



First Chronicles - Chapter Six

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

Summary of Chapter Six

This chapter is split into three sections: the descendants of Levi, who would be chosen to serve in the temple; the organisation by David of the Levites for tabernacle and later temple worship duty and a list of the Aaronic priesthood; and the cities that were allocated for the Levites to live in as they received no land allocation along with the other tribes.

I.g 1 Chronicles 6:1-81 - The Tribe of Levi

Refer to the chapter summary above.

I.g.i 1 Chronicles 6:1-30 - Descendants of Levi

The Chronicler now focuses on the descendants of Levi who would be the tribe destined to care for the spiritual welfare of all Israel. The significance of Levi is shown both by the amount of space devoted to this tribe and by its central position within this section of the book. Just as Judah in 1 Chronicles 2:3-4:23 heads the genealogies of Israel because of the leadership provided by the Davidic monarchy, and Benjamin (1 Chronicles 8:1-40) concludes them because of its close association with the pre-exilic kingdom of Judah and the restoration community, Levi is placed in the literary and spiritual centre of the Chronicler's ideal conception of Israel.

The Chronicler will show that the Davidic monarchy and the Jerusalem temple, which is served in every respect by the Levites, together constitute the institutional foundations of Israel's existence, and in fact have a mutually supportive relationship. Primacy among the Levites belongs to the Aaronic high priests (vv.1-15), who offered sacrifices of atonement for a guilty nation (v.49) – one of the principal themes of the book; refer also to 2 Chronicles 7:12-14 and

29:24. Other Levites were charged with the ministry of worship in Gibeon and Jerusalem (vv.31-48), another matter to which the Chronicler will frequently draw attention; refer to 1 Chronicles 16:7, 16:37 and 23:1-27:34; and 2 Chronicles 29:27-28. At the same time, the Levites, who possessed no tribal territory themselves, are distributed throughout the cities of Israel (vv.54-81).

The ordering of verses in the OT is significantly different from the Tanach.

¹ The sons of Levi: Gershom, Kohath, and Merari. ² The sons of Kohath: Amram, Izhar, Hebron, and Uzziel. ³ The children of Amram: Aaron, Moses, and Miriam. The sons of Aaron: Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar. ⁴ Eleazar became the father of Phinehas, Phinehas of Abishua, ⁵ Abishua of Bukki, Bukki of Uzzi, ⁶ Uzzi of Zerahiah, Zerahiah of Meraioth, ⁷ Meraioth of Amariah, Amariah of Ahitub, ⁸ Ahitub of Zadok, Zadok of Ahimaaz, ⁹ Ahimaaz of Azariah, Azariah of Johanan, ¹⁰ and Johanan of Azariah (it was he who served as priest in the house that Solomon built in Jerusalem). ¹¹ Azariah became the father of Amariah, Amariah of Ahitub, ¹² Ahitub of Zadok, Zadok of Shallum, ¹³ Shallum of Hilkiah, Hilkiah of Azariah, ¹⁴ Azariah of Seraiah, Seraiah of Jehozadak; ¹⁵ and Jehozadak went into exile when the Lord sent Judah and Jerusalem into exile by the hand of Nebuchadnezzar.

1 Chronicles 6:1-15

The sons of Levi. This chapter describes the descendants of Levi and of Aaron. The entire tribe of Levi had a special place in Israel, given over to the service of God generally. Within the tribe of Levi was a special priestly family descended from Aaron. All priests were therefore Levites, but not all Levites were priests.

The prominence given here to Levi and the detail provided lends support to the understanding that Ezra was the Chronicler for he was a priest and this would have been his own tribal heritage.

As previously seen, Simeon and Levi were both cursed to be scattered because of their massacre of the men of Shechem; refer to Genesis 34:24-30 and Jacob's pronouncement in Genesis 49:5-7. God did in fact divide both the tribes of Simeon and Levi and scatter them among Israel. Yet the way it happened for each tribe was different. The tribe of Simeon, because of their lack of faithfulness, was effectively dissolved as a tribe, and the tribe of Simeon was absorbed into the tribal area of Judah. The tribe of Levi was also scattered, but because of the faithfulness of this tribe during the rebellion of the golden calf recorded in Exodus 32:26-28, the tribe was scattered as a

blessing throughout the whole nation of Israel. Both were scattered, but one as a blessing and the other as curse.

