The KINGDOM of GOD as LITURGICAL EMPIRE

A Theological Commentary on 1-2 Chronicles

Scott W. Hahn
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as LITURGICAL
EMPIRE

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“Now the Records Are Ancient”

An Introduction to Chronicles

The Book of the Events of the Days

Reading the books of 1–2 Chronicles, we are confronted right away with questions about the meaning and practice of history and prophecy. The Chronicler obviously understands himself to be writing history in some sense. With his first word, “Adam,” he signals his ambition to tell the world’s story from the beginning—from the creation of the first man—to the end—his own time in the late sixth or early fifth century BC, possibly within a generation of the decree of King Cyrus of Persia that concludes his work.

At the time of the original composition of Chronicles, the people of Israel were being restored from their captivity in Babylon; they had returned home to rebuild the temple and again worship the living God at Jerusalem. The Chronicler wrote in a time of disorientation and uncertainty, when there was a real need for a remembrance of things past in order to make sense of the present and prepare for the future. And the rabbinic tradition placed his resulting work at the end of the canon of authoritative scripture—as the final book of Ketuvim, or “Writings,” and the close of the Tanak, the entire Hebrew Bible (Ackroyd 1991; Steins 1995: 415; Klein 2006: 2n15; Kalimi 2009: 17–33).1

The Hebrew title, dibrê hayyāmîm (The Events [or Words] of the Days), suggests the provenance of Chronicles as historical writing. As we begin our study, we need to remember that Chronicles was written originally as one book. The current division of the text into 1 Chronicles and 2 Chronicles in

1. The rabbinic canon does exhibit some wide variations, however, as Chronicles comes first in the Ketuvim in both the Aleppo and Leningrad Codices. Our canonical approach is similar to Steins, who (like Ackroyd) sees the Chronicler as “the first theologian of the canon,” except for his complex redactional theory of multiple layers and a late dating to the Maccabean period.
both the Jewish and Christian canons is an innovation begun with the ancient Greek translation, the Septuagint.

Chronicles takes a fairly straightforward chronological approach to Israel’s story. The basic outline of Chronicles looks like this: the Chronicler begins with a long list of the family of nations and ancestors of Israel (1 Chr. 1–9). He picks up Israel’s national story during the last days of its ill-fated first king (1 Chr. 10). The narrative pivots on the reigns of the great King David (1 Chr. 11–29) and his son and successor, Solomon (2 Chr. 1–9). The breakup of the monarchy into northern and southern kingdoms in the years after Solomon and the reigns of the post-Solomonic kings are detailed in the rest of the work (2 Chr. 10–36). He traces the fortunes of the southern kingdom, which preserves the house of David, through nineteen kings, until 586 BC, when invading Babylonian forces seize Jerusalem, destroy the temple, and drive the southerners into exile. Chronicles ends with King Cyrus of Persia’s decree announcing the end of the exile and the beginnings of their restoration and return to Judea (36:17–28).

The Chronicler aims at a recapitulation of the history of the people Israel. But the reader notices that there is more than history at work here. Chronicles strains the categories and definitions of traditional historiography, secular or biblical. First, there is the matter of tone: it simply does not read like history. Chronicles is a commentary, maybe even a series of homilies on Israel’s national story as told in its sacred scripture. Second, there is the question of selection, of why the Chronicler includes so much material omitted from other biblical sources, while excluding so much material that other biblical writers counted as essential to Israel’s national story. Finally, there is the matter of the Chronicler’s perspective. More than a summary or overview, Chronicles is a theological and liturgical interpretation of Israel’s history that answers key questions: Who are we? How did we get here? What must we do, and why?

