



First Chronicles - Chapter Twelve

II 1 Chronicles 10:1-2 Chronicles 9:31 - The United Kingdom of David and Solomon (continues)

II.a 1 Chronicles 1 Chronicles 10:1-12:40 - David's Rise to Power Over Israel (continues/concludes)

Summary of Chapter Twelve

When King Saul became jealous of David he planned to kill him and so David had to flee from his presence and spent many years as an outcast wandering in the various wildernesses of Israel and even living in neighbouring lands. During this time there were many men who remained faithful to David, even though this made them outcasts from Israel too. These were not just Judæans but were men from several of the tribes of Israel.

Following the death of Saul, even more men joined him in Hebron. He was king of Judah at the time but these men too were from various tribes and they wanted to help him become king over all Israel. Finally, this came to pass and there was a great festival in Hebron to celebrate the accession of the new king.

II.a.v 1 Chronicles 12:1-22 - David's Followers in the Wilderness

Before his reign in Hebron, David took refuge from Saul in various strongholds in the Judæan desert, then in Ziklag for 16 months, under the protection of the Philistine king Achish; refer to 1 Samuel 27:6. This section provides a literary flashback to those days and places, which are grouped within the larger unit of 1 Chronicles 11:1-12:40 under the theme of growing support for David from every tribe of Israel. The catchword 'help' connects this section, denoting personal commitment to and partnership with David in his task. More specifically, help here signifies military support and originates in God's own support for David (v.18).

¹ The following are those who came to David at Ziklag, while he could not move about freely because of Saul son of Kish; they were among the mighty warriors who helped him in war. ² They were archers, and could shoot arrows and sling stones with either the right hand or the left; they were Benjaminites, Saul's kindred. ³ The chief was Ahiezer, then Joash, both sons of Shemaah of Gibeah; also Jeziel and Pelet sons of Azmaveth; Beracah, Jehu of Anathoth, ⁴ Ishmaiah of Gibeon, a warrior among the Thirty and a leader over the Thirty; Jeremiah, Jahaziel, Johanan, Jozabad of Gederah, ⁵ Eluzai, Jerimoth, Bealiah, Shemariah, Shephatiah the Haruphite; ⁶ Elkanah, Isshiah, Azarel, Joezer, and Jashobeam, the Korahites; ⁷ and Joelah and Zebadiah, sons of Jeroham of Gedor.

1 Chronicles 12:1-7

The following are those who came to David at Ziklag. These verses describe the growing support for David from Saul's own tribe of Benjamin, during his stay in Ziklag, just before Saul's death on Mount Gilboa. David's time in Ziklag is described in 1 Samuel Chapters 27 and 30. This was a time when David lived in the territory of the Philistines to escape the murderous pursuit of King Saul.

They were archers, and could shoot arrows and sling stones with either the right hand or the left; they were Benjaminites. During David's time in Ziklag, certain mighty warriors came and expressed their allegiance to David and his cause. This was especially remarkable because they were of Benjamin, Saul's tribe, and therefore had much to gain from Saul's continued reign. They chose David over Saul because they knew that God was with David.

Scripture makes particular note of Benjaminites who were left handed: <<*But when the Israelites cried out to the Lord, the Lord raised up for them a deliverer, Ehud son of Gera, the Benjaminite, a left-handed man. The Israelites sent tribute by him to King Eglon of Moab*>> (Judges 3:15), a skill which enabled Ehud to conceal a sword and kill the king, and: <<*On that day the Benjaminites mustered twenty-six thousand armed men from their towns, besides the inhabitants of Gibeah. Of all this force, there were seven hundred picked men who were left-handed; every one could sling a stone at a hair, and not miss*>> (Judges 20:15-16). It may have been that left-handedness was a feature of a significant number of Benjaminites whereas in a typical society only about ten percent are left-handed. What is of greater importance here is that they were considered ambidextrous, an excellent skill for a warrior to have, often giving them an advantage with regard to field of fire or fighting at close quarters.

