



First Chronicles - Chapter Five

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

Summary of Chapter Five

The Transjordanian tribe of Reuben (vv.1-10), the tribe of Gad (vv.11-17), and half-tribe of Manasseh (vv.23-26) are considered next, although by the Chronicler's time these tribes had largely lost their own identities as a consequence of the Assyrian invasions in the 8th Century BC. Nevertheless, the Chronicler still included within his conception of 'all Israel' whatever remnants of the northern tribes still existed.

I.f 1 Chronicles 5:1-26 - The Transjordanian tribes

Refer to the chapter summary above.

I.f.i 1 Chronicles 5:1-10 - Descendants of Reuben

The first of the two and a half tribes to have settled east of the River Jordan is now given prominence. Reuben was Jacob's firstborn but he fell from grace when he went into his father's concubine: <<***Reuben, you are my firstborn, my might and the first fruits of my vigour, excelling in rank and excelling in power. Unstable as water, you shall no longer excel because you went up on to your father's bed; then you defiled it – you went up on to my couch!***>> (Genesis 49:3-4).

¹ The sons of Reuben the firstborn of Israel. (He was the firstborn, but because he defiled his father's bed his birthright was given to the sons of Joseph son of Israel, so that he is not enrolled in the genealogy according to the birthright; ² though Judah became prominent among

his brothers and a ruler came from him, yet the birthright belonged to Joseph.)

1 Chronicles 5:1-2

The sons of Reuben the firstborn of Israel. (He was the firstborn, but because he defiled his father's bed his birthright was given to the sons of Joseph son of Israel). This answers the question, "If Reuben was the firstborn son, why is he not listed first?" It was because of the sin described in this verse, which disqualified Reuben from being first among the sons of Israel. On account of Reuben's grave sin against his father, he forfeited his birthright as Israel/Jacob's firstborn to Joseph's sons Ephraim and Manasseh (Genesis 35:22), while leadership passed to Judah, from whose tribe David (a ruler) arose. Yet the Chronicler expresses a receptive openness to the non-Judahite Israelites by stressing that the birthright belonged to Joseph, whose descendants formed the core of the former northern kingdom.

In summary, the double portion of inheritance, which normally is the right of the firstborn son, was given to Joseph over Reuben, and his descendants were split into two independent tribes, Ephraim and Manasseh. The privilege of royalty, however, which should have gone to the firstborn, was not conferred on Joseph. It was stripped from Reuben and given to Judah.

³ The sons of Reuben, the firstborn of Israel: Hanoch, Pallu, Hezron, and Carmi. ⁴ The sons of Joel: Shemaiah his son, Gog his son, Shimei his son, ⁵ Micah his son, Reaiah his son, Baal his son, ⁶ Beerah his son, whom King Tilgath-pilneser of Assyria carried away into exile; he was a chieftain of the Reubenites.

1 Chronicles 5:3-6

Joel was the son of Camri and then the list provides generation after generation, i.e. Shemaiah was Joel's son, Gog was Shemiah's son, etc.

This is a fragmentary genealogy of Reuben's line, extending down to their exile by the Assyrian king Tilgath-pilneser III, in his conquest of Gilead, i.e. Transjordanian Israel, in 733 BC. Refer also to 2 Chronicles 28:19-21.

⁷ And his kindred by their families, when the genealogy of their generations was reckoned: the chief, Jeiel, and Zechariah, ⁸ and Bela son of Azaz, son of Shema, son of Joel, who lived in Aroer, as far as Nebo and Baal-meon. ⁹ He also lived to the east as far as the beginning of the desert this side of the Euphrates, because their cattle had multiplied in the land of Gilead. ¹⁰ And in the days of Saul they made

war on the Hagarites, who fell by their hand; and they lived in their tents throughout all the region east of Gilead.

1 Chronicles 5:7-10

When the genealogy of their generations was reckoned was in the days of Jeroboam (v.17).