The children of Amram: Aaron, Moses, and Miriam. These three famous and iconic leaders were all leaders but only Aaron was to become a priest.

The sons of Aaron: Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar. The four sons of Aaron all became priests but Nadab and Abihu disobeyed the Lord and were punished accordingly: *<<Now Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu, each took his censer, put fire in it, and laid incense on it; and they offered unholy fire before the Lord, such as he had not commanded them. And fire came out from the presence of the Lord and consumed them, and they died before the Lord>>* (Leviticus 10:1-2). In v.50 they are omitted from the list of Aaron's sons as priests.

Drawing from Exodus 6:16-25 for vv.1-4a, this genealogy focuses on the line of Eleazar descended through Kohath from Levi, as the origin of the high-priestly line down to the exiled Jehozadak.

Eleazar became the father of Phinehas. Phinehas is particularly well known for his faithfulness to God and his abhorrence to the sin of others. His intervention on one occasion stopped a plague that had come upon the people for their sin: *<<Just then one of the Israelites came and brought a Midianite woman into his family, in the sight of Moses and in the sight of the whole congregation of the Israelites, while they were weeping at the entrance of the tent of meeting. When Phinehas son of Eleazar, son of Aaron the priest, saw it, he got up and left the congregation. Taking a spear in his hand, he went after the Israelite man into the tent, and pierced the two of them, the Israelite and the woman, through the belly. So the plague was stopped among the people of Israel>>* (Numbers 25:6-8).

The list of high priests is incomplete, omitting several mentioned in other parts of this book, e.g. Jehoiada, 2 Chronicles 22:11; two other Azariahs, 2 Chronicles 26:20 and 31:10, and elsewhere in the OT: Eli and his descendants, 1 Samuel 14:3; and Uriah, 2 Kings 16:10.

Johanan of Azariah (it was he who served as priest in the house that Solomon built in Jerusalem). The text here seems to indicate that it was only Johanan who served but elsewhere it is recorded that Azariah also served in this role: *<<and these were his high officials: Azariah son of Zadok was the priest>>* (1 Kings 4:2). It is specifically referred to here as Solomon's temple to distinguish it from the second temple, rebuilt at the time the Chronicler wrote down his account.

Jehozadak went into exile when the Lord sent Judah and Jerusalem into exile by the hand of Nebuchadnezzar. According to pattern, the inspired historian saw the hand of God even in the great tragedy that still afflicted Judah at the time of

writing Chronicles. It was not the Babylonian Empire that carried Judah and Jerusalem into captivity, but it was the Lord.

The concluding note on the deportation of Jehozadak is a sober reminder that sin and its consequences touched even the most sacred person among the people: <<All the leading priests and the people also were exceedingly unfaithful, following all the abominations of the nations; and they polluted the house of the Lord that he had consecrated in Jerusalem>> (2 Chronicles 36:14). Nevertheless, Jehozadak's line was preserved into the postexilic period (refer to Ezra 5:2, where he is called Jozadak), just as David's line was in 1 Chronicles 3:17-24, as indications of God's continuing commitment to his people. One of the insistent themes of Chronicles is that God's grace is not nullified by human disobedience, but that rather God creates fresh opportunities for each generation to trust and obey.

¹⁶ The sons of Levi: Gershom, Kohath, and Merari. ¹⁷ These are the names of the sons of Gershom: Libni and Shimei. ¹⁸ The sons of Kohath: Amram, Izhar, Hebron, and Uzziel. ¹⁹ The sons of Merari: Mahli and Mushi. These are the clans of the Levites according to their ancestry. ²⁰ Of Gershom: Libni his son, Jahath his son, Zimmah his son, ²¹ Joah his son, Iddo his son, Zerah his son, Jeatherai his son. ²² The sons of Kohath: Amminadab his son, Korah his son, Assir his son, ²³ Elkanah his son, Ebiasaph his son, Assir his son, ²⁴ Tahath his son, Uriel his son, Uziah his son, and Shaul his son. ²⁵ The sons of Elkanah: Amasai and Ahimoth, ²⁶ Elkanah his son, Zophai his son, Nahath his son, ²⁷ Eliab his son, Jeroham his son, Elkanah his son. ²⁸ The sons of Samuel: Joel his firstborn, the second Abijah. ²⁹ The sons of Merari: Mahli, Libni his son, Shimei his son, Uzzah his son, ³⁰ Shimea his son, Haggiah his son, and Asaiah his son.

