

## THE PURPOSE OF THE BOOKS OF CHRONICLES

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The closing few verses of 2 Chronicles (2 Chr 36:22-23) inform us that in the first year of the Persian king Cyrus the end of the exile, prophesied by Jeremiah (Jer 25:12), occurred. Yahweh stirred up the spirit of Cyrus, who then made proclamation throughout his kingdom, putting thereby his own realm into the context of a general world rule by Yahweh. The decree directed the exiled Jews to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple of Yahweh. All this was in the terms of a commission given to Cyrus by Yahweh. As is well known, these closing verses of Chronicles appear in nearly identical form as Ezra 1:1-3. This suggests the continuity of the two works, a position that was axiomatically held until perhaps the last two decades. On such an assumption the books of Chronicles were theologically preparatory for the work of Ezra-Nehemiah that followed. Thus the purpose of Chronicles was traditionally assumed to be supportive of the community reforms that Ezra and Nehemiah had endeavored to implement.

Increasingly, however, there has been the disposition to divorce Chronicles from Ezra-Nehemiah on what have seemed to be convincing grounds. Thus the connection between the two works that the Greek Ezra (1 Esdras) established by commencing with the material of 2 Chronicles 35 and continuing uninterrupted until Ezra 1:11 is dismissed as secondary, notwithstanding arguments advanced for the priority of the Greek Ezra over Ezra-Nehemiah.<sup>1</sup> The literary connection that the canonical Chronicles now displays with the beginning of Ezra is further suggested to speak for merely an arbitrary junction between the two works rather than for a natural interdependence.<sup>2</sup> The balance of scholarship now seems to favor the separation of the two works for the above and for additional reasons. The most compelling of these latter is the appeal to wide theological differences between the stance of Chronicles and that of Ezra-Nehemiah. Though an appeal to stylistic differences is customarily made,<sup>3</sup> it cannot be said to be conclusive, and argumentation of that character is often circular. Since the question of the theological distinctiveness of the two works seems the major issue, it is to this that we now turn.

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<sup>1</sup>H. G. M. Williamson, *Israel in the Books of Chronicles* (Cambridge: University Press, 1977) 12-36, has surveyed recent discussion on this question. We agree with his assertion of the priority of Ezra and Nehemiah.

<sup>2</sup>D. N. Freedman, "The Chronicler's Purpose," *CBQ* 23 (1961) 436-442, argues this way.

<sup>3</sup>For a review of the stylistic (and other) differences between Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah note S. Japhet, "The Supposed Common Authorship of Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah Investigated Anew," *VT* 18 (1968) 330-371.

Important in this theological evaluation is the matter of the sustained Davidic interest in the books of Chronicles that is not reflected in Ezra-Nehemiah. Additionally, Ezra-Nehemiah lean heavily upon the earlier salvation history material, particularly the exodus-conquest themes; yet these are said to be absent in Chronicles. Further, the phenomenon of prophecy is heavily appealed to in Chronicles but is argued to be missing in Ezra-Nehemiah. Finally, Chronicles is widely suggested to be a tendentious work, basically supportive of the immediate postexilic reform prophets Haggai and Zechariah and only marginally adjusted by genealogical additions (principally 1 Chronicles 1-9) to fit it into the Ezra-Nehemiah period later.

We begin the discussion by assessing the purpose of Ezra-Nehemiah in their present canonical relationship. The Ezra-Nehemiah complex covers a period of some one hundred forty years. It begins by offering, in the shape of the edict of Cyrus, encouragement to the Jewish community to return. At the conclusion to the book of Nehemiah the period ends on a note of profound disappointment, with the community wracked by divisions between the priesthood and the laity. The Nehemiah party is opposed by Jerusalem officialdom supported by a powerful Samaria faction whose Persian sympathies were pronounced. Divisions within the community had been exacerbated by the Nehemiah reforms especially since he had made so bold as to expel from Jerusalem the son-in-law of Sanballat, governor of Samaria. This son-in-law was the grandson of the ruling high priest of the period, Eliashib (Neh 13:28). Thus having begun the Ezra-Nehemiah period with high hopes having been attached to the Cyrus edict, we end with a frank admission by the author of Nehemiah of the failure of an experiment and with a community divided. Though we do not learn it from the book itself, we know from outside sources that the pendulum was about to swing against the Nehemiah reforms and that with the advent of direct Persian governorship there would emerge in the fourth century a hierocratic Jewish state. This would endure, with all its tight regulativeness, until the Maccabean revolt.

