

STRAIGHT TO  
THE HEART OF

# 1 & 2 Chronicles

SIXTY BITE-SIZED  
INSIGHTS

Phil Moore

MONARCH  
BOOKS

## Introduction: The God of Small Things

*“The events of King David’s reign ... together with the details of his reign and power.”*

(1 Chronicles 29:29–30)

It wasn’t unusual for one of my father-in-law’s friends to dig his own foundations for an extension to his home. As a close-knit community of North Dorset farmers, they resented paying professional builders to do work that they could do themselves. One month, my father-in-law’s friends would dig with him in his garden. The next month, he would return the favour by driving his digger over to one of their homes.

What was unusual about this dig, however, was what John White found buried beneath the familiar turf of his backyard. The soil that he and his friends unearthed was peppered with so many brightly coloured little cubes that he eventually called a halt to his home extension and invited a team of archaeologists to come and dig over his garden instead. The BBC series *A History of the World in 100 Objects* would later place the Hinton St Mary Mosaic as number forty-four on its list of a hundred great historical finds. Underneath John White’s unimpressive garden lay hidden the oldest and best-preserved mosaic of Jesus Christ in the entire Roman Empire. In the mosaic, Jesus stands in front of the Christian *chi-rho* symbol, as if waiting patiently for the diggers to locate him.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *A History of the World in 100 Objects* was broadcast on BBC Radio 4 in 2010. The Hinton St Mary Mosaic has now become one of the greatest treasures in the British Museum in London.

That's how we ought to regard 1 and 2 Chronicles. At first glance, these two books of the Bible appear as unimpressive as the grass in John White's backyard. Some readers complain that they begin with nine long chapters of genealogy. Others wonder why the books were written at all, given that their story has already been told in greater detail in Genesis, 1 and 2 Samuel, and 1 and 2 Kings. Originally a single book of the Hebrew Old Testament, it was split in two during the third century BC by the translators of the Greek Septuagint. They named it the *Paraleipomenon*, which means *Things Omitted Earlier*, or *Leftovers*, and which must surely qualify as the least inviting name of any of the books of the Bible!<sup>2</sup> And yet, underneath the surface of these two unimpressive-looking books lies buried treasure. They are peppered with tiny details, each of which conveys big truth about God. They reveal him to be *the God of small things*.

Chronicles is the last book of the Hebrew Old Testament in many ancient manuscripts, reinforcing the idea that it was written as a supplementary appendix to the Old Testament as a whole. A long-held Jewish belief identifies Ezra as the author of 1 and 2 Chronicles and of Ezra and Nehemiah, and this is borne out by many striking similarities between those four books of the Bible.<sup>3</sup> At the very least, the Chronicler is a contemporary of Ezra who wishes to do more than merely write a history of Israel.<sup>4</sup> He is

<sup>2</sup> Ancient Hebrew omits vowels when written, so a lot of words could be fitted onto a single scroll. When the Book of Chronicles was translated into Greek, it needed to be split in half and turned into two scrolls instead.

<sup>3</sup> Ezra and Nehemiah were also originally a single book of the Hebrew Old Testament. Manuscripts such as the Babylonian Talmud make Chronicles the final book of the Old Testament but, since the first verses of Ezra are almost identical to the final verses of 2 Chronicles, other manuscripts make Ezra–Nehemiah the final book, after Chronicles. Note the same peculiar name for the Holy Spirit – the “hand” of God/the Lord – in 1 Chronicles 28:19, Ezra 7:6, 7:9, 7:28, 8:18, 8:22 and 8:31, and Nehemiah 2:8 and 2:18. Note also the same peculiar way of describing his work – stirred/aroused/moved – in 1 Chronicles 5:26, 2 Chronicles 21:16, and Ezra 1:1 and 1:5.

<sup>4</sup> Ezra was the priest and scribe who led the second great return of the Jewish exiles back from Babylon in about 458 BC. Since the events of Nehemiah end in 432 BC, Ezra probably wrote all four books in about 430 BC.

like the Apostle John, who assumed his readers had already read Matthew, Mark and Luke, and therefore wrote a supplementary gospel which explored events and topics which had been omitted by the previous gospel-writers. The Chronicler goes back over the story of the Old Testament in order to highlight items in the ancient scrolls of Israel that were omitted earlier but which are of great significance to readers in his own day.<sup>5</sup>

