CHAPTER ELEVEN

‘WE HAVE YHWH TO FIGHT OUR BATTLES’
WAR NARRATIVES IN THE BOOK OF CHRONICLES

At first sight, the Book of Chronicles appears to be a rather unattractive document. This is especially true in respect of its setting within the Christian Bible, where the Book of Chronicles is preceded by 1–2 Samuel and 1–2 Kings. Having read those latter writings, the Book of Chronicles seems to be nothing else than a mere repetition of them. However, if one takes some time to plunge into the Book of Chronicles, which was written between 400–300 BCE during the Persian Period, it has a tremendous appeal to its reader, even in such a way that one becomes fond of it and decides to write a commentary on this religious document.

In past decades, quite a number of studies on the Book of Chronicles have been published in which ‘war’ is explicitly dealt with. In 1973, Peter Welten devoted a chapter on ‘war reports’ (Kriegsberichte) in his revised ‘Habilitationsschrift’ of 1971. Since his analysis confined itself to 2 Chronicles 10–36, quite a lot of passages about war were not discussed at all. Ingeborg Gabriel who in her 1990 Vienna dissertation analyzes the concept of ‘peace’ in the Book of Chronicles, of course touches on the theme of war in it. However, since in 1 Chronicles 1–9 the notion ‘peace’ does not occur, these chapters have not been treated by her at all and as a consequence the notion ‘war’ is therefore kept out of sight here.

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1 This Chapter is a revised version of ‘War Narratives in the Book of Chronicles: A New Proposal in Respect of their Function’, Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies 59 (2003), 587–596.
2 For detailed information about the Persian Period, see e.g. L.L. Grabbe, Judaism from Cyrus to Hadrian, London 1994, 27–145.
3 P.C. Beentjes, 1 Kronieken (Verklaring van de Hebreeuwse Bijbel), Kampen 2002; id., 2 Kronieken (Verklaring van de Hebreeuwse Bijbel), Kampen 2006.
4 P. Welten, Geschichte und Geschichtsdarstellung in den Chronikbüchern (WMANT 42), Neukirchen-Vluyn 1973, 115–175.
In respect of her study, at least one further comment should be made. At the end of her doctoral thesis, Gabriel states that the war narratives in the First Book of Chronicles ‘have almost unchanged been adopted from 2 Samuel’. This statement, however, is not true, as can be shown by category C in Table 1 below.

In 1992, Andreas Ruffing published a revised edition of his doctoral thesis on wars in the Book of Chronicles waged by God. In this monograph he restricted himself, however, to three major narratives on war that all three belong to the Chronicler’s own material (Sondergut). And five years later, John J. Wright published an article in which, at last, the whole Book of Chronicles is in the centre of attention. However, since his contribution has focused upon the topic of the Chronicler as historian, now attention is paid to another aspect of war in the Book of Chronicles, which most certainly has not been dealt with earlier in that way.

**Some Data and Statistics**

Since there is a lot of conflicts in the Book of Chronicles, the Chronicler uses a wide range of terminology to describe such situations, e.g. ‘to strike’ (נגף q.), ‘to be beaten’ (נגף niph.), ‘to be subdued’ (כנע niph.), ‘to humble someone’ (כנע hiph.), ‘to march out’ (יצא q.), ‘army/warriors’ (צבא), ‘power/force’ (-force). The present chapter, however, will confine itself strictly to the topic of ‘war’ (מלחמה). As far as statistics are concerned, it should be noticed that the noun מלחמה (‘war’) is used quite often in the Book of Chronicles. Out of a total number of 318 occurrences in the Hebrew Bible, מלחמה is found no less than 63 times in 1–2 Chronicles, i.e.

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7 ‘Die Kriege in I Chr übernimmt die Chr fast unverändert aus der Vorlage in 2 Sam’; Gabriel, Friede, 192 n. 55.
9 His analysis relates to 2 Chr 13:2c–18; 14:7–14; 20:1–30.