

1 & 2 CHRONICLES

The Assyrian captivity of Israel (or Assyrian exile) occurs in 721 B.C., when the capital of the northern kingdom, Samaria, finally fell to Assyria and the Jews were deported throughout the Assyrian empire. These are the “Ten Lost Tribes of Israel” because they were never granted permission to return. In contrast, the Jews during the Babylonian captivity (or Babylonian exile) of 586 B.C., were eventually permitted to return in 538.

Just as with 1 & 2 Kings, 1 & 2 Chronicles were originally one book. In the Hebrew Scriptures they are known as “the Events of the Days.” Saint Jerome’s term for Chronicles is the “chronicle of the entire divine history,” because it recounts the history of God’s people beginning with Adam in the Garden of Eden until the Babylonian exile of the Jews (587-539 B.C.). Unlike the Book of Deuteronomy, Chronicles gives a more positive account of salvation history to encourage the people who sought to rebuild their lives after their return from Babylonian exile.

The first nine chapters of Chronicles are extensive genealogies. These genealogies have a practical purpose in that, upon their return from exile, each tribe was to get its own lands back, lands that had been parceled out in the time of Joshua. The detailed genealogies indicate where and in which cities everyone lived, and which territories belonged to which families.

After the genealogies the history continues with the united kingdom of Israel under David and Solomon; the kingdom of Judah after the division of the monarchy; and finally the return of the Jews from Babylonian captivity. By this historical review the author makes two important theological points.

- 1) While Chronicles begins with the creation of Adam, it is a specifically *Jewish* salvation history that begins in the Old Testament with the call of Abraham,
- 2) Despite the catastrophe Israel suffered with the destruction of Solomon’s Temple and subsequent exile in Babylon, Israel is not completely destroyed. Rather, by tracing the genealogies from creation to the present, the author shows that the generation then reading Chronicles for the first time is still part of God’s plan of salvation.

When the exile ends the most important family lines were those of the returnees from Babylon, that is, the tribes of Judah, Levi, and Benjamin for whom God will continue to be active and present: **Judah**, because David’s royal line is from Judah (Genesis 49:10; 1 Chronicles 3:1-24); **Levi**, because the priesthood belongs to the Levites (Exodus 32:29; 1 Chronicles 6:1-81); and **Benjamin**, because that was the tribe of Saul, the first king of Israel. Note that although Saul sinned, there is no curse on his line or his tribe. In fact, Saul’s line becomes a microcosm of all Israel because, though Israel sins repeatedly, hope remains alive due to the essential covenant relationship between God and David. According to Chronicles all the tribes are important to God, even if two of them – Judah and Levi – are particularly special. With the genealogies completed, the author now turns to the formal retelling of the history of Israel, with King David receiving most of the attention.

Religious purpose of Chronicles

Chronicles stresses that God requires holiness, and not only of the Levites who are already dedicated to Temple worship, but of all the people. Only in this way will the Temple sacrifices regain their original value. Therefore from a strictly religious viewpoint, the author of Chronicles wants to re-establish Israel’s worship after the Babylonian exile.

Moreover Babylonian exile did not mean the Jews were *slaves* of King Nebuchadnezzar as their ancestors were in Egypt under Pharaoh. They were free to go about and live their lives. Though they had no sanctuary or altar of sacrifice, they still observed the Sabbath, practiced fixed times for prayer, and held public readings of the Torah or Pentateuch (first five books of the Old Testament). Indeed, the community

possessed such high spirits that during the exile foreigners were attracted to Judaism and some became converts.

Main divisions of 1 & 2 Chronicles

- 1) 1 Chronicles (1-9): Sacred history from Adam to David, including genealogies for each of the twelve tribes of Israel.
- 2) 1 Chronicles (10-29): The history of David, including his appointment as king; the conquest and selection of Jerusalem as his capital; the installation of the Ark of the Covenant in Jerusalem and arrangements for worship; and preparations for the building of the Temple. No mention is given of the trouble between David and Saul, or of David's relations with Bathsheba. The author intends to write not what happened but what *ought* to have happened. As such, Chronicles is the story of the ideal Israel living under its law and the historical circumstances which led to its collapse.
- 3) 2 Chronicles (1-9): The history of Solomon and the building of the Temple, including Solomon's prayer of dedication.
- 4) 2 Chronicles (10-36): Religious reforms and exile. After the break with Samaria, the text concentrates on the kingdom of Judah and its kings who are all of David's line. These kings are judged for their fidelity or infidelity to the covenant. Religious reform was needed, particularly during the times of Hezekiah and Josiah. Josiah's reforms were not continued by his successors which led to Judah's eventual ruin. Finally there is an account of the fall of Jerusalem and the population's exile to Babylon. Later, after King Cyrus of Persia conquers Babylon, Cyrus permits the Jews to return home.