The Chronicler wrote after the Jews had returned home to the Promised Land after decades of captivity in Babylon.<sup>6</sup> Many of the returning exiles wept with disappointment, for things were not as they expected.<sup>7</sup> Their new Temple and the new city walls of Jerusalem were much smaller than the ones destroyed by the Babylonians. Judea remained a subjugated province of the Persian Empire and the royal dynasty of David failed to produce a resurgent new king who could lead the Jewish nation to freedom. Many Jews became so disillusioned that they turned their backs on the Lord by marrying the foreign idolaters who had settled in the Promised Land during their long exile and by worshipping their idols. The Lord needed to warn them in Zechariah 4:10 that his plans for Israel were far from over. “*Who dares despise the day of small things?*”

Into this context comes the Chronicler with a fresh retelling of the story of God's people. In **1 Chronicles 1–9**, he digs under the surface of Genesis and 1 Samuel to uncover **small things about Israel** which shed important light on what is happening in his own day. In **1 Chronicles 10–29**, he digs deeper into the events described in 2 Samuel, unearthing **small things about King David** that explain the disappointments of the present and unveil God's great promises for the future. In **2 Chronicles 1–9**, he digs deeper into the first chapters of 1 Kings to highlight

<sup>5</sup> The Chronicler names these old Jewish records as his primary sources in 1 Chronicles 9:1, 27:24 and 29:29, and 2 Chronicles 9:29, 12:15, 13:22, 16:11, 20:34, 24:27, 25:26, 26:22, 27:7, 28:26, 32:32, 33:18–19, 35:27 and 36:8.

<sup>6</sup> In 1 Chronicles 9:1–2, he describes the resettlement of the land by the returning Jewish exiles.

<sup>7</sup> See Ezra 3:12–13 and Haggai 2:1–3.

similar **small things about King Solomon**. In **2 Chronicles 10–36**, he unearths a host of buried treasures from the rest of 1 and 2 Kings, giving fresh hope to his readers through a myriad of omitted **small things about Judah**. In all of this, he echoes the words of Zechariah 4:10. He encourages the disappointed and disillusioned Jews after the exile that the Lord God of Israel is *the God of small things*.

The original Hebrew name for 1 and 2 Chronicles is *Dibrēy Hayyāmim*, which means literally *The Things of the Days*. The Chronicler sweeps through many centuries of history, stopping frequently to focus the eyes of his readers on the little details of certain days in the past which shed great light on the problems of the present day. He uses each of these small details to convince his readers that they are still living at the heart of God's great story. The Lord is still fulfilling all his promises to his people.

The Chronicler uses events in the past to answer the big questions of the present. Who are we? Why are we here? What is God doing all around us? What should we do in response to him? These are all questions of worldview. The Chronicler uses the familiar stories of the past to bring clarity to the present and fresh energy for the future.

Like John White and his friends digging in their backyard, as we delve deeper into 1 and 2 Chronicles together, we will ultimately find revealed the face of Jesus Christ. As we reflect afresh on the stories of David, Solomon and the other kings of Judah, we will find that God has peppered their stories with tiny pieces of a great mosaic which points towards the life and ministry of his Messiah. Each of these tiny details matters greatly.

So let's get ready for some fruitful digging as we read 1 and 2 Chronicles together. Let's get ready to be inspired by each of the omitted details that the Chronicler adds back into the Jewish story. Let's get ready to enjoy the beautiful mosaic of God's plans for his people. Let's get ready to discover that the God of Israel is *the God of small things*.

Part One:

# Small Things about Israel (1 Chronicles 1–9)

## Un-tribal God (1 Chronicles 1:1–54)

*“Adam ... Noah: Shem, Ham and Japheth ...  
Abraham: Isaac and Ishmael ... Esau and Israel.”*

(1 Chronicles 1:1, 4, 28, 34)

There is a famous story about two friends who played a trick on their dim-witted neighbour. When the Amazon delivery man left a parcel for him at their home, they opened the package and switched the novel that he had ordered with an old telephone directory. A week later, they asked their neighbour how he was enjoying his new novel. “Well, I’ll be honest with you,” their dim-witted neighbour confessed to them. “I don’t think much of the plot so far, but the opening cast list is incredible!”

The first nine chapters of 1 and 2 Chronicles are very similar. The story opens, not with action, but with a colossal list of names.<sup>1</sup> As a result, the eyes of many readers immediately glaze over, as they quickly flick forward to the start of the narrative in chapter 10. But to do so is to miss what the Chronicler is attempting to teach his readers. These opening chapters are more than just the cast list to his story. They are the story itself. The structure of these nine opening chapters reveals to us the God of small things.

**1:1–54      The un-tribal God**  
**2:1–4:23    The royal tribe of Judah**

<sup>1</sup> Our English translations seek to soften this for us a little – for example, by adding an explanation to 1:4 that these are “the sons of Noah”. In the Hebrew text, the first four verses of 1 Chronicles are simply 13 names.