Ishmaiah of Gibeon, a warrior among the Thirty and a leader over the Thirty. As mentioned in the previous chapter, David's army seemed to be organised into groups of thirty or the leaders of thirty. In the same way, a Roman centurion was supposedly a leader of one hundred soldiers. However, these numbers may be rounded up or down for practical purposes.

⁸ From the Gadites there went over to David at the stronghold in the wilderness mighty and experienced warriors, expert with shield and spear, whose faces were like the faces of lions, and who were swift as gazelles on the mountains: ⁹ Ezer the chief, Obadiah second, Eliab third, ¹⁰ Mishmannah fourth, Jeremiah fifth, ¹¹ Attai sixth, Eliel seventh, ¹² Johanan eighth, Elzabad ninth, ¹³ Jeremiah tenth, Machbannai eleventh. ¹⁴ These Gadites were officers of the army, the least equal to a hundred and the greatest to a thousand. ¹⁵ These are the men who crossed the Jordan in the first month, when it was overflowing all its banks, and put to flight all those in the valleys, to the east and to the west.

1 Chronicles 12:8-15

These verses detail the support that David received from the Gadites from Transjordan, during an earlier period, possibly at Adullam (1 Samuel 22:1), or Engedi, on the shore of the Dead Sea (1 Samuel 23:29).

Mighty and experienced warriors, expert with shield and spear. A frequent theme here is that the most skilful and heroic warriors in Israel are pledging allegiance to David, confirming that he is the Lord's anointed and that God's favour is on him. These Gadites were impressive soldiers:

- They were mighty and experienced warriors. They were men of courage and of a warrior spirit.
- Men trained for battle. They were men who patiently received the training and experience they needed to be mighty warriors.
- They could handle shield and spear. They were men who were skilled in the use of their essential weapons, both defensive and offensive, with skill gained from their training and in battle.
- Whose faces were like the faces of lions. They had the calm demeanour of men who were confident in God; they had the countenance of fierce warriors, yet they would show no fear during battle.
- They were as swift as gazelles on the mountains. They were mobile, active men, sure on their feet and with excellent balance, ready to fight wherever they were needed.

Charles Spurgeon wrote, “The grace of God can make us like them. The grace of God can make us brave as lions, so that, wherever we are, we can hold our own, or rather can hold our Lord’s truth, and never blush nor be ashamed to speak a good word for him at all times. He can make us quick and active too, so that we shall be like the roes upon the mountains.”

These are the men who crossed the Jordan in the first month, when it was overflowing all its banks. As an example of the might of these men, the Chronicler records an instance when these brave warriors crossed the Jordan at a dangerous time, just as the people of God did when they crossed over for the first time, although for them the waters ceased flowing and they crossed on dry ground: <<*Now the Jordan overflows all its banks throughout the time of harvest. So when those who bore the ark had come to the Jordan, and the feet of the priests bearing the ark were dipped in the edge of the water, the waters flowing from above stood still, rising up in a single heap far off at Adam, the city that is beside Zarethan, while those flowing towards the sea of the Arabah, the Dead Sea, were wholly cut off. Then the people crossed over opposite Jericho*>> (Joshua 3:15-16), and: <<*When the priests bearing the ark of the covenant of the Lord came up from the middle of the Jordan, and the soles of the priests’ feet touched dry ground, the waters of the Jordan returned to their place and overflowed all its banks, as before*>> (Joshua 4:18).

The first month is Nisan, i.e. March-April on the Gregorian calendar. During this time the river overflows caused by spring rains and melting snow from the Mount Hermon region and the Jordan’s headwaters.

Again Spurgeon comments, “These Gadites likewise furnish us with a noble example of strong devotion. When the eleven men determined to join David, they were living the other side of a deep river, which at that season of the year had overflowed its banks, so that it was extremely deep and broad. But they were not to be kept from joining David, when he wanted them, by the river. They swam through the river that they might come to David.”

¹⁶ Some Benjaminites and Judahites came to the stronghold to David.

