

CHAPTER 4

In this chapter we have,

I. A further account of the genealogies of the tribe of Judah, the most numerous and most famous of all the tribes. The posterity of Shobal the son of Hur (v. 1-4), of Ashur the posthumous son of Hezron (who was mentioned, 2:24), with something particular concerning Jabez (v. 5-10), of Chelub and others (v. 11-20), of Shelah (v. 21-23).

II. An account of the posterity and cities of Simeon, their conquest of Gedon, and of the Amalekites in Mount Seir (v. 24-43).

1 CHRONICLES 4:1-10

THE PRAYER OF JABEZ

One reason, no doubt, why Ezra is here most particular in the register of the tribe of Judah is because it was that tribe which, with its appendages, Simeon, Benjamin, and Levi, made up the kingdom of Judah, which not only long survived the other tribes in Canaan, but in process of time, now when this was written, returned out of captivity, when the generality of the other tribes were lost in the kingdom of Assyria. The most remarkable person in this paragraph is Jabez. It is not said whose son he was, nor does it appear in what age he lived; but, it should seem, he was the founder of one of the families of Aharhel, mentioned v. 8. Here is,

I. The reason of his name: his mother gave him the name with this reason, *Because I bore him with sorrow*, v. 9. All children are borne with sorrow (for the sentence upon the woman is, *In sorrow shalt thou bring forth children*), but some with much more sorrow than others. Usually the sorrow in bearing is afterwards forgotten *for joy that the child is born*; but here it seems it was so extraordinary that it was remembered when the child came to be circumcised, and care was taken to perpetuate the remembrance of it while he lived. Perhaps the mother called Habez, as

Rachel called her son Benoni, when she was dying of the sorrow. Or, if she recovered it, yet thus she recorded it,

1. That it might be a continual memorandum to herself, to be thankful to God as long as she lived for supporting her under and bringing her through that sorrow. It may be of use to be often reminded of our sorrows, that we may always have such thoughts of things as we had in the day of our affliction, and may learn to rejoice with trembling.

2. That it might likewise be a memorandum to him what this world is into which she bore him, a vale of tears, in which he must expect *few days and full of trouble*. The sorrow he carried in his name might help to put a seriousness upon his spirit. It might also remind him to love and honour his mother, and labour, in every thing, to be a comfort to her who brought him into the world with so much sorrow. It is piety in children thus to requite their parents, ~~<1804>~~ 1 Timothy 5:4.

II. The eminence of his character: *He was more honourable than his brethren*, qualified above them by the divine grace and dignified above them by the divine providence; they did virtuously, but he excelled them all. Now the sorrow with which his mother bore him was abundantly recompensed. That son which of all her children cost her most dear she was most happy in, and was made glad in proportion to the affliction, ~~<1805>~~ Psalm 110:15. 90:15. We are not told upon what account he was *more honourable than his brethren*, whether because he raised a greater estate, or was preferred to the magistracy, or signalized himself in war; we have most reason to think it was upon the account of his learning and piety, not only because these, above any thing, put honour upon a man, but because we have reason to think that in these Jabez was eminent.

1. In learning, because we find that *the families of the scribes dwelt at Jabez* (~~<1806>~~ 1 Chronicles 2:55), a city which, it is likely, took its name from him. The Jews say that he was a famous doctor of the law and left many disciples behind him. And it should seem, by the mentioning of him so abruptly here, that his name was well known when Ezra wrote this.

2. In piety, because we find here that he was a praying man. His inclination to devotion made him truly honourable, and by prayer he obtained those blessings from God which added much to his honour. The way to be truly great is to be truly good and to pray much.

III. The prayer he made, probably like Solomon's prayer for wisdom, just when he was setting out in the world. He set himself to acknowledge God in all his ways, put himself under the divine blessing and protection, and prospered accordingly. Perhaps these were the heads on which he enlarged in his daily prayers; for this purpose it was his constant practice to pray alone, and with his family, as Daniel. Some think that it was upon some particular occasion, when he was straitened and threatened by his enemies, that he prayed this prayer. Observe,

1. To whom he prayed, not to any of the gods of the Gentiles; no, he *called on the God of Israel*, the living and true God, who alone can hear and answer prayer, and in prayer had an eye to him as the God of Israel, a God in covenant with his people, the God with whom Jacob wrestled and prevailed and was thence called Israel.

2. What was the nature of his prayer.

(1.) As the *margin* reads it, it was a solemn vow — *If thou wilt bless me indeed, etc.* and then the sense is imperfect, but may easily be filled up from Jacob's vow, or some such like — *then thou shalt be my God*. He did not express his promise, but left it to be understood, either because he was afraid to promise in his own strength or because he resolved to devote himself entirely to God. He does, as it were, give God a blank paper, let him write what he pleases: “Lord, if thou wilt bless me and keep me, do what thou wilt with me, I will be at thy command and disposal for ever.”

(2.) As the *text* reads it, it was the language of a most ardent and affectionate desire: *O that thou wouldst bless me!*

3. What was the matter of his prayer. Four things he prayed for: —

(1.) That God would bless him indeed: “That, *blessing, thou wilt bless me*, bless me greatly with manifold and abundant blessings.” Perhaps he had an eye to the promise God made to Abraham (⁽¹¹²¹⁷⁾Genesis 22:17), *In blessing, I will bless thee*. “Let that blessing of Abraham come upon me.” Spiritual blessings are the best blessings, and those are blessed indeed who are blessed with them. God's blessings are real things and produce real effects. We can but wish a blessing: he commands it. Those whom he blesses are blessed indeed.

