

The Genealogies

In all of Scripture, there is nothing quite like the opening nine chapters of Chronicles. Starting with Adam, the first man, a series of genealogies records Israel's various bloodlines before terminating with the residents of Judah in the late-fifth century BCE. The Chronicler begins his tale of the Judahite monarchy only when this recitation is complete. His interest in lineages was not unusual for a member of an ancient Mediterranean society. Prefacing an extended historical narrative with a catalog of descendants, however, sets Chronicles apart not only from the rest of the Bible but also from other ancient Near Eastern works (Knoppers 2003: 260).

For many modern readers, religious and secular, the unbroken cascade of unfamiliar names poses a near-impassable hurdle. It is difficult to grasp the genealogies' relevance in an age in which, upon making another's acquaintance, one asks, "How (or what) do you do?" but never "From whom do you spring?" Patrick Henry Reardon, an Antiochian Orthodox priest and editor of *Touchstone Magazine: A Journal of Mere Christianity*, describes a believer's encounter today with Chronicles' genealogies in these terms:

Aware that the page in front of him is the Word of God, [the reader] is understandably hesitant to call it boring. Nonetheless, what is he to make of all these interminable names with no discernible narrative? He finds himself plodding through a primitive phone book, as it were, published long before the telephone was invented. This view would at least explain why the numbers are missing. (2006: 7)

The reception history of the genealogies reveals, however, that they are anything but dull. Interpreters through the ages have brought the genealogies to bear on timeless concerns as well as on the most pressing questions of their day. These include the identity of the messiah, the scope of salvation, the standing of Jews in the world, and the divine right of kings. Here, as elsewhere, Chronicles' exceptional verses provide exegetical purchase. The verses in the birthlists that differ from or are perceived to be in tension with other biblical books are those that have exploded with significance through interpretation.

These deviations fall into three categories. First, Chronicles gives scant information about the people it lists. Chronicles' opening verse – "Adam, Seth, Enosh" – is the shortest in the Bible (1 Chr 1:1), and that is all we hear of these three (Figure 1.1). Similarly, Abraham, his children, and Moses appear only as names, detached from any tales of the patriarchal age and the exodus experience. In reception, the book's terseness proved to be an irritant. Various interpreters sought to correct Chronicles' deficiency by discovering within the birthlists references to and elaborations of these narratives. Paradoxically, the genealogies' brevity of content generated a substantial expansion of biblical tradition.

Second, the Chronicler introduces many persons otherwise unknown. Some interpreters accepted his expansion of the sacred record at face value, others rejected it, and still others understood the names to be different monikers for well-known biblical figures. These different approaches reflected the ebb and flow of readers' confidence in Chronicles as an authoritative historical archive.

Lastly, at various points the Chronicler's information conflicts with what is said elsewhere in the canon. Faced with discrepancies, some readers wrestled over whether to privilege Chronicles' version, ignore it, or somehow resolve the contradiction. The reasoning behind their decisions, when offered, also yielded meaningful insights.



FIGURE 1.1 Illuminated (gold lettering on blue) ADAM in Hebrew at the beginning of Chronicles. From a Hebrew Bible of 1448 or 1449, the “Duke of Sussex’s Italian Bible” (British Library Add MS 15251, f 313v). Source: The British Library.

The passages that were either most consequential for readers or that best display the various techniques of interpretation – or both – are the genealogy of David (1 Chr 2 and 3), the justification for Reuben’s placement in the lists (1 Chr 5:1–2), the Ephraimites’ death in Canaan at the hands of the

Gaths (1 Chr 7:20–23), and the story of Jabez (1 Chr 4:9–10). The discussion that follows treats each of these cases.

David's Genealogy and the Christian Messiah

Of all the lists in the genealogies, the Chronicler's report on David's origins and offspring has inspired the most important receptions. The reasons are clear. David is a key figure in Israel's history, and both Jews and Christians identify him as the ancestor of the messiah.

Chronicles is the only book in Scripture to list David's postexilic descendants (1 Chr 3; Kings ends with Jehoiachin in Babylon and does not indicate whether he has children (2 Kgs 25:27–30)). It is difficult to overemphasize the significance of this genealogy for Jews in the first century of the Common Era. At this time, the community began to divide into those who accepted Jesus as the messiah and those who did not. The expectation that the messiah would be a descendant of David had already taken hold (Is 11:10; Jer 23:5, 33:15), and for some Jewish Christians, it was crucial to establish that Jesus met that qualification. Paul was among the first to assert Jesus's place in the Davidic line. Paul's letter to the Romans opens with the declaration that Christ was "descended from David according to the flesh" (Rom 1:3). The author of the second letter to Timothy also proclaimed, in Paul's name, his "gospel" attesting to Jesus's resurrection from the dead and his descent from David (2 Tm 2:8).

The first verse of Matthew's Gospel also affirmed that Jesus is "the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham" (Mt 1:1), and the Gospel's opening genealogy drew on Chronicles for proof. It is generally agreed that the Greek version of Chronicles was a primary source for the names of Jesus's forebears up until the return of the Judahites from exile (Albright and Mann 1971: 3; Fitzmyer 1981: 491–494). Matthew also follows LXX Chr's identification of Zerubbabel's father. In MT Chr, Zerubbabel is listed as the son of Pedaiah, but in LXX Chr, Zerubbabel is the son of Salathiel (Greek for Shealtiel), Pedaiah's brother (LXX 1 Chr 3:19). Once Matthew reached Zerubbabel, however, he set aside Chronicles' record and supplied names that have no other scriptural attestation.¹

¹ Luke went in a completely different direction from Chronicles (and Matthew) and traced David's line through his son Nathan rather than through Solomon (Lk 3:27–31; Nathan is mentioned in 2 Sm 5:14 and 1 Chr 3:5). Some suggest that Luke wished to distance Jesus from idolatrous kings such as Solomon and Rehoboam, or, alternatively, that Luke knew a different "pre-Lucan" tradition concerning the Davidic line (Fitzmyer 1981: 496–497). In any case, the only names among David's descendants that reflect Luke's reception of Chronicles are those of two postexilic figures, Shealtiel and Zerubbabel.

Nevertheless, it is possible to argue that the evangelist was deeply indebted to Chronicles and that his genealogy emulated the spirit and form of the book's introductory chapters with the intent of fulfilling and expanding them. Matthew, like the Chronicler, goes out of his way to distinguish David. Of all the rulers of Judah, David alone merits the title of king (Mt 1:6). Moreover, some suggest that Matthew's three groupings of fourteen generations (Abraham to David, David to Jeconiah, Jeconiah to Jesus) were a play on David's name in Hebrew. The calculation of gematria assigned numeric value to letters and was a popular practice in this period. Revelation 13:18, for example, stipulates that the numeric value of the letters comprising the name of "the beast" is 666. "David," consisting of three consonants (which may account for the three groupings), has a numerical value of fourteen (Allison 2004: 4).

Like the Chronicler, Matthew chose to preface his narrative with a genealogy. The apostle, however, altered the Chronicler's template to suit his own purpose and injected a supernatural dimension into the beginning of his list. Jesus's genealogy starts with the words "A book of the origin (*biblos geneseos*) of Jesus Christ" (Mt 1:1). The only other place *biblos geneseos* occurs in all of Scripture is in Genesis. There this phrase introduces not only the generations of the first man but also the generations of the heavens and the earth (LXX Gn 2:4, 5:1). Its invocation by Matthew gave cosmic coloring to Jesus's birth.