It is noteworthy that we begin and end the Ezra-Nehemiah period with detail relating to the temple. Indeed, it is not too much to claim that such a temple orientation, which is sustained throughout the two books, gives to them their inner consistency. This is clearly so in the book of Ezra since it is almost entirely given over to temple concerns. The first six chapters of the book do not concern the reformer personally; yet, because of their content, they can be conveniently grouped under his name. They are taken up with a temple rebuilding program and ostensibly do not prepare us for Ezra's coming or for the issues he will confront. We see now how connections between Ezra 1-6 and 7-10 may be forged. When Ezra does come, he too is concerned with the regulation of worship in Jerusalem and thus the rightful function of the temple. He is thus the continuator of the emphasis struck in Ezra 1-6.

It is clear now that we may dismiss the traditional picture of Ezra as the father of Judaism, as the beginning of a new movement that substituted a law-obedient Judaism for the older territorial notion of Israel. It is equally clear that the identification of Ezra as the imposer of the law who brought back the canonical Pentateuch is no longer a satisfying one.<sup>4</sup> Both of these facets of older re-

<sup>4</sup>For a recent discussion of the question of the law that Ezra brought back and its implications cf. C. Houtman, "Ezra and the Law," *OTS* 21 (1981) 91-115.

search have undergone considerable recent modification. Certainly Ezra's prominence in Ezra 7 is hardly to be based on any innovative restoration of law to the community since the role of law is arguably subordinated in Ezra 7 to temple and cultic concerns. To take this point a little further, it is true that Ezra is presented as a "ready scribe in the law of Moses" (Ezra 7:6), but this is a reference to a law whose components are presupposed by the writer to have conditioned the nature of the immediate postexilic community (6:18). Certainly the law is relatively unknown to the popular community, but there does appear to have been an upper stratum who would know it and also be encouraged to communicate it (7:25). The fact that the law is read by Ezra at the Feast of Tabernacles suggests that the writer has in mind a return to older paths (cf. Deut 31:10-13). Thus there is the probability that the reading of the law in Nehemiah 8 was designed to operate analogously as the reading of the law had done in earlier periods such as the Josianic.

That is to say, all this accords well with a range of prophetic-type concerns with which Ezra is to be identified. The law reading was probably designed to provoke the populace at large to covenant renewal rather than to provide for community regulation in itself. Such a renewal movement does take place within Nehemiah 9-10. We may here remark that even the so-called concentration on precise legal observance in Ezra 9-10 and the action taken against the mixed population resulting from intermarriages between Jews and aliens there was not an end in itself. It had in mind a second exodus motif of the cleansing of the promised land from defilement (cf. Lev 18:24 ff.; Ezek 36:17 ff.). Thus the sequence of temple cleansing or restoration of proper worship, of the reading of the law, of reform measures taken, and of the conclusion of a covenant take up similar concerns in the Ezra-Nehemiah complex to those with which the reforming kings of the books of Chronicles were readily associated. Platforms of this character were always of course within the mainstream of OT prophetic concern. This therefore makes the prophetic note so clearly seen in Chronicles as well as what may be argued to be the generally prophetic character of Ezra-Nehemiah readily understandable.<sup>5</sup>

Further, one must not lose sight of the all-Israelite character of Ezra's moves. The point has been made that within the narratives concerning Ezra personally the term Israel is used some twenty-four times while the mention of Judah occurs only four times (all of them in geographical references: Ezra 7:14; 9:9; 10:7, 9).<sup>6</sup> Ezra is sent, as the terms of his commission make clear (cf. 7:25), to "all the people beyond the river"—i.e., virtually to the entire population of the older Cis-Jordanian boundaries of the Davidic empire.<sup>7</sup> This all-Israelite tone in Ezra (and Nehemiah) will caution us from construing action taken during this period as "anti-Samaritan." The character of that sect, as we well know, was rigid in its orthodoxy, and its origins were certainly later than the Ezra-Nehe-

<sup>5</sup>H. G. M. Williamson, "Eschatology in Chronicles," *TB* 28 (1977) 129, rightly regards the assumption that the prophetic movement had vanished by 400 B.C. as unproven.

<sup>6</sup>Noted by H. C. M. Vogt, *Studie zur nachexilischen Gemeinde in Esra-Nehemiah* (Werl: 1966) 47 ff.

