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# The Chronicler: Theologian of Grace

by Thomas D. Hanks

*The old heresy that the Old Testament is a book of law as opposed to the New Testament which is a book of grace dies hard. We are grateful to Dr Hanks for choosing to overthrow it on ground that some might think was especially favourable to its defence. Dr Hanks is engaged in Ministry to the Student World in Costa Rica.*

16 In recent study of the theology of the Chronicler we find a growing appreciation of his emphasis on grace. Myers mentions it.<sup>1</sup> Von Rad sees David as the keynote to whom all themes are related<sup>2</sup> and Ackroyd stresses that David is the "type of the divine grace revealed to the true Israel."<sup>3</sup> In a work so long, varied, and complex, it is undoubtedly dangerous to seek to relate all to one theme. And it certainly would be great folly to pretend that the Chronicler composed a theological symphony on one note. However, it will become evident in the course of this study, we believe, that the note of grace is present, though not necessarily dominant, in most if not all of the chords struck. And attention to the place of grace in the Chronicler's theology enables us to appreciate something of the unity of his vision, in the midst of all its detailed diversity, as well as the distinctiveness of his interpretation of history, compared with the great parallel work of the Deuteronomist, written in the shadow of 587 by one still stunned by that great calamity. We need not be surprised, then, that the Deuteronomist history reaches its climax in an awesome expression of retributive justice, alleviated only slightly by the mention of Jehoiachin's release (2 Kings 25:27-30), while for the Chronicler, 587, though important, forms but one part of the series of events, stretching from the time of Adam to that of Nehemiah, and finding its climax in David's reign, which in turn serves as a type for the reign of David's greater son, long expected, but yet to come.

## I. THE GOD OF ALL GRACE

A. *Divine Initiative in Grace: Election.* Von Rad finds the Chronicler's concept of election dubious. He says that the Chronicler uses the verb *bahar* without literary precedent 11 times, but that the objects of this divine election are Levi (1 Chr. 15:2); David (28:4); the Temple site (2 Chr. 7:12,16; 12:13; 33:7); and priests (19:11). He concludes that for the Chronicler these specific acts of election were more important than the one act of election of Israel, that he says nothing at all about the election

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<sup>1</sup> Jacob M. Myers, *I Chronicles*, in *The Anchor Bible*, XII (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1965), 1xvi.

<sup>2</sup> Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, translated by D. M. G. Stalker, I (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1962), 350.

<sup>3</sup> Peter R. Ackroyd, "History and Theology in the Writings of the Chronicler," *Concordia Theological Monthly*, XXXVIII (September, 1967), 513.

of Israel and does not even know of a Covenant theology.<sup>4</sup> Ackroyd, however, disputes von Rad's conclusions as constituting "a very forced theology" of election.<sup>5</sup>

Undoubtedly von Rad is correct in calling attention to a distinctive emphasis of the Chronicler in stressing the Davidic period and the continuity of God's electing acts. Ackroyd rightly stresses the element of grace in the choice of the temple site, calling it a divine "act of grace in a moment of David's own failure and repentance" (1 Chr. 21).<sup>6</sup> And of course, the Chronicler in stressing the election of the temple site is but echoing the promise concerning "the place which the Lord your God shall choose" of Deuteronomy. With the election of the temple site, the election of Israel thus becomes complete, and should not be viewed as does von Rad as a disjointed view of election. Moreover, a methodological complaint may be raised against von Rad's treatment of election: why exclude the materials in the Chronicler's sources? In his treatment of "The Levitical Sermon in I and II Chronicles" Von Rad has pointed out the telling use of quotations from the prophets in Levitical preaching.<sup>7</sup> Why, then, cannot the sources of the Chronicler be interpreted as legitimately reflecting his own theology? Thus, in the prayer attributed in the Septuagint to Ezra God is said to have chosen Abraham (Neh. 9:6). And in a Psalm attributed to David, Israel is chosen (1 Chr. 16:13).

