Chronicles: Perspectives in Prophetic History

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By Rabbi Hayyim Angel

Introduction

Jewish tradition has understood the idea of multiple aspects of truth from its very beginnings. Drawing on analogies from ancient Near Eastern texts, Joshua Berman demonstrates that Tanakh exhibits signs of juxtaposed contradictory texts and updated histories. Prophetic writers often updated history for the needs of the moment, but did not erase earlier versions. The prophetic writers, and their ancient readers, understood that the meaning of the update is found by contrasting the new version with the earlier versions.[2]

One of the great illustrations of this principle emerges from a sustained comparison and contrast of the biblical Book of Chronicles with the earlier parallel texts in the Books of Samuel and Kings. Long neglected in study, Chronicles provides the opportunity to gain insight into the prophetic writers' religious

purposes. In this essay, we will outline an approach to the purposes of Chronicles, and also into Samuel and Kings.

In his introduction to the Book of Samuel, Abarbanel presents himself as the first to inquire about the fundamental nature of Chronicles. Why do Samuel and Kings omit significant episodes that are later included in Chronicles? Why does Chronicles omit major episodes that are included in Samuel–Kings? Furthermore, why does Chronicles repeat entire passages already recorded in Samuel–Kings? One ultimately may ask why Chronicles was canonized in Tanakh. Presumably, those stories omitted by Samuel and Kings were omitted deliberately, and those included already were told. Therefore, Chronicles appears superfluous:

> These are the doubts pertaining to this formidable question, but in searching for its solution, I remain alone and nobody joins me in this endeavor. I have not found any discussion—great nor small—in the words of our Sages of blessed memory; not the Sages of the Talmud, nor the later commentators.... God has added to my grief, in that there is no commentary on Chronicles in this land with the exception of the few glosses of Radak of blessed memory. And those comments are negligible in their brevity, and he did not address this issue at all. Additionally, the Jews do not study Chronicles in their academies. I confess my own sins today: I have not studied it nor explored its issues until now.[3]

Until fairly recently, Abarbanel's lamentation from 500 years ago remained as accurate as when he wrote it—precious little attention was given to the Book of Chronicles. In the past generation, however, there has been a surge of scholarly interest in the nature and theology of Chronicles and in its relationship with earlier biblical books.

Almost half of Chronicles has parallels in earlier biblical books, while the rest of the material likely was drawn from other written sources and oral traditions extant at that time.[4] It is a retelling of history, which stands independently as a coherent narrative. There are times where Chronicles depends on our knowledge of Samuel–Kings, but there also are times where Chronicles repeats narratives almost verbatim.

It is erroneous to read Chronicles as a commentary on Samuel–Kings, even though it does often supplement history and clarify ambiguities from those earlier books. Treating Chronicles as secondary to Samuel–Kings leaves us with the

glaring problems raised by Abarbanel. Similarly, shuffling all of the episodes recorded in the three books in order to create a composite history tends to eliminate the independent significance and purpose of each prophetic narrative.

What Questions Are We Asking?

When one is interested in ascertaining exact historical data based on the accounts in Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles, one first must reconcile the accounts and then combine the material into a composite picture. Far more important than attaining a historical portrait of the period, though, is addressing the question of how each biblical book uses history to teach its prophetic messages as an exhortation to its readers.

One example of a seemingly minor discrepancy in the texts that teaches an important theme is the account of an artisan that Solomon hires to build the Temple. In Kings, Solomon employs a Tyrian artisan named Hiram (not to be confused with the king of Tyre who had the same name) whose mother is from the tribe of Naphtali:

> King Solomon sent for Hiram and brought him down from Tyre. He was the son of a widow of the tribe of Naphtali, and his father had been a Tyrian, a coppersmith. (I Kings 7:13–14)

When retelling this narrative, however, Chronicles reports that this artisan's mother was from Dan, not Naphtali:

> Now I am sending you a skillful and intelligent man, my master Huram, the son of a Danite woman, his father a Tyrian. (II Chron. 2:12–13)

In attempting to explain the discrepancy, several traditional commentators follow midrashic leads that suggest that Hiram's maternal grandfather was from one tribe and his maternal grandmother from the other tribe. Unconvinced by that answer, Malbim posits that there actually were two artisans named Hiram. One

began working on the Temple project but died in the middle of the construction, so another took over. These commentators attempt to explain what happened.