The writing of Chronicles is an act of what the Hebrews called *zākhôr*, an act of remembrance that is liturgical, that aims to bring one into a living and vital contact with events recalled. Among their contemporaries in the ancient Near East, none was as preoccupied with historical remembrance as the children of Israel. Reif says:

> The Hebrews were often commanded to remember and not to forget, and this kind of religious imperative is unique to Israel... It was not all facts that were to be remembered but those that specifically documented God’s intervention and man’s response since in this way human history could be interpreted as the revelation of God’s will. Memory was a central element in ritual and recital, and the festivals manifestly had historical as well as religious and agricultural dimensions. The biblical narrative revolves around the reality of everyday life rather than having its focus on the exclusively spiritual... Thus, Israel’s history was incorporated—even transformed—into its Scripture. The whole process was maintained and nurtured by transmission, recitation, and education. (2006: 322)
In Chronicles too we see Israel’s history being transformed into scripture. We wonder to what extent the Chronicler felt himself to be writing an authoritative text. If Chronicles demands to be understood in some sense as history, we must acknowledge that it is history told in a prophetic key. There are more than a dozen original prophetic speeches in Chronicles found nowhere else in the canon. Prophets, seers, and divine emissaries play a prominent role in his recasting of Israel’s history: warning kings, delivering God’s covenant word, and—significantly—prophesying in the context of the temple liturgy.

Scholars have shown how the prophetic discourses in Chronicles reflect fundamental theological concerns of the author (Schniedewind 1997; Beentjes 2001). But this dimension of the work raises a set of further questions: To what extent did the Chronicler understand his own writing of Israel’s history to be a prophetic and even liturgical act—receiving the word of God, interpreting and applying it, and delivering it to God’s people in their concrete historical moment? To what extent is the Chronicler himself prophesying in the context of the temple liturgy?

At the outset of this commentary, my assumption is that Chronicles can best be understood as a work of prophetic historiography characterized by the author’s profound assimilation and interpretation of the covenantal and liturgical worldview of the Hebrew Bible. Josephus, the Jewish historian who wrote in the first century AD, said that the historical records found in the Bible are unique because “only prophets have written the original and earliest accounts of things as they learned them from God himself by inspiration” (Against Apion 1.37). Thus the rabbis described the Historical Books, such as Samuel and Kings, as the “Former Prophets.”

We detect this prophetic sensibility in the Chronicler, who aims to do far more than retell Israel’s national story. He is delivering a word of divine assurance. He wants his readers to understand that the history he is retelling is not finished: it is ongoing. God’s divine purposes are still unfolding in the lives of his people—despite the catastrophe of the exile and the hesitant and anticlimactic beginnings of the people’s return from exile and their restoration to Jerusalem. The Chronicler’s intent is to remind Judah’s people of God’s original intentions—not only for Israel, but also for creation—and to help align their hearts and lives more faithfully with that divine plan. A prophetic exhortation attributed to King Jehoshaphat could serve as a summary of his authorial purposes in this book: “Hear me, Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem! Believe in the Lord your God, and you will be established; believe his prophets and you will succeed” (2 Chr. 20:20).

“The Book of Chronicles was given only to be expounded upon homiletically,” we hear in Leviticus Rabbah 1.3, a midrash that dates to about the fifth century AD but contains material centuries older (ArtScroll 1987: xvi–xvii; Knoppers and Harvey 2002: 230–31). According to the Mishnah, Chronicles was among the books read by the high priest during the solemn evening vigil
preceding Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement—along with the books of Ezra, Job, Zechariah, and sometimes Daniel (Yoma 1.6). And generally in Jewish tradition, Chronicles was read spiritually, as a divinely inspired commentary on the history of the children of Israel.

The content and the form of the book are intensely liturgical. Many years ago Gerhard von Rad surmised that it was structured around a series of Levitical sermons (1966: 267–80). More recently, De Vries (1997) identified the Jewish liturgical festivals as the organizing principle of the book. My own sense is that Chronicles may have been originally composed as a series of interconnected homilies on Israel’s historical scripture, intended to be read in the liturgy.

The “style is very strongly homiletic,” Ackroyd observes (1991: 276), and its many repetitions suggest a strong catechetical intent. This is history told for didactic and deeply spiritual reasons. Ackroyd is surely correct in describing the Chronicler as “the first theologian of the canon” (1991: 285; cf. 280). And Selman, who wrote one of the best modern commentaries, identifies a unique feature of the work: “Chronicles stands apart in its attempt to interpret the Old Testament from beginning to end” (1994a: 42).

