

Kings and Chronicles, A Comparison

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In the bible, the books commonly called 1st and 2nd Samuel, and 1st and 2nd Kings provide a history for the monarchies in the kingdoms of Judah and Israel. A second and parallel account, though slightly different is contained in the books of 1st and 2nd Chronicles. A closer examination of the differences between the two accounts may reveal several aspects about the text. These include the author's beliefs, the approximate date of composition, the location or setting of composition, and the author's motivation or purpose for writing.

At one point 1st and 2nd Kings was contained on one scroll but was divided into two when translated to Greek, due to the greater length required by the Greek language to convey a translation of the Hebrew original. The same is true for Chronicles and Samuel. I will therefore in this paper refer to 1st and 2nd Kings as simply Kings, and likewise for Samuel and Chronicles.

It is apparent that the final version of Kings was written before Chronicles for in 2nd Chronicles 36:20-23 the book ends with the proclamation of Cyrus king of Persia allowing the Jews to return from exile to the land of Judah. This proclamation is generally considered to have happened in c. 536 BC. The book of Kings on the other hand ends during the exile, after Jehoiachin king of Judah is released from prison by Evil-Merodach king of Babylon. This happens in the 37th year of his captivity and thus c. 560 BC (for Jehoiachin was deported 11 years before the destruction of the temple in 586 BC).

Additionally the book of Chronicles reflects a later Hebrew style than that found in Kings. The final composition of the two books is clearly separated by some time and/or geography. However, one should note 2nd Chronicles 5:9, 8:8 and 10:19 where the phrase "to this day" occurs. The use of this phrase in these places would only make sense at a point before the Babylonian exile and in the case of 10:19, probably before 720 BC. So either Chronicles was partially completed before the exile or the Chronicler is directly quoting from other sources without changing them to make sense for his time period.

It seems unlikely that the writer of Chronicles relied heavily upon the book of Kings as a source, for the reasons that follow. Both writers name sources within their texts that were apparently used in compiling the two accounts. At least two or three of the sources are the same. Yet Chronicles mentions several sources not mentioned in Kings, especially the writings of various prophets. Indeed some of the additional material in Chronicles is that of the words of the prophets. Of all the sources that Chronicles mentions, the book of kings is never mentioned as one of them. Apparently Chronicles does not rely on Kings but both books go back to earlier sources for their materials, sources that were apparently known and available to the reading public at the time (see also Sarna p7). Some of these sources were used by both writers and some of the sources were only used by one or the other.

In fact concerning the reign of Abijah, Chronicles not only does not rely on Kings, but the two books even claim different sources for their information (1st Kings 15:7 and 2nd Chronicles 13:22). In fact if the two texts didn't mention Asa, Rehoboam and Jeroboam, it might be impossible to make a connection between the two passages. Abijah's name is different in the two accounts, his mother's name is different, his mother's father is different, and while Kings gives him the judgment of being a bad king,

the Chronicler makes no judgment at all but rather provides a story of his trust in YHVH. This story leaves one with the impression that he was a good king. It does not even seem possible that the Chronicler had the Kings account in front of him. If he did, he surely had a different agenda than the writer of Kings. However it is not as though the two accounts are completely contradictory for Kings doesn't paint Abijah as bad as the kings who "did evil" in the sight of YHVH, but rather says that he walked in the errors of his father, not following the LORD with a whole heart like David. It is entirely possible that Chronicles picked up on the good points and Kings on the bad points of a king who was neither really good nor really bad. Again, two independent researchers recording different aspects from different sources concerning the same topic, in order to stress aspects important to the message which was needful in their individual time frames to convey.

At the end of Kings we have the Jews fleeing down to Egypt after Gedaliah, the governor appointed by Babylon, is assassinated. We read "And all the people, small and great, and the captains of the armies, arose and went to Egypt; for they were afraid of the Chaldeans." (2nd Kings 25:26, cf. Jeremiah 41:1-44:30) Chronicles has no mention of this event. Rather we read "And those who escaped from the sword he (Nebuchadnezzar) carried away to Babylon, where they became servants to him and his sons until the rule of the kingdom of Persia, to fulfill the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed her Sabbaths. As long as she lay desolate she kept Sabbath, to fulfill seventy years." (2nd Chronicles 36:20-21) The Kings account gives much less attention to the Babylonian exile of the people. In Kings the story ends in Egypt (in spite of verses 27-30, which Sarna calls an appendix, p5) and in Chronicles the story ends in Babylon. Also the Chronicles account makes specific mention of the 70 years of exile, again reflecting the original target audience. The importance of the Babylonian exile and return is also shown at 2nd Chronicles 6:36-40, where Solomon's prayer basically predicts it.

The geographical and chronological setting of the target audience is highlighted by the lack of a reference in Chronicles to the original exodus from Egypt in four places where Samuel/Kings contains it. These include 1st Chronicles 7:20ff where it almost seems that the Chronicler doesn't even acknowledge the Egyptian slavery years, but seems to place Ephraim and his immediate descendants in the land of Canaan.

