

## 3,000 years of history in an hour

Limmud, Wednesday 25<sup>th</sup> December 2019, 16:00, Orange 11

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*Divrey hayamim – or “Chronicles” – is one of the Bible’s least-studied books. The opening would be almost as interesting as the telephone directory (remember them?) if there were any numbers. But persevere. And perhaps we’ll discover a purpose – even a hidden magic – in the book.*

### Structure of Divrei hayamim

#### 1. Genealogies (1DhY 1:1-8:40)

From Adam to the second Temple, though not in simple chronological order. Chapter 1 takes us up to Yisrael (not Ya’akov), including roughly the same detail on Yishmael’s and Esav’s descendants that appears in Bereshit. Then the tribe of Yehudah (2:1-4:23), with an extended list of David’s descendants (up to at least seven generations after Yehoyakhin) in chapter 3. Then Shimon, Reuven, Gad, half of Menashe, Levi, Yissakhar, Binyamin, Naftali, the rest of Menashe, Ephrayim, Asher, Binyamin again – leading to Sha’ul.

#### 2. A crucial verse (1DhY 9:1)

“And the whole of Yisrael had established their lineage, and the details are written in the book of the kings of Yisrael; but Yehuda had been exiled to Babylon because of their *ma’al*, (sacrilege?).”

#### 3. The return to Jerusalem (9:2-34)

(Parallels, roughly, Nechemiah 11)

The Second Temple settlers – Yisra’elim, Kohanim, Levi’im and temple workers.

#### 4. The family of Sha’ul (9:35-44)

Repeats, in part, 8:28-38; introduces the account of Sha’ul’s death in battle.

#### 5. The death of Sha’ul (1DhY 10)

All we are told of Sha’ul in DhY is the manner of his death – and the reason for it, in 10:13 – as in 9:1, it is sacrilege, *ma’al*, which is blamed.

#### 6. David (1DhY 11-29)

The Chronicler’s story starts with David’s acclamation as king and the conquest of Jerusalem, which are sketched in 11:1-9. Then we have more lists of names: the warriors (11:10-12:38) and the bracketing of 12:39-41 which takes us back to the coronation. Then the return of the Ark and the death of Uzza (13:1-14). Chapter 14 takes us on to Hiram’s supply of workmen, a list of David’s wives and the routing of the Philistines. David builds palaces and prepares a place for the Ark (15:1); then we have a lengthy description of the ceremony as the Ark is installed in its tent (15:2-16:43), including one of the few familiar passages in DhY – 16:8-36, David’s hymn of praise which we include as the first item in *pesukei dezimra*. Again, the account is full of names and numbers, this time Kohanim and Levi’im.

Chapter 17 describes how David seeks to build a temple and is told by Natan that only his son will build the Temple. 18-20 tell of wars; 21 the census and consequent plague. In one of the many differences between the Shemuel and DhY accounts, 21:1 claims that David was seduced by the Satan into initiating the census while in 2 Shemuel 24:1 it appears to have been God himself who was responsible, in His anger. While Shemuel ends with the appearance of the angel at Ornan’s threshing-floor and the end of the plague, DhY continues smoothly from David’s purchase of the temple site to his commencement of preparations for the building and his instructions to Shelomo (Chapter 22).

Chapters 23-29 describe the smooth handover of power to Shelomo, again with many lists of names: Levi'im, Kohanim, musicians, gatekeepers, soldiers and civil servants. David instructs the officers about the succession and warns them to be faithful to God and His commands. He gives Shelomo the complete plans for the Temple, which he has received semi-prophetically. Finally he calls on the entire people to support Shelomo in building the Temple, leading by example with huge donations, and Shelomo is anointed as king.

### 7. Shelomo (2DhY 1-9)

Lots about the building and dedication of the temple and very little else – except the story of the Queen of Sheba in chapter 9.

### 8. Rechav'am (2DhY 10-12)

Rechav'am is initially faithful to God and the Chronicler tells of his success in building and strengthening his kingdom. All the kohanim and levi'im join him and he marries only Israelite women. But after three years, when his kingship is established, he abandons God's law.

### 9. Aviyah to Achaz (2DhY 13-28)

Chapter 13 – Aviyah (called Aviyam in Melakhim).

Chapters 14-16 – Asa. A good king.

Chapters 17-20 – Yehoshaphat.

Chapter 21 – Yehoram. A bad king. DhY adds to the brief account in 2Melakhim 8:16-24 the letter sent by Eliyahu telling Yehoram of God's anger and punishment.

Chapter 22 – Achaziah. Another bad king.

