

# CHRISTIAN STUDIES

## SCHOLARSHIP FOR THE CHURCH

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*EDITOR'S NOTE*

5

*ARTICLES*

The Israel of God

7

Allan J. McNicol

The First Restoration Movement:

The Chronicler's Program of Restoration and Churches  
of Christ Today

21

R. Mark Shipp

Biblical "Restorationism":

A Response to Mark Shipp

31

Jeffrey Peterson

Finding a Way Past Lament:

When God Is Absent and Thanksgiving Impossible

39

Glenn Pemberton

Reflections on the Value of Isaiah for the Life  
of the Modern Church

57

J. J. M. Roberts

A Written Legacy:

A Bibliography of Paul L. Watson

69

M. Todd Hall with Michael R. Weed and Allan J. McNicol

*OBITER DICTA*

77

*CONTRIBUTORS*

79

With this issue of *Christian Studies*, I begin the duty and privilege of serving the faculty as editor. Since its inaugural issue in 1980, this journal, known at that time simply as the “Faculty Bulletin,” has been in the capable hands of its founding editor, Michael Weed. It is with gratitude for Dr. Weed’s visionary labor and with humility for the work at hand that I assume the role of editor, with the indispensable aid of the managing editor, Todd Hall.

From its inception, this publication has sought to provide responsible and biblical theological reflection that is beneficial and accessible to the scholar as well as to the interested “layperson.” This aim is summed up well in the journal’s motto: Scholarship for the Church. I want to assure our readers, old and new alike, that we press on toward the future mindful of what has come before. As in the past, so in the future, the goal of this journal will be not merely to publish the “results of scholarly research,” but to address real issues in the faith and practice of the church and of individual believers. As in the past, it will continue to be a publication of the faculty of Austin Graduate School of Theology, but also with contributions from other scholars. Within these parameters, the intent is to provide readers with the best theological writing in Churches of Christ, but also with a reach that extends beyond our walls.

All issues of *Christian Studies*, including this one, are available online, via the Austin Grad website, at <http://austingrad.edu/resources/christian-studies-publication>. If you find the content beneficial, please share this journal, in its print and online forms, with others.

In that first issue of the “Faculty Bulletin” that appeared thirty-five years ago was a contribution by Paul Watson. Watson is an Old Testament scholar who taught at the Institute for Christian Studies (now Austin Grad) from 1979-1983. He had a lasting impact on his colleagues and students during his years as a professor here. He left the Institute to work in full-time congregational ministry, where he has continued to influence countless souls for God’s kingdom. This issue of *Christian Studies*, whose theme is “The Old Testament and the Life of the Church,” is dedicated to Paul Watson and to the legacy of scholarship and ministry that he has passed on—and continues

to pass on—to the church. The contributors bring this gift to him, and to us all, in the hope that it will bring honor to whom honor is due.

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# The First Restoration Movement: The Chronicler's Program of Restoration and Churches of Christ Today<sup>1</sup>

R. Mark Shipp

## Introduction

I remember in my youth gospel meetings, sermons, and lectures in which the “Restoration Movement,” or “restoration principles,” were articulated. The point was that the New Testament alone was the standard for doctrine and organization, and the first-century church provided the pattern for our belief and practice. The “restoration” assumed that there was something which had fallen into disrepair or disuse and needed to be recovered or repaired.

The restoration appeal has fallen on hard times. Sermons, Bible studies, and lectures on the validity of restoration principles are rarely articulated in many Churches of Christ in recent years. While this may vary from place to place, there is no doubt that many Churches of Christ have either questioned its continuing validity, or have “voted with their feet” by engaging other traditions or systems of thought.

