

Wise Worship and Obedient Wisdom: Chronicles and an integrated life

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ABSTRACT

“The fear of Yahweh is the beginning of wisdom” rings out in the wisdom books. The book of Psalms in its structure and content exemplifies the intertwining of wisdom and worship. Yet it is stories that are powerful in changing lives, so alongside Proverbs and Psalms belongs Chronicles. For a community that was probably somewhat dispirited, struggling to carry on “life as usual” in a small province within the all-pervasive Persian empire, Chronicles tells of ways to “prosper, succeed” (the verb so translated occurs 13 times in Chronicles, only 2 in Kings). Temple worship is central and closely associated are arrangements for teaching throughout the land. Wisdom is required in the exercise of worship and worship is central to a life lived with wisdom. Wisdom (seen in practical understanding, discernment and ability) is exercised by many people in diverse contexts (building with its varied crafts, music and singing, administering a nation, defence, and common life). The story can encourage a community, helping to sustain integrated living that brings success.

“The fear of Yahweh” is a thread throughout the Hebrew Bible, expressed in worship of Yahweh alone and faithfulness to the covenant.¹ While worship itself is barely mentioned in Wisdom books,² they affirm that “the fear of Yahweh is the beginning of wisdom”, essential for successful living.³ Doing what is right and just is a frequent motif in all, Ecclesiastes ends “fear God and keep his commandments, for this is for all humanity” (Eccl. 12:13) and Job is described as one who “feared God and shunned evil” (Job 1:1,8).⁴ The “fear of Yahweh” is a common motif in Psalms (more than 20x) and the book exemplifies the intertwining of wisdom and worship: Psalms opens with what is commonly regarded as a wisdom psalm, with other

¹ H. F. Fuhs, “אָרָה: *yārē*,” in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. 6 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 200; M. V. Van Pelt and W. C. Kaiser, Jr., “אָרָה: *yārē*,” in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. Willem A. VanGemeren, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997).

² Job 1:5; 42:8 refer to “burnt offerings”.

³ Job 28:28; Prov. 1:7; 9:10; 15:33 (cf. 14:16; also Ps. 111:10). “Fear of Yahweh/God” occurs 18x in Proverbs, 2x in Job, and 5x in Ecclesiastes.

⁴ All scripture quotations are mine unless otherwise specified.

wisdom psalms at key structural locations.⁵ Psalms is both corporate prayer and instruction for life.⁶ The Wisdom books and Psalms provide a content for wisdom instruction that implies a worship context at its core, without excluding family and other settings.

Yet it is stories that are powerful in changing lives, foundational to thought and action, stirring the imagination and will, shaping attitudes and responses to the vicissitudes of life. I will argue that alongside Proverbs and Psalms belongs Chronicles. The narrative brings worship and wisdom together, integrating worship, law obedience, a structure for instruction, and examples of associated “success” in a wide range of activities.⁷

Chronicles, alongside Proverbs and Psalms in the Writings

For a community that was probably somewhat dispirited, struggling to carry on “life as usual” in a small province within the all-pervasive Persian empire, Chronicles tells of ways to “prosper, succeed” (*šālah* occurs 13 times in Chronicles of 55 in the whole OT; in Kings, only 1 Kgs 22:12,15, the words of false prophets!). Temple worship with the singing of psalms is central and closely associated are arrangements for teaching throughout the land. The book affirms wisdom (practical understanding, discernment and ability) for diverse contexts (building with its varied crafts, music and singing, administering a nation, and common life). The story encourages a community, helping to sustain integrated living that brings success.

The canonical placing of Chronicles can influence reading. The earliest evidence comes from the Christian tradition: in fourth century Septuagint codices and patristic lists Chronicles follows Samuel and Kings and is named *Paraleipomenon* “matters left out”.⁸ It is thus often treated as a kind of historical appendix, and skipped over as much is based on Kings. Recent decades however have seen growing recognition that the Chronicler’s use of sources and his own material show him to be “a person of much greater literary skill than is usually attributed to him”⁹ and his emphases become important.