Before beginning our close reading of 1–2 Chronicles, I want to identify some of the distinctive features of the work’s theological interpretation of the canon. I will inquire into the worldview we find in Chronicles: What does the Chronicler believe about history, how does he come to those beliefs, and how do his beliefs guide his selection of materials to include and exclude from his work? Second, I will look at the literary tools and narrative methods he employs for interpreting his sources and telling his story.

The Chronicler’s Covenantal Worldview

The pivotal feature of the Chronicler’s prophetic historiography is his sense of the covenant and the covenantal structure of the divine economy. Of crucial significance for interpreting Chronicles is the biblical notion that God’s covenant establishes sacred kinship, setting God, Israel, and humanity in a familial relationship (Hahn 2009b; 2005a). This relationship is not metaphorical or a sort of legal fiction. The covenant points to a kind of sacramental consanguinity, a blood bond, calling Israel to be “one flesh and bone” with God—a nuptial-covenantal image we hear in the Chronicler (1 Chr. 11:1; also Exod. 24:6). At the heart of the covenant is the divine word, an oath sworn by God himself. The Chronicler will speak of the covenant as “the word that he commanded, for a thousand generations,” as a divine oath that can never be broken (1 Chr. 16:15). The identity of God himself is defined by his keeping of his covenant oath, as King Solomon sings: “O LORD, God of Israel, there is no God like thee, in heaven or on earth, keeping covenant” (2 Chr. 6:14).
The sequence of biblical covenants is central to the Chronicler’s understanding of the divine economy. This can be traced from the early pages of his work. Beginning with Adam and the covenant of creation, his genealogy follows the path of God’s covenant through Noah, Abraham, Israel, and, finally and cumulatively, David, with whom God makes a “covenant of salt,” meaning a new and everlasting covenant (2 Chr. 13:5; 21:7).

His work focuses on David and the kingdom and temple liturgy established by the Davidic covenant. The making of this covenant is the climax of the Chronicler’s history, with the covenant presented as the fulfillment of God’s purposes for creation. The Davidic covenant is a novum, something unprecedented and radically new. But in the Chronicler’s presentation is a profound unity in salvation history, reflected in the continuity of God’s covenants. This is another way of saying that, for the Chronicler, the Davidic covenant advances the fulfillment of God’s purposes in all the covenants that came before, especially the covenant with Moses and Israel at Sinai and the foundational covenant—the covenant with Abraham.

The Mosaic and Abrahamic covenants illuminate the Chronicler’s understanding of salvation history. Indeed, these covenants provide a kind of typological substructure for the history that unfolds in the Chronicler’s work. The telos of history for the Chronicler is the fulfillment of God’s threefold promise to Abraham—to make Abraham’s descendants a great nation, to give him a great name, and to make him the source of blessing for all the nations of the world (Gen. 12:1–3; 15:7–21; 17:1–8; 22:16–18). And the Chronicler’s ideal of Israel is drawn implicitly from the mandate given to Moses and Israel at Sinai—to be God’s “firstborn son” (Exod. 4:22) and “my own possession among all the peoples, . . . a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (19:5–6; Hahn 2009b: 101–35).

In Chronicles, David’s kingdom fulfills the “covenant with the people of Israel, when they came out of Egypt” (2 Chr. 5:10; 6:11). The law of the kingdom is the tôrâ given at Mount Sinai, “the book of the covenant” (2 Chr. 34:30), now transformed at Zion into a law for all humanity. Further, the Chronicler depicts David as a new Moses and describes the kingdom of David and Solomon in terms that make clear the kingdom’s dependence on the covenant institutions established at Sinai—the ark of the covenant of God, the central role of the law and the Levitical priesthood, and the liturgical assembly or qāhāl (Greek ekklēsia).

