made his uncle Zedekiah king.
(The Chronicler says “brother” –
but the word brother can refer to any close male relative)

But notice that when he brought him to Babylon,
he also brought “the precious vessels of the house of the LORD” –
as goes the king, so goes the temple –
the house of the LORD goes into exile with the king.

d. Zedekiah: Did Not Humble Himself before Jeremiah and Stiffened His Neck (v11-14)

¹¹ *Zedekiah was twenty-one years old when he began to reign, and he reigned eleven years in*

Jerusalem. ¹² He did what was evil in the sight of the LORD his God. He did not humble himself before Jeremiah the prophet, who spoke from the mouth of the LORD. ¹³ He also rebelled against King Nebuchadnezzar, who had made him swear by God. He stiffened his neck and hardened his heart against turning to the LORD, the God of Israel. ¹⁴ All the officers of the priests and the people likewise were exceedingly unfaithful, following all the abominations of the nations. And they polluted the house of the LORD that he had made holy in Jerusalem.

Zedekiah came to the throne around 597 BC – twelve years after the death of Josiah his father.

The Chronicler gives four verses to his reign – focusing on four evil things:

- 1) he did not humble himself before Jeremiah, who spoke from the mouth of the LORD
- 2) he rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar – breaking his own oath before God
- 3) He stiffened his neck and hardened his heart against turning to the LORD
- 4) and the officers and the people followed him in his abominations

Notice the emphasis on words.

How do you do evil in the sight of the LORD?

Ignore what he has said!

If you ignore the word of God that he has spoken through his servants,
then that sets up everything else!

But notice *why* Zedekiah ignores the word of the Lord:

he did not humble himself...

he stiffened his neck and hardened his heart...

If your heart is not tender to the voice of the LORD then you will not hear him.

How can you have a tender heart?

Humble yourself!

So much of our culture prizes “ambition” and “pride” –
that’s what “manliness” is all about, right?

‘You gotta make something of yourself, son’!

God tells us that what was lacking in Zedekiah was *humility*.

If you want to know what manliness looks like,

look at Jesus –

the one who *humbled himself* to the point of death.

What was missing from the kings of Judah was self-sacrificing humility.

The Chronicler also says that Zedekiah’s rebellion against Nebuchadnezzar
was *doing evil in the sight of the LORD*.

Why is it evil?

After all, Hezekiah rebelled against Sennacherib,
and the LORD blessed him!

But Zedekiah had sworn an oath to Nebuchadnezzar before God.
Ezekiel 17 refers to this oath.
Both Jeremiah and Ezekiel agree
that Zedekiah *should have* been faithful to Babylon.

There are different stances required at different times in redemptive history.
After Josiah, when God had told the kings of Jerusalem
that wrath was now coming upon the city,
there was no way to go back to pre-Josiah era policies.
Don't try to *be* Hezekiah.
Do what Hezekiah did!
Hezekiah listened to the prophet Isaiah –
and did what the prophets told him!

Zedekiah does not listen to Jeremiah.
Instead, he follows the pro-Egyptian policies of his advisers,
and leads Jerusalem into rebellion and destruction.

What happened to Zedekiah?

The Chronicler never tells us.
After verse 13, there is only one reference to “the treasures of the king” –
and there is no comment on the fate of Zedekiah himself

Kings tells us that Zedekiah tried to flee,
but Nebuchadnezzar captured him, slaughtered his sons before his eyes,
then blinded him and carried him off captive to Babylon.

The Chronicler sees no reason to mention any of that.
For him, the less said about the reign of Zedekiah the better.

And what follows is a very brief description of the destruction of Jerusalem.
The Chronicler focuses our attention on a few crisp points.

2. “No Remedy”: the Wrath of the LORD and the Destruction of Jerusalem (36:15-21)

a. They Mocked the Messengers of God (v15-16)

¹⁵ *The LORD, the God of their fathers, sent persistently to them by his messengers, because he had compassion on his people and on his dwelling place.* ¹⁶ *But they kept mocking the messengers of God, despising his words and scoffing at his prophets, until the wrath of the LORD rose against his people, until there was no remedy.*

First, the problem was the people.

The LORD had compassion on his people and his dwelling place
(notice the importance of the people of God – and the land/temple –
but *especially* the centrality of the Word of the LORD),
but the people kept mocking the messengers of God.

Verses 15-16 emphasize that this is an ongoing problem –
they *kept* mocking – over and over for generations.

It's not just a king here or there –
it was the people of God over generations *refusing to hear and do* the word of the LORD.

If you despise the word of the LORD and scoff at his prophets,
then there is no remedy to avoid the wrath of the LORD.

This is the point that Hebrews 10 makes.