Chapters 23-24 – Yehoash. Behaves while Yehoyada the kohen is alive, then led astray by his officers.

Chapter 25 – Amatziah. Moderately good.

Chapter 26 – Uzziah. Far more info. than in 2Melakhim 15:1-7, with again more building and army.

Chapter 27 – Yotam. A good king, who behaves like his father – except that he does not presume to enter the off-limits sanctuary.

Chapter 28 – Achaz. A bad king.

### 10. Chizkiyah (2DhY 29-32)

The cleansing and rededication of the temple, the celebration of Pesach – including an invitation to the northern tribes to participate – the demolition of idols, reinstatement of tithing and organisation of kohanim and levi'im. Chapter 32 tells of Sancheriv's invasion.

### 11. Menasheh and Amon (2DhY 33)

In Melakhim, the portrayal of Menashe is wholly negative – including the spilling of much innocent blood. DhY ignores the bloodshed, though not the idolatry, and introduces a new story – Menashe is taken captive and exiled to Bavel (by Assyrians!) where he entreats God, humbles himself and is returned to Jerusalem.

Amon is quickly disposed of, as in Melakhim. He did not submit to God's will, unlike Menashe, and is murdered by his courtiers.

### 12. Yoshiah (2DhY 34-35)

### 13. Destruction and exile (2DhY 36:1-21)

The last kings – Yehoachaz, Yehoyakim, Yehoyakhin and Tzidkiyyahu are disposed of rapidly. The Chronicler repeats how God in His pity sends many messengers to warn the people but they treat them all with contempt until finally God sends the Babylonians. The exile lasts seventy years in fulfilment of Yirmiyah's prophecy.

#### 14. The proclamation of Cyrus (2DhY 36:22-23)

The last two verses are virtually identical with the first two and a half of Ezra, Cyrus's proclamation, ending with the word *veya'al*, "let him go up".

#### Key passages

1DhY 1:1-5

אָדָם שֶׁת אֶנּוֹשׁ. <sup>ב</sup> קֵינָן מַהֲלָלֵאל יָרֵד. <sup>ג</sup> חֲנוּךְ מֵתוֹשֶׁלַח לָמַךְ. <sup>ד</sup> נֹחַ שֵׁם חָם וַיָּפֶת. <sup>ה</sup> בְּנֵי יָפֶת גֹּמֶר וּמָגוּג וּמְדֵי וַיִּוּן וְתַבַּל וּמִשֶׁךְ וְתִירָס.

1 Adam, Seth, Enosh; 2 Kenan, Mahalalel, Jared; 3 Enoch, Methuselah, Lamech; 4 Noah, Shem, Ham, and Japheth. 5 The sons of Japheth: Gomer, and Magog, and Madai, and Javan, and Tubal, and Meshech, and Tiras.

1DhY 9:1

וְכָל-יִשְׂרָאֵל הִתְיַחֲשׂוּ וְהָנָם כְּתוּבִים עַל-סֵפֶר מַלְכֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיְהוּדָה הֶגְלוּ לְבַבְּלָא בְּמַעֲלָם.

So all Israel were reckoned by genealogies; and, behold, they are written in the book of the kings of Israel; and Judah was carried away captive to Babylon because of their transgression.

1DhY 10:13-14

וַיָּמָת שָׂאוּל בְּמַעֲלוֹ אֲשֶׁר מָעַל בַּה' עַל-דְּבַר ה' אֲשֶׁר לֹא-שָׁמַר וְגַם-לְשָׂאוּל בְּאוֹב לְדָרוֹשׁ. <sup>ט</sup> וְלֹא-דָרַשׁ בַּה' וַיִּמְיֹתָהּ וַיִּסַּב אֶת-הַמְּלוּכָה לְדָוִד בֶּן-יִשָּׁי.

13 So Saul died for his transgression which he committed against the LORD, because of the word of the LORD, which he kept not; and also for that he asked counsel of a ghost, to inquire thereby, 14 and inquired not of the LORD; therefore He slew him, and turned the kingdom unto David the son of Jesse.