The Chronicler emphasized the preeminence of Judah's line within the genealogies and thus prepared his audience for his account exalting David. Matthew's introductory genealogy also prepares his readers, but to an entirely different end. Matthew highlights four women among Jesus's ancestors: Tamar (Judah's daughter-in-law who tricked him into fathering twins), Rahab (the Canaanite prostitute who saved the Israelite spies), Ruth (the Moabite widow who contrived to spend a night in secret with her future husband Boaz), and Bathsheba (who committed adultery with David). Rahab and Ruth do not appear in Chronicles' birthlists. Even so, it is possible that in this instance, too, Matthew emulated the Chronicler. Matthew's listing of these women, all of whom engaged in unconventional sexual activity, set the stage for Mary and the unconventional story of Jesus's virgin birth (Mt 1:18–24).

Matthew never mentions Bathsheba by name. Rather, she is "the wife of Uriah" (Mt 1:6), a designation that owes nothing to Chronicles. In Chronicles, Bathsheba's one appearance is in David's genealogy, where she is called Bathshua and is credited with having borne David four sons (1 Chr 3:5). The Chronicler never acknowledges Bathsheba's previous marriage to Uriah, let alone her illicit affair with David while Uriah was alive or David's hand in Uriah's death.

The phrase "wife of Uriah" in Matthew's genealogy indicates that the apostle was intent not only on emphasizing David's central importance in Jesus's lineage but also on contrasting David's all-too-human shortcomings with the perfection

of Christ. The Chronicler composed his genealogy so that Abraham and Moses would stand in the shadow of David. Matthew adopts the Chronicler's model but undermines the aim of his source. In Matthew's new and improved version of Chronicles' synopsis of sacred history, Jesus supersedes all, including and especially David.

A similar spirit imbued the exegesis of Jerome, one of the most influential of the ancient Christian interpreters, in resolving a major challenge to Chronicles and Matthew posed by the book of Jeremiah. At issue was the fate of Jeconiah (also known as Jehoiachin and Coniah), the last king of Judah. In Chronicles, Jeconiah fathers seven children (1 Chr 3:17–18), and Jeconiah is one of Jesus's ancestors (Mt 1:11–12). According to Jeremiah, however, Jeconiah is a wicked king whom God punishes by denying him offspring: "Record this man as childless, a man who shall not prosper in his days, for none of his offspring shall prosper in sitting on the throne of David, and rule again in Judah" (Jer 22:30). Jerome argued, first, that the phrase "in his days" signified that Jeconiah's offspring would reign after some significant time had passed. Second, by stating that none of Jeconiah's seed was destined to rule, Jeremiah meant that God rather than a human descendant was destined to reoccupy David's throne (*Comm. Jer.* 22:30). Jerome's resolution by and large set the course for subsequent Christian exegetes.

Christian appropriation of Chronicles' genealogies was taken to its logical conclusion by the British Nonconformist (Presbyterian) minister Matthew Henry (1662–1714). Henry's verse-by-verse commentary of the Bible (*An Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*) was highly influential in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and continues to be studied today. (A new edited version was published in 2010.) In his opening exegesis of chapter one of 1 Chronicles, Henry argued that the genealogies show "that our blessed Saviour was, according to the prophecies which went before him, the son of David, the son of Judah, the son of Abraham, the son of Adam." Henry continued,

And, now that he [Jesus] has come for whose sake these registers were preserved, the Jews since have so lost all their genealogies that even that of the priests, the most sacred of all, is forgotten, and they know not of any one man in the world that can prove himself of the house of Aaron. When the building is reared the scaffolds are removed. When the promised Seed has come the line that was to lead to him is broken off. (1998: 651)

According to Henry, the significance of the genealogies began and ended with Christ. With the Advent, all vital and enduring connections between the genealogies and the Jews ceased to exist. Henry's remarks were repeated in other important commentaries, including that of John Wesley (1703–1791), one of the founders of Methodism.

David's Genealogy and the Jewish Messiah

The messiah's Davidic ancestry was also of paramount importance for Jews. From Chronicles' genealogy of David, some key interpreters deduced the identity of Israel's redeemer and others discovered proof of divine intercession in the continuance of the Davidic line. Both strands of interpretation affirmed God's everlasting commitment to Israel.

Like the Christian Jerome, these Jewish interpreters found Jeremiah's proclamation of Jeconiah's childlessness to be a formidable stumbling block. They took an entirely different approach, however, and resolved the problem through chronology. Jeconiah *was* cursed, but, after he reformed, God reversed his decree. The compilers of *Leviticus Rabbah* (a midrash of around the fifth century CE) spelled out the sequence of events. When God exiled Jeconiah for his sins and Nebuchadnezzar confined the captive king to a cell, the men of the Great Sanhedrin feared the Davidic line had come to an end. They successfully appealed to Nebuchadnezzar's wife for help, and the next time Nebuchadnezzar came to her bed she reproached him. Jeconiah was also a king, she said, and therefore equally deserving of sexual satisfaction. Nebuchadnezzar promptly arranged for a conjugal visit, but the couple abstained from intercourse because Jeconiah's wife was menstruating. God saw that Jeconiah, who had violated the Law while in Jerusalem, now upheld it. God (*El*) therefore asked (*sha'al*) the Holy Court to absolve him of his vow to inflict childlessness upon the king, and the Court assented. For this reason, Jeconiah named his son Shealtiel (Lev. Rab. 19.6).

The Talmud gives another reason for Shealtiel's name. In tractate Sanhedrin, Rabbi Johanan stated that Jeconiah successfully impregnated his wife within his prison cubicle even though the walls were too close together for copulation. "Shealtiel" testifies to the miraculous nature of the child's conception. Because of the restricted space, God (*El*) took extraordinary measures to "plant" (*shatal*) the child in the womb (b. Sanh. 37b–38a).

A verse from the book of Haggai also helped readers within the ancient Jewish community to neutralize Jeremiah's condemnation of Jeconiah. Here, too, the establishment of a chronology was key. In addition to proclaiming that Jeconiah would be without issue, Jeremiah declared, "As I live, says the Lord, even if King Coniah [Jeconiah] of Judah were the signet ring on my right hand, even from there I would tear you off" (Jer 22:24). Haggai, however, employed the same simile to opposite effect in reporting God's announcement about Jeconiah's grandson Zerubbabel: "On that day [of Apocalypse], says the Lord of hosts, I will take you, O Zerubbabel my servant, son of Shealtiel, says the Lord, and make you like a signet ring, for I have chosen you, says the Lord

of hosts” (Hg 2:23). The author of a homily from Pesqita Rabbati, a collection of homilies dating from the ninth century of the Common Era, understood the apparent reversal to mean that Jeremiah’s report preceded Jeconiah’s return to God, whereas Haggai spoke afterward (Pesiq. Rab. pisqa 47; see also Pesiq. Rab. Kah. 24.11). The timing of God’s singular selection of Zerubbabel in Haggai – the day of the world’s destruction – imbued the continuation of the Davidic line with messianic significance.

In the background for interpreters as they wrestled with the discrepancies between Chronicles’ genealogy of David, Jeremiah’s proclamation of Jeconiah’s childlessness, and Haggai’s elevation of Jeconiah’s progeny was the story of Chronicles’ Manasseh. Jeconiah and Chronicles’ Manasseh both spent time as captives of the Babylonians, a fact that may have led these early Jewish interpreters to import the details of Manasseh’s experience into their resolution of the conflicting reports on Jeconiah. According to Chronicles, the imprisoned king repents and God returns him to Jerusalem and to his throne (2 Chr 33). In the traditions that sprang up around Jeconiah, his divine reward is different but has the same end of reestablishing the Davidic monarchy. In any event, like Chronicles’ Manasseh, Jeconiah became a model of contrition for later Jewish thinkers. The twelfth-century philosopher Maimonides (1135–1204 CE) viewed the continuation of Jeconiah’s lineage in Chronicles as confirmation that repentance brings individuals and communities close to God no matter how wicked they have been (Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Teshuva, 7). In the Zohar, a Jewish work of mysticism compiled in the thirteenth century, God’s annulment of his judgment against Jeconiah was the Bible’s prime example that “nothing can withstand repentance” (Zohar II:106a–b; Tishby 1989: 1511–1512).