While there is little doubt that at times restoration appeals have been overstated or replaced by sectarian ones, what are the elements of restoration thought which have continuing relevance? What about the principles of turning to Scripture alone for our doctrine, including ordinances and organization of the church, and the need for repair or restoration of such practices where

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<sup>1</sup> First presented in an abbreviated form at Austin Graduate School of Theology Friends' Day, November 18, 2014. This author is indebted to Paul Watson for his friendship and for being a wonderful model of scholarship at the service of the Church.

they have lapsed? Are there any biblical precedents for restoration, or are we guilty of the thing we have charged others with doing, that of man-made movements without biblical warrant? My suggestion is that the book of Chronicles present the program of the restoration of Israel in the post-exilic age, and that the Chronicler's appeals may also benefit those who are interested in the renewal of the contemporary church. I will look at the book of Chronicles as a guide for the relevance of the past, for the recovery of particular practices and institutions, and for the unity of God's people.

### **The Chronicler's Understanding of the Past and Its Relevance**

The Chronicler is interested in recapturing the past as a model for the present. I will look at the Chronicler's interest in the past in these four ways: the Chronicler's use of genealogies, his re-telling of the story of the kings of Judah, the Chronicler and the past made contemporary, and the Chronicler's idealizing of the past.

*The Chronicler's use of genealogies.* The Chronicler is the first in the Bible to begin his writing with extensive genealogies. These genealogies do more than just chart family relationships. They establish that the post-exilic community of Judah was the legitimate heir to the promises and covenants to Abraham, Jacob, Moses, and David. But those promises had fallen on hard times. After the exile, Judah had a precarious hold on its identity. They had no national self-determination. They had no king and the promises to David appeared to be null and void. The twelve tribes were only a memory, and the land of Israel, Dan to Beersheba, was reduced to a small province surrounding Jerusalem. All Israel, a common phrase in Chronicles,<sup>2</sup> was in serious need of restoration.

The Chronicler based his program of restoration in several *origins*—in the most ancient ancestral fathers following the creation account of Genesis (1 Chronicles 1:1–23), in Abraham and the patriarchs (1:24–34; 2:1–2:2), and in the secondary creations of Israel at Sinai and especially the kingdom and covenant with David (genealogies of Judah and David, chapters 2–4) as models for the future. The genealogies establish that the community of Israel

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<sup>2</sup> David gathered “all Israel,” 1 Chron 11:1; “all Israel” went with David to capture Jerusalem, 1 Chron 11:4; “all Israel” agreed to make David king, 1 Chron 12:38, and 40 other occurrences in Chronicles.

forged in the past is the same as the one striving to be the people of God in the present, looking towards the future in an ongoing and incomplete restoration.<sup>3</sup>

The Chronicler is not the only biblical writer showing the relevance of the past through genealogies. The Gospel of Matthew also begins with genealogies: Jesus the Christ is the heir to the history, the covenants, and the promises of the Old Testament (Matt 1:1). He is the legitimate son of David and son of Abraham. The new community of Israel, forged in the new covenant in the body and blood of Jesus, is both the continuation of the promises and covenants of the past and the signal of a new beginning (Matt. 26:26–29). Both the Chronicler’s restoration and the new covenant in Jesus plant one foot squarely in the past while looking forward to God’s acts of redemption and restoration of his people and of his creation in the future.

*The re-telling of the story of the kings of Judah.* It is through the retelling of the story of the kings of Judah that the Chronicler makes plain his method and emphases. The Chronicles narrative begins in 1 Chronicles 10 with the death of Saul and David’s accession to the throne, because he, unlike Saul, “sought the Lord.”<sup>4</sup> The story ends with the demise of Judean kingship in exile, but with the possibility of a renewed king, kingdom, worship, and land with the edict of Cyrus. Roughly two-thirds of the book of Chronicles tells the story of two kings, David and Solomon, because they were the initiators and paradigms of kingship and worship in Judah. All kings who followed in Judah (north Israelite kings being almost completely left out of the story) are compared to these two paradigmatic kings who “sought the Lord.” The Chronicler tells the story of the kings of Judah relative to whether, and the extent to which, they sought the Lord.