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B. *Continuity in Grace: God of the Fathers.* The very "disjointedness" of which von Rad complains is explicitly negated in the Chronicler's emphasis on God as the God of the fathers. Thus, while David had stressed his own election in 1 Chr. 28:4, in the following chapter he prays "O Lord, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, our fathers," (29:18) and the assembled people in response "blessed the LORD, the God of their fathers" (see also 2 Chr. 13:18; 15:12; 19:4; 20:6; 21:10; 24:18,24; 28:6,25; 29:5; 30:7,22; 36:15; Ezra 7:27; 8:28; 10:11, etc.).<sup>8</sup> David himself becomes associated with the fathers, as later kings are reminded of "The Lord, the God of David your father" (1 Chr. 28:9; 2 Chr. 21:12; 34:3).<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Von Rad, *Theology*, I, 352-353.

<sup>5</sup> Ackroyd, p.510.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p.513.

<sup>7</sup> Gerhard von Rad, *The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays*, translated by E. W. Trueman Dicken (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, c. 1966), p.269.

<sup>8</sup> Myers, *I Chronicles*, p.1xiv.

<sup>9</sup> Jacob M. Myers, "The Kerygma of the Chronicler," *Interpretation*, XX (July, 1966), 262.

C. *The Bond of Grace: The Covenant.* While von Rad complains that the Chronicler "does not even know of a Covenant theology,"<sup>10</sup> Myers insists that the covenant and covenant-love are ideas the Chronicler means to accentuate.<sup>11</sup> He points out that 34 times in the Chronicler's work God is said to be bound to Israel in covenant, and that the related concept of steadfast love (*hesed*) occurs some 23 times. Thus, when the wickedness of King Jehoram is described, the power of the covenantal promises to David is stressed: "Yet the LORD would not destroy the house of David, because of the covenant which he had made with David, and since he had promised to give a lamp to him and to his sons for ever." (2 Chr. 21:7).

The Ark of the Covenant, of course, plays a significant role in the David stories. While the Deuteronomist speaks of it as "the ark of God," the Chronicler expands the title to "the ark of the covenant of the LORD" (see 1 Chr. 15:25, 26, 28, 29, etc.).<sup>12</sup> In addition to David, other leaders make a covenant with the Lord: Jehoida (2 Chr. 34:16); Hezekiah (29:10); Josiah (34:30-32); and Ezra (Ezr. 10:3). The book of the Torah, a prominent theme, is once called the book of the covenant (2 Chr. 34:30).<sup>13</sup>

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D. *The Complement of Grace: Righteousness.* Although compared to the Deuteronomic history, grace appears more prominent in the work of the Chronicler, righteousness and retributive justice still constitute highly important themes. So plain is the importance of retributive justice in the Chronicler's work that some writers have managed to focus upon this as if it were even more dominant than in the work of the Deuteronomist. Von Rad, following Wellhausen's lead, sees the Chronicler as standing on the Deuteronomist's shoulders in his interpretation of history. Like the Deuteronomist, the Chronicler is said to be concerned to point out a relation of correspondence between guilt and punishment: "the only difference is that it raises this correspondence to the level of complete rational proof — no disaster without guilt, no sin without punishment."<sup>14</sup> North selects as one of four main emphases in the Chronicler "short-range retributionism."<sup>15</sup> He cites Manasseh, whose long reign must be accounted for by some redeeming feature not mentioned by the

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<sup>10</sup> Von Rad, *Theology*, I, 353.

<sup>11</sup> Myers, *I Chronicles*, p.1xvi.

<sup>12</sup> Myers, "The Kerygma," pp.262-263.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p.263

<sup>14</sup> Von Rad, *Theology*, I, 348.

<sup>15</sup> Robert North, "Theology of the Chronicler," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, LXXXII (1963), 372-374.

Deuteronomist. Saul's death is explained as a punishment for his most recent sin. Josiah's death is blamed on disobedience, even though it was disobedience to an Egyptian "God." With his insistence upon Sheol, "the Chronicler's obstinately earth-bound retributionism" is interpreted as "the emphatic last-ditch credo of a conservative."<sup>16</sup>

Unquestionably von Rad and North bring out an important feature of the Chronicler's theology. However, by careful selection of the evidence, a false impression is easily given. In the Chronicler, as in the Deuteronomist, the catastrophe of 587 comes as a result of hundreds of years of apostasy, and can hardly be viewed as "short-range retributionism." Nowhere in scripture is the long-suffering of God more poignantly stressed than in the prayer of Nehemiah 9. And to find in the Chronicler's account of Manasseh only short-range retributionism, while neglecting the staggering mercy and forgiveness implied, is to say the least a very one-sided reading of the story.