It is difficult to ascertain the historical reality behind these parallel texts given the factual discrepancy and insufficient information to support either reading. It is possible, however, to detect important thematic contrasts between Kings and Chronicles reflected in this disparity. Chronicles' account of Solomon's deriving from Judah and Hiram from Dan parallels the two leading artisans of the Tabernacle in the wilderness. Bezalel and Oholiab were from Judah and Dan, respectively (see Exod. 31:1–6). In contrast, the Kings narrative does not create that association since it relates that Hiram descended from the Tribe of Naphtali. Without addressing the historical question of Hiram's tribe, one midrash highlights this connection between Chronicles' account of the Temple and the Tabernacle:

> When the Tabernacle was built, two tribes joined in the work. Rabbi Levi in the name of Rabbi Hama son of Rabbi Hanina says that they were from the tribes of Judah (Bezalel) and Dan (Oholiab). So it was with the building of the Temple, that these two tribes partnered, as it is written… Huram, the son of a Danite woman…and Solomon son of David was from the Tribe of Judah. (*Pesikta Rabbati* 6)

Chronicles is far more interested than Kings in demonstrating connections between the Tabernacle and the First Temple. Chronicles teaches that like the Tabernacle (Exod. 25:9, 40; 26:30; 27:8), there was a divinely revealed plan for the First Temple (I Chron. 28:11, 19). That suggestion is absent from Kings. Additionally, Chronicles reports fire from heaven at the dedication of the Temple (II Chron 7:1–2), a detail missing from Kings, where only the cloud of God is reported (I Kings 8:10–11). The Tabernacle dedication had both elements (Exod. 40:34–38; Lev. 9:24). Chronicles further mentions that Solomon went to Gibeon because the Tabernacle was there, whereas Kings does not report this detail. It may be argued that the author of Chronicles had a similar interest in presenting Solomon's chief artisan as deriving from Dan to draw another parallel between the Tabernacle and the First Temple.

Below is a brief summary chart of the relevant verses:

Chronicles	Kings
I Chronicles 28:11, 19 David gave his son Solomon the plan of the porch and its houses, its storerooms and its upper chambers and inner chambers; and of the place of the Ark-cover…“All this that the Lord made me understand by His hand on me, I give you in writing—the plan of all the works.”	No mention of divinely revealed plans for the Temple.
II Chronicles 7:1–2 When Solomon finished praying, fire descended from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and the glory of the Lord filled the House. The priests could not enter the House of the Lord, for the glory of the Lord filled the House of the Lord.	**I Kings 8:10–11** When the priests came out of the sanctuary—for the cloud had filled the House of the Lord and the priests were not able to remain and perform the service because of the cloud, for the Presence of the Lord filled the House of the Lord.

II Chronicles 1:3–5 Then Solomon, and all the assemblage with him, went to the shrine at Gibeon, for the Tent of Meeting, which Moses the servant of the Lord had made in the wilderness, was there. (But the Ark of God David had brought up from Kiriath-jearim to the place which David had prepared for it; for he had pitched a tent for it in Jerusalem.) The bronze altar, which Bezalel son of Uri son of Hur had made, was also there before the Tabernacle of the Lord, and Solomon and the assemblage resorted to it.	**I Kings 3:4** The king went to Gibeon to sacrifice there, for that was the largest shrine; on that altar Solomon presented a thousand burnt offerings.

Asking only “what happened historically” often leads to forced answers. Even when the factual resolutions are convincing, these explanations do little to explain the prophetic purpose of Chronicles. By noticing instead which details each book chooses to highlight and asking what each book is attempting to teach, we are encouraged to seek broader themes and patterns in the two books that shed light on the prophetic messages of each.

David and Solomon

The David–Solomon narrative in Chronicles is longer than the narratives of all other kings combined. The genealogies at the beginning of Chronicles highlight David, spanning from Adam all the way to David by chapter 2.