1DhY 29:26-30

<sup>כ</sup> וַדָּוִד בֶּן-יִשָּׁי מֶלֶךְ עַל-יִשְׂרָאֵל. <sup>כז</sup> וְהַיָּמִים אֲשֶׁר מָלַךְ עַל-יִשְׂרָאֵל אַרְבָּעִים שָׁנָה בְּחֶבְרוֹן מֶלֶךְ שְׁבַע שָׁנִים וּבִירוּשָׁלַם מֶלֶךְ שְׁלֹשִׁים וְשָׁלוֹשׁ. <sup>כח</sup> וַיָּמָת בְּשִׁיבָה טוֹבָה שְׁבַע יָמִים עֲשָׂר וּכְבוֹד וַיִּמְלֹךְ שְׁלֹמֹה בְּנוֹ תַחְתָּיו. <sup>כט</sup> וַדָּבְרֵי דָוִד הַמֶּלֶךְ הָרִאשֹׁנִים וְהָאַחֲרָנִים הָנָם כְּתוּבִים עַל-דְּבָרֵי שְׁמוּאֵל הָרֹאֶה וְעַל-דְּבָרֵי נָתָן הַנְּבִיא וְעַל-דְּבָרֵי גָד הַחֹזֶה. <sup>ל</sup> עַם כָּל-מַמְלָכוֹתָיו וּגְבוּרָתוֹ וְהַעֲתִים אֲשֶׁר עָבְרוּ עָלָיו וְעַל-יִשְׂרָאֵל וְעַל כָּל-מַמְלָכוֹת הָאָרְצוֹת.

26 Now David the son of Jesse reigned over all Israel. 27 And the time that he reigned over Israel was forty years: seven years reigned he in Hebron, and thirty and three years reigned he in Jerusalem. 28 And he died in a good old age, full of days, riches, and honour; and Solomon his son reigned in his stead. 29 Now the acts of David the king, first and last, behold, they are written in the words of Samuel the seer, and in the words of Nathan the prophet, and in the words of Gad the seer; 30 with all his reign and his might, and the times that went over him, and over Israel, and over all the kingdoms of the countries.

And by way of contrast...

1Melakhim 1:1 and 2:1-12

וְהַמֶּלֶךְ דָּוִד זָקֵן בָּא בַיָּמִים וַיִּכְסְהוּ בַבְּגָדִים וְלֹא יָחַם לוֹ.<sup>x</sup>

1:1 Now king David was old and stricken in years; and they covered him with clothes, but he could get no heat.

<sup>x</sup> וַיִּקְרְבוּ יָמֵי-דָוִד, לָמוֹת וַיִּצְוּ אֶת-שְׁלֹמֹה בְנוֹ לֵאמֹר. <sup>ב</sup> אֲנֹכִי הִלֵּךְ בְּדַרְךְךָ כָּל-הָאָרֶץ וְחִזַּקְתָּ וְהֵייתָ לְאִישׁ. <sup>ג</sup> וְשָׁמַרְתָּ אֶת-מִשְׁמֶרֶת ה' אֲנִי הֵיךְ לָלֶכֶת בְּדַרְכֵיךָ לְשֹׁמֵר חֻקֶיךָ מִצְוֹתֶיךָ וּמִשְׁפָּטֶיךָ וְעִדּוֹתֶיךָ כַּכָּתוּב בְּתוֹרַת מֹשֶׁה לְמַעַן תִּשְׁכַּל אֶת כָּל-אֲשֶׁר תַּעֲשֶׂה וְאֵת כָּל-אֲשֶׁר תִּפְנֶה שָׁם. <sup>ד</sup> לְמַעַן יָקִים ה' אֶת-דְּבָרֹךְ אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר עָלַי לֵאמֹר אִם-יִשְׁמְרוּ בְנֵיךָ אֶת-דִּרְכֶּךָ לָלֶכֶת לִפְנֵי בְּאֵמֶת בְּכָל-לְבָבָם וּבְכָל-נַפְשָׁם לֵאמֹר לֹא-יִכָּרֵת לְךָ אִישׁ מֵעַל פֶּסֶא יִשְׂרָאֵל. <sup>ה</sup> וְגַם אֶתְּהָ יִדְעֶת אֵת אֲשֶׁר-עָשָׂה לִי יוֹאָב בֶּן-צְרוּיָה אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה לְשֹׁנֵי-שָׂרֵי צְבָאוֹת יִשְׂרָאֵל לְאַבְנֵר בֶּן-נֵר וְלַעֲמָשָׂא בֶן-יֵתָר וְיַהֲרָגִים וַיִּשָּׂם דָּמֵי-מִלְחָמָה בְּשֵׁלֶם וַיִּתֵּן דָּמֵי מִלְחָמָה בְּחִגְרֹתוֹ אֲשֶׁר בְּמִתְנָיו וַיִּבְנְעֵלוּ אֲשֶׁר בְּרַגְלָיו. <sup>ו</sup> וְעָשִׂיתָ כַּחֲכָמְתָּךְ וְלֹא-תוֹרַד שִׁיבְתוֹ בְּשֵׁלֶם שָׂאֵל. <sup>ז</sup> וְלִבְנֵי בְרוּזֵי הַגִּלְעָדִי תַעֲשֶׂה-חֶסֶד וְהֵיוּ בְּאֹכְלֵי שֶׁלֶחֶןךָ כִּי-כֹן קָרְבוּ אֵלַי בְּבָרְחֵי מִפְּנֵי אַבְשָׁלוֹם אָחִיךָ. <sup>ח</sup> וְהִנֵּה עִמָּךְ שְׁמַעִי בֶן-גֵּרָא בֶן-הַיְמִינִי מִבְּחָרִים וְהוּא קָלְלָנִי קָלְלָה נְמַרְצָת בְּיוֹם לְכַתִּי מִחֲנָיִם וְהוּא-יָרַד לְקִרְיַת הַיַּרְדֵּן וַאֲשַׁבַּע לוֹ בַּה' לֵאמֹר אִם-אֶמִיתָךְ בְּחָרְב. <sup>ט</sup> וְעַתָּה אֵל-תִּנְקַחְהוּ כִּי אִישׁ חָכָם אָתָּה וַיִּדְעֶתָ אֵת אֲשֶׁר תַּעֲשֶׂה-לוֹ וְהוֹרַדְתָּ אֶת-שִׁיבְתוֹ בְּדָם שָׂאוֹל. <sup>י</sup> וַיִּשְׁכַּב דָּוִד עִם-אֲבֹתָיו וַיִּקְבֹּר בְּעִיר דָּוִד.