It is better, therefore, to recognize that in the Chronicler, as generally in biblical thought, grace and justice are viewed as complementary characteristics of God and held in careful, dynamic tension — a paradox that defies human comprehension: "Now, therefore, our God, the great and mighty and terrible God, who keepest covenant and steadfast love, let not all the hardship seem little to thee that has come upon us, for thou hast dealt faithfully and we have acted wickedly" (Neh. 9:32-33).

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God's righteousness is related to his truthfulness and the fulfilment of covenant promises: God chose Abram and promised to give to his descendants the land of Canaan, "and thou hast fulfilled thy promise, for thou art righteous" (Neh. 9:8; see also 2 Chr. 12:6; 19:16-17; Ezr. 9:15). In Genesis 6 man is viewed as righteous when his life conforms to the commandments of God (Gen. 6:9, 22). For the Chronicler God is righteous in that he fulfills his covenant promises. Both for God and man, then, righteousness must be interpreted in relation to the Word of God.

E. *The Transcendent Majesty and Mystery of Grace: Holiness.* As in Leviticus, holiness is one of the primary concerns of the Chronicler. In his concern for holiness, he speaks of a holy people, the holy city, holy offerings and vessels, a holy ark, a holy day, holy Levites, and holy attire (1 Chr. 16:29; 2 Chr. 20:21; Ezr. 8:28, etc.). Never, however, does the Chronicler speak of Yahweh as a holy God.<sup>17</sup> Probably little significance should be attached to this linguistic phenomenon. Sometimes the things most taken for granted and most basic to a writer's thought receive no

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p.373.

<sup>17</sup> Myers, *1 Chronicles*, p.1xv.

explicit affirmation. Thus, any reader of Amos recognizes immediately the prophet's emphasis on God's righteousness and his angry judgment on sin. Yet nowhere in the book does the prophet say explicitly that Yahweh is righteous or angry (the only characteristic of God explicitly mentioned in Amos is his holiness — 2:7 and 4:2—!). Linguistic statistics may thus be misleading as well as illuminating. The great presupposition for the Chronicler's concern for holiness in the cult is certainly his belief in the holiness of God.

The sovereign majesty and mystery of God's grace and justice are such that, while his anger may be kindled against Uzzah for putting out his hand to hold the ark (1 Chr. 13:9-10), Israel's most wicked king, Manasseh, is forgiven all his atrocities and miraculously restored to his kingdom from exile.

## II. MAN'S NEED OF GRACE: SIN

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The Chronicler has traditionally been charged with a denial of the realities of human life, and with drawing a veil over the scandalous falls of saints.<sup>18</sup> On the other hand, Myers can speak of the Chronicler's keen consciousness of sin (citing 1 Chr. 21:7, 17; Neh. 1:6; Ezra 9:6, 7, 13; 2 Chr. 19:10). He also points out the extensive use of roots of words in the Old Testament vocabulary of sin, indicating that they are used primarily, though not exclusively, of cultic sins (against God). Nehemiah once speaks and acts like a prophet when he denounces partiality in handling of economic problems by some in the Jewish community (Neh. 5).<sup>19</sup>

Certainly it would be hard to find a keener consciousness of our common involvement than is expressed in Ezra's great prayer: "O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift my face to thee, my God, for our iniquities have risen higher than our heads, and our guilt has mounted up to the heavens. From the days of our fathers to this day we have been in great guilt; and for our iniquities we, our kings, and our priests have been given into the hand of the kings of the lands . . ." (Ezra 9:6-7).

The great prayer of confession in Nehemiah 9 stresses the awfulness of sin as sin against the majestic creator (9:6), and sin in the face of God's continuing forgiveness, grace, mercy and steadfast love (9:17, 27, 28, 31).

If North is correct, the Chronicler even presents David as a descendant of the sinful line of Cain.<sup>20</sup> Certainly David is not presented as sin-

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<sup>18</sup> Von Rad, *Theology*, I, 354.

<sup>19</sup> Myers, *I Chronicles*, p. 1xxx; "The Kerygma," p. 264.

