

# PECULIARITIES AND PROBLEMS OF GENEALOGICAL METHOD AND OF TEXT IN THE BOOK OF CHRONICLES

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For about a century now or more orthodox theologians have had to wrestle with the discrepancy between the age of the human race as witnessed by the science of anthropology and as held by the current interpretations of the genealogical and chronological data of Scriptures. The conservative journals of the late 19th century carried articles on this problem as did also several Bible encyclopedias. William Henry Green's article in *Bibletheca Sacra*, April 1890, probably the most important article by a conservative on this problem yet to appear, showed that the genealogies may not be used for exact chronological calculation. This article was adopted and quoted by James Orr and A. A. Hodge as their own solution to the problem. Numerous conservative commentaries came to similar conclusions.

Many of the men of our generation for some strange reason were trained without knowledge of these works. But now in the last ten or fifteen years these older works are occasionally cited, or their data borrowed, almost as new discoveries.

Now recently, for reasons still too painful for some to be recited here, this subject has come in for renewed attention. On my part, I had about dismissed it in favor of other interests when a course in Chronicles was assigned me, fresh after reading a doctoral thesis by a former student on a related problem. Since then, without giving the problem continuous attention, I have been collecting information on the subject, limiting myself mainly to the situation in Chronicles.

My study procedure and method in this paper are to let the Book of Chronicles speak for itself. Assuming the book to be an inspired work of the Holy Ghost written by careful, serious men of the Restoration era who were seeking to summarize the past glories of the temple and of the Davidic dynasty, I have tried to learn what the authors' own methods and purposes were. The materials of this paper are almost wholly drawn from immediate examination of the text of Chronicles.

My conclusions will be brief. Our goal today is mainly to present some data, some of it long known to informed scholars, some of it new to me, all of it worthy of re-examination.

## **Peculiarities of Genealogical Method in Chronicles.**

1. Previous knowledge of earlier portions of Scripture or of other pertinent information is assumed. Without it many statements are not only inexplicable but misleading.

An example is the first four verses of I Chronicles, a list of 13 names as follows: "Adam, Seth, Enosh, Kenan, Mahalaleel, Jered, Henoch, Methuselah, Lamech, Noah, Shem, Ham, and Japheth." A person beginning his Bible reading here and observing that Chronicles seems to be in large part a book of genealogies would almost inevitably assume Noah to be father of Shem, grandfather of Ham, and great-grandfather of Japheth. This should alert the cautious modern reader that procedures quite foreign to our ways of doing things and attitudes toward history far different from our own are to be expected in this book.

Now this feature, that of assuming the reader's knowledge not only of earlier Scripture portions but of other facts of Hebrew culture, religion, and history not readily accessible today is a peculiarity of Chronicles among the historical writings of the Old Testament. Since most of the following list of further peculiarities appear to be mainly special forms of this specialty, we shall here introduce no further examples.

2. Sometimes "sister" appears in the apparent primary sense of that word but turns out upon investigation to refer to a step-sister. The fact that Joab and his mighty brothers Abishai and Asahel were "sons of Zeruiah" is familiar. That Zeruiah is their mother is not apparent in the name, so the reader would hardly suspect that these men were regarded as David's nephews, offspring of one of his sisters until he came to the list of Jesse's sons in I Chronicles 2:13-15 and then reads "And their sisters were Zeruiah and Abigail" (I Chron. 2:16). Now II Samuel 17:25 relates that Abigail was "the daughter of Nahash, sister to Zeruiah, Joab's mother." We learn elsewhere that a certain Nahash, king of Ammon, had been friendly to David in his years of wandering and that he had been dead for some time when David was still a young monarch (II Sam. 10:1, 2; I Chron. 19:1, 2). It would appear possible that this Nahash's widow (or if not, the widow of some other Nahash) then became a wife of Jesse. This unnamed woman was certainly the mother of Zeruiah and Abigail. Abigail was apparently the younger of the two girls for she is always mentioned second, and since her Father was Nahash (II Sam. 17:25) it is close to certain that Zeruiah was too. So, these two women turn out not to be true sisters of Jesse's sons at all, but rather the daughters of one of their fathers several wives (or step-mother).