Yet, in contrast to the other historical works in the canon where the Mosaic covenant is dominant, the Chronicler seems to insist on the priority of the Abrahamic covenant. This again reflects a sound interpretation of the canonical record, where the Abrahamic covenant is foundational and Israel’s liberation from Egypt and exodus to Sinai are brought about because “God remembered his covenant with Abraham” (Exod. 2:24; 6:5). The Chronicler may also feel that, following the ordeal of the exile, the people need a return
to their roots—to understand that long before the exodus and Sinai there was Moriah, the site of Abraham’s binding of Isaac and, in God’s plan, the site of the temple at Zion (2 Chr. 3:1).

The Chronicler wants his readers to see the inner unity of salvation history—running from Adam to Abraham, to the covenant with Abraham’s descendants at Sinai, and finally to the kingdom of David at Zion and his son Solomon, in which salvation history reaches its zenith (Ackroyd 1991: 265). The kingdom of David is the fulfillment of Israel’s mission to be a kingdom of priests—but again for the sake of God’s original covenant purposes with Abraham—to bring blessings to all the nations of the world through Abraham’s “seed.”

The Chronicler’s God is a God of the covenant, and the economy of salvation is for the sake of this covenant. When David finally brings the ark of the covenant to rest in Jerusalem, the great historical psalm he composes for the occasion declares: “He is mindful of his covenant for ever, . . . the covenant which he made with Abraham, . . . an everlasting covenant to Israel” (1 Chr. 16:15–17; cf. Ps. 105:8–10).

Typological Interpretation of History in Chronicles

The Chronicler’s history represents a deep reading of the canon of Israel’s scripture. Beginning in the Torah and continuing through the historical and prophetic books of the Nevi’im, as well as the liturgical and Wisdom literature of the Ketuvim, the Hebrew canon is filled with examples of inner-biblical exegesis. Later texts rewrite, comment upon, or reinterpret earlier ones; new situations and people are understood and characterized by analogy to earlier texts. The large measure of what scholars call the Chronicler’s Vorlage, or source material, is drawn from the biblical books of Samuel and Kings. But in addition to his rewriting and reinterpreting his Vorlage, his work is shot through with scriptural references and allusions, in addition to direct quotations and citations. For instance, in describing David’s ill-fated census, the Chronicler builds his account on his source in 2 Samuel while integrating allusions to earlier scenes in Israel’s history—Abraham’s acquisition of burial ground in Canaan, Gideon’s encounter with an angel, the deadly angel of the exodus, the heavenly fire of Aaron’s time, and maybe even the temptation of Adam. This is not clever literary styling, but biblical theology being practiced at a very deep level.

Like any good historian, the Chronicler provides a record of past figures, places, and events; but his accounting is written in such a way that these figures, places, and events often appear as types—signs, patterns, and precursors—intended to show his readers not only the past but also their present reality from God’s perspective. David is sketched as both a new Adam and a new Moses; the temple is a new creation and a new tabernacle and altar. In
the Chronicler’s account, the faithlessness and failures of Israel’s first king, Saul, are replayed by kings centuries later. Saul is more than a failed monarch: he becomes the type of the unrighteous king who leads God’s people to ruin and exile. In the same way, good kings in Chronicles do the things that David did—because David is a prototype of the righteous king.

Acknowledging this intensely inner-biblical and typological narrative technique is not to deny the historical reliability of the Chronicler’s account. Rather, I am suggesting that reporting history “as it happened” is not the Chronicler’s sole interest. What happened in the past is crucial for the Chronicler, but only because in the what of history he sees the patterns of divine intention and intervention revealed—the why of history. The why of history is the reason for the Chronicler’s work, which seeks not only to document past events but also to interpret these events in light of his readers’ present needs for guidance and hope in the face of an uncertain future.

The way the Chronicler comes to understand, interpret, and explain the why of salvation history is through typology. As an intensely typological work, Chronicles gives us a typological interpretation of history (Hahn 2005c: 19–25). Typology for the Chronicler is a way to shed light on the unity of God’s plan in history and to show the meaning of people, places, and events in light of God’s covenant promises and redemptive acts.

