

NOTES AND QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL OR GROUP STUDY OF I CHRONICLES

INTRODUCTION AND PART ONE

At first sight I and II Chronicles seem unimportant and not too exciting. Their stories have already been told in greater detail in the books of Samuel and Kings which spell out very frankly some of the more graphic accounts of the failure of the men of God who led Israel. Why does the writer of Chronicles leave out many of the stories which in the modern day would feature on the front of the popular newspapers?

There is no indication of who wrote the books of Chronicles although Ezra seems a likely candidate. The last two verses of II Chronicles, (II Chron.36:22,23) are also the first two verses of the book of Ezra.(Ezra 1:1,2) If so they were written when the people of Judah returned from captivity in Persia after the decree of King Cyrus in 538BC. Seventy years had passed from the first Jews being taken into captivity by Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon in 605BC before the return began under the leadership of Zerubbabel in 536BC. The returning Jews needed huge encouragement by hearing their history and God's dealing with them. They would benefit from hearing how God had blessed and led them from King David onwards when they and their leaders had been faithful. It would help them to know how again and again God had forgiven their failures when they had turned back to Him. They also needed to hear why the captivity had finally occurred. During their 70 years away from Judah they would largely have given up on any hope of returning but for the prophets like Ezekiel and Daniel who had encouraged them that God had not abandoned them and that He still had a plan. I and II Chronicles would have given substance to that glimmer of hope.

I Chronicles lists a huge number of names, mostly of people we have never heard of. What is the point of all this? Every name listed was special to God because everyone of His creation matters greatly to Him since He loves us so much.(Jn.3:16) It would also be very important to the returning Jews to know who they were. To understand themselves it would help to know who their ancestors were. Where do I fit into my family? Knowing our family history gives us a sense of identity until we discover a far greater identity as children of God.(Jn.1:12; Phil.3:20)

My suggestion as we start to study Chronicles is that as we read we keep asking the Lord "How would it have felt to read this if I was an exiled Jew returning home?" And at the same time to pose the question "How does this help me when I have drifted away from God and am now on my way back into His family and purpose?"

I CHRONICLES CHAPTER ONE is a list of the descendants of Adam down to Esau and Israel. It is a simple factual record that would lead the Jews to understand their part in the human race. It gives some detail of the family of Noah through Ham, Shem and Japheth. Ham's offspring had names recognisable as place names in North Africa. Japheth's descendants headed north into Europe and the east into Asia. Shem's family occupied the Middle East. Eber, from whom the name Hebrew comes, had 2 sons, Peleg and Joktan. There is an intriguing clue to history that in Peleg's day the earth was divided, presumably following the tower of Babel when the dispersion of Man worldwide began. Abraham's family are described reminding the Jews that some of their toughest enemies were also their distant cousins. The last part of the chapter lists in some detail the descendants of Esau, otherwise known as Edom. Most of the names are unknown to us but again there are men like Amalek who would be a huge challenge in the future.(Exod.17:8; I Sam.15:2) The Herods of the time of Jesus were Edomites who had managed to convince successive Roman emperors that they were the best people to rule the Jews on behalf of Rome.

I CHRONICLES CHAPTER TWO records all the sons of Israel and then focuses on Judah, the ancestor of the Jews. Several troublemakers are mentioned including Er and Onan. (Gen.38:6-10) Between them they nearly destroyed the tribe of Judah. Judah and his daughter in law Tamar produced the next generation after what could be considered a cheating relationship. Achar, otherwise known as Achan brought trouble on the whole Israelite nation by his greed.(Josh.7:1) The genealogy of the tribe of Judah included some lovely examples of God's forgiveness. Rahab, the harlot from Jericho, who trusted the God of Israel and hid the Israelite spies, married Salmon and together they were the parents of Boaz who in turn married Ruth, the widow from Moab.(Matt.1:5) They then became the grandparents of David the king who so often foreshadowed the Lord Jesus, known as the son of David. Another Jewish hero was Bezalel, the son of Uri, whose father was Hur.(Exod.31:2) Bezalel had a wide variety of practical talents which he trusted to God to make him the chief craftsman in the building of the tabernacle . Like most families, the descendants of Judah had both heroes who inspired and villains who were a warning. What would be so impressive to the Jews returning from captivity was that God had used all of them in His purpose, as He would now want to use the returning exiles whether they had failed or been faithful.

I CHRONICLES CHAPTER THREE focuses only on the descendants of David. Again the story begins badly with the sons of the king by the various wives he should never have had. Amnon raped his half sister, Tamar, and was murdered by her brother, Absalom, who in turn led a rebellion and died a violent death. Adonijah, another son attempted to become king as David was dying but he too was murdered. In the end it was Solomon, David's second son by Bathsheba, the former wife of his friend Uriah, who succeeded David. Solomon was brilliant, looking to God for wisdom to teach his people and lead them particularly in building a magnificent temple to house the ark of the covenant, the summary of God's plan, and the place to sacrifice to cover their frequent failures. Solomon had wonderful wisdom about many aspects of life including marriage, which in the end he himself ignored, taking him away from dependence on God. Not surprisingly his son, Rehoboam, did not take God seriously which led to the kingdom being divided into Israel in the north and Judah and Benjamin in the south. The following generations were a roller coaster with some like Asa, Jehoshaphat, Amaziah , Azariah, Jotham, Hezekiah and Josiah trusting God most of the time, and those in between refusing to do so. There was plenty of encouragement for the returning exiles to follow their heroes but also ample warning of the devastating consequences of rejecting the Lord.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION AND STUDY ON CHAPTERS ONE TO THREE

1. How would it have encouraged you as a returning Jew to know that you were related to one of God's chosen people? Why are both the faithful and the unfaithful ancestors recorded? (chap.1)
2. When the returning Jews were reminded of the life of Bezalel how might his story have inspired them for their own future roles in Jerusalem? How does the record of someone like Rahab and her descendants speak to those whose lives had previously been a disaster?(chap.2)
3. Why at times did outstanding believers sometimes later become disastrous failures? What warning and hope is there for us in these stories?(chap.3)