There are two Jewish traditions. A single Babylonian Talmudic reference (BT, Baba Bathra 14b) reports rabbinic tradition placing Chronicles as the last book in the Writings, and this was followed in European Hebrew Bibles of the late middle ages and so today. This position sees

⁵ Psalms 1,37,39,49,73,90,139 are commonly designated as wisdom psalms, together with acrostic psalms, 9–10,25,34,37,111,112,119,145; several focus on *torah* and the commandments. Erhard S. Gerstenberger, *Psalms, Part 1; with an Introduction to Cultic Poetry*, Forms of Old Testament Literature (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 19–21; Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 1-59, a Commentary*, trans. Hilton C. Oswald (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1988), 58–60.

⁶ J. Clinton McCann, Jr., “The Book of Psalms: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections,” in *The New Interpreter's Bible: A Commentary in Twelve Volumes*, vol. 4 (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 650.

⁷ Two much-used introductions to Wisdom material, James L. Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom: An Introduction* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1981) and Roland E. Murphy, *The Tree of Life: An Exploration of Biblical Wisdom Literature* (New York: Doubleday, 1990) have no reference to Chronicles. Paul B. Overland, “Wisdom,” in *Dictionary of the Old Testament Historical Books*, ed. Bill T. Arnold and H. G. M. Williamson (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2005) discusses mainly Judges-Kings but alludes to Chronicles regarding royal counsellors (1 Chr. 27:32–33; 2 Chr. 25:1) and a possible tutor of the king’s sons (1 Chr. 27:32).

⁸ The title “Chronicles” was first used by Luther, *Die Chronika*, following a suggestion of Jerome. This came into English first in Miles Coverdale’s 1535 translation.

⁹ Roddy Braun, *1 Chronicles*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, TX: Word, 1986), xxv.

Chronicles as a review of history, beginning with Adam (1 Chr. 1:1), and focusing on God's kingship, David and the temple and subsequent kings. The ending of the Hebrew Bible is then a single word, *wēya'al* "Let (anyone) go up", an invitation—or better, command—to demonstrate one's allegiance to God's reign through worship at the temple. God's word requires response.

The earliest Hebrew textual evidence however is the medieval Masoretic and Spanish manuscripts which have Chronicles as the first book of the Writings. It thus provides the historical setting and warrant for the inclusion of Psalms (since Chronicles tells of David's ordering of and arrangements for the singing of psalms at the temple) and Wisdom Literature (which begins with "The Proverbs of Solomon, son of David, king of Israel"). Further, the Chronicler's narrative closely intertwines David and Solomon, worship and wisdom, associating both kings with temple building and its worship.

Solomon, wisdom, success, law-keeping and the temple

It has been said that "Solomon's wisdom has become less prominent in Chronicles" with no mention of the judging of the two mothers or details of Solomon's wide-ranging wisdom (2 Kings 3:16-28; 4:29-34 [MT 5:9-14]).¹⁰ Yet in various ways the Chronicler does highlight Solomon's wisdom, but with emphases that are relevant throughout the book to readers, more than simply exalting Solomon. Wisdom is necessary for and exercised in a wide range of activities, but focused in temple building and worship—such wisdom is exercised corporately each person using their skills. Wisdom comes from knowing and following God's laws, that is the path to success.

In material unique to Chronicles, Solomon is first mentioned through David's charge to him to build the temple, with "success" flowing from Yahweh granting Solomon "insight and discernment (*šēkel ūbînā*)" as he "puts you in charge over Israel and with regard to keeping the Teaching of Yahweh ... the statutes and rulings that Yahweh charged Moses for Israel" (1 Chr. 22:11-13). Intertwined are wisdom, temple, law-keeping, and success. The end of the account of Solomon affirms his pre-eminence in wisdom (2 Chr. 9:22-23 // 1 Kgs 10:23-24).

The Chronicler's account of Solomon's reign begins with reshaping the visit to Gibeon and God's appearing to him. In contrast to Kings¹¹ the retelling uses "wisdom and knowledge [*hokmā ūmaddā*]" three times, the first in Solomon's words and twice in God's response (2 Chr. 1:10-12). "Knowledge" is much broader than discernment in judgement: the post-exilic word, *maddā'* is used of the "knowledge" given to Daniel and his friends (Dan. 1:4,17) and

¹⁰ Sara Japhet, *The Ideology of the Book of Chronicles and Its Place in Biblical Thought*, trans. Anna Barber (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1989; repr., Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2009), 483/376.