²⁶ *For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth,
there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins,
²⁷ but a fearful expectation of judgment,
and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries.*

²⁸ *Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy
on the evidence of two or three witnesses.*

²⁹ *How much worse punishment, do you think,
will be deserved by the one who has trampled underfoot the Son of God,
and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified,
and has outraged the Spirit of grace?*

If it was bad to ignore the prophets –
how much worse is it to ignore Jesus!

b. So He Gave Them into the Hand of the Chaldeans (v17)

¹⁷ *Therefore he brought up against them the king of the Chaldeans, who killed their young men
with the sword in the house of their sanctuary and had no compassion on young man or virgin,
old man or aged. He gave them all into his hand.*

And if the problem was that the people mocked the Word of the LORD,
then the solution was destruction.

“Therefore” he brought up against them the king of the Chaldeans,
who slaughtered the people – even in the temple.

Those who reject the word of the LORD will be handed over to destruction.

Notice who is the main agent in this:

God.

God brought up against them the king of the Chaldeans.

God gave them all into his hand.

Yes, Nebuchadnezzar conducted the slaughter –

but God was the one who gave them to Nebuchadnezzar.

We don't like to hear this – because we would like to think that God doesn't do that!

But again, Hebrews 10 goes on in the very next verse to say,

“For we know him who said, ‘Vengeance is mine; I will repay.’” (10:30)

God will make sure that justice is done.
And that's good news!
Because otherwise, justice will never happen!

As Hebrews goes on to say,
"The Lord will judge his people."
Judgment begins with the household of God.
And you see that clearly in the exile:

c. With All the Treasures of the House of the LORD and of the King (v18-19)
¹⁸ And all the vessels of the house of God, great and small, and the treasures of the house of the LORD, and the treasures of the king and of his princes, all these he brought to Babylon. ¹⁹ And they burned the house of God and broke down the wall of Jerusalem and burned all its palaces with fire and destroyed all its precious vessels.

After all, God's covenant with his people involved both the *land* and the *seed*.
And the promises of land and seed had both become more focused since Abraham's day.
The land is focused on the temple – the *place* for God's name.
The seed is focused on the king – the *son* who reflects his glory.
And in Jerusalem God had established the temple and the throne –
the priest and the king.

So when God brings judgment and destruction against his people for their breach of covenant, this destruction takes two forms:

- 1) the destruction of the house of God – the temple is burned with fire
- 2) the exile of the people of God into Babylon

Everything that represents God's favor is wiped away.

d. As Jeremiah Had Said: Seventy Years of Exile until the Land Had Its Sabbaths (v20-21)
²⁰ He took into exile in Babylon those who had escaped from the sword, and they became servants to him and to his sons until the establishment of the kingdom of Persia, ²¹ to fulfill the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed its Sabbaths. All the days that it lay desolate it kept Sabbath, to fulfill seventy years.

The Babylonian invasion is the *last* war – the war to end all wars!
It is an *eschatological* war.
It brings an end to the temple of Solomon, the house of David,
and the city of Jerusalem.

It also removes the people of God from the promised land.
Those who escaped the sword became exiles – servants to Nebuchadnezzar and his sons.

Why 70 years?
Listen to what Jeremiah said in Jeremiah 25:

The word that came to Jeremiah concerning all the people of Judah, in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah (that was the first year of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon),² which Jeremiah the prophet spoke to all the people of Judah and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem:³ “For twenty-three years, from the thirteenth year of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah, to this day, the word of the LORD has come to me, and I have spoken persistently to you, but you have not listened.⁴ You have neither listened nor inclined your ears to hear, although the LORD persistently sent to you all his servants the prophets,⁵ saying, ‘Turn now, every one of you, from his evil way and evil deeds, and dwell upon the land that the LORD has given to you and your fathers from of old and forever.⁶ Do not go after other gods to serve and worship them, or provoke me to anger with the work of your hands. Then I will do you no harm.’⁷ Yet you have not listened to me, declares the LORD, that you might provoke me to anger with the work of your hands to your own harm.

⁸ “Therefore thus says the LORD of hosts: Because you have not obeyed my words,⁹ behold, I will send for all the tribes of the north, declares the LORD, and for Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, my servant, and I will bring them against this land and its inhabitants, and against all these surrounding nations. I will devote them to destruction, and make them a horror, a hissing, and an everlasting desolation.¹⁰ Moreover, I will banish from them the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the grinding of the millstones and the light of the lamp.¹¹ This whole land shall become a ruin and a waste, and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years.¹² Then after seventy years are completed, I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation, the land of the Chaldeans, for their iniquity, declares the LORD, making the land an everlasting waste.¹³ I will bring upon that land all the words that I have uttered against it, everything written in this book, which Jeremiah prophesied against all the nations.¹⁴ For many nations and great kings shall make slaves even of them, and I will recompense them according to their deeds and the work of their hands.”

The Chronicler says that the land rested for 70 years –
until the land had enjoyed its Sabbaths.