<sup>7</sup>For a precise definition of what was meant by the phrase "beyond the river" in Persian boundary terms cf. A. F. Rainey, "The Satrapy 'Beyond the River'," *AJBA* 1/2 (1969) 51-78.

miah period.<sup>8</sup> This emphasis upon the purpose of Ezra's return follows hard upon material earlier in the book bearing on the unsuccessful character of the first return under Zerubbabel/Sheshbazzar/Jeshua in Ezra 1-6. It may have been designed, therefore, to present a contrast between what was respectively achieved under the leadership of the two returns. We are probably being encouraged by this pan-Israelitism to view the results of the Ezra mission as more determinative for the final shape of the community than those that had been achieved in earlier measures taken after 537 B.C.

Since we are arguing that the books of Chronicles were written to encourage the perpetuation of the Ezra-Nehemiah ideals, it is necessary for our purposes to take some matters further. Important here is the covenant renewal ceremony of Nehemiah 8-10. Ezra's reading of the law is followed by Levitical exposition (Neh 8:7 ff.), and it is the Levites who draw out the implications of this covenant about to be renewed in terms of the review of salvation history that is contained in the long prayer of Neh 9:5b-37. The emphasis in this prayer is on the gift of the land as the fulfillment of the promise to the fathers, and this type of material differs little from the sermonic type of exposition offered by the Chronicler in his treatment of the monarchical period.<sup>9</sup> The concluding verses (9:36-27) indicate the position in which the people of God, now returned to the land, find themselves—i.e., as slaves. That is to say, they are conscious that the real exodus of postexilic prophetic concern still awaits them, and for its blessings they are praying. What is striking in this covenant renewal of Nehemiah 8-10 is the absence of general priestly support. Priests are not associated with Ezra in the reading of the law, and their support for the movement seems only to have been perfunctory.<sup>10</sup>

The prophetic concerns of Ezra to which we have pointed are echoed in Nehemiah, and we may note the quasi-prophetic manner in which the book of Nehemiah itself opens.<sup>11</sup> True, God does not speak to him in the typical prophetic-type consultation, but the divine will is clearly indicated, and he is equally clearly charged to implement it. As a rebuilder of the city walls he is also being cast in the role of the traditional leadership of the ancient world.<sup>12</sup> As the facilitator of political stability and as the resolute upholder of the law (as the book presents him to be), Nehemiah in his mission evinces not only prophetic traits but also royal ones. He is thus again a religious reformer who can be cast into the very best traditions of a Josiah or a Hezekiah. Though he is a formidable figure whom

<sup>8</sup>On the question of the dating of the Samaritan sect cf. R. J. Coggins, *Samaritans and Jews: The Origins of Samaritanism Reconsidered* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1975) 68-72.

<sup>9</sup>P. R. Ackroyd, "God and People in the Chronicler's Presentation of Ezra," in *La notion biblique de Dieu* (ed. J. Coppens et al.; BETL 41; Leuven: 1975) 155-160, has drawn attention to this similarity.

<sup>10</sup>I have noted this in my "Malachi and the Ezra-Nehemiah Reforms," *Reformed Theological Review* 35 (1976) 42-52.

<sup>11</sup>R. J. Coggins, *The Books of Ezra-Nehemiah* (Cambridge: University Press, 1976) 70, has been one of several who have recently made this point. Note also the assumed close connection (Neh 6:7) of Nehemiah with a prophetic movement.

<sup>12</sup>As M. Smith, *Palestinian Parties and Politics that Shaped the Old Testament* (New York: University of Columbia, 1971) 129-130, has remarked.

a configuration of local dynasts cannot daunt, he is not indifferent to the social plight of the common people. The economic measures that he takes in Nehemiah 5 are at once designed to win popular support and thus to broaden the reform base as much as they are to check the power of the Samaria-based opposition.<sup>13</sup> Popular measures of this character were apparently intended to clear the way for the very significant steps that Nehemiah would take. These happen after his return at an unspecified time to Jerusalem subsequent to his recall to Babylon in 532 B.C. (Neh 13:6). Some have supposed that it was the messianic character of Nehemiah's measures and his own personal pretensions (cf. 6:7) that had led to this. Doubtless, however, assertions of that character were ploys raised by his opponents. The impact of the reforms in 13:4-22 clearly struck at priestly privilege, and once again in the history of Israel an eminent layman, prompted by a divine call, directed his attention in a prophetic manner to cultic abuse. Perhaps the period immediately after these measures saw the highwater mark of the reform movement. After 400 B.C., however, the power of the Jerusalem priesthood gradually became dominant, and the theology that had prompted the Ezra-Nehemiah movement perhaps became one of popular hope.

