

Introduction:

- A. Illus.: When we were first married, my wife Susan worked for a bank in Deerfield. You could get your license plates there at the time. The bank was issued a stack of them that normally began with D (for Deerfield). On one occasion, however, they ran out and got some from the bank in Des Plaines. They started with the letters DP. To her surprise, Susan discovered that some people—especially older people—would refuse those plates. Do you know why? After WWII, European refugees—many of them surviving Jews—had to live in refugee camps. They were known as Displaced Persons—DP for short. It was a title many of them hated. And they certainly didn't want it on their license plates!
- B. The Jews to whom the books of Chronicles were written had been displaced persons—exiles in Babylon. Now a remnant of them had returned to the rubble of their homeland and their heritage. They were small, powerless, king-less, vassals of another nation. Their national glory was gone. They didn't quite know who they were any more, or what they had to hope for. So God inspired an author—maybe a priest—to write down a long sermon for these disoriented people of God. It is ironic that in a book full of hundreds of names, we don't know the name of the author. We just call him “the Chronicler.” He actually wrote just one book, which was later divided into 1 & 2 Chronicles. Parts of these books are identical to things found in 1 & Samuel and 1 & 2 Kings. Those books were written when Jews were in exile, to answer the national question, “*How did we get ourselves into this mess?!*” Chronicles was written, ca. 475 BC, as a sermon to those who had made their way home, but were demoralized by their national state. **It is a book intended to help God's people remember who they are, and how God works.**
- C. That is a message we Christians need, too. The world we live in here messes with our heads and hearts till we forget what makes a person important, or what kind of life matters over the long haul.
- D. So finally we come to our text for today—the first 9 chapters of 1 Chronicles. Nine chapters of names! Is there a more mind-deadening section in the Bible?! There are 250 people and place names in the first chapter alone! And look how it starts. No warm-up verses or greeting. Just, “*Adam, Seth, Enosh, Kenan, Mahalalel, Jared, Enoch, Methuselah, Lamech, Noah.*” Boom, and we're off! Nodding off! So what can we possibly learn from 9 chapters of ancient genealogies? Let's take a look, remembering that this book is for God's people who may have forgotten who they are in this world, and what they have to hope for. People like us.

I. GOD WORKS THROUGH THE LIVES OF PEOPLE TO BRING HIS SALVATION

Open your Bible to 1 Chron. 1 and take a quick walk with me. **VV.1-4:** Adam to Noah, the three sons of Noah. **V.27:** Abram/ Abraham, and **v.28:** there are Isaac and Ishmael. Do you see in **v.34** that the sons of Isaac were “*Esau and Israel,*” not Esau and **Jacob**, Israel's other name? It is always Israel, never Jacob, in this book because Israel was the new name God gave Jacob. To our surprise, we see Israel's enemies in **vv.38ff**—the people of Seir and Edom. Then in **2:1** we find the 12 tribes of Israel followed by their descendants. David shows up in chap. 3, and the list of kings who descended from him in **3:10ff**.—a few good kings and lots of bad kings who ultimately brought about their national downfall. One big thing that we should see in these genealogies is that **God is always working through the lives of people—often ordinary people—like us.**

- A. God—our God—governs all peoples for his purposes. He is there behind the very first name, Adam, and behind all the other names—the good guys, like Abraham or Moses or David, and the bad guys, like Ishmael and Esau, Er whom God struck dead and Achar (AKA Achan whose sin brought a terrible defeat upon Joshua's army). **Our God is always, always sovereign over all peoples, including the people and nations among whom we live now, and he is exerting his sovereignty to save.** We may feel weak and powerless, but our God never is. God will do what he promises to do.

- B. God in his mercy blesses sinners and nobodies. Most of the people listed in these pages were as anonymous to the Chronicler's audience as they are to us yet God worked through them, and in many cases, blessed them. Some names here brought vivid stories to mind. For example, look at **2:3-4...** There's a sordid story behind those verses of broken promises, broken hearts, father-daughter-in-law prostitution and two sons whose father Judah was also their grandfather. Yet, both David and Jesus traced their lineage back to one of those two sons, and to Judah. God works in mysterious ways! There's old Boaz in **2:11,12** who married Ruth, a gentile, with God himself as matchmaker. And in the list of Judah's kings, in **3:13**, you'll find Manasseh—the most wicked king in the Bible, I think. He was so utterly bad that God had led off to captivity there with a hook in his nose. But later, in **2 Chron 33:12-13**, the Chronicler tells us an amazing end to that story...

