

1 CHR 1:1-9:44 – PART ONE

THE GENEALOGY OF ALL ISRAEL

The genealogy of 1 Chronicles 1-9 is the “tree of the Lord’s planting.” First Chronicles 1-3 are the “roots,” 1 Chronicles 4-7 the “branches,” and 1 Chronicles 8-9 the “fruit.” (WILCOX, 7). Chronicles genealogically portrays the historic progression of God’s purposes through time. God is growing his tree – he cares for it, waters it, and has a purpose for it.

The postexilic community needs to appreciate their roots. They live in the backwater of a huge Empire. Jerusalem is no longer the center of the universe, and Judah is a meaningless province. The genealogy reminds Israel of God’s active planting and watering. God has always had Israel in mind – from the beginning with Adam – and he will not forget his people.

The genealogies demonstrate God’s faithfulness. They evidence God’s love for Israel. God is faithful even while Israel is unfaithful (1 Chr 9:1; Hos 1-3). The genealogies connect Israel with their divine election, past history, and legitimate lines of royal and priestly service. They give the postexilic community their identity. The genealogies highlight God’s election of Israel. They trace the line of promise. Cain is not in the genealogical history. The elect line is important, and the line of promise is Adam – Seth – Noah – Shem – Abraham – Israel (Jacob).

The genealogies highlight the history of Israel. MYERS (1:6) compares the genealogical list to “sermon notes.” JOHNSTONE (1:25) considers them a “cryptic code, allusively bringing to mind in the most condensed form possible the stories of the primeval and of the patriarchal periods.” When Chronicles invokes a name, it reminds Israel of their stories, which evokes memories of God’s faithfulness throughout history. While the names are sometimes obscure to us, they were probably “commonplace to [the Chronicler] and to his audience and merely part of their awareness of the world in which

they lived” (JOHNSTONE, 1:29). Each name contributes to the plot that culminates in the reigns of David and Solomon. The genealogies prepare us for the coming narrative.

The genealogies also legitimate the royal and priestly lines of descent (Johnson, *Purpose*, 77-82). This assures the postexilic community that their leadership and religious cult is secure. The temple and its servants are legitimate.

Chronicles’s genealogy is laid out in three major sections: (1) Adam to Israel (1 Chr 1:1-2:2); (2) The Sons of Israel (1 Chr 2:3-9:2); and (3) Postexilic Israel (9:3-44). The structure is concentric.

- I. From Adam to Israel (1 Chr 1:1-2:2)
 - II. All Israel (1 Chr 2:3-9:1a)
 - A. Judah (1 Chr 2:3-4:23)
 - B. Northern Tribes near Judah (1 Chr 4:24-5:26)
 - C. Levites (1 Chr 6:1-81)
 - B’. Northern Tribes Distant from Judah (1 Chr 7:1-40)
 - A’. Benjamin (1 Chr 8:1-9:1a)
- I’. Postexilic Israel (1 Chr 9:1b-44)

SELMAN (1:86) suggests three reasons why this structure is important. First, the genealogy of the nations in 1 Chronicles 1:1-2:2 “shows that all nations were God’s creation and therefore part of his special purposes for Israel.” Second, 1 Chronicles 2:3-9:1 confirms that “the present small Jewish community was still descended from Jacob’s twelve sons and from ‘all Israel’ who had inherited the Promised Land.” The postexilic community includes the northern tribes, “all Israel” (1 Chr 9:1). Third, 1 Chronicles 9:2-44 shows that “the exile had not cut the umbilical cord of the postexilic community’s life, for those who now lived and worshiped in Jerusalem remained heirs of the promises of God.” The fact that the Chronicler brings the genealogical lists down into the postexilic community, and into his own time (1 Chr 3:17-24), indicates that this genealogy is no mere historical curiosity. It demonstrates God’s faithfulness to Israel as an elect people.

Given this theological context, 1 Chronicles 1-9 is bound up with the themes and theological emphases of 1 Chronicles 10-2 Chronicles 36. While some argue that parts of 1 Chronicles 1-9 might be the hand of a later editor, there is little to defend separating 1 Chronicles 1-9 from the rest of the book (JAPHET; WILLIAMSON).

