



First Chronicles - Chapter One

Summary of Chapter One

This first chapter provides the genealogical records from Adam to Jacob and also provides a record of the early kings of Edom.

I 1 Chronicles 1:1-9:44 - A Genealogical Presentation of the Tribes of Israel

The genealogies of Chapters 1-9 are intended to show the Chronicler's own generation, now existing as the small province of *Yehud*, i.e. Judah, in the Persian Empire, that they are still God's people Israel and retain their central place in God's purposes for humanity. The identity and legitimacy of this people are traced in a line beginning with Adam (and extending through the tribes of Israel in Chapters 2-8 down to the community of Judæan exiles restored from captivity in Babylon, recorded in 1 Chronicles 9:2-34. This community is depicted not as the sum total of the people but as the representative nucleus or focus to which 'all Israel' may join in God's work of restoration. The tribal genealogies have been carefully structured to show how the Chronicler conceived of Israel:

- The tribe of Judah (1 Chronicles 2:3-4:23).
- The tribe of Simeon (1 Chronicles 4:24-43).
- The Transjordanian tribes (1 Chronicles 5:1-26).
- The tribe of Levi (1 Chronicles 6:1-81).
- The northern tribes (1 Chronicles 7:1-40)
- The tribe of Benjamin (1 Chronicles 8:1-40).

The greatest amount of detail is devoted to Judah, Levi, and Benjamin. Judah and Benjamin bracket the lists, while Levi is placed at the centre. The significance of this arrangement is discussed in greater detail below; briefly, it indicates that Judah and Benjamin, the core of the old southern kingdom, along

with Simeon, whose territory was merged with Judah's, enclose or enfold Israel, while the Levites provide its spiritual heart.

This section also announces in advance some of the book's key themes: Israel's history of unfaithfulness (Hebrew *ma'al*), leading to exile (1 Chronicles 5:25-26 and 9:1); the persistence of the Davidic line after the exile as the bearer of God's promise to his people (1 Chronicles 3:17-24); and the central role of the Levites and the Aaronic priests in offering worship and making atonement for Israel (1 Chronicles 6:1-81).

The opening chapter, drawn almost wholly from Genesis, traces the descent of Israel (as Jacob is consistently known in the book) from Adam and depicts the place of his descendants among the nations. The line of divine election runs from Adam through ten generations to Noah, then through Shem in ten generations to Abraham and on to Israel. The author highlights this theme by presenting first the secondary lines of descent before dealing, last of all, with the figures who form the ancestral link between Adam and Israel. The descendants of Japheth and Ham (1 Chronicles 1:5-16) are listed before the Shemites, leading to Abraham (1 Chronicles 1:17-27). Next, the descendants of Abraham's concubines Hagar and Keturah are given (1 Chronicles 1:29-33) before Isaac (1 Chronicles 1:34); then Esau's line (1 Chronicles 1:35-54) before Israel's sons (1 Chronicles 2:1).

I.a 1 Chronicles 1:1-54 - Adam to Esau

This first genealogy takes the story from Adam, the first human, through Abraham and Isaac; then it focuses on Isaac's son Esau and the kings who descended from him.

I.a.i 1 Chronicles 1:1-27 - From Adam to Abraham

This first subsection provides details of the line of dependency from the beginning of time through to Abraham.

¹ Adam, Seth, Enosh; ² Kenan, Mahalalel, Jared; ³ Enoch, Methuselah, Lamech; ⁴ Noah, Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

1 Chronicles 1:1-4

This list was first given in Genesis Chapter 5. Israel's direct ancestral link with Adam means that Israel is the focus of God's purpose from creation. The line of Noah marks a fresh start for humanity after the flood.

Adam, Seth, Enosh. The opening verse of the Books of Chronicles indicates something of their focus. It is a known fact that Adam and Eve actually had three sons by name according to Genesis 4:1-2 and 4:25, plus many other unnamed sons and daughters: <<*The days of Adam after he became the father of Seth were eight hundred years; and he had other sons and daughters*>> (Genesis 5:4). Yet

in this first verse there is nothing of Cain or Abel; only of Seth. This indicates that the Chronicler was inspired by God to make a selective genealogy for a specific purpose.