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<sup>3</sup> One may see this in particular in 1 Chronicles 9:1–3. “Israel” is the first on the list of entities being restored after the exile (v. 2). This is followed by priests, Levites, and temple servants (v. 2), and then by “some of the people of Judah, Benjamin, Ephraim, and Manasseh,” that is, all of Israel that was left (v. 3). It was first necessary to establish the *bona fides* of the post-exilic community as the same as that which went into exile by the extensive “enrollment in genealogies” (v. 1).

<sup>4</sup> Note there are 38 occurrences of the Hebrew *darash* (“seek”) in Chronicles. See especially the reason for the rejection of Saul: “[He] did not seek guidance from the LORD. Therefore the LORD put him to death and turned the kingdom over to David son of Jesse” (1 Chron 10:14). Also, David left instructions with Solomon to do as he had done: to set his heart and mind to “seek the Lord” (1 Chron 28:9).

*The past made contemporary.* The past is brought forward and made contemporary in the book of Chronicles. This may be seen even in the Chronicler's use of sources, especially the Deuteronomic History (Joshua through 2 Kings, with Deuteronomy as an introduction). In one half of the book, the Chronicler quotes copiously from the earlier history. On the other hand, in the accounts of most kings the Chronicler adds his own non-synoptic narratives, based upon other sources and written in the Hebrew of the post-exilic age. Thus one half of the Chronicler's history is in the classical Hebrew of the monarchical period, and one half in the Hebrew of a later day. The end result is like reading Shakespeare with every other page in updated, modern English. One cannot fail to see the ancient stories of the past brought forward and given the "new dress" of the present.

There is another sense in which the past is made relevant to the present, from the Chronicler's point of view: the institutions he describes, such as Levitical orders, give every appearance of being the highly organized and diversified phenomena we see developing in the post-exilic age.<sup>5</sup> Thus the Chronicler makes apparent that the structure of the Levitical organization in the post-exilic age has its inception and warrant in the initiatives of David and Solomon. The effect is much like that of medieval portrayals of the Passion: the characters are from the first century A.D., but their garb is distinctly medieval European.

*The past as ideal model.*<sup>6</sup> The Chronicler not only "brings the past forward." He also idealizes the past as the model for the present, with an eye towards Israel's future restoration. The picture the Chronicler paints of David and Solomon, the priesthood, the Levites, and the unity of the twelve tribes is a truly optimistic one, which never existed in reality. But these ideal portraits

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<sup>5</sup> In earlier texts of the Old Testament, there is little, if any, evidence for the complex organization of priests and the Levitical orders of gatekeepers and singers, such as we see in 1 Chronicles 15–16. In pre-exilic texts, the Levites are "Levitical priests" or members of the tribe of Levi. Outside of post-exilic texts, there is only one mention in the Old Testament of the priests and the Levites both performing cultic functions, in 1 Kings 8:4. In post-exilic texts (Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Ezekiel), the number swells to over seventy.

<sup>6</sup> For a good discussion of how the Chronicler uses the past see Simon J. De Vries, 1 and 2 Chronicles, Forms of Old Testament Literature vol. XI (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 17–20.

make sense if the Chronicler is holding them out as models and blueprints for post-exilic Judah to emulate in its program of restoration.<sup>7</sup>

*The American Restoration Movement and the past.* There is a weakness in the Restoration Movement as it has sometimes been articulated. Much like the Chronicler, our focus has often been on the past as a Golden Age which needs to be recovered, but a corollary to this emphasis has been often implied, if not expressly stated: if the external signs of the church's life were recovered, the sanctity and mission of the church would necessarily follow. Perhaps we should learn a lesson from our Reformed neighbors and their Latin motto, *ecclesia reformata, semper reformanda* ("the church reformed, always reforming"): *ecclesia restituta, semper restituenda*—"the church restored, always to be restored." Restoration is never complete or perfect, for we are imperfect people. It will always be an unfinished task. The past is important to any restoration movement, but returning to the first century A.D. is not enough. Any restoration of the church of the past must also look to the future. We are grounded in our origin stories, our *primordium*, but in our imperfection we are looking to the future in anticipation of the perfect restoration of all things. An implication of this imperfect restoration is that humility becomes us. Perhaps the restoration of a humble, searching spirit is a prerequisite to the *ecclesia restituta*. It involves also the recognition that the restoration is not static and oriented only to the past, but toward the future as well.

