INTRODUCTION

There are at least four reasons why later scholars and commentators dispute the validity of a book of the Bible. First, a book may be disputed because it does not appear to comport with the theology of other books of the Bible. This was the opinion of Martin Luther regarding the book of James. Second, a book may be disputed due to its absence from other cross validating manuscripts. This was the case regarding the apparent absence of the book of Esther from the Dead Sea Scroll discoveries. Third, a book may be disputed due to its lack of authorship, date, and place of writing. This has been a challenge lodged against the book of Hebrews by some scholars. Fourth, a book may be disputed because the historical facts regarding names, places, and events do not seem to agree with what is recorded in other books of the Bible. This is the basis of the dispute between Chronicles and Kings. There are other reasons for disputing the validity of a book of the Bible based on literary criticism, lack of epigraphic or archaeological evidence, and the minimalist theory.

This paper will describe the significant research contributions of the most recent two hundred years on six components of the debate. These components are: (1) can the names and dates of all of Israel’s kings be authenticated, (2) are there any problems in Chronicles, (3) what is the theology of the book, (4) what is the purpose of the book, (5) are Chronicles reliable, and (6) who is the author and what is the date of writing of the book.

Finally, I will offer my own response to the debate. This will be based on the selection, omission, and addition of the genealogical text as compared to Kings.
DATING OF THE KINGS

Whenever one studies the history of a people, the chronology provides a framework of time and sequence. It is confusing to attempt to lift from the books of Chronicles the names of kings, length of reign, and dates of accession in the Northern and Southern Kingdoms. Further, it is more problematic to reconcile these three components to similar recordings in the books of Kings. Also, it is difficult to harmonize these components with surrounding secular nations’ histories. Finally, it is frustrating waiting to discover and decipher epigraphic and archaeological evidence, which sheds light on the validity of Chronicles as to dating accuracy.

Edwin Thiele has meticulously analyzed the biblical text and the available physical evidence. He has proposed a harmony between Northern and Southern kings as recorded in Kings and Chronicles, a consistency with Assyrian, Babylonian, and Egyptian eponyms and recordings; and confirmation with physical evidence from the Middle East.

The harmony proposed by Thiele is based on four principles of reconciliation of historical dates and sequences. First, one must recognize and corroborate the co-regencies of kings. Second, one must reckon with whether the list of kings is dated based upon the method of accession (first or next year of reign) or non-accession (date of enthronement). Third, one must consider whether the list of kings is based on the beginning of the year in the month of Nisan or the month of Tishri. Fourth, the investigation should discover whether any king list entry is subject to dual dating (whether it is a sole reign or overlapping reign).
Since no absolute dates are given in the Old Testament, synchronization between dates in the text is important. Hard evidence such as dates on steles or in eponyms from the Khorsabad lists, the SDAS list, and New-Babylonian tablets provide some fixed dates. Solar and lunar eclipses provide confirmation of some known events.

The Old Testament prophets recorded the kings’ names, dates of reign, and key events, which were passed down through the records of prophetic schools (I Chronicles 29:29) rather than through the official records or royal scribes. These were synchronized between Northern and Southern king lists by these prophets (I Kings 14:19, 29). Finally, they were enjoined as one list of all of Israel kings (II Chronicles 36:8). The synchronisms with which these reigns are introduced constitute strong evidence that these journals were not the products of palace recorders but must have come from some source such as the prophetic schools.”¹ Thiele has contributed to the foundation study of dating using sound methods which provide a beginning basis for the claim of validity of the books of Chronicles. By accepting his timelines, most commentaries up to 1983 will need to revise the dates of their king lists.

