

The Exile
2 Chronicles 36
Week 5

Opening

Prayer

Ask if anyone would like to open in prayer. They can pray on their own or use the prayer printed below. It also might be a good idea to reach out to a group member prior to your meeting and ask them ahead of time if they'd be willing to open in prayer. That's a great way to encourage participation without putting anyone on the spot.

Gracious God, as we come together to place our lives in front of your Holy Word, we pray that you would give us wisdom and understanding. May we approach this sacred text with humility, curiosity, expectancy and love. Be among us and in our conversation through the power of your Holy Spirit. We pray in the name of the one to whom this whole story points, Jesus the Christ, amen.

Depending on time constraints you may want to take a bit of extra time to check in with folks and see how they're doing. You could also wait and do this at the end of the session before closing in prayer.

Check-in question

Each week, give an opportunity for folks to either respond to the check-in question below or, if they'd rather, share something that came up for them as they were reading the other texts assigned for the Big Read this week.

1 and 2 Chronicles is a retelling of the Israelites' family story found in 1-2 Samuel and 1-2 Kings. The author takes a bit of editorial liberty.

Do you and your family have milestone moments in your life together that are talked about often. Put another way, is there a story that comes up around the table every holiday? Do you usually hear it accurately or is there some embellishment?

Background

Starting any book with nine chapters of genealogies (see 1 Chron. 1-9) isn't the best way to grab a modern reader's attention. However, once you understand how 1-2 Chronicles are a work of literary genius that's in conversation with the rest of the Old Testament, you'll come to see these books as one of the many gems in the Bible.

The book of Chronicles, composed as one unified literary work, was produced by an anonymous author living in Jerusalem more than 200 years after the return from exile. Bible scholars refer to this author as “the Chronicler.”

1 Chronicles context

The story begins with page one of the Bible: the first word of 1 Chronicles is “Adam.” From there, the Chronicler has woven the entire story of Abraham’s family leading up to David and beyond into a series of elaborately arranged genealogies.

For ancient Israelite readers, these genealogies weren’t just a matter of family lines but a shorthand way of retelling the stories of all these characters in an annotated form. These names would have provoked whole memories of earlier scriptural stories. The genealogies were meant to activate all kinds of mental links and collective stories deeply ingrained in Hebrew culture. They are the introduction to a retelling of Israel’s entire story, focusing on the future hope of a messianic king like David, who will restore the temple and God’s kingdom over the nations.¹

First and Second Chronicles is in large part a retelling of the story you read in the books of 1-2 Samuel and 1-2 Kings. This is why the books often get overlooked, as readers assume it is just a repeat of what they already read. But this book is way, way more! The Chronicler was living at a time when the Jewish people had long resettled in Jerusalem after returning from the Babylonian exile. Things were okay, but there was a growing awareness that God’s ancient covenant promises to Abraham, Moses, and David, which were reaffirmed by the prophets, had not yet come to pass. They awaited a messianic king of Isaiah who would rebuild the temple and invite all the nations into God’s kingdom. But where was this new David?

In English Bibles, the books of 1-2 Chronicles follow Samuel and Kings, but in the ancient Hebrew ordering of the Scriptures, Chronicles is the final book of the Old Testament. So what is the significance of this? This final word of the Old Testament Scriptures doesn’t come as an ending but as a “To Be Continued...” More of the story is coming—and through this next installment, Yahweh would tie up all of these loose threads (and more) into the perfect package in the person of his only Son, in whom all the promises of God find their “Yes” and “Amen” (2 Cor. 1:20).²

Reshaping a Story

One of the main goals of the Chronicler was to reshape the stories of Israel’s past to rekindle hope for the future. He had before him most of the books of the Old Testament, and he retells the stories of David and Israel’s kings in a way that turns them into models and portraits of the future king they hope for. The book of Chronicles is kind of like the Reader’s Digest of the Old Testament. This author has reflected on the Scriptures and offers an interpretation of Israel’s past that highlights their future hope. These books were designed to sustain the hopes and prayers of God’s people as they wait for God to fulfill his ancient promises.

¹ *Chronicles: Not Just a Repeat*. The Bible Project. <https://bibleproject.com/blog/chronicles-not-just-repeat/>

² *Chronicles: Not Just a Repeat*. The Bible Project. <https://bibleproject.com/blog/chronicles-not-just-repeat/>

In this way, the Chronicler is acting as the first commentary on the Old Testament. He's offering us a prophetic interpretation of Israel's history that is meant to guide the reader's attention forward to the hope of a coming king who will restore order and pursue the Lord as David once did, at least mostly. In other words, 1-2 Chronicles are a "prophetic work." That is, they represent God's point of view on Israel's past, and **announce that exile and disappointment is not the end of the story.**

Heading Towards Exile

Warnings had come from the prophets for decades. God patiently waited for His people to turn from their sin. The prophet Jeremiah spared few details when he warned Judah what would happen if they did not turn from their evil ways. (See Jeremiah 25:1-14.) The people of Judah did not change their ways. The kingdom had been declining for years, despite King Josiah's efforts to prompt nationwide repentance. When King Josiah died, the people went back to their old ways, worshiping idols and disobeying the Lord. The time of judgment had come.