<sup>20</sup> Robert North, "The Cain Music," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, LXXXIII (1964), 89.

less. God's gracious choice of the temple site, the place where sacrifice for sin is to be offered, comes upon the heels of David's sin in the census (1 Chr. 21). The Chronicler records in terms stronger than those of the Deuteronomist the reason why David was not permitted to build the temple: "Thou hast shed blood abundantly" (1 Chr. 22:8/1 Kg. 5:3).

Thus, Wellhausen's and von Rad's attributing to the Chronicler a kind of Victorian prudishness does not seem to fit the case. An alternative view, more in conformity with the total evidence and historical situation of the writer, is to recognize that David to a large extent is interpreted as a type of the David to come. If in Deuteronomy, Moses can serve as a type for a coming prophet (Dt. 18), we should not be surprised that David, too, becomes a type for a coming greater king.

### III. THE MEANS OF GRACE: WORSHIP

Often considered "the outstanding contribution of the Chronicler" was his theology of worship.<sup>21</sup> Myers has ably outlined the main features of this theology; the great complexity and extent of the materials forbid that we go into great detail. If the Chronicler was a Levite and musician, as many believe, we may better appreciate his tendency to delight in detail.

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A. *The Basis: Revelation.* 1. Torah. Myers points out that the notion of many that the Chronicler was little concerned with the Mosaic period is contradicted by his emphasis upon Moses and the Torah. The name of Moses, the term Torah and the phrase "Torah of Moses" occur with far greater frequency in the Chronicler than in Samuel and Kings.<sup>22</sup> The Torah was the official standard according to which the life and activity of nation and individuals were judged.

2. Spirit. Nor is the emphasis on the authority of Torah resulting in a dead orthodoxy. Rather it is accompanied in the Chronicler by a development of the doctrine of the spirit of God. While in earlier times the spirit of God was often a power enabling men to perform mighty deeds, the Chronicler stresses prophetic inspiration and indirect communication with Israel through the spirit (1 Chr. 12:18; 28:12; 2 Chr. 15:1; 20:14; 24:20; Neh. 9:20).

B. *The Personnel.* The Chronicler sees not only priests and Levites, but also kings and prophets as cultic personnel.<sup>23</sup> Kings on battlefields can be rather effective preachers, as we have seen. The prophets are viewed as

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<sup>21</sup> Myers, "The Kerygma," p.267.

<sup>22</sup> Myers, *I Chronicles*, p.1xxviii.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.1xvii-1xxi.

champions of cultic purity, not as deniers of the validity of cultic action.<sup>24</sup>

C. *The Place*. Confronted with other religious centres such as Samaria and Elephantine, the Chronicler followed the Deuteronomist in stressing one central sanctuary in Jerusalem,<sup>25</sup> but like the Deuteronomist, he recognized that God's presence was not limited to the temple (2 Chr. 6:18).

D. *Cultic Actions*. Preaching, teaching, sacrifice,<sup>26</sup> prayer,<sup>27</sup> and music<sup>28</sup> and praise are among the cultic actions stressed by the Chronicler.<sup>29</sup> The spectacle of a temple choir defeating a great army (2 Chr. 20:20-23) probably presented no more strain to the faith of his readers than the Deuteronomic account of the collapse of Jericho's walls before a marching band. Should not good (Levitical) music prove at least as effective a force for good as had bad music in Joshua's day?

E. *The Question of Legitimacy*: "Order and Ardor." North has summarized the Chronicler's concern for legitimacy as follows: "Those who are directing any important pursuit involving religion should be those who in one way or another are legitimately designated for the task."<sup>30</sup> We may question whether this strikes quite the proper note. Certainly the Chronicler would have rejoiced in Paul's insistence that "all things be done decently and in order." But he also makes it quite clear that if excessive preoccupation with decency and order results in all things not being done, then God may well raise up someone rather indecently and out of order to assure that the important things do get done. The Levites take over many of the roles of slothful priests, and one of them even gives a prophetic oracle, as does Pharaoh Neco to Josiah (2 Chr. 35:22)!<sup>31</sup> The Chronicler may not have considered it entirely decent that God should bring Nehemiah, probably a eunuch, to rebuild the wall, but he had to admit that it was part of God's order.

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#### IV. THE RESPONSE TO GRACE: FAITH AND OBEDIENCE.

A. *Faith*. The most significant contribution to appreciation of the Chronicler's theology of preaching and faith has been made by von

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<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.1xxv-1xxvii. See also Adam C. Welch, *The Work of the Chronicler* (London: Oxford University Press, 1939), pp.42-54).