PROBLEMS OF CHRONICLES

The first problem framing the debate is based upon the idea that the first Chronicle’s text was written around 400 B.C.E. and later redacted by a second writer around 200 B.C.E. This theory seeks to affirm apparent contradictions based on differing views of the two writers. These views are based on source material from the book of Samuel and Kings of the first writer and source material from the book of Kings of Judah and Israel for the second writer. If there are indeed two writers, then how can one

ascertain the central theme of Chronicles based on two different viewpoints where the additional history of two hundred years has been added? First, the histories of David and Solomon should be identical from the perspective of either writer’s time. Second, the linkage with Ezra and Nehemiah should be consistent as both writers are Post-Exilic. Third, the record of both good and evil kings indicates an interest in recording the truth of Israel’s history rather than disposing of the failures through later redaction. Fourth, there is very little of an eschatological nature to the text. One would think that if the text was redacted later (200 BCE) that some of the concerns for Israel’s future as expressed in the later writing of David would be incorporated. Fifth, during the Maccabean period the focus of Israel’s community centered on the Temple, the sacramental ceremony, and the priesthood ritual. During the earlier period the focus was on kingship, royal dynasty, and the prophets which were no longer front and center. This fits well with a Post-Exilic period. Sixth, the absence of concern for the salvation of people in the Hellenistic world seems to show that the writer is focused on Israel in a Persian world rather than a Greek world. This would suggest only one writer around 400 B.C.E. “The failure of the Davidic dynasty could be borne, so long as the second pillar of the theocracy, the Jerusalem Temple, stood firm”.

This is the writer’s central theme. Israel continues as a theocracy on earth rather than as a royal kingdom, or Messiahship, or a future heavenly kingdom which became central in the 200 B.C.E. period.

---

THEOLOGY OF CHRONICLES

The first interest of the writer of Chronicles is reflected in the opening discussion of lineage and genealogy. The first nine chapters of First Chronicles list the details from Adam to Azel and his sons. The lineage traces from the first human through the key persons of all-Israel during the Post-Exilic Persian period. Highlighted in First Chronicles chapters 11 through 29 are the events in the reign of David. Highlighted in Second Chronicles chapters 1 through 9 are the events in the reign of Solomon. Chapters 10 through 36 detail events in the subsequent reign of kings from Rehoboam through Zedekiah. The intent seems to be to depict the true history of Israel in human history while under God’s control and to restore the theocracy during the Post-Exilic period. The focus on the detail of the community of Israel, which had been dispersed and re-gathered, forms the interspersed narrative.

Second, the survival of Israel as a theocracy is consistent with the exile in Egypt and the re-establishment of a people in the land designated as Israel. Under Joshua and the Judges and later as a united kingdom under David and Solomon as a divided kingdom under good and evil kings, Israel was restored. The survival under Cyrus the Persian brings Israel back again from Babylonian exile to the designated land under a priesthood and Temple but without a king. This reflects God’s punishment for disobedience but mercy in re-gathering the people to fulfill His will and purpose.

Third, there is a unique focus on Levitical priestly rites and the music of cantors. By this set of liturgical practices being re-instated, the connection of Israel’s people to God would be re-established.
Fourth, by omission the writer of Chronicles seems to de-emphasize the Mosaic Covenant, the Aaronic priesthood, Messiahship, and any future eschatological promise and hope. Rather the writer’s emphasis is centered on the kingship of David and Solomon which has ultimately failed, in the reigns of their royal offspring. However, it is preserved through the theocracy, which in turn is supported, by the Levitical services and the Temple. The theology of the Chronicles is: (1) that God’s will is recorded in the genealogies of His people, (2) that He rewards and punishes obedience/disobedience, (3) that visual and verbal worship is necessary to human nature, and (4) the Davidic kingly theme is more important than the Mosaic law-keeping theme. These are expressed by North as follows: “There are four themes which seem to me to focus best the theological thought of the Chronicles: Legitimacy, short range retribution, cultus, and Davidism.”

PURPOSE OF CHRONICLES

One of the key interests for debate has been whether the books of Chronicles are connected to the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. First, the material presented is quite different. Chronicles focuses on the past Davidic reign whereas Ezra and Nehemiah do not. Chronicles recalls much of the work of the prior prophets whereas Ezra and Nehemiah do not. Ezra and Nehemiah focus on rebuilding of the altar, the Temple, the walls, and on reforms whereas Chronicles does not.