**4:24–5:26    The lesser tribes of Israel**  
(Simeon, Reuben, Gad and Eastern Manasseh)  
**6:1–81      The priestly tribe of Levi**  
**7:1–40      The lesser tribes of Israel**  
(Issachar, Benjamin, Naphtali, Western Manasseh, Ephraim and Asher)  
**8:1–40      The royal tribe of Benjamin**  
**9:1–34      The un-tribal God once more**

Far from being dull and pointless, these nine opening chapters reveal a beautiful symmetry to God’s purposes for his people. The Chronicler was probably Ezra the priest, so note the way in which the priestly tribe of Levi displaces the tribe of Dan to occupy the central place in this first section of the story.<sup>2</sup> The Chronicler wants to reassure his Jewish readers after the exile that it doesn’t matter too much that no one from David’s dynasty is ruling over an independent nation state of Israel. The centre of Jewish history was never a palace, but always the Temple. The fact that the Temple has been rebuilt after the exile means that the Lord now sits enthroned again in the midst of his people, even if Judea remains a minor province of the Persian Empire.

The priestly tribe of Levi is flanked on either side by the lesser tribes of Israel. These are flanked in turn by the two royal tribes of Israel – the families of King Saul and King David. These are flanked by people who enjoyed God’s grace before and after the strict division of his people into twelve tribes. The returning exiles were known as the *Jews* and their province was known as *Judea* because they were largely the descendants of the tribe of Judah. Members of the tribe of Benjamin and of the other, lesser tribes of Israel lost much of their identity as they were absorbed

<sup>2</sup> Technically, Levi was not considered to be one of the twelve tribes, but Dan is also replaced by Levi in Revelation 7:4–8. Since Jacob prophesied in Genesis 49:16–17 that Dan would prove to be “a snake by the roadside”, it seems likely that the Danites never returned home from exile. Since the tribe of Zebulun is also missing, it may be that the Zebulunites failed to return too.

into this new Jewish nation.<sup>3</sup> The Chronicler therefore begins by reminding his readers that they have an un-tribal God.

In 1:1–3, we are reminded that the Lord walked with Adam, Enoch, Noah and their families long before he created the twelve tribes of Israel. In 1:4–27, we are reminded that the Lord was equally faithful to all three of Noah’s sons. As many verses are devoted to describing the European descendants of Japheth and the African and Middle Eastern descendants of Ham as are devoted to describing the Israelite descendants of Shem.<sup>4</sup>

In 1:28–33, we are reminded that the Lord was faithful to all of Abraham’s children. While it is true that Isaac was counted as Abraham’s firstborn son when it came to inheriting his blessing (which is why he is listed before his older brother Ishmael), that doesn’t mean the Lord despised the other sons of Abraham. The twelve sons of Ishmael are listed ahead of the twelve sons of Jacob. After all, the first person that the Lord ever named in the womb was Ishmael. The first appearance of one of his angels to anybody in the Bible was to Ishmael’s mother Hagar.<sup>5</sup> In the same way, although Abraham should never have taken Keturah as his concubine and the Midianites she bore were bitter enemies to Israel, the Chronicler still lists her children ahead of Israel’s tribes.<sup>6</sup>

This proclamation that the God of Israel is an un-tribal God becomes even clearer in 1:34–54. Isaac had twin sons. Esau was the eldest, so he is listed ahead of his brother Jacob, whom the Lord later renamed Israel. Esau sinned against the Lord by selling the blessing of the firstborn to his younger brother for

<sup>3</sup> We can tell from Luke 2:36, Romans 11:1 and Philippians 3:5 that the separate identities of the twelve tribes were not lost completely. But in the New Testament such tribal distinctions become few and far between.

<sup>4</sup> *Shem* is the root of our English word *Semitic*. Ham’s descendants include the Egyptians who enslaved the Hebrews, the Philistines who repeatedly attacked them, and the nations which originally occupied the Promised Land. Ham’s descendant Nimrod was also the founder of Assyria and Babylon. For more detail about the people in this list of names, see Genesis 5:1–32, 9:18–10:32 and 11:10–26.

<sup>5</sup> Genesis 16:1–16.

