

CONTINUITY IN THE OLD TESTAMENT HISTORICAL LITERATURE

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It is probably well-known that at the end of certain Old Testament books there are indications that they form an historical narrative which is continuous with the book that follows. A couple of these examples are rather clear. These clearer cases can perhaps be used to suggest that other Old Testament historical narratives had the same tendency.

The first and most obvious instance of such a juncture of historical books concerns the end of II Chronicles and the beginning of Ezra. As is well known, the last two verses of II Chronicles are practically identical with the first two and a half verses of Ezra. There is one minor divergence. The Tetragram in Chronicles is the suffixive of the verb *hayah* in Ezra, but this difference is surely transcriptional. The Septuagint in both texts uses the verb "to be."

A further interesting point in the comparison of these parallel verses is that the one at the end of Chronicles is clearly secondary. The book of Chronicles ends in the middle of a sentence. It says "The Lord his God is with him, and let him go up." The sentence in Ezra continues: "his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem which is in Judah, and let him build the house of the Lord, etc." It seems very clear that the first sentence of Ezra was appended to the book of Chronicles.

The reason for this connection is rather obvious. In ancient times there were no codices—bound volumes such as we use—and it was more difficult than now to keep scrolls and tablets in their proper order. Therefore, the catch line practice was adopted whereby the first line of the following tablet appears as a catch line at the end of the previous tablet. In the case of the Gilgamesh epic, the ends and beginnings of most of the tablets are destroyed, but tablet IV ends with the catch line, "They stood still and looked at the forest." Tablet V begins, "They stood still and looked at the forest. They beheld the heights of the cedar. They beheld the entrance to the forest, where Humbaba was wont to walk" etc.¹ It seems that the first tablet ends in the middle of a sentence, or at least in the middle of a poetic couplet, much as does Chron-

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1. Alexander Heidel, *The Gilgamesh Epic and Old Testament Parallels* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1949), p. 45.

icles. In the case of Tablet VI, there is at the end also a colophon noting that this is Tablet VI and that it was collated with its original. In the case of Tablets X and XI, there is a catch line and a colophon both. The catch line of X is "Gilgamesh said to him, to Utnapishtim the distant:" Here the sentence is incomplete and is followed by the notation Tablet X of "He who saw everything" (the initial words of the epic) of the series of Gilgamesh, Palace of Ashurbanipal, King of the world, king of Assyria. Tablet XI begins with the catch line completing the sentence: "Gilgamesh said to him, to Utnapishtim the distant: I look upon thee Utnapishtim . . . etc."²

I think we do not need other examples, for the use of the catch line principle in antiquity is well known. But I would pause to deduce a conclusion. In the history of the collection of the Old Testament books, it is obvious that at sometime, and probably at a very early time, the book of Ezra was in a position following Chronicles, not before. In the major Septuagint manuscripts and patristic lists also, Ezra follows Chronicles. It is not the order of Bishop Melito or Codex Alexandrinus however. Actually there is wide variation in the order of the LXX books in the various sources. In the Hebrew Bible Ezra-Nehemiah now precedes Chronicles. The Talmudic witness of Baba Bathra simply says "Ezra wrote his book and the genealogies of Chronicles to his time," which may or may not indicate that at 400 A.D. Chronicles followed Ezra. Ezra follows Chronicles in the Vulgate.

There is one item of information from the New Testament often thought to indicate that Chronicles was the last book in the Old Testament canon of Jesus' day. He refers in Matthew 23:35 to the blood of the martyrs from Abel to Zecharias son of Barachias. This Zecharias is thought by some to be the Zecharias son of Jehoiada, whose death is mentioned in II Chronicles 24:21. Of course, this identification is not at all sure. The Zechariah son of Berechiah mentioned in Matthew could even have been a recent martyr of Jesus' day. In that case, Jesus would merely be saying that all the blood of the martyrs from creation to the present would come upon the Jews. In that case, the remark in Matthew would have no bearing on the order of the books.