The Books of 1 and 2 Chronicles were originally one book, and focus historically on King David and his dynasty after him. The actual history begins with the death of Saul, but the stage is set with these genealogical tables. The story continues until the return of the exiles from the Babylonian captivity, leading many to think that the books were written by Ezra or at least in his time and with his authority.

The importance of these genealogical lists for the returning exiles can be easily imagined. The message of the continuity of God's work through the generations was important for them, as well as helping them to affirm their own place in that flow of God's work through the ages. The principle design of the writer appears to have been this: to point out, from the public registers, which were still preserved, what had been the state of the different families previously to the captivity, that at their return they might enter and repossess their respective inheritances. He enters particularly into the functions, genealogies, families, and orders of the priests and Levites; and this was peculiarly necessary after the return from the captivity, to the end that the worship of God might be conducted in the same way as before, and then only by the proper legitimate persons.

It was not in fact until the 4th Century AD that Jerome, the famous Bible translator, first applied the term 'Chronicle' to these books. The mediating influence came from Luther, whose German title 'Die Chronika' passed into English as Bible translations proliferated during the Reformation period.

Noah, Shem, Ham, and Japheth. This father and his three sons - each survivors of the flood - became the basis for the nations in the post-flood world. The span from Adam to Noah and his sons is common to all humanity. This first chapter is a summary of the generations of Genesis, from Adam to Edom/Esau, shows that all the nations were God's creation and therefore part of his special purpose for Israel.

Introduction to 1 Chronicles 1:5-27

These verses are drawn from Genesis 10:1-29 and 11:10-32. Israel is located within the nations of the world, which are similarly God's creation and part of his purpose for Israel. The line of election is continued through Abraham, who is also recalled as the recipient of covenantal promises in 1 Chronicles 16:16 and 2 Chronicles 20:7.

⁵ The descendants of Japheth: Gomer, Magog, Madai, Javan, Tubal, Meshech, and Tiras. ⁶ The descendants of Gomer: Ashkenaz, Diphath,

and Togarmah. ⁷ The descendants of Javan: Elishah, Tarshish, Kittim, and Rodanim.

1 Chronicles 1:5-7

The descendants of Japheth. It is commonly supposed that the seven sons of Japheth founded the people of Europe and northern Asia:

- From Magog probably came the Russian peoples.
- From Gomer came the ancient Cimmerians of the Russian plains. Also from this son of Japheth came the Germanic peoples, from whom came most of the original peoples of Western Europe. These include the original French, Spanish and Celtic settlers.
- From Madai came the Medes and Persians of Iran. The peoples of India also came from this branch of Japheth's family.
- From Javan came Greek Ionia.
- From Tubal and Meshech came the inhabitants of the Turkish plateau.
- Tiras is not mentioned in Scripture other than in the Table of Nations (Genesis 10:2) and here. Josephus wrote that Tiras became ancestor of the Thirasiens or Thracians, a flame-haired people according to Xenophanes. Tiras or Tyras in antiquity was also the name of the Dniester river, and of a Greek colony situated near its mouth; the native inhabitants of the surrounding region Tyragetæ.
- Kittim and Rodanim are the islands of Cyprus and Rhodes respectively.

They are each linked by linguistic similarities that often seem invisible to the layman but are much more obvious to the linguist.

Magog, Tubal and Meshech are the nations referred to in eschatological prophecies: <<*The word of the Lord came to me: Mortal, set your face towards Gog, of the land of Magog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal. Prophecy against him and say: Thus says the Lord God: I am against you, O Gog, chief prince of Meshech and Tubal*>> (Ezekiel 38:1-3), and: <<*When the thousand years are ended, Satan will be released from his prison and will come out to deceive the nations at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, in order to gather them for battle; they are as numerous as the sands of the sea. They marched up over the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city. And fire came down from heaven and consumed them*>> (Revelation 20:7-9).