In the light of all this we may now return to the books of Chronicles. We remind ourselves in doing so that our examination of the Ezra-Nehemiah period has indicated that what was of interest to the writer was the notion of the construction of an ideal worshipping unity, Israel, centered around the presence of a purified temple. No eschatological emphasis was found to exist within these books—merely the belief that with the Ezra-Nehemiah period the community had been set before the possibility of a new beginning, the possibility of the realization of the hopes of the exilic theologians, the experience of a dramatic second exodus and a new covenant. No overt or even implicit messianism was found to exist within the two books.

We may therefore ask to what degree the books of Chronicles display congruency with the details of the Ezra-Nehemiah presentation. We may first inquire whether Chronicles is motivated by an "all-Israelite" ideal. This question may readily be answered in the affirmative, given the recent detailed interest in this question. Older expositors had seen the pan-Israelite theology of Chronicles as an anti-Samaritan polemic, with the "true Israel" notes of the book applicable only to those who clung to Davidic ideas and thus to the struggling Jerusalem community. Recent research has made it clear, however, that to regard the Chronicler as a southern sectarian is to misread the plain facts of his work.<sup>14</sup> There would be common ground now that the Chronicler (in agreement with Ezra-Nehemiah) held a view of an ideal Israel, worshipping as a community around an idealized temple conception. More open to question, however, would be the degree to which messianism—and especially Davidic messianism—is endorsed in the two books, and what further is the attitude of the Chronicler to the matter of eschatology. Both of these questions now require further development.

<sup>13</sup>Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 131-132.

<sup>14</sup>Both Williamson, *Israel*, esp. 87 ff., and M. D. Johnson, *The Purpose of the Biblical Genealogies* (Cambridge: University Press, 1969) 47-55, have strongly emphasized the pan-Israelite character of Chronicles.

The Davidic-Solomonic emphasis of the books of Chronicles is not in dispute. H. G. M. Williamson<sup>15</sup> has drawn our attention to the concentration on the eternal dynasty that is variously presented in Chronicles with David and Solomon related as promise and fulfillment. The building of the temple, the preparations for it, were precursors for the dynasty and not in themselves sufficient to ensure its establishment. The function of the Solomonic account is to assure us that the eternal character of the dynasty has been secured. We cannot be encouraged, however, to place much confidence in this dynastic hypothesis if only for the fact that the credibility or deportment of Solomon personally—by whom the Davidic dynasty in Chronicles had been established—had been seriously reflected upon by this time by the books of Kings. Even if we are unwilling to concede that these books had then assumed canonical form, the traditions on which the books of Chronicles drew would have been common property, and it must have been therefore clear to the readers that the portraits of both Solomon and David in Chronicles were designed idealizations. Such idealizations, moreover, were not intended by the Chronicler to magnify the dynasty that had been established so much as they were aimed at pointing to the splendor of the temple, which endorsed the character of Israel as a theocracy. David and Solomon are thus merely the architects of the theocratic policy to which all good southern kings thereafter in Chronicles rigidly adhered. In regard to David, moreover, S. Japhet<sup>16</sup> has pointed out that there are enough compelling details (1 Chr 13 with 15:11-13; 21; 22:7-8; 28:3) to indicate to the discerning reader that David was not without faults. All this is quite apart from the common traditions of Kings and Samuel, certainly available to the Chronicler, which reflect so adversely upon the character of these two kings. It is therefore more probable that the function of the Davidic-Solomonic narratives in Chronicles are theocratic (kingdom of God) in their nature rather than that they are dynastic.

Thus we cannot support a view of Chronicles that suggests that messianism or dynasticism, as bound up with the figures of either David or Solomon, is a major concern in that work. The case, however, for a first edition of Chronicles—a concept promoted in recent years—to be set at c. 515 B.C. rests on the assumption that the books were written to support a Davidic restoration<sup>17</sup>—a move, it is suggested, that was currently being promoted by the messianism of the return prophets Haggai and Zechariah. But there are three problems with such a thesis. The first is the doubtful character of the messianic hypothesis even from the material deemed to have been central to the first edition of Chronicles. The second is that this first edition was subsequently added to and overwritten in a way that throws an all-Israelite notion into greater perspective and that at least alters any supposed original emphasis. The first-edition hypothesis of heavily emphasized messianism draws its support from the supposed similar interest shown

<sup>15</sup>Williamson, "Eschatology" 133-142.