<sup>25</sup> Myers, *I Chronicles*, p.1xvii.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.1xxi-1xxiii.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p.1xvi.

<sup>28</sup> North, "Theology," pp.374-375.

<sup>29</sup> Myers, "The Kerygma," p.267.

<sup>30</sup> North, "Theology," p.370.

<sup>31</sup> Myers, "The Kerygma," pp.265-266. See also *I Chronicles*, p.1xvi.



Rad,<sup>32</sup> who suggests that the Chronicler, following the Deuteronomist, contains Levitical preaching. Von Rad discusses ten examples of such sermons: (1) the declaration of the "man of God" to Amaziah (2 Chr. 25:7-9); (2) the exhortation of Hanani the seer to Asa (2 Chr. 16:7-9); (3) the message of Azariah to Asa (2 Chr. 15:2-7); (4) King Jehoshaphat's exhortation to his judges (2 Chr. 19:6-11); (5) the exhortation of Jahaziel the Levite to Jehoshaphat and Judah (2 Chr. 20:15-17); (6) Jehoshaphat's exhortation the following day (2 Chr. 20:20); (7) Hezekiah's message (2 Chr. 32:7-8); (8) his address to the Levites (2 Chr. 29:5-11); (9) his letters sent throughout Israel (2 Chr. 30:6-9); and (10) David's speech, presenting Solomon to the council (1 Chr. 28:2-10). As Myers points out, "The basic theme running through most of these sermons is exhortation to faith, trust, and confidence in the Lord."<sup>33</sup> Often this theme is quite explicit, as when King Jehoshaphat, alluding to Isaiah's famous exhortation to Ahaz (Isa. 7:9), cries out: "Believe in Yahweh your God, and you will be established; Believe his prophets, and you will succeed." Strangely, von Rad finds here "a decadent and wholly unprophetic element"<sup>34</sup> — in making the prophets objects worthy of faith, but this surely is to neglect the prophetic claim to speak with God's words in their mouth. The power of this word to inspire faith is made explicit: "And the people took confidence from the words of Hezekiah king of Judah" (2 Chr. 32:8b).

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B. *Obedience.* Many of the prophets, as well as the Deuteronomist, had traced the root cause of the calamity of 587 to the people's idolatry. It does not surprise us, then, to find that the Chronicler places such great stress on cultic purity and obedience in the things pertaining to the worship of God. However, it should be recognized that for the Chronicler "The idea of holiness reflects a moral as well as ritual quality."<sup>35</sup> Ezra's concern to study and teach the Torah in its totality (Ezr. 7:10) is characteristic of the Chronicler's emphasis. Nehemiah's courage in confronting economic abuses has been mentioned (Neh. 5). A similar prophetic note is struck by Jehoshaphat in his exhortation to the judges (2 Chr. 19:6-7; see also 2 Chr. 10:1-19). In his insistence that true worship and genuine faith are to issue in practical obedience in specific situations the Chronicler is at one with the prophets and apostles.

In the account of Nehemiah's rebuilding of the wall we may find

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<sup>32</sup> Von Rad, *Kexateuch*, pp.268-276.

<sup>33</sup> Myers, "The Kerygma," p.268.

<sup>34</sup> Von Rad, *Theology*, I, 274.

<sup>35</sup> Myers, "The Kerygma," p.264.

much raw material for a theology of work — chapters curiously neglected in standard treatises on the subject. Nehemiah's political role, as governor of the district of Judah,<sup>36</sup> is important for understanding the Chronicler's theology of politics. Nor can the extensive use of scribal, secretarial, and genealogical materials be neglected. These elements do not always make for the most interesting reading, but as Stinespring appropriately comments, "biblical writers were writing not for entertainment but for salvation."<sup>37</sup> Plainly the Chronicler had a very broad vision — very much like Luther's — in his understanding of the nature of "good works." They included "bricklaying" and tedious secretarial service, as well as presenting petitions to kings, preaching, and cultic actions. The Chronicler provides a most healthy antidote for an entertainment — addicted age to the notion that the truly obedient life is an unbroken stream of "excitement." It certainly is at least as tedious to copy genealogies and lists of "those present" as it is to read them, yet the Chronicler saw fit to include them in his presentation of God's message for his time. And so a number of tedious elements became part of the Word of God — because they are a legitimate — even important — part of the work of God.