Other Jewish readers in the early period found evidence that the record of David’s descendants in Chronicles culminated with the messiah within Chronicles itself. The compiler(s) of Targum Chronicles focused on the final verse in Chronicles’ genealogy of David. It lists the sons of Elioenai and ends with the words “Anani, seven” – indicating that Anani is the last son and that Elioenai’s offspring were seven in all (1 Chr 3:24). Targum Chronicles changed the ending to read, “and Anani – he is the king Messiah who will be revealed – in all, seven” (Tg. 1 Chr. 3:24; tr. McIvor 1994: 57).

The compilers of Midrash Tanḥuma, in their exegesis of 1 Chronicles 3:10–24, also deduced that “Anani” was the messiah, basing their claim in part on their interpretation of a vision in Daniel. The verse literally reads, “I saw, with the clouds of heaven, one like a son of man coming” (Dn 7:13). In Aramaic, the word for cloud is *anan*. Accordingly, the midrashists understood Daniel to say, “I saw, with Anani of heaven, one like a son of man coming,” which indicated to

them that Anani was the messiah (Townsend 1989: 167; see also Pseudo-Rashi's comments repeating this tradition in his commentary on 1 Chr 3:11²).

In the modern era, Rabbi Malbim (1809–1879) gave new expression to the eschatological expectations raised by Chronicles' genealogies. Malbim was renowned not only for his insightful biblical commentaries but also for his opposition to Reform Judaism, which rejected belief in the messiah. According to Malbim, though God removed Jeconiah as a signet ring in Jeremiah, Haggai attested that, at some unspecified time in the future, God would wear Jeconiah as the ring on his right hand because the messiah will come from Jeconiah's seed. As every ring bears the engraved name of its owner, and by this means broadcasts the identity of the owner, so the miracles of the messiah will proclaim the name of God (Malbim 2014, commentary on Jer 22:24). For Malbim, God's anointed one was neither Zerubbabel nor Anani, both of whom had come and gone, but rather a descendant of Jeconiah who had yet to arrive. The door for the messiah was thus left perpetually open.

David as the Seventh Son of Jesse

The genealogies' designation of David as the seventh son of Jesse created yet another challenge and opportunity for exegetes. In Samuel, David is the eighth and youngest son of Jesse (1 Sm 16:10–11, 17:14). The fact arises during the celebrated story of Samuel's search among Jesse's sons for the one whom God has chosen to be king in Saul's stead. Jesse makes seven sons pass before Samuel, yet God rejects each in turn. Finally, Samuel asks if all are present and discovers that the youngest, David, is away tending sheep. When David is brought forth, God tells Samuel, "Rise and anoint him, for this is the one" (1 Sm 16:6–12).

In Chronicles' genealogy of Judah, however, David is listed as the seventh (and last) of Jesse's sons (1 Chr 2:15). It has been speculated that the Chronicler changed David's standing in the birth order to connote the king's nearness to perfection, and in so doing reinforced a powerful biblical tradition. Elsewhere in the Bible, seven sons signify exceptional blessing. The womenfolk of Bethlehem declare that Ruth is more precious to Naomi than seven sons (Ru 4:15), and Job loses and regains seven sons (Jb 1:2 and 42:13). To be the seventh is also a mark of distinction. In Genesis, God blesses and hallows the seventh day (Gn 2:3). Additionally, the number seven figures prominently in extra-biblical sources from the ancient period. Philo, a Jewish philosopher writing at the dawn of the

² Pseudo-Rashi's commentary appears in all editions of the Rabbinic Bible, and rather than point the reader to any specific edition, I will simply refer to his commentary on particular verses.

Common Era, considered seven to be the most potent and harmonious number in all creation (*De opificio mundi* 89–128); and Leviticus Rabbah continued to affirm that anything that came seventh (including David) was more favored than the rest (Lev. Rab. 29.11).

Though some ancient readers resolved the issue by making Chronicles conform to Samuel (in Peshitta Chronicles, a Syriac translation that may have been composed as early as 200 CE, David is Jesse's eighth son), most found Samuel's tale and Chronicles' numbering equally attractive. In Josephus's rewritten Bible, *Jewish Antiquities* (composed in the late first century CE), Jesse shows six of his sons to Samuel – whose names Josephus took from the Greek version of Chronicles (LXX Chr 2:13–15) – before he sends for David, the seventh (*Ant.* 6.161). A wall painting of the Dura-Europos synagogue (completed 244–245) depicts the anointing of David by Samuel, which the Bible reports was done “in the presence of his brothers” (1 Sm 16:13). The prophet holds a horn of oil over David's head as six other men look on (Figure 1.2).

The attempts by later interpreters to harmonize Chronicles and Samuel reveal the lengths to which exegetes would go to preserve David's seventh-son status. The medieval Christian commentator Rabanus Maurus (c.776–856) adhered to a tradition he had heard from “the Hebrews.” He maintained that Samuel's initial review of Jesse's sons had included Nathan the prophet, who had been adopted by Jesse, whereas Chronicles listed only Jesse's natural children (*Comm. Para.* PL 109.292a). The anonymous Jewish commentator writing at the turn of the eleventh century (traditionally identified as a student of Saadia Gaon) similarly preferred Chronicles' birth order. He proposed that at the time of Samuel's encounter with Jesse, Jesse's youngest son Elihu was in his cradle under the care of a nursemaid. (1 Chr 27:18 refers to “Elihu, one of David's brothers” but does not identify him as the youngest.) He also entertained the possibility that a grown son of Eliab, the oldest of David's brothers (1 Sm 17:28; 1 Chr 2:13), was with Jesse's sons when Samuel appeared, which would place seven youths at the scene but only six sons (Kirchheim 1874: 10–11). David Kimḥi joined Abraham Ibn Ezra (1089–1167) in proposing yet another solution. He asserted that Jesse's eighth son was from a different mother and therefore was omitted from Chronicles' list (Berger 2007: 40).

Of these explanations, perhaps the most evocative came from the twelfth-century German exegete Pseudo-Rashi, who recruited the ancient midrash Genesis Rabbah to resolve the discrepancy. Pseudo-Rashi compared Samuel's search for God's anointed to a king who, while traveling, lost a jewel from his crown. The king abruptly halted his retinue, began sifting through the sand, and did not stop until he found his pearl. This is the analogy used by Genesis Rabbah to account for the dispatch with which Chronicles marched through Judah's descendants to David (1 Chr 2:5–15) and Chronicles' terse listing of