Curiously, David is listed as the seventh of Jesse’s sons, whereas he was Jesse’s eighth son in the Book of Samuel:

> Thus Jesse presented seven of his sons before Samuel, and Samuel said to Jesse, “The Lord has not chosen any of these.” Then Samuel asked Jesse, “Are these all the boys you have?” He replied, “There is still the youngest; he is tending the flock.” And Samuel said to Jesse, “Send someone to bring him, for we will not sit down to eat until he gets here.” (I Sam. 16:10–11)

> Boaz of Obed, Obed of Jesse. Jesse begot Eliab his first-born, Abinadab the second, Shimea the third, Nethanel the fourth, Raddai the fifth, Ozem the sixth, David the seventh. (I Chron. 2:12–15)

In attempting to ascertain the historical truth behind this discrepancy, Radak suggests that Chronicles lists the seven sons who were born of the same mother. Jesse’s other son must have been from a different mother. Similar to our discussion about the tribal origins of Hiram’s mother, this response is not particularly satisfying, even as it is plausible.

Once again, a midrash addresses the conceptual meaning of Chronicles’ deviation from Samuel:

> All sevenths are favorites in the world…The seventh is a favorite among the generations. Thus: Adam, Seth, Enosh, Kenan, Mahalalel, Jared, Enoch, and of him it is written, And Enoch walked with God (Gen. 5:22). Among the children the seventh was the favorite, as it says, David the seventh (I Chron. 2:15). (*Lev. Rabbah* 29:11)

Without addressing the question of “what happened,” this midrash is sensitive to a major purpose of Chronicles: It highlights the greatness of King David. Since seven is a favorite biblical number, Chronicles listed David seventh in the genealogies even at the expense of Jesse’s having eight sons.

This recasting of David as the seventh son is symptomatic of the idea that Chronicles attempts to cleanse the negative perception of David. Most conspicuously, Chronicles omits reference to the Bathsheba affair and its aftermath, even though the Book of Samuel devotes ten chapters to that story. Similarly, Chronicles also omits Solomon’s idolatry, which caps the narrative in I

Kings 11. Additionally, Chronicles describes the beginnings of David's and Solomon's reigns as stable from their outset. All tribes immediately accept David as king after Saul's death (I Chron. 11:1–3), and Chronicles omits the stories of rebellions and instabilities associated with Solomon's ascension to the throne recorded in I Kings 1–2.

Kings mentions Pharaoh's daughter five times, highlighting her central role in Solomon's rise and fall particularly in leading his heart astray to idolatry (I Kings 3:1; 7:8; 9:16, 24; 11:1). In contrast, she is mentioned only once in Chronicles. It is noteworthy that even this one parallel casts Solomon in a more positive light than he is portrayed in Kings. In Kings, Solomon moves Pharaoh's daughter to her new palace. In Chronicles, he moves her there so that the Temple precincts would be kept more sacred.

I Kings 9:24	**II Chronicles 8:11**
As soon as Pharaoh's daughter went up from the City of David to the palace that he had built for her, he built the Millo.	Solomon brought up Pharaoh's daughter from the City of David to the palace that he had built for her, for he said, "No wife of mine shall dwell in a palace of King David of Israel, for [the area] is sacred since the Ark of the Lord has entered it."

This cleansing of the images of David and Solomon begins to sound like whitewashing. The commentary attributed to Rashi[5] already suggested this line of interpretation and many since have followed suit:

> [When the author of Chronicles] comes to recount the David stories he does not recount his flaws but rather only his heroism and greatness. [This is] because this book is [David's] and that of the kings of Judah. (commentary attributed to Rashi on I Chron. 10:1)

Yehudah Kiel rejects this line of interpretation, insisting that the author of Chronicles expects the reader to know the earlier Books of Samuel–Kings, so he does not need to repeat every story. Since Samuel and Kings still are included in Tanakh, people would know the stains on those kings' records.[6]

If the commentary attributed to Rashi really means that Chronicles records *no* flaws of the Judean kings, this assertion is incorrect. Many sins of southern kings are recorded in Chronicles, including several that are unattested in Kings. But it certainly is true that the mistakes of David and Solomon are significantly diminished or absent, and Kiel admits this point elsewhere in his commentary.