Ashkenaz. From this son of Gomer came the peoples who settled north of Judæa into what is called the Fertile Crescent. It is one of the kingdoms referred to in a prophecy of doom against Babylon: <<*Raise a standard in the land, blow the trumpet among the nations; prepare the nations for war against her, summon against her the kingdoms, Ararat, Minni, and Ashkenaz; appoint a marshal against her, bring up horses like bristling locusts*>> (Jeremiah 51:27).

From Togarmah came the Armenian race of people.

Tarshish is frequently referred to in Scripture and was accepted as a seafaring trading port or nation: <<*You destroyed them like ships of Tarshish shattered by an east wind*>> (Psalm 48:7 NIV), <<*The oracle concerning Tyre. Wail, O ships of Tarshish, for your fortress is destroyed. When they came in from Cyprus they learned of it*>> (Isaiah 23:1), <<*The ships of Tarshish travelled for you in your trade. So you were filled and heavily laden in the heart of the seas*>> (Ezekiel 27:25), <<*But Jonah set out to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish; so he paid his fare and went on board, to go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the Lord*>> (Jonah 1:3). Many people believe it to have been part of what is now Spain.

⁸ The descendants of Ham: Cush, Egypt, Put, and Canaan. ⁹ The descendants of Cush: Seba, Havilah, Sabta, Raama, and Sabteca. The descendants of Raamah: Sheba and Dedan. ¹⁰ Cush became the father of Nimrod; he was the first to be a mighty one on the earth.

¹¹ Egypt became the father of Ludim, Anamim, Lehabim, Naphtuhim, ¹² Pathrusim, Casluhim, and Caphtorim, from whom the Philistines come.

1 Chronicles 1:8-12

The descendants of Ham are the peoples who populated Africa and the Far East. In the Table of Nations in Genesis Chapter 10 they receive considerably more attention than those of Japheth and Shem. Among them figure many of Israel's enemies, such as the Egyptians, the Babylonians, the Philistines, and various Canaanite groups.

Apparently, the family of Cush divided into two branches early. Some founded Babylon (notably, Nimrod) and others founded Ethiopia.

Egypt is listed as *Mizraim* in the original Hebrew and that name became synonymous with the land of Egypt throughout the Hebrew Scriptures.

Put refers to Libya, the region of North Africa west of Egypt: <<*Cush was her strength; Egypt too, and that without limit; Put and the Libyans were her helpers*>> (Nahum 3:9 ESV).

Canaan refers to the peoples who originally settled the land today thought of as Israel and its surrounding regions.

Caphtorim, from whom the Philistines come. The Hamitic Philistines were 'sea peoples' before settling in Palestine, coming from the Casluhim, who were of

Egyptian origin but are related to the Minoan culture of Caphtor, i.e. Crete, and the southern coast of Asia Minor.

¹³ Canaan became the father of Sidon his firstborn, and Heth, ¹⁴ and the Jebusites, the Amorites, the Gergashites, ¹⁵ the Hivites, the Arkites, the Sinites, ¹⁶ the Arvadites, the Zemarites, and the Hamathites.

1 Chronicles 1:13-16

The family of Sidon, the firstborn of Canaan, went north and is related to the Hittites and Lebanese. Many commentators believe the Oriental peoples descended from the Sinites.

¹⁷ The descendants of Shem: Elam, Asshur, Arpachshad, Lud, Aram, Uz, Hul, Gether, and Meshech. ¹⁸ Arpachshad became the father of Shelah; and Shelah became the father of Eber. ¹⁹ To Eber were born two sons: the name of one was Peleg (for in his days the earth was divided), and the name of his brother Joktan. ²⁰ Joktan became the father of Almodad, Sheleph, Hazarmaveth, Jerah, ²¹ Hadoram, Uzal, Diklah, ²² Ebal, Abimael, Sheba, ²³ Ophir, Havilah, and Jobab; all these were the descendants of Joktan.

²⁴ Shem, Arpachshad, Shelah; ²⁵ Eber, Peleg, Reu; ²⁶ Serug, Nahor, Terah; ²⁷ Abram, that is, Abraham.

1 Chronicles 1:17-27

The descendants of Shem are the people with whom Israelites felt the most affinity, for Abraham was descended from Shem. Insofar as they can be identified, many of these are Arabian tribes or kingdoms.