¹¹ 1 Kgs 3:9-12: Solomon asks for "a hearing heart [*lēb šōmēa*] to govern your people and to discern [*hābîn*] between right and wrong" and in response God says that because Solomon has asked for "discernment in hearing justice [*hābîn lišmōa*]" he will give him "a wise and discerning heart [*lēb hākām wēnābîn*]".

can be compared with widespread mention of “knowledge” in Proverbs (*dā’at*, 40 times). The related Aramaic *mandā’* is used elsewhere in Daniel of a broad spectrum of knowledge, reasoning and understanding (2:21; 4:31,33; 5:12). It speaks of “comprehensive knowledge and intellectual flexibility”; in the later Sirach 3:13 “one must not despise one’s father simply because his intellectual flexibility decreases with advancing age”.¹²

It is soon evident that “Solomon’s wisdom is considered important when it comes to the building of the Temple”.¹³ The linkage of wisdom and temple is made explicit in Hiram¹⁴ of Tyre’s response to Solomon’s request for help. 2 Chronicles 2:1-18 is a reshaping of the Kings account of negotiations with and help from Hiram of Tyre.¹⁵ In particular Hiram’s expanded opening words highlight Solomon’s wisdom and direct it immediately to his building of the temple and palace.

1 Kgs 5:7(21)

2 Chr. 2:11-12

When Hiram heard Solomon’s message, he rejoiced greatly and said, ‘Blessed be Yahweh today, who has given David a wise son [*bēn ḥākām*] to rule over this great people.’

Hiram king of Tyre replied in writing to Solomon: ‘Because Yahweh loves his people, he has made you their king.’ And Hiram added: ‘Blessed be Yahweh, the God of Israel, who made the heavens and earth, who has given King David a wise son, knowing insight and discernment [*bēn ḥākām yōdēa’ šēkel ūbīnā*] who will build a house for Yahweh and a house for his kingship’.

Importantly, the Chronicler continues his reshaping by highlighting the same qualities exercised by another person. They are not unique to the king. After describing Solomon as “a wise son, knowing insight and discernment” (2 Chr. 2:12), Hiram of Tyre continues immediately, “I am sending you Hiram-Abi,¹⁶ a wise man knowing discernment [*’iš-ḥākām yōdēa’ bīnā*; NIV, “a man of great skill”; NJPSV: “a skilful and intelligent man”]. This description is foregrounded, followed by “the son of a woman from the daughters of Dan and whose father was from Tyre. He knows how [*yōdēa*] to work in gold and silver, ... and all kinds of engraving and can execute any design given to him. He will work with your skilled workers [*ḥākāmeykā*] and with those of my lord, David your father” (vv. 13,14). Two “wise sons” are to be involved in the temple building, Solomon and Hiram-Abi: different social and

¹²G. Johannes Botterweck, “יָדָא, *yāda’*,” in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. 5 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 480.

¹³ Japhet, 484/377.

¹⁴ In MT Samuel-Kings the king’s name is predominantly *Hīram* but in Chronicles always *Hūram*.

¹⁵ 1 Kgs 5:1-18(15-32); 7:13-14. Where MT verse numbers are different from English versions they are shown in brackets.

¹⁶ The name of the Tyrian craftsman varies: “Hiram” in 1 Kgs 7:13,40,45; “Hiram-abi” in 2 Chronicles 2:13; 4:16; and “Hiram” in 4:11a. In 4:11b the Hebrew text has written “Hiram” but is to be read “Hiram”. “Hiram-abi” has been interpreted by some as “Hiram, my father/master (craftsman)”. See Raymond B. Dillard, *2 Chronicles*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, TX: Word, 1987), 20-21.

ethnic backgrounds, dissimilar abilities, yet both equally endowed with “wisdom” and both essential for the task—together *with* other “wise” people!

The use of *ḥākām* for skilled artisans is well-known and is seen earlier in 1 Chronicles 22:15 after a list of artisans, “every kind of wise person for every kind of task [*kol-ḥākām bēkol-mēlā’kā*]” related to the temple, and in Exodus 35:10,25; 36:1-8 of the tabernacle makers. Similar is David’s words to Solomon, “The divisions of the priests and Levites are ready for all the work [serving, *lēkol-’ābōda*] on [of] the temple of God, and every willing person *with wisdom for all the serving* [*baḥokmā lēkol-’ābōdā*]” (1 Chron. 28:21). The “serving” relates to all the diverse ministry of the priests and Levites and the military and tribal officials (organised in chs. 23-27): sacrifices and offerings, music and singing, security, financial property, and administration throughout the land. Temple worship is central, but “wisdom” is needed by all.