When we read these names, connecting them to the stories we know about some of them, we see again and again how God in his mercy blesses even sinners and nobodies. That's why many think the key verse of Chronicles is **2 Chron. 7:14**, *"If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land."* **God is all about salvation.**

There's another thing that stands out in these genealogies—who the bluebloods are. In America, the bluebloods are those with ties back to the Mayflower, or the Daughters of the American Revolution, or the Rockefellers. Here two particular genealogies are highlighted. One, predictably, is the line of King David. But the other is that of the priests. **The kings who lead us for God, and the priests who lead us to God.** The lesson is this:

II. OUR MOST IMPORTANT PEOPLE CONNECT US WITH GOD

When it comes to God's people, our most important citizens aren't the people with the most money. They are the people who lead us to God, and those through whom God leads us.

- A. We esteem those who lead us to God, like the Levites and priests. Among the 12 tribes of Israel, the tribe of Levi held a unique place. These were the people designated by God to guide and guard the worship of God. Look at **chap. 6:1...** All the descendants of those three sons were known as Levites. According to **V.3**, one son, Kohath, had three important grandchildren—Moses, Aaron and Miriam. And in Chronicles, the most important of those three is actually not Moses, but **Aaron**, because he became Israel's first high priest. To be a priest in Israel you had to prove your descent from Aaron. That's why the genealogies of the Levites and priests here in Chronicles were so important. Only if you could *prove* your lineage back to Levi could you could serve. In this book, there's no mention of who the successful businessmen were, but look at **6:31ff.** The temple musicians, gatekeepers, treasurers and priests were the VIPs of the community because they led people into the presence of God in his temple.

For us, all these priests point to our great High Priest, Jesus Christ. We learned from them how much we need someone to lead us to God, but also how inadequate human priests and sacrifices are. In Jesus we have found the one who invites us to come boldly to God's throne to find mercy in our times of need.

- B. We also esteem those who lead us for God, like the kings. When Israel insisted on having a king, he became God's agent among the people. He was responsible to Israel's God to lead the people in righteousness. Chronicles focuses on the ancestors of King David, as well as his descendants. Look at **3:1-16.** Here we have the record of David's descendants, including those who became king. Now look at **3:17-24:** *"The descendants of Jehoiachin the captive."* Even after the exile, when there were no more kings, David's line was still carefully tracked. So 400 years later, when a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that everyone had to go to their own city to be taxed, Joseph and Mary, both direct descendants of David, headed for David's hometown, Bethlehem. And that is where Jesus was born, descended from David, new King of the Jews.

- C. When we read the importance of the Priest and King to God's people we think first of Jesus Christ. But we also remember that through our faith in Christ, we have become "a royal priesthood." That's what Peter wrote in **1 Peter 2:9-10**: *"But you are a **chosen people**, a **royal priesthood**, a **holy nation**, a **people belonging to God**, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. **Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God**; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy."* And that is why we are important people in this world.

There's one other big lesson we learn from these genealogies:

III. THE MEASURE OF OUR LIVES IS OUR WALK WITH GOD

- A. As God's people, we've got to live among dangerous people. *Illus.:* I saw this old picture in the *Tribune* this past week, a photo taken on Dec. 9, 1930 of a bunch of Chicagoans at a health resort. The big guy on the far left is Chicago's mayor, William "Big Bill" Thompson. We don't know who most of these other people are—just like Chronicles here. But if you look at the rest of the picture, there are a bunch of guys standing on the balcony above the mayor. And there's one guy there we know—Al Capone, the notorious gangster, and his cronies. Now between the mayor and the gangster, who do you think was influencing whom?