Now the custom of calling step-sisters "sister" is acceptable among moderns, but one would hardly fail to report the purely legal or social relationships in a book of genealogies or legal birth registers. (See articles in Bible Dictionaries and Encyclopedias on Nahash, Zeruiah, Abigail, Joab, David.)

3. Apparently a sort of "legal fiction" was sometimes employed whereby, when close kinship other than descent was involved, an immediate successor to a king could be called his son, even when he was not his physical offspring. In such a case "son of" seems to mean "successor in office." After listing the names of four sons of Josiah, all blood brothers, the second being Jehoiakim who resigned for eleven years immediately after the brief reign of Jehoahaz, the narrator reports, "And the sons (sic) of Jehoiakim: Jeconiah his son, Zedekiah his son" (I Chron. 3:16). Now Jeconiah (also known as Jehoiachin) was, indeed, Jehoiakim's offspring, but Zedekiah, who succeeded to the throne of Jeconiah after his brief term in the year 598/97 B.C. was a son of Josiah, and a brother of Jeconiah's father. So Zedekiah's actual relation to Jeconiah was that of uncle. Yet here he is called his son, presumably because he succeeded to his office, even though in the immediate context Zedekiah is also listed as Josiah's son.

The fact that Jeconiah was removed from Jerusalem and held captive in Babylon for many years may have something to do with this. Perhaps the reporter thought of Jeconiah as still the reigning king and of his uncle Zedekiah as his viceroy, and he called him "son of" Jeconiah in that sense. This is doubtful, for in II Chronicles 36:10 Zedekiah is called "king over Judah and Jerusalem." It is even conceivable that Jeconiah had a son named Zedekiah. This seems exceedingly unlikely, however, and a better explanation should be sought. There are very good interpreters who think Jeremiah 22:30, "Write ye this man childless" means he had no offspring.

4. This brings us to the fact that the author of Chronicles saw nothing out of the way with calling a man's uncle his brother. For II Chronicles 36:10, cited above, following a recital of Jeconiah's (Jehoiachin's) evil reign, states, "And at the return of the year king Nebuchadnezzar sent, and brought him to Babylon, and the vessels of the house of Jehovah, and made Zedekiah his brother king over Judah and Jerusalem." Strange as this seems it is no more irregular, from our point of view, than the fact that Genesis 14:14 refers to Lot, Abraham's nephew, as his brother. It is more appropriate in Zedekiah's case, for he was probably about the same age as Jeconiah.

5. Sometimes a legal heir, not a descendent, but the offspring of a brother or more distant kinsman is called a son. The case we have in mind is a very complicated

one, that of Shealtiel (or Salathiel) whose son is said to be Zerubbabel. Now nine times in the Old Testament and twice in the New Testament Zerubbabel is said to be the son of this man Shealtiel who in turn is said in I Chronicles 3:17 to be the son of king Jeconiah. Yet Luke in tracing Jesus' ancestry through Zerubbabel traces it from Zerubbabel to a certain Neri. Jeconiah is not mentioned. Now to further complicate the picture, and it is here that our present topic is concerned, it becomes apparent from I Chronicles 3:19 that Zerubbabel's real sire was not Shealtiel at all, but Shealtiel's brother (cf. v. 17), a man named Pedaiah. "Probably the genealogy in Chronicles exhibits his (Zerubbabel's) true parentage, and he succeeded his uncle as head of the house of Judah—a supposition which tallies with the facts that Shealtiel appears as the first-born, and that no children were assigned to him." (*Smith's Dictionary of the Bible*, p. 3622). Observe that this furnishes an analogy to the law of levirate marriage prescribed by the Pentateuch. It also suggests that since Shealtiel was really Zerubbabel's uncle, Jeconiah was an uncle, or more distant relative of Pedaiah and Shealtiel. Jeremiah 22:30 and Luke's genealogy would certainly favor this. It is true that Matthew 1:12 states that "Jeconias begat Salathiel." But that this may not be strictly true is born out by the fact that the same verse also says that "Shealtiel begat Zerubbabel." As the author and first readers of Chronicles and Matthew looked at things these statements were, of course, all true. But, we certainly need a shift of mental gears if we are to understand this, one that it never occurs to most of us to make.