The necessity, scope and results of “wisdom” are seen in the account that follows after Solomon’s reign. Here I consider briefly three intertwined wisdom features of the Chronicler’s history-telling: (1) the association of wisdom and worship, (2) the usage of wisdom-related words, and (3) Chronicles’ contribution to ongoing wisdom discussions of God’s involvement in the relationship between acts and consequences.

For the community in the Persian period, probably at least half a century after Ezra and Nehemiah, without a Davidic king, attention is drawn to what David and Solomon established that does continue: the temple, its worship and personnel, including structures for teaching, wisdom for worship, life and success.

Wisdom, Temple Worship and Prospering

Unexpectedly after God’s promise to Solomon of “wisdom and knowledge” the Chronicler inserts a summary of Solomon’s success from later in Kings (1 Kgs 10:26-29): building military resources (chariots and horses) and accumulating wealth (silver, gold and cedar)—to be repeated at 2 Chronicles 9:25-28. The association of wisdom, worship and success/prosperity is repeated in 8:1–9:28, so providing a parallel structure of matching topics surrounding the building and dedication of “a house for the name of Yahweh” (chs 2–7):

1:1	Solomon to be “exceedingly great”	8:1-11	Expanded territory and building
1:2-6	Burnt offerings at the altar at Gibeon	8:12-16	Offerings at the altar in the temple
1:7-13	God appears to Solomon, with	8:17–9:24	Solomon’s wisdom acclaimed amongst the nations, bringing

	promises of wisdom and wealth		wealth
1:14-17	Brief summary of wealth (including chariots and horses)	9:25-28	Repetition of details of wealth, horses and chariots, and extended territory

Another structural feature is the parallel between 1:2-13 (at Gibeon) and 5:2–7:22 (at the temple in Jerusalem). In Chronicles at both places Solomon gathers together national leaders for worship, followed by God appearing at night to Solomon. This serves to show king and people together in the transition from Gibeon to Jerusalem, with God’s blessing.¹⁷ For people as well as king prosperity is linked with the right use of “wisdom and knowledge”, evident in loyal worship in accordance with God’s decrees. This is a fulfilment of David’s earlier charge to build the temple. Temple building and law-obedience go together, and require wisdom, insight and understanding that is corporate.

Where is “wisdom” exercised? Wisdom-related language in Chronicles

I have commented above on the description of people involved with temple building and worship, including skilled artisans, as “wise”. Chronicles is also replete with people who “know” various skills: amongst David’s troops, men from Issachar “knew how to discern the times to know what Israel should do [*yôd’ê bînâ la’ittîm lāda’at ma-yya’āšeh yiśrā’ēl*]” (1 Chr. 12:32); artisans “know engraving” and “cutting timber” (2 Chr. 2:7,8 [6,7]); both Solomon and Hiram-abi “know understanding/ discernment [*yôd’ê bînâ*]” for their different tasks (vv. 11,12 [10,11]); Tyrian sailors “know the sea” (8:18). This is the knowledge that comes from experience and training, learning how to live and work in a range of situations. During the reign of Rehoboam Shishak of Egypt attacked, with the prophet Shemaiah announcing Yahweh’s message, “You have abandoned me; therefore, I now abandon you to Shishak”. King and leaders then “humble themselves” and Yahweh’s message continues, “Since they have humbled themselves, I will not destroy them but will soon give them deliverance ... They will, however, become Shishak’s servants, so that they may *know* (*wěyēdē’û*, also ‘learn’) serving me and serving the kings of other lands” (2 Chr. 12:5-8). Perhaps this is a coded message to the Chronicler’s hearers, now under Persian rule. There is a need to “know” how to live in the realities of the current situation, but never separated from learning how to “serve Yahweh”.

¹⁷ Leslie C. Allen, “The First and Second Books of Chronicles,” in *The New Interpreter’s Bible: A Commentary in Twelve Volumes*, vol. 3 (Nashville: Abingdon, 1999), 470. 1 Kgs 3:4 mentions only “the king” going to Gibeon. A distinctive of Chronicles is frequent association with the king, in both decision making and actions, of “leaders”, commonly an “assembly” (*qahal*; translated in LXX, *ekklesia*) of representatives of all tribes (“all Israel”). Of 33 instances of *qahal* in Chronicles, only four (2 Chr. 6:3[x2],12; 7:8) are also in Kings. See discussion in H. G. M. Williamson, *Israel in the Book of Chronicles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 87-140.