However, Kiel's assertion also is insufficient. A number of events recorded in Samuel–Kings are repeated in Chronicles, sometimes nearly verbatim. It is clear that each book includes information that it needs in order to teach its own messages. Chronicles is not merely a supplement to Samuel–Kings that fills in historical gaps.

A more fruitful approach emerges from trying to understand each book in its context. Traditionally, Jeremiah composed Kings in the era of the destruction of the First Temple. Ezra composed Chronicles at the beginning of the Second Temple period (*Bava Batra* 15a). One of the main purposes of Kings is to vindicate God for the destruction—it was Israel's fault rather than God's abandonment or injustice. Chronicles, on the other hand, wanted to inspire faith and hope in the Returnees to Zion, to be discussed below.

In Samuel–Kings, David plays only a minor role in the building of the Temple and Solomon is the Temple builder. In contrast, Chronicles contains eight chapters that describe David's doing many actions to help lay the framework for the Temple. In Chronicles, David and Solomon are partners in building the Temple.

Chronicles repeatedly emphasizes the divine election of Solomon, a detail conspicuously absent from Kings (see I Chron. 28:5, 6, 10; 29:1). This is not how Solomon claimed the throne in Kings, where he needed to eliminate opposition before securing his throne. David goes through a similar process in the Book of Samuel, having to contend with opposition from Saul's family before finally consolidating the kingdom. In contrast, Chronicles portrays David's assumption of the throne as unanimous and uncontested from the start.

The Davidic throne is referred to as "God's throne" in Chronicles (I Chron. 28:5; 29:23; II Chron. 9:8; cf. II Chron. 13:8). This appellation demonstrates an intimate link between God's kingdom and the human throne. There is no tension with the institution of monarchy expressed in Chronicles as there had been in

Samuel–Kings. In Samuel–Kings, in contrast, David is the permanent founder of the Davidic dynasty and viewed as the model king. Solomon fell short of David's ideal standard after turning to idolatry. In Chronicles, the roles of David and Solomon are equated on all three counts. Solomon's son Rehoboam even is equated to David *and* Solomon in righteousness before he turned to sin and folly:

> They strengthened the kingdom of Judah, and supported Rehoboam son of Solomon for three years, for they followed the ways of David and Solomon for three years. (II Chron. 11:17)

Kings would not have set Solomon as a religious standard, since Solomon himself fell short of David's standard.

Similarly, David and Solomon are founders of the dynasty and builders of the Temple in Chronicles, as Chronicles adds Solomon's name to the verse where Kings had mentioned only David:

I Kings 8:66	**II Chronicles 7:10**
On the eighth day he let the people go. They bade the king good-bye and went to their homes, joyful and glad of heart over all the goodness that the Lord had shown to His servant David and His people Israel.	On the twenty-third day of the seventh month he dismissed the people to their homes, rejoicing and in good spirits over the goodness that the Lord had shown to David and Solomon and His people Israel.

The combination of the two periods of David and Solomon, coupled with a near-elimination of their sins and political instabilities, forms one ideal period in Israel's history.

Manasseh

The Book of Kings casts Manasseh as the worst Judean king in history. His unparalleled levels of idolatry and murder led to the decree of the destruction of the Temple and exile (II Kings 21). In contrast, Chronicles reports Manasseh's sins but then states that he repented (II Chron. 33:11–16). In contrast with Kings, Chronicles blames the destruction squarely on Zedekiah's generation (II Chron. 36:11–19).

Overall Purposes of the Books

Using the aforementioned contrasts, we now are in a position to discuss some of the primary purposes of Samuel–Kings and Chronicles.

Samuel–Kings

The three great disasters—the splitting of the kingdom, the exile of the Northern Kingdom, and the destruction of the Temple—all came as a result of idolatry. All three punishments were intergenerational decrees. Several Northern dynasties likewise followed this pattern of idolatry, leading to intergenerational punishment.