The priority of Ezra had perhaps more appeal to scholars when they dated Chronicles at about 250 B.C. Dead Sea Scroll studies now suggest a date closer to 400 B.C., which would allow an early arrangement of these books in the Septuagint order. Incidentally, the arrangement of the Old Testament books of Josephus in *Contra Apion* 1.8 would make Chronicles not the last book in the Old Testament, but would put both Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah in the second division which he calls the prophets. He places only four books, probably Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon in his third division.

II.

The second instance of one book being attached to its preceding history is the case of Joshua-Judges. The case is not identical, nor so crystal clear, but still is similar and probable. The death of Joshua and a mention of the death of his contemporaries is given in Judges 2:7-9. The book of Judges begins "Now after the death of Joshua." It was very fitting therefore for the book of Joshua to end with the death of Joshua. The narrative of Joshua's life, however, ends with his dismissal of the people after his last charge to them to keep the covenant with their God. Added to this are the three verses describing Joshua's death from Judges 2:7-9. Actually Joshua's dismissal of the people ends again in an incomplete sentence, Joshua 24:28 "So Joshua let the people depart every man unto his inheritance." A close parallel is found in Judges 2:6 "And when Joshua had let the people go, the children of Israel went every man unto his inheritance to possess the land." Then follows the parallel verses speaking of Joshua's death and there is a slight rearrangement of the order of the verses given in Judges. The case here is not exactly that of a catch line. But there is a reduplication of verses in the two books and the verses at the end of Joshua seem to be secondary, placed there to round out the history of Joshua's life. There are two other verses also added giving footnotes on the burial of the bones of Joseph and the death of Eleazar, son of Aaron, a contemporary of Joshua. The net result at the very least is a linkage of Joshua and Judges into a continual story giving a history of the conquest and the period of the Judges.

III.

A third instance of this sort of thing is in what I would call an appendix to Ruth. Ruth, of course, was once counted as part of Judges in the Hebrew enumeration, and its scene is laid "in the days of the judging of the judges." It forms a third addendum to the book of Judges, which has these three concluding stories about events in the area of Bethlehem-Judah.

There is, however, a connecting link at the end of Ruth which has the effect of joining it with the following narrative. The narrative of Samuel indeed begins with the ministry of Samuel himself and the abortive start of the monarchy under Saul. But Samuel continued into the times of David and records David's march to power. The final six verses of Ruth are a brief genealogy which join the narrative of Ruth and Boaz to the times of the great king David. There is nothing else in Ruth that portrays the days of Samuel and David, but these concluding verses form just that connecting link with the history of David that really makes Joshua to Samuel one continuing narrative.

IV.

It is obvious that one more case of this nature concerns the old question of the death of Moses. The Jewish tradition enshrined in the

tract Baba Bathra of the Talmud says that "Joshua wrote his book and eight verses in the law." Many have declared that the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch is impossible for how could Moses write about his own death! It would seem that the authorship of these final verses of Deuteronomy should not be considered a part of the questions concerning the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch in any case. It seems to have been the custom of the later historical writers to add a brief footnote to the preceding book to give it the appropriate conclusion. Who wrote this footnote will doubtless be a question decided on other principles. If Joshua wrote Joshua, then surely he wrote the verses which conclude Deuteronomy, which attach his work to the books of the Law. If Joshua is thought to have been written by a Deuteronomist school, still the later writer completed the narrative of earlier days with a connecting link. Note that Deuteronomy does not end just with the death of Moses, but with the transfer of authority to Moses' successor, Joshua.

V.

I turn now to a still more theoretical part of the presentation. The books of Samuel-Kings themselves purport to be a connected historical narrative covering some 400 years. Were they written as a unit by someone at the end of this period? If so, did he use written sources of earlier times? Or were these books written through the centuries by many men who took it upon themselves to write a connected religious history of the kingdom? The previous view is usually espoused by modern commentators, but there are some indications to the contrary.

Of course, the books of Kings declare that sources were used in their composition. There is the refrain beginning with reference to the book of the acts of Solomon in I Kings 11:41 and with one exception—Jehoram of Israel—every king's biography down to Pekah and Jehoiakim is concluded with a reference to the chronicles of the kings of Judah or Israel where more information can be found.