Next in 2nd Samuel 7:6 we read "For I have not dwelt in a house since the time that I brought the children of Israel up from Egypt, even to this day, but have moved around in a tent and in a tabernacle" Chronicles records almost the exact same account, but leaves out the words "from Egypt". However the Chronicler knew of the exodus, for he states "I brought up Israel..." (1st Chronicles 17:5), but he deliberately leaves out from where Israel was "brought up".

Reference to Egypt is again left out by the Chronicler at 2nd Chronicles 6:11 when compared to 1st Kings 8:21. Additionally the Chronicler leaves out the 1st Kings 6:1 account completely.

In making these omissions perhaps the Chronicler was trying to stress the connection of the Jews to the land of Canaan, rather than to let them appear as a foreign people who came from Egypt. This would be especially important in Nehemiah and Ezra's time when they were stressing that it was they and not the other peoples dwelling in the land who had right to re-build the temple and re-build Jerusalem and that Canaan

was the land of the Jews. They definitely didn't want to sound like they had no original claim to the land.

The writer of Kings, if he were among the exiles to Egypt and not Babylon, would have every reason to include as many possible references to the exodus, to encourage the people not to remain there or even more likely to scold them for fleeing to Egypt. Coincidentally, Jeremiah who is traditionally credited with the authorship of the book of Kings, strongly objected to the Jews fleeing to Egypt and instead encouraged them to submit to the king of Babylon: "If you will remain in this land, then I will build you and not pull you down, and I will plant you and not pluck you up. For I relent concerning the disaster that I have brought upon you. Do not be afraid of the king of Babylon... But if you say, 'We will not dwell in this land,' disobeying the voice of the LORD your God, saying 'No, but we will go to the land of Egypt where we shall see no war...' Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: 'If you wholly set your faces to enter Egypt, and go to dwell there, then it shall be that the sword which you feared shall overtake you there in the land of Egypt'" (Jeremiah 42:10ff). We read in Jeremiah 43:8ff that Jeremiah himself was brought down to Egypt.

Kings, like Jeremiah, ends on a basically negative note (with the Jews left in exile), one that is strongly felt throughout both. Chronicles on the other hand ends on a note of hope, and indeed throughout the book of Chronicles the idea of hope, especially for those who repent, is stressed. This is not to say that Chronicles does not contain a message of Judgment, but simply that Chronicles stresses the mercy of God that is shown to the repentant.

To demonstrate this point it is beneficial to view the reign of King Manasseh of Judah as portrayed in Chronicles versus that which is portrayed in Kings. Both accounts relate how he sinned and "acted more wickedly than all the Amorites who were before him, and has also made Judah sin with his idols" (2nd Kings 21:10, cf 2nd Chronicles 33:9). However the Chronicler adds the story of Manasseh being deported to Babylon by the king of Assyria. Manasseh humbles himself there, prays to God and then God "brought him back to Jerusalem into his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the LORD was God" (2nd Chronicles 33:13) Manasseh does a house-cleaning in order to get rid of the foreign gods. His repentance is considered very great by the Chronicler such that his wicked son Amon is compared to him saying that he did evil as his father had done, but did not humble himself before the LORD as his father had done.

The fact that the Chronicler is addressing a specifically Babylonian exile audience, cannot be overlooked here. For in Manasseh he demonstrates a micro Babylonian exile and return. It's as though he is trying to encourage his audience to repent, pray and humble themselves and that then God would return them to their land. This echoes precisely what is stated in Deuteronomy 30:1-5.

Additionally in this story the Chronicler credits all the law and statutes and ordinances to the "command of God" (33:8) and that they came by the hand of Moses. The writer of Kings on the other hand states "...according to all that I have commanded them, and according to all the law that my servant Moses commanded them." (21:8). This difference in approach may just be two ways of saying the same thing, or it may show something else. Perhaps the Chronicles account reflects a more developed view of the giving of the Torah, one that parallels the ultra-orthodox view that all the Torah was given directly from God via Moses to the people. This is also the view that one would

expect of men such as Ezra or Nehemiah who were so concerned with the law. Such men would naturally want to stress that the Law was from God and not from God *and* Moses as the Kings account seems to say. For by saying that the Law is from God the importance of keeping it, without bending the rules, is all the more stressed. Notice Ezra 9:10-11, which holds the same view as the Chronicler on this matter. With the only difference being that Ezra mentions prophets in the plural versus Moses alone. Interestingly, Jesus in the New Testament seems to take up the Kings approach to the matter when he states, "Because of the hardness of your heart he (Moses) wrote you this precept" (Mark 10:5, also Matthew 19:8)

The idea seen here with Manasseh, that sin brings judgment and repentance brings restoration, is a common theme in Chronicles. 2nd Chronicles 7:19 states disobedience to the commandments and statutes as being the reason for exile, very similar to the Deuteronomist. Although Kings also deals with the subject, Chronicles makes a special point of the idea of humbling oneself and thereby finding favor again with God. This is clearly shown in the account of Rehoboam versus Shishak of Egypt. The Kings account mentions nothing of the humbling. Chronicles on the other hand records the leaders and the king humbling themselves (12:6ff). Because of this God has mercy on them and grants them "some deliverance" along with discipline.

