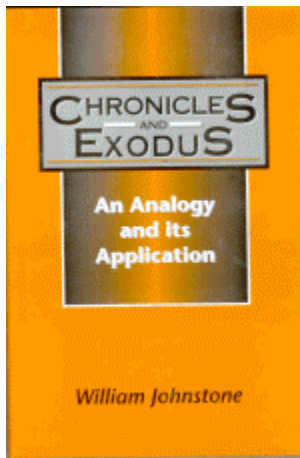


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Johnstone, William

Chronicles and Exodus: An Analogy and its Application

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William Johnstone's recent contribution to the expanding JSOT Supplement Series has something for all biblical and theological scholars, especially those interested in the Pentateuch, the Deuteronomistic History, Chronicles, tradition and redaction criticism, but also NT and Christian theological studies.

Johnstone has drawn together into one volume a series of articles originally delivered at various conferences or published elsewhere in various journals and books. The genesis and compilation of these articles echo Johnstone's theory on Chronicles as he draws together divergent materials into one volume with an overarching final purpose.

Johnstone argues that biblical scholarship should take its lead for the redaction history of the book of Exodus from one of the latest contributions to the Hebrew canon, the book of Chronicles. The redaction history of Chronicles is laid bare to the reader because of direct access to its primary Vorlage, the Deuteronomistic History. Thus trends seen in Chronicles reveal redactional methodology in the ancient context and should inform the critic as the redaction history of Exodus is investigated. This is further bolstered by the intimate relationship between Chronicles and the Priestly tradition in the Pentateuch. Through a series of articles, Chronicles is identified as a Priestly revision of a Deuteronomistic presentation of the history of Israel. When applied to the book of Exodus, a similar trend is seen—a priestly revision and supplement to a Deuteronomistic presentation of the exodus and Sinai traditions.

The book begins with an extended introduction that attempts to draw the collection together as a compact unit. After a quick orientation to his personal journey into pentateuchal studies and a short overview of the content of the articles, Johnstone presents an extended dialogue with and criticism of recent contributors to the field of the redaction of the book of Exodus, namely, E. Blum and G. I. Davies.

In the initial section (“The Proposal: Chronicles as Gateway to Pentateuchal Criticism”), Johnstone presents his foundational proposal that Chronicles should be used as a case study for Pentateuchal redactional criticism. Here he criticizes the traditional historical approach to the exodus that strips the text of its intention to legitimize Israel’s religious institutions.

In the second section (“Looking at the Gateway: Chronicles in Itself and in its Relation to the Pentateuch”), Johnstone moves to a study of the book of Chronicles, tracing the way that it employs the Pentateuch. He sees Chronicles not as an introduction to Ezra-Nehemiah, but rather as a post Ezra-Nehemiah work that interprets the present predicament of the community as an exile for which God will bring restoration. Priestly vocabulary is employed in order to identify the cause of exile and hope of return. Israel is guilty and needs atonement from this guilt. Johnstone traces this in both narrative and genealogical sections, not only by the use of *m’* and *’sm* but also in the placement and role of the Levites and use of Benjamin as a redeemed tribe.

Johnstone then moves on to a dialogue with S. Japhet’s commentary on Chronicles. He disagrees with her distancing of Leviticus and Chronicles and sees a precedent in Leviticus for the Chronicler’s view of guilt. He attacks her view of Israel’s relation to the land and especially her assertion that the exile is played down in Chronicles. He claims in the end that the books of Chronicles are “a midrash on a theme of Leviticus.” Johnstone’s final contribution in this second section bolsters his argument that Chronicles is deeply indebted to the Priestly presentation of the Pentateuch as he argues for the influence of Exodus 30:11-16 on David’s census in Chronicles 21.

