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CHRISTIAN STUDIES

Volume 24	2010
<i>FOREWORD</i>	5
<i>ARTICLES</i>	
Paul and Spiritual Formation James W. Thompson	7
Beyond the “Image of God” Conundrum: A Relational View of Human Dignity Ron Highfield	21
Baptism and the Moral Life Everett Ferguson	33
The Sacrifice of Praise Jeffrey Peterson	43
Return, Restoration, and Renewal in Chronicles —and Today R. Mark Shipp	55
American Fundamentalists: The Left Behind Michael R. Weed	65
My Theological Journey: A Retrospective Allan J. McNicol	79
A Written Legacy: A Bibliography for Allan J. McNicol M. Todd Hall	87
<i>OBITER DICTA</i>	93
<i>CONTRIBUTORS</i>	95

Return, Restoration, and Renewal in Chronicles— and Today*

R. Mark Shipp

The books of Chronicles have a lengthy history of neglect, at least until relatively modern times.¹ This may have been partially attributable to the perception that Chronicles only provided supplementary data to Samuel and Kings and was thus of limited historical or theological value. In recent decades, the focus of scholarship has shifted to literary and historical concerns, i.e., the extent and nature of the Chronicler's history and the date of the composition.² These questions continue to be debated, and interest in the literary, theological, and historiographical value of Chronicles continues to rise.

* I am pleased to submit this article in honor of my colleague, Allan McNicol, whom I have worked with for the past nineteen years. Allan has a longstanding interest in the subject of restorationism and has published several articles on the subject.

¹ The perception of Chronicles as providing only supplementary data to the "real" history of Samuel and Kings goes back at least to the Septuagint translation, which calls the book *paraleipomenon*, "Things Omitted." Recent years have seen a large number of commentaries and monographs written on Chronicles. Of special note are Sara Japhet, *I & II Chronicles: A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1993) and Gary Knoppers two volume commentary on Chronicles, *I Chronicles 1–9* (New York: Doubleday, 2003) and *I Chronicles 10–29* (New York: Doubleday, 2004). Also, Patrick Graham's three volumes of articles on select topics important to the Chronicler must be cited: M. Patrick Graham, Kenneth Høglund, and Steven McKenzie, eds., *The Chronicler as Historian* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1997), M. Patrick Graham and Steven McKenzie, eds., *The Chronicler as Author: Studies in Text and Texture* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1999), and M. Patrick Graham, Steven McKenzie, and Gary Knoppers, eds., *The Chronicler as Theologian: Essays in Honor of Ralph W. Klein* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2003).

² For a discussion of this, see Shipp, "1–2 Chronicles," in *The Transforming Word: A One-Volume Commentary on the Bible*, 353–356.

It is the thesis of this essay that one of the Chronicler's main concerns is with the restoration of all Israel—politically, socially, and religiously—in the post-exilic age. The way the Chronicler promotes his concerns is by the retelling of the biblical story from the death of Saul to the exile of Judah. The story of the kings of Judah is presented much like a medieval painting of the Passion Narrative: the characters are biblical, but their dress and ambience are medieval and out of sync with the era in which they lived. This “contemporizing historiography” served the valuable function of telling the ancient stories through the lens of later concerns. In light of its concern for return, renewal and restoration, Chronicles should resonate strongly with those of us in the American Restoration tradition.

Return, Renewal, and Restoration

“Restore” or “restoration” are unusual words in Chronicles, although the concepts are prevalent. The verb *haddesh* (“renew,” “restore”) occurs three times in the book, all within the context of a reform movement: first, in 2 Chron 15:8, relative to Asa's repair of the altar of the Lord, and second, two occurrences which describe Josiah's restoration project on the temple (2 Chron 24:4 and 12). Another verb, *shuv*, literally means “to return,” but often in Chronicles has the connotation of “repent” or “restore.” First, in 2 Chron 6:24–26, 37–38, and 7:14, the temple dedication prayer, Solomon prays that God might hear and forgive when the people of Israel *repent* of sin. In 2 Chron 11:4, Rehoboam attempted to *restore* the kingdom of Israel to Judah, to no avail. Note especially 2 Chron 15:4: “But when in their distress they *turned* to the LORD, the God of Israel, and sought him, he was found by them.” Also note 2 Chron 24:19, where *shuv* is used in a causative sense: “Yet he sent prophets among them to *bring them back* to the LORD; these testified against them, but they would not give heed” (See also 2 Chron 30:6, 9; 32:25; and 36:13).

One of the most common words for “restore” in Chronicles is *hazzeq*, meaning “to strengthen,” “make strong (again),” “repair.” It is always used of building/restoration projects, fortifications, or political entities (1 Chron

26:27, 29:12, 2 Chron 11:11, 12, 17, 24:5, 12, 26:9, 29:3, 34, 32:5, 34:8, 10, 35:2).

