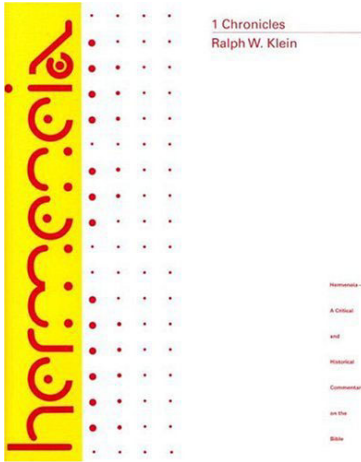


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**Klein, Ralph**

***1 Chronicles***

Hermeneia

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In the last twenty years, study of the book of Chronicles has flourished: dozens of monographs and articles have been published, as well as at least twenty commentaries (Braun, 1986; Becker, 1986, 1988; Kiel, 1986 [Hebrew]; Dillard, 1987; Eisemann, 1987; Wilcock, 1987; De Vries, 1989; Willi, 1991; Japhet, 1993; Thompson, 1994; Selman, 1994; Galil et al., 1995 [Hebrew]; Johnstone, 1998; Allen, 1999; Tuell, 2001; Jarick, 2002; McKenzie, 2004; Knoppers, 2004; Dirksen, 2005; and Klein, 2006); several more commentaries are in progress (including Klein's and Knoppers's volumes on 2 Chronicles; Z. Talshir, *1 and 2 Chronicles*, Mikra Leyisra'el [Hebrew]; and Wright, *1 and 2 Chronicles*, Berit Olam).

Klein's commentary is the most important of these studies and is a great achievement even in comparison with the excellent commentaries of Japhet, Knoppers, McKenzie, Willi, and Williamson. It opens with an introduction, followed by a well-organized close reading of the book that is divided into literary units; each unit begins with a translation of the text, followed by three main sections (text, structure, and detailed commentary), and sealed with a conclusion.

Klein has scrutinized every aspect of this book, particularly its first nine chapters, which are among the most complicated and obscure in the Bible. This is a systematic commentary that should serve as a model for every commentator for its methodology, originality, depth of discussion, and respect for previous scholarship.

Klein's commentary begins with a detailed introduction (1–50) that highlights all possible aspects of 1 Chronicles, including its name, canonicity, language, extent, unity, date, the nature of the work, text, sources, historicity, formation, central themes, and more. Klein, like many other scholars of the last generation, is convinced that “Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah are separate works” (10b), pointing out that the ideological distinctions between the two books make common authorship unlikely. The similarity in language in the two books is presented by Klein as “inconclusive in deciding whether Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah are one work or two” (6a). Klein points out the unity of the book and ascribes only a very few passages to a second hand (mainly in the last eight chapters of 1 Chronicles, e.g., 27:23–24: see 505a), following Williamson and others (*contra* Galling and Cross: see 12–13, 30).

In Klein's opinion, Chronicles was composed in the first half of the fourth century B.C.E., before the end of the Persian period (13–16), so he actually rejects the new trends in research dating the book to the early Hellenistic period, as reflected in Albertz's studies (mainly his *History of Religion*, 1994) as well as in Knoppers's commentary. In Knoppers's opinion, the book was composed in the “late fourth or early third century” (*1 Chronicles 1–9*, 116). But Albertz's and Knoppers's suggestions ascribing the book to the early Hellenistic period are untenable.

Klein gives credit to earlier scholarship, pointing out that a few of his discussions rest on the work of others. He treats previous studies with respect and humility, and even when he criticizes the opinions of other scholars he does so with notable reservation. Two examples will suffice. (1) One scholar dismisses those who consider the Chronicler a theologian, claiming that he is not “a theologian” but “a historian.” Although this statement attests to a profound misunderstanding of Chronicles, Klein's criticism of it is quite moderate (“an overstatement at the least” [18]). Klein prefers to call Chronicles “a work of historiography and theology” (19); recently in an article in *Journal of Hebrew Scripture* (6 [2006]), Klein calls Chronicles “a literary narrative,” which is an even better definition, since Chronicles is first of all a literary composition, and the Chronicler is a great writer. He is also very interested in the past: he rewrites the story of the Davidic line, but he also has a clear theological agenda. So the Chronicler is a skillful author, a historian, and a theologian—and I can see no contradiction in these three complementary definitions. (2) In Japhet's opinion, the Chronicler denies the Egypt-conquest tradition. She also claims that, for the Chronicler, Israel enjoyed virtually undisturbed continuity in the land, and the relation between the God and the people of Israel existed a priori and was not the result of any historical process. Klein disagrees with her, but his criticism is again low-key: “In my judgment Japhet overstates this issue” (44 n. 307); “This view, however, may make too much of the somewhat diminished emphasis on the exodus in the book” (62 n. 33; see also 232–33). Klein is right, and I reached the same conclusions in