A wide range of situations is likewise seen in instances of *bîn* “understand, discern”. Several relate to the skills of Levitical temple musicians, especially those who lead (1 Chr. 15:22; 25:7,8; 2 Chr. 34:12) or “teach” (2 Chr. 25:8),¹⁸ while others describe administrative roles, kings, scribes and Levites (1 Chr. 27:32¹⁹; 2 Chr. 2:12; 11:23), including the task of teaching (“causing to understand”; 2 Chr. 26:5; 35:3; cf. 17:7-9). The few occurrences of *śkl* (noun and verb, “(have) insight, success”; cf. Prov. 1:3) describe Solomon, in keeping the law (1 Chr. 22:12) and understanding the plans for the temple (28:19; 2 Chr. 2:11), a gatekeeper/counsellor, so interpreting the laws regarding the temple (administrative, 26:14), and Levites (singing and administration, 2 Chr. 30:22). These occurrences illustrate how *śkl* has come to refer “to the wisdom of an intellectual elite”.²⁰ This can be focused further by noting how often the words are associated with Levites who are involved in teaching the law and settling disputes along with “judges” (2 Chr. 19:5-11; in Deut. 16:18-19 “judges” are among the “wise” [*hākāmîm*]).²¹

Similar to a link between “wisdom”, centred in worship, and success/prospering, “the fear of Yahweh” is associated with obedience and positive results. In Solomon’s intercessory prayer at the temple dedication the plea for God to hear in times of famine or plagues or enemy attack concludes “so that they will fear you *by walking in your ways* [added in Chronicles] all the time they live on the land that you gave our ancestors” (2 Chr. 6:31; cf. 1 Kgs 8:40). In Jehoshaphat’s reforms, both judges and Levites appointed to decide cases in Jerusalem and throughout the land are to do so “in the fear of Yahweh” (2 Chr. 19:7 [*paḥad*], 9 [*yir’af*]). When the community so acts nations around also come to “fear Yahweh” with resulting peace (17:10; 20:29-30). Illustrative is the Chronicler’s statement concerning Uzziah: “He sought God during the days of Zechariah, who instructed him in the fear of God. During the days he sought Yahweh, God gave him success [*hiṣliḥ*]” (26:5).

In summary, “Wisdom, knowledge, insight, discernment” and “the fear of Yahweh” are spoken of in a range of contexts. Many relate to the temple, including skills in building and furnishing, but also in music and administration. There are contexts of general rule of the people, including judges, and meeting military threats from surrounding nations. These are intertwined: success in general life, including relationships with neighbouring people, is

¹⁸ A “teacher” is *mābîn* “the one who understands” This verse has the only OT instance of the later word for “student” *talmîd* [cf. Isa. 8:16: *limmûd*] pointing to formal instruction. Cf. Graham I. Davies, “Were There Schools in Ancient Israel?,” in *Wisdom in Ancient Israel*, ed. John Day, Robert P. Gordon, and H.G.M. Williamson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 200.

¹⁹ Their role probably included tutoring “the king’s sons”; Overland, 985.

²⁰ K. Koenen, “שָׂכַל *śākal*,” in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. 14 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 117. Also in Daniel 1:4,17; 9:25; 11:33,35; 12:3,10. The root occurs 19x in Proverbs and 21x in the Hebrew fragments of Sirach.

²¹ Joseph Blenkinsopp, “Wisdom in the Chronicler’s Work,” in *In Search of Wisdom: Essays in Memory of John G. Gammie*, ed. Leo G. Perdue, Bernard Brandon Scott, and William Johnston Wiseman (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1993), discusses the difference in socio-economic context between Yehud and Greece with its philosophers.

related to faithfulness in worship and obedience of the laws of Moses. Narrative effectively provides the total intertwining picture with its diversity of examples of life experiences.

Wisdom and “success”: the relation between act and consequence.