That's one of the lessons hiding behind all these names: be careful who is influencing you. In the list of the kings of Judah (3:10-16) we see many names who led the whole nation away from God and into deep trouble. Or look at **9:1b-3**... The remnant who returned from exile were from only five of the tribes. The rest are unaccounted for. It's a warning to us and to our children. Be careful not to squander your spiritual heritage. **You're known—and shaped—by the company you keep.**

- B. For us, success or failure depends on our faith and faithfulness before God. Look at an interesting contrast at the end of **chap. 5**. First, **vv.18-22**... [*"They were helped... God handed (their enemies) over to them, because they cried out to him during the battle. He answered their prayers, because they trusted in him... the battle was God's. And they occupied the land until the exile."*] Is that what you do? Is that how we live our lives? God doesn't change. He still responds the same way when his people cry out to him and trust him. Now look at the next paragraph: **vv.23-26**... [*"...they were unfaithful to the God of their fathers and prostituted themselves to the gods of the peoples of the land... So the God of Israel stirred up the spirit (of the king of Assyria) who took (them) into exile... where they are to this day."*] They never got out. They never came back.

Remember, 2 Chron. 7:14, promises God's grace to those who repent and call out to God for forgiveness, but this book also teaches us that there is a point of no return. Literally. No return.

- C. One more thing: For us, faith and faithfulness before God is also a personal matter. We would see more of this in 2 Chronicles, but there is a little gem of a story in **1 Chron 4:9-10**... That is all we know about Jabez. He isn't actually even in the genealogy anywhere. We're nodding off while all these names go by and he just pops in, like someone walking into the wrong classroom. Here is a guy whose mom gave him a name something like, *"You are a pain!"* and he is afraid that is going to be his life story, a self-fulfilling prophecy, a kind of inborn neurosis: *"I'm nothing but trouble."* So he *"cried out to the God of Israel"*, that is, to the same God Jacob and all these other faithful people had cried out to. *"And God granted his request."* That's it; that's all we get. He prayed and God blessed him and enlarged his territory. Because that is what our God is like. That is what moves our God. To this day.

Conclusion

We all have an innumerable list of ancestors but our most important forbears are those who gave us a heritage of faith. Chronicles starts with all these names but the Chronicler will focus, especially in 2 Chronicles, on those kings who turned to God in trouble. Chronicles really tells the revival stories of Israel because when God's people are weak and weary, we need to remember our spiritual heritage.

Illus.: When my father, Lyle, died, 22 years ago this past week I realized that for all the good things he passed on to us, the most precious was his faith. He wasn't a giant of faith, but he trusted in Christ, he took church seriously, and he made sure we never missed. On his tombstone I had the words of Ps. 61:5 carved on his tombstone, *"You have given me the heritage of those who fear your name."* That's what stands out to us in reading these names in Chronicles. These are our ancestors, because we have been grafted into this family tree by our faith in Christ, and their great gift to us was to teach us **to reverence the name of our God, and to treasure the Priest and King he gave us in Jesus Christ.**

Background you need to know about 1 & 2 Chronicles

Written in the late 4th century BC by an unknown author, Chronicles was originally just one long book. It was divided into 1 & 2 Chronicles when it was translated into Greek (the Septuagint), and since Greek requires more letters than Hebrew, it no longer fit on one scroll. 1 Chronicles (our focus this summer) takes us through the life of David. 2 Chronicles begins with Solomon, goes through the kings and exile, and ends with the Jews being allowed to return home and rebuild the temple.

Chronicles focuses especially on two things God's disoriented people needed to remember: the dynasty of King David which God promised would endure forever, and the centrality of the temple worship to the Jews.

This book has two key verses which capture most of the significance of Chronicles. The first is 1 Chron 17:12, *"He [Solomon] is the one who will build a house for me [the temple], and I will establish his throne forever."* The second is more familiar: 2 Chron 7:14, *"If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land."* Here is hope for a people, like us, who have learned the hard way that obeying God is not easy.

Finally, a couple things you should know about genealogies in the Bible:

1. Genealogies take two forms. **Linear** is father to one son to one grandson, etc. **Segmented** is when the family tree is spelled out, like in 1:4: *"The sons of Noah: Shem, Ham and Japheth."* Then he lists Japheth's sons, Ham's sons and Shem's sons. Shem, the firstborn, is saved for last because he's the most important in this story.
2. Genealogies in the Bible don't always list every generation. For various reasons, the writers skip generations—perhaps just highlighting the most significant ancestors, and sometimes to keep a kind of numerical symmetry of generations.