6. The name of a city or community can appear as the "son of" its founder or owner. This is not peculiar to Chronicles, for one meets with it in the registers of Genesis chapters 10 and 11. Bethlehem and Ephratah are names associated with the home of Jesse and his sons as well as with Joseph and Mary the parents of Jesus. The two names have the same essential meaning; "house of bread" and "fruitful." In I Chronicles 2:54 Bethlehem is said to be a son of a certain Salma. Yet in the verses preceding, Ephratah is said to be the father (or mother) of Shabal, Salma, and Hareph.

Now unless you have tried your hand at unravelling some of the fantastic text problems of Chronicles the complication at this point becomes unbelievable. They involve the error of calling Caleb the son of Hur (v. 50), whereas verse 19 says Hur was the son of Caleb. There is also the likelihood that after the analogy of verse 33: "These were the sons of Jerahmeel"—period—verse 50 should have a period after "Caleb." Then following GV (Codex Ventus of the LXX) we change ben (son of) to beni (sons of) and read, "The sons of Hur, the first born of Ephratah, were Shabal, Salma . . . Hareph" etc.

At any rate this strange context not only lists a woman as having the same name as a town (Ephratah) existing hundreds of years earlier in the time of Jacob (Gen. 35:16, 19; 48:7), but also states that her sons are the fathers of several towns of Palestine. Among them are Kirjath-jearim, Bethlehem, and Beth-gader.

7. This leads to another observation, viz: that these towns are cited as parents of still other communities or cities of Palestine. In other words, towns cannot only be offspring (sons); they may be parents (fathers) also. A simple reading of I Chronicles 2:53-55 will demonstrate this to anyone familiar with the register of the towns of Palestine in the book of Joshua and with the history of the Old Testament. Again, while such rather far-fetched metaphors do not seem strange to us today in poetic and allegorical literature, or even in Sunday morning oratory, they seem almost incredible in sober annals of a country.

8. At least once a concubine appears as offspring of her mate among a list of his sons. Perhaps we may call this inexactness in manner of speech. This startling occurrence is in I Chronicles 1:36 in a list of Esau's descendants: "The sons of

Elphaz; Teman, and Omar, Zephi, and Gatam, Kenaz, and Timna, and Amelek." Now who would suspect that the last two of these seven "sons" of Eliphaz, Esau's son, are a mother (Eliphaz's concubine) and her son respectively? Yet Genesis 36:11, 12 plainly says so! Imagine statistics like this even in the family register on the front or middle pages of the family Bible, much less the files of the clerk of the country!

9. A less inexact but equally strange feature of the Chronicles genealogies is that in adjoining contexts a line of descent will be carried from father to son through several generations, and then later will turn around backwards and with a longer or shorter list, adding or subtracting names, the same line will be covered again in reverse order, son to father. This may be observed in the register of the families of the Levites in chapter six of I Chronicles. This, together with obscurity of many names, use of two different names for one man, problems of vocalization and of textual corruption, makes this chapter an interpreter's wilderness.

10. In connection with the ancestry of Heman one of the chief musicians of David, there is a group of brothers presented as if they were descendants one of another. Twice in I Chronicles 6 the line leading from Samuel (=Shemuel) is given. By inverting the order of the second to bring it into descending order we get the following (we list only the first eight after Kohath in each).

I Chronicles 6:12-24

I Chronicles 6:33-38

- I - 1. Amminadab
- 2. Korah
- 3. Assir
- 4. Elkanah
- 5. Ebiasaph
- 6. Tahath
- 7. Uriel
- 8. Uziah

- II - 1. Izhar
- 2. Korah
- 3. Ebiasaph
- 4. Assir
- 5. Tahath
- 6. Azariah
- 7. Joel
- 8. Elkanah

Note that number 3, 4, 5 in list No. I are Assir, Elkanah, Ebiasaph. In No. II they are Ebiasaph, Assir, Tahath. Tahath takes Elkanah's place and Elhanah appears in position eight. Now these variations are complicated

enough. But turning to Exodus 6:24 we are astounded that the third, fourth and eighth persons of the second list, and the third, fourth, and fifth persons of the first are not descendants one of another but blood brothers—sons of the same father. All three are presented as sons of Korah! This particular practice of the authors of Chronicles is probably one of the most amazing of any of the seeming irregularities of the Book.