The canonical placing in the Jewish tradition, whether at the beginning or the end of the Writings, is a reminder that Chronicles is written within an intellectual milieu and vigorous debates represented by the Wisdom books. Its narrative addresses the relationship between faithfulness/ unfaithfulness and prosperity/ disaster. The account is replete with examples of how individuals and communities are to gain “wisdom, understanding, discernment, knowledge” for life that “prosper/succeeds”.

Noted at the beginning was the Chronicler’s frequent use of *šlh* “be successful, enjoy success, prosper”. In Chronicles Solomon is “successful” in building the temple in accord with David’s instructions when he also obeys Moses’ laws (1 Chr. 22:11,13; cf. later 2 Chr. 26:5). Solomon, Uzziah and Hezekiah each experience “success, prosperity” overall associated with faithfulness, including relating to the temple worship (1 Chr. 29:23; 2 Chr. 7:11; 26:5; 31:21; 32:30). “Success” is mentioned in military and defensive contexts, positively when there is faithfulness or responding positively to a prophet’s message (2 Chr. 13:12; 20:20), or negatively when commandments are broken, despite warnings from prophets (2 Chr. 24:20; cf. 18:11,14 // 1Kgs 22:12,15).

While “success, prospering” is described in wisdom contexts outside Chronicles with a variety of words, a form of *šlh* occurs in Proverbs only once: “the one who covers their transgression will not succeed/prosper” (28:13) and in Psalms only four times, including the contrast between the “righteous” person who ponders God’s law and “prosper” (1:3) and “don’t fret when the evildoer prospers” (37:7; see also 45:4[5]; 118:25). Hausman notes that “the Chronicler is accommodating the use of *šlh* to his interest in the act-consequence schema, closely coupling piety with the success of construction projects and military undertakings. Here too it is ultimately Yahweh who is responsible for that success even though such is not explicitly stated. The same applies to Proverbs 28:13 [cited above]”.²² Oeming has even argued that the *Talio* (“of the same kind”) principle seen in the *lex talionis* of Exodus 21:22-25 (cf. Lev. 24:20; Deut. 19:21) is “an expression of legal-theological wisdom” and that “*the whole Chronicist historiography is based on the sapiential principle of the Talio*”.²³

²² J. Hausmann, “*נִלְחַ שְׁלַח*,” in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. 12 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 384-85.

²³ Manfred Oeming, “Wisdom as a Central Category in the Book of the Chronicler: The Significance of the *Talio* Principle in a Sapiential Construction of History,” in *Shai Le-Sarah Japhet: Studies in the Bible, Its Exegesis and Its Languages*, ed. Mosheh Bar-Asher, et al. (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 2007), 138*,139*; emphasis his.

Much has been written on the Chronicler's emphasis on retribution.²⁴ Japhet has summarised how the Chronicler reworks historical events, without altering the historical facts:²⁵

1. in the case of any transgression (described as such in Samuel–Kings or conceived as such by the Chronicler), an appropriate punishment is added by the Chronicler;²⁶
2. whenever righteousness or piety is displayed with no mention of recompense, the Chronicler adds a fitting reward;²⁷
3. every difficulty, affliction, and defeat is automatically perceived as retribution. For this reason, when any incident which might be a punishment remains unexplained, the Chronicler adds a suitable sin;²⁸
4. every success, whether personal or public, is considered a reward. Whenever a possible reward is mentioned without the appropriate causes for it, the Chronicler provides the source of merit;²⁹
5. if two occurrences, one a possible sin, the other an apparent punishment, are described independently, the Chronicler makes a causal connection between the two.³⁰

While she affirms that “the principle of cause and effect is evident throughout Chronicles”, she qualifies in a parenthesis, “although not operative in every single incident”.³¹ An extreme instance where faithfulness leads to violent death is the killing of Zechariah the priest (2 Chr. 24:20-22). There are also many instances where the wider population suffers because of a king's wrongdoing (e.g., David's census, 1 Chr. 21:14), although at times widespread unfaithfulness is mentioned (as in Kings).