<sup>16</sup>I am indebted to Williamson, "Eschatology" 152 n. 56, who refers to S. Japhet's unpublished dissertation (pp. 468-472), for these particulars.

<sup>17</sup>Freedman, "Purpose," though cf. J. N. Newsome, "Towards a New Understanding of the Chronicler and His Purposes," *JBL* 94 (1975) 201-217, who supports the theory but sees the work as endorsing primarily the theocracy.

by Haggai and Zechariah. It not only seems a somewhat circular process of reasoning but is rendered nugatory if the evidence of Haggai-Zechariah is differently assessed. Thus the third is the arguable absence of any particular messianic emphasis in the exilic and postexilic writings other than that supposedly found in Chronicles. The restoration prophecies of Isaiah 40-55 contain virtually no mention of any Davidic hope, for the genitive of Isa 55:3 must be taken as objective<sup>18</sup> and as transferring the Davidic promises to the people of God as a whole. The matter of Davidic emphasis in Ezekiel is controversial, and opinion is divided on it. But it must be regarded as significant that the book is at pains to emphasize the kingship of God (cf. Ezek 20:33 in a chapter in which the monarchical period of Israel is unceremoniously passed over). No Davidic presence in the new temple situation is described in the fulfillment chapters 40-48, and where the Davidic presence does occur in the book it is generally devalued. True, Ezek 17:22 lets it be known that God has not forgotten his Davidic promises. But that passage may be remotely messianic, which the review of Judahite kingship from 609 B.C. onwards that Ezekiel 19 contains ends on a note of lament and thus without prospect for the Davidic house.<sup>19</sup>

Nor can Haggai and Zechariah be drawn into this debate with any real conviction. Zerubbabel admittedly is seen as a replacement for Jehoiachin at Hag 2:23 since that verse has Jer 22:24 in view, but he is addressed in that section as the governor of Judah (Hag 2:21). He is probably therefore operating as no more than a continuity figure, a reminder of God's fidelity to the Davidic promises in a general sense. It is too much to argue that he is presented here as a messianic claimant.<sup>20</sup> Likewise the direct evidence for messianism from Zechariah is very slender. As sons of oil, Jeshua and Zerubbabel are jointly presented as guarantors of blessing for the community, not as anointed ones.<sup>21</sup> Moreover it is perfectly consistent with the tenor of the postexilic period to see the "branch" expectation transferred to the figure of Jeshua as high priest (Zech 6:12) in view of the hierocratic situation that has begun to develop in the immediate second-temple economy. There is no firm textual evidence to support the supposition that Zerubbabel was in any way connected with that latter passage. Of course Zerubbabel is venerated in both Haggai and Zechariah as the temple builder. In that sense he is the continuity figure and the continuator of the general hopes ex-

<sup>18</sup>H. G. M. Williamson, "'The Sure Mercies of David'—Subjective or Objective Genitive,'" *JSS* 23 (1978) 31-49, has argued cogently for the genitive as objective.

<sup>19</sup>On the whole question of Davidic messianism in Ezekiel I refer to my "Kingship and Temple in the Post-Exilic Period," *Reformed Theological Review* 37 (1978) 33-42.

<sup>20</sup>R. Mason, "The Prophets of the Restoration," in *Israel's Prophetic Tradition: Essays in Honour of Peter R. Ackroyd* (ed. R. Coggins, A. Phillips and M. Knibb; Cambridge: University Press, 1982) 140, rightly downplays the messianic interest of Haggai-Zechariah. He agrees that Haggai speaks of Zerubbabel in more directly messianic terms in Hag 2:23. The question is, however, for what reason? Mason sees the emphasis also in continuity terms, with the renewal of the Zion traditions being the point made by the verse.

<sup>21</sup>A. S. van der Woude, "Die Beiden Söhne des Ols (Sach 4:14): messianische Gestalten?," in *Travels in the World of the Old Testament* (M. A. Beek *Festschrift*; Assen: Van Gorcum, 1974) 262-268, has shown that *yīshār*, "oil," in Zech 4:14 is not otherwise associated with anointing in the OT.

pressed in the Davidic promises. Moreover, one might draw brief attention to the attitude of Jeremiah to the monarchy and the very slight expectations of messianism that that book contains. Jer 23:5 is clearly, by the use of the name itself and the reversal of its components,<sup>22</sup> a tilt at the ruling Zedekiah, while the name of Zedekiah as a messianic expression is transferred eschatologically to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, as the pivot of the new society, in 33:14-16.