Chronicles casts David as the ideal king and his son Solomon as the extension of David's rule in the southern kingdom. The northern kings do not interest the author, who mentions them only if they have significant dealings with the king of Judah. Chronicles also highlights the reform of Israel's liturgy when David reassigned the Levites from their centuries-old duties of transporting and maintaining the Tabernacle during the desert sojourn, to new responsibilities for Temple worship (1 Chronicles 23:24-32).

After giving an account of David's power and prestige (1 Chronicles 18:1-20:8), the attention shifts to the building of the Temple: its location; the building materials; David's instructions for the Levites who will serve; and David's instructions to Solomon. As instructions were once given to Moses for erection of the desert Tabernacle, so God gave the instructions for the building of the Jerusalem Temple to David, who passed them along to Solomon: **“all this he made clear by the writing from the hand of the Lord concerning it, all the work to be done according to the plan”** (1 Chronicles 28:19). Thus the Jerusalem Temple, like the desert Tabernacle, was not a mere human construction but a work of divine inspiration.

Regarding music within the Temple, while Moses gave no instructions in this area, David appoints four thousand Levitical singers and musicians to accompany the Temple's sacrificial offerings. This is a major change in the character of Israel's liturgy, which up to that time appears to have been celebrated in silence.

Unlike David's reign, the author omits almost all of the negative aspects of Solomon's reign and instead focuses on Solomon's role as Temple-builder. Readers are also reminded why Solomon and not David was permitted to build the temple (1 Chronicles 22:6-10).

After Solomon dies, the author retells the history of the southern kingdom (Judah) from King Rehoboam to King Zedekiah. Unlike what we find in the Book of Kings, the author of Chronicles virtually ignores the northern kingdom due to its repeated infidelity. Instead the author lengthens the accounts of the kings of Judah, and adds positive material about their military strength and religious reforms.

Differences between the Book of Kings and the Book of Chronicles

- 1) In the Book of Kings, the southern kingdom of Judah appears to be perpetually weak, whereas in Chronicles several kings of Judah have impressive armies and enjoy military successes.

2) In Kings, the liturgical reforms and temple cleansing of King Josiah appear almost unprecedented (1 Kings 23:1-20); but in Chronicles several early kings make efforts at reform, though not always successfully.

3) In Kings, Josiah is the ultimate reformer-king, and Hezekiah is second to him; in Chronicles this relationship is reversed.

Finally, Chronicles gives additional information about several kings which changes their profiles and significance in the history of Israel. For example, Manasseh, who is vilified in Kings (2 Kings 21:1-9) and is seen as the primary cause of the Babylonian exile, is cast as a late-in-life penitent who reverses his moral direction and initiates liturgical reforms after the Babylonian captivity (2 Chronicles 33:10-13).

In Chronicles, the kingdom of God is manifested on earth *through* the kingdom of David. The closest Old Testament parallel to this is the New Testament Church born at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-47). In Chronicles, Israel's kingdom is a political body whose reason for being is the celebration of the liturgy of the Lord in the Jerusalem Temple. Thus the high points in Chronicles are when the priests, Levites, and all Israel come to Jerusalem to celebrate great liturgical feasts: David's dedication of the Ark; Solomon's dedication of the Temple; the repair of the Temple and covenant renewal; Hezekiah's Passover and Josiah's Passover. These events are a kind of foretaste of the future restoration of the Twelve Tribes for which the author at the time was still awaiting.

Unlike 1 & 2 Samuel and 1 & 2 Kings, the author of Chronicles interprets the history of the Israelite monarchy to encourage the efforts of his contemporaries to restore the kingdom. In short, the books of Kings and Chronicles both understand the demise of the kingdom of David to be the result of the defections of his sons and his subjects from God's covenant. Yet within that common perspective, the Book of Kings and the Book of Chronicles have a number of differences in emphasis and detail, yielding complementary rather than competing visions of the history of Israel.