These verses recount an earlier expansion of the Reubenites into Gilead, a land later recaptured by the Moabites in the 9th Century BC.

And in the days of Saul they made war on the Hagarites. The Hagarites were linked with the Moabites: <<*They conspire with one accord; against you they make a covenant – the tents of Edom and the Ishmaelites, Moab and the Hagarites, Gebal and Ammon and Amalek, Philistia with the inhabitants of Tyre*>> (Psalm 83:5-7), and were understood to be descendants of Hagar; refer to Genesis Chapter 16 for the account of Abram and Hagar.

The Hagarites were tribes of Nomade, or Scenite, Arabs; people who lived in tents, without any fixed dwellings, and whose property consisted in cattle. The descendants of Reuben extirpated these Hagarites, seized on their property and their tents, and dwelt in their place.

I.f.ii 1 Chronicles 5:11-22 - Descendants of Gad

Gad also requested a land allocation east of the Jordan. They were brave warriors and defended their land until the time of the Assyrian exile.

¹¹ The sons of Gad lived beside them in the land of Bashan as far as Salecah: ¹² Joel the chief, Shapham the second, Janai, and Shaphat in Bashan. ¹³ And their kindred according to their clans: Michael, Meshullam, Sheba, Jorai, Jacan, Zia, and Eber, seven. ¹⁴ These were the sons of Abihail son of Huri, son of Jaroah, son of Gilead, son of Michael, son of Jeshishai, son of Jahdo, son of Buz; ¹⁵ Ahi son of Abdiel, son of Guni, was chief in their clan; ¹⁶ and they lived in Gilead, in Bashan and in its towns, and in all the pasture lands of Sharon to their limits. ¹⁷ All of these were enrolled by genealogies in the days of King Jotham of Judah, and in the days of King Jeroboam of Israel.

1 Chronicles 5:11-17

The sons of Gad lived beside them in the land of Bashan. As this follows the account of Reuben then that is the accepted meaning of them. The Chronicler's information about the descendants of Gad in Bashan, which was roughly to the northeast of the Sea of Galilee, is taken from records, possibly a military census

(v.18), dating from the 8th Century BC reigns of [King Jotham of Judah](#) and [King Jeroboam of Israel](#). This is King Jeroboam II.

[They lived in Gilead, in Bashan and in its towns](#). The precise boundaries and dwellings of Reuben and Gad seem to be indistinct, with some overlap in Bashan: <<*Bezer in the wilderness on the tableland belonging to the Reubenites, Ramoth in Gilead belonging to the Gadites, and Golan in Bashan belonging to the Manassites*>> (Deuteronomy 4:43).

¹⁸ The Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh had valiant warriors, who carried shield and sword, and drew the bow, expert in war, forty-four thousand seven hundred and sixty, ready for service. ¹⁹ They made war on the Hagarites, Jetur, Naphish, and Nodab; ²⁰ and when they received help against them, the Hagarites and all who were with them were given into their hands, for they cried to God in the battle, and he granted their entreaty because they trusted in him. ²¹ They captured their livestock: fifty thousand of their camels, two hundred and fifty thousand sheep, two thousand donkeys, and one hundred thousand captives. ²² Many fell slain, because the war was of God. And they lived in their territory until the exile.

[1 Chronicles 5:18-22](#)

[For they cried to God](#). The Chronicler has reworked a military census and battle report concerning the two and a half tribes to express one of his characteristic theological ideas: that God answers his people and grants them victory when they cry out to him in trusting prayer; refer to 2 Chronicles 13:13-16, 14:9-15, 20:5-12 and 20:22-23.

[They received help against them](#) may be, 'they were helped to prevail over them,' an allusion to divine aid in battle. For examples of help as a theological concept, refer to 1 Chronicles 12:18, and 2 Chronicles 25:8 and 32:8. However, they also received the actual help from other tribes who came to their aid because God was with them too.

