Paul S. Evans and Tyler F. Williams, eds.

*Chronicling the Chronicler: The Book of Chronicles and Early Second Temple Historiography*


Michael D. Matlock
Asbury Theological Seminary
Wilmore, Kentucky

For a period of six years (2006–2011), the Ancient Historiography Seminar of the Canadian Society of Biblical Studies met to discuss ancient historiography and the broader biblical studies and ancient Near Eastern studies communities. According to the official seminar website (http://biblical-studies.ca/historiography/info.html), the purpose of the seminar is to “bring together a diverse group of methodologically distinct junior and senior scholars to discuss, present, foster understanding, and publish on these topics. Participants are encouraged to approach the proposed topics from their own methodological perspective(s) whether literary, historical, archaeological, epigraphic, or otherwise in nature.” All but two essays in *Chronicling the Chronicler* edited by Evans and Williams are revised seminar papers on Chronicles presented at the fifth and sixth meetings at the CSBS.

The editors have divided thirteen essays into three parts. The eight essays contained in the first part, “Texts and Studies,” concentrate upon particular texts in Chronicles and follow the order in which the texts appear in Chronicles. There are two sets of essays that treat the same text in this first section. The first two essays focus on the genealogies in 1 Chr 1–9 with a postmodern literary reading but ask different questions of the text. The fourth and fifth essays examine 1 Chr 21 but again ask different questions and have different
methodologies. In the second part of the volume, “Central Themes,” four essayists probe different motifs or themes in Chronicles. One final, concluding essay appears in the third part of the book, “Future Prospects,” in order to provide a critique and supplemental reflection upon all of the essays in the volume.

In the succinct introduction, Evans supplies a brief mention of the work of the Ancient Historiography Seminar and a synopsis of the essays in the volume, produced primarily from the final two years of the seminar. Evans states that the essays “represent many different perspectives, methodologies, and conclusions regarding the Chronicler’s work,” deepen “the ongoing conversation regarding the book of Chronicles,” and are not meant to offer “a unified perspective, definitive answers, or an achieved consensus about the many important questions and texts examined herein” (1).

In the first essay, drawing upon utopian literary theory, Steven Schweitzer addresses the identity of Israel in the genealogies and concludes that the function of 1 Chr 1–9 is to analyze the present and depict a better, alternative reality. Schweitzer carefully analyzes the question of how Israel will continue to exist during the time of the Chronicler and concludes that Israel is defined as more than exile returnees, is not definitively determined by land boundaries, and reflects a cross-section of Israel’s history that creates an evolving Israel.

Next, Keith Bodner also explores the genealogies in 1 Chronicles and brings into sharp focus Simeon’s listing in 1 Chr 4 and particularly the crux interpretum of who was the remnant of escaped Amalekites destroyed by the Simeonites (4:42–43). His interpretation disregards the historical questions of the text and thus offers an informed reading from an intertext from 1 Sam 30:17. According to Bodner, through the Simeonite genealogy the Chronicler wants to communicate that Simeon is finishing a task that King David was not able to accomplish and “carves out an identity that survives, rejects, and transcends assimilation” (41). The third essay, by P. J. Sabo, investigates the intriguing Saul narrative in Chronicles from a psychoanalytical, transferential reading. Adopting a postmodern hermeneutic, Sabo nuances his position by critiquing Kelso’s transferential reading in O Mother, Where Art Thou? and concludes that the specter in the Saul narrative cannot be expunged. Rereading and reanalyzing the text results in the creation of endless new meanings not cemented in the text à la Derrida.

Paul Evans’s essay surveys and evaluates current scholarship regarding the maneuverings in 1 Chr 21, particularly the suitability of the divine punishment for the human sin in census taking. He concentrates upon the hermeneutical key from Exod 30:11–16 that indicates that if a kōper payment is not collected with a census a plague will result. Because the Chronicler also appeals to the kōper casuistic law in 2 Chr 24 in the context of
temple repair, Evans concludes that the census followed by a plague in 1 Chr 21, which falls within imminent temple construction, is an appropriate “punishment befitting the crime.” In the next essay Louis Jonker reexamines the presence of Benjamin in Chronicles and the issues around identity negotiation in Yehud during the late Persian period. Jonker explores the tensions that existed during this time between Judahite Jerusalem and Benjaminite Mizpah and demonstrates how Benjamin’s function in 1 Chr 21 both bolsters the status of Jerusalem and undermines it at the same time. Thereafter, Evans contributes a second essay that assesses the genre of the Hezekiah-Sennacherib narrative in 2 Chr 32. Neither midrash nor historia, the Chronicler’s interpretation in this chapter employs “exegesis for historiographical and theological ends” (120). To view the genres as mutually exclusive, as a numerous scholars have done, is reductionistic.