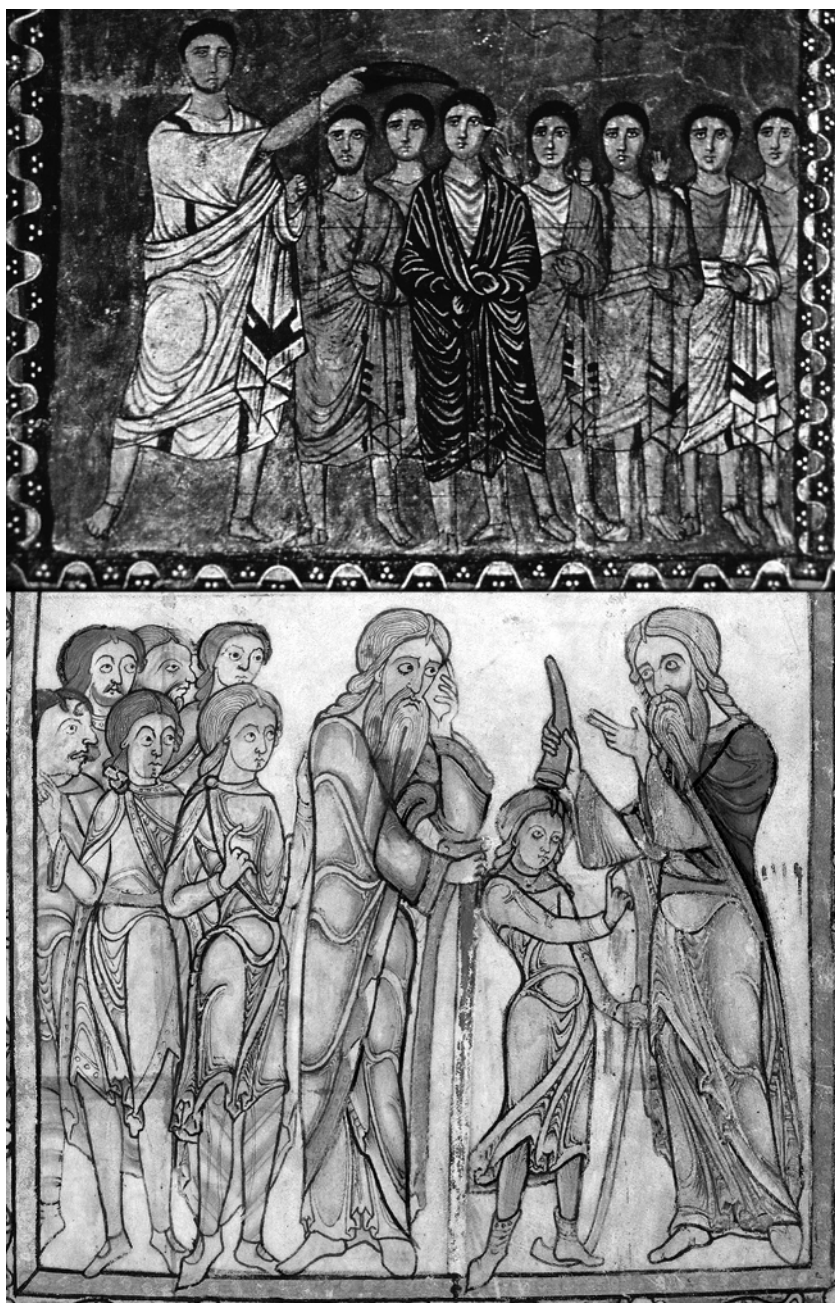


FIGURE 1.2 David anointed by Samuel with six brothers looking on. Top: Wall painting (tempera over plaster) in the Dura-Europos synagogue, Syria, third century, CE. Source: The British Library. Bottom: From an illuminated manuscript, the “Winchester Psalter,” England, twelfth century (British Library Cotton MS Nero C IV, f 7r). Source: The British Library.

Abraham's immediate ancestors (1 Chr 1:24–26). God did not wish to waste time tracing tangential lineages but hastened to arrive at Abraham and David (Gen. Rab. 34.10). In Pseudo-Rashi's retelling, David now becomes "the pearl." For this reason, Pseudo-Rashi argued, the youngest, Elihu, was not included in the count (Pseudo-Rashi, commentary on 1 Chr 2:15).

Many post-Reformation Christian Bible commentaries also strove to maintain David as Jesse's seventh son. The English Puritan Matthew Poole (1624–1679) suggested in his commentary (published in 1683) that, of the eight young men who appeared before Samuel, one was either a child of a concubine or a son who died soon afterwards (M. Poole 1853: 553). During the centuries that followed, one or both of these possibilities appeared in other popular commentaries, including that of the English Baptist John Gill (published 1763), the English Methodist John Wesley (1765), and the American Presbyterian Albert Barnes (1834). Today the World Wide Web is the conduit for this strand of tradition, though it is unclear whether the impetus for its transmission remains constant. The American Church of Christ minister Eric Lyons, in a 2002 blog devoted to "Alleged Discrepancies," explained that David is Jesse's eighth son but is listed as the seventh in Chronicles because another son died (Lyons 2002). Lyons appears to be more interested in resolving a contradiction rather than in celebrating the significance of David being the seventh son. Nonetheless, the posting shows the continuing attention David's birth order in Chronicles receives.

Solomon's Place in the Davidic Line

After David, Solomon is the most important of Israel's kings. In Samuel, Solomon is the oldest of David's surviving sons by Bathsheba. In Chronicles' genealogy of David, Solomon appears fourth in the list of David and Bathsheba's sons (1 Chr 3:5). Several interpreters, Jewish and Christian, attached special significance to Solomon's seniority, however. Rabbi David Kimḥi (1160–1235), for instance, refused to believe that Chronicles' list reflected actual birth order. If it had, Kimḥi asserted, Solomon would have come first (Berger 2007: 56–57).

The Christian glossators of the Geneva Bible (published 1560) were perhaps the most discomfited by Solomon's fourth-place position. Their note to this verse argues against recognizing Bathsheba's first three children altogether and asserts that the unnamed dead child who preceded all of them did not count either. The annotation reads:

Only Solomon was David's natural son, the other three were Uriah's, whom David made his by adoption, he that was begotten in adultery & died the eighth day, is not reckoned among David's sons. (GB note on 1 Chr 3:5; Berry 1969: 179)

For the Geneva Bible commentators, of those born to David and Bathsheba, Solomon is the first and *only* son. Though there is no annotation to the parallel verse in Samuel (2 Sm 5:14), 1 Chronicles 3:5 is given as a cross-reference. It is possible that the compilers of the Geneva Bible chose to clarify Chronicles' verse rather than its counterpart in Samuel because of Chronicles' importance for tracing the human lineage of Christ.

A hundred years later, the English Puritan John Trapp (1601–1669) also asserted that Solomon was the firstborn son, and he drew on Proverbs for evidence. Trapp wrote that Solomon was “the only beloved in the sight of his mother” because he was the eldest. The last phrase is taken from Proverbs (“the only son in the sight of my mother,” Prv 4:3), which, according to tradition, was authored by Solomon. Though Trapp recognized the legitimacy of Bathsheba's other children, he ended up discounting them as thoroughly as did the Geneva Bible (Trapp 1662: 461). Other important commentators transmitted this interpretation, including Trapp's fellow Puritan Poole, the English Catholic exegete George Haydock (1774–1849), and Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown, the authors of *A Commentary Critical and Explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments*, published in 1871.

Reuben's Genealogy

Reuben's genealogy gave interpreters another avenue for probing Scripture for ageless as well as immediate truths. In its opening verses, the Chronicler uncharacteristically offered a rationale for an editorial decision. He explained why the genealogy of Reuben, Jacob's oldest son, is not listed first:

The sons of Reuben the firstborn of Israel (for he was the firstborn, but because he defiled his father's bed, his birthright was given to the sons of Joseph, the son of Israel, so that he is not enrolled in the genealogy according to the birthright; though Judah prevailed over his brothers and a ruler came from him, the birthright belonged to Joseph). (1 Chr 5:1–2)

The reason for Reuben's disinheritance in Chronicles echoes Jacob's deathbed condemnation of Reuben in Genesis, where he denounces Reuben for defiling Jacob's bed and then affirms Judah's preeminence and enduring rule: “your father's sons shall bow down before you ... The scepter shall not depart from Judah” (Gn 49:8, 10). The Chronicler's paraphrase – “Judah became prominent among his brothers and a ruler came from him” – implies that Jacob foresaw David's rise. Context suggests that the Chronicler considered David to be the predicted king.

The medieval Jewish philosopher Gersonides (1288–1344) reinforced the Chronicler's interpretation of Jacob's blessing. Gersonides maintained that the kingdom was taken from Saul and given to David in order that Jacob's dying words could be fulfilled. David, not Saul, was from the line of Judah and therefore, of the two, David was the only one destined to rule (Gersonides 1888: 43).