¹⁷ David went out to meet them and said to them, ‘If you have come to me in friendship, to help me, then my heart will be bound to you; but if you have come to betray me to my adversaries, though my hands have done no wrong, then may the God of our ancestors see and give judgement.’ ¹⁸ Then the spirit came upon Amasai, chief of the Thirty, and he said,

‘We are yours, O David;

and with you, O son of Jesse!
Peace, peace to you,
and peace to the one who helps you!
For your God is the one who helps you.'

Then David received them, and made them officers of his troops.

1 Chronicles 12:16-18

David went out to meet them. This shows both David's large heart and his trust in God. He received these soldiers whom he had some reason to suspect. In his words to the sons of Benjamin, he appealed to God for wisdom and righteousness, 'If you have come to me in friendship, to help me, then my heart will be bound to you; but if you have come to betray me to my adversaries, though my hands have done no wrong, then may the God of our ancestors see and give judgement.'

We are yours, O David; and with you, O son of Jesse! These verses reflect the same period, when David's life was threatened by Saul, and the loyalty of those who come to him in his stronghold cannot be assumed. The prophecy by Amasai affirms and encourages loyalty to David, declaring that he enjoys God's support.

Peace does not imply absence of battle but victory and 'success' that attains a full and lasting peace and well-being.

The expression peace, the Hebrew word *shalom*, has a much richer connotation than the English word does, since it conveys, not merely the absence of conflict and turmoil, but also the notion of positive blessing, especially in terms of a right relationship with God: <<*The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace*>> (Numbers 6:24-26), <<*May the Lord give strength to his people! May the Lord bless his people with peace!*>> (Psalm 29:11), and: <<*The latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former, says the Lord of hosts. And in this place I will give peace, declares the Lord of hosts*>> (Haggai 2:9 ESV); and also, as a result, the idea that 'all is well' in one's life. This may be manifested most clearly amid persecution and tribulation.

In the same way Jesus offers peace to all who will turn to him: <<*Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid*>> (John 14:27). The peace that Jesus offers is the gift of calmness and confidence that comes from a union with God and faith in him and his purposes: <<*True instruction was in his mouth and nothing false was found on his lips. He walked with me in peace and uprightness, and turned many from sin*>> (Malachi 2:6 NIV), <<And

the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus>> (Philippians 4:7), <<And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful>> (Colossians 3:15), <<Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times in all ways. The Lord be with all of you>> (2 Thessalonians 3:16), and: <<Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ>> (Philemon 3).

The spirit came upon is the Chronicler's characteristic idiom for prophetic inspiration; refer to 2 Chronicles 15:1, 20:14 and 24:20. Literally, it says, 'The Spirit clothed Amasai.' It is also seen as a way to give inner strength beyond normal human capability as in the case of Gideon: <<*But the spirit of the Lord took possession of Gideon; and he sounded the trumpet, and the Abiezrites were called out to follow him*>> (Judges 6:34). David united the fractious tribes around his kingship, but that unity was shattered by his intemperate grandson Rehoboam. The northern tribes rejected Rehoboam's rule in words that ironically echoed Amasai's declaration of support: <<*What share do we have in David? We have no inheritance in the son of Jesse. Each of you to your tents, O Israel! Look now to your own house, O David*>> (2 Chronicles 10:16b). This OT phrase may have been in the mind of Jesus when he promised that his followers would be <<*clothed with power from on high*>> (Luke 24:49b). That is, they would receive the Holy Spirit to indwell them.

For your God is the one who helps you. Whatever the sons of Benjamin knew about David, they knew that God helped David. This made them want to follow him. However, they might have said, "Our God helps you as well as us!"

¹⁹ Some of the Manassites deserted to David when he came with the Philistines for the battle against Saul. (Yet he did not help them, for the rulers of the Philistines took counsel and sent him away, saying, 'He will desert to his master Saul at the cost of our heads.')

²⁰ As he went to Ziklag these Manassites deserted to him: Adnah, Jozabad, Jediahel, Michael, Jozabad, Elihu, and Zillethai, chiefs of the thousands in Manasseh.