The Chronicler's particular expression of cause and effect as related to Yahweh's actions is clearly stated in two passages. They introduce words and phrases that permeate the narrative as various events are seen to illustrate their truth. In the first, David charges Solomon: “If you *seek* Yahweh, he will *be found* by you, but if you *forsake* him, he will *cast you off forever*” (1 Chr. 28:9).³² Later, following Solomon's temple dedication prayer, Yahweh

²⁴ E.g., Sara Japhet's chapter on “Reworking the Historical Narrative According to the Principles of Retribution” in Japhet, 129-38; Raymond B. Dillard, “Reward and Punishment in Chronicles : The Theology of Immediate Retribution,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 46 (1984); and Brian E. Kelly, *Retribution and Eschatology in Chronicles*, JSOT Supplement Series 211 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996). including a table of the motifs of blessing and reward and of punishment and restoration for all kings after Solomon (pp. 242-43).

²⁵ Japhet, 130-31.

²⁶ 2 Chr. 13:17-20; 16:7-9; 22:16-19; 28:17-21; 33:11.

²⁷ 2 Chr. 14:5-7,11-14; 15:15; 17:2-5,10-19; 20:1-30; 24:15-16; 26:6-15; 27:3-6; 32:27-30.

²⁸ 2 Chr. 16:10,12; 20:35-37; 24:17-19,21-22,24,25; 25:14-16,27; 26:16-20; 35:22; 36:12-16.

²⁹ 2 Chr. 11:5-23; 12:6,7,12; 13:10-12; 18:31; 25:7-10; 33:12-13.

³⁰ 1 Chr. 10:13-14; 2 Chr. 12:2,5; 21:10; 28:19.

³¹ Japhet, 131.

³² *Seek* (*dāraš*) occurs in a religious context almost forty times in Chronicles, generally expressing devotion to God, but also used of God “searching” (or “seeking” a responsive heart). The promise that he “will be found [*yimmāšē*]” is repeated in 2 Chr. 15:2 in a passage which reports how God “was found” both in the past and in that current situation (vv. 4,15). The opposite, “forsake/leave/abandon [*’āšab*]” is used 19 times in passages unique to Chronicles, both of people “(not) forsaking” God, his commandments or the temple (2 Chr. 7:19,22; 12:1; 13:10,11; 21:10; 24:18,24; 28:6; 29:6; 34:25) and of God “(not) forsaking” his people (1 Chr. 28:20), and sometimes in the combination of God “forsaking” the people because they “forsook” him (2 Chr. 12:5; 15:2; 24:20).

responds: “If my people who are called by my name, *humble themselves*, and *pray* and *seek* my face and *turn* from their wicked ways, then I will *hear* from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land” (2 Chr. 7:14).³³

The above words and phrases occur in many passages unique to Chronicles, or as added comments in passages matching Kings. They may be compared to the contrasting motifs of humility before God and pride seen throughout wisdom books. Negatively speaking, “forsaking” may be evident in apostasy, neglect of the temple, rejection of prophetic warnings, or blatant injustice, and leads to war, defeat and loss. In contrast, “humbling”, “seeking,” “turning,” etc., leads to blessings of prosperity and peace. Both judgement and restoration are often immediate (but not always), although punishment is generally delayed to give opportunity for change, with prophets sent to urge repentance, with forgiveness following (e.g., 2 Chr. 12:1-8; 16:7-10; 19:1-3; 24:17-20; summarized in 36:15-16). Related are repeated exhortations to follow God’s ways as the path to “succeed, prosper” (forms of *šlh*) and examples of such success.

We are not to see a mechanical cause and effect (*quid pro quo*) but rather the actions of a God who desires that his people serve him wholeheartedly. “It is not a fixed principle imposed on history but a possible tool to use if the age warrants it”, flowing from Yahweh’s relationship with his people.³⁴ Especially in restoration, God’s forgiving grace stands out, seen, for example, in the temple being on the site where David offered sacrifice in repentance (1 Chr. 21:16–22:1), and in the unexpected account of Manasseh’s “humbling himself” and God’s merciful response (2 Chr. 33:10-13).

³³ While the vocabulary of verse 14 was occasionally used previously in Chronicles in a non-theological or neutral sense, from here on the words speak of relationship with God and are key motifs in later added incidents or comments unique to 2 Chronicles.