Trompf suggests (1979) that the typological patterns of “recurrence” found in Chronicles and elsewhere in the Bible are related to the use of these scriptures in the rhythms of Israel’s cult and worship (also G. Wright 1962). Others, beginning with the rabbis, noticed an archetypal pattern of creation/blessing, sin/exile, repentance/restoration running through the canon. The creation of Adam and Eve is followed immediately by their sin and consequent exile from paradise; Israel is created as God’s chosen people in the Sinai covenant and immediately falls into the golden-calf apostasy, which leaves them wandering in the wilderness until a new generation comes along. Similar patterns can be traced in the period of the judges, and these patterns run throughout the Chronicler’s retelling of Israel’s history, especially in his accounts of the divided monarchy and the destruction of the temple. In turn, Israel’s sacrificial liturgy and priesthood grows out of this archetypal story and orient the prayer and worship of the people toward repenting for sin and seeking atonement.

All of this has an important bearing on our reading of the Chronicler’s work. These overarching biblical archetypes are at work in his liturgical historiography, and this helps us to understand how certain features that scholars have long identified as peculiar to the Chronicler, such as his supposed theology of immediate retribution, have not always been fully or accurately understood.

What we find in the Chronicler fits the definition of what Fishbane terms “aggadic historiography.” It is a kind of inner-biblical exegesis in which the Chronicler reinterprets key elements of Israel’s “received historical traditum” (Fishbane 1985: 381). Fishbane, however, does not think that the Chronicler
presumed his readers to know this *tradicum* so intimately that they would recognize the reinterpretations and historical revisionism going on in his text. He argues that Chronicles does not present itself as an interpretive commentary on earlier scriptures but rather as an authoritative “final document” that “purports to tell the past ‘wie es eigentlich gewesen,’” as it actually was (1985: 382).

This characterization of the Chronicler’s project is not as self-evident as Fishbane supposes, although he is surely correct to caution us against projecting our modern historical and literary-critical hypotheses back onto the Chronicler and his audience. But it may perhaps be another kind of modern projection to assume that the Chronicler’s audience was as unaware or unmindful of Israel’s national story as many moderns are about their own traditions. After all, one can hardly speak of a *tradicum* unless one presumes that these works are not only known by the people but also bear some normative authority in their lives and worship. Fishbane’s own close readings confirm that the Chronicler is often consciously retelling and reshaping a story that he presumes his audience already knows from the liturgy. The original placement of Chronicles as the final book in the Hebrew Bible further suggests an awareness among the Chronicler’s first readers that his work is intended less as a stand-alone historical text than as haggadah, a theological homily on all of Israel’s history.

In any event, what is clear is that the Chronicler is often making haggadic—theological and homiletic—rereadings of Israel’s *tradicum*, often utilizing various forms of typology. In general, his narrative is shaped by a typological outlook that is characteristic of the biblical worldview and sees the divine hand at work in Israel’s history. As Fishbane notes, typology is far more than a literary device:

> Typological exegesis . . . celebrates new historical events in so far as they can be correlated with older ones. By this means it also reveals *unexpected unity in historical experience and providential continuity* in its new patterns and shapes. Accordingly, the perception of typologies is not solely an exegetical activity, it is, at the same time, a religious activity of the first magnitude. . . . Typological exegesis is . . . a disclosure of the plenitude and mysterious workings of divine activity in history. (1985: 352)

For the Chronicler, the typological key to “the plenitude and mysterious workings of divine activity in history” is the kingdom of David. Chronicles is the world’s family history written in a Davidic key, beginning in the deceptively simple genealogical lists, which are actually careful compositions that progressively narrow the world’s family tree into a single branch—the line of the family of David.