Other readers, however, went in an entirely different direction and loaded the verse with eschatological significance. The Syriac Bible (composed c.200 CE) renders 1 Chronicles 5:2 as "From Judah goes out the King Messiah" (tr. Fleisher and Chilton 2011: 367). Scholars debate whether the ancient community that produced Peshitta Chronicles was Jewish or Christian, and this verse illustrates the difficulty in making a determination. Members of both groups would have been equally receptive to a suprahistorical interpretation of the ruler that sprang from Chronicles' Judah.

A case in point, the Christian exegete Theodoret of Cyrus (393–460) was sure of the passage's messianic import. He believed that Scripture was speaking prophetically and that the king was none other than Christ: "By the will of God Judah had the dignity of receiving the Lord who was born from him according to the flesh. This is the sense tacitly expressed with the words 'A leader from him'" (*Quaest. Reg. et Para.* PG 80:801–803; tr. Conti 2008: 245). The authors of the Geneva Bible fully embraced this understanding. Their annotation for 1 Chronicles 5:2 reads: "That is, he [Judah] was the chiefest of all the tribes according to Jacob's prophecy, Gen 49,8, & because Christ should come of him" (Berry 1969: 180).

The prelate Rabanus Maurus also considered Reuben's misdeed, its consequences, and Judah's celebration to point to the advent of Christ, but Rabanus discerned in these verses criticism of the Jews as well. Reuben's acts foreshadowed the Jews sullyng their own Father's bed through their rejection of Jesus, which in turn led to the award of the birthright to Christ – the awaited king from Judah – and his followers (*Comm. Para.* PL 109.309b–c).

The Jewish author(s) of the Zohar employed yet another exegetical strategy and explored the verse for its mystical teachings. The point of entry was Chronicles' notice of the birthright's transfer from Reuben to Joseph. The Zohar noted that when Jacob initially lay with Leah, he thought he was sleeping with Rachel. Chronicles revealed that the power of his intention was such that the birthright of the firstborn went to the child Jacob meant to sire rather than to the son he fathered in fact. From the transference, the Zohar concluded that the direction of a person's heart and mind have significant and enduring consequences (Va-Yhi, 1:222b; Va-Yishlah, 1:176b; Matt 2005: 65, 334).

During the Reformation, interpreters took a different tack and read the verses for guidance in contemporary debates over royal succession. For the English political theorist Robert Filmer (c.1588–1653), there was no question

about who should inherit the throne under normal circumstances. Filmer defended absolute monarchy on biblical grounds in his work *Patriarcha, or, The Natural Power of Kings*, written in the period leading up to the English Civil War. God granted Adam and the patriarchs dominion over others, and, according to Filmer, from this grant came the divine right of kings. A monarch's right to rule passed down through the law of primogeniture to the eldest son. Filmer was worried, however, that if the king should die without an obvious heir, his successor would be determined by popular vote. Proponents of this plan cited Chronicles, which said that Solomon assembled "all Israel" before undertaking certain important tasks (2 Chr 1:2, 5:2). Filmer argued that a closer reading of these verses revealed that "all Israel" consisted of the elite – commanders and elders and leaders of families – and these "supreme heads" alone had the power to identify the natural heir (Filmer 1680: 51). Filmer therefore advocated a limited body of electors, should succession ever prove problematic.

In answer, another English political theorist, John Locke (1632–1704), cited Reuben's genealogy in Chronicles to throw into question the whole case for primogeniture and the divine right to rule. Locke's part in this discussion is important because he was the founder of modern liberalism and his writings had a profound influence on the framers of the Declaration of Independence and of the Constitution of the United States of America. Locke cited Chronicles' genealogy of Reuben as proof that possession of the birthright did not translate into authority over others. The birthright of the firstborn entailed inheritance of property, not power, and Chronicles showed that even the birthright was transferable to another son. In Chronicles, dominion did not fall to Reuben, the firstborn son of the patriarch Jacob, nor to Joseph, who received the firstborn's birthright, but to Judah, who appeared to have no special inherent standing within the family (Locke 1690: 148–149). Locke's arguments helped advance a republican model of government, which Americans later implemented as their own system of rule.

The Ephraimites' Early Exodus

For readers, Chronicles' notice of the death of Ephraim's sons during the settlement of Canaan spurred reflections on the themes of divine justice, human salvation, and the nature of God's covenant. The passage reads,

The sons of Ephraim: Shuthelah, and Bered his son, Tahath his son, Eleadah his son, Tahath his son. Zabad his son, Shuthelah his son, and Ezer and Elead. Now the people of Gath, the ones born in the land, killed them because they went down to seize their livestock. Their father Ephraim mourned many days, and his

brothers came to comfort him. Ephraim went into his wife, and she conceived and bore a son; and he called his name Beriah, because disaster [*b'raah*] had befallen his house. (1 Chr 7:20–23)

These verses raise a problem of timing. In Chronicles, the Ephraimites' calamitous end occurs during their father's lifetime, but according to Numbers and Deuteronomy, everyone who had been in Egypt with Moses was dead when Israel entered Canaan (Caleb and Joshua excepted) (Nm 14:20–24, 26:65, 32:10–14; Dt 1:34–40). Some early Jewish exegetes therefore concluded from this passage that the sons of Ephraim left Egypt thirty years before everyone else, while Ephraim was still alive. In other words, there was an exodus *before* the exodus.

There are two strands of this tradition; one is critical of the Ephraimites and the other is sympathetic. For interpreters who comprise the first group, the Ephraimites' early departure was due to pride. According to the second-century midrash *Mekilta* of Rabbi Ishmael, they willfully disregarded the divinely stipulated term of enslavement. (In Genesis, God tells Abraham that his offspring will be slaves in a foreign land for 400 years (Gn 15:13).) As divine punishment for their disobedience, the Philistines attacked and killed them. This event, the midrash noted, was also recorded in Psalm 78 (Lauterbach 1933: 1.172–173), which declares, “The Ephraimites, armed with shooting the bow, turned back on the day of battle. They did not keep God's covenant, but refused to walk according to his law” (Ps 78:9–10). In *Pirqe de Rabbi Eliezer*, Rabbi Eliezer reveals that the instigator was Ganoon, a grandson of Ephraim. Ganoon claimed that God had designated him to lead the Israelites out of Egypt to Canaan. The Ephraimites, convinced of their special status among the tribes, believed him, with disastrous consequences (*Pirqe R. El.* 48; Friedlander 1916: 377).

Others, however, asserted that the Ephraimites' premature exodus was simply a tragic accident. According to the sage Rab in the Talmud, Ephraim's sons miscounted the number of years that constituted captivity, and they left Egypt with the best of intentions. It is their dry bones that were brought back to life by Ezekiel (b. Sanh. 92b). Targum Chronicles explained how this happened. The Ephraimites thought the countdown to freedom began the moment God proclaimed to Abraham the length of Israelite captivity when the correct starting point was actually the birth of Isaac (Tg. 1 Chr 7:21).

The *Mekilta* also found in these verses the reason why God did not take the Israelites to the Promised Land by the most direct route, which would have been through Philistine territory. The book of Exodus reports, “God did not lead them by the way of the land of the Philistines, which was closer, for God said, ‘Lest the people have a change of heart when they see war and return to

Egypt” (Ex 13:17). In light of Chronicles’ report, the Mekilta understood the Exodus verse to mean that if the Israelites had seen the bones of the Ephraimites lying on the battlefield in Philistia, they would have turned back (Lauterbach 1933: 173; see also Tg. Sg. 2:7 and Pirqe R. El. 48 (Friedlander 1916: 377)).

