

LESSONS FROM HISTORY

1st Chronicles

Thoughts come from a wide variety of sources. Some from messages I have heard from individuals, some from assemblies Bible studies, some from home life and some from books I have read. The Holy Spirit is the Teacher who makes them real to me.

- "What the Bible Teaches, 1st Chronicles, by J. Hay. John Ritchie Ltd.
- "The Life Application Bible." Tyndale House and Zondervan
- "Zondervan TNIV Study Bible." Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI

1st Chronicles 1

ANCESTRY IS IMPORTANT

How is it possible for those who are older in years to impress upon the succeeding generations the importance as to who they are and why they are alive? Most younger people live only for the moment or the few days, months or years ahead of them personally. Their background and the history surrounding their forefathers has very little interest to them because it is not measured in dollars and cents, or in fame and possessions. Occasionally there are some, who as they mature, have a little curiosity in how they came to be where they are and what they are as a family. It is to those people we try to pass on the value of their heritage and who their ancestors were.

Ezra the scribe, likely the writer of the Chronicles of Israel, knew those who had been in captivity for seventy years needed to connect with their past in order to identify themselves in the present. The older people had died for the most part and there was a need to pass on the value of their heritage to their children and grandchildren in view of the future. They had the promises of God to assure them of their continuance as a unique people. The Chronicles, or "the events of days" (years) as it is more rightly called, are really the last books of the Old Testament. It links the final events of the Old Testament to the beginning of the new covenant God has with His people - The New Testament. The two books of Chronicles summarize the history of Israel as a way of unifying those who returned from captivity. They began again to be identified as a people among the nations around, so the national and spiritual unity was important in the rebuilding process.

1st Chronicles has mainly to do with the time of David's reign when Israel was a united nation and a power to be reckoned with in the Middle East. 2nd Chronicles begins with Solomon's reign until the people were carried away captives. We learn from past successes as well as past failures. History does have a way of repeating itself when the lessons of the past are not learned. We need to know, the same as the returning Israelites, "Is God still interested in us even though we have failed to obey Him? Is our relationship with God still intact?" How wonderful it is to be able to read the books of the New Testament and be assured of God's on-going care and concern for His people, and how, in spite of failure, we can return to live effectively for Him and walk in fellowship with Him.

The books of the Chronicles deal with the significance of the people of God being assured by the building of the temple in Jerusalem; the renewal of the work and election of the Levites and priests that was still in place; the law and the teaching of the prophets continued as the focus of God's covenant with them as an identifiable people. Obedience to the law and the prophets; the hope of the Messiah; the movements of God's people and the genealogy of the people demonstrated their link with the past. Also, some public speeches by kings like Abijah, Asa and Jehoshaphat are found written in the Chronicles that were not written by the earlier writers of the books of Samuel and Kings.

The fact of duplication in the scriptures is not careless redundancy, but a calculated design by the Holy Spirit. Those "holy men of old" were moved by the Spirit to write some of the same things as a way to emphasize their importance. Repetition is a way of making sure the readers get the message right. It also impresses on the minds of people, and hopefully their hearts, that the things they may think are unimportant are important to God.

The writer of the Chronicles was selective in the events of which he wrote so that moral and spiritual lessons were passed on that would positively affect the people of God. The failures are mainly ignored in the Chronicles, including most of the history of the northern ten tribes as well as the failures of individuals. Victories and the importance of national and spiritual worship are emphasized. Recovery to the Lord and enthusiasm for that which pleased God was the point of recalling the past.

The list of names from Adam to Zerubbabel include people of faith and people of failure. That pattern is common to humanity. Why do some reject what they have been taught and deliberately go their own way? Really, only God knows what is behind the decisions like that which people make. It is plain that each person is known by God, good or bad, and every bent in one's personality, every practice and every event in a person's life has consequences that are felt by many generations that follow. Each of us needs to remember our heritage and the privileges associated with it. "The things written aforetime were written for our learning." The Lord Jesus said, "They are they which testify of Me."

Genealogies establish our family identity with its privileges and responsibilities. It also puts us in a national, and to a certain degree, political framework that has an impact on where we live and what our role in life is to be. Those born to royalty have certain obligations and expectations put upon them. Those in families that own property have certain rights because of the order of their birth in the family. Those born into God-fearing homes where spiritual things are of supreme importance are rightly expected to be different from those without a spiritual heritage. Christian's children need to know the value of their privilege is of greater importance than what they feel is expected of them. A Levite's child lived differently than other children. Their income was based on what other people were willing to give to the Lord. A servant's child was in a different place in society than the landowner's children. And yet, every one was important in the place where they were, for the benefit of all the people of God.

All of those listed in the first chapter of 1st Chronicles are traced back to Adam. From Adam to Noah, from Noah and his sons Japheth, Ham and Shem, from Abraham to Jacob, include half of human history as far as time. Human history is here identified by the names of the forefathers. Not all were bad nor were all good people of faith in God. But all are recognized by God as individuals who were responsible to Him. Some were antagonistic towards others. Some were resentful; some family members would have nothing to do with their kin.

However, in the list are those whose names are remembered and revered as people of faith. We would not be ashamed to name our sons Adam, Enoch, Noah or Abraham. Isaac and Jacob still have an appeal to new parents because of the historical accounts of their lives while they were here in their generations. Others too were honorable, trustworthy people whose names often characterized their personalities and the actions of their lives. All of us have a heritage and all of us have influence on others. When we realize the fact that what I am doing now may have an impact on the lives of others after I am dead, that makes me careful that I "do justly... love mercy and walk humbly with [my] God."

1st Chronicles 1:19. *"And unto Eber were born two sons: the name of one was Peleg; because in his days the earth was divided: and his brother's name was Joktan."*

EARTH WAS DIVIDED.

The names are there, and hidden tales to be told
These ancients lived long years before they got old
But die they must, for sin had brought them death
Some brought evil to earth; through others we are blessed.

One must have wondered when his two sons were born,
"What have we done? Why has earth apart been torn?"
Some went one way; other people went another -
Division then as now, caused separation of brothers.

No wonder God hates division, its consequences are great
Instead of fellowship, brothers are strangers when they meet.
Sin has its consequences of whatever kind it is -
But division brings such a schism it seldom can be fixed.

As one glances over his shoulder, he sees his brother's back
And knows he is going away for good, his fellowship he will lack.
His gift perhaps will lie unused though God a work intended
For him to use it for the benefit of all when with others it is blended.

Perhaps a careless word, a task undone, something was quite small
But it becomes a big issue when we to division fall.
As far as I know, division leaves an uncrossable gap -
When it takes place, so many are affected and there is no coming back.

"Holy, Righteous God: please keep us from anything that will further divide us. In our family there is a distance in one area of our lives that we cannot bridge. Some chose

to go away from where we were, and although we have a degree of fellowship, there is an area in which we are divided. Keep Thy people from further division I pray. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

1st Chronicles 2

REPUTATION

When giving a historical account of a family history, there are always some sordid details that have no reason to be told. To "hang out dirty laundry" doesn't benefit anyone. It may be appropriate to learn from the mistakes of others in a different context, but when seeking to unify God's people, it is not wise to deal with those things that would make the leadership of the saints despised. Israel's (Jacob's) sons are listed but not according to their ages. They were not a good bunch of men. Apart from Joseph, they were a quarreling, discontented, mean-spirited group that God was willing to use in grace to fulfill His purposes. From the tribe of Judah our Lord came - holy, harmless, undefiled and separate from sinners. Through Him has come into God's family those who have been born again into the kingdom of God.

Judah's firstborn son, Er, is marked out as an evil, wicked person whose reputation was so tarnished he was not allowed to live. A number of generations later, covetous Achan is named as one whose bad reputation negatively affected the whole nation. People died because Achan did what God told His people not to do. He took gold, silver and nice clothes from Jericho and by that deliberate sin, brought about the defeat of Israel at the little city of Ai. A lesson for us to learn is "a little leaven, leaveneth the whole lump." There are always bad consequences to accept when we covet that which we should not have. Those things we think are hidden will be brought into the light of divine justice.

Nahshon was a "prince," a leader of God's people when they were in the wilderness. To go before God's people in difficult times, or when circumstances seem to be hopeless, is a very difficult role to fill. Quiet consistency has a strength to it that doesn't have to be advertised. Some of God's people are hardly noticed until they are gone. Then those who took them for granted look around and see how effective they were and why their influence was so important, even though it wasn't noticed or acknowledged at the time.

Dignified, trustworthy Boaz is only named, as is David. Their testimonies were well established in the stories of the children of Israel. Likely the reputation of Boaz and Ruth, and of Jesse's youngest son would have bed-time stories Israelite parents told their children before they went to sleep. Honorable people have a reputation that does not have to be promoted. It is part of their personal history in spite of one's background and/or failures. The three nephews of David were a problem to him even though they were family members. Not all of our kinsfolk, see things the same way as we do. There is a degree of fellowship and participation that we can share, but we have to maintain our own reputation and fulfill our own responsibility in spite of what others in our family might do.

In the list of names in chapter two, there are likely many stories behind the scenes of victories and defeats. Some things that happen are joyful events. Some things are tragedies. Hezron was well along in life when he married and didn't live to see his son. Apparently, he died while his new wife was still pregnant. Another man named Seled never had any children. There are those whose lives seem to be a series of disappointments as far as human experience is concerned. Yet it is well for us to remember that God knows every person and every event in one's life as well as every word that proceeds from our lips and well as the thoughts and intents of our heart.

It is well for us to remember the poetic words:

"Only one life 'twill soon be past.
Only what's done for Christ will last."

Our occupation may be the way our reputation is made and hopefully well maintained. "The families of the scribes" were notable to the Lord and to His people. It was important for them to be accurate as they fulfilled their calling in the nation and for the benefit of the nation. I have heard people say, "He was a good farmer." The words, "You can count on him to do what he says," means a lot when it comes to keeping one's good reputation. "She is one you can go to for advice and know she can be trusted to keep the matter private" are words that are worth considering. We can identify those of our ancestors who lived before as worthy people when we hear older people talk about them in good terms. We should seek to emulate them and keep the family name with honor.

Family names carry a certain weight of one kind or another. Integrity, honesty and reliability are all characteristics that should be in all of us. Then we can teach our children and grandchildren who come after

us to be the same kind of people and they have a good ancestral pattern to follow in their own lives and that they can pass on to their offspring who follow them.

1st Chronicles 2:7. *“And the sons of Carmi; Achar, the troubler of Israel, who transgressed in the thing accursed.”*

THE TROUBLER.

Was it just the one act, or was there even more?
Covetousness has a way of being repeated o'er and o'er -
Because when one gives way to one temptation, others take its place
And before long the course of life becomes a daily chase
After things that others have, and that one thinks he needs more
And instead of one or two, he is going for three or four -
Because he gave way to a habit - following the lust of eyes
And is never satisfied until the forbidden thing is his prize.

One serious problem with covetousness is many others are affected
Things that are wrong are reached for; right things are often neglected
One forbidden thing is taken and other people see
What you have gotten away with and what its effect will be.
The process of dealing with covetousness is a very serious act
That must be taken by the many to bring the miscreant back.
If it is carried out biblically, hopefully others too may fear
And turn away from forbidden things when the devil brings them near.

Some may not understand there is morality here involved.
Covetousness is an addiction; not just a problem easily solved.
The heart of man is never satisfied by the things we may obtain.
Ill-gotten gains affect the soul, and discipline brings the pain
That is necessary to be applied that the covetous one forsakes
Any and all habits and cravings before that first wrong step he takes.
All of God's people are affected when one makes that kind of decision -
We all need to be reminded of the consequences of actions that are forbidden.

“O God, preserve me I pray from wanting what I should not have. May contentment and gratitude always take the place of a covetous glance or act. May I never be a trouble to the people of God by the actions I take. May I always be a help to Thy saints - not a hindrance. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

1st Chronicles 3

PLUS, AND MINUS

The history of most nations we have studied in school is a recounting of events that have made the nation strong or weak. But events are really the result of human actions that may have been calculated or spontaneous. spur-of-the-moment decisions. The list of names that continues in chapter three reminds us that as far as God is concerned, "nations are as a drop of a bucket." People live forever. History in God's eyes is an unfolding of His-story and how mankind, created in His image, has fulfilled or failed according to His plans.

Humans have a mind, like "The mind of God," so that we can know Him. In a believer life changed from darkness to light when we were saved, so Paul could write, "We have the mind of Christ." We have emotions like God, "For God so loved the world..." and when we were made alive in Christ, love for God and for His people is part of the new nature we received by the new birth. "We love Him, because He first loved us..." and "We know we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren." This is a demonstrable fact. The will of God is revealed clearly in the scriptures. Believers seek to "Do the will of God from the heart."

In the list of names in the first nine chapters of 1st Chronicles, we have a series of lessons we can learn from the lives of those people named. Adam's transgression has affected all of the human race. We may not realize the lasting implications of sin in our lives on the following generations at the time we make a bad decision. But it will have an impact for good or bad on those who know what we chose to do. Noah decided to obey God and saved "his house." Abraham chose to live by faith. Isaac was a peace-loving man. Esau was a bitter man. Amalek was just plain evil. Jacob failed in a lot of ways but was recovered to fellowship with God. Perez didn't come from a good background but God work His own will through his lineage anyway. Boaz was a kind man. Jesse showed favoritism at first but learned that God see things differently than we do. Joab was just plain mean who died with nothing but a bad reputation although he was a good general.

Then we read of David's family at the head of the list in chapter three. David was the king in the line of Judah through which our Lord Jesus Christ came. Joseph, the husband of Mary, was from the kingly line of Solomon. Mary came from the line of David's son, Nathan. Perhaps he was named after the honorable prophet who lived in Israel at the time of his birth. For a man to have six wives even when polygamy was an acceptable practice, was forbidden for those who were kings. Money didn't seem to be a big problem to David although he was wealthy, but women were. As a result of that problem, family life was an even more serious problem to David. We may do a lot of things right, but that doesn't mean we will not have to suffer the consequences of doing wrong.

David's sons were notable for being lustful, subtle, deceitful, bitter and angry men. The teaching of the law and the prophets didn't seem to mean much to them. They wanted for themselves, and sought to take, what was only God's to give. At least two of them died in an attempt to go around the plan of God and take things into their own hands. Solomon asked God for wisdom, and got it, as well as riches and honor. But all of this was mainly directed at an outward show of materialism apart from the building of the temple. Israeli kings were not to have a lot of wives, horses, gold and silver because extreme wealth has a tendency to turn us away from faith and trust in God. Poor Solomon made bad decisions, especially as he got older and became a failure on almost all accounts.

All the generations that followed, suffered because of the moral failures of those who should have known better than to do what they did. That by no means excused them from taking responsibility for their own actions, but it does remind us that what I do or don't do, has influence that will be felt by generations yet unborn. It is incumbent on us to live each day in view of that which is right in the eyes of God. Each event in a day and each issue I have to face should be dealt with in the consciousness of the fact that there will be "fall-out" from those actions that will be either good or bad.

The list of names up through chapter three have to do with the nation and those who led the nation. Those who returned from captivity were given a positive, maybe even an idealized, view of their past leaders and their past history. It doesn't mean they were deceived in any way by the writer of the Chronicles, but there was no reason for them to be reminded of the failures and difficulties that David had, or his sin with Bathsheba. The crimes of Amnon and Absalom; the lack of self-control of Solomon or the failures of Adonijah would have no unifying effect on those people who were just released from captivity that was a result of their national sin.

To spend time looking back at mistakes and failures has no real beneficial effect on a large group of diverse people. We can learn as individuals from the mistakes of others, but that is only useful if there is a positive point to be made for our learning. The favorable light in which the Chronicles is written, points forward with hope to the future. There will be future glory for the nation under the reign of peace under the Messiah - our Lord Jesus Christ. This first list of names is basically a legal and political line of humanity that brought Israel into favor with God. It begins with Adam, the father of humanity. Then goes to Abraham, the father of the faithful. From the kingship of David through Zerubbabel traces the history of their nation under the rule of kings to the results of their failure as a people. The last names on the list are unknown people who in one way seem insignificant apart from the fact that through them and the succeeding generations came the Messiah who comes on to the pages of Israel's history after the four hundred years of "darkness." It was then that "light came into the world."

1st Chronicles 3:1. *"Now these were the sons of David, which were born unto him in Hebron; the firstborn Amnon, of Ahinoam the Jezreelitess; the second Daniel, of Abigail the Carmelitess:"*

A FAMILY.

What part does love play? Do the children kind of sense
Their position in the order of things - the cause and effect?
Are personalities genetic or are they unseen developed?
Can they feel some kind of neglect when young? Or know they are by love enveloped?

I guess there are a lot of things that affect the outcome of our lives.
A gentle touch often - or a feeling of abandonment
Each person in a family may respond differently
To the same act and the same words - each is taken independently.

What can be done by a father to make things be as they should?
Is the recreational time spent, the key - is it the fun?
Or is the insistence on work to be performed - something accomplished -
Opportunities arranged for - meaningful labor - is that how a family is established?

One would think a man after God's own heart would know the answers
But it was a choice he had to make, the same as I do -
To determine the amount of time allotted for leisure -
One has to consider what is the ultimate source of pleasure.

I have considered, but I may be seriously wrong -
That what is significant to me - pleasure and meaning in work
Should be the same to my family, and so for serious labor I insisted.
I hope and pray that it was not wrong that I in this course persisted.

My thoughts were that offspring would learn from parents
What was right, what was wrong, what was necessary or not
Would be learned by a form of modeling - discipline that was caught
And that pleasure and recreation alone ultimately was for naught.

I wonder now, as probably David did, if I started over - life to live -
If I would do it differently, could God my labor bless?
Would my family be different - would I want them to be more like me?
Have I failed them in various ways? I guess I'll just wait and see!

“O God of all grace, sometimes when reading scriptures like these I wonder if my family wants to be as different from me as possible. I wanted to be like my parents. I don't think my daughters and their families want to be like me. If I have failed Thee, and them, in family life Father, I am truly sorry. I just don't know what else to do. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

1st Chronicles 4

OCCUPATIONS

There are number of reasons to go back through our ancestors' history and learn what we can from the dim and distant past. For those who were from the tribes of Judah and Simeon it would have been a help to them to know just where their parents and grandparents lived, before they were taken as captives from the land of Israel. In the resettlement they would need to know what property was theirs by inheritance from ancient days. Property owners would be able to go back to the land of their forbearers. Craftsmen settled back in the areas most suited to their need of material to do their work, the same as the past generations.

Those who made fine linen would resettle where the flax would be grown, and the potters would be where they could get the right material for their special work for the king. The plants and hedges probably referred to places where there were certain natural surroundings that would have been especially pleasing to those who labored there. To live near the king would have been a well-known story told by older people to the younger when they were in captivity.

As Ezra, or whoever was the scribe, was writing down these chronicles of a people who had been dispersed for years, put these things down on paper, he didn't follow a special order as to time or place. Rather it is an accounting of names, places and occupations that would help the younger generation find out their own personal identities, where they belonged geographically and in the overall scheme of things in the resettlement program. That practice is good in the sense that it places us under a sort of obligation to continue what those before us began. By this means loyalty and allegiance is established and maintained. We have been blessed by the labors and convictions of those who lived for God long before us. Compared to today, times were hard, daily labor was needed for survival, but the Lord's people in our own families made sure there was time to fulfill their responsibilities to the Gospel and the assemblies of God's people of which they were a part.

People can look at the same place and recall the same event but both views of the same thing may be quite different. The point of view, both physically and emotionally, emphasizes different things. Neither one is more right or wrong than the other because of our human limitations. A record of ancestry includes names, places and occupations usually. One establishes who you are in relation to those in your past. Where they came from helps us to realize the significance of where we are now and how this came to be. The work we do is often a reflection on the impressions made on us by those who came before us. A skilled craftsman would create a sense of pride in a job well-done that would be felt by his sons. A farmer who appreciated the work of nature in the combination of sun and rain would find delight in watching plant life spring from the ground that supplied the food they ate. His children would learn the value of caring for the soil that the abundance of the food in the ground could be brought forth.