### **The Restoration of the Institutions of King and Temple**

The Chronicler is concerned with Israel's institutions, especially the "twin pillars" of *king* and *temple*.<sup>8</sup> The narrative section of Chronicles begins with the death of Saul and the elevation of David to the kingship over Israel.

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<sup>7</sup> The word "blueprint," plan, or "pattern," Hebrew *tabnît*, is used in 1 Chronicles 28:11–12 and 18–19.

<sup>8</sup> Note that the institution of kingship is paramount in Chronicles. Some have argued that kingship is subsumed under the temple and its worship, and that the restoration of kingship is not in the Chronicler's purview. For a good survey of the evidence in favor of Davidic kingship as a critical institution in itself, and with ongoing significance to the Chronicler, see Steven McKenzie, *1–2 Chronicles*, Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries (Nashville: Abingdon, 2004). For a discussion of the temple as the prevailing motif in the Chronicler's history, see Steven Tuell, *First and Second Chronicles*, Interpretation Commentary (Louisville: John Knox, 2004), 11–12.

All of the rest of 1 Chronicles and much of 2 Chronicles deal with the kings of Judah, especially the first two, David and Solomon. The Chronicler is concerned with the apparent demise of the eternal covenant with David in light of the absence of a Davidic king on the throne in the post-exilic age.

*David and Solomon as models of faithful rule.*<sup>9</sup> The Chronicler portrays David and Solomon, his exemplary kings, almost like marble statues in their perfection. This is not because the Chronicler could not read or was unaware of their serious lapses, but because their kingship, as it should have been, was the ideal model for the post-exilic community of Israel. Like the heroes of the faith in Hebrews 12, whose failings are omitted, David and Solomon are exemplary because they “sought the Lord.”

*The Davidic/Solomonic priesthood and worship as a model.* The Chronicler is also concerned with temple worship, organization, and priesthood. Every reforming king restored the reading and practice of the Torah, or decreed the purification and restoration of the priesthood and temple worship. To the Chronicler, worship was more than temple sacrifice. There was power in worship: when the people of Judah were threatened by the Ammonites, Moabites, and Edomites during the reign of Jehoshaphat, the Levites sang to the Lord and God smote the enemy.

The covenant with David thus involved two elements: God’s eternal election of David as king and his election of the temple. It was unthinkable to the Chronicler that God’s promises to David could falter or be abrogated. If Judah would seek the Lord, as David and Solomon had done, God might once again restore king, temple, and worship. But the Chronicler never suggests that the recovery of Israel’s king and temple was to be accomplished through human initiative and activity alone, although human activity is involved. The priests and prophets are to be faithful in fulfilling their roles in worship, consecration, and teaching the Torah. The kings of Judah and the people of Israel are to “seek God with all their heart,” humble themselves, and practice faithfully the Torah and the recovery of these institutions would result through God’s initiative.

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<sup>9</sup> For a discussion of David and Solomon as models of kingship, see Roddy Braun, *1 Chronicles*, Word Biblical Commentary vol. 14 (Waco: Word, 1986), xxxii–xxxv.

*The American Restoration Movement and the restoration of institutions.* I suggest this is a failure of the Restoration Movement as it has sometimes been practiced: that God left the church in human hands, and the outcome of its unity and spiritual growth more or less depends upon us. The difference between David and Saul in 1 Chronicles 10:13–14 is that David sought the Lord with all his heart. Perhaps seeking the Lord with all our heart is the necessary prerequisite to the renewal of the visible manifestations of the church.