King	Rehoboam	Asa	Jehoshaphat	Hezekiah	Manasseh	Josiah	Zedekiah
“humble oneself” (<i>niknaʿ</i>)	12:6, 7 (X2), 12			30:11; 32:36	33:12, 19, 23 (X2);	34:27 (X2)	36:12
“pray” (<i>hitpallel</i>)				30:18; 32:20, 24	33:13		
“seek” (<i>biqqeš</i>)	11:16	15:4, 15	20:4 (X2)				
“turn (to God)” (<i>šub</i>)		15:4		30:6, 9 (X2);			36:13.
See also: “seek” (<i>dāraš</i>)	12:14	14:4, 7 (X2); 15:2, 12, 13; 16:12	17:3, 4; 19:3; 20:3 Amaziah: 25:15, 20 Uzziah: 26:5 (X2)	30:19; 31:21		34:3	

³⁴ John W. Wright, “Divine Retribution in Herodotus and the Book of Chronicles,” in *Chronicling the Chronicler: The Book of Chronicles and Early Second Temple Historiography*, ed. Paul S. Evans and Tyler F. Williams (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2014), 209.

By narrating several examples of God's response when people turned to him, the Chronicler encourages his hearers: as God has kept his promises in the past, so they can look forward in hope as they "turn" to him.³⁵ God desires to bring full restoration to his people, and calls them to be faithful, loyally trusting and worshipping him alone, keeping his laws. Hope is sustained in "humbly" worshipping him. "Wisdom, understanding, discernment, knowledge" cannot be separated from faithfulness. By telling the story the Chronicler has "opt[ed] for ... the practical wisdom of fidelity to a law conceived to have been available from the beginning of the nation's history".³⁶

Conclusion

The Chronicler recognises that the relationship between individual and corporate behaviour is complex—people do suffer at the hand of wrongdoers. There is no presentation of a rigid *quid pro quo*, but over against Ecclesiastes "what do I gain by being wise?" (Eccl. 2:15; cf. 6:8,11) where he can he tells of many historical instances where there has been "success" associated with faithfulness in worship and keeping the commandments. The outworking of the pairings of 1 Chronicles 28:9 may not be evident in every life experience but they are generally true. When a community uses wisdom in praise of God and is obedient in the use of understanding and knowledge, then there is blessing.

The story told by the Chronicler by its historical examples, intertwining wisdom, worship and law obedience, exemplifies the exhortation and results of Deuteronomy 4:5-8:

See, I have taught you decrees and rulings as Yahweh my God commanded me³⁷ ... Observe them carefully, for this be your wisdom and understanding [*ḥokmā ûbînâ*]³⁸ in the eyes of the peoples, who will hear about all these decrees and say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people [*'am-ḥākām wēnābôn*].' For what great nation has their gods near them the way Yahweh our God is near us whenever we call to him? And what great nation has such righteous decrees and rulings as this Teaching [*torâ*] I am setting before you today?

These words are echoed in David's first charge to Solomon and are fulfilled at the end of the Solomon narrative as the rulers of nations are drawn by Solomon's wisdom and wealth which, in Chronicles, have been associated with his faithfulness regarding the temple. For the Chronicler's readers there is no Davidic king but throughout have been accounts of leaders and people being faithful and having "success".

³⁵ Blenkinsopp, 25. "Beginning with the divided monarchy, the history may in fact be read as a series of moral exempla".

³⁶ Ibid., 22-23. "Moses" is mentioned 21x in Chronicles (13x in Samuel-Kings),

³⁷ Phrase as in 1 Chr. 22:13.

³⁸ Combination as in 2 Chr. 2:11,12 (Solomon and Hiram-abi).

While the Wisdom books relate to everyday life in society with its relationships and generally address the individual, the story of Chronicles is a reminder that corporate worship is not an extra or simply a part of life. Wisdom is required for the exercise of worship and worship is central to a life lived with wisdom. The book addresses “all Israel” and the path forward for the community, while clearly requiring individual responses—the book ends, “let (any one of you of all his people) go up [wěya‘aʃ]” (2 Chr. 36:23) to Jerusalem and its temple. The narrative illustrates how a “successful” life is centred in and shaped by the corporate worship of Yahweh and obedience of the Teaching of Yahweh given in the laws of Moses. Here is where “the fear of Yahweh” is taught through the instruction of the priests and Levites and sustained through corporate identity. Wisdom that is integrated with worship and obedience is indeed “a tree of life” (Prov. 3:8).

About the author

John Olley joined the faculty of Vose Seminary, Perth, Australia, in 1978 and served as principal from 1991 to 2003. In retirement, he continues as a research fellow and chair of the Vose College Academic Board.