

## CHAPTER 13: 1 Chronicles, 2 Chronicles and the Prophets

The books of 1 and 2 Chronicles repeat some of the events from Israel's monarchy that we looked at previously (2 Samuel and 1 and 2 Kings). But this time the "the chronicler" as we will call him views those events in a whole new perspective. He is writing from a future vantage point, on the other side of the Exile. His focus is on how all that happened during the period of the monarchy starting with David and Solomon worked to fulfill God's covenant promises to His people.

As we left off in our story, God's people are living far from home in Babylon. They are hanging onto the only hope that they have. As we saw before, their hope is that long cord which connects what God said and did in the past with what He promised He will do in the future. As the chronicler reflects back upon Israel's monarchy with long-term optimism, he indicates that better days are ahead. The Exile is not the end for Israel.

The book of 1 Chronicles begins with a long list of genealogies – chapters and chapters filled with names! The chronicler traces the family lines of the tribes of Israel from the first man, Adam to his own day, long after the events of the monarchy. Special emphasis is given to the tribe of Judah. It is through the tribe of Judah that Israel's royal line runs. The chronicler builds on the hope of a Messianic king that God promised would come from King David's family.

The first stories (1 Chronicles 10 thru 29) are from the life of King David. The emphasis is not on David's sins or his weaknesses. We already know about those from the book of 2 Samuel. Instead the chronicler shines a positive light on David. New stories are told about him. David gathers resources for building the Temple. God gives David detailed blueprints, the plans for the Temple. Even though the Temple will be built later by his son, David does what he can to get everything ready. The chronicler recalls several highlights from David's life: David becomes the king of Israel, battles as a mighty warrior, conquering Jerusalem, organizing and leading the worship of God, and designating Solomon to succeed him as the next king of Israel.

The key story about David is the covenant promise God made to him of a future king. This king will come from David's family and he will rule Israel. This is what God says to David about the king: **"I will become his Father and he will become My son. I will never withhold My loyal love from him, as I withheld it from the one who ruled**

**before you. I will put him in permanent charge of My house and My kingdom; his dynasty will be permanent.”** (1 Chronicles 17:13-14)

While we have already seen that David was far from perfect, the chronicler presents stories about David as an ideal godly king. They foreshadow the kind of king who will come from David’s line – the promised eternal Messiah of Israel.

Then we have stories from King Solomon’s life (2 Chronicles 1 thru 9). Highlights of Solomon are retold from the book of 1 Kings. These include God giving Solomon wisdom, his great wealth, building the Temple, moving the Ark into the Temple, dedicating the Temple, entertaining the Queen of Sheba, and his many building projects.

As with David, the chronicler does not bring up Solomon’s weakness but presents him in a positive light. There are things about Solomon that foreshadow the future Messiah king. One example is how people came from all over the earth to Jerusalem to see King Solomon in all his glory and to hear his words of wisdom.

A key moment in Solomon’s reign comes right after he dedicates the temple to the Lord. God appears to Solomon and makes a promise. He says, **“If My people, who belong to Me, humble themselves, pray, seek to please Me, and [turn from] their sinful practices, then I will respond from heaven, forgive their sin, and heal their land.”** (2 Chronicles 7:14)

While these are certainly wonderful words and they are often quoted, they must be understood in the context of Old Testament Israel. A stern warning follows this promise... **“But if you people ever turn away from Me, fail to obey the regulations and rules I instructed you to keep, and decide to serve and worship other gods, then I will remove you from My land I have given you; I will abandon this temple I have consecrated with My presence, and will make you an object of mockery and ridicule among all the nations.”** (2 Chronicles 7:19-20) This is exactly what Moses prophesied would happen back in Deuteronomy 29. God’s reminder here to Solomon and the nation helps us better understand why the people ended up in Babylon.

After Solomon’s death, his son Rehoboam becomes king and the kingdom splits. The northern kingdom of Israel follows Jeroboam while the southern kingdom of Judah is loyal to Rehoboam. We noted this before (1 Kings 10). From this point on the chronicler recalls stories from the books of 1 and 2 Kings, but with one big difference. He **ONLY** talks about the kings of Judah. And why is that? Because Judah’s kings are David’s direct descendants. The chronicler focuses his attention squarely on David’s royal line from where the promised Messiah King will come.

