

Who Needs Chronicles? We Do.

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Suppose 1 and 2 Chronicles went missing from the Old Testament. Would anyone care? Would anyone notice?

It doesn't tell us much we can't find somewhere else. Samuel tells us a lot more about David than 1 Chronicles does, including the scandal with Bathsheba and Uriah, which goes unmentioned in Chronicles. First and 2 Kings covers the same history, from Solomon to the exile, and records far more about the northern kingdom of Israel, including the careers of Elijah and Elisha. Chronicles mentions Elijah once in passing ([2 Chron. 21:12](#)). Chronicles ends with the decree of Cyrus, but that's in Ezra too.

If we didn't have Chronicles, we'd be missing nine chapters of genealogy (ho hum!), details about David's preparation for the temple, a handful of episodes in the lives of the kings of Judah (Joash's apostasy, Uzziah's attempt to offer incense, Manasseh's repentance). That's about it.

So, who needs Chronicles? I say, *we do*—that is, we late-modern evangelical Protestants. Chronicles pointedly exposes the governmental and liturgical weaknesses of many American Protestant churches, and offers sketches of ecclesial repentance and ecclesial health.

Vindication of Bureaucracy

Few books of the Bible stress the organizational dimensions of Israel more than the Chronicler does. In the Chronicler's telling, the temple is a joint project of David and Solomon. David assembles the materials, organizes the craftsmen and priests, receives the blueprints, and then hands it all to Solomon to complete the work.

The book of 1 Chronicles devotes several chapters to Levitical duty-rosters. David numbers and organizes the Levites ([1 Chron. 23](#)), divides the Aaronic priests into 24 clans who serve at the temple on a rotating basis ([1 Chron. 24](#)), creates a Levitical choir and orchestra ([1 Chron. 25](#)), and assigns overseers to guard and account for the temple treasury ([1 Chron. 26](#)) and maintain his own lands and storehouses ([1 Chron. 27](#)). The Chronicler gleefully records the gathering, storage, accounting, and distribution of temple gifts in great, not to say excruciating, detail.

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Every revival in Judah's history involves a renewal of priestly organization, increased contributions to the temple, and careful oversight of the temple and palace treasuries. The Chronicler slows the narrative pace to a crawl to tell us exactly how Joash transfers donations from a collection box at the temple gate to the workmen who repair the dilapidated house of Yahweh (2 Chron. 24:8–14). On reflection, the reason is obvious. Corrupt priests and overseers skim gifts off to line their own pockets. Yahweh's house can't be glorious unless those who handle the money are honest.

For the Chronicler, Israel isn't a free-form community, but a nation and people with skilled officials who carry out specific responsibilities within a stable institutional structure. So too the church. Church bureaucracies can become as clogged as federal agencies, but try planting a church without a good secretary and treasurer.

Sacrifice of Praise

The Chronicler regularly depicts Israel in assembly (Heb. *qahal*). Nearly every major event of David's life takes place when he's presiding over a great *qahal*—his coronation, the ascent of the ark to Jerusalem, the preparations for the temple. Solomon gathers Israel for the temple dedication, and every renewal is marked by a re-assembly of the people. In assembly Israel experiences the favor of Yahweh and the joy that comes with it. In assembly Israel fights her battles and resists invaders.

What Israel does in assembly is as important as the number of assemblies. We expect sacrifice, lots of dead animals, gallons of blood, flesh turning to smoke. That's all there. But alongside animal sacrifice is something new: the sacrifice of praise.

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According to the Chronicler, music-making is a priestly activity. Priests and Levites are the primary musicians, and the music they produce is a form of human sacrifice. Song rises to God like the smoke of a sacrifice, mingling a soothing sound with the soothing aroma. Priests and Levites guard the sanctuary to keep intruders at bay, and Chronicles describes music as a form of priestly "guarding" (1 Chron. 25:8). During the Mosaic era, Levites carried the furnishings of the tabernacle from place to place, and Chronicles describes music as a new form of Levitical "bearing" (1 Chron. 15:22, 27). They raise their voices to enthrone Yahweh on their praises.

Kings make music too. King David writes music, invents instruments, and establishes a choir. Later, taking a cue from Joshua's musical conquest of Jericho, Jehoshaphat resists an invasion by deploying singers to the front lines ([2 Chron. 20](#)). The connection of music and kingship isn't accidental. To sing well, we have to rule our bodies and breath. To make a musical instrument, we cut trees and shape wood, pull guts into strings, mine and mold metals, train our fingers to pluck. Music transforms creation into praise.

Music makes kings. Song fills us with the Spirit who enlivens our spirits. Soldiers march to battle in rhythm. The pounding beat and soaring chords of warm-up music fill athletes with the spirit of the game. Martyrs go to the arena singing psalms and hymns. No wonder David consults with the commanders of the army when he sets apart the sons of Asaph, Heman, and Jeduthun as musicians ([1 Chron. 25:1](#)). Temple music is critical to Israel's national defense.

Manual for Reformers

Chronicles was written after Israel's return from exile. The Jews were back in the land, rebuilding the temple and the city, but they were vulnerable to enemies in the land and in the Persian court. Though a historical book, Chronicles also set out a program for the future. If the Jews were to flourish in the new imperial world, they needed to learn from Chronicles. Among the most important lessons were these: organize and sing.

As you pray for revival, don't just pray for more evangelists and conversions. Pray for more accountants. Pray for more musicians.

We too are politically and culturally vulnerable and would do well to absorb the lessons of Chronicles. If the church is going to survive and flourish under these pressures, we can't be satisfied with inchoate or sloppy church government. We won't be equipped for witness or spiritual war by sentimental songs. We need faithful men who govern effectively, and we need to learn to sing psalms, the war songs of the Lamb.

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