BRAUN (1-12) summarizes the issues related to genealogical forms, sources, and purposes (cf. Johnson, *Purpose*, and Wilson, *Genealogy*). The form of a genealogy is either linear or segmented. The linear provides the depth of relationship within a family (e.g., grandparent-parent-child): Abraham, Isaac, Jacob. Its purpose is to legitimate the last person named. The segmented provides the breadth of relationship within a family (e.g., siblings): Jacob and Esau. Its purpose is to establish relationships among various branches of a family. Chronicles uses both kinds. In addition, these lists are not comprehensive, that is, not every descendent is listed.

Chronicles shares the characteristics of the genealogical genre found in ancient and contemporary oral cultures. The accuracy of a genealogy is not modern precisionism and comprehensiveness. Rather, it is theological function (Plum, 66-92). Consequently, ancient genealogies (and modern oral ones) have a certain “fluidity” that serves the purpose of the community and establishes relationships between peoples and cultures, including “adoptions” from other genealogical lines (Wilson, “Between,” 11-22; Malamat, “King,” 163-173). The Chronicler used appropriate sources and methods which would legitimate postexilic Israel in the eyes of his community. This means that none of the genealogical data was simply pure invention. On the contrary, he gathered canonical data, military and census lists, and used other sources available to him to accomplish his purpose in a way that it would be received and valued by his community. We should not impose on Chronicles the expectations of modern, scientific genealogists, but neither should we think that the Chronicler is a propagandist who invents genealogical records. The Chronicler works with sources, both canonical and noncanonical, to report a sanctioned and legitimate genealogical record according to the conventions of the ancient genre (Rendsburg, 185-206; Aufrecht, 205-235).

These genealogies may seem as interesting as a dictionary, but their total impact is theologically significant. The African-American community was reinvigorated in the 1970s by the appearance of Alex Haley's *Roots*. In contrast to our mobile, urban culture, *Roots* reminded us that we are connected in important ways with our past. These genealogies serve the same function. This is the story of God among his people. It is the story of Israel. It is the Christian story.

Adam, Abraham, and David are our forefathers. God has preserved his family. The story continues in the genealogies of Jesus Christ, and in Christ we are Abraham's children. These genealogies are our genealogies not just because we are now part of Israel's story, but because Israel's God is our God. His grace and faithfulness, demonstrated in this genealogical history, belong to us. The function of these genealogies is not to date the history but to root Israel's present in the past. Continuity, not exhaustiveness, is critical.

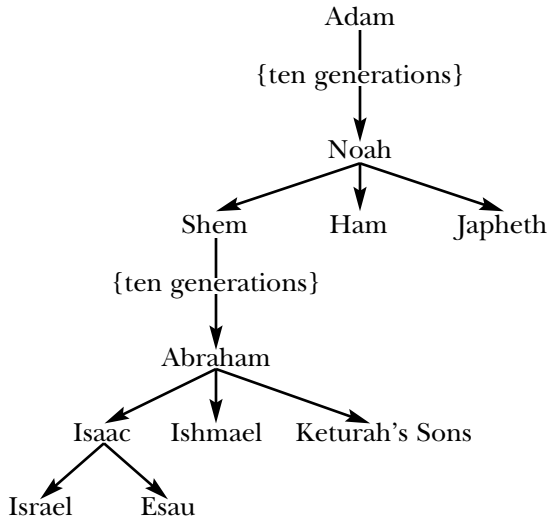
Teaching these genealogies is a difficult but fruitful task. One method is to let the names evoke their stories. From Adam to Israel is the story of God's relationship with people. As each name evokes a story, it reminds God's people of their forefathers. But the names are put together so that each individual story serves the broader continuity of God's purposes (e.g., the royal line in 1 Chr 3:1-24). Another method is to stress genealogical themes (e.g., inclusiveness [racial and gender], continuity, divine faithfulness) and illustrate them with various lines. Further, the genealogies contain some narrative examples (1 Chr 2:3-4; 4:9-10; 5:1-3,18-22; 6:31-32,48-49). A teacher can use these narratives to illustrate the broader values of the genealogical record. Still further, one may teach these genealogies in light of the broader themes: (1) world history, (2) Israel's history, and (3) the needs of the postexilic community. Chronicles stresses Israel's link with the "nations," the importance of Judah (royal), Levi (temple servants), and Benjamin (Jerusalem). He offers hope in the present through the postexilic community's link to the past.