The artisan who made special vessels suited for the use of a king, would pass on his skills to those who followed his path in life. Those who made exquisite cloth from plants and animals would learn and practice those things that had been passed on during their apprenticeship. We learn from others. That is why our history is important. If we don't learn from those who have gone before us, we are going backward and will have to start over at square one. There is no way to just stay still for long. We are either going ahead or back. Sadly, in our day we are going ahead rapidly in developing technology, pleasure, temporal and physical ways, but we are going rapidly backwards morally and spiritually. If this backward trend continues, it will very negatively affect every other part of our lives and that of our children behind us.

Jabez stands out as one in the list of ancestors who went forward as a property owner, probably as a farmer, in spite of what his brothers did and the kind of people they were. Those who returned to the land of Israel would be caused to remember that even in times of failure and departure that led to captivity, there was one man who was committed to his faith in God. The simple word, "Oh," when said in the context of prayer, eliminates other distraction and focuses one's mind on God.

Jabez was also conscious of the sovereignty of God. He knew all blessings come from God who is the source of "every good and perfect gift." Some things we can do and are expected to do. Some things belong to God alone to give or keep as He chooses. In his prayer Jabez asked for a blessing from Him "through whom all blessings flow." He asked for help in fulfilling his responsibility to his "coasts" (territory) to use well what he was given. He wanted God's presence with him as he labored in his calling. He wanted God's protection because he was conscious of the enemies that were coming, and he knew pain would follow if they captured him.

Apparently Jabez was spared the grief and sorrow of the tribe of Judah, because "God granted his request." Even though "sorrow" was the meaning of His name, sorrow wasn't his fate. It is important to live in the consciousness of God with us, hearing us, responding to our heart-calls and producing the kind of results that we are best suited to us and for us. To pray so we know specifically what our request are, makes it possible for us to be consciously aware of the answers. When we are in fellowship with God in our prayer life, the Holy Spirit is there with us "making intercession for us with groanings that cannot be uttered." He knows what needs to be said when we are stuck for words and cannot say what our hearts mean.

The tribes of Simeon and Judah were closely connected geographically and much of what happened to the families of Simeon was tied to the larger tribe of Judah. Some families grew and others faded. Some of God's people "increase greatly" and others seem to be so needy that they fade away and die as far as Christian testimony is concerned. There are places where growth takes place and others where "dearth is in the land." The key to growth and maintaining growth is where there is "pasture for the flocks." That food may be in places that seem unexpected to us and may even seem controversial at first. However, God may give us what we need in the most unexpected ways, by the most unexpected people in unexpected situations.

When God's people are where He wants them to be, doing what He wants them to do, and are keeping His word in fellowship with Him, He can use us and bless our efforts of service. There is no need for God's people to wither and die even though we have to deal with the flesh (Amalek), the world and the devil. Enemies are going to oppose any work of God. That is a historical and unavoidable fact. But whether opposition comes openly and often, there is a more important remarkable work of God among His unified people. In times like this, God is glorified in a special way because any success is an obvious work of God. When that happens, no one can take the credit, and all can honestly say, "To God be all the Glory!"

1Chronicles 4:10. *"And Jabez called on the God of Israel, saying, 'Oh that Thou wouldest bless me indeed, and enlarge my coast, and that Thine hand might be with me, and that Thou wouldest keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me!' And God granted him that which he requested."*

BLESS ME.

Amidst the lists of men of old; some better than the others.
A man's name rises to our eyes, he's more honorable than his brothers.
There seemed to be some sadness there, from problems in the past-
But Jabez's name doesn't mar his faith, when from his God he asked;
"Oh God of Israel, bless me indeed" - and his requests he then did make;
Knowing the God who has the right to give, also has the right to take.

He knew His God was very great, and able to perform
The requests he asked for when he called, and where they would come from.
For God alone has the hand that gives and protects us with His strength.
The God he prayed to, heard his prayer to give his coast more length.

But greater still, his desire was plain; he wanted to be kept from evil.
He must have known from those around; he was a target of the devil.

We learn ourselves from Jabez's story, there are things God wants to give.
Some requests we make will not be answered, if they hinder what we have.
But when our prayers have higher aims, and God's glory we do seek -
Then God blesses us, and grants to us, the petitions that we make.
It is important I understand, some times answers will be "No."
Other times the very things I ask, He grants; and graciously bestows.

No matter what I'm called to do, or even what I want -
May I without demand, with acceptance be content.
His blessing I desire, on the work I seek to do -
And gratefully accept His will for what I am passing through.
So, whether He answers "Yes" or "No", or maybe "Wait awhile."
What I desire most of all is my blessed Master's will.

Among the thousands all near me, some known and some unknown -
I would like to be acknowledged as my Father's earthly son.
May "my coast" be souls of people saved, who appreciate God's grace.
May my life be kept from evil and the distractions of this place.
May the joy that I experience, be a testimony folks can see.
May the life I live here in my day, display my love for Thee.

"Father; Thou hast answered many prayers I have made in ways far surpassing my highest expectations. This I pray again, as Thou hast taught and Jabez prayed, 'Keep me from evil.' In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

1st Chronicles 4:40. *"And they found fat pasture and good, and the land was wide, and quiet, and peaceable; for they of Ham dwelt there of old."*

THE WORK.

We all have been called to work, not to laze away our days
Not every one does the same things; we are provided for in different ways
But it is our obligation in our work to be as effective as we can
Though skills may differ in us, it is the responsibility of a man
To search out ways to further the work God to him gave
And it is certainly wisdom for the laboring man to save;
What God in grace provided, in order to give it back to Him
The first-fruits and the offerings thanking God for them.

Jabez was a different man from the others in his family
We are not told the story of how this came to be
His priorities were in the right place and God he knew to trust
He knew his limitations and that prayer in life is a "must"
He knew that God was able to give, the same as He can withhold
His prayer wasn't one of trepidation; in prayer he was really bold
God was pleased to hear him, and granted his request
The God who gives and takes away is the God who knows what's best.

Others in their efforts to put forth a successful work
Were not satisfied to rest and sleep or from their obligations shirk
They kept moving till they found what they were looking for
They were able to claim what others had many years before.
When in our work we are prepared to venture and not be satisfied
With mediocre results because in laziness we still abide -
Get up and get moving that our potential we may use -
We will find God has been there too and this work for us did choose.

At first the land before us seems hard to work till we get started
Then we find the promised land just beyond where the river is parted.
So, we have to get up and move ahead with confidence in God,
And we will find opening up before us a goodly land and broad
With potential there to be developed if only we move ahead in faith
And there we find God has already been working in this special place.
He's been waiting for me to act and provides the needed grace -
And in our work, we will find satisfaction as the hand of God we trace.

“There have been others in this good and wide land before me, Father. I trust in Thee to give me the right understanding of the work that is here to be done by me. May I not hesitate to give this work my best effort. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

1st Chronicles 5

GOOD START - BAD END

As much as we hate war and the consequences of warfare are death and destruction, battles are fought between opposing nations, and sometimes lesser battles between ideologies and families. Mankind because of our sinful nature, is not satisfied until we get what we want for ourselves - and often at any cost. The listing of the leaders of the two and a half tribes of Israel that settled on the east side of Jordan is mainly that of military leaders. The history of most nations includes times of warfare and both victories and defeats. In this way succeeding generations who may be enjoying the results of the bloodshed of those in generations before them, will hopefully learn that the blessings they enjoy now were costly to others.

Because of Reuben's gross sin, he forfeited the double portion that historically was given to the firstborn son. Joseph's two sons each got full tribal recognition and benefits because of Joseph's faithfulness to God. Reuben was a privileged son at the beginning of his life and on occasions seemed to be willing to assume his leadership role. The consequences of his sin ruined not only his personal testimony and took away his place of leadership, but also the disaster of yielding to temptations affected the lives of those in his tribe who followed him. My children and grandchildren - and even those who will come after them in the family tree, will be affected by the choices I make. The place where I live, the occupation of my life, the things I do in business or leisure, my convictions, my faith and the practices of my life will leave some kind of impression on them.

To their credit, the two and a half tribes, Reuben, Gad and Manasseh, did not let the actions of Reuben their ancient forefather, sour them or keep them from fulfilling their potential. They did not complain about Joseph's sons or Judah being ahead of the in inheritance or leadership. Judah made some very bad decisions but he stood up as a surety for Benjamin and became the spokesperson for the family. Reuben's descendants were good cattlemen and were doing a good job with what they had received for their inheritance. By pressing ahead to claim all that was theirs and moving east to the edge of the desert, they gained good land for their enterprises.

God's people are not all the same either as to their personality, ambition and family characteristics. But when we are united with others of "like precious faith," and do not let past failures "hamstring" us to where we will do nothing, there can be spiritual victories. Those who connect easily with people in a personal way may not be the ones to preach the Gospel publicly on the behalf of the assembly. Others may be able to reach out to "the regions beyond" and the assembly as a whole is able to support their outreach. There are those who can effectively teach the word of God and consolidate the work of the Gospel by explaining carefully in an expositional way, the will of God for us.

The tribe of Gad had settled next to Reuben, but by comparison seemed to be kind of a laid-back people who were content to let others do what they wanted, "but please don't both us." When their land wasn't producing enough to raise cattle and sheep, they turned to raising pigs that would dig in the ground to sustain them rather than needing grass. If we spend our time looking back instead of ahead, we are in danger of being defeated by the present and will have no future. It is true that if one does nothing, he makes no mistakes (he is probably dead), but he certainly contributes nothing to benefit others. By his apathetic complacency, he will soon have nothing for himself and his family.

When God's people settle down to a routine life of business occasionally mixed with pleasure, and at our convenience, we contribute a little to assembly life, it will not be long before they are unhappy, discontented and critical of others. Enthusiasm for spiritual things and ambition in the furtherance of the kingdom of God, gives meaning to our lives. When we live for eternity, the present is merely a beneficial stepping stone to that which is full and satisfying. Our present life is simply an opportunity to fulfill our preparation for our eternal calling. love for God and people gives a meaning to life that is far superior to having fat pigs.

When the combined military power of Reuben, Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh got God's direction, prayed to God and trusted in Him, they won battles and gained territory because the "war was of God." They had trained and developed military skills before, but were wise enough to know they had to trust God to bring about the desired result. The learning process of "Christian education" that is practiced in scripturally gathered assemblies of God's people is a remarkably effective way of training and developing spiritual skills.

Our teaching meetings and time for practical applications of truth between those times the assembly comes together, provides the Lord's people with an "apprenticeship program" that works well.

Older saints teach the younger from the scriptures and their life-experiences with God, and may even take them along with them to practice what they have learned. After a meeting one might inquire of another, "How have things been going this week?" and that opens the way to communicate one's practical experience in a similar matter. That can greatly help one who is under pressure at school or in a job where they need moral answers to the problems they face. Some people have an instinctive way to come alongside and help others. Some must choose to do what does not come naturally to them and normally they wouldn't do. But we all need the help of others from time to time, and they need ours too. Victory in life comes when there are spiritual solutions addressed to the difficulties of life.

The tribes east of Jordan did well at first when they were united under the guidance of God. Even though they were different, when their differences were applied to the present need; they all shared, they unified and there was exceptional strength. Brave people, famous people and who fear God are wonderful to be around and we can learn from them and follow their lead. Paul said, "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ."

The writer of the Chronicles knew the positive side of the history those three tribes and their military and geographical conquests. But to be honest and fair with the present generation, he wrote about the bad ending as well as the good start. The leadership failed. They "transgressed against the God of their fathers." they were unfaithful to God. The military skill, the business acumen, the enthusiastic attitude of some, their fame and success could not preserve them from their enemies. Not only were they unfaithful to God, but they prostituted to false gods and served the idols other people around them served.

Those very idols and the people who had worshipped them, had once been destroyed and the Lord's people had prospered because God was with them. However, following generations forgot the lessons of history and thought they could do what they wanted and get away with it. To compromise our convictions or those that had been our parents may not seem too serious at the moment. But compromise leads to disloyalty to God, and disloyalty leads to lack of allegiance to the truth of God. That is followed by disobedience, and disobedience is followed by divine justice carrying out judgment.

It is possible to start out life committing a serious sin, and yet be recovered in a measure to usefulness. Usefulness enables us to experience a degree of success, but that can be lost in a short time if we forget "the hole of the pit from whence we have been digged, and the rock from which we have been hewn." Then the following generations hopefully will learn not to do what we did, and unite with others of "like precious faith" to go forward in the things of God now - at this present time!

1st Chronicles 5:2. *"For Judah prevailed above his brethren, and of him came the chief ruler; but the birthright was Joseph's:"*

JUDAH AND JOSEPH.

Even in families not all are the same
Some traits stand out in one though both have the same name
The parental influence plays in children a great part
The only thing completely alike is each has a deceitful heart
That shows itself outwardly in a unique way -
One may be quiet, the other has a lot to say
Even though brothers and sisters are linked by blood
Each one has to personally believe on accept the Lord.

Judah was one who seemed to be a born leader
From his line and seed came the One who is the Savior
Judah had his faults and sins that dimmed his moral light,
But the Lion of his tribe is "The Way, the Truth and the Life."
It would be wrong to expect each brother in a family to lead
One may be an evangelist; another is called to feed
The people of God with spiritual teaching and biblical truth
The fact is that God is in His work able to use them both.

Joseph was tested in many ways, he seemed to be a visionary
Sometimes from a family one is called to be a missionary
But that doesn't mean he is more important than all of the others
He just has a different purpose in life, than his sisters and brothers
Joseph got the birthright even though he was second to last

He took the leadership until the famine was past
So it is now, one in a family may have a unique role -
Each one in his or her place has a purpose to fulfill.

“Father, I have been given by Thee a role to fill in Thy divine scheme of things. I thank Thee for any way Thou hast allowed me to do what I have been called to do. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

1st Chronicles 6

THE SERVICE OF GOD

The role of those who serve God on behalf of His people, and serve the people for God is very important. In this long chapter there are a series of lists that distinguished those who were given specific work on behalf of all of the Lord's people. When we understand the variety of positions our Lord has designated for His people to fill in their public testimony, that enables us to be content with what our role is in the work. Divine Persons have gifted us to be able to do what by nature we couldn't and then He arranges the opportunities to use that gift and calling. The use of these gifts keeps us united as we each realize the need of us as individuals to fulfill our responsibility to God and His people.

The first list is of the priests who all came from the tribe of Levi. Levi and Simeon, the sons of Jacob had acted in cruelty, bitterness and hatred against the men of Shechem and were consequently not given territory of their own in the promised land that they could claim for themselves and their posterity. Simeon was blended into Judah and some of them went north as far as Dan. Levi had stood for God when others failed so that in spite of the wickedness of the original son of Jacob, they had been given a special role to fill in the nation of Israel. A lesson for us to learn is that even though there is a dark past in the lives of some of God's people, there is a work for them still in the service of God.

When God saves us by His grace, He begins with us there - at that moment in that place and in that situation and adapts us into our new life in a way that best pleases Him. We do not realize this at the time, but when we look back over life's history, we face the fact that there may still be consequences we have to accept because of sin in our lives before we were saved. Some things we have to live with and some areas of service we will not be able to participate in. But that does not mean we are useless and have nothing to contribute to the advancement of the kingdom of God.

Priests and Levites were dispersed to all parts of Israel and they were able to use their influence in positive ways for the benefit of the Lord's people where they were placed. Not all priests are mentioned in the list of names. Some of the Levites stand out. Amram was a man of faith. He and his wife, Jochabed had three children who were each different in personality and ability. Each one had influence on the God's people, and apart from some serious lapses on the part of each, they were a blessing to the Israelites. Moses had God-given leadership capacities that were unmatched. Aaron was a smooth-talking capable man who wanted to please the people but was willing to stand up for what was right when he was propped up by Moses. He could handle the public priesthood quite well. Miriam was a good singer and seemed to be a good leader of women even though she had an underlying vindictive spirit toward her younger brother Moses. One who leads God's people are not perfect people. We all fail in some way, but that does not necessarily mean we are finished. However, in the case of Nadab and Abihu, the consequences of their willful and casual attitude toward holy things was fatal. Aaron and Miriam on the other hand, had occasions when their moral weakness brought temporary consequences.

It is right to expect those who lead God's people and are given the privilege to speak for Him, to conduct themselves in moral, physical and spiritual ways that are consistent with the high standard of righteousness God desires. People should be able to look up to them and follow them with confidence, knowing that they are acting under divine guidance and authority. They should do what is right and we should be able to emulate them gladly.

Eleazar and Phinehas were priests who could confirm God's word in an uncompromising way and yet correct wrongs with tact and integrity when it was appropriate. Integrity is not based on heavy-handed demands of adherence to the law, which is necessary at times, but also wisdom is needed in situations where there is controversy because of a difference of opinions. Those engaged in spiritual leadership need to be strong and compassionate at the same time. Abiathar and Zadok had their times of testing in their priestly ministry. There is a price to be paid by some when they do right and well as when they do wrong. Those costs are part of what is expected when we are actively engaged in the service of God.

The service of the Levites included tending to the needs and maintenance of the tabernacle and the temple. Those returning from captivity needed to know that the people of God are not free-lances but are accountable to God, to His people, to their designated calling and to those who labor closely with them. Gershon, Kohath and Merari each had specific responsibilities when the cloud lifted off the tabernacle as the sign it was time to go forward. When each person fulfilled their assigned task it was like the tabernacle melted and moved from being a structure to a parade of material crossing the desert. At the appointed spot when the cloud stopped, the material would rise before the eyes of those looking on like a miracle being performed until it was a unique building put in the right place in the right way, and then the cloud would come down right on top of the tabernacle.

In temple service everything from moving the animals to the appropriate place for sacrifice, to the singing of appropriate "psalms, hymns and spiritual songs" was done by the Levites. They were trained from generation to generation to do the right thing in the right way at the right time. It is incumbent on those who have been ministering to the Lord and His people in some appointed way, to make sure that work is continued by qualified and exercised younger people. They have a right to know why the work they do is important and how to do it best. They should also be made aware of what will happen if they get careless and seek to do things in their own way. They should know why certain things should not be done and why the consequences can be very serious if a work is neglected or not accomplished as it should be.

When Heman from the family of Kohath led the music, he needed Asaph from the family of Gershon the music coordinator at his right hand, and Ethan of Merari at his left. Discordant music has a negative effect on worship and testimony. The words of a hymn or a Gospel song needs to be well-sung and heard clearly when the people of God are assembled. The fact of the changing of sounds in music coordinates the variety of voices so, that by saying the same words at the same time, the truth being conveyed is easily understood. This cannot be done in a chant or when words are overpowered by instruments. Mere sounds are not the point of music in assembly gatherings. Scriptural truth is able to be made personal to every person who participates when they sing the words together. No longer are they merely listening, but by singing words it has a personal effect.

Elkanah, Samuel's father, was a Levite living in Ephrath where Bethlehem is located. Samuel's father would have been involved in tabernacle service in his turn, so Samuel's service to the Lord by serving Eli would not have been strange to him. When the musicians led the music, Heman the grandson of Samuel was there doing his service for the Lord in spite of the failure of his father Joel's sinfulness.

So that those returning from exile would know what to do and where to go, the chronicler listed the tribe of Levi designating those of the priestly work. Then he listed those who had the responsibility of the temple, those who were responsible for the music and the duties associated with Levitical service. There was a list to tell the Levites where they were to live. The resettlement program included the restoration of public worship and also having the Levites move to areas designated by lot. Lots would leave the results with God, and would preserve from charges of favoritism or nepotism as to who lived where.