1 Chronicles 6:16-30

This section details the three main divisions or clans of the Levites, descended from Gershom (the Chronicler's usual spelling for Gershon), Kohath, and Merari. Verses 16-19a are based on Numbers 3:17-20. Seven generations are given for the descendants of Gershom and Merari, probably taking them down to the time of David, who reorganised the duties of the Levites.

Asaiah and Uriel were two of the leading Levites to bring the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem, refer to 1 Chronicles 15:4-10.

The sons of Kohath. The Kohathite line is a little more difficult to follow. Amminadab may be an alternative name for Izhar or Amram (v.2, v.18 and v.38).

Verses 22-27 present the vertical line of descent from Korah, also giving seven generations, from Kohath through Assir to Shaul. Combined with this are horizontal lines of the family tree: Elkanah and Ebiasaph (v.23) are Assir's brothers.

The sons of Samuel. The genealogy of the prophet Samuel identifies him as a Kohathite. First Samuel 1:1 states that his father Elkanah was from an Ephraimite family, but this may indicate the locality in which they lived as part of a Kohathite clan rather than their tribal identity; refer to Joshua 21:20-21. A clear genealogical link with the Kohathite singer Heman is established in vv.33-38, which is basically the same as vv.22-28, but with the names arranged in a single vertical line.

I.g.ii 1 Chronicles 6:31-53 - Musicians Appointed by David

Although the temple would not be built until Solomon was king, it was David, with his love of worship of the Lord, who organised those who would serve as worship leaders once the temple was completed. As will be seen later in Chronicles, this organisation was originally made for those who would minister before the ark and in the Tabernacle in the time of David. The descendants of Aaron were the only Levites designated as priests who could make offerings on the altar and they are listed at the end of the section.

³¹ These are the men whom David put in charge of the service of song in the house of the Lord, after the ark came to rest there. ³² They ministered with song before the tabernacle of the tent of meeting, until Solomon had built the house of the Lord in Jerusalem; and they performed their service in due order. ³³ These are the men who served; and their sons were: Of the Kohathites: Heman, the singer, son of Joel, son of Samuel, ³⁴ son of Elkanah, son of Jeroham, son of Eliel, son of Toah, ³⁵ son of Zuph, son of Elkanah, son of Mahath, son of Amasai, ³⁶ son of Elkanah, son of Joel, son of Azariah, son of Zephaniah, ³⁷ son of Tahath, son of Assir, son of Ebiasaph, son of Korah, ³⁸ son of Izhar, son of Kohath, son of Levi, son of Israel; ³⁹ and his brother Asaph, who stood on his right, namely, Asaph son of Berechiah, son of Shimea, ⁴⁰ son of Michael, son of Baaseiah, son of Malchijah, ⁴¹ son of Ethni, son of Zerah, son of Adaiah, ⁴² son of Ethan, son of Zimmah, son of Shimei, ⁴³ son of Jahath, son of Gershon, son of Levi. ⁴⁴ On the left were their kindred the sons of Merari: Ethan son of Kishi, son of Abdi, son of Malluch, ⁴⁵ son of Hashabiah, son of Amaziah, son of Hilkiah, ⁴⁶ son of Amzi, son of Bani, son of Shemer, ⁴⁷ son of Mahli, son of Mushi, son of

Merari, son of Levi; ⁴⁸ and their kindred the Levites were appointed for all the service of the tabernacle of the house of God.

1 Chronicles 6:31-48

Genealogical details are provided of the Levites whom David put in charge of the service of song in the house of the Lord before the ark in Jerusalem and the tabernacle in Gibeon, which is explained in detail in 1 Chronicles 16:4-6 and 16:41-42. Their leaders were appointed from each of the Levitical clans: Heman, from the Kohathites (vv.33-38); Asaph, from the Gershonites (vv.39-43); and Ethan, from the Merarites (vv.44-47). Each line is traced back vertically to Levi.

They ministered with song before the tabernacle of the tent of meeting. Their ministry was music. It was sacred service before the Lord, worthy of their dedication and hard work.

The dramatic entry of the Ark of the Covenant into Jerusalem is described in both 2 Samuel Chapter 6 and 1 Chronicles Chapters 15-16. The fact that David appointed these men over the service of song shows that the musical worship of God is important, it is worthy of attention, and should be organised. In fact, it is specifically said they performed their service in due order.