As we read about the various kings of Judah, it becomes obvious very quickly that none of them, even the good ones, are the Promised One. They may be good men who love God and follow Him, but they are not THAT guy! And so, the people wait with eager anticipation for the Messiah to come. No one knows who he is or when he will come, but there is this ongoing expectation that He is out there somewhere and will soon arrive.

The chronicler re-tells a lot of stories about the kings of Judah that we saw in 1 and 2 Kings. But he also tells some new stories. Many of Judah's kings are obedient to God. These good kings **did what the Lord desired and approved** (2 Chronicles 14:2). They follow the examples of King David and King Solomon. While these good kings are certainly not perfect (just as David and Solomon were not perfect), they are godly leaders who, for the most part, obey God's commandments. The good kings include: Asa, Jehoshaphat, Joash, Amaziah, Uzziah, Jotham, Hezekiah and Josiah. The chronicler describes how the obedience of these eight kings brings divine blessing to the nation of Judah. These kings have successful reigns. They lead the people in spiritual revivals. They win great victories on the battlefield. Under their leadership, the nation prospers.

Unfortunately, not all the kings of Judah are good. In fact, most of them are unfaithful to God. They **did evil in the sight of the Lord** (2 Chronicles 21:6). These evil kings do NOT please God. As a result, the nation experiences a spiritual roller-coaster ride throughout their monarchy.

Starting with Rehoboam where the kingdom split – he is an evil king. His son Abijah is also evil. Then you have Asa who is a good king. His son Jehoshaphat is even better and the nation experiences great revival. But then his son Jehoram is evil as is his son Ahaziah. After Ahaziah is murdered his mother Athaliah actually becomes the queen of Judah for about six years. She tries to wipe out the entire royal line of David. However her plan fails. Through divine intervention Ahaziah's infant son, Joash is rescued and hidden away. After Athaliah is killed Joash, at the age of seven, is raised to become the king of Judah. He reigns for 40 years and turns out to be a very good king. His son Amaziah is also a good king as are Uzziah and Jotham. But then you have Ahaz who is evil. After him you have one of the best kings in Judah's history, Hezekiah. We talked about him previously. He was a very godly king. But then his son Manasseh is one of Judah's worse kings. His son Amon is also bad. After him comes Josiah, a good king who again leads the nation in revival. From there we see a steady downward decline with a series of godless kings – Joahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah. These last few kings are nothing more than puppet kings of Egypt and Babylon. Like I said, Judah's monarchy is quite a roller-coaster ride!

The chronicler does not sugar-coat how bad some of Judah's kings are. He describes how many of their kings blatantly disobey God. Not only do they not heed God's

prophets, they kill some of them. They lead the people into idolatry, the worship of Baal and Molech. Some are even involved in child sacrifices! They are spiritual failures as the nation's leaders. Their sinful actions usher in Judah's tragic downfall and Jerusalem's destruction.

Just like God warned would happen, the people of Judah are exiled far away from their land, into Babylon. At the end of 2 Chronicles the sad story is retold from 2 Kings. Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon conquers Jerusalem. He destroys the city and kills many of its citizens. He carries away items from the temple and plunders the treasures of the kings. He burns the city including Solomon's temple. Finally, he tears down Jerusalem's walls.

**[Nebuchadnezzar] deported to Babylon all who escaped the sword. They served him and his sons until the Persian kingdom rose to power. This took place to fulfill the Lord's message... [the land] remained desolate for seventy years as prophesied.** (2 Chronicles 36:20-21)

It would be tragic to end the book of 2 Chronicles here. So we won't. Just as 2 Kings ended with a glimmer of hope, so does this book. Recall what we said earlier, that the chronicler shines a whole new perspective on these stories. Now we find out how he is able to do that. He is writing from well into the future – long after the exile ends. He is reflecting back on the various events from Judah's monarchy – both good and bad – with a retrospective view. He is in the future looking back.

Listen to the last lines of the book of 2 Chronicles... **In the first year of the reign of King Cyrus of Persia, in fulfillment of the promise He delivered through Jeremiah, the Lord moved King Cyrus of Persia to issue a written decree throughout his kingdom. It read... "The Lord God of the heavens has given to me all the kingdoms of the earth. He has appointed me to build a temple in Jerusalem in Judah. May the Lord your God energize you who belong to His people, so you may be glad to go back there!"** (2 Chronicles 36:22-23)

Whoever King Cyrus is here, he addresses God's people who are about to go back to their land, back to Jerusalem. This is a message from the future. It offers hope. We know now that God's people – the ones who are now in exile WILL return home after seventy years! So there IS a light on the distant horizon!