From Shem came Elam, who was an ancestor to the Persian peoples; Asshur, who was the father of the Assyrians; Lud was father to the Lydians who lived for a time in Asia Minor; and Aram was father to the Aramæans, who are also known as the Syrians.

Arpachshad or Arphaxad was the ancestor to Abram and the Hebrews. Significantly, these included the nations from under which the people of Israel were largely exiled, i.e. the Persians. As the Chronicler includes lists this sweeping panorama of all the nations as a part of God's plan, it assured Israel that they were still part of this plan and so were the nations to whom they had been exiled.

A region in Arabia was named Uz after this son of Aram. Job came from the land of Uz (Job 1:1). Some think that Jobab is another name for Job, but their names are actually quite different in the Hebrew.

Shelah became the father of Eber. The name Eber forms the root of 'Hebrew'; but this patriarch was the ancestor not only of Abraham, but also of a number of other unsettled people, known in ancient history as Habiru or Apiru.

To Eber were born two sons: the name of one was Peleg (for in his days the earth was divided). This seems to refer to the dividing of the nations at the tower of Babel described in Genesis 11:1-9.

Sheba is generally thought to have been a wealthy trading nation in the region of modern Yemen and is best known for its queen who visited King Solomon: <<*When the queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon, she came to Jerusalem to test him with hard questions, having a very great retinue and camels bearing spices and very much gold and precious stones. When she came to Solomon, she discussed with him all that was on her mind*>> (2 Chronicles 9:1).

I.a.ii 1 Chronicles 1:28-54 - From Abraham to Jacob

This subsection includes the record of Abraham's descendants as far as the sons of Isaac. The descendants of Esau and the kings of Edom are recorded but Jacob's descendants appear in the next chapter. The details of Abraham's descendants are drawn from Genesis Chapter 25.

Verses 35-54 are drawn from Genesis Chapter 36. The descendants of Esau and the sons of Seir are considered together here, as both inhabited the neighbouring territory of Edom, and the latter would often have conflicting relations with Judah; refer to 2 Chronicles 20:10, 21:8, 25:5-13 and 28:17.

²⁸ The sons of Abraham: Isaac and Ishmael.

1 Chronicles 1:28

Abraham was originally called Abram and was the man that God called in Genesis 12:1-9 to come to land that he would eventually give to his people, the descendants of Abraham.

Isaac was the son of promise and the covenant, whose birth was announced in Genesis Chapters 17 and 18, and whose life is recorded in Genesis Chapters 21-27.

Ishmael was the son born of Hagar, blessed as a son of Abraham but not an heir to the promise or the covenant (Genesis Chapters 16 and 21).

²⁹ These are their genealogies: the firstborn of Ishmael, Nebaioth; and Kedar, Adbeel, Mibsam, ³⁰ Mishma, Dumah, Massa, Hadad, Tema, ³¹ Jetur, Naphish, and Kedemah. These are the sons of Ishmael.

1 Chronicles 1:29-31

The firstborn of Ishmael. God promised to make a great nation through Ishmael: <<*Come, lift up the boy and hold him fast with your hand, for I will make a great nation of him*>> (Genesis 21:18). These descendants were the beginning of the fulfilment of that promise, ultimately fulfilled in the Arabic peoples. The prophet Mohammed is believed by some to have descended from Ishmael. However, his family were Sabæans whereas Ishmaelites were a nomadic people who lived in the Sinai and Fertile Crescent deserts.

³² The sons of Keturah, Abraham's concubine: she bore Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak, and Shuah. The sons of Jokshan: Sheba and Dedan. ³³ The sons of Midian: Ephah, Epher, Hanoch, Abida, and Eldaah. All these were the descendants of Keturah.

1 Chronicles 1:32-33

The sons of Keturah, Abraham's concubine. This was the second wife of Abraham, taken after the death of Sarah; refer also to Genesis 25:1-4.

Jewish tradition holds that Keturah is Hagar, the Egyptian maidservant of Sarah, with whom Abraham had a son, Ishmael. While Rashi seems confident that he knows Keturah is Hagar, however, Rashbam, Radak and Ibn Ezra, following a simple reading of the text, state unequivocally that Keturah is not Hagar, but a different woman. Perhaps the Sages were bothered by Abraham's treatment of Hagar and hoped to make midrashic amends.