²¹ They helped David against the band of raiders, for they were all warriors and commanders in the army.

1 Chronicles 12:19-21

They helped David against the band of raiders, for they were all warriors and commanders in the army. These Manassites went from Saul to David at Ziklag and were with him when he went after the Amalekites who had raided Ziklag in David's absence and taken away both spoil and the families; refer to 1 Samuel Chapter 30.

The rulers of the Philistines took counsel and sent him away. During his time in Ziklag, David was willing to fight with the Philistines against Saul and the army of Israel. The Philistine lords, fearing that David planned to desert to his master Saul, refused to allow David and his mighty men to fight in the battle as described in 1 Samuel Chapter 27. On the Philistines' relationship with David, refer to 1 Samuel Chapter 29.

²² Indeed from day to day people kept coming to David to help him, until there was a great army, like an army of God.

1 Chronicles 12:22

Indeed from day to day people kept coming to David to help him. This is a summarising comment on the whole chapter: from small beginnings: <<*So David set out and went over, he and the six hundred men who were with him, to King Achish son of Maach of Gath*>> (1 Samuel 27:2), a great army was progressively gathered to David, up to his anointing as king in Hebron.

Until there was a great army, like an army of God. The expression indicates that this was an extremely large camp. Under the hand of God and his servant David, these mighty men - who began as disaffected people with nowhere else to go in 1 Samuel 22:1-2 - developed into an amazing and formidable fighting force. David and his mighty men needed each other and were each nothing without the other. David did not have to seek these warriors: God was strengthening him by stirring up the hearts of these men to do what was right and join the anointed one of God.

II.a.vi 1 Chronicles 12:23-40 - David's Army at Hebron

These verses list military contingents from every tribe that defected to David in Hebron, corresponding to the elders of every tribe, who anointed him; refer to 1 Chronicles 11:3.

²³ These are the numbers of the divisions of the armed troops who came to David in Hebron to turn the kingdom of Saul over to him, according to the word of the Lord. ²⁴ The people of Judah bearing shield and spear numbered six thousand eight hundred armed troops. ²⁵ Of the Simeonites, mighty warriors, seven thousand one hundred. ²⁶ Of the Levites four thousand six hundred. ²⁷ Jehoiada, leader of the house of Aaron, and with him three thousand seven hundred. ²⁸ Zadok, a young warrior, and twenty-two commanders from his own ancestral house. ²⁹ Of the Benjaminites, the kindred of Saul, three thousand, of whom the majority had continued to keep their allegiance to the house of Saul. ³⁰ Of the Ephraimites, twenty thousand eight hundred, mighty warriors, notables in their ancestral houses. ³¹ Of the half-tribe of

Manasseh, eighteen thousand, who were expressly named to come and make David king.³² Of Issachar, those who had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do, two hundred chiefs, and all their kindred under their command.³³ Of Zebulun, fifty thousand seasoned troops, equipped for battle with all the weapons of war, to help David with singleness of purpose.³⁴ Of Naphtali, a thousand commanders, with whom there were thirty-seven thousand armed with shield and spear.³⁵ Of the Danites, twenty-eight thousand six hundred equipped for battle.³⁶ Of Asher, forty thousand seasoned troops ready for battle.³⁷ Of the Reubenites and Gadites and the half-tribe of Manasseh from beyond the Jordan, one hundred and twenty thousand armed with all the weapons of war.

1 Chronicles 12:23-37

These are the numbers of the divisions of the armed troops who came to David in Hebron. Men came from all thirteen tribes to David. These included the twelve tribes with land allocation and the Levites. The Transjordan tribes are listed as one with the half tribe of Manasseh from west of the Jordan listed as a single entity.

To turn the kingdom of Saul over to him refers back to 1 Chronicles 10:14 and summarises the overall theme of Chapters 10-12.