North relates the Chronicler's concern for legitimacy to the problem of work in modern society with the following observation: "It is obvious that if every father has little esteem for the rôle he plays in society, he can find no pride or loyal love in forming his son tenderly to the same function. Must not the solution lie in reappraising the work of society's fathers rather than the training of its sons?"<sup>38</sup>

## V. THE COMMUNITY ESTABLISHED BY GRACE: ALL ISRAEL

A. *The Ecumenical Vision: Unity.* The Deuteronomist had given considerable emphasis to the vision of "all Israel," as a united people. The same phrase is found about 41 times in Chronicles and 8 times in Ezra and Nehemiah, only 6 of which are paralleled in Samuel and Kings.<sup>39</sup> The Chronicler thus becomes a proponent of an ecumenical movement to unite the people of God in a visible unity.

B. *The Limits of Fellowship: Separation.* North calls attention to the Chronicler's concern for "the legitimacy of the community."<sup>40</sup> As von

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<sup>36</sup> Myers, *I Chronicles*, p. liv.

<sup>37</sup> W. F. Stinespring, "Eschatology in Chronicles," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, LXXX (1961), 210.

<sup>38</sup> North, "Theology," p. 370.

<sup>39</sup> Myers, *I Chronicles*, p. lxxiv.

<sup>40</sup> North, "Theology," pp. 371-372.

Rad puts it, "Chronicles was interested in the delimitation of the community from the Samaritans and . . . wanted to prove that the cultic community at the Jerusalem Temple was the true Israel."<sup>40a</sup> This appears chiefly in Ezra and Nehemiah and focuses in the rejection of mixed marriages and of Samaritan collaboration (Ezr. 9-10; Neh. 4; 13). A number of other writers have pointed out the obvious concern for the delimitation of the community from the Samaritans, and the insistence that the cultic community centered in the Jerusalem Temple is the true Israel.<sup>41</sup> This may even explain the relative neglect of the Sinai-Exodus tradition, which the Samaritans also espoused.

C. *The Theology of Mission.* While many would see the Chronicler as totally devoid of any missionary interest, Myers points out his taking over from the Deuteronomist the consideration for the stranger in Solomon's dedicatory prayer (2 Chr. 6:32-33).<sup>42</sup> The prayer at least demonstrates that the earlier universalism has not been completely quenched in a flood of post-exilic exclusivism.

The historical situation evidently indicated that part of the immediate missionary strategy be focused upon the remnants of the northern tribes in Samaria. Individuals such as Ezra could concern themselves at times with their "testimony" before pagan emperors (Ezr. 8:21-23), but Gentile domination evidently proved a sufficient threat to the community's existence that the immediate strategy became one of defense and preservation rather than offense and penetration.

The fact that most prominent Jews preferred to remain in exile may have strengthened the conviction that it was not the time for sermons calling for "more missionaries." Leaders had to resort to a kind of conscription by lot to get sufficient families to live in Jerusalem (Neh. 11:1-2)! Had the Chronicler not properly recognized his task to be one of strengthening the stakes, rather than lengthening the cords, the tent may well have collapsed. But his solidifying of the home base provided necessary foundation for growing interest in Gentile conversion in inter-testamental times. Like the apostles in the early chapters of Acts, it was his responsibility to concentrate on the first stage, "beginning at Jerusalem." His inclusion of Solomon's prayer serves as a gentle reminder that he expected Jerusalem to serve as a genuine beginning, not the end of missionary vision. And when we consider the prominence given to Jerusalem (Isa. 2:1-4) and the temple (Isa. 56:7) in the vision of

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<sup>40a</sup> Von Rad, *Theology*, I, 348.

<sup>41</sup> Von Rad, *Theology*, I, 348.

<sup>42</sup> Myers, "The Kerygma," p. 265.

earlier universalists, we are not surprised that the Chronicler, like the Apostles, found it necessary to begin there.

## VI. THE FINAL TRIUMPH OF GRACE: DAVID'S SON

North well expresses the conclusion of much recent study when he writes: "The person and dynasty of David forms the heartbeat of all the Chronicler's theology."<sup>43</sup> This suggests a fully personal theology of grace, and not some abstract metaphysical power, magically at work in the cult.