(2.) That he would enlarge his coast, that he would prosper his endeavours for the increase of what fell to his lot either by work or war. That God

would enlarge our hearts, and so enlarge our portion in himself and in the heavenly Canaan, ought to be our desire and prayer.

(3.) That God's hand might be with him. The prayer of Moses for this tribe of Judah was, That his own *hands might be sufficient for him*, ^{<1301>}Deuteronomy 33:7; but Jabez expects not that this can be the case, unless he have *God's hand with him* and the presence of his power. God's hand with us, to lead us, protect us, strengthen us, and to work all our works in us and for us, is indeed a hand sufficient for us, all-sufficient.

(4.) That he would keep him from evil, the evil of sin, the evil of trouble, all the evil designs of his enemies, that they might not hurt him, nor grieve him, nor make him a *Jabez* indeed, *a man of sorrow*: in the original there is an allusion to his name. *Father in heaven, deliver me from evil.*

4. What was the success of his prayer: *God granted him that which he requested*, prospered him remarkably, and gave him success in his undertakings, in his studies, in his worldly business, in his conflicts with the Canaanites, and so he became *more honourable than his brethren*. God was of old always ready to hear prayer, and *his ear is not yet heavy*.

<1301> 1 CHRONICLES 4:11-23

GENEALOGIES

We may observe in these verses,

1. That here is a whole family of craftsmen, handicraft tradesmen, that applied themselves to all sorts of manufactures, in which they were ingenious and industrious above their neighbours, v. 14. There was a valley where they lived which was, from them, called *the valley of craftsmen*. Those that are craftsmen are not therefore to be looked upon as mean men. These craftsmen, though two of a trade often disagree, yet chose to live together, for the improving of arts by comparing notes, and that they might support one another's reputation.

2. That one of these married the daughter of Pharaoh (v. 18), which was the common name of the kings of Egypt. If an Israelite in Egypt before the bondage began, while Joseph's merits were yet fresh in mind, was preferred

to be the king's son-in-law, it is not to be thought strange: few Israelites could, like Moses, refuse an alliance with the court.

3. That another is said to be the *father of the house of those that wrought fine linen*, v. 21. It is inserted in their genealogy as their honour that they were the best weavers in the kingdom, and they brought up their children, from one generation to another, to the same business, not aiming to make them gentlemen. This Laadah is said to be the *father of those that wrought fine linen*, as before the flood Jubal is said to be *the father of musicians* and Jabal of *shepherds*, etc. His posterity inhabited the city of Mareshah, the manufacture or staple commodity of which place was linen-cloth, with which their kings and priests were clothed.

4. That another family had had *dominion in Moab*, but were now in *servitude in Babylon*, v. 22, 23.

(1.) It was found among the *ancient things* that they had the *dominion in Moab*. Probably in David's time, when that country was conquered, they transplanted themselves thither, and were put in places of power there, which they held for several generations; but this was a great while ago, time out of mind.

(2.) Their posterity were now potters and gardeners, as is supposed in Babylon, where they *dwelt with the king for his work*, got a good livelihood by their industry, and therefore cared not for returning with their brethren to their own land, after the years of captivity had expired. Those that now have dominion know not what their posterity may be reduced to, nor what mean employments they may be glad to take up with. But those were unworthy the name of *Israelites* that would dwell among *plants and hedges* rather than be at the pains to return to Canaan.

<130E> 1 CHRONICLES 4:24-43

GENEALOGIES

We have here some of the genealogies of the tribe of Simeon (though it was not a tribe of great note), especially the princes of that tribe, v. 38. Of this tribe it is said that they *increased greatly*, but *not like the children of Judah*, v. 27. Those whom God increases ought to be thankful, though they see others that are more increased. Here observe, 1. The cities allotted

them (v. 28), of which see ^{<680E>}Joshua 19:1, etc. When it is said that they were theirs *unto the reign of David* (v. 31) intimation is given that when the ten tribes revolted from the house of David many of the Simeonites quitted these cities, because they lay within Judah, and seated themselves elsewhere.

2. The ground they got elsewhere. When those of this tribe that revolted from the house of David were carried captive with the rest into Assyria those that adhered to Judah were remarkably owned of God and prospered in their endeavours to enlarge their coasts. It was in the days of Hezekiah that a generation of Simeonites, whose tribe had long crouched and truckled, was animated to make these bold efforts.

(1.) Some of them attacked a place in Arabia, as it should seem, called *the entrance of Gedor*, inhabited by the posterity of accursed Ham (v. 40), made themselves masters of it, and dwelt there. This adds to the glory of Hezekiah's pious reign, that, as his kingdom in general prospered, so did particular families. It is said that they found fat pastures, and yet *the land was quiet*; even when the kings of Assyria were giving disturbance to all their neighbours this land escaped their alarms. The inhabitants being shepherds, who molested none, were not themselves molested, till the Simeonites came and drove them out and succeeded them, not only in the plenty, but in the peace, of their land. Those who dwell (as we do) in a fruitful country, and whose land is wide, and quiet, and peaceable, have reason to own themselves indebted to that God who *appoints the bounds of our habitation*.

(2.) Others of them, to the number of 500, under the command of four brethren here named, made a descent upon Mount Seir, and smote the remainder of the devoted Amalekites, and took possession of their country, v. 42, 43. Now the curses on Ham and Amalek had a further accomplishment, when they seemed dormant, if not dead; as had also the curse on Simeon, that he should be divided and scattered (^{<044E>}Genesis 49:7): yet to him it was turned into a blessing, for the families of Simeon, which thus transplanted themselves into those distant countries, are said to *dwell there unto this day* (v. 43), by which it should seem they escaped the calamities of the captivity. Providence sometimes sends those out of trouble that are designed for preservation.