Other words, translated “restore” or “repair,” are less common in Chronicles, but help us get a picture of the Chronicler’s concerns. One such word is *kûn*, “to establish,” in the context of re-establishing or restoring worship (2 Chron 29:35 and 33:16).

While this is not an exhaustive survey, it is adequate to demonstrate the Chronicler’s concern for “return, renewal, and restoration.” The focus of this concern is “all Israel” as a community of worship, as a community under *Torah*, and as a unified community.

Israel as a Community of Worship

Some scholars of the past have subsumed all of the Chronicler’s theological concerns into this one area: concern for temple and worship.³ While this is an overstatement, there is no question that concerns for worship, temple, and the organization of the priests and Levites loom very large in Chronicles. This can be seen in the very beginning of the book in the genealogies (1 Chron 1–9) and also in the very first narrative (1 Chron 10). If amount of dedicated space in genealogies is indicative of importance, then Judah and Levi have pride of place in the genealogies. Other tribes have some genealogical entries, such as the Trans-Jordanian tribes (2 1/2 tribes east of the Jordan), which figure in chapter 5. Naphtali receives one verse (1 Chron 8:13). Judah and Levi, on the other hand, have two or three chapters each, underscoring the Chronicler’s focus upon the twin pillars of his theology: king and temple.⁴

The Chronicler is vitally interested in worship in Israel and in grounding that worship in God’s covenant with David. His agenda in including the ex-

³ See, for example, Edward Curtis and Albert Madsen, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Chronicles* (International Critical Commentary; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1910), 7–17.

⁴ Judah in chapter 2 and half of chapter 4, also the genealogy of David in chapter 3; Levi in chapter 6 and most of 9).

tensive genealogies at the beginning of his work is to connect post-exilic Judah—the Persian province of Yehud—with the nation of Israel and its covenants, especially the Davidic covenant, prior to the exile. To the Chronicler, the community, worship, and organization of Judah in the fifth century BC is continuous with pre-exilic Israel. It is important to him that the organization of Judah’s priesthood and worship in post-exilic Judah—musicians, gatekeepers, and the complex system of Levitical orders—be grounded in and legitimated by Israel’s earliest temple traditions, involving Solomon and even more, David.

1 Chronicles 10, which begins the narrative part of the book, sets up the reason for the rejection and demise of Saul and God’s choice of David. In a synoptic passage with 2 Sam 31, Saul is killed on the field of battle against the Philistines. Of special interest are the last two verses (10:13,14), non-synoptic with 1 Sam 31. The reason given for the rejection of Saul is because he was unfaithful and sought out a medium, but did not “seek the Lord,” which sometimes means in Chronicles to seek the presence of the Lord in the temple and at the ark of the covenant.

After the death of Saul, David is immediately anointed king over “all Israel” at Hebron. The balance of 1 Chron 11–12 is dedicated to a catalogue of David’s supporters: first his inner circle of “mighty men,” then warriors of every one of the tribes, north and south, come to David first at Ziklag, and then at Hebron to support him. The “all Israel” emphasis of the Chronicler cannot be missed—segments of all the tribes unanimously support David’s bid for the kingdom. Once David is anointed, his first order of business is to conquer the Jebusite city of Jerusalem and make it his own. This is a necessary precursor to bringing the ark of the covenant up from its lengthy stay at Kiriath-Jearim, where Saul had “neglected it,” because the ark was to be housed in a “tent” in Jerusalem (see 1 Chron 15:1). Chapters 13 and 15–16 deal with the subject of bringing the ark into Jerusalem and organizing Levitical worship. One can immediately see that the concerns of the Chronicler are not at all the same as those of the compiler of Samuel and Kings: David’s

kingship is established and blessed because he “sought the Lord,” particularly in matters of the cult, whereas Saul was rejected because he did not.⁵

Most of the balance of 1 Chronicles treats the subject of David’s planning the construction of the temple, which his son Solomon was to carry out. Even the one sin the Chronicler allows David—numbering the people—was necessary because this account is the origin story of the sites of the temple site the altar of sacrifice:

Then the angel of the Lord commanded Gad to say to David that David should go up and rear an altar to the Lord on the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite. . . . Then David said, “Here shall be the house of the Lord and here the altar of burnt offering for Israel” (1 Chron 21:18, 22:1).

The first part of 2 Chronicles follows in the same manner. The first act of Solomon as king is to worship at the “high place that was at Gibeon; for the tent of meeting of God, which Moses the servant of the Lord had made in the wilderness, was there” (2 Chron 1:3).⁶ 2 Chronicles 2–7 and portions of chapters 1 and 8 describe the building of the temple, its dedication, and worship at the appropriate shrine. God blessed Solomon because he “sought the Lord” like David (2 Chron 1:5). He mainly did that through worship and sacrifice at the Lord’s altar and the ark of the covenant.