## AN OVERVIEW OF THE PROPHETS

I want to pause for a moment in the biblical narrative and focus on a special group of men known as “The Prophets.” These men are tasked with delivering God’s messages. We have met a few prophets in our story so far...

One of the earliest was Moses. The Lord called him from the burning bush and told him to go and speak God’s words to Pharaoh. Later Moses gave God’s commandments to the Israelites. Then there was the prophet Samuel who judged the nation and led them in revival. During the monarchy you had prophets like Nathan – who is famous for confronting King David about his sin with Bathsheba and killing Uriah. Finally there were Elijah and Elisha who frequently spoke against the kings of the northern kingdom of Israel. They pointed out the nation’s sins. They called for repentance. They warned that there would be consequences if their messages were ignored. All of these prophets acted as God’s mouthpiece.

Now we are introduced to a whole new group of prophets. These are the “literary prophets” – Isaiah to Malachi. Their words dominate the last part of the Old Testament that we are about to get into. Their role will be the same as those prophets in the past. They will deliver God’s messages. They will confront sin. They will call for a return to God. They will warn about consequences, but they will also offer words of encouragement and hope where needed. With the monarchy now ended, these prophets replace the kings as the central characters of our story.

Some people draw a distinction between these prophets. They refer to Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel as “Major Prophets” while the other 12 men are called “Minor Prophets.” But the Bible never makes this distinction, and so, we won’t either. The fact is that all 16 of the literary prophets are God’s spokesmen. They all have major importance for different reasons.

Historically there are three groups of literary prophets – those prior to the Exile (pre-exilic) who prophesied during the period of the monarchy and the divided kingdom; those who prophesied during the Exile (exilic); and those following the Exile (post-exilic) who prophesied after God’s people returned to their homeland.

Most of the literary prophets are pre-exilic prophets. They include such well known men as Isaiah and Jeremiah. But this group also includes Hosea, Joel, Amos, Micah, Habakkuk and Zephaniah. All these men prophesied during the final days of the monarchy, prior to the destruction of Jerusalem. All these prophets deliver the following three-part message to their target audience: (1) You, Israel or Judah, have broken the covenant with God and you had better repent! (2) If you do not repent, then judgment will come, both on you and on the nations. (3) There is hope beyond judgment – hope

for a glorious future restoration for the nation of Israel (this would include both Israel and Judah) and yes, even for the Gentile nations!

There are three other pre-exilic prophets whose messages are a bit different. Their messages do not follow the standard three-part message just described. These prophets include Obadiah, Nahum and Jonah. Obadiah and Nahum preach only to foreign nations and not against Israel or Judah. God actually sends His prophets to some Gentile nations! But these prophets offer them no message of deliverance. Jonah is a bit different from Obadiah and Nahum this way: although the actual historical message he preaches – “Repent!” is to the foreign city of Nineveh (in Assyria), his literary message is really directed at his own people. The repentance of the godless Gentile Ninevites stands in stark contrast to the stubbornness of the Israelites.

During the Exile there are three prophets: Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel. We noted that Jeremiah was also a pre-exilic prophet. He transcends both periods. The book of Lamentations which laments the sad condition of God’s people in exile is connected to Jeremiah.

Finally we have three post-exilic prophets. These are Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi. Their messages are directed at the group of returning exiles. They address some social injustices and religious ritualism. One thing to note about the Israelites after the exile – idolatry was never again a problem for them. They had many other spiritual issues, but the worship of false gods was not one of them. These three post-exilic prophets also pronounce some words of judgment against the surrounding Gentile nations. Primarily they offer words of hope for God’s people. They focus on the future messianic kingdom that is tied directly to God’s covenant promises to Abraham and David.

So then, as we move forward in our story we will look at the messages from each one of the literary prophets. We will not spend a lot of time on each one, but it is important that we understand what they have to say and its context in the biblical story line. Their common message can be summarized like this: “There is yet a future hope for Israel!”