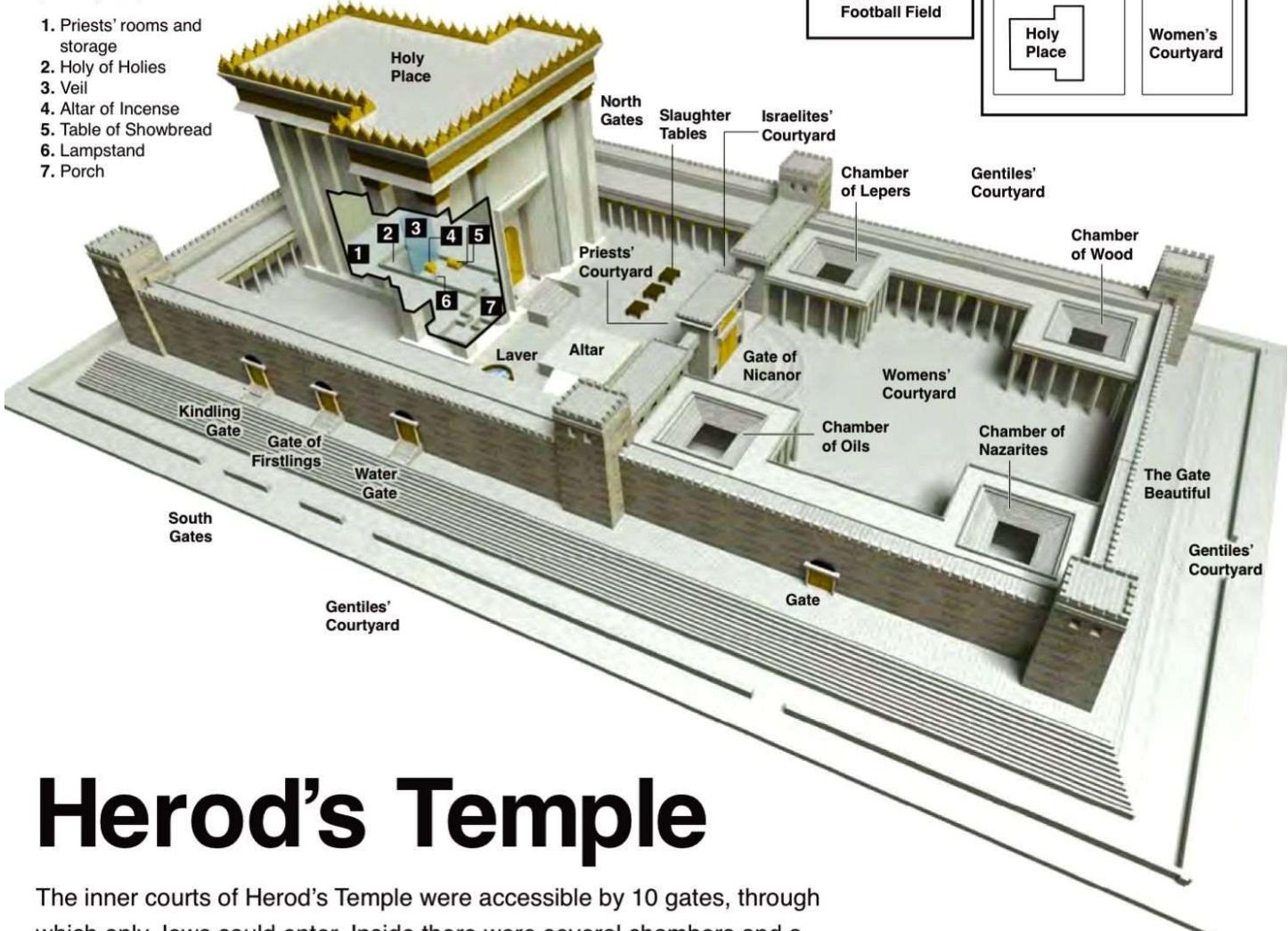
Solomon's Temple

The First Temple, erected by King Solomon, was built to replace the Tabernacle and to house the Ark of the Covenant. The Temple was completed in 957 BC after seven years of labor, but was destroyed by the Babylonians in 587 BC.

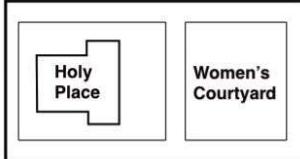
INSIDE THE HOLY PLACE

(cutaway view)

1. Priests' rooms and storage
2. Holy of Holies
3. Veil
4. Altar of Incense
5. Table of Showbread
6. Lampstand
7. Porch



Size comparison (approximate):



Herod's Temple

The inner courts of Herod's Temple were accessible by 10 gates, through which only Jews could enter. Inside there were several chambers and a courtyard where sacrifices were made. At one end was the holy place—a two-room sanctuary used by Jewish priests. The expansive building project of Herod's Second Temple and Temple Mount was completed in approximately AD 62–64, only to be destroyed by the Romans in AD 70.