I. FROM ADAM TO ISRAEL (1:1-2:2)

Since the word "Israel" does not appear until 1 Chronicles 2:1, this section has sometimes been called the "preamble" or "preface." (BRAUN, 13; JOHNSTONE, 1:24). It is the Chronicler's Genesis from which all the genealogical material is derived. "Preamble" is an appropriate term because "Adam to Israel" provides the setting of Israel as a nation. Israel is "the Way" for the nations (ALLEN, 31). God has elected Israel from the beginning, even in Adam (Japhet, *Ideology*, 116-124). "Israel has the task of realizing in its life the ideal once intended by God for all" (JOHNSTONE, 1:30). All nations will be blessed through Abraham and Israel.

Seventeen of the place names found in this section are repeated by the Chronicler in his discussion of David and Solomon (ALLEN, 34-35). These two kings represent God's regency over the world, and the whole earth seeks them and submits to them. This genealogy anticipates their rule in Chronicles's history.

The genealogical history presented in this section (1 Chr 1:1-2:2) is summarized in the following chart (SELMAN, 1:90).



A. THE DESCENDANTS OF ADAM (1:1-27)

BRAUN (16) notes the symmetry of this section. From Adam to Noah are ten generations (1 Chr 1:1-4) and from Shem to Abraham are ten generations (1 Chr 1:24-27). These generations are succinct, one-name lineal lists which form an *inclusio* (JAPHET, 53-54). The author moves quickly without stopping to note the details, but he moves through history rather than skipping it. This section introduces the main event, that is, the sons of Abraham and then on to the sons of Israel, but also intentionally links Adam and Abraham through Noah. God has ordered this history and progressively brought his purposes into play with Adam, Noah, and Abraham. God's purpose does not exclude other nations, but includes them.

1. The Lineal Descent of Adam (1:1-4)

The first word in Chronicles is the beginning of history: **Adam**. The history of Israel is linked to the history of the world. Israel did not drop out of the sky. The history of Israel begins with Adam. This “is a bold theological statement to trace Israel’s ancestry back not just to Abraham, but to creation itself.”

This links Israel with God’s purposes from the beginning. Just as Luke traces the ancestry of Jesus to Adam in Luke 3:38, so the Chronicler links David with Adam. Israel is part of world history. Israel is not a “blip” on the screen but the conduit of God’s gracious purposes in the world for the world. In God’s intent, Israel serves the nations.

The Adamic genealogy down to **Noah** is taken from Genesis 5:1-32. The Chronicler has deleted the stories surrounding each name and given us the lineal descent to Noah where his line is segmented: **Shem, Ham and Japheth**.

2. The Segmented Descent of Noah (1:5-23)

The Noahic family history is derived from Genesis 10:1-32 where we find the traditional seventy descendants of Noah which symbolize the seventy peoples of the world (the “table of nations”; cf. PAYNE, 4:327-329). He reverses the order in Genesis so that **Shem** receives the emphasis: **Japheth, Ham**, and then Shem (in Gen 11:10ff). The Chronicler also deletes the territorial comments (Gen 10:5,9-12,19-21,30-32). For example, he does not tell us about Nimrod’s kingdom (Gen 10:9-12), though he retains the characterization of Nimrod as a **mighty warrior** (cp. 1 Chr 1:10 with Gen 10:8). He streamlines the account in terms of descendants in a way that parallels Genesis. He includes all the names Genesis provides.

Some have argued that the descendants of Japheth and Ham were not original. The focus of this section is 1 Chronicles 1:1-4 and 24-27. However, the lineage of Japheth and Ham marks off those sections as significant and provides a sense of the world history to which Israel is linked. Israel does not appear in a vacuum but alongside the history of other peoples.