

# I CHRONICLES

When I did my pastoral internship, I was assigned to a big church in a small town. Many people were related to each other. Very quickly, I realized that I needed to know how everyone fit together. I began to collect information about family histories, grandparents and cousins, in-laws and out-laws, parents and grandparents, newcomers, and old-timers. As the new intern, this was survival information. For everyone in town, this was essential information for current and future community life. If you had given me family trees and genealogies before I moved to Rushford, I would have been bored silly. Once I began to know people and wanted to understand their community, this information was fascinating and highly relevant.

Chronicles was originally one book, which was later divided. I Chronicles includes creation to David with the last 20 chapters covering David's reign. II Chronicles covers King Solomon through the exile, concluding with the Persian emperor Cyrus who allowed the Jews to return to Jerusalem in 538 B.C. The building of the temple, a project that began in David's reign but was given to his son Solomon to accomplish, is central to these books. These books were written sometime during the Persian rule (538-333 B.C.), probably around 400. Ezra and Nehemiah, which tell the story of the return from exile and the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the temple, may have been written as the conclusion of the Chronicles.

Basic tips for reading I Chronicles:

- Skip the parts where you lose interest. They are important, but genealogies are not easy reading or appropriate for beginners.
- Focus on King David. What were the accomplishments of his reign?
- If you read nothing else, read Chapter 17. The promise of God to David that God would "establish his house," that there would always be a son of David to rule God's people sets the stage for later history and for Jesus. I recommend that you read Chapter 17 first. Then read the rest of I Chronicles.

I Chronicles begins with lists and lists of fathers and sons (and a few daughters) from Adam to Abraham, Abraham to Moses, and the twelve tribes of Israel to the reign of King David. If you already know their stories, and know them well, you are more likely to find value in these lists.

It was important for the original audience for Chronicles to remember and understand their family history. They were the Jews who had inherited a history of good and bad kings, of faith and rejection of God. They were the Jews who had seen their homeland destroyed and grown up as refugees, as people cut off from their roots. Chronicles is written for people who need to know their place in God's promises, their place in the world and how they fit together as a community. These were exiles returning to a devastated land. They needed a basis to re-establish themselves as a people and a nation.

The first-time – and even the experienced – Bible reader of the 21<sup>st</sup> century in the United States will probably find that they do need to skip or skim the opening nine chapters of genealogy as well as the lists of musicians and temple servers whom King David appointed. The stories of King David, especially those stories found only in Chronicles, will seem more interesting and relevant.

There are several things which will make your reading more productive:

1. Read a Bible with chapter and section headings. Many new editions of the Bible have included headings which are not part of the original written text, but really help orient the reader. This will give you some sense of the content without getting bogged down.
2. Keep asking yourself: *How does this story or information help me, the church, and all of God's people be the community God has called us to be?* Do not expect all practical answers. Understanding self-identity is very important.
3. Ask yourself: *How is this book important for my Jewish friends and neighbors?*
4. Notice the prayers. (Challenge: See if you can find the prayer of Jabez.)