There are other serious implications of this for our church life today. The recovery of kingship for us involves the confession of Christ as king and his enthronement in our hearts and the lives of our churches. The recovery of worship involves the recognition of divine initiative, both in our baptism and in the Lord's Supper, where Christ is the host. Also, as in restoration movements narrated in Chronicles, teaching Scripture and singing hymns are powerful elements in faithful response to God.

### **The Chronicler and the Unity of Israel**

*The Chronicler and "all Israel"*. The Chronicler is concerned with the restoration of the *land* promised to the fathers and "all Israel" as a *unity of twelve tribes*.<sup>10</sup> With every restoration in Judah's history—those of Hezekiah and Josiah in particular—came recovery of territory lost in faithless periods of Judah's history and also the reconciliation of errant brothers to the North. The Chronicler portrays an ideal picture of Josiah's reform, extending all the way to Naphtali in the far north of the defunct kingdom of North Israel, not just to Bethel, as 2 Kings records. The Chronicler's genealogies record a return of North Israelite exiles with the Judeans in 539 BC. Those who came over to David when he was in the wilderness running from Saul included many North Israelites. This emphasis on "all Israel" sits in tension with the reality of the Chronicler's history. The Chronicler has essentially "edited out" all of the stories about the North from 1–2 Kings. It is the history of the kingdom of Judah, which alone was left of God's broken and scattered people. But the restoration of Judah has implications for God's ultimate restoration, that of "all Israel," the whole community of faith and the recipients of

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<sup>10</sup> For the importance of "all Israel" to the Chronicler's theology, see Braun, xxxv–xxxvii.

the promise. The unity and restoration of all Israel, therefore, was a future hope, something the Chronicler only saw “in a glass darkly.”

*The Churches of Christ and the unity of believers.* We, like the Chronicler, see the evidence of the broken community in the shattered fragments of the unity for which Christ prayed. Like the Chronicler, the restoration appeal to unity sits in uneasy tension with the reality of fragmentation. To the Chronicler, Israel’s unity was both a declared reality and a longing for the future. So it is with us. The unity of the church is both a declared reality and an eschatological longing, as we seek the Lord’s presence and his healing of the fractured body of Christ.

What may we do to promote such unity within the fractured body? While we did not begin the divisions in the church, nor will we in all likelihood eliminate them, there are several practical things we can do. The first is to foster a spirit of kindness and forbearance for our religious neighbors who name the name of Christ. Ugliness and sectarianism have never been virtues, but sins. The second is to announce our commitments and invite others to respond, dialogue, and even join with us as we attempt to live faithfully. Our school’s statement of faith illustrates this: “Austin Graduate School of Theology is a seminary associated with Churches of Christ and in conversation with all who confess Jesus as Lord.” Finally, where we can, we should invite others to participate in our labors of ministry. The Timeless Psalter/Commentary project is a concrete example of ecumenism.<sup>11</sup> All who name the name of Christ are invited to submit psalm lyrics and musical settings, for Christians all agree on the importance of the psalms.

### Conclusion

What is right about restorationism? It focuses upon the recovery of our origins in the past, but it needs to be oriented towards the future as well and the realization that all our efforts are incomplete and God’s restoration of all things awaits the final day. It involves the recovery of the church and its

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<sup>11</sup> R. Mark Shipp, ed. *Timeless: Ancient Psalms for the Church Today. Vol. 1, Psalms 1–41: In the Day of Distress* (Abilene: ACU Press, 2011). Volume 2 is in production. See also *Be Still and Know: Timeless Psalms of Trust, Confidence, and Hope*, CD published by Austin Christian Acappella, 2014, and *Where Are You, Lord? From Lament to Praise in the Psalms*, Austin Christian Acappella, 2015.

worship, but we need to recognize that Christ is the one who builds the church and is its host in worship. It calls its scattered members to unity, but does so in a spirit of kindness and love.

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