The authors of Exodus Rabbah (compiled between the fifth and tenth century CE) claimed that ultimately God was the one most deeply affected by the Ephraimites’ deaths. The root consonants of the Hebrew verb “to lead” are the same root consonants for the verb “to comfort.” Rather than read Exodus 13:17 as “God did not lead,” the midrash says the more accurate translation is “God could find no comfort” – meaning, God chose the other route because it was God who could not bear to behold the corpses of the Ephraimites. The midrash further claimed that God, wearing clothes dipped in their blood, declared, “I have no comfort until I avenge the death of the Ephraimites” (Ex. Rab. 20.11). In the Chronicles passage, after Ephraim’s brothers come to console him, he has another son (1 Chr 7:23). In this reception, God’s grief cannot be assuaged and there are no substitutes.

The midrash thus portrays God’s ongoing love of Israel as greater than a father’s love for his children, a reassuring message in the aftermath of the Temple’s destruction. Some suggest, however, that the story originated as a rebuke against those who participated in the Bar Kokhba revolt, a rebellion of Jews against their Roman rulers that erupted in 132 CE (Blidstein 2008; Heinemann 1975). Seduced (and, in many cases, coerced) into revolt by the charismatic military leader Simon Bar Kokhba, the insurgents’ initial success fueled expectations that the redemption of Israel was at hand. In short order, however, the Romans regrouped, and in 135 the affair ended, as had been the case for the Ephraimites, in mass slaughter. Anti-Zionists today draw on the midrash to demonstrate the perilous consequences of hastening the resettlement of Israel. A posting on the website of Nazarene Israel (a messianic Jewish evangelical organization) claims the Ephraimite exodus teaches “the hazards of early ingathering” (Nazarene Israel 2015).

The Ephraimites’ demise served an entirely different purpose in the exegesis of the great Protestant reformer Martin Luther (1483–1546). For Luther, the event proved God’s rejection of the Jews and demonstrated God’s free will. Luther expounded on the theological lessons of the Ephraimites’ fall in a series of lectures on Genesis delivered at the University of Wittenberg through the last decade of his life. Two verses from Genesis (Pharaoh’s praise of the God-given wisdom of Ephraim’s father Joseph (Gn 41:39) and Jacob’s singling out of Ephraim in his blessing (Gn 48:1–2, 19)) provided Luther with an opportunity to decry the vanity of the Ephraimites. Luther, echoing one strand of rabbinic tradition, claimed that the Ephraimites, filled with haughty ambition, attempted to usurp the honor of leading the Israelites to Canaan by disregarding the pre-set time for

departure from Egypt. Luther claimed that all Jews displayed the same sense of entitlement even though God had extended the covenant to include Gentiles, who were by definition not in the bloodline of Abraham. The destruction of the Ephraimites, Luther concluded, taught that God's blessings are not inherited or gained through observance of the Law (which also leads to arrogance) but are a gift of grace (Luther 1955–1976: 8.107, 150–151, 175–176).

Jabez

Within the genealogies, Jabez is second only to David for galvanizing readers. From the ancient early rabbis to twenty-first century practitioners of the Prosperity Gospel, interpreters have probed Jabez's vignette to evaluate the efficacy of prayer, the place of private petition, and the spiritual significance of material goods. Their findings reveal the potential role of exegesis in establishing societal norms.

The Chronicler introduces Jabez abruptly, about halfway through the genealogy of Judah, and his story captures Chronicles' central theme that God is responsive to all who call upon heaven.

Jabez was more honored than his brothers; and his mother called his name Jabez, saying, "Because I gave birth in pain."³ Jabez called to the God of Israel: "Oh that you would indeed bless me and enlarge my territory and your hand would be with me and you would keep me from evil so that I not be in pain!" And God granted what he requested. (1 Chr 4:9–10)

Ancient Jews debated the identity of this extraordinary figure. It appeared to stretch the credulity of the early rabbis that the other books of Scripture would omit him. They therefore understood Jabez to be an alternative moniker for an illustrious person already known from the earlier books. This method of interpretation was consistent with the rabbis' general understanding that much of Chronicles required a nonliteral reading. R. Simon b. Pazzi, addressing the book directly, declared, "All your words are one, and we know how to find their inner meaning" (b. Meg. 13a; cf. b. Pesah. 62b).

Based on Chronicles' details, an early sage taught that Jabez – who receives from God what he requests – is Othniel (Jgs 3:9–11), the first judge of Israel. The connection stems from Othniel's name, which combines the root letters for "to respond" and "God," signifying that God answered him. The uncovering of Jabez's true name allowed the rabbis to define what Jabez had requested from

³ "Jabez" shares the same root consonants as the verb "to have pain."

God. Since, according to R. Abbuha, Othniel restored the teachings that were forgotten during the period of mourning for Moses, and since Othniel and Jabez were one and the same, the rabbis understood Jabez's prayer to be a request for the attainment of instruction in the Law. "Oh that you would indeed bless me!" was Jabez's plea to God to be blessed with Torah. In asking that his borders be enlarged, Jabez meant that he desired students. His petition that God's hand be with him was to ensure that he would not forget what he had learned, and asking God to keep him from evil was a request that he would meet friends like himself. Lastly, Jabez's appeal to God to safeguard him from pain was a petition that his own evil inclination not keep him from study (b. Tem. 16a).

The Mekilta of Rabbi Ishmael (a second-century midrash on the book of Exodus) relied on a similar interpretation to establish a connection between Jabez and Moses's father-in-law, Jethro. A brief narrative in chapter two of 1 Chronicles describes the families of scribes that lived in a city called Jabez, and identifies them as Kenites (1 Chr 2:55). A verse in Judges states that the Kenites are the offspring of Jethro, who left Jericho to resettle in Judah (Jgs 1:16). The midrashist understood these two verses to mean that Jethro's descendants, seeking a Torah teacher, departed from Jericho to study with Jabez. In this way God answered Jabez's prayer for pupils (Lauterbach 1933: 2.188).

In medieval times, the purported student of Saadia Gaon embraced the Talmud's identification of Jabez with Othniel but added a new wrinkle to the tale. He asserted that Jabez vowed to do certain unspecified things if God blessed him, and God granted Jabez what he requested only after he fulfilled those promises. In this instance, the commentator assumed that the standard grammatical formula of a vow ("If you do X, I will do Y") was at work in the verse, even if the second part, what Jabez promised to do in return, was not stated (Kirchheim 1874: 18). This understanding of the passage fended off the notion that prayer could be a means to instant and effortless gratification. Even Othniel, a man of proven righteousness, contracted an obligation as part of his request.

Pseudo-Rashi embraced the notion of an implicit *quid pro quo* between God and Jabez, but he did not conflate Jabez with Othniel or any other known illustrious figure. His reading opened up the possibility that what happened to Jabez could happen to anyone. Accordingly, Pseudo-Rashi derived a universal teaching from Jabez's actions. If Jabez fulfilled his end of the bargain despite no mention of the fact, then people should make charitable donations without publicly swearing to do so (Pseudo-Rashi, commentary on 1 Chr 4:9–10).

These currents and crosscurrents are also evident in the Christian reception of Jabez. Early interpreters held Jabez up as a model petitioner while at the same time spiritualizing his demands and dampening expectations of

easily replicating his success. Reading the story of Jabez in light of Christian kerygma (“preaching”), Rabanus Maurus came to the same conclusion as the early rabbis: that Jabez was no ordinary Judahite. Rabanus did not conflate him with Othniel, however. Instead, he understood Jabez’s spirit to be that of Christ and his prayer to concern the needs of the church. Accordingly God’s blessing of Jabez is akin to God’s nourishment of the church through baptism, and the expansion of his borders signified the extension of God’s possessions to the ends of the earth. Jabez gained protection from harm because the devil had no dominion over those who had given themselves over to the Lord. Rabanus thought that the declaration in Philippians that every knee would bow to, and every tongue confess, the glory of Christ (Phil 2:10–11) was the post-Advent continuation of Jabez’s prayer (*Comm. Para.* PL 109.303d–304c).