<sup>6</sup> The Chronicler lifts these two lists of names from Genesis 25:1–4 and 25:12–16.

a bowl of stew. Nevertheless, the Chronicler makes it clear that his unfaithfulness towards the Lord did not undo the Lord’s faithfulness towards him.<sup>7</sup> The sons that Esau bore in his youth are listed in full in verses 35–37. The sons that he bore later, in the land that the Lord gave him in Seir, are listed in verses 38–42. The Chronicler even lists the kings of that land after it became the ancient kingdom of Edom, emphasising that “*These were the kings who reigned in Edom before any Israelite king reigned*”.<sup>8</sup> By listing these non-Jews ahead of the twelve tribes of Israel, he helps his readers to grasp that the Lord is the God of all nations.<sup>9</sup>

So, if you find the opening chapter of 1 Chronicles a bit confusing, then you are in good company. So did its original Jewish readers after their return from exile in Babylon. As they stared with disappointment at their new Temple and lamented the fact that the twelve tribes of Israel were in disarray, the Chronicler surprised them with a careful retelling of the story of humanity. He pointed out that the God of small things has peppered the story of humanity with tiny details which together form a great mosaic of his purposes in history. He insisted that God’s plan was never all about the twelve tribes of Israel. It was always about something far greater, for every nation.

It was the revelation of a God who does not play favourites, of a gloriously un-tribal God.

<sup>7</sup> See 2 Timothy 2:11–13.

<sup>8</sup> *Esau* means *Hairy* because his body was covered with thick red hair. Genesis 25:21–34 and 36:8 explain that he was also nicknamed *Seir* and *Edom*, which mean *Hairy* and *Red*, and these became the names of the land where he settled and of the kingdom that he founded there. For more detail on this list, see Genesis 36:1–43.

<sup>9</sup> God’s grace is all the more remarkable in view of the fact that the Edomites helped the Babylonians to destroy Jerusalem and Judah in 586 BC. See Obadiah 1–21, Lamentations 4:21–22 and Malachi 1:2–5.

Part Two:

# Small Things about David (1 Chronicles 10–29)

## The Messiah (1 Chronicles 10:1–14)

*“Saul died because he was unfaithful to the Lord ...  
So the Lord put him to death and turned the kingdom  
over to David.”*

(1 Chronicles 10:13–14)

SMALL THINGS ABOUT DAVID

46

There was a special Hebrew word that the Israelites used to describe Saul as the first king of Israel. They called him the *messiah* – a word that is used to describe him eight times in 1 Samuel and which means *The Chosen One* or *The Anointed One* of the Lord.<sup>1</sup>

Sadly, Saul did not live up to the name he had been given. The Chronicler emphasises this by beginning the narrative of the second section of his story with the downfall of King Saul at the Battle of Mount Gilboa. He makes no mention of the good old days, when the Holy Spirit anointed Saul to prophesy words from the Lord, or when the Holy Spirit empowered him to deliver Israel from the hand of the Ammonites in fierce battle. Instead, the Chronicler fast-forwards to the very last day of Saul’s reign. His narrative begins where 1 Samuel ends, with King Saul’s final downfall.

The Lord’s *messiah* was meant to deliver the tribes of Israel from their bitterest enemies, the Philistines.<sup>2</sup> Instead, we find Saul on the run from the Philistines. They massacre

<sup>1</sup> In the Hebrew text of 1 Samuel, Saul is described as the Lord’s *messiah* in 12:3, 12:5, 24:6, 24:10, 26:9, 26:11, 26:16 and 26:23. David is described as the Lord’s *messiah* in 16:6 and throughout 2 Samuel.

<sup>2</sup> The Lord says in 1 Samuel 9:16 that Saul’s calling as *messiah* is to rescue Israel from the Philistines.

his army, slaughter his three sons and bring his kingdom to a shameful end.<sup>3</sup> They then move in on Saul for the kill. The tribe of Benjamin was famous for the accuracy of its archers and its slingers, so it is deeply ironic when Saul is driven back and wounded by the Philistine bowmen and forced to make his final stand amid their arrows.<sup>4</sup>

The Lord's *messiah* was meant to be a man of prayer, who ruled the tribes of Israel for God. He is described in the Hebrew text of 1 and 2 Samuel, not just as a *melek*, which means *king*, but as a *nāgīd*, which means *viceroy* or *deputy*.<sup>5</sup> Saul refused to rule this way, so he was told in 1 Samuel 13:14 that "*Your kingdom will not endure; the Lord has sought out a man after his own heart and appointed him ruler (nāgīd) of his people, because you have not kept the Lord's command.*" The Chronicler demonstrates how unwilling Saul was to submit to the Lord's authority by telling us that, even on the brink of death, he refused to repent of his sins and to plead with the Lord to rescue him.<sup>6</sup> He would literally rather die than hand his life over to the Lord, so in the end that's precisely what he did.