my article “The Pre-Davidic Period in Chronicles,” (*Zion* 55 [1990]: 1-26, Hebrew with an English summary). This article is mainly a detailed criticism of Japhet’s arguments, which are clearly untenable.

Klein points out that, “While throughout the Bible it is expected that faithfulness is followed by reward or well-being, and unfaithfulness by punishment, in Chronicles these rewards/punishments are more immediate and individual, normally taking place within a person’s lifetime” (46b). However, in a few cases in Chronicles the punishments are not individual, and in others an accumulated merit is intimated (e.g., 1 Chr 21:14, 17; 2 Chr 21:7; 25: 13). This important point is only rarely addressed in research, and it merits more attention. One example will suffice: in 1 Chr 21 the Chronicler follows 2 Sam 24 in his account of David’s census, but with substantial differences. Although it is clear that only David sinned, the people of Israel were actually punished: “Yahweh caused a pestilence in Israel, and there fell from Israel seventy thousand persons” (1 Chr 21:14). In verse 17 David clearly points out what seems to be an unjust verdict of the Lord: “David said to God: ‘Was it not I who gave the command to number the people. It was I who sinned and acted very wickedly. But these sheep, what have they done? Yahweh my God, let your hand be against me and against my father’s house, but let not the plague be against your own people.’” Klein is correct in claiming that David takes full responsibility (426; see also McKenzie, 174), *contra* Japhet, who argues that to submit to a census is a sin of the people (377). One may claim that the Lord is merciful in commanding the angel to sheathe his sword, but this command was given only after seventy thousand innocent people were killed by the Lord. In this case, therefore, one can hardly accept Kelly’s position, namely, that the Chronicler is less concerned to demonstrate strict relationships between acts and consequences than to emphasize Yahweh’s benevolence and mercy toward the people (1996, 79–83).

Kelly also criticizes Japhet in her belief that retribution takes place by virtue of the principle of absolute divine justice (107–8). In my opinion, Kelly and Japhet alike are too dogmatic: actually, the Chronicler’s attitude to reward and retribution is less clear than presented by the scholars. It is true that generally the Chronicler does present a just Lord and immediate and individual rewards/punishments—but not always. We may explain these few “exceptions” by the Chronicler’s wish to point out the complex and mysterious nature of divinity and to preach to his audience that human beings, even great persons such as David, cannot always understand the Lord’s will or acts and should remain faithful to the Lord (like David), even though they are unable to fathom the meaning of his actions, which might seem unjust (see also Deut 29:29: “The secret things belong to the Lord our God”). R. E. Clements is right in claiming that this verse presents the “mysterious side of the God’s Being that humans did not, and could not know” (*Deuteronomy*, 1998, 512b).

Klein takes a balanced and careful view of the issues of the sources and the historicity of the book of Chronicles, thoroughly examining each passage in 1 Chronicles. He states that the book consists of certain descriptions that undoubtedly can be proven unreliable (e.g., the genealogy of Ephraim), of other passages that can be proven reliable (see below), and of yet other matters whose reliability cannot, for the time being, be determined. Klein agrees that the Chronicler had access to extrabiblical sources, referring especially to the genealogical materials in 1 Chr 2–8 and to the lists in 27:25–34. A good example of his balanced and careful system is demonstrated in the commentary to chapter 27 and in his special reference to the historicity of verses 16–34 (504–7). Concluding his discussion, he doubts the historical nature of verses 16–24 but claims, rightly, that both lists in verses 25–34 “seem plausible for the era of David” (506b) and “may be authentic material from the time of David” (25b). Klein, like most scholars, recognizes that the lists of the various ranks of clergy in chapters 23–26 represent “authentic but post-exilic data,” and “crediting David with these appointments is anachronistic” (25b).

In sum, Klein’s commentary on 1 Chronicles is one of the best ever written on this book, and it will without doubt be the standard reference for the next generation, if not longer.