<sup>xx</sup> וְהַיָּמִים אֲשֶׁר מָלַךְ דָּוִד עַל-יִשְׂרָאֵל אַרְבָּעִים שָׁנָה בְּחִבְרוֹן מָלַךְ שְׁבַע שָׁנִים וַיְבִירוּשָׁלַם מָלַךְ שְׁלֹשִׁים וְשֵׁלֶשׁ שָׁנִים. <sup>ב</sup> וַשְׁלֹמֹה יָשָׁב עַל-פֶּסֶא דָּוִד אָבִיו וַתִּכְפֹּן מִלְכָתוֹ מֵאֹד.

2:1 Now the days of David drew nigh that he should die; and he charged Solomon his son, saying: 2 'I go the way of all the earth; be thou strong therefore, and show thyself a man; 3 and keep the charge of the LORD thy God, to walk in His ways, to keep His statutes, and His commandments, and His ordinances, and His testimonies, according to that which is written in the law of Moses, that thou mayest prosper in all that thou doest, and whithersoever thou turnest thyself; 4 that the LORD may establish His word which He spoke concerning me, saying: If thy children take heed to their way, to walk before Me in truth with all their heart and with all their soul, there shall not fail thee, said He, a man on the throne of Israel. 5 Moreover thou knowest also what Joab the son of Zeruiah did unto me, even what he did to the two captains of the hosts of Israel, unto Abner the son of Ner and unto Amasa the son of Jether, whom he slew, and shed the blood of war in peace, and put the blood of war upon his girdle that was about his loins, and in his shoes that were on his feet. 6 Do therefore according to thy wisdom, and let not his hoar head go down to the grave in peace. 7 But show kindness unto the sons of Barzillai the Gileadite, and let them be of those that eat at thy table; for so they drew nigh unto me when I fled from Absalom thy brother. 8 And, behold, there is with thee Shimei the son of Gera, the Benjamite, of Bahurim, who cursed me with a grievous curse in the day when I went to Mahanaim; but he came down to meet me at the Jordan, and I swore to him by the LORD, saying: I will not put thee to death with the sword. 9 Now therefore hold him not guiltless, for thou art a wise man; and thou wilt know what thou oughtest to do unto him, and thou shalt bring his hoar head down to the grave with blood.' 10 And David slept with his fathers, and was buried in the city of David.

11 And the days that David reigned over Israel were forty years: seven years reigned he in Hebron, and thirty and three years reigned he in Jerusalem. 12 And Solomon sat upon the throne of David his father; and his kingdom was established firmly.

And the end of the book...