[One hundred thousand captives. Many fell slain. Because the war was of God](#). This describes the unique wars of judgement God called Israel to bring against the Canaanites when they came into the Promised Land. Refer also to 2 Chronicles 20:15 and 32:8 for the idea that God fights for his people.

This was a war of extermination as to the political state of the people, which nothing could justify but a special direction of God; and this he could never give against any, unless the cup of their iniquity had been full. The Hagarites were full of idolatry.

And they lived in their territory until the exile. The Gadites, along with their two neighbouring tribes, were among the first to be taken by the Assyrians ahead of the remaining tribes of the northern kingdom of Israel.

I.f.iii 1 Chronicles 5:23-26 - The Half-Tribe of Manasseh

The tribe of Manasseh segregated on coming into the Promised Land with half settling in the east and half in the west, with the River Jordan between them: *<<Now to one half of the tribe of Manasseh Moses had given a possession in Bashan; but to the other half Joshua had given a possession beside their fellow-Israelites in the land west of the Jordan. And when Joshua sent them away to their tents and blessed them>>* (Joshua 22:7). This is the account of the half tribe that remained in Transjordan. They too had a reputation for bravery in battle.

²³ The members of the half-tribe of Manasseh lived in the land; they were very numerous from Bashan to Baal-hermon, Senir, and Mount Hermon. ²⁴ These were the heads of their clans: Ephraim, Ishi, Eliel, Azriel, Jeremiah, Hodaviah, and Jahdiel, mighty warriors, famous men, heads of their clans.

1 Chronicles 5:23-24

The half-tribe of Manasseh lived east of the Jordan between the boundary of Gad's territory (Bashan) and Mount Hermon in Lebanon. These details are probably drawn from old military records. Their large numbers and their extensive lands indicate divine blessing.

These were the heads of their clans, mighty warriors, famous men. These original settlers of the eastern tribe of Manasseh were godly and bold men. Their desire to settle east of the Jordan River did not reflect an ungodly desire on their part.

²⁵ But they transgressed against the God of their ancestors, and prostituted themselves to the gods of the peoples of the land, whom God had destroyed before them. ²⁶ So the God of Israel stirred up the spirit of King Pul of Assyria, the spirit of King Tilgath-pilneser of Assyria, and he carried them away, namely, the Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh, and brought them to Halah, Habor, Hara, and the river Gozan, to this day.

1 Chronicles 5:25-26

But they transgressed against the God of their ancestors, and prostituted themselves to the gods of the peoples of the land. Despite the good start for the

eastern tribe of Manasseh, this is how they ended up. Their distance from the people of Israel in general and the spiritual life of the nation in particular seemed to weaken their devotion to God and strengthen their attraction to the gods of the peoples of the land.

The half-tribe of Manasseh was defeated and exiled, along with the Reubenites and the Gadites, into Assyrian lands by Tiglath-pileser, who was known as Pulu in the Babylonian Chronicle; refer to the comment made on 2 Kings 15:16-22. However, this may have looked from the perspective of worldly politics, the Chronicler attributes the defeat and exile to God's initiative in human affairs: the God of Israel stirred up the spirit of King Pul; refer also to 2 Chronicles 21:16 and 36:22. The writer's brief account is based on 2 Kings 17:7-23, along with particular details from 2 Kings 15:29, 17:6 and 18:11, to which he has added his own characteristic emphasis, that because these idolatrous Israelites transgressed (Hebrew *ma'al*), they were punished by suffering foreign invasion and exile. Exactly the same fate will befall Judah for the same reasons; refer to 1 Chronicles 9:1 and 2 Chronicles 36:14-20. Just as vv.20-22 portray the result of faithfulness to God, vv.25-26 depict the consequences of the opposite attitude. This basic contrast will be reflected throughout the narrative. The fate of these Transjordanian tribes is representative of the other northern tribes' fate as well. The Chronicler does not, however, describe their invasion and deportation by the Assyrians, but only alludes to these events in 2 Chronicles 30:6-7.