

CHAPTER 6

Though Joseph and Judah shared between them the forfeited honours of the birthright, yet Levi was first of all the tribes, dignified and distinguished with an honour more valuable than either the precedency or the double portion, and that was the priesthood. That tribe God set apart for himself; it was Moses's tribe, and perhaps for his sake was thus favoured. Of that tribe we have an account in this chapter.

I. Their pedigree, the first fathers of the tribe (v. 1-3), the line of the priests, from Aaron to the captivity (v. 4-15), and of some other of their families (v. 16-30).

II. Their work, the work of the Levites (v. 31-48), of the priests (v. 49-53).

III. The cities appointed them in the land of Canaan (v. 54-81).

<1311>1 CHRONICLES 6:1-30

GENEALOGIES

The priests and Levites were more concerned than any other Israelites to preserve their pedigree clear and to be able to prove it, because all the honours and privileges of their office depended upon their descent. And we read of those who, though perhaps they really were children of the priests, yet, because they could not find the register of their genealogies, nor make out their descent by any authentic record, were, *as polluted, put from the priesthood*, and forbidden to eat of the holy things, <1312>Ezra 2:62, 63. It is but very little that is here recorded of the genealogies of this sacred tribe.

1. The first fathers of it are here named twice, v. 1, 16. Gershom, Kohath, and Merari, are three names which we were very conversant with in the book of Numbers, when the families of the Levites were marshalled and had their work assigned to them. Aaron, and Moses, and Miriam, we have known much more of than their names, and cannot pass them over here without remembering that this was that Moses and Aaron whom God honoured in making them instruments of Israel's deliverance and settlement

and *figures of him that was to come*, Moses as a prophet and Aaron as a priest. And the mention of Nadab and Abihu (though, having no children, there was no occasion to bring them into the genealogy) cannot but remind us of the terrors of that divine justice which they were made monuments of for offering strange fire, that we may always fear before him.

2. The line of Eleazar, the successor of Aaron, is here drawn down to the time of the captivity, v. 4-15. It begins with Eleazar, who came out of the house of bondage in Egypt, and ends with Jehozadak, who went into the house of bondage in Babylon. Thus, for their sins, they were left as they were found, which might also intimate that the Levitical priesthood did not make anything perfect, but this was to be done by the *bringing in of a better hope*. All these here named were not high priests; for, in the time of the judges, that dignity was, upon some occasion or other, brought into the family of Ithamar, of which Eli was; but in Zadok it returned again to the right line. Of Azariah it is here said (v. 10), *He it is that executed the priest's office in the temple that Solomon built*. It is supposed that this was that Azariah who bravely opposed the presumption of king Uzziah when he invaded the priest's office (^{<487>}2 Chronicles 26:17, 18), though he ventured his neck by so doing. This was done like a priest, like one that was truly zealous for his God. He that thus boldly maintained and defended the priest's office, and made good its barriers against such a daring insult, might well be said to *execute it*; and this honour is put upon him for it; while Urijah, one of his successors, for a base compliance with King Ahaz, in building him an idolatrous altar, has the disgrace put upon him of being left out of this genealogy, as perhaps some others are. But some think that this remark upon this Azariah should have been added to his grandfather of the same name (v. 9), who was the son of Ahimaaz, and that he was the priest who first officiated in Solomon's temple.

3. Some other of the families of the Levites are here accounted for. One of the families of Gershom (that of Libni) is here drawn down as far as Samuel, who had the honour of a prophet added to that of a Levite. One of the families of Merari (that of Mahli) is likewise drawn down for several descents, v. 29, 30.

<136> 1 CHRONICLES 6:31-53

GENEALOGIES

When the Levites were first ordained in the wilderness much of the work then appointed them lay in carrying and taking care of the tabernacle and the utensils of it, while they were in their march through the wilderness. In David's time their number was increased; and, though the greater part of them was dispersed all the nation over, to teach the people the good knowledge of the Lord, yet those that attended the house of God were so numerous that there was not constant work for them all; and therefore David, by special commission and direction from God, new-modelled the Levites, as we shall find in the latter part of this book. Here we are told what the work was which he assigned them.

I. Singing-work, v. 31. David was raised up on high to be the sweet psalmist of Israel (<137> 2 Samuel 23:1), not only to pen psalms, but to appoint the singing of them in the house of the Lord (not so much because he was musical as because he was devout), and this he did *after that the ark had rest*. While that was in captivity, obscure, and unsettled, the harps were hung upon the willow-trees: singing was then thought unseasonable (when the bridegroom is taken away they shall fast); but the harps being resumed, and the songs revived, at the bringing up of the ark, they were continued afterwards. For we should rejoice as much in the prolonging of our spiritual privileges as in the restoring of them. When the service of the ark was much superseded by its rest they had other work cut out for them (for Levites should never be idle) and were employed in the service of song. Thus when the people of God come to the rest which remains for them above they shall take leave of all their burdens and be employed in everlasting songs. These singers kept up that service in the tabernacle till the temple was built, and then they *waited on their office* there, v. 32. When they came to that stately magnificent house they kept as close both to their office and to their order as they had done in the tabernacle. It is a pity that the preferment of the Levites should ever make them remiss in their business. We have here an account of the three great masters who were employed in the service of the sacred song, with their respective families; for they *waited with their children*, that is, such as descended from them or were allied to them, v. 33. Heman, Asaph, and Ethan, were the three that were appointed to this service, one of each of the three

houses of the Levites, that there might be an equality in the distribution of this work and honour, and that every one might know his post, such an admirable order was there in this choir service.