The *messiah* was meant to partner with the Lord to conquer the remaining pockets of the Promised Land which had held out stubbornly against Joshua and the Judges. Instead of inspiring the twelve tribes of Israel to do so, we meet Saul's army in full flight. In a tragic reversal of God's plan for Israel, it is the Philistines who expand their borders to possess a greater share of the Promised Land.

<sup>3</sup> Saul's dynasty was not quite wiped out, since 9:39 says he also had a fourth son. 2 Samuel 1–4 explains that Esh-Baal (also known as Ish-Bosheth) ruled over the northern tribes of Israel for the next seven years.

<sup>4</sup> Their skill with the bow and sling is celebrated in 12:2. It is equally ironic when Saul commits suicide, since he has been self-harming the royal dynasty of Benjamin throughout his sinful reign.

<sup>5</sup> The word *nāgīd* is used in 1 Samuel to describe both Saul (9:16 and 10:1) and David (25:30). It is used in 1 Chronicles to describe both Solomon (29:22) and the many deputies who helped David govern Israel (13:1).

<sup>6</sup> Even the sinful Reubenites, Gadites and Manassites were helped by the Lord, in 5:18–22, "*because they cried out to him during the battle*" as a sign that "*they trusted in him*". Saul stubbornly refuses to do so here.

The *messiah* was meant to demonstrate to the world that the God of Israel was far stronger than any pagan idol. Instead, the Philistines return to the battlefield to mutilate Saul's corpse, and to put his severed head and armour on display as victory trophies in the temples of their false gods.<sup>7</sup> We are meant to be horrified that they "*sent messengers throughout the land of the Philistines to proclaim the news among their idols and their people*". In all of this, the Chronicler is seeking to remind his readers that Israel's salvation never lay in a merely human king sitting on its throne, but in the Presence of the Lord turning its Temple into the footstool of his far greater throne.

In case we miss this lesson, the Chronicler states it very plainly in verses 13–14. If the Jews are harking back to the days of the monarchy, then they need to remember what those days were truly like. "*Saul died because he was unfaithful to the Lord; he did not keep the word of the Lord and even consulted a medium for guidance, and did not enquire of the Lord. So the Lord put him to death and turned the kingdom over to David son of Jesse.*"

We can almost hear his readers rushing to respond that they did not wish for a return to the monarchy of Saul, but to the monarchy of David. After all, the word *messiah* is also used throughout the Hebrew text of 1 and 2 Samuel to describe David. He was a man of prayer, who consciously ruled as God's deputy.<sup>8</sup> He defeated not just the Philistines, but all the other enemies of God's people too. He extended the territory of Israel to its greatest ever boundaries, and as he did so he brought back the pagan idols of his foes along with treasure plundered from their temples as victory trophies for the Lord.<sup>9</sup>

But such a response ignores the strange verb that the Chronicler uses in verse 2 to describe the Philistines in hot

<sup>7</sup> The Lord had caused a statue of the Philistine idol Dagon to bow down before him in 1 Samuel 5. Now, because of Saul's unfaithfulness, the world is falsely led to assume that Dagon is stronger than Yahweh, until the men of Jabesh Gilead, who were rescued by Saul in 1 Samuel 11, put an end to this shame.

<sup>8</sup> Psalms 5:2 and 145:1.

<sup>9</sup> 2 Samuel 5:21 and 8:11, and 1 Chronicles 14:12.

pursuit of the *messiah*. The Hebrew word *dābaq* states literally that they *clung* or *stuck like glue* to King Saul and his sons. Whenever we set up someone as an earthly saviour, the Lord allows the Devil to pursue that person closely until everybody grasps that the best of men are never more than men at best. This happens to King David in 1 Chronicles 21:1, because he is not the true *Messiah* who will save God's people. Nor are any of the other kings of Judah, which is why the Lord did not restore their dynasty to the throne when the Jews returned from exile in Babylon.

The downfall of King Saul paves the way for the Chronicler to retell the story of King David, so let's not make the same mistakes as the Jews after the exile by imagining that he is the *messiah* we are looking for. The Chronicler omits to mention his many years as a fugitive, his seven years of rejection by the northern tribes of Israel, his shocking sin with Bathsheba or the repeated rebellions of his sons because he wants to use King David, not just as a historical figure, but as a prophetic picture of the true *Messiah* who is to come.

Matthew picks up on this at the start of his gospel by beginning with seventeen verses of genealogy which echo 1 Chronicles 1–9. This leads into narrative in which Matthew tells his readers that Jesus is the true *Messiah* of 1 Chronicles 10–29. Matthew is looking back to the retelling of the story of King David in 1 Chronicles when he starts his gospel with a cry of triumph: "*This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah!*"