The language of Chronicles is constructed based on the division of the kingdom. The language of Ezra and Nehemiah uses all-Israel language references most often. Further, priestly duties are referenced in Chronicles significantly but only barely mentioned in Ezra and Nehemiah. Finally, Ezra and Nehemiah seem to focus on social

---

reforms whereas Chronicles seems to focus on continuance of Levitical practices and the centrality of Temple worship. “The temple-structured society of David and Solomon and the kingdom of God leadership that it represented provided the model to the end”.  The object of defining Israel as a theocratic nation which is chosen, guided, and rewarded/punished by God as a reminder to the people of Israel is an important purpose of the Chronicler.

A second subject of debate is the matter of whether the Davidic dynasty was the means of ensuring a future hope and purpose for Israel or whether this was accomplished in the succeeding reigns of kings up until the time of the Chronicler which is assumed to be after 515 B.C.E. There is very little text in Chronicles regarding God’s commitment to the Davidic dynasty for the sake of David’s royal family e.g. II Chronicles 21:7.

There is a period of several hundred years following the end of the last successor to the Davidic throne until the Chronicler writes the text under study. One can see by reading Chronicles the volume or text associated with the restoration of the Levitical priesthood and Temple has little reference to restoration of the Davidic throne. If it was important, then why is it not fully commented upon by the Chronicler? But instead, we find Cyrus the Persian in obedience to God restoring an earthly Temple in Judah (II Chronicles 36:22-23). Further, the climax of Second Chronicles focuses on the destruction of the Temple and the exile of the people without a similar lament for the loss of the dynastic throne. (II Chronicles 36:18-20). “The new concern substitutes for the temple-dynasty-people nexus of the Vortage at this point a people-temple nexus; that is, the temple once established is for the people directly, not mediated to them only via the

---

The Chronicler seems more concerned with the functions of priesthood and Temple than of the dynasty with a king on the throne. The conditional nature of the dynasty-temple-people is evident in Solomon’s words in II Chronicles 7:19-22 where what is warned has come to pass by the time the Chronicler is writing. Murray concludes that since the present state of Israel’s community is uppermost in the mind of the Chronicler, then the purpose is to demonstrate the continuance or the Temple among the people. Since the royal dynasty is not of great importance in the near future, it is not important for the distant future. This argument is largely based on the omission of significant text by the Chronicler regarding the importance of the royal dynasty and of the future restoration. To my mind this is likely correct otherwise we would have had concepts of Messiahship and future kingdom language as in contemporary works such as Zechariah and Haggai.

A third subject of debate regarding Chronicles is whether the treatise is intended to denigrate the Northern kingdom based upon a negative view of the religious system established at Mt. Gerizim. Some argue that this was an issue of conflict because of the two opposing religious systems based at Jerusalem in the Southern kingdom versus the Samaritan system of the Northern kingdom. This seems unlikely for several reasons.

First, there is a record of a reconciliation offer from Hezekiah in the seventh century B.C.E. to the people of the Northern kingdom to celebrate Passover in Jerusalem (II Chronicles 30:1). This is not an act of hostility but rather of hospitality, which the Chronicler thinks is important to recount.

---

Second, doubt has been shed upon the nature of the religious system and any Temple located on Mt. Gerizim. Archaeology has found nothing to substantiate any serious rivalry to the Temple and system of worship at Jerusalem. If the attempt of the North was to mimic and replace Jerusalem by a replacement site for the peoples of the Northern Kingdom, it failed and hence the Chronicler had little reason to focus on the demise of a failed competing system.