Stephen Langton (c.1150–1228), the Archbishop of Canterbury, considered Jabez to be no more or less than a worthy individual whose prayer merited emulation. Jabez’s name, which could be interpreted as either “sorrow” or “drought,” indicated his character. Sorrow in the Bible, Langton observed, was tied to wisdom (Eccl 7:4). Drought also had positive connotations. The drying up of desire was a great good, and Jabez’s achievement of “dryness” made him more honorable than his brothers. Chronicles’ report that Jabez’s mother bore him with sorrow indicates that at the moment of his birth, flesh was in contention with mortification. It is therefore not only possible but also right to pray with sorrow and dryness of desire for God’s blessing. Langton also maintained that there was more to the story than God simply giving Jabez what he requested. Langton treated the prayer as an example of *aposiopesis*, a rhetorical term for a sentence that was deliberately broken off, with the rest left unstated. What was missing, Langton claimed, was Jabez’s promise to do as God wished (Langton 1978: 89).

The Geneva Bible annotators also asserted that Jabez’s prayer (“If you will bless me...”) was the beginning of an oath: “It is to be understood, that then he would accomplish his vow which he made.” They followed the tradition of conflating Jabez with Othniel (GB note on 1 Chr 4:9; Berry 1969: 179), however, thereby preserving his distinctive status and placing his accomplishment out of the easy reach of others.

In the post-Reformation period, a new front of interpretation opened up. Several English Christian interpreters debated to what extent Jabez had prayed for material gain and whether such a prayer should be emulated. The question was complicated by what the German sociologist Max Weber (1864–1920) termed the “spirit of capitalism” that challenged older views of the morality of riches. Weber traced its origins to Calvin’s theology of predestination and the Calvinist movement’s subsequent understanding that wealth

could be interpreted as a sign of salvation (Weber 2016). The potential difficulty that Jabez's blessings posed in the wake of Calvinism is evident in the exposition of the lay-exegete Lady Anne Halkett (1623–1699):

He [Jabez] is called more Honourable than his Bretheren, not so much, on the account of his noble exploits, as his eminent Piety; that appears in this his Prayer, which, in so far as it seems mainly to be made for Temporal Blessings, is not to be a rule for any, absolutely to ask Temporal things, no more than the Thief on the Cross, should be encouragement to any to delay seeking Mercy & Pardon, until they can Sin no more. Both, it's true, had a grant of their requests, but neither is to be imitated, in what was singular and extraordinary: Yet both are recorded in Holy Scripture, to shew how prevalent faith is, when placed on the right object. (1702: 28)

Though in this passage Halkett acknowledged that Jabez requested temporal blessings, she nonetheless went on to spiritualize those requests. She claimed that when Jabez petitioned for the enlargement of his territory, he was actually praying for “the enlargement of God's Kingdom”; and asking that God's hand be with him was no different from requesting one's daily bread in the Lord's Prayer. The essential point of Jabez's prayer, Halkett maintained, was to demonstrate the utter dependence of humans upon Heaven (1702: 34).

The English Dissenter Daniel Turner (1710–1798) took the next step and left open the possibility, without qualification, that Jabez's gains were material goods. First, however, he established that Jabez merited God's benefaction upon request:

About Jabez himself we know little, if any thing, except what is here told. It is said he was more honourable than his brethren; either that he had more eminently distinguished himself in a military capacity; had obtained some high civil distinction, or what seems more probable, only because of a piece with his prayer, superior to his brethren; that is, tribe in general, or family in particular, on account of his shining virtues, and singular piety. (D. Turner 1789: 37)

Turner speculated further that the report that Jabez called on “the God of Israel” might be contrasting Jabez with others who prayed to idols. Perhaps Jabez was like Abraham, who worshipped only the true deity (D. Turner 1789: 37).

With Jabez's exceptional piety duly noted, Turner proceeded to affirm that Jabez's request for expanded territory was indeed a prayer for material benefits. Turner offered a defense for such a request: “Though the glory of God is our chief end, and our immortal concerns of the greatest consequence, yet a limited and prudent care about our situation in life, is also requisite” (1789: 43–44).

Turner thus cautiously sanctioned the spread before God of “temporal, as well as spiritual wants ... provided we keep them in their proper place.” He continued,

The curious question of theology, Whether it be lawful to desire more than we posses [*sic*], if our necessary wants are supplied? Or if, having daily bread, we may be justified in desiring more? is what here I shall not discuss, but rest contented with observing, that from the conduct of the pious Jabez, the devout man may discern the propriety of repairing to God in all possible emergencies, or distress. (D. Turner 1789: 46–47)

In Turner’s exegesis, Jabez’s remarkable qualities did not preclude others from following his lead in praying for material benefits if their circumstances warranted such a request.

One hundred years later one of the most renowned preachers of the English clergy, Charles Spurgeon (1834–1892) (the “Prince of Preachers”), inveighed against the notion that Jabez asked for temporal gifts. In 1871, he delivered a sermon on Jabez, and he limited its lemma to “Oh that you would bless me indeed!” According to his reading, those words were the full extent of Jabez’s prayer. Spurgeon reviewed the most common transient goods people desired – wealth, fame, health, and an abode – and warned his congregants against asking for these or any other specific benefits lest there be unforeseen and undesirable consequences. God alone was the best judge of what blessings to bestow, not humans. To drive home the point, he told the story of a woman who insisted that her minister omit “If it be thy will” from his prayer for the healing of her sick boy. The child lived, only later to be hanged from the gallows as a criminal before his mother’s eyes. Much better, Spurgeon said, to ask for God’s blessing – period (Spurgeon 1995: 25–37). Spurgeon thus deemphasized Jabez’s exceptionalism. The prayer was indeed worthy of imitation, as long as it was properly understood.

A new interpretation of Jabez burst onto the scene at the beginning of the twenty-first century and captivated a worldwide audience. It leveled all personal qualifications, eliminated any conditions, and embraced this-worldly goods. In 2000, Bruce Wilkinson, an American evangelical minister, published *The Prayer of Jabez*. In this book, Wilkinson guaranteed that the daily recitation of Jabez’s prayer would elicit an immediate and positive response from God. He further stated that it was acceptable, and indeed desirable, for people to ask for blessings in the form of wealth. To illustrate his point, he argued that it would be well within bounds for a modern-day Wall Street businessman to ask God for more profit from his investments. Such a gain would be the modern equivalent of expanding one’s territory (Wilkinson 2000: 31–32).

Critics of Wilkinson pounced on the book and accused him of promoting the Prosperity Gospel, a religious doctrine that celebrates consumerism and

equates wealth with Christian virtue. In a newspaper interview, Wilkinson denied the charge in the strongest terms, claiming, “It’s the opposite of what I believe” (Baker 2001: 21). Wilkinson’s disclaimer, however, did not deter Ross Douthat, a *New York Times* columnist and author of *Bad Religion*, from characterizing Wilkinson’s beliefs as “God-and-Mammon Christianity” (Douthat 2012: 206.)

It is hard to identify a more powerful modern reception of Chronicles than this slim book. By the end of 2001, *The Prayer of Jabez* had sold 8.3 million copies. That year, *Publishers Weekly* speculated that it might be “the fastest selling book of all time” (Maryles 2001). At the close of 2005, a *Wall Street Journal* article reported that *The Prayer of Jabez* and its variants (including the leather-bound edition and *The Prayer of Jabez For Teens*) had achieved sales totaling more than 22 million. The number puts an exclamation mark on the statement that Chronicles’ genealogies continue to find relevance today.

The Genealogies – Inside or Outside of History?