In the third section (“Looking through the Gateway: Applying the Analogy to the Pentateuch”), Johnstone moves into pentateuchal redaction theory. He first provides a transitional chapter in which he justifies his use of Chronicles as an analogy for Pentateuchal redactional theory. His premise is that, because the Chronicler uses a source to which we have direct access (DtrH), we can use it as a case study to form principles for Hebrew Bible criticism, both on the synchronic and diachronic levels. The old literary-critical approach used Chronicles as evidence for the use of source but more in a “cut ‘n’ paste” fashion. Chronicles shows us that although a source document is being used, it is not “cut ‘n’ paste,” but rather a reformulation of tradition. He sees a double redaction process in both DtrH/Chronicles and the Pentateuch: in both cases there is a “covenant” redaction (Deuteronomic) and a “holiness” redaction (Priestly).

In the following chapters within this section, Johnstone applies his hypothesis to the various sections of Exodus, focusing attention on paradigmatic pericopae: first the Decalogue (Exod 20), then the Passover pericope (Exod 12-13), the plague cycle (Exod 7-12), the wilderness journey from the Sea to Sinai (Exod 15:22-19:2), and the journey from Sinai to Kadesh (Exod 32-34).

With the third section we leave the main argument of the book, but Johnstone is not finished. He adds a fourth section (“The View Beyond”) comprised of two essays. The initial essay is a superb apologetic for authorial intention using 2 Chr 6 (and the book of Chronicles as a whole) as an example. Then Johnstone applies his findings in redactional criticism to Christian theology, revealing links between his two levels of Exodus and the Christian doctrines of justification and sanctification, Johnstone provides for Hebrew Bible scholarship an interesting hypothesis for Pentateuchal studies. His work straddles two increasingly distanced Hebrew Bible disciplines (Pentateuch and Chronicles studies) and Hebrew Bible hermeneutical approaches (diachronic and synchronic). In this he attempts a daring feat and will be attacked on all sides.

In terms of style and format, at times the book is difficult to follow in its overall flow because it is a conglomeration of previous sources with various “intentions.” Transition notes and summaries placed at the end of the sections or chapters would have been helpful guides for the reader. But Johnstone’s work is a welcome addition to the ongoing debate over the origins and message of the Pentateuch. It joins several works over the past two decades that have challenged the traditional source-critical proposals of J. Wellhausen, G. von Rad, and M. Noth (J. van Seters, R. Rendtorff, R. N. Whybray). In a discipline with such a long history and voluminous bibliography, Johnstone is wise to provide a new hypothesis and to illustrate it in the book of Exodus. This approach will not satisfy all scholars for it does not attempt to take into account the various theories throughout the history of the discipline.

Some will not be convinced of Johnstone’s view of “P” as a supplement/revision layer rather than an independent source. Not only is this left unproven within Exodus but will cause difficulties for many who see within Genesis clear evidence of a “P” level in, for example, the flood narrative. Of course, if “P” is not merely a supplement/revision layer then Chronicles cannot be used as a paradigm.

In addition, there is a question of whether the supposed “D” layer Johnstone has excavated in Exodus is assuredly “Deuteronomistic” in character. Some will remain unconvinced that the presence of “covenant” tradition is the litmus test for “D,” especially as the theology of “covenant” certainly preceded the “Deuteronomism” in any account of the origins of this movement and, in any case, the covenant in Exodus is not identical to that in Deuteronomy.

Johnstone's evaluation of the theme of Chronicles is extremely helpful as he fills out further the Priestly vocabulary and themes of the book. This, however, is not balanced with interaction with some of the classic themes and categories associated with the Chronistic History, especially the "retribution" theme, the portrayal of David-Solomon, and the use of recapitulative historiography. Johnstone's commentary on Chronicles does reveal more of this interaction, but its absence in this volume does make one wonder if Johnstone is limiting himself to cover up non-priestly elements.

Johnstone has provided an interesting redaction theory for Pentateuchal studies and convincing work on several Priestly themes in Chronicles. Although he will not satisfy many, his contribution will have to be taken into account as scholars in these fields continue to refine their theories.