Third, Ezra and Nehemiah are in fact negatively disposed toward the Northern Kingdom (Ezra :1-3). This does not mean that Chronicles is also negative on the subject. One must postulate that the writer of Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah are one and the same person to accept the premise that Chronicles is anti-Northern. However, even if this were proven conclusively, it does not mean that the purpose of the Chronicle’s text is to denigrate the North, which is so evident in the Ezra text. “In comparison to Ezra-Nehemiah, the Chronicler recognizes an opportunity for his community to expand its horizons, to claim its rightful place over Israel”.

RELIABILITY OF CHRONICLES

The practical aspect of validity may well be the reliability associated with the text of Chronicles. Sara Japhet provides an historical analysis of the examination and claims of scholars going back to the claims of Spinoza. Japhet lists skeptics of the reliability of Chronicles such as de Wett, Gramburg, Graf, Wellhousen, and Torrey as well as supporters of its traditional acceptance as reliable such as Eichhorn, Dahler, Hertz, and Keil. These scholars framed the debate during the nineteenth century. The skeptics’ two

---

criticisms were that the Chronicler was prejudiced in support of the Levitical priesthood and toward support of the Southern over the Northern kingdom.

Albright added the dimension of archaeological discoveries, which he found to be supportive of the reliability of Chronicles as history. This was based on epigraphic discoveries of physical inscriptions of people, places, and events, which confirmed from an outside, objective source certain portions of the text of Chronicles. This tended to substantiate the reliability of Chronicles as a stand-alone text.

By the 1930’s the development of biblical historiography become the norm. This method tended to extract an overall picture of Chronicles to discern its contributions to an understanding of the times. Von Rad and Noth both utilized this approach.

The approach of Welten and North during the 1970’s is based on literary-linguistic criticism. The conclusion of Welten is that Chronicles is late work, complete in its text, and independent of other sources. North views Chronicles as unsubstantiated by archaeological evidence. Japhet concludes by 1985 that the reliability of Chronicles is unresolved. “Yet, the question of the Chronicler’s historical reliability cannot be considered a closed case.”

More recent scholars see Chronicles in a more favorable light regarding its reliability. “The chronicler was selecting historical materials from several reliable sources and wove these into a story that emphasizes aspects of Israel’s history that were of special importance to the Jews returning from exile who were seeking to re-establish

---

their national life.”

“Kelly argues that I and II Chronicles present history in a responsible way.” This issue is still being debated.

**AUTHOR AND DATE OF WRITNG OF CHRONICLES**

The final area of debate focuses upon who wrote the book of Chronicles and when was it written. Sugimoto joins the debate by examining any linkage between Chronicles and Samuel-Kings. He posits three views by Willi, Wright, and Mosis that Chronicles is: (1) early midrashic, (2) historical literature, or (3) independent literature. Sugimoto defends the third view based on the premise that the Chronicler’s purpose is to declare that David and Solomon during the united kingdom accomplished the central part of God’s plan which was to be based on the Temple. Sugimoto concludes that what the Chronicler extracts from Samuel-Kings, by recording his choices in I Chronicles 18-20, determines a new purpose and picture independent of conclusions from the earlier sources. “…the Chronicler is not dependent on the literary structure of Samuel-Kings, though he uses it as his source. He rather chooses the appropriate portions from his own work.” This author argues for the independence of Chronicles from the earlier books of Samuel-Kings.

Japhet has stated in her 1977 work that Chronicles is independent from the later books of Ezra-Nehemiah. “…that the author of Chronicles was not responsible for the

---

books of Ezra and Nehemiah.”11 Japhet in her 1985 work discussed the traditional view that Ezra wrote Chronicles. This view was replaced by Zunz that the Chronicler wrote Ezra. The view of Torrey was that Chronicles was a late work and mostly fabrication by an unknown Chronicler. These views are no longer mainstream. “Thus, the problem of these ad absurdum conclusions about the unreliability of Ezra-Neh. Can be regarded as a major cause for change of direction and a reconsideration of the historicity of the Chronicler.”12

Most scholars place the date of writing of Chronicles after Samuel-Kings, the Pentateuch, and the history recorded in Deuteronomy. Further, it is arguably assumed to be independent of Ezra-Nehemiah. This places the date of writing between 400-200 B.C.E.