The six cities of refuge which were likely mainly inhabited by Levites, they would be the judges for the most part and thus would be more impartial than those who were kin. Local tribal interests or disputes would not be a major concern to the Levites because their service for God was distinct. To some this may not have seemed important until an accident happened. The Levites would hold a preliminary hearing outside the gate to determine the next step to take in a dispute. The accused person had to remain inside the city walls. Even if the death of a person was accidental, the one who caused it had to stay inside the city until the high priest died. Justice and mercy go together and those engaged in the leadership of God's people are responsible to show both.

We think some things are insignificant and/or petty, but when the unity and fellowship of God's people are at stake, nothing should be considered unimportant. Even the details given that seem small and irrelevant, have to be considered to have a clear understanding of an issue. If instructions are important enough to have been placed in the scriptures by the Holy Spirit, we need to know them and apply them to situations in which we are found or are called upon to make a wise judgment.

God identified His servants by name in the past, whether they were priests, those who gave out hymns or those who prayed. Some made decisions that affected many and others affected one or two people, but none were irrelevant to the Lord. We live today in a similar public reference where what one of the Lord's people does, has an effect on the public testimony of an assembly. Some decisions are made that have far-reaching effects. As those who serve a living Savior, we need to remain unified with the Lord's people and still do that to which we have been called without interfering with another man's line of things.

1st Chronicles 6:32. *“And they ministered before the dwelling place of the tabernacle of the congregation with singing, until Solomon had built the house of the Lord in Jerusalem: and then they waited on their office according to their order.”*

THEIR ORDER.

The Levites had a work which God gave them to do
They dare not leave God's dwelling place until that work was through
Each knew the role he had to fill, the burden he had to carry
When one's office claimed their time, they were not to tarry.

Aaron's family went to the altar, their work was that of priests
Asaph's family stood on the right, the musical score to keep
Merari's stood on the left, each one ready to assist
The order was maintained lest anything important would be missed.

They had their families to maintain; their own work back at home
But when it was their turn to serve, to the Lord's house they did come
They dwelt among the other tribes but had a separate identity
It was their calling from the Lord to serve Him faithfully.

That practice and order should still be maintained among God's people now
Not every one that serves the Lord at first knows really how
He should participate in holy things until by others he is shown
The order of God's work and how assembly work is done.

The older folks should take the time to guide the younger ones
And give the reasons for each event and how it best is done
Even the hymns to sing and why we sing with attention on the words
And how we can support God's work and give financially to the Lord.

Some things seem insignificant to us, but there are special needs
That have to attended to whenever the assembly meets
Some people may not realize the work each other does
But the Lord it is who we serve through His saints, and He our service knows.

We don't need to compare our work with others or keep track of the time it takes
Our only concern is it is done for the Lord, we serve for Jesus' sake
When all the saints each do their part, the work of God succeeds
The needs are met, the saints are encouraged, and the Gospel is fully preached.

“O Lord God, the God of order and of grace: I pray that this assembly will be able to maintain their strong testimony here. Move each believer to do his or her part that the public presentation of truth may clearly testify of Thee and the orderliness of Thy people. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

1st Chronicles 7

PERSONALITY DIFFERENCES

In any group of people there is a wide variety of personal strengths and weaknesses. Differences in personality should not be a cause of disunity. There is a tendency on the part of most people to think that, "If everyone was like me, we would be a much better group and have a far greater influence on those around." This happens in families, assemblies and even nations. In some cases, nations try to force their political opinions on other nation in an effort to make them conform to their way of doing things. This has been a cause for war between nations at times. In some assemblies a strong-minded leader is never satisfied until every person is willing to do what he says, on his terms and in the way he wants. In families some parents have told their child, "It's too bad you are not like your brother and sister."

This mindset has serious negative consequences, one of which is disunity in the group that may lead to division. The writer of the Chronicles with the aim of unifying people who had been scattered in captivity and diverse in their thinking, compiled these lists of individual groups to reestablish in the minds of the people their common ground rather than things that divided them. The list of the military men of Issachar and their strengths is very impressive. These "valiant men of might" were notable and rightly so. As the returning exiles read about the strong military leaders in their past, perhaps it instilled in them some courage to pick up and go forward from where they were now. They would have to bravely step ahead in spite of having to start over from a scratch. Those names from their past would let them know the kind of people from whom they came.

The tribe of Benjamin had been decimated generations before and had barely been able to survive as an identifiable tribe. Civil war had brought the numbers of men down so low they were wondering how they could ever continue. The few that were left were "mighty men of valor." Even when we are small and insignificant in numbers, and perhaps think we are overlooked in the whole scheme of things, we need to recognize when God brings recovery, the size of the group isn't what is important.

Some assemblies have been very successful in testimony and in reaching out with the Gospel. Other assemblies have suffered great losses for one reason or another. One group may have leaders who have vision and a desire to further the work of God by outreach to other areas. Another may have leaders who focus on teaching believers. The assembly at Thessalonica was actively engaged in "sounding out the word of the Lord." The assembly at Berea was characterized by "searching the scriptures" to see if what was taught was correct scripturally. Yet men from both assemblies came together to support and work with Paul as a unified group.

Differences can strengthen a work. If every person or assembly was exactly alike there would be areas of great strength and areas of great weakness. A unified body of believers when guided by the Holy Spirit and led by spiritual men, is a strong force for good in furthering the interests of the kingdom of God. In the lists of names the chronicler wrote, there are a number of women mentioned who were able to influence the nation. The tribe of Naphtali is listed here as a reminder of their grandmother, Bilah, the concubine of Jacob. Even though little is written about their progeny and their accomplishments, there were times in their tribal history when they rose to the occasion and did what was necessary even though they seemed to be pacifists who wanted to avoid controversy. It is unfortunate for a people if some constantly are in a fight or are hoping for one. It is also bad if no one will stand up and challenge what is wrong and pay the price for doing what is right.

Because a person is reticent by nature, and may be unwilling to attack a problem or a project with vigor and enthusiasm, does not mean they have nothing to offer of a positive nature. Those who "stay by the stuff" while others go out to engage publicly in the work, are filling an important role in the overall purpose of things. We need to recognize and appreciate quiet people who stay in the background, and give them credit for using what they have and doing what they do.

Women are given special consideration in the list of the half-tribe of Manasseh that settled on the west side of the Jordan River. The inheritance of a father who had no sons was to be passed on to his daughters. Certain restrictions applied if they married. They had to marry someone who was from within the tribal families. There are roles to fill and work to do among God's people by women who have an understanding of who they are and why they are here. Instead of seeking to do the work designated for men, women should apply themselves with enthusiasm and grace to the work they have in their sphere of service. There is much to do among the people of God for women who are available to do what they are able. There is no reason for them to seek to take on the work God has given to men. For both men and women, the Spirit of God will provide ample opportunity to serve Him, once we take the initiative in a work, we know we can do.

Another area of concern Ezra did not ignore was the fact that temperament has an effect on other people. It is important for me to be aware of the fact that some sisters in Christ may suffer depression during and after pregnancy. Jabez's mother was a case in point as well as the wife of Machier. Some of God's people suffer in ways others will never know. It is wrong for me to be intolerant of those who have idiosyncrasies that are uncommon or live with depression. Those may be caused by physical or emotional distress, or it may even be a genetic thing passed on from those in their family. It is important for us to make ourselves available to assist them in any way we can without condemning them.

Some of God's people have suffered great losses and tragedies. If a son or daughter has been quickly taken away, and there is no evidence they have been born again is a very hard burden to bear. When a brother or sister is going through a painful time of loss, usually the best way we can help them is to sit and listen to what they have to say. A touch on the shoulder or arm, a quiet hymn, a personal gift, a verse of scripture written out on a piece of paper may be the best thing we can do for them in our desire to give them comfort. People who haven't experienced something similar sometimes talk about the "healing process" in a way that suggests we can get over the loss. Actually, we can't. We have to learn how to live with the loss and press ahead in life knowing there are things that have happened which we cannot change.

Ephraim went through that when he lost two sons in a battle over livestock. They lost their lives for some cows. It is at such times we begin to take stock of what really counts in life. It is not wrong for us to grieve over the passing of loved ones. That is part of life. But there should be a dignity and grace on our part that is

similar to what Job said, "The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away. Blessed be the name of the Lord." It is possible to be so occupied with our own grief that we forget others are looking on. Our children and grandchildren, our neighbors have had a loss too, and they need to know when the time has come to "cast our care upon the Lord," and trust His sustaining power.

The historical record of the men of Asher would have impressed those of that tribe when the captives returned, that not only were their forefathers mighty men of valor, but they were "choice" men. These men would have maintained their integrity in the heat of battle. They were both brave and compassionate and maintained their purity all at the same time. Those who led the soldiers were men who could see beyond the immediate event and looked to the outcome of the situation. They were "outstanding" leaders who could do what needed to be done with what they had.

There are always going to be obstacles which leaders have to face. How they face them and how they deal with the obstacles is a testimony as to the kind of person they are. Purity of motive, integrity in character, bravery in action and wisdom in the whole matter is needed in those going before the people of God. The heart of the leaders is best seen when he has the kind heart of a shepherd and the brave heart of a lion.

1st Chronicles 7:9. *"And the number of them, after their genealogy by their generations, heads of the house of their fathers, mighty men of valour, was twenty thousand and two hundred."*

WARTIME.

They rallied to the cause - there were enemies around
It took more than wishful thinking
When they heard the trumpet sound
Calling them to rally and gird themselves for war
When the time came for them to stand and fight
They knew what they were there for.

Some enemies were after their cattle
Some after their saleable goods
When they all gathered to battle
They went forward from where they stood
We need to protect what God has given to us
And recognize what we have is a sacred trust.

The foes may seem like giants similar to those of Gath
They will not be satisfied until they take away what we have
The only way to deal with giants is to smite them until they are dead
Fatal wounds won't be in their feet, we have to hit them in the head
Where they who challenge truth they say, "intellectually,"
Will fall under the sword of genuine spirituality.

Some still take a stand against truth by quoting their great numbers
It is okay when that happens if it awakens us out of slumber.
But the numbers really have no lasting meaning
Though we should not on our spears be leaning
It is true the Lord is in the midst of two or three
But we must use the sword of the Spirit effectively.

The war is not over for us; there are battles yet to fight
Until the Lord comes there will be strife between darkness and the light
Some times the enemy is subtle, he actually gets inside
We must resist him strong in faith; never run away nor hide
And wherever the good fight of faith is waged
Be sure of the outcome - it is the triumphs of grace.

"Almighty God, who has all power in heaven and earth. Help Thy people to bravely resist the enemies of materialism, opposition, strife, vainglory, complacency and fear. I pray in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

1st Chronicles 8

A SECOND LOOK

To a person who is looking for his roots by tracing the family ancestry, there are a number of places to look for information. There are places where people lived and occupations in which they were engaged that are recorded in various places. Military records provide the names of those who served their country in the military services. Tax records are kept regarding those who were in business, and property tax records or

land surveys have the names of those who lived in certain places and worked at certain vocations. The list in the previous chapter of the tribe of Benjamin is probably a list of those who served in the military. In this long list are those who would have given an idea to those returning from exile as to who their forbearers were as families and where they lived. This knowledge gives to those who are curious a sense of belonging.

Those who returned from Babylon were mainly from the tribes of Judah, Simeon and Benjamin that were more or less assimilated into one nation who lived in the south of Israel. 130 years earlier the northern tribes had been taken captive by the Assyrians who scattered the captives all over the empire so they could not unite against the government. It was because of this technique of keeping captives separate and moving strangers into the land captured, that the phrase "the ten lost tribes" came. It was different for those from the south who were taken captive a generation or two later. They were taken to Babylon and used for the benefit of the government. Daniel and those with him, Nehemiah and Ezra, others who were skilled and had natural ability were trained and used in Babylon. The Jews retained their identity in spite of people like Haman who wanted to have them all killed. When they returned from their exile, they needed these lists of names to provide a sense of unity and restore their identity and property.

Accountability among God's people is a good thing to practice in order to maintain a unified testimony to the truth of God in an area. Assembly life is not just an individual choice as to whether I want to be involved or not. It begins with God making a clear statement in that He says, "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together..." We are accountable to God. We are also accountable to the assembly as to the activities in which we are engaged. Peter, Paul and Barnabas "rehearsed the matter," and "rehearsed all that God had done with them," to the Lord's people who were gathered together in order to maintain unity by the saints being informed of what was going on.

The tribe of Benjamin had a particular reason for tracing their lineage because it was from that tribe from which Saul, the first king of Israel, came. In any family history there are people we would like to forget who have been an embarrassment to our family name. There are also noble souls we hope everyone remembers. Ehud of the tribe of Benjamin was a judge of Israel before they had a king, and many generations before the captivity and return of the captives. Shoham was an embarrassment to the tribe because he had divorced at least two wives and had children by another. There were industrious people who built towns and pressed ahead to claim their inheritance. Some of the tribe were militant people who took back by force what had belonged to their forbearers.

Women in the genealogical history stood out for one reason or another as the who should be remembered by the succeeding generations who needed to remember the cost that was paid for that which had been given to them. And then there was Saul: the son of Kish, who was both a reason for pride by the tribe - and also embarrassment. As the Benjamites either read or heard read this list of names, they would be made to realize that in spite of their checkered past, God was still interested in them and their future.

All of us have been involved in things we wish had never happened. We all know some of the bad points of our family tree as well as some of the good things. But we are not called upon to spend time worrying about things we cannot change, nor should we ignore lessons that can be learned from the events of the past. It is up to us now, to go forward in faith and commit ourselves again to following the path of life the Holy Spirit opens up before us.

Saul had his strengths and weaknesses. He was chosen by God to be the first king of Israel that the people had demanded. He was outwardly the kind of person people thought they could look up to. He was a big good-looking man who looked kingly. However, personally he was a very inconsistent man who could not be counted on to do the right thing from one time to the next. Inwardly he was weak and untrustworthy. There was no evidence of divine life in him although at times he could say the right words and do the right things. That was mainly for a show of authority or religion for the sake of the people.

Jonathan his son was also listed in the ancestry as one who was in line to be the king, but he knew David would be the king, not him and he died in battle at a comparatively young age. Mephibosheth his crippled son was in the list as well as those who came after him up to the time of the captivity. It is of interest that in the tribe of Benjamin there are those who were known for being particularly skilled with their left hand, and were able to use that to advantage. At the end of the list are bowmen or archers, who were brave men and would have tried to defend the people. They had large families that were obviously a source of wonder in that there were so many of them.

In our history there are reasons to be glad as well as sad. Each of us should consider that we too are in an ancestral list, and our lives may be of some significance to our progeny after we have died. It may be, they

will make decisions based on what they knew or heard about us. It is important for me to remember my children and grandchildren will wonder what made me do this, live there or believe that. It is the same with spiritual children. Some we may have taught in a Sunday School class or are friends of our children who came in and out of our houses. Some may have heard us preach the Gospel and have formed opinions and even convictions because of that. Their lives and actions may follow a certain course because of our influence. We need to take a serious look at ourselves and our lives. We may be found in a list of ancestors who have an impact for good or bad on future generations if our Lord be not come soon.

1st Chronicles 8:40. *"And the sons of Ulam were mighty men of valour, archers, and had many sons, and sons' sons, an hundred and fifty. All these are the sons of Benjamin."*

ARCHERS.

Some people do best up close where they can see the enemies' eyes
Others though they are small are quick, can bring big ones down to size
There is also a skill that often is left unsung
Because it is from a distance their most effective work is done.

We don't see their labor in the field because sometimes they are alone
In quietness they tend to their work often far away from home
They don't advertise nor give reports, about them no song is sung
Their work is done in silence; the results aren't seen till the battle is won.

A bow at a venture, a notched arrow of truth reaches far beyond our sight
Sometimes the target is not even seen as the arrow is let loose at night
A word spoken in season, a small Gospel tract, can do effective work
The pressure of a hand on a wayward one's shoulder, deep in the soul does hurt.

Then later on we hear a testimony as to how one soul is saved
We wonder which person said the right word, or who the credit will have
Until we listen and then get the whole story and picture -
The most important part of the work was done by the distant archer.

One can't seem to sleep, so in the darkness of the night
They send arrows of intercession and to God's throne they do take flight
Then from that throne, Divine Persons will send
The right words of enlightenment, and a life of sin comes to an end.

A shut-in believer who is not able to get around
Writes a letter or sends a paper hoping it will be found
On the beach in a bottle and curious eyes will behold
The truth of God's message as the papers they unfold.

Archers may not get the credit for all that they have done
By those who think by the swordsman only the battle can be won
But the Great Victor of all is the only One who really knows
Each one in his calling has a part in those who He chose.

"I wonder Father, how far back the seed was sown which brought a harvest here 50 years ago. If it would bring honor and glory to Thee, please use the seen sown then to bring a new harvest now. I pray in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

1st Chronicles 9

ABLE MEN

The purpose of the lists of genealogies in the first nine chapters of 1st Chronicles does not seem to be that every person's name appears in some list to impress either that person or others with their significance. In some cases, the unnamed person is contained in a name that represents the whole family. The important thing is that God knows every person by name. It is a very special occasion when a name is added to "The Lamb's book of life." The value of every human is not found in their family name, their occupation or where they live, but on the fact that every person has been given life by God. He knows who each one is, where they live and what they do. "All Israel" was included in the genealogies but not every one is named. Names of people are left out but the person is connected through the ones listed on the domestic list as to who they belonged to in a family, the political list as to what they were occupied with, or the religious lists as to their role in the worship of God. "All Israel" was included specifically or by proxy.

It was a powerful reminder to the returned Israelites that their genealogy extended from creation to where they were personally at the moment of restoration. Any casual thought for an excuse for their sin would be

removed as the Spirit of God reminded them of who they are before God. The historical records of the Israeli kings included every one of them and the cause of their captivity. "All Israel" and the sin and unfaithfulness of the people that took them to Babylon are linked. It seems like the Jews learned the lesson as far as worshipping idols of other nations was concerned. From the most liberal Jews to the most orthodox, there is a certain adherence to the Old Testament scriptures and a public reading of them in synagogues today. There is an awareness of their heritage that affects the religious and the atheistic Jews as a tie that binds them together.

A lesson for us is that if we ignore the word of God or even pick and choose what we are going to believe and practice of its teaching, we have opened ourselves to God's discipline for our unfaithfulness. These things that are written regarding the people of God in the past, are "written for our learning" in the same way genealogies were written for their learning. When we read through the New Testament as well as the Old, we are able to learn from those early Christians and early assemblies the principles and practices passed on by them. The doctrines and scriptural teaching we hold and practice are taught to us by those old believers, and "the things which we have learned among many witnesses, we are to commit to faithful mwn who are able to teach others also."

The "traditions of men" can be good or bad. Certain practices suitable to a community or a culture can be the best way to maintain a work of God in that place. It may not be suitable in another part of the world but the truth of the word is the same everywhere. The word of God alone is the source of information and instruction that is consistent with God's will. It should be practiced under divine authority in every person and place, and will be by those who are committed to obeying our Lord. How we apply it locally is up to wise and spiritual leadership.

Israelites, priests, Levites and those who served in the temple were all able to get back that which belonged to them by the right of inheritance. Along with those from the southern tribes came people from other tribes in the north who had moved into Jerusalem or its suburbs to be near the temple. They likely had not been taken captive 130 years earlier because they knew what was going to happen because of the rampant idolatry in the northern ten tribes. Some Jews from various tribes had moved to Judea and there they could be part of the worship of the people of God as God intended.

The Lord's people today have to make similar decisions as to where we are going to live and what our occupation will be. It is a wise man and woman who have first committed themselves to God and His word, who will either stay where there is a scripturally gathered assembly of believers or move to where there is one. The amount of money we can earn or the work we like best should not be the consideration as to where we live. It is better to have less money and be in fellowship with God and His people, than to be rich or famous and be in the wrong place.