It could perhaps be said that the artistic temperament resists organisation, and it is certainly possible to be too ordered and too rigid, refusing to allow a proper flexibility in the Holy Spirit. Nevertheless, organisation and order remain part of a good music ministry.

Heman, the singer. This man is mentioned several times in connection with temple worship in the days of David and Solomon; refer to 1 Chronicles 15:17-19, 16:41-42 and 25:1-7, and 2 Chronicles 5:12-13. He was an important part of the ceremonies connected with bringing the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem and the dedication of the temple.

Psalm 88 is attributed to Heman: A Song. A Psalm of the Korahites. To the leader: according to Mahalath Leannoth. A Maskil of Heman the Ezrahite. It reveals a man well acquainted with sorrow and trouble: <<For my soul is full of troubles>> (Psalm 88:3a), <<I am like those who have no help>> (Psalm 88:4b), and: <<Your wrath lies heavy upon me>> (Psalm 88:7a). Some of the sweetest songs come from the heaviest sorrow. It also shows a man who could take his grief to the Lord: <<But I, O Lord, cry out to you; in the morning my prayer comes before you>> (Psalm 88:13). It is not a confident or triumphant psalm, but the undercurrent of trust and refuge in God runs through the song of sorrow.

His brother Asaph, who stood on his right. Partnered with Heman the singer was Asaph, making for one of the great worship leading combinations in history. This is

the first mention of Asaph in the Bible; the Asaph listed in 2 Kings 18:18 and 18:37 is a different man. Asaph was a man of wide and long lasting influence among God's people:

- 1 Chronicles 15:17-19 mentions Asaph as a fellow singer with Heman and Ethan.
- 1 Chronicles 16:5 describes Asaph as the chief at the ceremony bringing the Ark of the Covenant into Jerusalem.
- 1 Chronicles 16:7 says that David delivered a psalm to Asaph and his brethren at that ceremony. Apparently, David wrote the psalm and Asaph and his brethren performed it.
- 1 Chronicles 16:17 says that Asaph was left with the responsibility to daily minister before the Ark of the Covenant when it was brought into the Jerusalem in David's time.
- 1 Chronicles 25:6 says that Asaph, Jeduthun, and Heman served in music under the authority of King David.
- 2 Chronicles 20:14 and 29:13 indicate that the influence of Asaph lasted far beyond his death, in that future worship leaders and musicians were known as the sons of Asaph, even to the days of Ezra; refer to Ezra 2:41 and 3:10; and Nehemiah 7:44, 11:17 and 11:22.

Twelve Psalms are attributed to Asaph (Psalm 50 and Psalms 73-83).

Their kindred the Levites were appointed for all the service of the tabernacle of the house of God. The Levites served God in almost every conceivable way, both practical and spiritual in appearance. Every kind of service is important and precious to God.

⁴⁹ But Aaron and his sons made offerings on the altar of burnt-offering and on the altar of incense, doing all the work of the most holy place, to make atonement for Israel, according to all that Moses the servant of God had commanded. ⁵⁰ These are the sons of Aaron: Eleazar his son, Phinehas his son, Abishua his son, ⁵¹ Bukki his son, Uzzi his son, Zerahiah his son, ⁵² Meraioth his son, Amariah his son, Ahitub his son, ⁵³ Zadok his son, Ahimaaz his son.

1 Chronicles 6:49-53

Aaron and his sons made offerings on the altar of burnt-offering and on the altar of incense, doing all the work of the most holy place, to make atonement for Israel. The priesthood descended from Aaron and Aaron alone. He, his sons, and their descendants were the only ones authorised to offer sacrifices on the altar. The work of the Aaronic priests in making atonement for Israel will be a recurrent theme in the narrative as the means of restoring and maintaining Israel's

relationship with God; refer to 2 Chronicles 13:10-11 and 29:21. Verses 50-53 repeat vv.4-8 to enclose the Levitical genealogies within the line of Aaronides down to Zadok and Ahimaaz, who were contemporaries of Solomon. Aaron's first two sons, Nadab and Abihu, who died for their disobedience, are not mentioned here. Refer to the comments made on vv.1-15 above.

Only an authorised priest could make atonement. Although Jesus was not descended from Aaron, he was nevertheless an authorised priest according to the order of Melchizedek, not Aaron; refer to Hebrews Chapter 7.

