

NOTES AND QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL OR GROUP STUDY OF I CHRONICLES

PART TWO

I CHRONICLES CHAPTER FOUR records several family groups descended from Judah. It is by no means comprehensive or consecutive presumably because its sources were returning Jews who had scraps of information about their ancestors. They would be encouraged to have the assurance that they really belonged to God's people. There were also some inspiring heroes who should be celebrated and copied. Jabez, (v.9) was exceptional in his faith in the Lord which caused him to expect blessing and protection from God as the former exiles would also need to be expecting. Caleb and his nephew Othniel, (v.13,15) would also be remembered for their confidence that the Lord would give them victory in the difficult time which followed the death of Joshua. (Judges 1) Several generations later in the same family Joab was another man of remarkable courage who became David's chief general. (II Sam.2:13) By contrast there were also potters and other tradesmen who served David in humble ways when he became king. (v.24) The chapter also mentions some of the tribe of Simeon who were neighbours south of Judah. Although belonging to the northern kingdom of Israel they allied themselves with Judah and were rewarded for doing so. God's blessing was based on faith not just ancestry.

I CHRONICLES CHAPTER FIVE briefly describes some of members of the 2 ½ tribes who were settled east of the River Jordan. Again their histories had useful lessons for the returning Jews. Reuben as the first born of Jacob should have had a privileged position which he forfeited because of his incestuous relationship with one of his stepmothers. (Gen.35:22; 49:4) Although Reuben and Gad had a rather insignificant territory as their inheritance, in the time of Joshua they cried out to God in tough times and were rewarded. (Josh.23) By contrast in later years these two tribes together with their immediate neighbours from the tribe of Manasseh rebelled against God by worshipping other gods and suffered the consequence in exile to Assyria. The Jews who would be hearing these stories were reminded how their exile to Babylon had been for the same reason. The only difference between Reuben, Gad and Manasseh on the one hand and Judah on the other was that the Jews turned back in repentance to God and so were forgiven and were now on their way back into enjoying the land God had promised all of them.

I CHRONICLES CHAPTER SIX is devoted to just one tribe, the Levites. As the priestly tribe they were not given one area of the Promised Land but were spread through the twelve tribes to be able to minister to all of them. They were given a city here and there with sufficient land around it to allow them to support themselves. The three sons of Levi were Gershon, Kohath and Merari whose descendants were later, (Num.3) given three areas of responsibility once the tabernacle had been built in the time of Moses. Gershom's descendants were to look after the tent itself including the veil which screened the Holy of Holies; the Kohathites cared for all the utensils and equipment in the tabernacle; the people of Merari had to maintain the framework on which the whole structure hung.

Moses, Aaron and Miriam were the children of Amram who belonged to the division of Kohath. Aaron was appointed high priest and future high priests were always from this family. The rest of the Levites were the support team who would serve in the daily operation of the tabernacle. When the northern kingdom of Israel because of their persistent worship of other gods were taken captive by Assyria in the 8th century BC, the Levites who were allotted to these tribes were taken with them and disappeared from Bible history. Sadly they had failed in their task of keeping Israel faithful to one God. The southern kingdom of Judah which also included the smaller tribe of Benjamin continued and with them were their Levites. Spiritually they were up and down until finally in one deep down they too went into captivity in Babylon between 605 and 586BC. When Judah were allowed to return to their own country in 536BC the Levites among them would have special responsibility to keep them spiritually on track. It was therefore very important for the returning Levites to know which branch of the family they belonged to and what part they therefore had to play in keeping the Jews faithful to God. It is for this reason that chapter six has such a full list of names so that returning Levites could work out where they fitted into the family of Levi and therefore to God's calling for them.

Most of the long list of names in this chapter are otherwise unknown to us but occasionally there is someone like Hilkiah the high priest, (II Kings 22) who played a key role behind the scenes. When Manasseh, one of the most evil kings Judah ever had, died his 8 year old son, Josiah, was left in charge. Remarkably Josiah was an ardent believer almost certainly under the care of Hilkiah who not only taught and protected him but personally made the thrilling discovery in the temple of the long neglected Law of God, brought it to the young king, read it to him and was then instructed to be sure that every Jew heard its message. For that one generation the Jews again became the people of God in their daily lives.

I CHRONICLES CHAPTER SEVEN by contrast reviews some of the generations of 6 tribes, Issachar, Benjamin, Naphtali, Manasseh, Ephraim and Asher from Jacob their ancestor down to the time of King David. Each time the final number is of their contribution to David's army. Apart from the original sons of Jacob, the only name known to us is of Joshua, the son of Nun. Presumably the purpose of this chapter was to remind the returning Jews of the part their ancestors had played in the great victory under God's direction in the time of David.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION AND STUDY ON CHAPTERS FOUR TO SEVEN

1. What was remarkable about the stories of Jabez and Caleb? How might the returning Jews have identified with them and therefore been encouraged by their example? How in the same way could the tradesmen recorded have lifted the expectations of ordinary people?(chap.4)
2. How might the story of the 2 ½ tribes who made such serious mistakes and yet were forgiven have reassured the returning Jews? When does the Christian message speak to a whole society in such a way that we should respond collectively?(chap.5)
3. Why was such attention given to the one tribe of Levi? Who are the priests today and what is their role?(I Pet.2:9) How do the different tasks given to the Levites form an indication of our responsibilities towards the whole church?(chap.6)
4. Would the returning Jews again choose to be part of God's exciting purpose when they returned from Babylon 500 years later? Would there again be exceptional men like Joshua who dared to believe God's promise when everything looked too hard?(Num.13) How do we choose to respond to the same questions?(chap.7)