The conclusion of Rudolph, following Hertzberg and Vriczen, was that "the complete lack of eschatological expectation is what sunders this book from the prophetic perspective and sets it on the fringe of the canon."<sup>44</sup> Even Myers concluded that "In Ezra-Nehemiah . . . messianism has all but evaporated."<sup>45</sup>

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Stinespring's survey of "Eschatology in Chronicles"<sup>46</sup> might lead one to the opposite extreme. However, while it does not seem legitimate to make of the Chronicler an eschatological fanatic, it is difficult to see how he could have preserved Nathan's promise concerning David's son in its present form ("his throne shall be established forever," 1 Chr. 17:14) if he did not continue to cherish the prophetic hope of a David-like Messiah.

Von Rad is quite explicit at this point:

In his miserable age when there were no kings, the Chronicler is the guardian of the messianic tradition . . . We may certainly read off the picture of the one whom he awaited from his great original David — he would be a king in whose hands two offices, the royal and the priestly, were united.<sup>47</sup>

It should be noted that the promise to David, unlike those to his successors, is not conditional. This hope may not always have burned brilliantly in the foreground of the Chronicler's theology, but the prominence given to David and the apparent typological treatment of his life suggest that the prophetic hope was not by any means lost. It is difficult to understand how the Chronicler could have continued to stress the authority of the prophetic oracles, including the fulfilment of their predictions, if the Davidic hope had been abandoned.

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<sup>43</sup> North, "Theology," p.376.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p.378.

<sup>45</sup> Myers, *I Chronicles*, p.1xxxv.

<sup>46</sup> Stinespring, *passim*.

<sup>47</sup> Von Rad, *Theology*, I, 351.

The temple, Jerusalem, and David had been prominent themes in prophetic eschatology. In Ezra and Nehemiah the Chronicler presents a kind of "realized eschatology" as he patiently traces God's gracious fulfillment of his covenant promises in the return of the remnant, the rebuilding of the temple (515), and the restoration of Jerusalem (Nehemiah). When he had borne witness to God's gracious restoration of people, temple and Jerusalem, should we expect him, with all his faith in prophetic promises, to deny the coming of David's son?

We must also reckon with the possibility that the messianic hope had undergone the kind of development reflected in Malachi (3:1-4; 4:1-3) before the Chronicler finished his work. If so we may rightly understand the urgency with which Ezra and Nehemiah pressed for reform and purity within the covenant community as an eschatologically motivated urgency. Thus, the great prayer of Nehemiah 9, as North points out, becomes ultimately in vss. 32ff. a plea for "deliverance from the yoke."<sup>48</sup> We may also ask whether at a time when Persian speculation and mythology may have penetrated behind Nehemiah's wall, it is not significant that David in the Chronicler's theology, like Christ in Luke's gospel, is presented not only as a Jew, but also as son of Adam (1 Chr. 1:1), or son of Man.

27

Finally, we should note Nehemiah's repeated plea "Remember me," (4:4f. (Heb. 3:36f); 5:19; 6:14; 13:22, 31), which recent studies stress as "decisive for our understanding of the book."<sup>49</sup> Kaiser would see in the petition only a request that God secure for Nehemiah good repute and an eternal name after death. However, a number of factors may suggest that this is too limiting: (1) the purported closeness of the book to biographical inscriptions from Egypt, where thoughts of final judgment and life after death were ever dominant; (2) Dahood's strictures against modern tendencies to reduce the eschatological implications in biblical language, when Ugaritic parallels support a maximizing approach; (3) while we do not find convincing Kaiser's arguments for pushing the final redaction of the Chronicler's work close to the Macabean period so it is difficult to see how those suggesting such a date should continue to exclude from Nehemiah's hope the kind of personal participation by resurrection that is undeniably present in Daniel 12 and the Isaiah apocalypse (ch. 24-27).

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<sup>48</sup> North, "Theology," p.379.

<sup>49</sup> Otto Kaiser, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, translated by John Sturdy (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1975), p.187.

If the great prayer in Nehemiah 9 is indeed a plea for “deliverance from the yoke,” is it not more reasonable to see in Nehemiah’s “Remember me,” a petition that approaches that prayer addressed to David’s Son, which added — to remove all ambiguity — “when you come in your kingly power” (Lk. 23:47)?

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