The restored community listed here would be at the end of 2nd Chronicles if the purpose was to give a timeline of events. So there was obviously a different reason to put these names ahead of the genealogy of Saul that is at the end of this chapter leading the written account into the reign of David that follows. Those people had to have impressed on them the importance of the work in which they were to be engaged and the consequences of failing to do God's work in God's way. The Israelites were the common people who were responsible to provide all that was needed for the maintenance of the population and for the worship of God. The priests had a unique role that only they could fill. The Levites had duties designated to them that were the link throughout the whole nation. The gatekeepers had a specific role of guarding the house of God against all evil. When all of these occupations are working together there is unity among the people of God and a testimony to those around.

Spiritual priesthood today involves sacrifices of many different kinds. There are acceptable sacrifices [Heb.8:3] that we are able to offer to our God today. One is the sacrifice of a consecrated body [Rom.12:1]. There is the sacrifice of audible praise [Heb.13:15] and of temporal gifts [Heb.13:P16]. We are able to give sacrificial gifts of support to the Lord's servants [Phil.4:18] and share in their labors. When we come together as well as in private we can offer the sacrifice of thanks to God [Ps.107:22]. This often leads to the sacrifice of joy to God for His many mercies to us [Ps.27:6]. Repentance of sin and recovery to fellowship with God, produces the sacrifice of contrition [Ps.51:7]. To live righteously before the world [Ps.4:5] is a sacrifice when we refuse to compromise with that which is wrong. Paul indicated the sacrifice of self [2Tim.4:6] may bring suffering, reproach and even death. Of greater value than any physical sacrifices is the sacrifice of obedience [1Sam.15:2]. We have a priestly ministry and are numbered in the "kingdom of priests."

The widespread ministry of Levites would be obvious where in the places where they lived. On certain times of the year they would be responsible to go to Jerusalem to take their turn at temple service. In the assembly

of which we are a part we have our service to fulfill according to the gifts which God has given. These are for the benefit of the Lord's people and for the glory of God. The significance of our work does not depend on the recognition we may get from people, but rather on what we do for God and for the blessing of others. My attitude toward the role God has given me is as important, and maybe more so, than the actions of my service. Some may be mentioned publicly and what has been placed in our hands is not even recognized by people. That is not what puts a value on our work. "Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord."

Gatekeepers were placed at each of the four doors of the temple to guard them in the night and unlock the doors in the morning. There was a fortune of precious things inside that building, but of far greater importance was the presence of God who dwelt among His people and evidence of that fact was in that building. Gatekeepers of the temple then, and the house of God today have to be able to be trusted to handle costly things in a safe way to avoid any blame or charge of doing things dishonestly. Whether in be money, gifts, offerings, building material and maintenance of the property, those people must be honest and reliable men.

There will likely be attacks against that which belongs to God in His house "which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth." When the duties of each steward are fulfilled without compromise for any reason, the right spirit of fellowship and worship can be kept warm and vibrant. When that is true, the singers can edify themselves and each other as they sing "psalms, hymns and spiritual songs," and sing and make melody in their hearts unto the Lord." Those who participate publicly on behalf of all of the assembly will have a fragrance of Christ when they pray and preach. The ungrieved Holy Spirit will be able to lead each person to present to the Lord that which is fitting and "in order." Preparation for service leads to effectiveness in service and worship.

Each day of the week is part of our commitment to stewardship whether it be in our homes with our families or out in business and school with those who are strangers to God's grace. Each activity in which I am engaged can be a priestly service, a maintenance work like that of the Levites, a protective role for the benefit of others or a source of support for all of us. A consciousness of God's presence and knowing that He is guiding us in and through situations is a steward's privilege.

Once those who returned from exile understood who they were in God's eyes. and where they were in God's program of the ages, a united people were then ready to hear or read how they came to be where they were presently. The narrative begins with Saul's genealogy and moves on into the history of David's kingship right to the time of Solomon. There were able men then, and there are able men now. It is the responsibility of able men to be available men.

1Chronicles 9:27. *"And they lodged round about the house of God, because the charge was upon them, and the opening thereof every morning pertained to them."*

THE CHARGE.

A charge to keep, a work laid on willing shoulders
Of those who are by families chosen, by a Sovereign Lord who knows
He has His reasons based on faithfulness of those whose blood-line
Runs from distant days, and choices made - unpopular by others,
But recognized by God, who places in the histories of families - true,
A solemn sense of duty, and a commitment made, not to men but God.

About the gate, the younger generation gathers, looking at each other -
Taking stock of others waiting too, for those who come to God with gifts -
Gifts and sacrifices alike pass the learning eyes, and move to place of death.
Other, older men, stand near the door where God with man, meets.
Meets in solemn convocation, with thousands gathered and watched -
Watched by men - tried and proven in smaller, lesser service in years past.

Now, with dignity and obvious respect - these standing ones, keep watch.
Day and night with designated employ, they stand on guard - for God.
It is no small or trifling thing to keep the door - the door that leads within.
Within, in holy solitude - the place of life and latent death - and brightest light -
Guarded a few steps before by incense rising in the flickering light of lamps;
And the bread in rows - significant in meaning of a fellowship holy.

There, with the charge of God upon them - quietly they stand their post.
The daily opening of doors, preparations there to make before the dawn-song starts.
Then voices rising to the morning sun - and God - the songs begin.

The singers with their voices - bass and tenor - mingles with the sound of gathering feet
and hands.
Sounds of gathering food from without the camp - and Hallelujahs from within -
Daily reminders of the blessed truth - God dwells with men.

May never I forget, the God of those gate-guards and keepers of the door,
Is the same Supreme Almighty God to whom I owe allegiance full and genuine.
His nature and His purposes remain the same; a people for His name, and for His Son.
A kingdom of priests who worship daily in spirit and in truth, but not free-lances.
His way is clearly taught, and guards about the gate and door, keep watch.
Not their own choices, but simply to preserve for God, what belongs to Him.

“Father in heaven, I am thinking today of those Thou hast placed in the gates who learn Thy ways and word that others coming in can see and order prevails. There are those who farther on in life and experience are able to lead and guide the actions and the priestly service that none may fail in due respect for that which is of God, and for God. I praise Thee for such ones appointed by Thee. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

1st Chronicles 9:27. *“And they lodged round about the house of God, because the charge was upon them, and the opening thereof every morning pertained to them.”*

THE HELPS.

They kind of blended in, these laborers for the Lord.
Easily overlooked, they were in their appointed place,
To do the appointed work - given by God - unsung by men
Skilled in the work to which they were called
“Very able” - tried and proven - doing what they should.
Some with stooped shoulders - bent down by burdens borne
Others near the doors - unobtrusive - blending in somewhat,
But with watching, wary eyes scanning those entering -
At times a guiding hand removing from the throng
One or two - and questions asked or answered.

Other some lived nearby - close to God's house
For theirs was an important work done in early morning darkness -
Arising from their beds while others slept on -
Hastening to their appointed tasks before the first morning rays signaled the sacrifice.
The sounds echoed in the darkness of doors opening -
The morning sacrifice unpenned - made ready for the coming priest.
Who knows their names or the work they do?
They are only noticed if they are absent - their work undone.
Others working at the ovens - making sure the bread is right - and there.
And the sound of continual singing - day and night - from those who service is praise.

It goes on today - perhaps altered in some ways by the New Covenant -
But following the same pattern of divine instruction and guidance by our God, who is the
same.

The Unseen Presence lays upon broad shoulder a yoke to wear with honor.
Some “very able” men labor in the Word to feed the flock of God.
The “keepers of the entry” are in their place, with opened eyes and ears alert.
Those with the “charge upon them” are there to open and make ready -
The bread of God has been prepared - has baked in warm ovens of ready hearts -
The emblematic loaf symbolizing the Source and Cost of the Covenant -
The songs of praise and worship have been sounding in private chambers - unheard -
But now in full voice break forth in public worship - all of this by “the Helps.”

Gracious God and Father, for those whom Thou hast gifted as “helps” in the Church - I give thanks. I pray that I will not take their service for granted nor ignore the sacrifices they make for the good of God's people. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

1st Chronicles 10

THE END OF THE BEGINNING

Sometimes we hear people say, "Forget the past and start over." At times there may be some reason to start over because of a mistake or failure, but to forget the past usually means that the mistakes and failures will be repeated. To have to repeat the same lesson time after time means the teacher is very inept, or the ones who should be hearing the lesson are asleep, ignorant, incapable of learning, not interested or are so

occupied with other things they do not pay attention. The interest of the chronicler was to promote a continuity with the past in order to unify a new generation who had been living in a foreign land all their lives where the news and daily events had no real connection to them. They were slaves or indentured servants who depended on the foreign government or their slave-owner to make all decision. Now, suddenly, they became a small group of nation-builders who hardly knew where to start and what to do.

History is not redundant when recounting the motivation behind establishing and maintaining a unique identity. Our Lord Jesus Christ intends His people to be a "peculiar people, zealous of good works. One of the most important activities of God's people is to weekly review the most important event in our history as the people of God, by remembering Him in our minds and making a proclamation of His death. "This do in remembrance of Me," does not give us free rein to design a special program similar to a year's end program for the Sunday School classes and their parents. He gave us a uniquely simple practice in which we are to be engaged weekly to recall our history and the One who placed us in the middle of His-story. On a table is placed bread and a cup, symbolic of a Person and the greatest work He ever did for us. We do not put a blood-pressure cuff or a box of Band-Aids on the table to remind us our Lord worked miracles and authority There is not five loaves of bread and two small fish on the table to remind us that He can create something out of nothing or a lot out of a little.

As "a pilgrim band in a foreign land, who are marching from Calvary," we remember Him who is the Source of Life, the Sustainer of Life, the Giver of Life, the Essence of Life - and we are unified. By the practice of breaking the bread and drinking from the cup together, past history become real afresh to us today, and the center of our unity is a Person - God Himself. By this means we recall the event and learn the lessons from Him who lived and died for us, and lives again for us. We are raised to walk in newness of life David's kingdom with an account of the first king, Saul, and how he died.

The Philistines were a strong tribe of enemies of Israel at the end of the book of Judges who captured Samson and physically abused him, humiliated him and mocked him before his final act of faith took place. He "slew more [Philistines] in his death than in his life." The failure of Saul, Israel's first king, who followed Samson, led to his death also by the Philistines. An arrow shot from a distance struck him and mortally wounded him. David in contrast is brought into public view first as a young person who got "up-close and personal, with Goliath and then dealt further with the Philistine enemies face to face. When God is with us we have to remember our hope and power is in Him, not ourselves. Our enemy will pursue unless we "resist the devil." The whole armor of God is given to us to be put on for protection. Then we have the sword of the Spirit to motivate us to move forward in faith to "victory in Jesus."

The point of recounting this brief history of Saul to those who never knew his leadership, was that they would pick up the reins of nationhood and start again in fellowship with God. They were to start right at the first of this new beginning by giving God the first place in leadership, and by not forgetting the consequences of self-will. Saul did not obey God nor did he turn to God when he should have. He was unfaithful to God's will and died in his transgression. He turned to the powers of darkness for needed wisdom because he knew he was a failure himself and the powers of darkness turned on him. Saul had not done what he was told by God when he stopped short of totally eliminating the Amalekites. He was unfaithful in that event. From that time on he was obsessed with getting rid of David. The chronicler knew as he was guided by the Holy Spirit that there was no unifying purpose in recounting a litany of failures.

To make the exiles understand the importance of divine guidance in their future, the end of Saul's willful reign is the object of focus. A battle with historic enemies - the restored ones would have to face enemies; leaders affect those who follow them in the way they live and die - they would have those followed them both for the good and bad; these were useful lessons. Defeat and dishonor has a similar effect of many when we take matters into our own hands. Those people would experience the same results if they did the same things without God. Wrong actions on the part of a leader will likely lead to wrong actions by those who follow them. Saul failed by doing what he knew was wrong, and he also failed by not doing what he knew was right. We will fail too if we do not pursue what is right as well as avoiding that which is wrong.

However, there is another thing for us to consider. Even though a leader may be a failure in his personal life, the position of leadership deserved our respect. There is no excuse for us to "speak evil of dignities." In order for unified continuance to be maintained, the office of leadership needs to be honored even if the person who holds the office fails. Valiant men took a valiant action to remove that which was dishonoring to their history as well as to their present nation. The men of Jabesh-Gilead did a very courageous thing when they got the mutilated bodies of Saul and his sons and buried them properly. Appreciation and gratitude are always appropriate in spite of failures. Bitterness or a "he got what was coming to him" attitude is never right.

Saul's fear and frantic pursuit of guidance from the witch of Endor are not recounted here at the place of a new beginning. It would have served no useful purpose in challenging God's people to go forward with confidence in God. We can't avoid the consequences of failure, but there is no reason to dwell on the past failure of other or to recount it. It becomes a problem when jealousy or animosity moves people to dig up dirt to make mud to throw at those who may affect a new generation of believers. It was enough for the chronicler to identify the reasons Saul died so they would not do the same things

Saul was unfaithful in not carrying through to the end the command of the Lord. Self-will is a form of stubbornness and stubbornness is as "iniquity and idolatry." When one chooses to do a work for God in the way they want rather than the way divine instructions are given, that is the serious sin of stubbornness. When Saul consulted with the witch, this act was rebellion, which is as "the sin of witchcraft." He didn't practice witchcraft but yielded himself to be influenced by the power of darkness. The is a dark attraction in the natural man to the allure of the unknown. That often is camouflaged by Ouija boards, tarot cards, crystal balls, horoscopes etc. and also the "spirit-guides" of the New Age movement.

It is true that the keys of life and death are in the hand of the Lord, but the method or cause of death is not necessarily of His doing. "The wages of sin is death," and "death has passed upon all men, for all have sinned," so no one can avoid that consequence. God holds that key and it was used first to give life. However, the actions involved in the process of death is not removed from omens hands. In sickness the course of life, if not altered by medical help, leads to a short life. If that life is maintained for many years, that does not mean that death is conquered. Only that disease has been temporarily controlled by the intervention of mankind and medical practice. The Israelites were told if they obeyed the Lord and walked in His ways, "None of these diseases" would come upon them. That didn't mean they would not die, but that they would live longer in the same way as they would if they "honored their father and mother."

An archer's arrow started the death process, falling on his own sword in a suicide attempt to avoid torture, and finally the sword of an Amalekite, one of those Saul spared, were all involved in the death of the first king of Israel. The whole story of his life didn't need to be told to motivate the exiles to start a new beginning and move forward in faith. The national identity was now in their hands. All they had to start with were ruined building, natural resources, as history that revealed the God of Israel in the past, and the confidence that He would be the same to them as He was to their forefathers. The conclusion of a life of failure by Saul the first king, didn't mean there was no hope for the future. The Lord who in His own way arranged that Saul's death would not stop His sovereign plans, had already picked David to lead His people into a new day for the nation of Israel. The rest of the book of 1st Chronicles tells of the events that would be beneficial to guide those new people who were starting over.

Failures come in personal life, family life, assembly life and national life. This does not mean we should succumb to a feeling of hopelessness. Instead we should take a brief look back and learn. Then we should look around at our responsibilities and our assets so we can meet those responsibilities. Then we look up to our God and commit ourselves to Him to walk by faith in Him. following that we go to work and begin again to serve Him wholeheartedly with reverence and godly fear.

1st Chronicles 10:13. *"So Saul died for his transgression which he committed against the Lord, even against the word of the Lord, which he kept not, and also for asking counsel of one that had a familiar spirit, to inquire of it;"*

TWO FATAL CHOICES.

One act was enough for the kingdom to be taken from failing hands
And given to another - though younger in years - God found a true man
Who saw beyond the moment to the consequences of choices -
And did not turn aside from divine direction to listen to strange voices.

To not do what God says - or to do what He says not to
Is a challenge to divine intelligence and will - to do
Those things of self-interest that lift one up in damning pride
That is only concluded when the sinning one is thrust through and dies.

The fatal attraction of Satan's purring voice through a woman -
Leads one into the darkness coming from the pit that's superhuman -
And takes one from the path of righteousness and holy ground
Leaving the sinning one to suffer as the lost ones all around.

The first act that leads to the final blow came from afar -
The arrow from some distant strength let go, and through the air

Came that which struck the strong man down in deep despair -
Causing the fatal wound and left him dying then and there.

Many temptations come through the air from unknown sources -
Through airy skies comes sounds, and words, and pictures offering choices
Like arrows that strike between the joints and seams of our harness:
There come the poison arrows that when they strike, can fatally harm us.

When those poisoned tips strike first, we feel only the prick of conscience -
But the awful venom that kills slowly at first seems harmless -
Until the mind with thoughts unclean begin to daily rise
And one is consumed with sins unsatisfied until one dies.

Keep the door of eyes and ears and mouth under control.
When they are left unguarded, they bring poison to the soul -
And a life once lived in the strength of God now becomes weak.
The downfall of the righteous is what those fatal choices seek.

“Righteous God, it saddens me today to think of one whose life held good promise; now lying wounded and alone because of fatal choices. Breathe Thy life into that man again and may he and his family be healed. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

1st Chronicles 11

GOD HAS A PLAN

Consistent with the objective of unifying a comparatively small group of people from divergent places who for the most part of their lives, were only allowed to do what they were told, is the recounting of the life and work of their most illustrious leader in their history as a nation. There would be no reason to go back over the failures of the leader nor even all of the bad things that happened to the nation. This account was to assist them in the starting of a new national identity as a united people. There are a few incidents of failure that would help them to avoid repeating the same problem, but to relate the sordid details of the failure of their ancient leaders would serve no positive purpose. Even to remind the exiles who had returned of the reluctance of the nation as a whole to acknowledge the divine appointment of David as the king of all Israel, would not have been a positive motivating message.

When God's people have undergone discipline for sin or failure, there is no benefit derived from bringing the cause of discipline up again after it has been dealt with. There will always be found a reason, we think, for being critical of others. Sometimes we will feel ourselves quite godly if when we are criticized and corrected, we take it with downcast eyes, and a sanctimonious humble demeanor - and maybe even are able to arrange ourselves to shed a few tears. The actual point of any correction and discipline is to change one's behavior and attitude so they will not repeat the offense or do anything we know is not consistent with fellowship with God's plans.

Details of David's early life, his victory over Goliath, the animosity of Saul, the cave of Adullam, or even the seven years he was king over Judah reigning from Hebron while the rest of Israel chose to follow Saul's family, are not mentioned here. Recounting those events would have had no unifying purpose. The urgency of the Chronicles was to lay the foundation, a groundwork, for a new identity and a new day in which they would be established and motivated by divine design. It was important for the sake of the new generation to know it was "The Lord your God" who told David he would shepherd the sheep and be their ruler.

Shepherds need to know the territory in which they live so they can make sure their charges will avoid the dangers in that area. Also, they will know where the "green pastures" are so the people can receive the greatest benefits for their maintenance and growth. Shepherds know potential enemies as well as obvious enemies. The poison of "tansy-ragwort" with its attractive yellows flowers is as great a danger as a prowling wolf. There are weeds the shepherd has to pull out that no one will ever know about except God and you - but you spared the sheep of God's pasture from death and that is what counts. There will be open battles against false teachers so that the sheep will not fall prey to their lies and deception.

To "rule well" doesn't require a baseball bat to instill fear people lest they do something out-of-the-way. A shepherd has enough experience in life that he knows how to be fair and kind at the same time he is firm and plain speaking with authority, Balance and firmness; justice and compassion; a correcting hand and an even hand at the same time all have to be found in one who rules God's people. A "novice" has not yet had the experience to do this. The standard of righteousness and truth are balanced by morality, integrity,

spirituality and grace when one is called to "feed the flock of God" and oversee the affairs of an assembly of God's people.

In order to help the "returnees" from Babylon who came to the ruins of Jerusalem, it was well that they learned how Jerusalem became important in the first place. The battles and victories that were recounted in the books of Samuel and Kings may have been known, but the city of David, the temple and the walls that had to be rebuilt, needed to be emphasized. This work was the immediate responsibility the exiles had and they needed to know why. The Jebusites who inhabited the city first, thought they were safe from any attack. Joab took the lead, and just how he conquered the city was not important to the narrative. Ezra wanted the new generation of Jewish inhabitants to know the real reason behind the importance of the city. That reason was because "The Lord of Hosts," "The Lord Almighty" was with David.