The claim is clear that the courts of Israel and Judah kept chronicles of their kingdoms, reign by reign, and probably year by year. This was not an uncommon thing. The yearly Chronicles of the Court of Nebuchadnezzar have lately been published by Wiseman.³ Similar fragmentary chronicles from later times are also known. The earlier Babylonian and Assyrian Limu-lists are the same sort of thing. There is nothing surprising in the practice of keeping chronicles in the Jewish courts.

But how were the books of Samuel-Kings excerpted from these records? The books of Chronicles give us definite answers on this matter. Whether Chronicles is fully to be trusted may be debated. At least its information goes back to a time near to Ezra, if not to Ezra himself. The tradition it presents is at least worthy of consideration and, to the present writer, decisive.

3. D. J. Wiseman, *Chronicles of the Chaldaean Kings* (London: British Museum, 1956).

Chronicles itself gives a list of books as its source material. The books of Chronicles are less interested in the Northern kings, but they do name the sources used for their history of the Southern kings. These sources are a sequence of books of history written over the years by various prophets. The history of David was written in the books of Samuel the Seer, Nathan the prophet, and Gad the Seer (I Ch. 29:29). Similar citations of histories are:

for Solomon: Nathan, Ahijah, and Iddo	II Ch. 9:29
Rehoboam: Iddo and Shemaiah	II Ch. 12:15
Ahijah: Iddo	II Ch. 13:22
Asa: The book of the Kings of Judah and Israel . . .	II Ch. 16:11
Jehoshaphat: Jehu son of Hanani	II Ch. 20:34
Jehoram: none	
Ahaziah: none	
Joash: the book of the kings	II Ch. 24:27
Amaziah: The book of the kings of Israel	
and Judah	II Ch. 25:26
Uzziah: Isaiah the son of Amoz	II Ch. 26:22
Jotham: Books of the kings of Israel and Judah . . .	II Ch. 27:7
Ahaz: Books of the kings of Israel and Judah . . .	II Ch. 28:26
Hezekiah: Isaiah—books of the kings of Israel and	
Judah	II Ch. 32:32
Manasseh: The book of the kings of Israel	II Ch. 33:18
Amon: none	
Josiah: Jeremiah's lamentations	II Ch. 35:25
Jehoahaz: book of kings of Israel ⁴ and Judah . . .	II Ch. 35:27
Jehoiakim: book of kings of Israel and Judah ⁵ . . .	II Ch. 36:8

In summary, six or seven kings' histories are mentioned as written by their contemporary prophets over the years. No source is listed for six kings and the court chronicles are listed for seven. What were these kings' histories written by contemporary prophets on which Chronicles depended as a source? For answer, we can first of all say with assurance that Chronicles depended on the books of Samuel-Kings as a major source. Samuel-Kings was not a court chronicle. Those books were abstracted from the court chronicles. If we seek a source for Chronicles, we should rather naturally look to Samuel-Kings. And there we find a history which we may conclude was written over the years by prominent prophets, largely in the style of court historians, only more in a narrative form and embellished with moral and religious interpretation.

A natural problem is that these books have a constant format and

4. The text of I Esd. 2:33 omits *Israel*.

5. The text of I Esd. 2:42 omits *Israel and Judah*.

unified style broken only occasionally, as by the Elijah pericope or the Sennacherib narrative, (which Chronicles assigns to the work of Isaiah and which also appears in the book of Isaiah). But is it not equally possible that the format and style were actually set by the brilliant courts and penmen of David and Solomon's day just as the chroniclers of Babylon carried on the same notations year after year in the same style, no matter who was the scribe?

Unless Chronicles is making up its references to prophetic histories out of whole cloth, there were such documents. The author of Chronicles uses its traditions with some care. He distinguishes, for instance, David's originality of Israel's musical liturgy from the older Mosaic institution of the altar ceremony. It is clear that we should pay attention to these traditions enshrined in Chronicles and should hold that the books of Samuel-Kings are a continuous historical document written over the years by men contemporary with the kings of whom they wrote, who used the public records of their day. This picture would at least fit the rather impressive evidence of a consciousness in Israel's authors that they were bearers of a continuous historical tradition.