Interpretations of individual verses and sections in the genealogies lead to the larger question of the historical value of Chronicles’ opening nine chapters for readers through time. In the ancient period, the early rabbis and church fathers generally viewed the birthlists as an important supplement to, and illumination of, the biblical record. Figurative interpretations in particular allowed for the discovery of stories about the patriarchs and the exodus – as well as, for Christians, Christ – within the genealogies, thereby wearing away at some of the features that set Chronicles apart from the canon.

A budding preference for rationalism in the Middle Ages influenced the reading of all of Scripture, and the change enhanced the genealogies’ status as an authentic independent archive. A good example of this effect is found in the interpretations of Kimḥi, who believed that the historical information contained in the genealogies had been reliably transmitted from one generation to the next (Berger 2007: 68–69). He therefore took Chronicles’ unique figures largely at face value. Writing at the start of the Reformation, the sixteenth-century Jewish historian Joseph Ha-Kohen (1496–1578) carried forward this approach. Ha-Kohen used Chronicles’ initial reckoning of humankind as an introduction to his mostly secular account of international relations, *Divre ha-yamim le-malkhe Tsarfat u-vet Oṭoman ha-Tugar* (“History of the Kings of France and of the Ottoman Turkish Sultans,” completed in 1553). The title of his book incorporated Chronicles’ title in Hebrew (*Divre ha-yamim*) and its adaptation of Chronicles’ opening birthlists launched the narrative (“Adam begot Seth, and Seth begot Enosh, and Enosh begot Kenan ...”) (Ha-Kohen 1859: 1).

By the eighteenth century, many notable exegetes viewed the Chronicler as an archivist who had preserved the most up-to-date information available to him at the time. The literal reading of the names in the birthlists now worked in combination with Chronicles' "lateness" to enhance the book's value. The influential American preacher Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758) flatly stated, "None that read those genealogies and historical references will make himself so ridiculous as to question whether these were not taken from the very history that we have in the Pentateuch, and an history that the Jews had among them as the ancient, great, and established records of their nation" (1998: 457). In a tract published in 1785, Richard Watson, the Lord Bishop of Llandaff and Regius Professor of Divinity at Cambridge University in England, lauded the Chronicler for resuming the genealogies of the Pentateuch "with all possible exactness" (Watson, 1785: 1.326).

In the nineteenth century, the Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Bible commentary (1871) endorsed Chronicles' genealogies as an impeccable source of information. Commenting on the opening verse of chapter nine of First Chronicles ("So all Israel was enrolled by genealogies ..."), the authors wrote,

These genealogical tables, then, are of the highest authority for truth and correctness, the earlier portion being extracted from the authenticated records of the nation; and as to those which belong to the time of the captivity, they were drawn up by a contemporary writer, who besides enjoying the best sources of information, and being of the strictest integrity, was guided and preserved from all error by Divine inspiration. (Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown 1871: 254)

At the start of the twentieth century, however, Chronicles' vaulted historical status was in dire jeopardy. In 1878, the German biblical scholar Julius Wellhausen published his groundbreaking work *Prolegomena zur Geschichte Israels* and upended the world of biblical critics generally and their view of Chronicles in particular. In that work, Wellhausen devoted particular attention to Chronicles' birthlists. He discerned in the genealogy of Caleb evidence that the Chronicler altered the ancient record to reflect postexilic circumstances, which, for Wellhausen, signaled the artificiality of the lineages as a whole. Wellhausen found additional proof of his thesis in the fact that the book of Samuel preserved Saul's genealogy but offered nothing for David. If David's bloodline was missing from this earlier work, Wellhausen reasoned, it could only mean that the information did not exist. It appeared clear to Wellhausen that once all these factors were taken into consideration, Chronicles' tribal family trees – and most especially the pedigree of David – could be seen to be fake. The perpetrators of this fraud, he argued, were Second Temple priests who were intent on enhancing the glory of David, the Temple cult, and their own standing in the community (Wellhausen 1895: 217–218).

Wellhausen's findings had an immediate and dramatic effect on the reception of the genealogies. In 1899, the British cleric and professor Hope Hogg (1863–1912), writing on Chronicles' genealogy of Benjamin for the *Jewish Quarterly Review*, concluded that "there may be little that is historical in the chapter beyond the clan-names" (1899: 114). The passage of time has largely solidified this position. In 1943, Martin Noth (1902–1968), another seminal German interpreter, argued in his influential book *Überlieferungsgeschichtliche Studien* that the genealogies by and large were a confused amalgamation of postexilic additions that obscured whatever facts may underlie them (Noth 1987: 36). More recently, Israeli commentator Sara Japhet has asserted that "the artificial nature of [Jesse's] genealogy" in Chronicles is "universally recognized" (2012: 298).

Today, in the wake of Wellhausen, many readers throw up their hands at the question of the genealogies' historical value. They find them meaningful on other grounds. Some treat the birthlists as a literary composition that yields clues to the author's circumstances and concerns. Others use them as a platform for treating modern theological and philosophical themes.

Gary Knoppers, the American author of the Anchor Bible Commentary on Chronicles, maintains that the Chronicler engaged a larger theological purpose through the genealogical lists. They affirmed God's universal sovereignty, Israel's special status, and postexilic Judah's unbroken connection to its sacred origins. The fact that the genealogies extend beyond the historical narrative (which ends with the edict of Cyrus) was, Knoppers proposes, the Chronicler's reminder to his people that, though the Judahite monarchy may have come to an end, their sacred community endures (Knoppers 2003: 264–265). In much the same vein, another American scholar, Steven Schweitzer, argues that the genealogies were integral to the Chronicler's utopian depiction of Israel. The lineages did not reflect and maintain Judah's composition in the Chronicler's own day but rather were intended to offer a "better alternative reality" (Schweitzer 2007: 54, 74).

Taking an entirely different tack, the Australian biblical scholar Julie Kelso views Chronicles' opening nine chapters through the lens of Irigarayan theory, which posits that in Western culture men strive to "forget" their mothers in order to represent themselves as "self-made." Kelso sees in the genealogies evidence of the Chronicler's perpetration of the "phantasy of mono-sexual, masculine (re)production." The patrilineal progression of the generations gave men the primary credit for their progeny and, in the rare instance in which a mother's speech was recorded (Jabez's mother), there was no father and the line came to an end (Kelso 2007: 161–163). For Kelso, the birthlists are an early example of how men have silenced women.

Religious readers continue to find in the genealogies relevant spiritual truths, as so ably demonstrated by Wilkinson's *The Prayer of Jabez*. Reardon,

who, as we saw at the outset of this chapter, compared the pages and pages of Chronicles' names to a phone book without numbers, provides another example. He urges Christian readers to think of themselves as potential extensions of Israel's family tree:

How should the Christian read this list of names? First, he should see them as pertaining to his own family history. Second, he should regard them as the names in that "great cloud of witnesses" [Heb 12:1]. If they tend to become blurry, he does well to remember that a certain blurriness is characteristic of clouds. The reader should not think of this as a problem. Third, let the Christian reader devoutly pray that his own name will be added to this ancient list. If he bears these considerations in mind, it is unlikely that the task of reading these countless names will ever be boring. (Reardon 2006: 33)

The Orthodox rabbi Moshe Eisemann maintains that the key to life's meaning lies within the genealogies. Though he believes access to this secret has been intentionally hindered, study of Talmudic and midrashic commentary on Chronicles' birthlists may offer inklings of what is yet to be fully revealed:

The treasures of truth hidden behind the façade of these lists is to remain hidden from us until such a time when Divine Providence will once more permit them to be known. Nevertheless, here and there, a few of the teachings of the Sages have been preserved and through them we have been permitted an occasional glimpse. Several times we have surmised that these hidden truths concern the *qets*, *the end of days*, the ultimate mystery of Jewish experience. (Eisemann 1987: 49)

According to Eisemann, Chronicles' genealogies should command our rapt attention. If ever properly decoded, they would reveal God's ultimate plan.