In view of this postexilic disenchantment with messianism or with the Davidic dynasty generally we should have to ask ourselves whether it would have been likely that Chronicles would have taken the matter further. H. G. M. Williamson<sup>23</sup> has virtually argued that he had, but we feel the evidence ought to be differently evaluated. R. Mosis<sup>24</sup> is surely correct in his assessment that the concentration of interest shown in David and Solomon in Chronicles is simply connected with temple building. The Chronicler does not appear to have been interested in the person of David himself, nor does he glorify Solomon individually. Earlier in 1 Chronicles 11-16 the focus of interest had been on the return of the ark and the conquest of Jerusalem, and even the anointing of David had been subordinated to that. It is pointedly remarked that Saul had neglected the ark (1 Chr 13:3) and thus the theocratic nature of the kingdom over which he had presided. David's reign, which is to be extended through Solomon, thus begins on a new note, and this high theocratic posture is consummated by the building of the temple. Solomon's emphasized function is that he will build a house of "rest" for Yahweh (28:2). Thus J. N. Newsome<sup>25</sup> is to be followed here in suggesting that the concern of the Chronicler was with the kingdom and not with messianism. God had taken the kingdom away from Saul and had chosen David to build the temple, for which there were plans in writing from the hand of the Lord (28:19). Thus the construction of the temple merely served to underscore the theocratic note. This concentration on temple building as linked with the purposes of the kingdom of God finds its theological conclusion in the temple restoration edict of Cyrus. As associated with divine rule, this is the note on which the books of Chronicles end. It is therefore consistent with the purposes of the Chronicler that the reign of Solomon should end with the pilgrimage of the Queen of Sheba to the wisdom and splendor of the Solomonian court. This court is a symbol pointing beyond itself to a higher reality, the Chronicler would have us understand, and it is consistent therefore that in coming the queen virtually brings her world with her (2 Chr 9:23). All the indications of a Gentile pilgrimage to the divine city are here, and we may therefore recognize why the Gentile Hiram of Tyre should confess that God had given the kingdom to David to build a house for the Lord (2:12).

<sup>22</sup>Note here J. R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah: A Study in Ancient Hebrew Rhetoric* (Missoula: Scholar's, 1975) 31-32, who comments on this fact.

<sup>23</sup>To be fair, Williamson, "Eschatology" 154, disavows the term "messianic" and prefers the concept of the Chronicler as a royalist. Nevertheless it is clear that Williamson is keen to endorse the concept of the Davidic dynastic hope as the central eschatological feature of the books.

<sup>24</sup>R. Mosis, *Untersuchungen zur Theologie des chronistischen Geschichtswerkes* (Freiburg: Herder, 1973) 162-163.

<sup>25</sup>Newsome, "New Understanding" 201-217.



This wider theocratic interest will also account for the heavy prophetic tone the two books of Chronicles display, for the direction of the kingdom of Israel through prophecy had always been a characterizing feature of the monarchical period of the OT. Particularly the prophetic direction of the south after the norms had been established by the Davidic-Solomonic nexus is a matter of special interest to the writer.<sup>26</sup> Yet while a Solomonic-type restoration occurs under Hezekiah, and a "Davidic" political revival under Josiah, the provisionality of the Solomonic temple is made clear by the profanation to which it was subjected by its Josianic successors (2 Chr 36:14) and of course by its ultimate destruction. Yahweh had warned north and south through his prophets (v 15) but such a counsel had never been received (v 16). Consequently the symbol of the theocracy, the temple, was finally destroyed (v 17) and its sacred vessels carried into captivity (v 18). All this was in fulfillment of the Jeremianic word (v 21), a situation that the Cyrus edict was designed to reverse (vv 22-23).