At the time of the destruction of the Temple, many complained that God unfairly punished them for the sins of their ancestors: "Our fathers sinned and are no more; and we must bear their guilt" (Lam. 5:7; cf. Jer. 31:29; Ezek. 18:2). Kings addresses their concern by agreeing that they were in fact suffering primarily for the sins of their ancestors. However, this was fair and part of a broader pattern in God's judgment. The generation of the destruction did not have to be the worst generation in order to experience the nation's worst disaster. Kings teaches that God was fair, and therefore did not permanently abandon Israel.

Samuel and Kings form the completion of the first nine biblical books comprising the Torah and "Early Prophets." The pattern of David and Solomon's reigns follows a pattern set out in the Torah. The world began with instability (*tohu va-bohu*); people were placed in the Garden of Eden conditional on their faithfulness to God's command; sin undermined the fabric of creation by leading to exile from Eden and ultimately the Flood. Similarly, the reigns of David and Solomon also started with instability. Through faithfulness to God, David was accepted by all

and Solomon built a stable empire and a Temple that symbolizes the Garden of Eden;[7] then sin undermined the stability leading to destruction and exile. Anticipating these disasters, Jeremiah poignantly laments the reversal of creation to its primeval state of desolation:

> I look at the earth, it is unformed and void (*tohu va-bohu*); at the skies, and their light is gone. (Jer. 4:23)

Chronicles

> Adam, Seth, Enosh; Kenan, Mahalalel, Jared; Enoch, Methuselah, Lamech; Noah, Shem, Ham, and Japheth. (I Chron. 1:1–4)

By opening from the beginnings of humanity, Chronicles casts itself as a "new version" of the first nine biblical books, culminating with the building of the Second Temple. The Returnees to Zion were led by Zerubbabel, a Davidic descendant; and Jeshua, the High Priest from the Zadokite line.

The nine chapters of genealogies connect the Returnees to the beginnings of humanity, and also to the idealized Golden Age of David and Solomon. David, Zadok, and the Levitical choir families have their pedigrees traced back to Adam. I Chronicles 9 parallels the roster of returnees to Israel in Nehemiah 11, stressing that all of human history from Adam until the Second Temple period is linked.

Sara Japhet extends this idea to the overall purpose of Chronicles:

> By reformulating Israel's history in its formative period, the Chronicler gives new significance to the two components of Israelite life: The past is explained so that its institutions and religious principles become relevant to the present, and the ways of the present are legitimized anew by being connected to the prime source of authority—the formative period in the people's past. Thus, Chronicles … strengthens the bond between past and present and proclaims the continuity of Israel's faith and history.[8]

There is a consistent effort in Chronicles to demonstrate continuity throughout the generations. This premise also explains Chronicles' efforts to connect the building of the First Temple with the Tabernacle discussed earlier.

In a similar vein, Chronicles demonstrates the ongoing stability of Israel and the Davidic dynasty. Its narrative therefore characterizes the reigns of David and Solomon as stable from their outset and it omits reference to rebellions, divisions, or the major sins of these individuals.

In order to further portray a nation that is secure and enduring despite the monumental rupture at the time of the destruction of the Temple, Chronicles downplays the idea of intergenerational punishment (and merit). It teaches instead that the people are unburdened by their bleak past. Manasseh is not explicitly blamed for the destruction in Chronicles (though Huldah alludes to the decree in II Chron. 34:23–28). Chronicles focuses on individual responsibility, so it can include Manasseh's repentance. Kings, which depends on Manasseh's unprecedented sinfulness and intergenerational punishment to justify the destruction, could not include any sign of his repentance.[9] By highlighting Manasseh's repentance and God's acceptance of his prayer, Chronicles teaches that *anyone* can repent, and God never shuts the door to penitents (cf. *Sanhedrin* 103a).

On a broader level, Manasseh's sin, exile to Babylonia, repentance, and return to Israel symbolizes the trajectory of the nation of Israel. This parallel is strengthened by the fact that the Assyrians exiled Manasseh to Babylonia (II Chron. 33:11) instead of to their capital, Nineveh. Thus, Manasseh serves as a microcosm for the returnees. The Jewish people had endured the destruction of the Temple and exile to Babylonia for their sins, but God accepted their prayers and repentance and returned them to Israel.

