

PART ONE:
Israel's Roots
(1 Chronicles 1:1–9:34)¹

While modern readers find these seemingly unending registers of names boring and of little interest, they were considered most valuable in the ancient world and were particularly prized by the people of God in the Old Testament era. For the Chronicler, these family trees and the incidental comments that he occasionally makes not only enabled him to cover a vast period of time as briefly as possible, but they provided him with a means of drawing attention to themes that are developed in the rest of Chronicles. In particular, they indicate the unfolding of a divine plan in which Israel is shown to be God's chosen means of bringing blessing to the whole of humanity.²

At the time when the Chronicler was writing, the outlook was not promising for the nation. After the Babylonian exile, the people of Israel had been reduced to a comparatively small community in and around Jerusalem, and though they

1. Among the commentaries from which I have benefited are these more recent ones: Gary N. Knoppers, *1 Chronicles 1-9, A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible 12A (New York: Doubleday, 2004); *1 Chronicles 10–29, A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible 12A (New York: Doubleday, 2004); Ralph W. Klein, *1 Chronicles* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 2006); Ralph W. Klein, *2 Chronicles* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 2012).

2. See M. D. Johnson, *The Purpose of the Biblical Genealogies: with Special Reference to the Setting of the Genealogies of Jesus*, 2nd edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Roddy Braun, *1 Chronicles*, Word Bible Commentary 14 (Waco: Word Books, 1986), pp. 1-12.

had been given certain freedoms by the Persians, they still considered themselves in bondage under foreign rule. God, however, had not abandoned His people and had raised up prophets like Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi to encourage them not to be despondent but to realise that God had made promises that were yet to be fulfilled. The messages of hope in the pre-exilic and exilic prophets were not to be dismissed and the prophetic writer of Chronicles, like the final compiler of the Book of Psalms, played his part in urging God's people to trust Yahweh and to be true to Him.

Interestingly, after his introductory genealogical lists in 1:1–2:2, the Chronicler orders his material by placing the tribe of Judah first (2:3–4:23), Benjamin last (8:1–40) and Levi in the middle (6:1–81), and it is to these tribes he devotes most attention. They are the ones that made up the bulk of the post-exilic community and, as it happened, they were the ones that Chronicles shows remained true to David and the Jerusalem temple in the pre-exilic period. This did not mean that the other tribes had no part in the covenant community and, to indicate this, they are placed each side of Levi but surrounded by Judah and Benjamin. The concluding chapter nine focuses on the post-exilic community before preparing for the next main section of the work.



Adam to Israel

(1:1–2:2)

In this whistle-stop tour from the creation of the first human to the twelve tribes of Israel, the Chronicler sets Israel in the context of the nations of the world. In particular, the lists draw attention to a special family line and highlight significant moments important to the compiler's overall aim. The genealogical tables found in Genesis are followed closely with ten names recorded of the chosen line from Adam to Noah (vv. 1-4a; Gen. 5) and ten from Shem to Abram (vv. 24-27; Gen. 11:10-26). Similar genealogical lists are found in Ancient Near Eastern texts.¹ It is unlikely that this family tree was meant to be a means of working out the precise date when Adam was created. Like the three sets of fourteen generations in Matthew's Gospel 1:1-17, where we know that Uzziah was not Joram's son (Matt. 1:8) but his great, great, grandson (see 2 Kings 8:25; 11:2; 14:1, 21; 1 Chron. 3:11-12), the symmetry of the two sets of ten generations suggests that they are not an unbroken chain of generations from Adam to Noah and on to Abram.

Some parts of the lists, of course, must be taken as continuous. Seth is the actual son of Adam and Lamech is the father of Noah and grandfather of Shem. Likewise, Nahor is the father of Terah and grandfather of Abram. But

1. See T. Jacobsen, *The Sumerian King List* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1939).

in other cases 'son' can mean 'grandson' or even 'descendant', and 'father' can mean 'grandfather', 'ancestor' or 'founder', depending on the context. This was common practice throughout the Ancient Near East. Kenneth Kitchen presents an extreme example from Egypt where King Tirhakah honours his 'father', Sesostris III, who lived 1,200 years earlier.² If we compare the lists in Ezra 7:1-5 and 1 Chronicles 6:3-14, it is clear there are a number of omissions. It may well be that someone like Reu (1:25) fathered a son from whom Serug (1:26) was a direct descendant.

Two types of genealogies are found: linear and segmented. A linear genealogy, presenting a clear line of descent from one generation to another, is produced in 1:1-4a and 1:24-27. It is like the main trunk of a tree with only one son of each family named. In Genesis and Chronicles, it is used to indicate the central family line. Adam had many sons and daughters, including Cain and Abel, but in the genealogy only Seth is named. The same is true of Seth's children, for only Enosh is named, and so it continues down to Noah. Between the two linear genealogies of the elect line, in 1:4b-23, a segmented genealogy is found. This is more complex and, like the various branches from the main trunk, it separates off in all directions to present details of other family members.