Moses had said that Israel was supposed to take a sabbatical year every 7th year.
They were to leave the land fallow, and eat whatever the land produced.

Apparently Israel didn't do this.

Because there were 70 years of sabbaticals backed up
(which would mean that Israel had failed to practice the sabbatical year
for around 490 years – since 1077 BC,
right around the birth of king Saul).

The “70 years” of the exile have at least two different fulfillments.

In Chronicles like in Jeremiah 25 or Daniel 9 –
the decree to rebuild is taken to be the end of the 70 years.

The decree took place in the first year of Cyrus, king of Persia – in 539 BC,
which would mean that the beginning of the exile
is reckoned from the first deportation in the days of Jehoiakim (605)
[the year of Jeremiah's prophecy of the 70 years in Jeremiah 25].

Of course, in Zechariah 1, it appears that the 70 years

run from the destruction of the temple in 586
to the dedication of the second temple in 516.

One could also argue that Cyrus's decree was not itself the end of the exile,
but the only way the temple could be rebuilt in time to end the 70 years
was if Cyrus decreed the *return* and *rebuilding* twenty years in advance!

But it is still the case that *for those who had been carried captive* in 605,
they had lived in Babylon for nearly 70 years at the time of the decree.

I suspect that Jeremiah's point had less to do with the exact number of years,
and more to do with the approximate time frame.

But, with the 70 years of sabbaticals repaid,
and with the judgment of God against Jerusalem fulfilled,
the Chronicler reminds his hearers that God is still faithful to his promises.

Still, the numbers are important!

One of the disciples once asked,
Lord, how many times should I forgive my brother, up to 7 times?

Seven is the number of completeness, after all.

No, the Lord replied, but I say to you, up to 70 times 7.

And in the ensuing story in Matthew 18,
Jesus makes it clear that to those who repent and themselves show mercy,
God is merciful times beyond count!
But to those who refuse to listen to Jesus and heed his call
to forgive your brother from your heart,
God will do to you what he did to Jerusalem.

3. "All the Kingdoms of the Earth": Cyrus and the Building of the Temple (36:22-23)

²² *Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom and also put it in writing: ²³ "Thus says Cyrus king of Persia, 'The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever is among you of all his people, may the LORD his God be with him. Let him go up.'"*

Michael Willcock points out that Chronicles concludes
with a matter-of-fact description of the destruction of Jerusalem –
together with this brief "almost optimistic" conclusion about the rebuilding of the temple.

Because in spite of the judgment upon Jerusalem,

there are three things that remain:

First, the word of the LORD endures.

God had spoken by the mouth of Jeremiah (v20) and God's word came to pass.

The people were enslaved and the land was left desolate.

As Willcock puts it, "nothing of what has happened is outside the plan of God.

Indeed, none of it is outside his *declared* plan." (286)

The people of God may rest secure in knowing
that God's word continues to govern all things.

Second (in verse 20), "those who had escaped from the sword" –

there is a remnant that will always survive.

After all, if God has promised – and God is faithful to his word –

then you may be sure that he will triumph in the end.

While David's throne and Solomon's temple may no longer stand,
the things that they stood for will always endure.

Third, the *land* is still there.

Yes, it lay desolate for 70 years –

one year for every seven since the beginning of the monarchy.

But this is still the *place* where God spoke –

the land that he promised to Abraham,

the land that Moses saw,

the land that Joshua caused Israel to possess –

and where David reigned, and Solomon built the temple.

The land is an abiding witness to the work of God *in history*.

Yes, time wears down all things –

but you can still stand in the hills of Moab

and look out over the promised land, like Moses did.

As Willcock puts it, "Never imagine...

that the men of the Bible lived in a world disconnected from ours.

They were real people in whom the same God was at work

in the same ways as he is today.

There is one church, one faith, one Lord.

Allow for the differences of language and culture,

allow for the fulfillment in Christ of the promises of priesthood and kingship,

allow for the completing of God's revelation in Scripture;

but the principles have never changed.

To know the Chronicler's God is to know the God of all history,

who lives and loves today as he always has done, and will do forever." (287)

But there is one more thing that the Chronicler may well have been hinting at:

We've been talking about the *land* and the *seed*.

What about the third part of the promise to Abraham?

The blessing to the nations?

Thus says Cyrus king of Persia:

*'The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth,
and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem.'*

It's true that the Persians tended to be pretty eclectic and were willing to issue edicts
in the names of the gods of the nations,
in order to curry favor with the peoples,
but even so our text shows how the kings of the earth submit to the LORD –

Neco of Egypt,
Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon,
Cyrus of Persia

But as Cyrus of Persia orders the building of the second temple in Jerusalem,
you begin to see what God is doing in history.

Israel plundered Egypt for the building materials for the tabernacle.
Israel exacted tribute from the nations for Solomon's temple.
But now the nations give freely for the second temple.

All that is missing is their worship.

Let us pray.