Ehud Ben Zvi composes the next essay, “Reading Chronicles and Reshaping the Memory of Manasseh,” in which he examines the literary portrayal of King Manasseh in 2 Chr 33. Ben Zvi’s primary research interest is located in understanding Manasseh through which the literary presentation of Manasseh influenced the postexilic community of the Chronicler’s era in terms of repentance and hope not by comparing the sources behind his account or exploring the historical person. In the eighth and final essay in part 1, Shannon Baines analyzes the conclusion of Chronicles, 2 Chr 33–36, with a variety of literary techniques (e.g., climax, inclusio, repetition, and omission). She concludes that the section contains a cohesiveness that discloses Hezekiah’s ideal kingship by casting Josiah in a negative light and calls the postexilic community to return, obey, and worship Yahweh.

In the thematic section of the volume, Gary Knoppers offers the lead essay and the lengthiest one in the entire volume. He evaluates the role of prophecy in Chronicles and notes the divergences with prophecy as found in Samuel–Kings. He surmises, “Chronicles reforms images of the classical prophets found in the prophetic books in accordance with its reformation of the Deuteronomic prophetic schema” (164). He further concludes that the Chronicler innovates Deuteronomic notions of prophecy in certain ways, such as presenting professional and pro tem prophets. The many authentic prophetic figures in Chronicles help to create a “work of theodicy and identity formation” in as much as it is a work of history (194). In the tenth essay John W. Wright reassesses the continuities and discontinuities of divine retribution in Herodotus’s Histories and the book of Chronicles. He concludes that both works agree that retribution is linked to sacrilegious behavior, disregarding prophetic oracles, and not dispensed for individual human acts. Although there is established ancient Aegean world contact between the two works in terms of divine retribution, nevertheless the two are profoundly, ontologically different.
Mark Boda’s essay surveys and evaluates Chronicles scholarship since Wellhausen by focusing on the Chronicler’s perspective on the Davidic Dynasty and future hope. Boda’s assessment is that Chronicles contains “an ideal David embedded within a priestly led community and an expectation of a future ideal that will arise from and for a community that remains faithful to the priorities already established at the temple” (245). Next, Ben Zvi contributes his second essay in the volume, “Toward a Sense of Balance,” in which he argues the Chronicler extends less space to the exile (than the prophetic books and the Deuteronomistic historical collection) in order to diminish its mindshare within the late Persian Yehud or early Hellenistic Judah. Finally, Christine Mitchell provides a response piece to all contributions in the volume and notes directions for future research; she is primarily interested in issues of genre, literary techniques, postmodern literary readings, the influence of Aramaic on the text, and contextual biblical interpretation.

_Chronicling the Chronicler_ takes its place as yet another fruitful volume in a growing tide against those Hebrew Bible scholars who have neglected and shown distain for the book of Chronicles particularly since Wellhausen. Moreover, as the bibliographies in the essays attest, this volume represents a burgeoning scholarly interest in studying Chronicles since 1990. This collection of essays invites the reader to explore texts and themes in Chronicles from several methodological angles and to glean from studies that approach Chronicles in its own right, not as a defective version of Samuel–Kings. Critical study would be enhanced with more cross-referencing and indexing of topics treated in more than one article, such as the handling of the exile in Chronicles or the role of Hezekiah in Chronicles.

In general, the essays are of a high quality, exhibit solid conclusions reached from the pertinent evidence, and present many intriguing studies from such angles as postmodern literary, modern literary, historical, psychological, genre, identity negotiation, and social memory. In particular, essays from Knoppers, Ben Zvi (“A Sense of Balance”), Evans (“Historia or Exegesis?”), and Schweitzer contribute an invigorating discussion regarding the genre of Chronicles. Rather than viewing the postexilic period as one of decline and the book of Chronicles as theologically inferior in the Hebrew Bible, these essayists have once again unearthed the creative and renaissance spirit of the Chronicler, who was seeking to establish the core values of God’s kingdom during his age.