Typology for the Chronicler is a way to shed light on the unity of God’s plan in history and to show the meaning of people, places, and events in light of God’s covenant promises and redemptive acts. Williamson offers a helpful clarification of the Chronicler’s use of typology: “Typology . . . is not used to
The Twofold Pattern of the Canon

In its own way Chronicles fits into the scheme of the biblical canon. Reading the Bible canonically, we see a larger twofold pattern in the canon, and this larger pattern helps us to interpret the Chronicler’s purpose. The Hebrew canon presents us with two distinctly different perspectives on Israel’s history: one decidedly more secular, and the other more liturgical or priestly. Yet these are not hard and fast divisions, and we should be cautious in labeling texts as “secular” or “priestly.” For instance, what scholars identify as the “Deuteronomistic History”—the history recorded in Joshua, Judges, 1–2 Samuel, and 1–2 Kings—lays more stress on secular concerns, such as law, society, and royal government, than does Chronicles. And we can trace this pattern backward and forward in the canon. Within the Pentateuch, Deuteronomy is preoccupied with the Deuteronomic covenant establishing the twelve tribes as a holy yet secular nation-state. Leviticus, on the other hand, is concerned with the priestly and liturgical life of the nation.

I am not suggesting mutually exclusive viewpoints here. Deuteronomy does not stress the secular to the exclusion of the liturgical any more than Leviticus stresses the liturgical to the exclusion of the secular. What I am arguing is that, read from a canonical and synchronic perspective, the final redactor of the canon appears to intend for readers to see certain dialectical tensions within Israel’s history and an overriding concern for the proper coordination of the secular and the liturgical, the royal and the priestly. Thus the Deuteronomist focuses our attention on the lay governance of the twelve tribes and how the national order is to be related to the priestly ministry of the Levites. Leviticus, on the other hand, focuses on the training, sanctification, and ministry of the Levitical priests—on how their ministry is ordered to the twelve tribes.

Throughout the so-called Deuteronomistic History, Israel is constantly tempted to follow the secular model of the surrounding nations, which would exalt the political and military concerns above the priestly and religious service of God. These temptations culminate in Israel’s desire for “a king to govern us like all the nations,” a desire that is interpreted as a rejection of God’s rule (1 Sam. 8:4–22). Such a king, Samuel warns, will demand the best of everything from the people—their children, their money, their crops; that is, he will demand a tithe as the priests do. In other words, the royal will supplant the priestly: the kingdom will be ordered to the earthly king and not the true king in heaven.

Running through the canon, this tension between the pull of the secular and the call of the divine is expressed in the tensions between the royal and the priestly concerns of Israel. This twofold pattern appears even within the Ketuvim. The so-called Wisdom literature reflects more secular concerns of daily life—morals, ethics, and the like. The Psalter, on the other hand, points to the sacred, the liturgical concerns of the priestly and the temple. In the...
later histories of 1–2 Maccabees, we again detect this pattern: 1 Maccabees looks at Israel’s restoration entirely in political or military terms, whereas 2 Maccabees is written by a different author, who while covering the same general period, writes from the perspective of the priesthood and the temple.

Again, I am not suggesting any kind of antithesis or opposition within the canon. Only the modern, post-Enlightenment mind finds these viewpoints irreconcilable. In the biblical canon, the secular and the sacred are not distinguished to be opposed: they are distinguished to be united. In the canon we find a duality of complementary perspectives rather than a dualism of contradictory viewpoints. Chronicles must be understood in light of this wider canonical pattern. A canonical and synchronic reading of Chronicles enables us to see that what Leviticus is to Deuteronomy, Chronicles is to the so-called Deuteronomistic History. The Chronicler retells Israel’s story, not from the standpoint of secular and lay concerns, but from the perspective of the sacred historiography of liturgy. Some scholars consider it to be a kind of rewritten Bible. Others consider it to be a work of primitive political theology, a literary work of “utopia” or “ideology,” in which the author seeks to portray an idealized Israelite society or an “alternative reality” (Schweitzer 2007: 415; also Dyck 1988).

Although there is much to be learned from a political-theological or utopian reading of the text, this type of viewpoint can have the tendency to downgrade or relativize the historicity of the Chronicler’s account. Scholars continue to debate to what extent Chronicles depicts events that actually happened, and they have produced a steady stream of more or less plausible arguments. But such discussions can never transcend the merely hypothetical; hence they are not necessarily useful for helping us to understand the text as handed on to us in the Jewish and later Christian tradition.