The only hope of spiritual victory, or effective testimony and happy assembly life is when the "Lord Almighty" is with us. This account is not a review of political or social history, but a reminder that spiritual people need God to go before us in any enterprise in which we are involved. God has His own timetable, and in it the waiting times are as important as the active times. David had to wait seven years for kingship over all Israel after he had been king over Judah. Other things needed to be done before he took Jerusalem. God has a plan. He is in control. His sovereign will, directs events to produce what He knows is best. "Our times are in Thy hands."

Saul lost his credibility when he wanted for himself that which belonged to God. David gained his credibility by his trust in God through waiting times as well as the active struggles. In his victories he gave God the credit for doing that which is out of the ordinary to produce the fulfillment of His plans. We have the ability to live righteously, honestly, with integrity and dignity. When we are committed to excellence in fulfilling our responsibility, we are wise to leave the results to our Lord and give God all the glory. Leadership has its burdens, but when we "cast our burdens upon the Lord," and do what believe is the will of God, we can rest in faith. There are the Lord's people we represent. He has given us the great privilege of leading them. He will sustain and guide us. The presence and power of God made David an effective leader who became more powerful because he was conscious of his own weakness and was committed to walk in conscious fellowship with the Lord Almighty.

The Jews who returned from Babylon at that time were reminded by the chronicler of those who followed David with bravery and loyalty. They were committed to David their leader, not to enhancing their own reputations. One exception was Joab who was a skilled brave leader but was not counted among the "mighty men" because of his narcissism and self-centered ambition. It takes courage to step out ahead of others and lead them through difficult time. One has to be loyal to his Lord in order to stand for what is right, even when he has to stand alone. For one to expect people to do difficult tasks, he has to be willing to go ahead and do similar tasks himself and do it with clarity and excellence.

When one is called to serve God in a foreign country, there will be latent resentment by the locals that "one from far away is telling us what to do." The only way one can maintain an effective ministry and still be happy in his spirit and kind to the people is to know we serve the Lord first and foremost. Then we serve the Lord's people without an exalted opinion of ourselves, our education or our understanding. No matter who or where we serve, God's people are to be served "without respect of persons." The "mighty men" of today are not only found where I am.

Our brothers and sisters in Christ today are found in great cities where they live under the constant pressure of temptation. Others are found in obscure places of earth where their service is unknown and there is great loneliness every day and wondering if anybody even cares about what we are doing or where we are. Opposition is directed against the mighty men and women of God today to the extent that some are mocked where they work or go to school. They are abused by those of their own families and/or by the government. Some are physically beaten, imprisoned for meeting publicly and/or reading the Bible. Some have been beheaded because they would not deny their Lord. Some live daily consistent lives in their calling but are never recognized, and are overlooked and considered of little worth. These are mighty people in the mighty army of the Almighty God.

Valiant, honorable people are recognized by God and may only be known as a name in a list of names in some address book, but our Lord knows each one and will recompense their faithfulness in His own way and time. To be unknown except as a statistic bothers some who want the applause of the people. Those who are conscious of their call by God and who serve Him faithfully with love in their hearts for Him, can rest contentedly that this is the will of God for me. Some names of God's mighty men in my life were in our assembly, in books about them I have read, men and women with whom I have served. They would not

have considered themselves might and would not care if their labors for the Lord were never heralded among the people. They just did what they could to the best of their ability and left the results to God.

In the same way the returned exiles needed to be reminded of God's plans being carried out in their past, we too need to remember those who served God in our recent past. In the same way they were being challenged to rebuild for God that which had been broken down, so we should apply ourselves vigorously to the work we have been given. God carries out many of His plans today through the willing hands and hearts of His people.

1st Chronicles 11:9. *"So David waxed greater and greater: for the Lord of hosts was with him."*

GREATER AND GREATER.

What really is the sometimes elusive, key to success?
Is there something I can do so that the Lord can bless
The efforts I put forth to bring about a victory?
Is there a special act of faith God is expecting to find in me?

It appears to me there is something at the beginning
Of one's Christian life that leads to winning
Divine favor - perhaps it is an attitude one has towards God
That leads one to give the first place in life to the Lord.

One might not be aware of the doctrine of Lordship at the first -
It is simply that light upon a person's redeemed soul that has burst.
A flame of devotion - a burning light that brightens the souls
And there is a willingness in that person to give God full control.

There are small things accomplished which at the first we see
May not be significant to others, but are important to me -
A prayer of faith answered, a need remarkably supplied -
A joy in the soul that opposition or the world can't hide.

There may be a song, a special hymn and a prayer
That gives confidence to one that the Lord is always there.
So when the time comes to go further and take a step higher -
The things of God appeal to the soul, and temptations of life are so much drier.

God's grace becomes more real; one experiences it more -
Faith is increased and we learn what our life is really for.
God is very real as we live and work from day to day.
And we practice the presence of the Lord walking with Him in His way.

Life becomes a progression, not just a kind of stalemate.
No longer when called to labor, do we sit around and wait
For more favorable circumstances, but we rise up and go
To attend to our calling, that we, and others, greater blessings know.

"O Father of the faithful and God of all grace: the evidence is in that Thou art still working in the salvation of sinners and the sanctification of the saints. If You can trust me, would You please let me again be a channel through whom Thou canst work. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

1st Chronicles 12

DIVERSITY - UNITY

As those who returned from Babylon were about to begin the rebuilding of their nation including the cities, walls, temple and their own homes, they would have been very interested in their second king David, who many generations before had been and outcast in his time before he became the leader of the nation. There were many useful principles of leadership, and practices of rebuilding a failing society in the account the chronicler wrote for their learning - and ours. The three areas of David's movement before he became king of Israel and could move in and take Jerusalem as his capital city were the cave of Adullam, Ziklag, in Philistia and Hebron. The first mentioned in this chapter is the second in time. The narrative begins by identifying who was needed by David and why. He needed "helpers in battle" or perhaps better stated, "helpers in war," because war does not always include the confrontation of a battle.

As those who live in a world whose god is adamantly opposed to our God, and whose kingdom of darkness cannot coexist with the kingdom of light of which believers are a part, we move daily through the world as lit

up torches that cannot be hid and who expose the "hidden things of darkness" that men love rather than light that are all around us. We are helpers of our heavenly David in this place "outside the camp" of popular opinion and acceptable "Christian religion" that appeals to those who want to be identified as Christians but do not want to be "despised and rejected of men" as He was. They want to be known as those who love the golden rule and want to be accepted by everyone.

This chapter then tells of those who went to be with David when he was first rejected and was living in a cave, and concludes with David at Hebron where he had been ruling over Judah for seven years before becoming king of the whole nation for which he had been anointed by Samuel years previously. "Our Lord is now rejected, and by the world disowned." But for those who love Him and are loyal to Him, we owe our support in spite of where we are and what other people do. Even evangelical groups will find our support of our Lord Jesus Christ and our loyalty to Him offensive because they think we are extreme and fanatical in our commitment to His word. We are not part of a movement but are members of His family. What happens to Him happens to us. What happens to us is important to Him. Our affection for Him and our convictions as to how best to serve Him while we are in this world, are indissolubly linked. What my heart feels controls how my body acts. Conviction and affection enable us to stand firm with our Lord in times of opposition.

1st Chronicles 12:2. *"They were armed with bows, and could use both the right hand and the left in hurling stones and shooting arrows out of a bow, even of Saul's brethren of Benjamin."*

SKILLED...FAMOUS...UNDERSTANDING.

Some combinations stand out, because when they are put together
The results are such that it is obvious God made it happen.
A training time when natural talents and God-given gifts are honed to use
Prepares one to fit with others and together win battles to be fought.

Practice first, then the use of skill in challenging situations,
Make possible the results longed for - and through them
Laborers, warriors, leaders become famous;
Known for their ability to accomplish difficult tasks.

But there is a third part of the trio that is the real key -
Not learned by personal training or public acclamation.
It comes from the use of intelligence and observation -
And finds its way into the inner recesses of the soul.

With understanding to set the course of action, the three set out
To serve with alacrity the Master who gives the call.
The skills learned in private places are now applied -
And victories for the King do now occur.

The fame of quiet, confident men who have learned
To trust their God, and use their instincts
In times and places in which God has placed them -
Reaches to the ears of a worried public - and brings peace.

Leadership of people chosen by God Himself
Is not something to be taken lightly or overlooked.
The challenges that arise from time to time are met -
Understanding of the times, the learned skills and fame bring peace.

"Father God, I pray that here in this village and among these assemblies, there will be a strong leadership who is able to make wise decisions even when there are differences of opinions. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

The people who returned from Babylon brought a wide diversity of skills that were learned, which when used by natural ability could be used to good advantage in the rebuilding process. Diversity among the people of God today is a good thing when the natural talents of an individual and God-given gifts are put to use with those of others. Diversity of ability, and solidarity of heart, produce a special unity that meets the present need of the work of the Lord. When all of these function under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, much can be done to further the work of the kingdom of God.

As the returned exiles would go through the Chronicles, they would be reminded of the indifference of Saul to the word of God, and then the indifference of the people to the leadership of Saul. When there is indifference, confusion follows. Mixed messages create confusion and division follows confusion. When

there is division, departure follow, and where there is departure, dispersion and disintegration is the result. Great nations that once were world powers are completely forgotten because of that course they followed.

Because of their devotion to David, men from all of the tribes came to David and were separated unto him. Separation just to be different has no real value and is really a sign of self-importance and self-interest. Separation from the world to our Lord Jesus Christ because of devotion to Him is a good thing. The power associated with separation "from among them" is that God is able to act as a Father to us and we live as "sons and daughters" to Him. The choices and the sacrifices we make must be controlled by His revealed will. Independent choices and self-imposed sacrifices are only just that. But when decisions, choices, separation and devotion are made by design, our Lord is honored and glorified in "our bodies and spirits which are His."

Ambitious men who had practiced their natural talents until they became proficient in using both arrows and slings with either right or left hand, would have been extremely valuable to David for both defensive and offensive positions. God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit have all given gifts to His people to preserve the people of God and to further the work of God. In wisdom and grace God uses our natural talents and spiritual gifts to accomplish things that are naturally impossible for us to do, and to preserve that which He has already done.

Joining David when he was in "the hold" were brave committed men of God who were not easily intimidated nor were they afraid of strong opposition. They were the kind of men who could either face down enemies on a battlefield or chase after those enemies who fled until they caught them. These men did not let normal obstacles or extraordinary obstacles turn them aside from their objective. It is important for us to have defined goals in our service for God that are consistent with His will, not our own wishful thinking. When that is the case, then we can move forward confident in the knowledge that "He knoweth the way that I take." When we are in fellowship with God, committed to His work to which we are called, and are unified with our brothers and sisters in a biblical way, we can expect divine approval as God does His will through us.

Attitude and action compliment each other as each need and each event opens up before us. David was at first skeptical of those who had been followers of Saul both by family ties and in their service for him. Some occasions arise when people have to be put to the test to see if there is reality to their profession and genuine truth in their words. When we are in doubt about a matter, we are able to confidently put it into God's hands knowing there is nothing hid from Him. The Spirit of God who came upon Amasai made it unmistakably plain with the double word, "Peace, peace," that those men of Judah and Benjamin were with him in heart. Authenticity is very hard to fake, and is quite easily discerned by those of experience who are not manipulated by prejudice or nepotism.

Determination to obey our Lord and carry out His will brings with it opportunity to meet and coordinate with others who have made the same determination. As believers in Christ we experience the working of the Holy Spirit in our lives and as we move forward, we find ourselves joining in fellowship with those all over the world who have the same commitment to our Lord. There is a sense in which caution and commitment need each other. Caution keeps us from jumping ahead too quick and commitment keeps us from lagging behind or going too slow. The guiding principle of "Them that honor Me, I will honor," will help us in discernment of the time and task to know what is true humility and what is righteous honor. Truly humble men can receive honor and it will not go top their heads.

To be gracious and quietly accepting of honor is appropriate. The brave men who came to David were given great responsibility. Responsibility requires a dignity and integrity that is evident and those who lead God's people need those qualities. Those who follow their leaders have the right to expect them to conduct themselves in a way in which they can honor them. Success and peace among God's people largely depends on the attitude and conduct of those who lead the people. Half of Manasseh came late to David, but they came - along with others from the east side of Jordan. Some of the priestly families joined David's army along with Levites who were willing to join him.

To be ready and willing to be involved in the service of our Lord is expected of us. What our role in that service is up to Him, not us. Whether many or few of those we know or are tied to by nature, join us in our desire to serve the Lord, is up to them and Him, not me. I am responsible for my actions. Some servants will be famous and their names will be on the lips of many of God's people around the world. Other names won't mean much to very many people. The common denominator we all have is our Lord Jesus Christ. It is the privilege of us all to be associated with Him whether our responsibility is to lead or to follow. Respect for our Lord and His people, is an important part of our testimony. Obedience to Him and His word makes my part in the great work of kingdom building important, whether it is obvious or unseen.

There was order and designated roles in David's camp and the focus of everyone's part in the work would be useful when it was coordinated by those who were leaders. A knowledge of what is happening and what needs to be done is important for leaders to make right decisions that affect the Lord's people and the work of an assembly. Conformity to the standards of the word of God makes unity of diverse people and gifts possible. An honest evaluation of the needs around us and the assets available to us makes it possible to bring to reality that which was once only an idea. The principle of supply and demand can be applied to our calling and the specific needs of the moment.

All of these things needed to be reviewed by those returning Israelites so they could evaluate their resources and use them all to the advantage of the work in their hands. When we know what is needed and take time to prepare those things and ourselves, then when the time comes to take action, we are ready. Any advance in the work in which we are involved needs the guidance of God. He knows the need precisely and He knows everything in which we have to be engaged to fulfill that need because He provided it.

Like David's army, God's people are very diverse, but when they come together in solidarity as a people, and are unified in purpose, then God can work through His prepared people. The more solid, devoted and committed we are, the more God provides to meet every need. The first ones came because their hearts were knit to David, but each came because something was wrong where they were. Attitudes and actions changed when they became unified around David. As others joined them the whole group became polarized into one properly functioning body because of their increasing devotion to David. Supplies came, needs were met and there was great joy even as the numbers increased. These same principles apply to the people of God today. What a joy it is to be where God wants us - gathered to our Lord Jesus Christ, and doing what He wants - "Ye shall be witnesses unto Me."

1Chronicles 12:32. *"And of the children of Issachar, which were men that had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do; the heads of them were two hundred; and all their brethren were at their commandment."*

THE TIMES.

The kind of men that were needed in times of war like those,
Were wide and varied much to act for God.
The over-riding principle of life - they wanted each to please
Their king-beloved, and for his kingship stood.

There were the men of valor who were ready armed to war.
There were famous men whose names were far revered.
There were soldiers skilled in battle, and those who went before -
And their hearts were all united, as such men are rightly feared.

But a group of men stood out among that mighty army troop.
Two hundred men who knew what Israel ought to do.
Those men unnamed were special and were called upon when doubt,
Had raised its ugly head about how the war would go.

To understand the times and of the days in which they lived -
Gave them authority when decisions must be made.
Discerning minds together met, giving power to what they said -
And the famous and the brave knew they must follow where they led.

I live in times unusual; confusion seems to reign.
What to do and how to do it, seems to escape from those who lead.
I pray God will raise up understanding, faithful men -
Whose knowledge of the times is from the heart, not just their heads.

To continue in uncertainty, never means I walk by faith -
For the Spirit and the Word are faithful guides.
Those to whom the Lord has given the will to do exactly what God says -
Are those special ones who have understanding of the times.

"O Lord God of hosts: I beseech Thee in these times of crisis, to move upon the minds and hearts of some young men, and give them an understanding of our times. There are pressures from all sides to conform to the way that is most popular in churches, families, marriages and even the nations. Bring us again to the place where integrity and honor, commitment and loyalty are not forgotten. Raise up true and honorable men. I pray in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

1st Chronicles 13

DOING THE RIGHT THING IN THE WRONG WAY

In order to unify the people of Israel, the writer of the Chronicles directs their attention to the king who unified the twelve tribes under his leadership and then wanted to build the temple as a physical object for spiritual unity. David was able to unify them politically and socially under his leadership, but he knew true lasting unity includes spiritual unity under God. The "body politic" is only one part of national identity. "The soul of the people" is another. But like in marriage, unless there is spiritual unity as well, the nation will be constantly unstable. The events of chapter 13 actually took place after some events recorded later in the book, because it suits the objective of the narrative to bring the need of spiritual unity to the forefront of the minds of the people.

To neglect biblical worship in a gathering of the Lord's people is to miss the point of an assembly in the first place. An assembly is the "house of God." In reaching out with the Gospel to new places there needs to be consultation with others so that we move forward in faith. Assembly life is not like a corporation or government where "the will of the people" rules, and action is taken on that basis. We are governed by a benevolent Father when we gather to His Son under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. He has arranged "under shepherds" who make decisions, upon which an assembly takes action. It is a wise group of elders who know what the saints believe about a matter, that takes the opinions of others seriously and considers their thought in their decision.

David made consultation with each of his "officers, captain and commanders," but he neglected to consult with God. We do not have to go to a temple or some special place to communicate with God. "He is near unto all that call upon Him out of a pure heart." David did not do that but acted on his own desire. The desire to serve God and see God honored among His people and respected by the unsaved is a good thing, but desire without divine order is wrong. How I feel about a thing and my enthusiasm is good on one hand, but dangerous on the other if I take action based on my desire to do the right thing in my own way. Unchecked enthusiasm does not only affect me but also others. In the case of David's desire to have the ark of God brought to "the city of David," his enthusiasm for the project brought the people of God together from the southern border to the northern border.

Great fanfare and a charismatic leader "seemed to be right in the eyes of all the people." This is one of the challenges of spiritual leadership. We have to look beyond that which is popular in other places, and what pleases superficial believers, to what exactly is the will of God in this matter. It is important to know the word of God well enough to show a "thus saith the Lord" statement to the Lord's people: not to quench their enthusiasm but to guide it in a spiritual and scriptural way. Before taking an action, take divine counsel. and then in fellowship with the Lord, confidently lead them forward giving the sanctifying effect to their enthusiasm.

Cooperation and unity are closely bound together. They are almost one and the same. The one relates to an action and the other to an attitude that motivates the action. When we are conscious of the presence and pleasure of God, our hearts are moved to support that which is of God by our actions and our presence. It may be that the weakness and obscurity of an assembly and its testimony motivates us to take some action to bring about recovery, and restore public testimony - that is a good desire. The ark of God was known as "The Name" in reference to the fact it was there the name of God was called upon. Scripturally gathered assemblies are "The place of the name." Holy things demand holy people.

During the reign of Saul the ark of God was rejected and was in the house of Abinadab since the Philistines had sent it on a driverless cart back to Israel. Uzzah and Ahio were used to having the ark there, so perhaps had gotten used to the neglect, and forgot the holiness associated with the things of God. It is possible, both for us and our children to become so used to being in "the house of God" that we forget that "Holiness becometh Thy house, O Lord, forever." Spiritual desire and enthusiasm can motivate us to act without hearing the voice of God. God's silences are as important as His instructions. Enthusiasm without spiritual direction and divine control leads to carelessness. Carelessness can lead us to act without praying, reading the Bible and serious thinking in order to get God's mind about a matter.

Whoever decided on using a new cart was simply copying the Philistines. True, they made a new cart, so it looked good, wasn't tainted with dirt, had never been contaminated by anything, but it still was only a cart - not the human shoulders of consecrated priests and Levites. Doing a right thing in a wrong way makes the consequences worse and worse if it is continued. Man's opinion should never replace God's order no matter what the majority of people may think. The world's way of "doing church" is just that - the world's way. God's way is clearly stated in the scriptures and has not changed. "Gather My saints together unto Me, those that

have made a covenant with Me by sacrifice," remains the same truth. We gather to Him and meet under the authority in His name. Other names, practices or organizations are based on men's opinion.