1. Of the house of Kohath was Heman with his family (v. 33), a man of a sorrowful spirit, if it be the same Heman that penned the 88th psalm, and yet a singer. He was the grandson of Samuel the prophet, the son of Joel, of whom it is said that *he walked not in the ways of Samuel* (^{<BOOK>}1 Samuel 8:2, 3); but it seems, though the son did not, the grandson did. Thus does the blessing entailed on the seed of the upright sometimes pass over one generation and fasten upon the next. And this Heman, though the grandson of that mighty prince, did not think it below him to be a precentor in the house of God. David himself was willing to be a door-keeper. Rather we may look upon this preferment of the grandson in the church as a recompense for the humble modest resignation which the grandfather made of his authority in the state. Many such ways God has of making up his people's losses and balancing their disgraces. Perhaps David, in making Heman the chief, had some respect to his old friend Samuel.

2. Of the house of Gershon was Asaph, called *his brother*, because in the same office and of the same tribe, though of another family. He was posted on Heman's right hand in the choir, v. 39. Several of the psalms bear his name, being either penned by him or tuned by him as the chief musician. It is plain that he was the penman of some psalms; for we read of those that praised the Lord in the words of David and of Asaph. He was a seer as well as a singer, ^{<BOOK>}2 Chronicles 29:30. His pedigree is traced up here, through names utterly unknown, as high as Levi, v. 39-43.

3. Of the house of Merari was Ethan (v. 44), who was appointed to Heman's left hand. His pedigree is also traced up to Levi, v. 47. If these were the Heman and Ethan that penned the 88th and 89th psalms, there appears no reason here why they should be called *Ezrahites* (see the titles of those psalms), as there does why those should be called so who are mentioned ^{<BOOK>}1 Chronicles 2:6, and who were the sons of Zerah.

II. There was serving-work, abundance of service to be done *in the tabernacle of the house of God* (v. 48), to provide water and fuel, — to wash and sweep, and carry out ashes, — to kill, and flay, and boil the sacrifices; and to all such services there were Levites appointed, those of other families, or perhaps those that were not fit to be singers, that had

either no good voice or no good ear. *As every one has received the gift, so let him minister.* Those that could not sing must not therefore be laid aside as good for nothing; though they were not fit for that service, there was other service they might be useful in.

III. There was sacrificing-work, and that was to be done by the priests only, v. 49. They only were to sprinkle the blood and burn the incense; as for *the work of the most holy place*, that was to be done by the high priest only. Each had his work, and they both needed one another and both helped one another in it. Concerning the work of the priests we are here told,

- 1.** What was the end they were to have in their eye. They were to *make an atonement for Israel*, to mediate between the people and God; not to magnify and enrich themselves, but to serve the public. They were *ordained for men*.
- 2.** What was the rule they were to have in their eye. They presided in God's house, yet must do as they were bidden, according to all that God commanded. That law the highest are subject to.

~~1316~~ 1 CHRONICLES 6:54-81

THE CITIES OF THE LEVITES

We have here an account of the Levites' cities. They are here called their *castles* (v. 54), not only because walled and fortified, and well guarded by the country (for it is the interest of every nation to protect its ministers), but because they and their possessions were, in a particular manner, the care of the divine providence: as God was their portion, so God was their protection; and a cottage will be a castle to those that abide under the shadow of the Almighty. This account is much the same with that which we had, Joshua 21. We need not be critical in comparing them (what good will it do us?) nor will it do any hurt to the credit of the holy scripture if the names of some of the places be not spelt just the same here as they were there. We know it is common for cities to have several names. *Sarum* and *Salisbury*, *Salop* and *Shrewsbury*, are more unlike than *Hilen* (v. 58) and *Holon* (¹²¹⁵Joshua 21:15), *Ashan* (v. 59) and *Ain* (¹²¹⁶Joshua 21:16), *Alemeth* (v. 60) and *Almon* (¹²¹⁸Joshua 21:18); and time changes names.

We are only to observe that in this appointment of cities for the Levites God took care, 1. For the accomplishment of dying Jacob's prediction concerning this tribe, that it should be *scattered in Israel*, ~~<0407>~~Genesis 49:7.

2. For the diffusing of the knowledge of himself and his law to all parts of the land of Israel. Every tribe had Levites' cities in it; and so every room was furnished with a candle, so that none could be ignorant of his duty but it was either his own fault or the Levites'.

3. For a comfortable maintenance for those that ministered in holy things. Besides their tithes and offerings, they had glebe-lands and cities of their own to dwell in. Some of the most considerable cities of Israel fell to the Levites' lot. Every tribe had benefit by the Levites, and therefore every tribe must contribute to their support. *Let him that is taught in the word communicate to him that teacheth*, and do it cheerfully.