Attention to the Chronicler as historian and author in recent years by this group of editors who have shared responsibility for the direction and success of the Chronicles–Ezra–Nehemiah Section of the Society of Biblical Literature yields this collection of essays devoted to the Chronicler’s theological message. The book is also a fitting tribute to Ralph Klein, the pioneer of Chronicles study in the United States, who mentored several of the contributors. That the Chronicler’s status should be elevated to theologian, historian, and author, whose narrative really has distinctive theological, historical, and literary substance to be valued alongside Dtr, P, and other creative shapers of biblical traditions, is a development long in coming. That this association and meritorious label is made in honor of Ralph Klein is entirely appropriate.

The book has three divisions: part 1 includes an anecdotal review of Ralph Klein’s scholarly contributions on Chronicles, which ends with the anticipatory note announcing that his Hermeneia commentary on Chronicles will hopefully be published as early as 2006. A brief select bibliography follows. Part 2 focuses on particular texts from Chronicles ordered canonically. Part 3 brings together several thematic treatments of fairly diverse Chronistic topics. Finally, indexes of biblical and other ancient references, and of authors cited are helpful resources in such a diverse treatment of Chronicles.
Part 2. Texts

Gary Knoppers deals with the genealogies that open 1 Chr 1, noting their dimensional movement from universals to particulars and from depth to breadth, which leads him to argue the case “that the genealogy of nations in 1 Chron. 1.1–2.2 is more than a jumble of materials extracted from various contexts in Genesis” (19). Indeed, Knoppers examines stylistic and organizational evidence that overrides various duplications and discrepancies found in this material but that are also part of the Genesis Vorlage. The Chronicler accentuates the patterns and schematic already present in this Vorlage to accomplish his own purpose of unifying the collection toward a theological end, locating Israel among the nations.

Continuing the genealogical investigation in 1 Chr 2:3–4:23, Gerrie Snyman looks at the linear function, Judah to David, in light of the geography of the implied audience. The inclusive ideology of the Chronicler’s genealogy “regulate[s] a new social order established in an economic collective unit under Persian imperial control” (59).

Ehud Ben Zvi reexamines the Chronicler’s assessment of the northern kingdom’s secession within the broad context of Israelite history. The key, he points out, “In Chronicles, as in most—if not all—historiographical works, the narrative context gives meaning to the facts, rather than vice versa” (63). Although the Chronicler makes it clear that Yahweh was the one who caused the nation to split, the Chronicler leaves readers pondering the theological mystery of why.

Philippe Abadie examines the Chronicler’s revision of the Deuteronomist’s narrative of Manasseh to determine methodological concerns and motives. Abadie reveals that the curious reversal of several negative elements in 2 Kgs 21, where the Deuteronomist emphasized Manasseh’s neglectful attitude toward the covenant with Yahweh, is the Chronicler’s effort to call Israel to return in faithfulness to Yahweh, who is merciful and compassionate. Just as Yahweh accepts Manasseh’s repentance, so he will receive a penitent Israel. “In this light, Manasseh appears with all his ambiguities as the reflection of Israel, the believing community that must always repent. One understands henceforth the theological choices made by the Chronicler that led him to engage in a complete rewriting of this figure’s reign” (104).

In the final textual essay, Mark Throntveit considers the relationship of Hezekiah to David and Solomon in the books of Chronicles. Throntveit looks carefully at the evidence for the Chronicler depicting Hezekiah as a second David and as a second Solomon. In each case he concludes that the Chronicler’s concern to present Hezekiah in light of David and Solomon is unique compared to other pious Judean kings. Indeed, Hezekiah,
for the Chronicler, was seen as both a second David and a second Solomon. In essence, the reigns of David and Solomon are to be seen as one, and we are to understand the Chronicler’s portrayal of Hezekiah as a return to the golden age of the united monarchy.

Part 3. Themes

The final section of the book presents eight essays, alphabetically organized by author, thematic studies that clearly emphasize the Chronicler’s role and importance as theologian.

Leslie Allen keys in on the importance of the Chronistic use of the phrase “the God of their/your/our/his fathers” to call each generation to pursue covenantal faithfulness and spiritual restoration. Allen traces the roots of the recurrent phrase in order to demonstrate the Chronicler’s purpose. He concludes that the Chronicler’s intertextual borrowing from various preexilic traditions serves the spiritual challenge presented to every generation: “Seeking Yahweh is the sum of spirituality in Chronicles” (124).