These are the sons of Aaron. Not listed are the two disobedient sons of Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, who were judged for bringing a strange fire of corrupt worship to the altar.

I.g.iii 1 Chronicles 6:54-81 - Settlements of the Levites

This section is summarised from Joshua Chapter 21 with some small omissions and variations of order. As a sign of their central role in the nation's life and wellbeing, it was intended that the Levites, with no allocated tribal land of their own, should reside throughout the tribal territory of Israel as spiritual representatives and leaders of the people.

⁵⁴ These are their dwelling-places according to their settlements within their borders: to the sons of Aaron of the families of Kohathites – for the lot fell to them first – ⁵⁵ to them they gave Hebron in the land of Judah and its surrounding pasture lands, ⁵⁶ but the fields of the city and its villages they gave to Caleb son of Jephunneh. ⁵⁷ To the sons of Aaron they gave the cities of refuge: Hebron, Libnah with its pasture lands, Jattir, Eshtemoa with its pasture lands, ⁵⁸ Hilen with its pasture lands, Debir with its pasture lands, ⁵⁹ Ashan with its pasture lands, and Beth-shemesh with its pasture lands. ⁶⁰ From the tribe of Benjamin, Geba with its pasture lands, Alemeth with its pasture lands, and Anathoth with its pasture lands. All their towns throughout their families were thirteen.

⁶¹ To the rest of the Kohathites were given by lot out of the family of the tribe, out of the half-tribe, the half of Manasseh, ten towns. ⁶² To the Gershonites according to their families were allotted thirteen towns out of the tribes of Issachar, Asher, Naphtali, and Manasseh in Bashan. ⁶³ To the Merarites according to their families were allotted twelve towns out of the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and Zebulun. ⁶⁴ So the people of Israel gave the Levites the towns with their pasture lands.

⁶⁵ They also gave them by lot out of the tribes of Judah, Simeon, and Benjamin these towns that are mentioned by name.

⁶⁶ And some of the families of the sons of Kohath had towns of their territory out of the tribe of Ephraim. ⁶⁷ They were given the cities of refuge: Shechem with its pasture lands in the hill country of Ephraim, Gezer with its pasture lands, ⁶⁸ Jokmeam with its pasture lands, Beth-horon with its pasture lands, ⁶⁹ Aijalon with its pasture lands, Gath-rimmon with its pasture lands; ⁷⁰ and out of the half-tribe of Manasseh, Aner with its pasture lands, and Bileam with its pasture lands, for the rest of the families of the Kohathites.

⁷¹ To the Gershomites: out of the half-tribe of Manasseh: Golan in Bashan with its pasture lands and Ashtaroth with its pasture lands; ⁷² and out of the tribe of Issachar: Kedesh with its pasture lands, Daberath with its pasture lands, ⁷³ Ramoth with its pasture lands, and Anem with its pasture lands; ⁷⁴ out of the tribe of Asher: Mashal with its pasture lands, Abdon with its pasture lands, ⁷⁵ Hukok with its pasture lands, and Rehob with its pasture lands; ⁷⁶ and out of the tribe of Naphtali: Kedesh in Galilee with its pasture lands, Hammon with its pasture lands, and Kiriathaim with its pasture lands. ⁷⁷ To the rest of the Merarites out of the tribe of Zebulun: Rimmono with its pasture lands, Tabor with its pasture lands, ⁷⁸ and across the Jordan from Jericho, on the east side of the Jordan, out of the tribe of Reuben: Bezer in the steppe with its pasture lands, Jahzah with its pasture lands, ⁷⁹ Kedemoth with its pasture lands, and Mephaath with its pasture lands; ⁸⁰ and out of the tribe of Gad: Ramoth in Gilead with its pasture lands, Mahanaim with its pasture lands, ⁸¹ Heshbon with its pasture lands, and Jazer with its pasture lands.

1 Chronicles 6:54-81

These are their dwelling-places according to their settlements within their borders. According to Numbers 18:20-24, the tribe of Levi had no province of land as the other tribes did. Their inheritance was the Lord himself and the tithes that the people of God brought to them.

To them they gave Hebron in the land of Judah and its surrounding pasture lands. After this pattern, the Levites were sprinkled throughout the land of Israel by giving them cities in the different tribal provincial cities together with surrounding common lands; refer to Numbers 35:1-8.