11. Lists of generations furnished at greater length in other books of the Bible are condensed. This sort of thing is familiar to us in the genealogy of Jesus in the first chapter of Matthew. There in verse eight three names are omitted between Joram and Ozias (Uzziah). They are Ahaziah (II Ki. 8:25), Joash (II Ki. 12:1) and Amaziah (II Ki. 14:1). In verse 11 Jehoikim is left out after Josiah (II Ki. 23:34; I Chron. 3:15, 16). "In Chronicles 26:24 we read in a list of appointments made by King David (See Chron. 24:3; 25:1; 26:26) that Shebuel, the son of Gershon, the son of Moses, was ruler of the treasures; and again in I Chron. 23:15, 16, we find it written, 'the sons of Moses were Gershon and Eliezer. Of the sons of Gershon, Shebuel was the chief.' Now it is absurd to suppose that the author of Chronicles was so grossly ignorant as to suppose that the grandson of Moses could be living in the reign of David, and appointed by him to a responsible office" (Green, *op. cit.*, p. 286). A comparison of I Chronicles 26:31 with 23:19, 12, 6 shows similarly that all the generations from Levi to David's time are condensed to four generations.

12. We conclude without completing a survey of these peculiarities with the fact that, conversely, occasionally lists of generations abbreviated in other books are ex-

panded in Chronicles, for some strange reason. A comparison of I Chronicles 6:3-14 with Ezra 7:1-5 will show the addition of a block of six names. The six names of I Chronicles 6:7-9 fit into the comma after Azariah in Ezra 7:3, only in reverse order.

### Problems In the Genealogical Material of Chronicles

The above "peculiarities" may be regarded as growing out of the point of view and methodology of the authors. Next we plan to present certain problems which remain even after the above peculiarities are taken into consideration and assumed to be understandable. Samples only of each type will be presented.

1. Different pointing (vocalization) of the consonants of the same name in different portions of the book give the false impression that different persons are meant. An unusual case is Caleb whose name has the usual spelling six times in I Chronicles 2 (verses 18, 19, 42, 46, 48, 50), but whose name appears *incognito* in verse 9 as Chelubai. The reference is unquestionably to Caleb, as the context demonstrates. But how would anyone without knowledge of Hebrew vowel notation know this? Caleb and Chelubai appear to be two persons when definitely they are not. In like manner, the Gershonite Shebuel of I Chronicles 23:16 and 26:24 is the same as Shubael of 24:20, and Shelomoth of 24:22 the same as Shelomith of 23:18.

2. Variations in the spelling (i.e. of the consonantal Hebrew text) of names, some of a very radical sort render identification difficult if not impossible. Most of these appear to be the result of textual corruption. Comparing I Chronicles 6:25,\* 26 with 33, 34 it appears that among the ancestors of Heman the singer Eliab and Eliel, Nahath and Toah, Zophai and Zuph\*\* are three men, not six, Gershon and Gershom are misspelled by preference for the second, as if the former, Moses' first-born, was no different from the latter, one of the three sons of the Patriarch Levi! Another case of this is "Jether the Ishmaelite" (I Chron. 2:17) who in II Samuel 17:25 is given as "Ithra the Israelite."

3. The same man may be called by two names, viz. Uzziah and Shaul of I Chronicles 6:24 seem to be the same as Azariah and Joel of v. 36.

4. The practice of Levirate marriage causes great variation in genealogical lines. For example, Uzziah son of Uriel, son of Tahath (I Chron. 6:24) is parallel with "Azariah" (Uzziah) the son of Zephaniah, the son of Tahath (I Chron 6:36, 37). Zephaniah is too different from Uriel to be a spelling corruption. So either the same man had two names or Uriel and Zephaniah were brothers (cf. Shealtiel and Pedaiah under I, 5) and Uzziah (Azariah) the offspring of one but legally assigned as son of the other.

5. Hebrew common nouns with pronominal suffixes are occasionally confused by translators with proper nouns, i.e., names resulting in the creation of names in our translations which never existed before. Thus "Beno" son of Merari (I Chronicles 24:27) and "Beno" son of Jaaziah turn out to be mistaken renderings of beno, his son! It is no loss to Holy Writ to get rid of this unlikely sounding name!