We have been given the privilege of being stewards of our Lord. With that privilege comes the responsibility of acting only under His authority. To make a profession that we are committed to Him to do His will, must be consistent with what His word says. If the profession and the reality are different, we are on our own and that is not a good place to be. Much of what is being done by professing Christians today is to promote good-will so unbelievers will be attracted by our lifestyle and join us in a desire to "change the world." God's will does not mean people will like us. In fact, the Lord Jesus said the world will hate us because it hated Him. Paul wrote, "All that live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." But in spite of that, we still seem to want to continue to be liked. It is up to us to be "zealous of good works," in view of the time when people will "glorify God in the day of visitation."

David was responsible for the whole event and for some reason had become careless about how to do God's work. Leadership calls for consecration of the person who leads, and dedication to the work to do it as "unto the Lord and not unto men." Uzzah likely had become used to the ark being in his father's house so the reverence that would have been there when the ark was first placed in the living room gradually decreased. The grace bestowed on that house was taken for granted. Children of Christians often seem to get an irreverent attitude toward the things of God, and the life of an assembly bores them. There may be sense in which "familiarity breeds contempt." The consistent appreciation of God's grace and blessings on the part of believing parents needs to be expressed audibly and visibly. It is important that we do not express a bad attitude toward fellow believers, leaders and the assembly itself.

There is nothing wrong with zeal as long as it is sanctified and controlled. Man's enthusiasm and God's holiness have to be consistently in fellowship. Apparently God was willing to put up with the first movement of the ark on the cart, but whether it was the loud noise that made the ox stumble or a rock in the road that would have been avoided by a human foot, the sudden movement of the ark made Uzzah react just as if it was a crate of chickens he thought might tip over. God's eye saw Uzzah's heart and when he put his careless hand on that ark and instantly died, the whole jubilant celebrations of man's making was stopped.

We learn that what is convenient to us but unscriptural as far as God is concerned can be quickly changed from joy to fear. And the consequences are far reaching. Instinct is not our guide. Instinct may be irreverent. It may make us act in haste and do what is wrong. Reverence for God and all that is holy will guide us to act responsibly in a way that is suitable to our holy calling. David reacted quickly and angrily perhaps because he thought God was being extreme, but it is more likely he was angry against himself for taking God for granted in such an important event. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom," and he quickly learned not to leave God out of a matter. It may be, we forget that when we do not do God's work in His way, it is sin. Discipline will follow until we leave self-will behind and act in faith and the fear of the Lord.

God's presence demands holiness on our part. We need to get used to practicing the presence of God in every aspect of our lives. It would take courage on the part of Obed-Edom to have the ark of God in his house for three months. The house of Obed-Edom was likely near the road, and everyone who passed along that road would be conscious of what happened at that threshing-floor, and would likely look at that house and wonder what would happen to that family. They probably didn't have many visitors for quite some time until they realized instead of judgment, God was blessing that household and even their property in a special way. When God's face smiles on our place, we rejoice in the riches of His grace. The changes that happened at that home were wonderful, but no one would take the ark of God sitting in that room for granted. There would be a very real sense of the power of God's presence being there. When we have room for our Lord in our homes and the assembly of which we are a part, there is a special wonder at the grace of God and the blessings He gives, "And He addeth no sorrow with it."

1st Chronicles 13:1, 3. *"And David consulted with the captains of thousands and hundreds, and with every leader. "And let us bring again the ark of our God to us: for we inquired not at it in the days of Saul."*

WHAT ABOUT THE BIBLE?

They came together from every part and made a great congregation.
Something right had been left undone, it was time to fix the situation.
All the leaders from each different place had opportunity for something to say.
Finally, all agreed to bringing the ark back to the city in a certain way -
But what about the Bible?

It seemed so special with all of the pageantry and glory -
Every one would be able to go home and tell the others their story
Of the loud music and dancing, everything seemed so bright -
There was room for all the people to participate - surely this was right -

But what about the Bible?

But everyone went home with heads and hearts cast down.
They were all subdued when each went to their hometown.
It didn't work right though they had all agreed
This was the right way they thought, but they neglected to read -
And find out what about the Bible?

Loud music is here now and some dance "before the Lord."
Large numbers attend thinking they are worshipping God.
Not a lot of people go to their church carrying with them their Bible.
They like the experience and will go if they are able -
But what about the Bible?

God has given us His plan as to how He wants things done.
The Church is His dwelling place, where we live is His home.
In the house of God there is an order to maintain -
Behavior in the house and the practices are not decided by men -
It is right to ask, "What about the Bible?"

It is not up to us to decide to do a thing or not.
We need to read the scriptures and see what was taught
When we can see what God wants, then we act upon His will.
What was there at the first is in the Bible still -
So, we set out to do things according to the Bible!

"O God, preserve us from "new cart" activities or the "majority rules" mindset. Keep us fixed upon Thy truth and committed to acting only on what the Bible says. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

1st Chronicles 14

THE LORD CONFIRMED HIM

In every new venture in which we move ahead in faith believing God has opened "a great door and effectual," we are always glad when we know it is the Lord who has confirmed and established the work. How He does that is not always the same in every case. Sometimes it may be because of a singular success in some particular part of the work. Other times it may be evidence of the overall potential that is obvious and we can press on in spite of difficulties knowing that God is working. In the case of David and Hiram, it seems like Hiram who was king of a very small kingdom of very skillful people, took the initiative in building a house for David.

This was no small insignificant task. To make lumber out of the cedars of Lebanon was time consuming and labor intensive. To bring all that was needed of material and workmen was a major undertaking. But Hiram thought that much of his friendship with David, that the objective far outweighed the expense. Love for our Lord Jesus Christ and true appreciation for what He has done for us, motivates us to do all we can to further His kingdom. By preaching the Gospel and teaching God's people, we are allowed to be helpers in establishing His kingdom.

For those who had returned from Babylon, it would have been an encouragement to expend their labor and work together in fellowship to build again that of their heritage which had been torn down. Faithful people who love the Lord can be used by Him when they are unified, to accomplish that which He desires. God had established David. He is the same today when He establishes His local testimonies of saints in an area. His people stand out among those who profess, because "they know the Bible" and are committed to a precise presentation of the truth. They do not "beat around the bush" but plainly present what is said in the scripture, and are willing to apply it to themselves and the people around.

David did some things well but when it came to his relationship with women, he did not follow God's word. The consequences were a divided home and unruly children. Those born of one of David's wives were often against those born of another wife. All of us likely have a strong point or two in which we are proficient, but that does not negate our failures in other areas. We need to know ourselves well enough to face our weaknesses and commit ourselves to changing that "Achilles heel" into a controlled part of our lives even though it may not be what we would naturally like. It would have been a good lesson for those returned exiles to separate themselves from those around who had accommodated themselves to the world.

During Saul's reign, he had come to think David was a greater enemy than the Philistines. He hunted David "Like a partridge in the wilderness" and got so sidetracked from his leadership responsibility that he was powerless against his real enemy. Our implacable enemy will never stop his attacks against the people of God. If we yield in one way, he may repeat the same tactics again and against us in an attempt to defeat the purposes of God. If we stand strong and oppose to the extent that we can gain a victory, we should not deceive ourselves into thinking the war is over. He will attack God's people openly, subtly, religiously or secularly, and he will not stop. We must constantly be on our guard and be close enough to our God that we can inquire of Him at any time and know we are heard.

The valley of Rephaim had been a fruitful place for the enemy in the past, so they returned. David had neglected to speak to God about bringing the ark to Jerusalem, but he had learned the lesson. Now he asked God for instructions before taking any action, and he acted on what the Lord told him. He also carried out that which he knew from God's word and burned the idols of those the Israelites had defeated so that none of them would carry home any souvenirs of idols to their families. A different way of meeting the enemy was done the next time under divine guidance. There is a reason behind this. It was not only to confound and defeat the enemy, but was a way of reminding the people of God that "God has gone forth before thee." God was out front in this battle and the victory was because of His power and presence.

When we do "as God commanded," then our efforts are not in vain nor are they a reason for pride because of our success. God must be at the center of our lives. He will only have that place if He is at the center of our thoughts. He can only be at the center of our thoughts if we have no idols in that place. Money, fame, success, pleasure and people all have the potential of being idols to us when they have the priority claim to our time and attention. It is up to us to deliberately remove any things in our lives that take the place of God, and then determine to follow Him with love and devotion.

If and when God is willing to use us to bring some spiritual benefit to others and bring about victory in some way through our efforts, there is a latent danger to us. Our ego will want to rise up and tell us we did really good. After all, look how successful we were in this work God gave us. Look at all we were able to accomplish. When a person becomes famous, they are in great danger of falling because "Pride goeth before the fall."

"He that is down need fear no fall.
He that is low, no pride.
He that is humble shall ever have,
God to be his guide."

David's fame produce fear in other people and nations. Israel had become weak under Saul's leadership whole had been sidetracked by envy, jealousy and hatred. When the Philistines attacked Israel under the leadership of David, they found a whole new kind of people who were revitalized under their new leader. Now the Philistines fear those who had once feared them.

When the people of God put unreserved trust in Him and are willing to obey the Lord, that faith and obedience opens doors to an active and full area of service for Him. Those Israelites who were back in the land were reminded of the fact the "If God be for us, who can be against us." Our unity also is dependent upon our obedience and faith to act according to the word of the Lord. We have the legacy of faithful people who went before us to give us guiding principles that work when acted upon. It was the Lord who made the nations to fear David. It is the same Lord who makes our feeble efforts prosper as we serve Him in the place we are called. Respect does not depend on us seeking to be like those around us, but rather on us owning Jesus as Lord in sincerity and truth. He is the One who can control the attitude of those among whom we live.

1st Chronicles 14:12. *"And when they had left their gods there, David gave a commandment, and they were burned with fire."*

BURNED WITH FIRE.

There seems to be a lot of talent in some men's skillful hands.
Evidence of mankind's talents can be seen throughout the land.
There are those who promote self-worship and say, "Up with man!"
But all of man's work will be burned with fire!

Edifices for industry, for pleasure and for worship
Rise up to glorify man - people come from afar to see it
But there are times when cheering turns to deathly quiet -
All you can hear is the burning of fire!

It happened in the past and it will happen again -
Things that have been made to bring honor to men
And the gods they have made to bring great acclaim to him -
Will end by being burned with fire!

It is a serious mistake to ignore the power of God.
His wisdom and authority by man are not moved -
He reveals Himself often in the simple things we hold -
And they cannot be burned with fire!

The soul of a child when we hear the first cry -
The joy of the parents who are standing close by -
And the satisfaction that comes when hard things we try -
Are not gods that can be burned with fire!

The worship of God and the salvation He gives
The glory of His creation - everything that is His -
The peace of God and love - all of these -
Are not able to be burned with fire!

So, I will put my attention on things that will last.
Not on material success or things that quickly pass.
And all will be worth it when before Him crowns we cast -
And none of it can be burned with fire!

“Holy God, for this day and every day - I pray that what I focus my attention on will be things that are unseen and eternal. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

1st Chronicles 15

CONSECRATED SERVICE

It is of great interest to follow the chain of events relating to the ark being brought to Jerusalem. What started out as an enthusiastic attempt to do the right thing without taking the time necessary to make sure it was done in the right ways, was changed to a whole new attitude toward this work. The first attempt started without even asking for divine guidance and ended with death. Time was taken to prepare so that the service was done "As Moses had commanded according to the word of the Lord."

David had finished buildings for his own use and likely for members of his household. Then time was taken to "prepare a place for the ark." Not just any old place would do. In order for due respect to be given to that which represented God among His people, careful preparation was needed. A haphazard approach to spiritual things is not acceptable. Any thing that reflects on God should be done with careful consideration and a commitment to excellence. When something is dedicated to the Lord, the work needed to do it should be done by consecrated people.

The three clans of the tribe of Levi whose priority was the service of the tabernacle, now were to consecrate themselves to this specific task. They had to be cleansed personally, and so would know that any inward defilement had been dealt with. Their clothes had to be washed as a testimony to outward, public cleanness. Any service we are privileged to do for our Lord must be done from a clean heart and pure conscience. There should be an awareness of our public representation of our Lord that motivates us to be blameless before men.

Order in the service of God is under His directives, not that which appeals to us or is expedient. The commands of the Lord should never be ignored. When we purify ourselves by "The washing of water by the word," and apply the truths in the scripture to our lives, then we can worship and serve as those who have been consecrated. Our meditation will lead to appropriate preparation. Preparation leads to appropriate participation. Appropriate participation brings the honor and glory to our Lord which He deserves.

The Levite carriers, singers and doorkeepers were all made aware of their responsibility and the importance of what they were to do. There was nothing left to chance as to what part each person was to do. Any ministry for the Lord deserves and commands, "due order." Personal opinions are not the criteria we go by in our priestly service. Even our bodies are to be presented as living sacrifices. Nothing has the right to ignore or supersede "due order."

The consequences referred as taken place "at the first," or "the first time" were not because David was wrong in wanting to bring the ark to Jerusalem, but because the law of God was ignored. Now that an

appropriate place had been prepared and the right people were prepared, the move was ready to take place. The whole nation was aware of what had happened earlier, and now generations later were learning to not take God for granted in the tasks they were to do for Him. Our faith in God is often tested in various ways and He expects us to know what He says, carry it out in an orderly way, and take action even if we may have fear because of our own inadequacy.

Those Levites who moved close to the ark to pick it up by the staves and put it on their shoulders, were likely fearful at first. To reach out and touch the carrying poles, "All Israel" had gathered and likely breathed a sigh of relief as the ark was lifted up and the Levite carriers stepped ahead with the first steps to "the place." Before long the terror and bated breaths were replaced with the sounds of joy - "God is satisfied." In faith we move forward even after mistakes were made. There may be fear and trepidation at first, but when we sense the leading of the Spirit and the presence of God among us, our steps grow more confident and longer. Our voices are raised in praise, our hearts are filled with joy and our faces begin to shine as we look at the Son.

The appointed singers sang, the musicians made appropriate music and "all Israel" listened with joy. This was not the ecstatic noise they made in the flesh at the first attempt to move the ark. Now there thoughtfulness, preparedness, care and a sense of caution put into the movement of the ark. Enthusiastic abandonment was replaced with "holy joy." There was reverence and order that accompanied their joy this time. There is joy among God's people today when we share our joy with other as we praise and worship our Lord. Harmonious singing of understandable words gives expression to the joy in our hearts. Only listening to others sing and maybe saying "Amen" at the end reduces music to not much more than a form of entertainment. We are able to edify ourselves and others when we "sing and make melody in our hearts" with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs.

When God's instructions are followed, even though we may not know the reasons or the outcome at the time of the event, there is joy in obedience because we trust and love our Lord. Our real understanding of all that happens to us, or the value of what we do, will not be grasped until a future day when everything will be made plain. Those who carried the ark had just the one major event in which they had a work to do to remember for the rest of their lives. The musicians and singers had opportunities to serve from time to time. The silent doorkeepers were always outside the tent where the ark rested in "the place." They may not have seemed important to other people, but they were there at their post when everyone else went home. Obedience became one of them. His commitment to the presence of God in the form of the ark at his home, led to his privilege to continue in service as a doorkeeper.

We have "doorkeepers" today who deserve our respect and honor, but even if they don't get it from people, their service is for God and it continues. It may not seem important now and it is not regarded by men, but pay-day is coming. God will fully recompense His faithful servants. God helped the Levites carry that heavy gold covered ark and the solid gold mercy seat above it. He would give the needed strength to lift that weight to their shoulders. As they walked, He would guide their footsteps so they would be able to coordinate their steps with their brethren. The obstacles in the road could be a problem as weight would shift from one set of shoulders to another. When we are called upon to bear burdens, we are to "bear our own" burdens. We are also to bear "one another's burdens." Our service for God needs help from God and He is near to give what is needed. "Thy shoes shall be iron and brass, and as thy days, so shall thy strength be." We are not powerless to do what God wants.

The linen garments of all in that procession would indicate a respectful outward appearance of those involved in service for God in a public way. Dignity and humility go together. Those were all dressed alike so they attended to that which testified to the presence of God among His people, not to their position. We owe the Lord evidence of our respect for Him when we represent Him in public. A casual attitude toward divine things is reflected in the way we present ourselves. The opposite is also true. Extreme attention to how we appear before people is as much as distraction as slovenly dress. Humility has a way of knowing what is appropriate so that the minds of the people are directed to God, not to men and women. To be overdressed or underdressed are both representative of a self-centered attitude.

How we appear to people is not really what is behind our looks or actions. David appeared undignified to his uppity wife Michal. They really had nothing in common. She had reveled in being a daughter of a king and then a wife of a king. But she wanted to be the one who decided what her king-husband should be like. It we have an image of ourselves that we think is the standard for everyone, we have made a big mistake. "Man looks on the outward appearance, but God looks on the heart."

A husband and wife should be able to communicate openly with each other and discuss any matter without being critical of each other. Each has strengths that are suitable to their gender, calling and personality. When we are conscious and acceptant of each other's role, there is compatibility. Carnal criticisms from a spouse, or any other believer for that matter, is not only uncomfortable but counter productive. The enthusiasm of one can be balanced by the even temperament of the other to the benefit of both. Then we can be unified in our work for the Lord and are able to fulfill what we are doing, and be ready for the next task that our Lord gives us.

1st Chronicles 15:13. *“And because ye did it not at the first, the Lord our God made a breach upon us, for that we sought him not after the due order.”*

DUE ORDER.

There is an order in the things of God - nothing should ever be careless
For God Himself is a God of order - everything He does has a purpose.
The creation attests to the fact He knows best how things reveal His design.
The nature of material; the seasons of life and the designations of time -
Unfold a character that is always suited to what is best for all -
Nothing God does is haphazard - especially the Gospel call.

The ark was to be borne by men suited to do this special work for Him.
They were identified carefully for God had chosen them
To sanctify themselves to be ready to carry that ark so holy.
God dwelt with His people and the ark symbolized His presence was there truly.
Due order was needed; strong shoulders to bear, and men united together,
That the testimony of God would be made clear and plain as God with His people did
gather.

So today there are those who are trustworthy in the things of God.
Those who deal publicly in presenting the truth have an important load.
What is to be done is made plain by God's word revealing to men;
Each individual needs to be aware that God chose him to represent Him
Who is supreme over all, God bless`ed forever -
It is a matter of life or death and the message changes never.

Those who represent all of us when it is God's truth they shoulder,
Should be humble in their spirit and never get bolder -
Because they have been chosen to speak of such holy things,
Due order is expected in service and when our worship brings
To God what He desires as we speak of Him to our own generation -
Knowing that what is at stake is eternal life or the soul's damnation.

“Sometimes Father, I fear I don't handle Thy things as a life or death matter. Maybe that was why last night I didn't seem to be able to appropriately present Thy Word. I am sorry for that failure. I pray this morning that I will be able to give these isolated saints something from Thee that will do them good. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

1st Chronicles 16

WHAT SHOULD WE SAY?

A whole group of people had come to Jerusalem, many and maybe most, who had been born in captivity in Babylon. They had never seen the holy convocations of the Lord's people when they gathered for the feasts. They had never viewed the priests as they offered sacrifices for the people before the Lord. Likely they had never brought their own sin offering or trespass offering - had never seen the burnt offering or tasted the blessing of the peace offering. It is one thing to hear about the glory of holy worship, and listen to a mother or father singing quietly psalms, hymns and spiritual songs in the privacy of a slave's room, and quite different to hear believers sing in full voice of true praise to the Lord. Their captors wanted then to sing for their entertainment but the reply of the Jews was, "How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?" It is meaningful when we are able to participate in praise, worship and thanksgiving to God. But what should I say? What should I sing? How should I act?