³⁴ Abraham became the father of Isaac. The sons of Isaac: Esau and Israel. ³⁵ The sons of Esau: Eliphaz, Reuel, Jeush, Jalam, and Korah. ³⁶ The sons of Eliphaz: Teman, Omar, Zephi, Gatam, Kenaz, Timna, and Amalek. ³⁷ The sons of Reuel: Nahath, Zerah, Shammah, and Mizzah.

³⁸ The sons of Seir: Lotan, Shobal, Zibeon, Anah, Dishon, Ezer, and Dishan. ³⁹ The sons of Lotan: Hori and Homam; and Lotan's sister was Timna. ⁴⁰ The sons of Shobal: Alian, Manahath, Ebal, Shephi, and Onam. The sons of Zibeon: Aiah and Anah. ⁴¹ The sons of Anah: Dishon. The sons of Dishon: Hamran, Eshban, Ithran, and Cheran. ⁴² The sons of Ezer: Bilhan, Zaavan, and Jaakan. The sons of Dishan: Uz and Aran.

1 Chronicles 1:34-42

The sons of Isaac: Esau and Israel. Israel is the name that God gave to Isaac's son Jacob: <<*Then the man said, 'You shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with humans, and have prevailed'*>> (Genesis 32:28). Of these two sons, only Israel was chosen as the son of the promise and the heir of the covenant of Abraham. Nevertheless, the sons of Esau still were important to God and had a place in his eternal plan.

Timna, and Amalek is literally ‘and Timna and Amalek.’ The names have been added here in an abbreviated note from Genesis 36:12, which here, as elsewhere in this chapter (e.g. v.4), omits kinship details.

The sons of Seir. Seir was the progenitor of the original inhabitants of Mount Seir, whom Esau supplanted.

Dishon in v.38 and v.41 is considered to be the same man in Jewish interpretation.

⁴³ These are the kings who reigned in the land of Edom before any king reigned over the Israelites: Bela son of Beor, whose city was called Dinhabah. ⁴⁴ When Bela died, Jobab son of Zerah of Bozrah succeeded him. ⁴⁵ When Jobab died, Husham of the land of the Temanites succeeded him. ⁴⁶ When Husham died, Hadad son of Bedad, who defeated Midian in the country of Moab, succeeded him; and the name of his city was Avith. ⁴⁷ When Hadad died, Samlah of Masrekah succeeded him. ⁴⁸ When Samlah died, Shaul of Rehoboth on the Euphrates succeeded him. ⁴⁹ When Shaul died, Baal-hanan son of Achbor succeeded him. ⁵⁰ When Baal-hanan died, Hadad succeeded him; the name of his city was Pai, and his wife’s name Mehetabel daughter of Matred, daughter of Me-zahab. ^{51a} And Hadad died.

^{51b} The clans of Edom were: clans Timna, Aliah, Jetheth, ⁵² Oholibamah, Elah, Pinon, ⁵³ Kenaz, Teman, Mibzar, ⁵⁴ Magdiel, and Iram; these are the clans of Edom.

1 Chronicles 1:43-54

These are the kings who reigned in the land of Edom before any king reigned over the Israelites. The Chronicler reminds the reader that God’s ways have their own timing and wisdom; a timing and wisdom which is sometimes apparent and sometimes not. This list of the kings of Edom shows that Esau was indeed a blessed man (Genesis 33:8-16 and Genesis Chapter 36), even though he was rejected as the inheritor of the covenant of Abraham.

Bela, Jobab, Zerah, Husham: The steady repetition of the names may seem to be an irrelevant blur to the modern reader, but they have an important place in God’s plan of the ages. If nothing else, they demonstrate the reality of prior generations and a connection to both them and God’s broader plan - just as a walk through a graveyard can speak the same things today.

The clans of Edom. The chapter closes without a mention of the name of God in the entire chapter. Yet, as the Chronicler mentions these men as quoting from the sacred history of Genesis, God is the unspoken main character in the entire sweeping drama.