



Reviews

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Profiting from Chronicles*

John Nicholls

WHEN, IN SEPTEMBER, we reach the books of Chronicles for our daily readings and are confronted with all those genealogies, we may well be tempted to skip that portion, especially if the reading circle includes young children. Those children may well feel that, apart from the difficulty of pronouncing the names, the genealogies seem, to use Paul's description, "endless" (1 Tim. 1:4). But for those of more mature years, the problems mentioned above can seem as nothing if we can understand why God has included these books in His Word.

To help us to this end, Brother Michael Ashton has written a book which sheds much light on this part of Scripture. There have been a few books in the Truth's literature touching upon this area of the Bible; Brother Roberts has a few chapters in *The Ways of Providence*, and there is Brother Philip Hinde's book *The Divided Kingdom*, Brother Ron Abel's *The Great Kings of Judah* and Brother H. P. Mansfield's ever helpful *The Story of the Bible*. The book under review, however, deals not only with the kings whose reigns are recounted in Chronicles, but also with the background to why the books were written and the reasons for the choice of material included in the books. It is a complete study, much of the material appearing in *The Christadelphian* between 1998 and 2000, with a section on Solomon's reign being added.

Underlying purpose

Of course there is a lot more to Chronicles than just the genealogies, but they can give us an illustration of one underlying purpose of the books, which was to confirm to the exiles returning to Israel under Zerubbabel, Ezra and Nehemiah that the priests and Levites among them had an authentic claim to the work of the priesthood being established again in the land. Not only was this genealogical issue being confirmed, but the selection of the material in Chronicles was designed to give encouragement and warn-

ing to the returning exiles, based on the experiences of the nation from the time it first became a kingdom under Saul to the last king, Zedekiah.

Brother Ashton's book begins with a discussion of the title, which in the Septuagint version means 'The acts (of the kings) left out'. David's sin with Bathsheba, the work of Elijah and Elisha, and the reigns of the kings of the northern kingdom of Israel, are all omitted from Chronicles because they were not immediately relevant to the returning exiles as they rebuilt the temple and re-established the work of the priesthood and the offerings and services. Chronicles also contains much unique information, such as the preparations for the temple and its service undertaken jointly by David and his son Solomon, Asa's victory over the Ethiopians, and Manasseh's repentance and prayer.

Worship at Jerusalem

After the genealogies and lists of names in the first twelve chapters of 1 Chronicles, David's speech of appeal to leaders of Israel would have struck a note of agreement with the returning exiles. It begins: "If it seem good unto you, and that it be of the LORD our God, let us send abroad unto our brethren every where, that are left in all the land of Israel, and with them also to the priests and Levites which are in their cities and suburbs, that they may gather themselves unto us: and let us bring again the ark of our God to us: for we inquired not at it in the days of Saul" (13:2,3). The author's comments on this section of Scripture on page 11 are worth quoting (see [box opposite](#)).

* *Chronicles of the Kings*, Michael Ashton. Available from the Christadelphian office, 404 Shaftmoor Lane, Birmingham, B28 8SZ, 0121-777-6328, orders@thechristadelphian.com, £7.00 plus postage.

“This great theme of devotion to God through worship at the Temple in Jerusalem runs through both books of Chronicles. At critical points in the nation’s history—when Abijah’s fragile kingdom of Judah was threatened by Jeroboam, for example, and when Hezekiah’s was plagued by the paganism of Ahaz and the impending downfall of Israel in the north—kings of Judah made urgent appeals based on David’s appeal at the beginning of his reign in Jerusalem (see 2 Chronicles 13:4-12; 29:5-11; 30:6-9). The last verse of Chronicles confirms that the message about Jerusalem being the centre of Divine worship is the books’ most important theme. It records Cyrus’ great declaration, by which the outcasts from Judah were encouraged to return to the Land to restore Temple worship. And it too is modelled on David’s appeal to the people four hundred and fifty years before: ‘Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, All the kingdoms of the earth hath the LORD God of heaven given me; and He hath charged me to build Him an house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Who is there among you of all His people? The LORD his God be with him, and let him go up’ (2 Chronicles 36:23)”.

Attention to details

Many interesting points are drawn from the genealogies, and doing the Chronicles readings with this book at hand will certainly enhance our understanding and make us realise that the Scriptures always have a particular impact on the generation for whom they were provided in the first instance. The author also devotes a chapter (Number 4, “Pen portraits with a purpose”) to several small character sketches tucked away amongst the genealogies, which would have given the exiles from Babylon, to whom the books were primarily addressed, encouragement and warning. And, by extension, we too who are making our exile journey out of the captivity of sin can take the same exhortations in these latter days.