By way of conclusion we may raise the question of the eschatology of the books of Chronicles, and we now return more directly to the edict of Cyrus. The language of the Chronicler in 2 Chr 36:22-23 would have served to sustain for his generation the expectations surrounding Cyrus that had been set in motion by Isaiah 40-55. Certainly the concepts put forward in these verses are totally consistent with the prophetic exilic program. Thus the return to the land, the second-exodus theology associated with it, the endorsement of all that by the building of the sanctuary—all would have been compacted into the summary edict of 2 Chr 36:22-23. We are clearly therefore at a posture here very congruent with the second-exodus emphasis of Ezra-Nehemiah. Though the Chronicler had not exploited the Exodus materials in his narration of Israel's past, he is in his conclusion presuming their full detail. Thus we cannot drive a wedge at this point between him and the Ezra-Nehemiah presentation. Therefore in regard to the alleged areas of theological differences—namely, Davidic messianism, a pan-Israelite emphasis, a prophetic bent, and a second-exodus tone—Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah share an essentially common perspective. The so-called tendentious attitude of Chronicles depends in large measure on whether the work is understood as having been written to provide support for the return prophets Haggai and Zechariah. We have argued, however, that the purpose of the book of Chronicles must be deduced from its final redacted form. This final redaction was most probably subsequent to the Ezra-Nehemiah period.<sup>27</sup>

This compels us to raise the question of the appropriateness of this conclusion to the work and of its application to the society setting of c. 400 B.C. Two points must here be considered. If most recent criticism is wrong and Chronicles is consciously written c. 400 B.C. as an introduction to Ezra-Nehemiah, this suggests that the theocratic directions that the Chronicler had emphasized were meant to be those that the Ezra-Nehemiah reforms had in fact endorsed. We have already noted that this theological congruency is demonstrated by Ezra-Nehemiah. If Chronicles, however, is to be separated from Ezra-Nehemiah, as

<sup>26</sup>Cf. A. Noordtzij, "Les Intentions du Chroniste," *RB* 49 (1940) 161-168, esp. 163, where the relevant texts are cited.

<sup>27</sup>This is the majority opinion, though an appeal to the dating of the Davidic genealogy of 1 Chr 3:17-24 may be inconclusive. On the general question of dating cf. Williamson, "Eschatology" 121-133.

now seems more likely, then the function of the edict as a conclusion assumes a new dimension. The ending would then be an affirmation that the Ezra-Nehemiah reforms, though they had failed, had set directions that were to be maintained. The Chronicler, however, may be suggesting that eschatology would bear out the contours of the theological revival that Ezra and Nehemiah had begun.

Either way, however, the result is much the same. If written as an introduction to the trilogy of Chronicles-Ezra-Nehemiah and yet written after the failure of those reforms, then what is being asserted by Chronicles is that the universalistic, second-exodus theology of the Cyrus decree, all of which finds its world center in Jerusalem, is to be the hope to which the Ezra-Nehemiah adherents must cling. The reforms had foundered, but they had set directions—covenantal directions, Abrahamic promise directions—that must control the future hope of Israel.

If the books of Chronicles were a separate endeavor, the message supportive of the reforms remains the same. The kingdom of God would come, the second exodus would occur. Jerusalem would be the world center to which Gentile kings would come. The temple state of the Ezra-Nehemiah aims, though now shifted by the Chronicler to the future, becomes the hope to which Israel is referred. Either way he writes as a thoroughgoing eschatologist. The temple-structured society of David and Solomon and the kingdom of God leadership that it represented provided the model for the end. The tenor of traditional prophetic eschatology (cf. Isa 2:2-4; Mic 4:1-5) had thus been preserved. Cyrus' edict had been the unconscious endorsement of all that postexilic Israel had ever believed in or hoped for, and the Chronicler's work is entirely oriented to the theological implications of that decree. It is thus the burden of the Chronicler that the disappointments of the postexilic period must not be permitted to cloud the hopes that the prophetic movement of the exilic and postexilic periods had promoted. God would never withdraw from his Abrahamic commitments. Once again the promised land would be Israel's. The kingdom of God would come, and the theocracy would be established. Whatever the disenchantments of the present may be, they would be able to be borne if such a theology of hope could be sustained. Thus the Chronicler was a theologian of eschatological enthusiasm. He belonged to a prophetic movement that would not give up on the promises given to Israel, the disappointments stemming from the failure of the Ezra-Nehemiah reforms notwithstanding. For the Chronicler's Israel, the future was bright with promise. As A. Noordtjz has emphasized, "pour lui, l'unique vocation d'Israel est de réaliser la théocratie."<sup>28</sup>

<sup>28</sup>Noordtjz, "Intentions" 167.