The returned exiles standing in the ashes of what had been the center of national worship would hardly know what to say or do. The chronicler wisely went back far enough in history to help them understand their present. The ark had been absent from its place for years because of the sin of unbelief. Then David and the people together brought the ark to Jerusalem instead of taking it to Gibeon where the tabernacle and the altar were. It was there sacrifices were made but God, in His own way moved David, a man after God's own heart, to start the transition to the capital city by having the ark taken there.

The ark was "in the midst" of the structure David had provided. It was there and to the Lord Himself that "the gathering of the people be." The tabernacle was still an acceptable place to bring sacrifices and offerings, but the days of wilderness travel were over and the transition time had begun. Slaves from Egypt were now the people of the covenant. Those who had been slaves in Babylon were still people of the covenant and it was time for them to rebuild the house of the Lord.

To know that the Lord is in the midst of His people puts the fear of God into us. Our gathering unto Him is not just a casual stroll into a building to meet with other Christians, sing a few hymns, read some scripture, listen to a speech and then go home. A covenant has been formed between us and God made on the highest possible terms of a covenant - the death of each party to themselves. Then new life is lived for the other person in the covenant.

Our part in the new covenant took place when we gratefully accepted the substitution of our Lord Jesus Christ for us personally. On God's part, He sent His Son to be the Savior of the world who would reconcile us to Him. God laid on Him the iniquity of us all in a singular demonstration of boundless love. God did not spare Him in that He "delivered Him up for us all." Now God looks at the sacrificial Lamb He provided - I look at the Man who died in my place. We both look at Him and we are each satisfied - and so we are legally reconciled.

No wonder "With Jesus in our midst we gather 'round the board. Though many, we are one in Christ, one body in the Lord." Perfect unity is provided on a perfect legal basis and fellowship is established forever. With the ark in place as the gathering center, burnt offerings and peace offerings were certainly called for. Praise and honor ascended to God and fellowship and peace extend to the people of God. As their leader, the king "blessed the people in the name of the Lord," even though he was not the priest. To a certain extent his position made that possible and acceptable. David's blessing included tangible blessings of bread, meat and raisins for everyone. Only the king could have done that.

In the reading of these Chronicles those who returned from exile would begin to understand the words of praise and worship that were never sung in a "strange land." The "Lord's song" just didn't fit in the raucous pagan worship of idols common to the Babylonians. The world's system and the house of God don't have anything in common. Religious entertainment and loud noise, and unrestrained uncontrolled exuberance, have nothing in common with the thoughtful words and harmonious sounds of thanksgiving and praise from those who have experienced and appreciated the grace of God. "Holiness becometh Thy house, O God."

Asaph was given the words of David's song of thanksgiving and would likely have put them to music. His would have been the first of many he received and some he was moved to write himself. Ministry "before the ark of the Lord" was no insignificant matter so that those designated to do this work would take it seriously. Those who appreciate and praise God privately will find it a delight to express our praise and thanksgiving publicly. That doesn't mean we all express vocally our praise in the same way as those who lead, but we all participate in a way suitable to our personality and ability. Asaph knew the role he was to fill. Obed-edom and others knew where they were to lead and where they were to assist others who led. The Holy Spirit has defined roles for all of us and in some there is a leadership responsibility and others assist them and others to fulfill unified responsibility and privilege.

When we praise the Lord we remember what God has done and give thanks to Him from grateful hearts. Part of that remembrance is when we "call upon His name" who has met our every need and supplied us with "all spiritual blessings." In remembering for our own sake that which we have received, we make it known to others. We review His "marvelous works" so that even in our thanksgiving we are testifying to the impact of the Gospel. "No Gospel like this feast, spread for us Lord, by Thee; No prophets or evangelists Preach the glad news more free."

Another part of thanksgiving is to sing, to harmoniously join our voices in testimony and to talk of all His works and wonders. When we speak of the wonders of His Person, we honor Him who is "higher than the highest, greater than the great." To seek His face and remember His works and wisdom kind of go together because the more we desire to know, the more is revealed to us of His Person. To those ragged returnees, and to us in this worldly scene, the remembrance of His holiness and the covenant He has made with us enables us to move through the pressures to conform without surrendering to them.

For those who read the Chronicles, to remember the covenant God made with Abraham before there was ever a nation, would have established firmly again in their minds their identity as a chosen nation of people.

They were not an afterthought on God's part, but a forethought through whom He would ultimately bring "peace on earth and goodwill to men," when David's "royal Son" would reign on earth.

Praise is real when the character of God, the goodness of God, the nature of God and all His attributes and benefits toward us are acknowledged. When our focus is on Him and not on ourselves, we are able to truly glorify Him. His power, grace, mercy and love, directs our thoughts, and hopefully our lives, on Him. He is due all glory, praise and honor and credit for every good and perfect work.

It is a privilege for us to be engaged in any activity or on-going ministry that is done for Him. Some preach, others teach. There are helps, administrations, and many, many varieties of service and opportunities to minister to others in fellowship with the Lord's people. 42 times in the Old Testament, beginning here, the wonderful phrase, "His mercy endureth forever," is stated. The returned remnant would know where to begin in their worship as they had experienced His mercy in their restoration to the land and the God of their fathers.

The priests offering sacrifices at the altar in front of the tabernacle, and those in front of the ark in Jerusalem would have understood the temporary arrangement of this practice. The day was approaching when the house of Lord would be the temple yet to be built. But the temporary situation did not need to hinder their worship of God, nor that of the returnees, nor that of us today. The day of full unity around the Person of Christ that will include all of His people at one place, is coming.

Now we need the "trumpeters" who will sound the right notes at the appropriate time to keep our attention focused on God, not on the sensual music of the world. We need the doorkeepers (porters) in place to guard the holy things of God from being desecrated by those who ignore God's word as irrelevant to their wishes and opinions. We need a worshipping priesthood of all believers to offer up spiritual sacrifices to our Lord. We need to not forsake the "assembling" of ourselves together as the day of His coming draws nearer. We also need to remember our families - our children, our homes - that they might be truly sanctified places for those over whom we have influence. From there we wait, watch and worship for the day when our Lord will be "Crowned Lord of all" and the whole world will rejoice.

1st Chronicles 16:29. *"Give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name: bring an offering, and come before him: worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness."*

GIVE UNTO THE LORD.

What can I give to the Lord God of heaven;
Who has created all things, maintains and controls them?
As He keeps order in the heavens and knows every man -
What possibly could I give unto Him that would honor His name?

I can give thanks for His mercy, His love and His grace,
I can make known the greatness of His works to people in this place,
I can sing hymns of praise for His Person and His Work,
That will glorify and exalt Him before the people of earth.

I can talk of His works, of His strength and His power.
I can tell of the blessings that on me He does shower.
I can speak of His holy name when to others I talk.
I can give Him reverence when in His light I do walk.

I can seek His face in prayer and express my appreciation
For Him looking on me with grace and giving me salvation.
I can review His covenant mercies when with others I meet,
And we worship together like those who fell at His feet.

Every day I can show forth my gratitude for His great salvation,
And declare His glories as I express my sincere adoration.
My strength I can give to further the work of His kingdom -
And with delight and respect along with others - fear before Him.

In holiness and gladness, we will join our voices as we praise
To declare the honors and worth of Him who is the Ancient of Days.
I can bring my offerings to Him from a grateful heart,
So, I can bless and praise Him whose grace was shown at the start.

"Gracious Father, I feel very inadequate when it comes to giving Thee even the best I can. I am unworthy of the least of Thy mercies. In reading this psalm, I can identify

with those who praised Thee when the ark finally was properly placed in that tent. I praise Thee for all who praise and honor Thee and Thy name in this place. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

1st Chronicles 17

HOLY CONVERSATION

The reason for this event to be placed in the Chronicles before the events that happened previously but follow in this record, must have been to keep the focus of the returning people on the ark. The readers were going to build a temple. The ruins around them may have had a tendency to discourage them. When we learn how God worked in the past to accomplish His plans through His people, it encourages and challenges us to know He can use us too - right where we are. The actual order in which events took place was not as important as what happened.

Not everything that takes place in our lives serves the purpose of instructing those who follow us. Some things are best not talked about. Other historical events need to be emphasized as to the purpose of it instead of the time it took place historically. In this chapter David has settled down in his palace after the victories that are recounted in the following chapters. Perhaps he could look out a window and see the tent that covered the ark and the faithful doorkeepers in their place guarding it. The sound of the two trumpets may have stirred him to speak to his faithful friend, Nathan the prophet.

It is possible for the activities of our lives and our own ambitions for the immediate present to make us forget what is important to God and the future of His people. Time taken to pause and reflect on the past, consider what is happening at the present and make plans for the future is not wasted time. It is at times like this that we are more inclined to listen to the voice of God. When we look around, we realize our family is growing fast and soon will be gone from our home and sphere of major influence. Have we done what we could for them? Have we done what we could for the benefit of God's people? Have we done what we could for "the ark of God" - for God's interests?

David had the right desire. He wanted to build the temple. The continuity of God's presence and work among His people was evident in the presence of the ark of God among them. But the tent seemed so inappropriate and unimpressive for such an important article of testimony. God was dwelling among His people, but in David's thinking His dwelling place was too inconspicuous. He wanted God's presence to be so evident that it would never be overlooked or taken for granted by the people. The chronicler had this in mind also, so put this event right after the move of the ark to Jerusalem.

When things get out of balance in our lives, we need to take stock and see what action we can take to make sure God's will and my activity are synchronized. It is possible for me to be so occupied with my own ambitions, business, pleasure, family, hobbies and habits that I leave undone those things that will be a benefit for others and further God's work. On the other hand, we do have obligations that only we can meet in all of these areas of daily life. A balanced life can be an effective and happy life not only for me, but also for those around me - and for the Lord.

It is not everybody we can confide in when we have a matter pressing on our heart. Nathan the prophet was a close enough friend to David that he could face him with what was wrong, and when appropriate tell him what was right. When wanting and making friends, avoid those who flatter too often, even though you like it, and are subtle in their suggestions. A complainer or a critical person is basically a self-opinionated person who sees life only through their own eyes. Find a person who likes you enough to be around you, but loves God more and gives Him the priority, and you likely will have a good friend. When a person gives a biblically perspective on life and the events going on around us, that is likely to be a faithful friend. When they can listen as well as talk, and are willing to ask the hard questions, he or she is likely to be a trustworthy friend.

David had good desires but he also had the sense to listen quietly to Nathan who passed on to him in depth, the message he had received from God. If and when God uses someone else to speak to us in his name, take the message. Do not feel slighted or ignored but understand God can use others to bless us when He so chooses. The historical account of God's presence with His people in the past, made the present message to David significant. God was making plain who He was and where David, His servant, fit in His divine plan. David was as much as servant of God when he was caring for sheep as he was as king over Israel. He was God's servant when he was a warrior in battle and a conqueror of nations. God appreciated his desire to build a house for the Lord, but because of his past service and the blood that he shed, he was not the one to build the house.

Our desire for the things of God and willingness to do what we can, is not the guiding principle that gives us the right to take any action we desire. The will of the Lord is what must be done. Whether I like to admit it or not, there are those younger than me who are more qualified and better able to do what I would like to do. It is my responsibility, and privilege, to support them in any way I can, and rejoice when they are successful. When they do better than I could have and accomplish more than I have done, I need to let them know I appreciate them and what they do. They may not have approached the work they way I thought was right, and there may be things they do that cause me to grumble and say, "What are you doing?" but God is building a place for His people and uses who He chooses.

David enthusiastically did what he could in view of Solomon building the temple after he was gone. More than that was the fact that God was building a perpetual "house" (dynasty) for David and those who came after him. The throne of David will be filled when our Lord Jesus Christ from "the house of David" reigns in power, glory, honor and peace. The enemies of God's people will not subdue them forever. The Jews who returned from Babylon were a testimony to that fact themselves. God's promise to David was valid by their existence as an identifiable people even though there was no one who would sit on the throne again until "Shiloh comes, and unto Him shall the gathering of the people be." Those who returned would have read or heard this read and stirred themselves to roll up their sleeves and get to work.

Even the king understood humility was in order when he was in the presence of the Lord. It is likely David left his house made of precious cedar and went into the tent where the ark was and sat there before the Lord. There he sat in quiet contentment and contemplation as he prayerfully talked to the Lord who had spoken to him through Nathan the prophet. Humility and faith are powerful friends when together they move us to approach to our holy God. An understanding of who God is compared to who we are, keeps a respectful attitude on our part when we speak to Him.

A friendly, respectful, humble relationship with the Lord gives weight to the words we say when we address Him in reverence. Our spiritual life is greatly enhanced when there is humility in prayer, praise to God when we pray, an acknowledgement of God's blessings when we pray and a grateful acceptance of His blessings. In the presence of God there needs to be an appropriate state of mind and heart as well as attitude suitable to the situation in which we are found. There are times when fervency in supplication is right. There are the quiet sensitive times of reflection and remembrance when we consider His grace and mercy to us. Intercession and giving of thanks are times when our confidence in His sovereignty gives us a holy boldness to mention names and things to Him. When we are consciously aware that God knows us and there is no reason for us to try to hide anything from Him nor bluff ourselves into thinking we can be less than honest before Him, then we can truly worship Him.

Worship involves an acknowledgement of the greatness and uniqueness of God. The character, power and works of God are not out of place when we try to put into words the wonder we have when we worship. Acts of His grace, experiences of His love, His mercy and longsuffering toward us can be rightly expressed when we worship. The promises of God, His provisions for our benefit and His blessings upon us as His people cause us to worship in the spirit of holiness in words and thoughts. But in all of these ways there must be worship "in spirit and in truth," otherwise it is vain repetition.

Rejoicing in the Lord and expressing what we really mean from deep within our spirits, changes prayer and praise from a mere practice to true worship. When we worship, we have placed ourselves in the condition and position of having true fellowship with God. The joy and meaning at such times, defies description but is meaningful to God who hears and answers, and certainly is meaningful to us even though we may wonder "What should I say to Him?" "What should I render to Him?" "How can I adequately put into words what I really want to say?"

1st Chronicles 17:17-18. *"What can David speak more to thee for the honor of thy servant? for thou knowest thy servant. O Lord, for thy servant's sake, and according to thine own heart, hast thou done all this greatness, in making known all these great things."*

THOU KNOWEST THY SERVANT.

Not from a great family of pomp and wealth -
Just a hard-working people to who Thou gavest good health -
From a long line of people to whom grace Thou hast dealt
Lord God, Thou knowest Thy servant!

From those who respect Thy Word and did give
Loyalty and allegiance for Thou didst many of us save -
And kept by Thy power, providing for us all that we have -
Lord God, Thou knowest Thy servant!

Thy grace to Thy servant was clearly made known unto me
When by Thy Gospel I came to face eternity
And learned by the Gospel what Christ's blood means to Thee -
Lord God, Thou knowest Thy servant!

Like in ancient times when they put blood on the posts -
I saw Christ shed His blood for me when He died on the cross -
By faith in Christ alone - not of works lest I boast -
Lord God, Thou knowest Thy servant!

A desire within to please God from the start
Came from the Holy Spirit who moved on my heart -
I did not want in any way from Thy will to depart -
Lord God, Thou knowest Thy servant!

It has been my great privilege to serve Thee for years.
Thou gavest me a wife who in Thy great work shares.
We both look to Thee in confidence who our burdens bears -
Lord God, Thou knowest Thy servant!

To see Thy saving grace in many others is our life.
To worship and praise with them brings great delight.
I have such joy to see our children walking in the light -
Lord God, Thou knowest Thy servant!

**“Hear the thoughts of my heart, O God, and be glorified by them in some way I pray,
in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”**

1st Chronicles 18

THE LORD GAVE VICTORY

To explain the way material such as gold, silver and bronze that was used by Solomon in the building of the temple, the chronicler wrote a brief account of the military victories of the past under the leadership of David the king. The Jews who returned from the years in Babylon were in a desolate place and needed to know the history of their past so they could get a sense of the present. Why was the temple they were to build so important? How should they begin and where would they get all the building materials they needed? The point of the book of 1st Chronicles was to motivate them to rebuild that which had been torn down. They learned that God had His own way of providing all that was needed.

By nature, people want to accumulate material goods for themselves and use them in ways to impress others if possible. All the nations around Israel at the time of David's reign were wealthy in gold, silver, bronze and used precious material on their weapons of war. Gold shields were used by officers likely to visibly define their position in a battle and promote a certain respect from those under them. Apparently, these precious metals were used for a wide variety of articles that were used in idol worship, and either were taken by the victorious Israelites or given to David. The heart of man has not changed and the biblical injunction to believers of "having food and raiment let us be therewith content," is not very common, even among the Lord's people.

The Lord gave victory after victory to David and his military men who wisely gathered all that precious metal so it could be used in the building of the temple. David followed the teaching of the word of God even to making the horses only usable for peaceful work, not for riding at speed into a battle. Rather than "trusting in horses" God's people were to put their trust in the Lord. It was evident to all: the soldiers, David - and now to returned slaves that it was God working for His people that made possible that which was beyond their ability.

God had promised Abraham in the ancient past a land whose boundaries He had described. David reached nearly all of those boundaries as God gave victory after victory over their foes. Human skill and "luck" really were not involved in this remarkable time of Israel's history. God had raised up a leader He could trust and who was a "man after God's own heart." Justice and love were both in his heart at the same time without conflict. Truth and grace were demonstrated in this unique leader. Mercy and judgment both were in David's decision making as he dealt righteously with the Lord's people and the conquered foes.

Order and obedience are needed to advance in a right way in any action we take in life. The joy and contentment a family can have depends on the character of the parents who guide the life of that social unit

in a way that is can be produced in the families of their children. The same things are needed in an assembly of God's people to maintain a spirit of worship and service. Haphazard ways and carelessness, when Satan opposes God's work, leads to the demise of scriptural testimony. A nation needs leaders who know who the enemies are and how to defend its own citizen from every kind of attack.

Peace comes at a price. Our peace with God was "made through the blood of His cross." In order for Israel to have peace, the enemies have to be defeated. In order for the house of God to be built, there had to be access to the needed material. Under the leadership of David, God provided both, and the resources were gathered and kept for the right purpose, not for personal use or extravagance. Personal and financial success given to God's people, are for reasonable uses. It is up to each of us who may have been entrusted with material benefits, to determine how and where these things can be used for the right purposes. Our consciousness of the fact that God has given this into our hands should cause a desire to use it right for His glory and honor.

Our work and expertise my have made possible the accumulation of the "good things of life," but it is a wise person who takes time to consider why God allowed us to have this, how and where to use such largesse. When all that we have that God has entrusted us with is truly dedicated to Him, He will guide us as to what it is to be used for. Then it is our responsibility to take action to use these things for Him as trustworthy stewards. A willing heart and a cheerful giver are a good combination to use to produce good fruit.

Victories are one thing, and the bounty we receive that is entrusted to us is another, that can be a real burden to bear. David's leadership over the nation of Israel wasn't only in the areas of warfare and accumulated wealth. He knew he was responsible for the welfare of the people who were under his leadership. He "executed judgment and justice" in ways that God intended. They were God's people and deserved to be treated as such. To do right for others can make them all love you because of what you give them. It is necessary to be "just" as well. fairness and righteousness go together. Not everyone is capable of this. God the Holy Spirit, raises up those He gifts and chooses to lead God's people. It is then the responsibility of the leaders to be in close enough fellowship with God that they can make "just and right" decisions regarding the needs of the people of God.

Other people can be designated roles to fill for the work of the Lord. It is a wise leader who can delegate responsibility to others and give them room to fulfill that responsibility by using their God-given gift. Each person who is suited for a particular work needs to commit themselves to that work and not interfere with others nor criticize those who have another area of delegated responsibility. When each one does "unto the Lord" their part to fulfill their role, the whole unified group is effective.