Dyck represents this view based on two assumptions. First, he notes the reference to a Persian coin in I Chronicles 29:7 which were first minted in 515 B.C.E. and therefore establishes the oldest date for Chronicles. Second, he mentions the reference to I Chronicles 15-16 as the basis for a mid-second century B.C.E. account of David in Sirach 47:8-10. Dyck concludes his evidence that, “Most recent interpreters favor a late Persian period date based on, among other things, the lack of Hellenistic influence in Chronicles.”13

Murray notes in II Chronicles 29:8-9 that the Post-Exilic period is described. These verses reflect an historical summary of the last days of the kingship, occupation of the land by the people, and calamity replacing blessing. This places the dating no earlier

12 Japhet. 90.
13 Dyck. 19.
than the sixth century B.C.E. “On the contrary, 29:8-9 fits better into the situation of the later Persian period than that of Judah at the end of the eighth century…”

Another view toward the dating of Chronicles defends a Hellenistic period of dating in the fourth or third centuries B.C.E. This view is based on the study of genealogies. Genealogies were written and have been discovered from Middle Eastern kingdoms as king’s lists and from ancient Greece in the prose writers of the sixth and fifth century B.C.E. The comparisons are between heroes of Greek prose (both actual and mythological such as Agamemnon and Odysseus respectively) and the heroes of the Bible (David, Samson, Joshua). What is interesting about Chronicles is that the writer not only included genealogies from Adam and then from David and his successors, but also listed genealogies of singers and musicians who can only be important as connected with the priesthood and the Temple (I Chronicles 5:27-41; 6:35-38). This last listing of genealogies of seemingly unimportant people was also a technique of some Greek writers. “In the context of the late Persian period and the beginning of the Hellenistic period, the search for historical analogies to the literary conventions found in the Chronicles’ compositional technique need not end with ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt. Some of the best extra biblical analogies to the Chronicle’s case of segmented genealogies are found not in the East and the South but in the West.”

RESPONSE TO THE DEBATE

Chronicles today is seen in a better light. By evaluating the more recent articles from the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, one can take advantage of the

---

14 Murray. 8.
cumulative wisdom of the prior two hundred years of research while accepting the primacy of the latest consensus based on additional evidence. The way in which to approach the validity of Chronicles is to ascertain the central function of the genealogies in I Chronicles 1-9.

There are two lengthy lists of genealogies in the Old Testament which are recorded in the books of Genesis and Chronicles. The terms linear and segmented genealogy have surfaced several times in this research by different authors. Genesis genealogy is chronological and narrative-oriented which tells the story of the patriarchs and Israel’s ancient history. Chronicles’ genealogies decipher the family, clan, and tribe in both a kingship reign and a geographic framework. This likely suggests a different purpose and method between the two different writers of Genesis and Chronicles.

One should notice that there are three structural differences within the genealogies of Chronicles. For each name listed: (1) the linkage to others in the genealogy is given, (2) the length by number of generations is long or short, and (3) some names listed in kings are deleted while others not listed are added. This must serve to highlight the importance to the Chronicler of some members over others in the genealogy.

The additive commentary by the Chronicler shows the placement of the person in society as personal, political, public-ruling, or religious-public serving. “A genealogy will always have a domestic, political, or religious function for which it was composed and for which it is recited.”16 The Chronicles contain this type of personal, clan, vocational, and geographic information. The genealogy which receives the most attention by volume concerns: David, Levi, Benjamin, and to a lesser extent Ephraim and

---

Manasseh. This indicates the message is directed at and delivered primarily to the descendants of Judah, Levi, and Benjamin.