6. The KJV has confusing ways of varying the rendering of identical names. For example the Shemuel of I Chronicles 6:33 is none other than our familiar Samuel. The reason for variation is, no doubt, that elsewhere the translators wished the readers of 1611 to know the man was the person called Samuel from the days when the Septuagint first gave the world Samouel (I Sam. 1:20). Here the king's men evidently did not connect the son of Elkanah and father of Joel with the son of Hannah and I Samuel, or if they did, for some strange reason varied from their custom. Chronicles also furnishes both Micab and Michah, as well as Jesiah and Isshaiah (I Chron. 23:20 cf. 24:25). The Hebrew is not different for the two forms of the names.

7. Transposition of names has resulted in confused situations almost beyond recovery in certain cases. One of these is almost "classical," viz. the case of the name

of the second high priest in David's time. Zadok is safe—there is no confusion with him. But of the other it is said in I Chronicles 18:16 that his name was Abimelech son of Abiathar. In three other passages of Chronicles his name is given as Ahimelech, usually adding that he was son of Abiathar (24:3, 24:6, 24:31). Now Abimelech is obviously a text corruption of Ahimelech, an annoyance not a problem. Serious trouble arises when we discover with nearly full certainty that the high priest referred to by Chronicles as Ahimelech, son of Abiathar, was really Abiathar, son of Ahimelech. This Ahimelech was slain by Saul in jealousy of that priest's unwitting favor to David (*vid.* I Samuel 21:1-9; 22:6-23). It is reported that Ahimelech's father was a certain Ahitub and that Abiathar one of his sons escaped the slaughter. I Kings reports that this Abiathar was priest in David's time and survived until Solomon's days (*vid.* I Kings 1:7, 42; 2:22-27). The King's narratives are so circumstantial and extensive that there is hardly any possibility of doubt as to their meaning. Add to this the fact that Jesus said (Mark 2:26) that Abiathar, not Ahimelech, was the one who gave the bread to David (the priest whom Saul slew) at Nob. Various solutions to this problem have been proposed. Whatever the solution, a confusion which seems wrongly to make Abiathar son of Ahimelech into Ahimelech the son of Abiathar—and that three times in succession, is hard for the interpreter to assimilate.

3. A final difficulty to be noted is that of knowing exactly how the authors intended their groupings to be understood. It will be said: "these are the sons of so and so," with registers of names both preceeding and following. Now the translations all have the punctuation to indicate whether this applies to a following list or to a preceeding list. The Massoretic notes also interpret this for us. But sometimes the Massorettes may have been wrong. For example I Chronicles 2:1 starts off with, "these are the sons of Israel." Since we know them well from other parts of the Bible we have no problem with identifying the *following* 12 names as those of Israel's sons. But, at 2:33, "These were the sons of Jerahmeel", the expression is intended to close a section beginning nine verses earlier, but at verse 50 the Massoretic evidently failed. As shown earlier in this paper, "These were the sons of Caleb" should end with a period, and it should be regarded as a summary belonging to the foregoing, rather than as an introduction to what follows.

### Conclusions:

The genealogical data of Chronicles must be used with great caution in reaching theological or historical conclusions. Firstly, because at this distance in space and time we have the greatest difficulty in knowing exactly what the authors' methods and meanings were. Secondly, because these genealogies themselves have a long history of textual transmission, during which a greater amount of textual corruption seems to have crept in than is the case in most other parts of the Old Testament.

Chronicles, having been written during the latest epoch of the canonical Old Testament history, for the purpose of explaining the history to the Restoration community and to cause them to appreciate and support the worship, institution, and piety of their ancestors, has certain special governing characteristics. These are chiefly, firstly, *selection* of material pertinent to the author's themes. After all, the general history had already been written in the Pentateuch and Joshua—Kings. Like John's Gospel, which selects a few incidents related to a theme to prove historically that Jesus is Christ, so Chronicles presents selected data to show that the Restoration community of the fifth and fourth centuries that they possessed the very religious institutions founded by Moses and David and were divinely approved. This means further that some materials were in the second place, drastically *condensed*, others were in the third place greatly *expanded*, as suited the authors' purposes.

Chronicles, on account of its technical problems and because it seems dry to the beginner, has been neglected in modern scholarship exposition. Is it possible that these same reasons have contributed to a less careful transmission of its text by the ancient Hebrew custodians?

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