2DhY 36:11-23

<sup>א</sup> בן-עשרים ואחת שנה צדקיהו במלכו ואחת עשרה שנה מלך בירושלם.  
<sup>ב</sup> ויעש הרע בעיני ה' א'היו לא נכנע מלפני ירמיהו הנביא מפי ה'. <sup>ג</sup> וגם  
במלך נבוכדנאצר מרד אשר השביעו בא' ויקש את-ערפו ויאמץ את-לבבו  
משוב אל-ה' א'הי ישראל. <sup>ד</sup> גם כל-שרי הכהנים והעם הרבו למעל-מעל  
ככל תעבות הגוים ויטמאו את-בית ה' אשר הקדיש בירושלם. <sup>ה</sup> וישלח ה'  
א'הי אבותיהם עליהם ביז מלאכיו השפם ושלוח כפי-חמל על-עמו ועל-  
מעונו. <sup>ו</sup> ויהיו מלעבים במלאכי הא'הים ובזים דבריו ומתעתעים בנבאיו  
עד עלות חמת-ה' בעמו עד-לאין מרפא. <sup>ז</sup> ויעל עליהם את-מלך פשדים  
ויהרג בחוריהם בחרב בבית מקדשם ולא חמל על-בחור ובתולה זקן וישש  
הכל נתו בידו. <sup>ח</sup> וכל כלי בית הא'הים הגדלים והקטנים ואצרות בית ה'  
ואצרות המלך ושריו הפל הביא בכל. <sup>ט</sup> וישרפו את-בית הא'הים, וינתצו  
את חומת ירושלם וכל-ארמנותיה שרפו באש וכל-כלי מחמדיה להשחית.  
<sup>י</sup> ויגל השארית מן-החרב אל-בבל ויהיו-לו ולבניו לעבדים עד-מלך מלכות  
פרס. <sup>יא</sup> למלאות דבר-ה' בפי ירמיהו עד-רצתה הארץ את-שבתותיה כל-  
ימי השמה שבתה למלאות שבעים שנה.  
<sup>יב</sup> ובשנת אחת כורש מלך פרס לכלות דבר-ה' בפי ירמיהו העיר ה' את-  
רוח כורש מלך-פרס ויעבר-קול בכל-מלכותו וגם-במכתב לאמר.  
<sup>יג</sup> כה-אמר כורש מלך פרס כל-ממלכות הארץ נתן לי ה' א'הי השמים  
והוא-פקד עלי לבנות-לו בית בירושלם אשר ביהודה: מי-בכם מפל-עמו ה'  
א'היו עמו ויעל.

11 Zedekiah was twenty and one years old when he began to reign; and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem; 12 and he did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD his God; he humbled not himself before Jeremiah the prophet speaking from the mouth of the LORD. 13 And he also rebelled against king Nebuchadnezzar, who had made him swear by God; but he stiffened his neck, and hardened his heart from turning unto the LORD, the God of Israel. 14 Moreover all the chiefs of the priests, and the people, transgressed very greatly after all the abominations of the nations; and they polluted the house of the LORD which He had hallowed in Jerusalem. 15 And the LORD, the God of their fathers, sent to them by His messengers, sending betimes and often; because He had compassion on His people, and on His dwelling-place; 16 but they mocked the messengers of God, and despised His words, and scoffed at His prophets, until the wrath of the LORD arose against His people, till there was no remedy. 17 Therefore He brought upon them the king of the Chaldeans, who slew their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion upon young man or maiden, old man or hoary-headed; He gave them all into his hand. 18 And all the vessels of the house of God, great and small, and the treasures of the house of the LORD, and the treasures of the king, and of his princes; all these he brought to Babylon. 19 And they burnt the house of God, and

broke down the wall of Jerusalem, and burnt all the palaces thereof with fire, and destroyed all the goodly vessels thereof. 20 And them that had escaped from the sword carried he away to Babylon; and they were servants to him and his sons until the reign of the kingdom of Persia; 21 to fulfil the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had been paid her sabbaths; for as long as she lay desolate she kept sabbath, to fulfil threescore and ten years.

22 Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be accomplished, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing, saying:

23 'Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia: All the kingdoms of the earth hath the LORD, the God of heaven, given me; and He hath charged me to build Him a house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whosoever there is among you of all His people--the LORD his God be with him--let him go up.'

So what is this book, and what does it tell us not only about its author(s) but about the early rabbis who determined that it should be included in the Bible? And has it any connection to Chanuka?

And a fun fact. The great biblical commentator Isaac Abarbanel (Portugal, Spain and Venice; 1437-1508) Abravanel admits in his introduction to Shemuel that he had never studied DhY until he came to ask himself what the difference was between the accounts in Shemuel/Melakhim and those in DhY

He complains that the book is neglected, that the only commentary is a few words from R David Kimchi. Ironically, Abarbanel himself did not write on DhY, but he did at least address the question of the relationship between DhY and Shemuel/Melakhim. The (prophetic) narrative in Shemuel, he says, has a pedagogic purpose: we study David in order to understand service of God, so Shemuel gives us David with all his human frailties. DhY is a political history, which tells only the good parts! (Abarbanel was of course familiar with the behaviour of European kings...)

And those of us who have never before read Divrey haYamim are at least in good company.