There must have been some conflict over the land and how the society was to be structured following the return from captivity. Some people remained after the initial Babylonian captivity in 586 B.C.E. (II Kings 25:12). Others were returning from cosmopolitan Persia under imperial decree with a mandate by the ruling powers (Cyrus and Darius I) to re-gather and rebuild in Israel. Which society would control the land and what way of life would prevail? This would have been viewed by some of the Judean remnant as an unwanted invasion of kin who had left their previous way of life. The Chronicler is writing during this on-going societal change during the late sixth century and the fifth century B.C.E. time frame. One can see that the Chronicler is writing from a different perspective from Ezra-Nehemiah as he is clearly not arguing against Samaritan interference nor marriage alliances with foreign wives. Rather, he is calling for an all-Israel society as a goal of unity based on re-instating the Temple with its Levitical priesthood practices. He does not take sides based on Northern or Southern, returnees or remnants, or by tribal heritage.

One may conclude that examination of the validity of Chronicles can be based on the confirmation of genealogies with Samuel-Kings which was referred to in Thiele’s work. Second, validation is confirmed by comparison with Middle Eastern eponyms usually found in epigraphic manuscripts. Third, validation is provided by comparison/contrast with the independent literary style of Ezra-Nehemiah. Fourth, validation is provided by archaeological discoveries of physical evidence which confirms selected people, places, and events in Chronicles.
The first three points have already been discussed. The discovery of archaeological evidence is usually viewed as outside objective confirmation of biblical text if it is reliable and non-disputable. Yamauchi lists five categories of physical evidence: (1) Old Testament manuscripts, (2) Old Testament Apocrypha and Josephus’ *Antiquities*, (3) royal kings’ lists, (4) common communications such as letters, and (5) pottery. The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1947 pushed back the Old Testament text to around 250 B.C.E. which confirms that the Old Testament books were written no later than that date.

The eye-opening event may be when a person, date, or event in the Old Testament is confirmed by physical evidence and never contradicted by the evidence. Yamauchi references three such discoveries: (1) the reign of Pekah in 732 B.C.E. found on an ostracon in Hazor, (2) Senacherib’s invasion of Jerusalem in 701 B.C.E. where Hezekiah’s water tunnel is mentioned on the Siloam text, and (3) the victory of Zakia over Ben-Hadad, king of Damascus in the eighth century B.C.E. which is referred to on a stele found near Aleppo. Yamauchi recounts a cave inscription from Khirbet Beit Lei which expresses the unique relationship of God to Judah that is so evident in Chronicles, “I am Yahweh thy God: I will accept the cities of Judah, and will redeem Jerusalem.”

Finally, most likely the Chronicler was a different writer from the writer of Ezra-Nehemiah. The former probably wrote between 515-333 B.C.E. He likely wrote to the people of Israel (both remnant and returnee) in a way which is consistent with expressing history by genealogy inclusive of name, family, clan, and tribe which is still reflected in the writings by Semitic peoples today. Finally, his purpose was to exhort the people to

---

reclaim that portion of their history based on the Levitical priesthood rituals and temple in order to rebuild society based on the volume of text attributed to this theme. He may well be from Judah and be associated with the Levites since he seems to know more detail about this geographic area and the vocational responsibilities of the priesthood. “The villages of the hill country of Judah and Benjamin, but also of Ephraim and Manasseh were both the Chronicler’s source of information and his audience.”\textsuperscript{18} I accept Chronicles as true and accurate as well as being the Word of God (II Timothy 3:16). This study has served to reinforce this belief.

CONCLUSION

It has been shown that the genealogical facts in the books of Chronicles comport with Samuel-Kings. It has been further supported by manuscripts outside of the Old Testament. The authorship, date, and place of writing have been proposed by recent researcher’s consensus. Finally, archaeological discoveries of an epigraphic nature from physical evidence have confirmed the validity of selective facts from Chronicles. Therefore, Chronicles is seen in a better light today. Further research and archaeological discovery will hopefully provide further evidence of the validity of Chronicles.

\textsuperscript{18} Levin. 245.
Bibliography

Chisholm, Robert B. “Retribution and Eschatology in Chronicles.” Bibliotheca sacra 156 no. 621 (January 1, 1999): 133-211.