Christopher Begg’s essay, “The Ark in Chronicles,” reviews prior proposals dealing with “The Chronicler’s obvious interest in an object that was not a component of the temple of his time” (134). Begg focuses on the forty-six references to the ark in Chronicles, particularly in two primary contexts: David’s transfer of the ark (1 Chr 13–16) and Solomon’s placement of the ark in the temple (2 Chr 5–6). In his conclusion, Begg stresses the need to move beyond the “past-legitimating function” of the ark in Chronicles to consider questions regarding the Chronicler’s possible longing for a new or recovered ark for the Second Temple.

Roddy Braun explores the exilic understanding of Cyrus from the perspectives of Second and Third Isaiah, Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah, asking the question, “Is it possible that the author of Chronicles or that of Ezra viewed the Persian Cyrus in any sense as the fulfillment of the messianic hope? If Second Isaiah could do this, why not Chr.?” (146). After a concise treatment of messianic texts and messianism, Braun concludes that the Chronicler concentrates on the immediacy of reconstructing the temple rather than speculate on Cyrus or Zerubbabel as Yahweh’s anointed.

John Endres suggests that the Chronicler’s theology of worship is expressed via his retelling of Israel’s national history, which is done “through careful and inspired processes of interpretation … the proclamation of the Word to the community at worship” (166). Although the worship ceremonies and theology are variegated in Chronicles, Endres concludes that the Chronicler invites his readers to engage and learn
from the nation’s narrative past by fully participating in the joyful praise of Yahweh, who is gracious and compassionate, accessible through ritual actions and ritual words.

Isaac Kalimi distinguishes the Chronistic view of Jerusalem from other Jewish texts, earlier and later, to “evaluate properly the uniqueness of the Chronicler’s approach” (189). “Contrary to all the exilic and postexilic prophetic and post-biblical literature mentioned above, Jerusalem is represented in Chronicles essentially in realistic terms” (197). Moreover, Chronicles lacks any visionary or apocalyptic description of Yahweh’s chosen city. Indeed, the Chronicler views Jerusalem, the chosen city, as Yahweh’s only legitimate capital city, though it remains an earthly city described pragmatically rather than eschatologically or idealistically.

Brian Kelly reexamines the Chronistic theme of retribution alongside restoration. He questions the scholarly consensus that tends to regard the Chronicler’s doctrine of divine retribution as mechanical, rigid, and extreme. Kelly argues that in Chronicles “God’s response to repentance is not so much an issue of divine justice as of grace and his restorative will towards his guilty people” (210). In fact, Kelly insists that the Chronicler depicts God as personally active in Israel’s history; therefore divine action is hardly mechanical. It is rather, “always grounded in God’s personal decision and direct activity” (213). Consequently, Kelly argues that the Chronicler’s primary concern is “to highlight the offer of God’s prevenient and undeserved mercy to a sinful yet penitent people” (226).

William Schniedewind follows the development of Name theology from its origin in the political/religious nationalism of the seventh century B.C.E. across the exilic void of Yahweh’s homelessness to the abstract personification of Yahweh’s name and eventual return of the Name to Jerusalem in the rebuilding of the temple. “The name of God became a hypostasis of Yahweh himself, and thereby God was returned to his temple. For the postexilic writer of Chronicles it was assumed that God’s name—and thereby God himself—came to rest in the temple” (228).

In the final essay of the book, John Wright attends to the Chronicler’s representation of Yahweh’s presence, activity, and absence in the book of Chronicles. Wright counters a longstanding characterization that within postexilic Israel Torah and temple became sacred replacements for Yahweh’s historical presence. Moreover, “previous treatments of God in the book of Chronicles have tended to abstract stable doctrinal propositions” to describe divine activity and presence in somewhat predictable terms. Wright suggests, “God is a rather slippery character in the book of Chronicles. In some ways ever-present, in other ways God is usually absent within the narrative” (245). Thus, Wright’s theological analysis of Chronicles renders the traditional categories of transcendence and
immanence inadequate. Wright suggests that the Chronicler’s presentation of God destabilizes typically contented ways of understanding and portraying God.