The author notes in careful detail quite small but significant differences between the Chronicles’ accounts and the record in the books of Samuel and Kings, and shows how these are related to the particular theme of Chronicles. Thus, in the record of Saul’s death, the last two verses of 1 Chronicles 10 explain, when 1 Samuel does not, why Saul died and a new king had to be found. Similar small differences of emphasis are brought out in the life of David, which occupies some eight chapters of 1 Chronicles. There is so much that lovers of God’s Word, and, in particular, those who love David, the man after God’s own heart, can take from these chapters, and they are commended to the reader. The reviewer enjoyed the chapters, “Bringing the ark to Jerusalem”, “The promises to David” and “Preparing a house for God’s Name”.

The chapters about the reign of Solomon adhere closely to the theme that the author is demonstrating exists in Chronicles: the emphasis on

the construction of the temple and its dedication to encourage the returning exiles to carry out their task, which was so similar. Five chapters are devoted to Solomon and how his reign is presented in 2 Chronicles.

Lessons from the kings

The remainder of the book covers the reigns of the kings of Judah. Brother Ashton draws out the exhortations which the faithful exiles would have heeded and which we are privileged to have also. Of Rehoboam he writes:

“The real problem lay in Rehoboam himself: ‘He strengthened himself, he forsook the law of the LORD, and all Israel with him’ ([2 Chron.] 12:1; cp. verse 13). Previously the kingdom was strengthened, now Rehoboam strengthened himself. The difference may seem small but it is highly significant. In our own lives, we can spend all our energy on things to do with our own personal interests, and those that do so ‘have their reward’ now, Jesus said (Matthew 6:5). It is better to devote ourselves to building up the people of God—and in the process, we shall be strengthened ourselves” (p. 130).

The chapter on Hezekiah and his religious reforms is excellent, as the exiles could perhaps relate very powerfully to the king who at a young age instituted reforms immediately on the death of his unfaithful father. Brother Ashton’s concluding words are helpful. He reminds us that the faithful exiles did not wish to restore the monarchy which God Himself had overturned, but to restore the worship at Jerusalem in a rebuilt temple and personally to accept God’s Word. They looked now for the Messiah to come, the one whose right it would be to the throne

and the priesthood. Chronicles, like the Gospels, helps to prepare God's true servants for the Saviour to come, commencing with genealogical information, and then describing how the privileged classes in Judah moved away from God's Word, killing the prophets and stoning those who were sent to them from God.

Thanks be to God that soon that Saviour will be in the earth again to build the temple which will be the house of prayer for all nations. Jerusalem will once again ring with the worship in the temple, for "Praise waiteth for thee, O God,

in Sion" (Ps. 65:1), and the nations will be taught the ways of God in the house of the God of Jacob.

This book is highly commended to the Brotherhood, and the reviewer's sole criticism is the lack of any indices. A book of this calibre is much more use as a study document with such, and perhaps any future editions will include them. It is nicely produced and very reasonably priced. It will be at the reviewer's side when we next read the Chronicles in our daily readings.



Science

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Science update

Recent news from the world of science

David Burges

Global warming

EVIDENCE continues to accumulate that the world is experiencing a sustained period of increasing average temperatures, with resulting severe effects across the planet. For example, figures compiled by the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation show that 2003 was one of the worst years for fires in recent history.¹ The United States, Russia, southern Europe, Central America, sub-Saharan Africa and Australia all lost substantially greater areas to fires than in previous years. Scientists attribute the problem to increased temperatures, warmer winds and reduced rainfall combining to make forests and scrubland more combustible.

At the same time there is great concern that the Arctic icecap is melting even faster than climatologists had predicted.² Declassified data from American submarines has shown that the Arctic sea ice may have thinned by as much as forty per cent over the past fifty years. More recently, scientists at University College, London, have used radar echoes picked up by satellites to plot the changes in more detail. This has shown that variations in the thickness of the ice correspond almost exactly to the length of the

summer melting season. They report that just one extra day in the melting season can cause an extra five centimetres thickness of ice to melt. With the length of the summer currently increasing by an average of five days per decade, the effects are quite dramatic. Satellite data from NASA shows that the ice cap is retreating rapidly, with incalculable results for the world's climate. One doomsday scenario is that the melt waters from the Arctic might cut off the Gulf Stream,³ ironically bringing much colder conditions to Britain and Western Europe.

Although it is generally accepted that human activity is responsible for much of this global rise in temperature, a new study by Finnish and German scientists has shown that the sun is more active now than it has been for over 1,000 years.⁴ They were able to demonstrate this by

1. "Planet goes up in flames", *New Scientist*, 1 Nov. 2003.
2. F. Pearce, "Longer summers shrink Arctic ice cap", *New Scientist*, 1 Nov. 2003, p. 12.
3. See "Science and the Creator: 'This great and wide sea'", Jan. 2004, p. 26.
4. Jenny Hogan, "Hyperactive sun comes out in spots", *New Scientist*, 1 Nov. 2003, p. 17.