The kings which follow Solomon in Judah are evaluated on the basis of their commitment to the restoration or advancement of the cult, the temple, and the proper consecration and ordination of the priests and Levites. Abijah of Judah condemns Jeroboam of Israel because he did not install proper priests and Levites, descended from Aaron (2 Chron 13:8–12). Asa “sought the Lord,” like David and Solomon, and so removed idols from the land and repaired the altar of sacrifice (2 Chron 15). In one of the more interesting

⁵ See Steven McKenzie, *1–2 Chronicles* (Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries; Nashville: Abingdon, 2004), 120.

⁶ In 1 Chron 1 and 2, Solomon’s first act is to worship the Lord in Gibeon. In 1 Kings 1 and 2, Solomon’s first acts are to consolidate his power and to remove or marginalize his opponents. Thus, the Chronicler emphasizes Solomon’s piety and faithfulness to God.

passages in Chronicles, Asa's son Jehoshaphat sought the Lord through fasting and prayer during a war with the Moabites, Ammonites, and Meunites. Jehoshaphat and all the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem bowed to the ground and worshipped. Then the Levites began to sing the psalmic refrain (*kî tôb kî l'olam hasdô*, "for he is good, for his loyalty is everlasting"). The Lord ambushed the warring parties and they were routed. Two of the great kings in Judah's history—Josiah and Hezekiah—were idealized primarily because they renovated the temple and restored worship. Both re-instituted the Passover, one hundred years apart. About both kings the text says there was never a Passover like it, before or after!

Israel as a Community Under *Torah*

Undergirding the Chronicler's theology of restoration of the cult is his "back to the Bible" movement, or concern for recovery of *Torah*, as exemplified in the good kings of Judah's past who "sought the Lord." To the Chronicler, David and Solomon are paradigmatic kings who sought the Lord in worship and in the *Torah*:

And [David] left Zadok the priest and his brethren the priests before the tabernacle of the LORD in the high place that was at Gibeon, to offer burnt offerings to the LORD upon the altar of burnt offering continually morning and evening, according to all that is written in the law (*Torah*) of the LORD which he commanded Israel (1 Chron 16:39,40).

In David's initial setting up of worship in Jerusalem (which to the Chronicler began with David and the tent he set up for worship, rather than with Solomon),⁷ everything is done scrupulously according to the *Torah* of Moses. Similarly, Solomon also sought the Lord according to the *Torah*:

Now therefore, O LORD, God of Israel, keep with thy servant David my father what thou hast promised him, saying, "There shall never fail you a man before me to sit upon the throne of

⁷ Simon de Vries, *1 and 2 Chronicles* (The Forms of Old Testament Literature, vol. 11; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 149–150. See also McKenzie, 142–146.

Israel, if only your sons take heed to their way, to walk in my law (*Torah*) as you have walked before me” (2 Chron 6:16).

The “reforming” kings of Judah follow this same pattern, promoting the reading and keeping of the *Torah*. Asa, for example, “[C]ommanded Judah to seek the Lord, the God of their fathers, and to keep the law (*Torah*) and the commandment” (2 Chron 14:4).

Jehoshaphat, likewise, assigned “princes and Levites” to teach the book of the *Torah* of the Lord in the cities of Judah. Jehoiada the priest, young king Joash’s mentor, also was scrupulous to follow the *Torah* relative to temple organization (2 Chron 23:18). Amaziah, who was faithful (but not perfectly so), did not put the children of the murderers of his father to death, in keeping with the *Torah* of Moses.

It is not surprising that the two kings who most resemble David and Solomon in terms of faithful seeking of the Lord, Hezekiah and Josiah, also read and kept the precepts of the *Torah*.

Israel As a Unified Community

One of the Chronicler’s main concerns is “all Israel,” north and south, as a unified community. To the Chronicler, Israel was an ideal entity, a twelve tribe whole, in contrast with the fractured remnants which are his reality in the post-exilic age. This concern for the restoration of all Israel, and to demonstrate the continuity of the post-exilic community with pre-exilic Israel, is demonstrated already in the genealogies of 1 Chron 1–9. All tribes are given genealogical entries, even though in some cases they are vestigial (e.g., the genealogy of Naphtali). The returnees to Judah from Babylon in chapter 9 also include some from the northern tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh:

So all Israel was enrolled by genealogies; and these are written in the Book of the Kings of Israel. And Judah was taken into exile in Babylon because of their unfaithfulness. Now the first to dwell again in their possessions in their cities were Israel, the priests, the Levites, and the temple servants. And some of the people of Judah, Benjamin, Ephraim, and Manasseh dwelt in Jerusalem.