This idea is further demonstrated in the account of Asa's foot disease. Kings states merely "But in the time of his old age he was diseased in his feet." (1st Kings 15:23) Chronicles goes on to say "...yet in his disease he did not seek the LORD, but the physicians." (2nd Chronicles 16:12) This idea of seeking the LORD is important to the Chronicler (2nd Chronicles 14:4 or 20:4).

In the account of Asa, the author of Chronicles clearly chose to add passages that supported his views among the people of Israel. The tradition that Ezra the scribe/priest wrote Chronicles seems credible. One can practically hear Ezra speaking when he inserts the words of the prophet Azariah (2nd Chronicles 15:3, compared to Nehemiah 8:1ff). In 15:2, 4 he quotes almost directly from Deuteronomy 4:29-31. Also in 14:4 he commands the people to seek God and to keep the law and the commandment. Clearly reflecting the views of someone like Ezra, who was a priest concerned greatly with matters of the law. The account goes on in 14:7ff to emphasize building projects, which again is so well suited to the audience Ezra and Nehemiah were addressing. Additionally the passage states that the "land is still ours", consistent with the Chroniclers view that the Jews are the natural inhabitants of the land. An allusion to the exile might be found in 15:5-7. Note that verse 15:7 seems written as encouragement to the people of Ezra's day (see Neh. chps 4-6) and 12-14 are very reminiscent of Nehemiah 10:29. For those who look for a priestly or cultic theme in the books, it can be found both in Kings and Chronicles where negative reference to the high places is made, not only here in the story of Asa but also with the other kings. The emphasis in both books includes keeping worship centered around Jerusalem, the city where God chose to put his name (2nd Kings 23:27, 2nd Chronicles 6:6, 7:16, 12:13, 36:14 or 30:1ff). In all of 2nd Chronicles 6, constant reference is made to praying towards Jerusalem, the place of the temple where God chose to put his name. Note also in the account of Abijah (2nd Chronicles 13:8-12) how he appeals to proper worship in order to revile the armies of the northern kingdom of Israel.

Similar to Ezra and Nehemiah, Chronicles stresses the leaders, Levites and Priests together teaching the people from the book of the law. (2nd Chronicles 17:7-9 and 19:8ff)

In both Ezra/Nehemiah and Chronicles the priests do not merely teach the people about laws of worship, but also Deuteronomical laws. Such as Deuteronomy 23:3ff.

Significantly the Chronicler adds to the story of Asa's confrontation with Baasha king of Israel, the account of Hanani the seer. Thereby he accuses Asa of sinning by not trusting the LORD. The writer of Kings makes no analysis of this incident with Baasha nor of Asa's not seeking God about his foot disease.

The writer of Kings seems much less concerned about faith towards God and more simply with just basic actions of right and wrong according to a legal code and according to the laws of proper worship.

The Chronicler, on the other hand, while also being concerned with the Law and proper worship, seems to promote more intensely than the writer of Kings the idea of trusting God (2nd Chronicles 20:20 for example). He seems very focused on the idea of encouraging the nation to believe rather than merely to adhere to a legal code. Again this is very similar to what Nehemiah and Ezra did (e.g. Nehemiah 4:9,14 or Ezra 8:21-23). This is plainly seen in the prophetic accounts added by the Chronicler where they do not exist in Kings. The account of Asa in Kings is very brief, in Chronicles however not one, but two stories of prophets appear. In the first Asa is exhorted to and even commended for believing God and in the second he is reproached for not trusting in or relying on God.

In summary, while both Chronicles and Kings deal with the subject of sin and pending exile, Chronicles additionally highlights the factors of faith, humility, hope and encouragement. The tone and style of Chronicles seems well suited to the audience of returned exiles living in the time of Nehemiah and Ezra and also to those still exiled in Babylon. These audiences dealt with many tough issues, including facing enemies who seemed more powerful while trying to return and reestablish their home in Canaan. They were also dealing with the issue of getting back to the Law of the LORD, which was a complicated path due to intermarriage and the dire circumstances they found themselves in. Chronicles was the book for them. It provided everything they needed: connection to a heritage, connection to the land, examples of sin and punishment as well as humility and restoration. It also gave them an explanation of why they were exiled, but it did not leave them there in exile as the book of Kings does. Additionally the connections between the book of Chronicles and Deuteronomy cannot be overlooked. The book of Chronicles contains all the elements/doctrines that are contained in Kings concerning both the legal and Levitical codes, but additionally stresses the elements of faith, humility, and hope.

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