In addition to reading Chronicles in its final form as presented to us in the canon, a Christian theological commentary must take into account the findings of literary and historical research in order to understand the work’s intent and its reception by its original audience. We also need to read it in light of Jewish and later Christian interpretive tradition. Jewish tradition, while acknowledging a certain midrashic quality to the work, never received it as a work of historical fiction or as a statement of a religious or political ideal. Chronicles was understood to be a commentary on history, on events that in fact did happen in Israel’s past.

“A Chronicle of All Divine History”

The editors of the Septuagint, the Greek translation of Hebrew scripture, grouped Chronicles as the last of the Historical Books, following the books of Kings. The Septuagint title, Paraleipomena, indicates the editors’ apparent
belief that it contained mostly supplemental “things omitted or left behind” in those earlier historical accounts.

Yet contrary to the implications of its Septuagint title, Chronicles is far from a gathering of fragments or things left over. It is a coherent and compelling theology of history. Chronicles is more than a “rewritten Bible” (Pitre 2003), and the Chronicler is doing more than biblical interpretation. His prophetic historiography is guided by a prayerful and profound biblical worldview—based on an understanding of what he believes scripture reveals about God’s ways and means and his purposes for Israel and the world.

The Chronicler’s narrative is pervaded by a sense of what Paul and later Christian tradition would call the oikonomia, the divine economy through which God works out his saving purposes. For the Chronicler, history has a telos—a definite direction and goal toward which it is driving, a goal established through the intention of God. This does not mean that in Chronicles history is reducible to eschatology. Chronicles is not an eschatological work or a species of apocalyptic literature. It is prophetic historiography that looks forward not to the end of history, but to the fullness of time and the fulfillment of what is anticipated in Israel’s liturgy, which is always open to what God holds in store for the future. It is typological in its look at Israel’s past.

Rabbi David Kimchi, also known by the acronym RaDaK, prefaced his thirteenth-century commentary on Chronicles with an affirmation that “this book is a historical account” (Berger 2007: 26). This basic understanding remains consistent throughout the early Christian interpretive tradition. The first full-fledged Christian commentary, written by Bishop Theodoret of Cyrus in the fifth century, begins: “What the royal scribe [the redactor of Samuel and Kings] omitted, the author who took up this specific task set down, using as sources many of the books of prophecy. Much of what was written in those books he harmonized with these events [in 1–2 Chronicles], so that he might demonstrate historical consistency” (quoted from Knoppers and Harvey 2002: 234).

This recognition about Chronicles was made early in the Christian interpretive tradition. In the preface to his translation of Samuel and Kings, Jerome called it “a chronicle of all divine history” (Klein 2006: 1). For the Chronicler, human history is divine history: in human events we see signs of divine purpose; history is salvation history. History in Chronicles is a kind of dialogic and filial encounter between the Creator and his creation and especially his chosen “firstborn,” the children of Israel.

Chronicles, quite simply, begs to be read as it is written—as the history of a people. “Now the records are ancient,” the Chronicler tells us (1 Chr. 4:22), and his work includes a wide variety of these records—straight historical narratives, official correspondence, legislation and legislative history, private prayers and ritual practices, speeches, homilies, poetry, prophecies, and genealogies. This is the stuff, the raw data of human remembrance, and the Chronicler uses it all to preserve for us a rich historical record. Chronicles is a family history,
point to one incident or institution as the fulfillment of its shadowlike predecessor; rather, it serves as a cross-reference from one incident to another, inviting the reader to draw parallels and conclusions that go beyond the immediate statement of the text” (1991: 21).

In the Chronicler we do find a profound belief in the unity and continuity of the history of God’s people. This is the point of the genealogies that open the work. The Chronicler’s audience is the same people of God born to Abraham and Israel. They are all members of the same family, sharing a common ancestry, a common covenant, and a common story. That means that what God did for their ancestors he did, in a certain way, for them; what was written earlier in the scriptural story was meant for them too. “All that happened to the fathers was a sign for their sons,” the thirteenth-century scholar and poet, Immanuel of Rome, famously wrote (quoted from Fishbane 1985: 350).