The chapter is divided according to the principal characters: Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. As in Genesis, the descendants of non-elect lines appear before the elect: Ishmael's family is listed before Isaac's, and Esau's before Jacob's. Both Genesis 1-50 and 1 Chronicles 1:1-2:1 begin with Adam, God's son, before narrowing the divine choice to Israel, God's son.³

Adam to Noah (1:1-4a)

1:1. Adam, Seth, Enosh, 2. Kenan, Mahalalel, Jared, 3. Enoch, Methuselah, Lamech, 4. Noah,

Without any word of introduction, the Chronicler begins by listing the ten names of the chosen line as found in

2. Kenneth A. Kitchen, *Ancient Orient and Old Testament* (London: Tyndale Press, 1966), pp. 36-39.

3. See William J. Dumbrell, *The Faith of Israel* (Leicester: Apollos, 1989), p. 273.

Genesis 5:3-32 but lacking any of the details concerning their ages, the connection between them or, as in the case of Enoch, their spiritual standing with God. Numbers in the Bible often have symbolic significance and ten is a naturally round figure like the number of fingers on a person's hands. It symbolised totality or completion (Gen. 16:3; 18:32; 1 Chron. 6:61; 2 Chron. 4:6, 7, 8; 14:1b [13:23b]). These names are all real people and the Chronicler goes back to the very beginnings of human history. He expects his readers to be familiar with what is written in Genesis concerning these individuals.

From the initial ten names, a number of points are evident. The first is that the whole human race is descended from the one man, Adam, who was created in God's image and became a living being through God's life-giving breath which He personally breathed into Him. Humanity was created to rule as God's viceroys on the earth and to have fellowship with God (Gen. 1:26-28; 2:7-8; 3:8; 2 Chron. 6:18). By commencing with Adam, readers are also reminded of that initial disobedience to God's command which led to divine punishment and the tragic consequences for the rest of humanity. He is the first 'son' in a long line of 'sons' who were exiled; they included Israel and the Davidic kings who disobeyed God. Nothing is said of Adam's firstborn son, Cain, who murdered his brother Abel. Instead, Chronicles refers only to Seth, the one 'appointed' by God to replace Abel (Gen. 4:25). From the outset, the Chronicler indicates what he will illustrate many times during the course of his work, that God fulfils His purposes despite setbacks and false starts. He substitutes others to take the place of those who seemed to be the obvious choices. At the beginning of the main part of the Chronicler's work, David's appointment as king instead of Saul is the clearest example (1 Chron. 10:13-14).

By tracing Israel's family line back to Adam, the Chronicler has a universal perspective in mind and this fits with his overall interest in people of various nations who became part of Israel. The nations of the world belong to God and Chronicles indicates how they are used to fulfil God's purposes for His people.

Noah's descendants (1:4b-23)

Noah's sons (1:4b)

1:4. Shem, Ham and Japheth.

An unusual feature in verse 4 is the way Noah's sons are introduced. They are named in straight succession one after the other in exactly the same way as all the other names from Adam to Noah. It is as if Japheth were the son of Ham and Ham the son of Shem. The Chronicler, as always, expects readers to know their biblical history and it becomes more obvious in what follows that Shem, Ham and Japheth are brothers whose father was Noah. Typical of the Septuagint, this ancient Greek translation makes the text clearer by adding after Noah, 'sons of Noah,' before mentioning the three sons.

Noah's family of eight, which included his three sons and their wives, are the only ones who escaped the universal Flood. Though the event is not mentioned, the Chronicler wishes his readers to pause and remember that catastrophe, for the text does not immediately continue with the elect line of descent through Shem. The main trunk of the tree is abandoned for a moment in order to introduce some of the chief branches. Here again, a universal note is detected in the Chronicler's arrangement of his material. Israel and all the other nations of the world are descended not only from Adam, but from Noah's three sons. It is not an exhaustive list but a symbolic round figure of seventy names and it represents the entire world of nations and people groups. It reads like a verbal 'map of the world'.⁴ One commentator notes that the only material the Chronicler omits from Genesis at this point is the genealogy of Cain (Gen. 4:17-24) and suggests that this is because the Flood 'meant a completely fresh start in the spread of mankind'.⁵

Descendants of all three of Noah's sons are named and they call to mind the nations of the world that spread out over the earth after the tower of Babel incident (Gen. 10:1-11:9). As

4. Gary N. Knoppers, 'Shem, Ham and Japheth,' in *The Chronicler as Theologian: Essays in Honor of Ralph W. Klein*, eds. M. Patrick Graham, Steven L. McKenzie and Gary N. Knoppers (London: T & T Clark, 2003), p. 30.

5. H. G. M. Williamson, *1 and 2 Chronicles*, The New Century Bible Commentary (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1982), p. 41.