When Chronicles was written, it must have stunned the Jews who already knew the bleak Kings narrative and who may have still felt rejected by God. Instead of being a secondary book to Samuel and Kings, Chronicles functions as a prophecy and conveys religious messages to people of its time. Through insertions, omissions, and other changes to the Samuel–Kings narratives, Chronicles teaches God's relationship with Israel and the House of David is stable and eternal, and that there is full continuity with the past.

The most important point of any biblical historical narrative is the prophetic message that underlies it. Because we have alternate versions of prophetic history in Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles, we have the ability to see how each prophet *could* have written the story. This gift enables us to hone in on the overall

purposes of each book, gaining multiple perspectives on prophetic truth.

Notes

[1] This essay appeared originally in Hayyim Angel, *Vision from the Prophet and Counsel from the Elders: A Survey of Nevi'im and Ketuvim* (New York: OU Press, 2013), pp. 329–341. Several sections of this essay were adapted from Hayyim Angel, "Seeking Prophecy in Historical Narratives: Ahaz and Hizkiyah in Kings and Chronicles," *Milin Havivin: Beloved Words* 2 (2006), pp. 171–184; and "Seeking Prophecy in Historical Narratives: Manasseh and Josiah in Kings and Chronicles," *Milin Havivin: Beloved Words* 3 (2007), pp. 110–121; reprinted in Angel, *Revealed Texts, Hidden Meanings: Finding the Religious Significance in Tanakh* (Jersey City, NJ: Ktav-Sephardic Publication Foundation, 2009), pp. 227–244, 245–261.

[2] Joshua A. Berman, *Inconsistency in the Torah: Ancient Literary Convention and the Limits of Source Criticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

[3] Abarbanel, *Nevi'im Rishonim* (Jerusalem: Torah VeDa'at Press, 1955), pp. 163–164. See also his introduction to Kings on pp. 428–429.

[4] Isaac Kalimi, *The Reshaping of Ancient Israelite History in Chronicles* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005), p. 1. See further discussions in Abarbanel, introduction to Early Prophets, p. 8; introduction to Kings, p. 428; Yehudah Kiel, *Da'at Mikra: I Chronicles* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Mossad HaRav Kook, 1986), introduction pp. 51–55.

[5] See discussion of this attribution in Kiel, *Da'at Mikra: I Chronicles,* introduction p. 140; *II Chronicles,* appendix pp. 89–90.

[6] Kiel, *Da'at Mikra: I Chronicles,* introduction p. 140.

[7] See, e.g., *Num. Rabbah* 12:6: "Rabbi Simeon bar Yohai said, '...From the beginning of the world's creation the Divine Presence had dwelt in this lower

world; as it says, “And they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden….” (Gen. 3:8), but once the Divine Presence departed at the time when Adam sinned, it did not descend again until the Tabernacle had been erected.’” Also *Pirkei D’Rabbi Eliezer* 20: “‘He drove the man out’ (Gen. 3:24)—He was driven from the Garden of Eden and settled on Mount Moriah, for the entrance to the Garden of Eden opens onto Mount Moriah.” For a survey of other biblical passages that link Eden to the Temple, and discussion of how this connection relates to its ancient Near Eastern setting, see Lawrence E. Stager, “Jerusalem as Eden,” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 26:3 (May–June 2000), pp. 36–47.

[8] Sara Japhet, *Old Testament Library: I and II Chronicles* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), p. 49.

[9] On intergenerational punishment in Kings, Ezekiel, and Chronicles, see Gershon Brin, *Iyyunim BeSefer Yehezkel* (Hebrew), (Tel Aviv University: The United Kibbutz Press, 1975), pp. 80–105; Japhet, *Emunot VeDe’ot BeSefer Divrei HaYamim*, pp. 138–154; Yehudah Kiel, *Da’at Mikra: I Kings* (Jerusalem: Mossad HaRav Kook, 1989), introduction pp. 124–127. See also Hayyim Angel, “Did Ezekiel Change Torah Theology?” in Angel, *Vision from the Prophet and Counsel from the Elders: A Survey of Nevi’im and Ketuvim* (New York: OU Press, 2013), pp. 153–162.