

BOOK DESCRIPTION

THE IDEOLOGY OF THE BOOK OF CHRONICLES AND ITS PLACE IN BIBLICAL THOUGHT

by

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Preoccupation with the ideology of the Book of Chronicles began at an early stage of biblical research with De Wette's study at the beginning of the nineteenth century (W. M. L. De Wette, *Historisch-kritische Untersuchung über die Bücher der Chronik*, 1806). However, the investigation into the Chronicler's ideology was conducted not as an end in itself but rather as a means towards solving other pertinent problems. De Wette's aim was to prove that the Book of Chronicles is devoid of any historical value, and thus all the divergencies between the description of Chronicles and that of Samuel/Kings have to be explained as emanating either from the Chronicler's ideology or from the historical conditions of his time. Therefore, he tried to clarify the Chronicler's aims, purpose and concepts.

This approach reached its peak in Wellhausen's brilliant chapter on Chronicles in his *Prolegomena zur Geschichte Israels* (1878), and it prevailed until the 1920's when in 1927 Hänel wrote a chapter on the theology of the Book of Chronicles clearly distinguishing its theology from the question of historical reliability. However, it was mainly in von Rad's work, *Das Geschichtsbild des Chronistischen Werkes* (1930), that the attempt was made to treat Chronicles not as a historical source, but as a literary composition in its own right, and to study the specific way in which it reshapes the history of Israel, i. e. its *Geschichtsbild*. Since then, the spiritual world of Chronicles has become an independent subject of research.

The existing studies on Chronicles, although they sometimes arrive at opposite conclusions, are usually based upon several commonly accepted assumptions. The first is literary in nature but has far-reaching consequences for the understanding of the Chronicler's ideology, namely that Chronicles and Ezra/Nehemiah were composed by the same author. The present work, following the results of a separate study dedicated to this question (VT 18, 1968), assumes that Chronicles and Ezra/Nehemiah are two independent works that could not have been written by the same author.

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Another assumption, which derives from Chronicles' place at the end of the biblical period, is that the book is to be seen as a transition stage to post-biblical religious thought. This assumption has been pursued along two divergent lines. One conceives Chronicles as a transition to post-biblical Judaism and defines its thought in terms commonly used to describe that Judaism such as Legalism, Normativism, Ritualism etc. This line of research emphasises Chronicles' attachment to the priestly strata of the Pentateuch, its intense preoccupation with the cult, its rigid theory of retribution and so on. The other regards Chronicles as a stage towards Christianity and tries to explain the book and its concepts in terms taken from Christian thinking, such as *Verus Israel*, Kingdom of God etc. This line of research tends to emphasise Chronicles' attachment to the Deuteronomistic literature, in particular to Deuteronomy, and stresses the role and figure of David in the book.

The attempt to regard Chronicles merely or mainly as a transitional stage and to integrate it into a ready-made system of concepts resulted in a blurring of the book's uniqueness and in a diminishing of its stature. Many aspects in its spiritual world were neglected, and it did not receive its proper place in biblical thought.

The purpose of the present work is to treat Chronicles on its own terms, without either harmonising it with Ezra/Nehemiah or mechanically transferring to it foreign terms and concepts from without. The study examines anew the complex of ideas within Chronicles and tries to point out its uniqueness within the framework of biblical thought and to discover, wherever possible, the line of continuity and the connecting points between the Bible and the period that follows.

The method was determined by the nature of the material. The book of Chronicles is a historiographical composition, describing the history of Israel from the Creation to the destruction of Judah and the Temple. It is written as a history, describing past events, and not as a philosophical essay dealing with concepts and beliefs. Therefore the author's ideas are expressed indirectly and unsystematically. Matters relating to any one subject are scattered throughout the book and find expression only when the historical description allows, or when the author deliberately creates an opportunity for such an expression. Even in such cases, the author's ideas are not always expressed directly, and are at times indicated through the structure of the material or by reshaping of the events.

The material found in Chronicles may be divided into two main parts – material taken from sources, for the most part written, and material added by the Chronicler. The principal sources are the other books of the Bible, in particular Samuel and Kings. Comparison of these texts with Chronicles reveals all the differences between them – textual, linguistic, stylistic, factual and ideological. Some of these variations could possibly

have been present in the Chronicler's *Vorlage*, but most of them were introduced by the Chronicler himself and thus afford a clear look into his world-view and ideas.

The Chronicler edited his sources in a very uneven manner. Sometimes the editing is quite thorough and the old material is totally subjected to his new ideas. At other times the revision is inconsistent, leaving contradictory, or at least differing, attitudes juxtaposed.

With regard to the added material not found in the other biblical books, it may be assumed that the Chronicler utilised various other sources which are no longer available. However, it is often impossible to determine the extent of these sources. Furthermore, one must consider the possibility that Chronicles, like many other books of the Bible, has undergone several changes after it was initially written, and that passages were interpolated into it. Scholarly opinion differs with regard to the extent and date of these additions. The attitude taken by this work is that they are not many.

Of the material added by the Chronicler, special attention has been paid to the speeches and the prayers. These are rhetorical compositions, produced by the Chronicler, and continually attributed to kings and prophets throughout the historical description. These compositions grant a direct and unequivocal expression of the author's ideas.

The thesis consists of five chapters. The opening chapter deals with the conception of God, which is the key to the understanding of the whole book. The most important feature of the Chronicler's conception of God is his being a God who is related to the world. This relation is expressed by the facts of creation, domination, providence and guidance. However, from God's epithet "God of Israel" it is already clear that the focus of God's relation is not the world but Israel. The entire history of Israel – to the description of which the book is dedicated – is a continuous expression of the permanent relation between God and his people. The basis for this relationship and the principles that determine it are of paramount interest to the Chronicler.

The next chapter examines the second side of the relation between God and the people of Israel, namely Israel's part. How does Israel fulfil its obligation? What, according to the Chronicler's views, compromises the worship of God?

The following two chapters deal with the people of Israel in areas which are generally regarded as secular, namely the ethnic, geographical and sociological conceptions of the people. It becomes clear from the discussion that the Chronicler's most basic point of departure is his all-embracing religious conception, which encompasses all spheres of life in all their details. Within this framework he refers to Israel's ethnic composition, to her geographical boundaries, to her social order etc. The third chapter, which analyses the concept of Israel, is divided into two parts: the first deals with

Israel as an ethnic entity and the second with the relation between the People of Israel and the Land of Israel. The fourth chapter is devoted to the institution of the monarchy; the first part to the phenomenon of monarchy and the second to the Davidic dynasty.

The last chapter is dedicated to a much debated question in the recent study of Chronicles, that of eschatology. The dissertation is therefore terminated in a question directed towards the future: are there hopes for the future in the Book of Chronicles; and if so, what are they?

The principal result of the whole discussion is the recognition of the Chronicler as an independent thinker. While basing himself on the whole of biblical tradition and absorbing both its literary heritage and its conceptual world, he creates a complete system of concepts and beliefs. In its full compass and in its special moulding it is a unique system, emanating both from the personality of its creator and from the historical and spiritual conditions of his time.

Summary by the author

The book of Chronicles, written at the end of the fourth century B.C.E., relates the history of Israel from its beginnings with the creation of man to the return from exile with the declaration of Cyrus. The historical and theological points of departure of the Chronicler's description are to be found in the realities of his own day.Â The one is interpreted in terms of the other. Japhet's study strives to reveal the Chronicler's views and perspectives on all the major issues of Israel's history and religion, unveiling his role as a bridge between biblical and postbiblical faith.