Like God had warned through Jeremiah, He used the king of Babylon—King Nebuchadnezzar—to deport the people from Judah to Babylon where they would live in exile for 70 years. King Nebuchadnezzar went to Judah when Jehoiakim was king. He put Jehoiakim in chains and took him to Babylon. Jehoiachin became king, and Nebuchadnezzar came back for him too. Many of the people in Judah were taken, along with treasures from the Lord's temple. Nebuchadnezzar put Zedekiah on the throne in Jerusalem. The people of Judah were unfaithful to God. Zedekiah rebelled against King Nebuchadnezzar, and God poured out His wrath on Judah.

Nebuchadnezzar showed no mercy to the people of Jerusalem. The Babylonians set fire to the Lord's temple and the king's palace. They destroyed the wall around Jerusalem. King Nebuchadnezzar's armies carried most of the people away to Babylon as prisoners; only poor farmers were allowed to stay and work the land. The people were held captive in Babylon, serving the king for the next 70 years. But God did not abandon His people. The prophet Jeremiah told what would happen next: "The days are certainly coming ... when I will restore the fortunes of My people Israel and Judah" (Jeremiah 30:3). God was going to save His people from captivity and raise up a new King—a forever King—from the line of David. (Jeremiah 30:9)³

Not the End of Israel's Story

The book of Chronicles is a journey through the entire Old Testament that makes crystal clear that the story isn't over. We've looked at just a few examples and details. Every page is brimming with more evidence of the future prophetic angle of 1-2 Chronicles.

And this wasn't just cool theology for the Chronicler. **The book's message has a pastoral purpose: to bring comfort and hope to generations of God's people who were tempted towards despair or apathy.** During a time when many wondered if God was ever going to fulfill his promises, the Chronicler retold the story of their collective past in order to rekindle hope for

³ *Judah Taken into Captivity.* https://www.creeksidechurch.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/TGP02V5K_UNIT15_SESSION3_LEADERGUIDE_OLDER.pdf

the future. As you read and ponder these retold stories, may you find your own faith and hope reignited as we still await the return of the world's true king.

The Return from Exile

The decree of Cyrus quoted in the last verses of Chronicles is also quoted at the beginning of the book of Ezra (2 Chron. 36:22–23; [Ezra 1:1–4](#)). For the Chronicler, rest in the land is something that each generation must work for, and in keeping with that theme, return from exile to rest in the land is not something accomplished in an instant. Rather, it is something that must be fought for: Ezra and Nehemiah tell us about the obstacles facing the rebuilding of the temple and the walls of Jerusalem. There would be many opportunities to put into practice the Chronicler's call to participate in God's work and to throw in one's lot with God's people in obedience to the law and right worship. Each generation faces this challenge anew. In the Chronicler's day, even with a rebuilt temple, God's people still looked forward to God's restoration of a Davidic king, as he had promised. Ultimately, God's promises for restoration would not be fulfilled until the coming of his own Son, David's greater Lord, whose body is the true temple. And in a sense, we are still exiles (1 Pet. 2:11), awaiting the making new of all things promised to us in the return of Christ. Just as in the Chronicler's day, we are challenged to throw in our lot with God's king and to wait in patience for all of his promises to be fulfilled.⁴

Read 2 Chronicles 36 (focus on verses 11-23)

*Make it a point over the course of this series to read from a few different translations. Encourage those who may be reading from a different translation to share any differences they see.

Initial Reactions

1. What from this story confuses, inspires, or resonates with you? What questions or curiosities do you have about this passage?
2. What does this story tell us about God? What does this story tell us about humanity?
3. Were there any images, stories or insights that stuck out to you from Sunday's sermon?

Going Deeper

4. In How could retelling so many stories in light of God's ideals prepare readers for what was promised to come? How does it set up the story of the New Testament?
5. The Babylonians utterly destroyed God's temple and tore down the walls of Jerusalem. This was devastating to the people. Why was the temple so important to the Israelites? How do you experience the presence of God today?
6. What do verses 15–16 tell us about God? Is he hasty in his judgment? Does he enjoy smiting his people? Why is judgment necessary?

⁴ *Manasseh, Josiah, and the End (2 Chronicles 33-36)*. Knowing the Bible.
<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/course/knowning-the-bible-1-2-chronicles/#week-1-overview>

7. What does verse 22 tell us about who ultimately is sovereign over global politics? How would the words of verse 23 be encouraging to the people in the Chronicler's day? How would they be challenging?

So What Questions

8. Read Psalm 137:1-6

This is a Psalm of lament from the people in exile. After reading of the blatant disobedience of God's people in 2 Chronicles 36, do these words of desperation and longing make you at all sympathetic towards the people? Can you relate to their grief?

Closing

Check in if you haven't already done so and ask for any prayer requests. Encourage group members to write down these requests and follow up as necessary. Close with prayer.