This is the principle at work in Israel’s liturgy. Rabbi Gamaliel used to say of the Passover celebration:

In every generation a person is duty-bound to regard himself as if he personally has gone forth from Egypt, since it is said, And you shall tell your son in that day saying, It is because of that which the Lord did for me when I came forth out of Egypt (Ex. 13:8). Therefore we are duty-bound to thank, praise, glorify, honor, exalt, extol, and bless him who did for our forefathers and for us all these miracles. He brought us forth from slavery to freedom, anguish to joy, mourning to festival, darkness to great light, subjugation to redemption, so we should say before him, Hallelujah. (Mishnah, Pesaḥim 10.5, quoted from Neusner 1988: 250, emphasis original)

This same principle of liturgical historiography is at work in Chronicles. History is being brought into the present tense, as it is in the liturgy. “The Chronicler . . . shared a common hermeneutic with the Jewish community who composed the Targum,” according to Duke’s rhetorical analysis. “Scripture was actualized. The message of the text was contemporary; it spoke to the present; ‘revelation’ was continuous. . . . The Chronicler interpreted his tradition both in light of contemporary cultic praxis and according to the need of the present situation” (1990: 115).

In the Chronicler we are often brought to the point where scripture and the liturgy intersect as mutual projects of zākhôr or anamnēsis—as “remembrances” of the mirabilia Dei that in a certain sense actualize these miraculous works of God, bringing the people of today into living contact with them. Cult and history are inseparable in Israel’s covenant relationship with God. For Israel, liturgy was historical and history was liturgical. Cultic prayers such as Pss. 77, 78, 105, 106, and 136 are essentially meditations on history. The great feasts of Passover and Weeks are memorials rooted in historical events that God has commanded his people to remember liturgically (Exod. 12:1–13:4; 23:14–16; Lev. 23:4–22).
with Israel understood to be a family of families—fathers and mothers, sons and daughters, uncles and aunts, and cousins and distant relations, all tied by blood and bound by divine-human covenant in a special kinship with God.

Chronicles is also the history of a people that understands itself to be God’s agent in the world, the chosen vessel of the Almighty for bringing about his divine purposes for creation. It is an account of God’s revelation of himself in the history of his people, a history in which the human and the divine are intertwined. One of the author’s chief aims is to make the case that God is still in charge, that his divine purposes are still unfolding in the lives of his people—despite the catastrophe of the exile and the hesitant and anticlimactic beginnings of the restoration. A prayer of David preserved by the Chronicler could serve as a summary of his authorial purposes in this book: “O LORD, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, our fathers, keep for ever such purposes and thoughts in the hearts of thy people, and direct their hearts toward thee” (1 Chr. 29:18).

The Chronicler’s homiletic intent is to remind the people of God’s plan and to align their hearts more faithfully to that plan. Thus the Chronicler does not write only a historical account. He also sets out to interpret events in light of what later Christian interpreters call the *oikonomia*, the divine economy through which God works out his saving purposes.

Chronicles tells Israel’s history backward, from the perspective of the end, the qēṣ, the zenith of history foretold by the prophets. Then the people will be definitively restored from exile and the kingdom of David will finally be established by God’s Anointed One, the Messiah, who will rebuild the temple at Zion to be the font for the blessings that God wants to pour out upon the families of the world from the beginning of time.

In the Chronicler’s prophetic historiography we see what Daniélou notices in the Old Testament prophets—a profoundly “typological interpretation of history,” in which the basis of present hope and the vision for the future is based upon a deep reading of God’s patterns of dealing with his covenant people in the past (1960: 157). For the Chronicler, the key to history is the kingdom of David, established by divine covenant and embodied in the temple at Zion and its liturgy. As the rise of this liturgical empire in the past triggered blessings for God’s chosen people and for the world, so its future restoration will bring to fulfillment God’s plan for history.