Note the repetition of “all Israel,” and interestingly, “Israel” mentioned again in 1 Chron 9:1–3. The returnees living in Jerusalem include half northern tribes (Ephraim and Manasseh) and half southern tribes (Judah and Benjamin). To the Chronicler, Israel is a twelve tribe sacred community under *Torah*, and the restoration of this community must include everything which pertained to pre-exilic Israel.⁸

The phrase *kol yisra'el* (“all Israel”) occurs 43 times in the book of Chronicles. Following the genealogies, the balance of the book is replete with this phrase. After the death of Saul (1 Chron 10:6, 13), David’s first act is to go with “all Israel,” to conquer the Jebusite city of Jerusalem. After Jerusalem was secured, David’s mighty men gave him strong support in his kingdom, together with all Israel, to make him king, according to the word of the LORD concerning Israel (1 Chron 11:4).

After two chapters of detailing David’s supporters who came to him at Hebron and Ziklag, we hear that “all Israel” came to make David king:

All these, men of war, arrayed in battle order, came to Hebron with full intent to make David king over all Israel; likewise all the rest of Israel were of a single mind to make David king (1 Chron 12:38).⁹

Once again, it is important to the Chronicler to establish that all Israel is supportive of David and is of one mind regarding his kingship.

At important junctures in the lives of David and Solomon, related to the ark of the covenant and the building of the temple, all Israel is unified in support of the temple and its priesthood, the cult, and the ark (see 1 Chron 13:5–8, 15:3 and 28, 28:4 and 8, 29:21, 23, 25, and many other passages). “All Israel” is critical to the Chronicler, for he is compiling his history in the post-exilic era in order to inspire the remnants of the Judeans and North Israelites to seek the Lord together, with unity of purpose and identity.

⁸ For the “all Israel” emphasis, see de Vries, 146–148. Relative to the Chronicler’s concerns that all Israel, North and South, ought to be a single entity in both pre- and post-exilic Judah, see Roddy Braun, *1 Chronicles* (Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 14; Waco: Word Books, 1986), xxxv–xxxvii.

⁹ Braun, *1 Chronicles*, 171.

Return, Restoration, and Renewal in Chronicles and Today

The Chronicler is concerned first of all with return (*shûv*) or repentance. Seeking the Lord in Chronicles most often entails putting away the false gods of the age and returning to the Lord with the whole heart. Part of this return to the Lord involves renewal of worship and the institutions which surround it, which through carelessness or idolatry fall into disrepair and disrepute. In the book of Chronicles, those who seek the Lord with their whole heart will renew and recommit to worship and prayer, will work to rediscover and re-dedicate themselves to the way of *Torah* (God's righteous instruction), and will do so in unity of heart and purpose. Then God will honor his commitment for his people to be a light to the nations and for the seed of Abraham to fulfill its purpose envisioned so long ago (1 Chron 16:13).

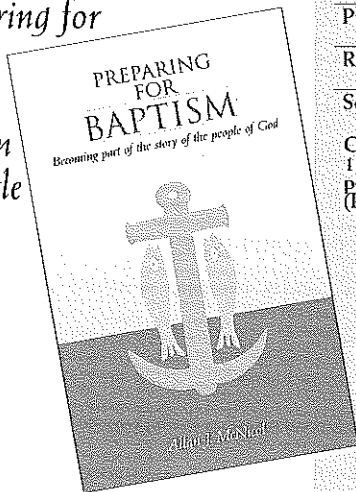
In light of this paradigm for restoration, it is ironic that we who have emphasized the restoration of biblical doctrine and practices, the unity of the Spirit, and the life of faith, have missed the most obvious model for restoration in the Bible. If the Chronicler's vision of restoration includes Israel as a faithful, worshipping community, a community which seeks to recover scripture, and the unity of God's people, nothing could be more pertinent to the ideals of Restorationism.

It is easy for the church in our day to assign the texts and themes of the Chronicler to the *marginalia* of life, where it is consigned to the museum of ancient historical oddities. But we, like the Chronicler's community of old, have a tendency to forget the covenants and the promises of God. We, too, tend towards entropy in personal and corporate worship, to lose the Word even in the midst of being overwhelmed and inundated by words. We, too, are often the sadly fractured and disjointed community of faith in the world. Perhaps a fresh look at our own restoration roots and ideals might provoke us again to recover the surprising words of grace and judgment by the prophets and apostles. Perhaps recovery of our own *Torah* will lead us to reexamine, in the crisis of identity the church now faces, the Chronicler's paradigm of return, renewal, and restoration.

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