According to the word of the Lord. The tribes, like their elders, act in obedience to the prophetic word declaring David to be king. Some interpreters understand these to be the actual numbers of soldiers, since elsewhere the ‘tens’ and ‘hundreds’ and ‘thousands’ add up correctly; refer to Numbers 1:46. Others conclude that the total number of troops seems overly high for such a gathering. One possibility is that the word for thousand, Hebrew *'elep*, in a military census denotes a unit of undetermined size as commented on for Numbers 1:20-46. It is also possible that the word originally had the vowels of the word for ‘chief’ (Hebrew *'allup*). By this second possibility, the six thousand eight hundred in v.24 would reveal that Judah supplied eight hundred armed troops under six commanders. The contributions from Judah and Levi (vv.26-28) may seem surprisingly low compared to the northern and Transjordanian tribes (vv.30-37), but these numbers may indicate those who rallied to David at a later stage than others from their tribes since David had already been king in Hebron for several years by this time.

Of the Levites four thousand six hundred. Some think that the Levites were prohibited from going to war, but this is not specifically stated. Numbers 1:47-53 says that in that census they were not to be counted among the other tribes when the men ready for war were numbered, but it does not say that they could never

fight for Israel. Indeed, even the priests were willing to come as fighting men, including Jehoiada, leader of the house of Aaron. At least one priest nearly always went with the army to battle so that the king could enquire of the Lord through him. He would then use the Urim and Thummin kept in the breast piece of his tunic to determine the Lord's will.

Of Issachar, those who had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do, two hundred chiefs, and all their kindred under their command.

Some ancient traditions attribute this understanding of the times to skill in astrology, yet there is no foundation for this speculation. Instead, it should simply be taken that these descendants of Issachar were men who supported King Saul up until the time was right to give their support to David.

Of Zebulun, fifty thousand seasoned troops, equipped for battle with all the weapons of war, to help David with singleness of purpose.

The idea behind the word translated here as singleness of purpose or stout-hearted is that these were men of a single or whole heart in their devotion to King David. Its literal translation is 'without heart and [another] heart', i.e. without duplicity. This is reflected in several other translations:

- They were not of double heart (KJV)
- To help David with undivided loyalty (NIV)
- Helped David with an undivided heart (NASB)
- Completely loyal to David (NLT)

³⁸ All these, warriors arrayed in battle order, came to Hebron with full intent to make David king over all Israel; likewise all the rest of Israel were of a single mind to make David king. ³⁹ They were there with David for three days, eating and drinking, for their kindred had provided for them. ⁴⁰ And also their neighbours, from as far away as Issachar and Zebulun and Naphtali, came bringing food on donkeys, camels, mules, and oxen – abundant provisions of meal, cakes of figs, clusters of raisins, wine, oil, oxen, and sheep, for there was joy in Israel.

1 Chronicles 12:38-40

Warriors arrayed in battle order is about keeping formation. Because they were completely committed to their king, they stayed tight in their formations even during the heat of battle. Their single devotion to their king made them able to stay together as a single unit.

And also their neighbours, from as far away as Issachar and Zebulun and Naphtali. All Israel, even those from the far north of the country, travelled down to Hebron to celebrate the dawning of a new era for their country.

They came to Hebron with full intent to make David king over all Israel. This celebration came late, some seven years after the death of Saul, but it did come. The people of God together recognised David as their king. Significantly, David would not force his reign upon the people; he waited until they were willing to make David king over all Israel.

For there was joy in Israel. The three day festival celebrated the covenant made before the Lord between David and the elders of Israel; refer to 1 Chronicles 11:1-3. Religious celebrations in Chronicles are regularly characterised by joy. Under David's leadership, God had given the nation peace, unity, prosperity, and joy. He also gave them the king they so desired: <<***appoint for us, then, a king to govern us, like other nations***>> (1 Samuel 8:5b), one that was worthy of caring for the people of God.

The paragraph as a whole, however, shows that the people of God are the real heroes of the chapter. Those Israelites exemplify the principle that when God's people become committed to one another in obedient service to God's chosen King, they find both unity and joy.