These principles had to be taught and learned by those Jews who returned from Babylon to begin again that which had been done generations before. That was lost when poor leaders led the people of God astray after David's reign. The condition of life and soul of God's people is very dependent on the kind of leaders they have. Military leaders give a certain characteristic to those they lead as to whether they are careless or diligent. Those who were responsible for the historical records, are similar to those today who keep checks and balances so God's people do not go too far too fast, or drag their feet and are too cautious fearing they will make a mistake. The worship and witness of an assembly follows the lead of those who lead in public testimony. Accountability is also needed and those who oversee the people of God have to have good spiritual discernment. It is God who gives victories, and it is God who gives responsibilities.

1st Chronicles 18:6. *"Then David put garrisons in Syria-damascus; and the Syrians became David's servants, and brought gifts. Thus, the Lord preserved David whithersoever he went."*

THE LORD PRESERVED.

It happened in the past when enemies came against God's people
They rallied huge forces together lest opposing forces were equal.
But they did not reckon that when opposing the children of God
The One who sets the course of nations is the Almighty God.

The odds are not a way to consider if a thing is right or wrong.
The Lord can bring down the mighty and make the weaker ones strong.
To assure ourselves that what we are doing is really right -
We must take the time to seek God's will before we start to fight.

It is possible if we are not careful to think just like the world.
Even as Christians we think God is with us when we our battle-flags unfurl.
Our calling is clear and enthusiasm is high - we are sure we are bound to win -

But to go ahead of God's will, or lag behind; both are equally sin.

"The Lord preserves the simple" it's true, but it is more important to be wise.
Because to try to do God's work on our own, will pare us down to size.
It must be the Lord who initiates a work, and the Lord who opens the door.
He is the One who sets the starting time, and determines when the event is over.

Our biggest concern is to be ready and willing when He gives the "go ahead."
And we can trust Him implicitly when He His people lead.
He knows the opposition, and He knows what needs to be done -
All glory belongs to God alone when the battle for truth is won.

For many years I have been able to prove the Lord does me preserve.
Some of my choices have not been right although Him I sought to serve.
When I tried to do God's things in my own way, I found out that's a big mistake.
He preserved me by stopping me from going too far, so I, His way would take.

In personal things; in family life too - the Lord is there indeed.
In the work of the Gospel or in teaching the saints, His guidance I must heed.
As I stop this morning and look ahead, I am putting my trust in Him -
To preserve His servant and open doors, that glory for God we will win.

"O Lord God, I pray that there will be blessing on Thy people today as I seek to help them along the way. I pray that in the Gospel efforts ahead as well as those going on now, there will be many souls saved for Thy glory. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

1st Chronicles 19

WRONG ADVICE

The chronicler was conscious of the need of the returned Jews to have a strong motivation to put their strength into the rebuilding work before them. The account of the victories of Israel over their enemies in the past, served to focus their attention on the reason for the task at hand. What they were doing and the opposition they were encountering was to be expected. Even when one's motive is to show kindness, that may be misread, misunderstood or rejected. A suspicious nature makes life very difficult.

There are family characteristics in people we know that we need to take into account when we are interacting with them. People who are strangers to us do give us some signs as to who we are dealing with. If one seems excessively familiar when we first meet them, they may be unsure of themselves and are over-compensating, or have an unspoken motive. A hidden agenda may be the cause of flattering words. A dour disposition lets us know one is suspicious of us and our intent when we show kindness. Likely they have been deceived or hurt in their interaction with people they knew before us.

Not everyone is able to be open and frank with people. When we approach those we do not know, with acts of kindness or something to give for their benefit, the first usual response is. "What's the catch? Nobody does this without wanting something back?" In the story of David's men and Hanun, Hanun's advisers were likely older men that the new king. It seems they were angry, jealous, bitter men who resented David's success. Their bad advice was to humiliate the emissaries David sent to show kindness to the son of an older acquaintance who had died.

When taking action, think before hand about what might happen if a certain course is followed. As those who represent the kingdom of God, we are not going to be welcomed into every home or situation. Even so, kindness is never out of date, but there will be suspicion and a degree of opposition from those who love the world and the things in it. There will always be charges that we are judgmental and unrealistic because we do not fit the mould or do what most people do. Humiliation and embarrassment often follow the rejection of acts of kindness. Our personal response should be like our Lord, "When He was reviled, He reviled not again. When He suffered, He threatened not."

Challenges against the public testimony of an assembly or even a nation is different. we need to defend the truth of God in our outward testimony. Humiliation is difficult to take but by waiting for the effects of the initial event to pass, we can make a proper decision as to how to act after due consideration. Those who opposed and rejected David's men took the first aggressive steps in spending a lot of money to seek to cover up the mistake they had made. When we make a mistake of some kind, it is wise to admit it and seek to compensate for the damage done. It may be all that we can do is to ask the offended party to forgive us.

To avoid admitting to error means that reconciliation will never fully take place. The cost of not honestly facing up to a mistake may be high, but it can be the best way to deal with a problem. That way a long drawn out bitterness and on-going trouble can be avoided. The Ammonites got others involved and the problem escalated until warfare against the people of Israel occurred. Joab was a skilled military leader who could improvise and adapt to situations that were one of a kind. He seemed to be able to discern how best to deal with a serious attack. By making the enemy divided around his army and yet placing his men in such a way that they could fight in two different directions and yet support each other, led to victory. In this event he acknowledged the Lord would do what was good in His eyes.

Those who lead the saints of God need to be mature enough that they have a general strategy in mind before the event happens. That way they are united in how to deal with a problem and can act quickly. Leaders also need to be young enough to have the energy to carry out the defense of the truth. There comes a time when those who have led God's people for years need to pass on leadership roles to others who have the initiative to further the work, and the strength to do it.

Motivation by itself does not accomplish a work. Opportunity has to present itself and faith has to see beyond the opposition to the mind of God about a matter, and the result we are seeking. Encouragement to take advantage of opportunity, when united with faith and motivation, makes possible advancement in the things of God. The wisdom of older men when united with the strength, enthusiasm and faith of younger, makes victory possible when we carry out the will of God.

Fear and pessimism often create a deadly pause in the work of God. Fear of making a mistake and a pessimistic view of the situation effectively stops a work of God. Overcoming complacency is one of the most difficult tasks of spiritual leadership. Undue optimism can bring great disappointment when it is not grounded in realism. A realistic understanding of what our Lord has called us to do, and a sensible evaluation of ourselves and our assets, prepares us for what God has for us.

Poor David had all of these things in place - and then he stayed home. It was then he got into trouble with his reoccurring "women problem" with his neighbor's wife. It is possible for an older person who knows what is right, and has experienced God using them in his life, to become complacent, or critical, or pessimistic - and fall into sin. The chronicler did not bring up this event in this book because it would have not served any purpose as far as the rebuilding program was concerned. For our learning: lessons from the past are not just stories to be told, but salient points to be made.

David learned the hard lessons and the next time the enemy came against them, he was where he should have been before, doing what he should do - leading his people. Leaders are to be out front leading, not staying safe way behind the action. If one can't do that, then step aside and pass the reins of active leadership of guiding the Lord's people to those who can. One or more victories do not mean there will always be victories. If and when we become complacent, it is time for us to reconsider our role and responsibilities. If we have been lazy, then it is time to put on the armor of God and go back to work. If we have become incapable of fulfilling the responsibilities of leadership, then step back into an advisory role and support those who are able to lead God's people.

1st Chronicles 19:3. *"But the princes of the children of Ammon said to Hanun, Thinkest thou that David doth honour thy father, that he sent comforters unto thee? Are not his servants come unto thee for to search, and to overthrow, and to spy out the land?"*

DON'T SECOND GUESS.

To act before you know the reason someone comes to seek
You out, and decide upon a course of action even before you greet
The visitor - can be a great mistake.
They may have come to you with an honorable intention -
Perhaps to bring a blessing, or alleviate some tension -
Before an important decision they make.

By acting in haste some lasting danger may inadvertently occur.
And their response may be some retaliation that is impossible for you to defer -
Because your act gave no other choice.
Now a situation has arisen over which you have no control.
And the results of "second guessing" has left many a grieving soul -
When you ignored the wise man's voice.

It very seldom is a mistake when you decide to take a second look.
Many regret not considering results before serious action they took -
And now they have serious regrets.

Take the time to consider both sides and the pros and cons,
And what "second guessing" might cause to happen after they are gone
Then you won't have reason to fret.

When an approach to you is made, be cautious, but stop to hear.
And what one brings to your attention should give no cause to fear -
When their suggestion is made in good faith.

Don't "second guess" their motives until you hear their story -
Then take time to decide a thing, that to God will be all the glory -
And what you did was an act of grace.

If a thing has mushroomed into a serious and dangerous event -
Consider carefully how you react and how your effort is spent -
Deal with the action, but don't "second guess."
You may not be sure of the outcome if for some reason you act in haste -
And there may only left to you both, the results of a bitter taste -
But a wise, careful decision God can bless.

"I am afraid Father that I may have tried to "second guess" some actions toward me and the work I seek to do. Please help me to leave all of this to Thee - and to get on with my work. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

1st Chronicles 20

VICTORY AND FAILURE

The writer of 1st Chronicles had a reason for putting certain events down in writing to be read by the returning Jews, and omitted other events that would not promote the objective of rebuilding. The objective of the chronicles was to give the Lord's people motivation to rebuild the temple and the city. As a place of habitation for God in the middle of His people, the temple would be the center of attention, the place of sacrifice and a reminder of their sovereign God who is the Ultimate Ruler. The legacy left to the restored people was the history of the holy city and the service of the temple to remind them as to who they were and to whom they belonged. God's dealing with His people in the past set the foundation for His dealing with them in the present. The temple, the law and the prophets were the way God unified His people to Himself in the past. Now they were to pick up the torch of Israel's testimony among the nations and rebuild, and carry on that legacy. Their obedience to God was expected if there was to be peace, prosperity and victory over those who opposed. The hope of Israel was in their hands now. The restored people had this opportunity to establish again a unified testimony to the name of the Lord God of Israel.

In view of the shrinking size of assemblies that gather to the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we need to take stock of ourselves and face the fact that "There is dearth in the land. Is there not a cause?" There is a sense in which we have been taken captive by the world-religion of materialism. In this pseudo-religious movement, money and possessions have become the focus of our attention and effort. Pleasure seeking is a fallout of that as the pursuit of this evasive thing takes up any extra time we have. Then we use any leftover money to add extra square feet to our dwellings so we can look across a large room and congratulate ourselves for "having arrived." But the fact is, we have gone backward. If we are not going forward in the things of God, we are going backward. The only solution to this trend is to change our goals and make sure the objective of our lives is that which God wants. "Fix your eyes upon Jesus. Look full in His wonderful face. And the things of earth will grow strangely dim; In the light of His glory and grace."

For some reason, David did not take seriously the value of his role as king and leader at this particular time. Perhaps he had become used to victories by the power of God, and thought it wouldn't matter if he was there or not. Joab, even though he was not a nice man at all, realized his role and responsibility. He also realized his limitations, so he led "the power of the army to deal with the Ammonites. He took no chances and left nothing behind that was needed - except the king. We may be well-trained, our skills may be honed to accomplish that for which we have been called to do, but we need to use every provision God gives us and be honest enough to admit our own inadequacy. We need God in any work we do. It may seem small in our eyes at first, but behind every obstacle ahead of us is an organized enemy under the control of Satan, and empowered by his unceasing hatred. He hates God, he hates God's people, he hates God's work being done by His people and he uses every nefarious means he can find to stop the advancement of the kingdom of God.

Sadly, we have allowed his deception to cloud our commitment to the commission our Lord gave of "going into all the world" and making disciples, baptizing them and teaching them to "observe all things whatsoever I have command you." An enthusiastic approach to the heralding of the Gospel, has been toned down to making friends with as many people as possible in order to "win them." True, "He that winneth souls is wise,"

but it is also true that "The preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but to us which are saved, it is the power of God." We have substituted a quiet chat at Christmas time in which we quote, "Jesus is the reason for the season," instead of "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief." The Easter bunny and colored eggs has taken the place of "Christ died for the ungodly;" "He made peace through the blood of His cross;" and "He was delivered for our offenses and raised again for our justification." We need again to go forth "in the power of the army" as a band of Christian soldiers "Marching as to war. With the cross of Jesus going on before."

It is true the chronicler left out the events in David's life that happened when "He tarried at Jerusalem," because it did not need to be told again to help meet the objective of motivating the new generation to build the temple. As general rule there is no need to back over failures from the past. However, for us as individuals, we need to be reminded of the fact that there are temptations and sinful opportunities that attract us and can bring us down if we "tarry at Jerusalem." When we have a choice of making a million or "making it to a meeting," choose the meeting with God's people where the real battle is going on. If we have the choice of taking a vacation to "get a rest," or helping out in an outreach work or missionary enterprise, choose the last ones, not the first, and you "will find rest to your soul," - and avoid sin.

Joab and his army surrounded and besieged the city of Rabbah. They waited until David finally came before taking the full surrender of the Ammonites. The 75-pound gold crown was put on David's head that had been on the head of foolish Hanun. One wonders whether someone pointed out to David the place where Uriah the Hittite was killed because he had been sent out front by David's "arm-chair" directive. Likely when David and his army returned to Jerusalem, he did so with a sense of guilt. The forced labor of the Ammonites, and the spoils of war would have been an asset in building Solomon's temple. But failure and victory often are not far apart.

Another major victory written about by Ezra to encourage the people he led, was the victory over the Philistines. They had been a problem to God's people from the time they left Egypt. They went through the wilderness rather than go by way of the Philistines so the people of God would not be attracted or captured by the world system the Philistines represented. The overpowering influence of the world has behind it the power of the adversary, the devil. Giants seemed to be always nearby when there are people of God who want to serve Him. There were giants at the beginning when Noah preached righteousness for 120 years before the flood. There were giants in the promised land, and there are giants who oppose us today.

It would have been an encouragement to the returned Jews to know that there were four giant-killers in their past history who by the power of God with them defeated the giants. The opposition the returned Jews faced could be overcome by the power of God when they went forward in their work by faith. David, Sibbechai, Elhanan and Jonathan were able to bring down those who opposed the people of God. The three battles and the three victories over the Philistines were centered around the defeat of those giants. One man who knows his limitations, but is willing to prepare himself as best he can, then steps out in faith against opposition, can bring victory for many.

Paul wrote, "My (God's) strength is made perfect in weakness." Peter wrote, "The trial of your faith is more precious than gold that perisheth." As our numbers shrink in assemblies who gather in the name of the Lord unto Him, we pray for men and women of God to rise up with "vision, vitality and venture," to take the word of God in hand and move forward for God to reach the lost, rather than go backward to find an easy-chair or a pool-side chaise. Jim Elliot wrote, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep, to gain what he cannot lose."

1st Chronicles 20:8. *"These were born unto the giant in Gath; and they fell by the hand of David, and by the hand of his servants."*

GIANTS.

Today, as in the ancient past, there are giants in the land.
In those days they were noted by their size; one had six fingers on each hand.
I suppose it made him more able to grab from others things that weren't his own.
And because of the hugeness of his size he could intimidate everyone.

There is a giant like that around now, he goes by the name of "Greed."
He is never satisfied with what he has, he wants everything he sees.
There is hardly room for another thing in the place he makes his abode.
Greed uses all his strength to get what he wants, and he has no fear of God.

Another goes about with noise like the one who had a spear like a weaver's beam.
His name is "Intimidation," he is a nightmare, not a dream.

He is never satisfied until he has everything done his way.
It makes no difference to Intimidation as to what the Bible says.

“Selfishness” also stomps about making his loud, self-centered demands.
He thinks everyone should pay attention to him and do everything he commands.
He is very hard to live with, for nothing anyone else does, pleases.
And whatever he sees he thinks is his right, so everything around he seizes.

There are a lot of others around with whom we will have to deal.
Malice, Hypocrisy and Evil Speaking all need to be put under our heel.
Some stand right out, you can see them well. Others only come out at night.
The only way to deal with giants, is by God’s power, put them to flight.

The good fight of faith may go on and on, and really, it is for life.
Against the giants who oppose our God, there will be a life-long strife.
The powers of darkness are on their side, but with Christ we are stronger than them.
He is our Strength, our Almighty Shield, no one can overcome Him.

The on-going battle of Light against dark will not end until life is over.
But greater is He that is in us than our foes; He will endue us with power.
To defeat the enemies who come against us, even though they come again and again.
The battles fought and victories won will be worth it when we hear “Well Done” from Him.

“I thank Thee Almighty God, for power to overcome all attacks of the enemies. I trust Thee to make me aware of the silent enemies and opposition as well as the ones that are obvious. By Thy strength alone, I praise Thee that we are overcomers. In the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

1st Chronicles 21

THE SWORD OF THE LORD

For the most part, the problem of failures is not written by the person who wrote the Chronicles. His purpose was to give the reasons, and promote the motivation for the returned Jews to build again the temple, the walls and the city. However, there was a reason for this national tragedy from their past history to be included in this account. This is where the location of the temple was designated and the legal right for it to be the chosen place. Abraham, the father of the Jews, had brought Isaac to this place to be offered to God. It was a place of historical and spiritual importance. God made a promise at that place as to the future nation and it was by this means that all attempts to procure it for other purposes have been opposed by Israelis.

The first mention of the name, Satan, in the scripture is here. The enemy of God and His people is "the adversary." In other places in scripture he is "the devil" (slanderer), "the serpent" (subtle deceiver), "The dragon" (cruelty) and "the roaring lion" (predator). His challenge here is not just against David but against Israel. The people of God will always be the focus of the adversary's attack because a unified people under divine guidance has divine power for their use in furthering the kingdom of God. The Gospel is "the power of God unto salvation, to everyone that believeth." Our adversary will do whatever he can to divide and/or destroy God's people. It worked for him in the past and it is working for him in this present day.

Often his strategy follows the same general line, especially if it has accomplished his purposes. In this biblical account he made his attack against God's people by subtly inciting their leader David, to do something that was unnecessary. To take a census is not wrong if done for the right reason and to accomplish that which God wants. Previously a census had been taken by Moses under divine direction. The motivation the adversary used in this account apparently was the pride of David for his accomplishments. He had led the people of God in a great victory and perhaps was considering it was his leadership that brought this rather than God's power.

There is a serious temptation for those who are older and have experienced God working in them and through them, to think they are someone special. A certain arrogance and self-opinionated attitude can tempt us to think our leadership is something special. It is not. It is "God who worketh in you" to accomplish His will. We may have to be reminded of this in terrible ways. God's people have been divided and the work He has done in a place has been stopped by the effect of self-centered men in leadership who think their way is right They may refuse to consider that which was successful in the past may not be what God wants done now.

It is possible for us to shut our minds to serious spiritual suggestions from God's people because the idea did not come from me. On the other hand, it is possible for a leader to not take the counsel of others when it

is reasonably given. David's personal pride at this time combined with feeling good about victories under his leadership, moved him to do something in his older years that he would have avoided when younger and more consciously dependent on God. So, he was provoked by Satan to self-congratulate himself.

Sometimes the most unusual source is where wisdom comes from. Joab had a side to his personality that showed itself in a surprising way. In a respectful way he contradicted David's plan to number the people by reminding him they were the Lord's people, under the Lord's control, and the Lord knows who belongs to Him. The people were his servants, so why doubt their loyalty? The soldiers had always responded when he needed them. Joab also seemed to understand that if this census happened, it would negatively affect the whole nation.

We may not have the same affinity with some of God's people that we have with others, but it is not wise to discount what others say just because of who they are. Even small children have words of wisdom at times to which a wise person will give consideration. Not all that young people say, do or want should be rejected out of hand as foolish or not worth a thought. Not everything an old person says or does is right even though they have been tried and proven in many ways over the years. Before taking an action, listen to what others say. Compare it to the scriptures that reveal God's will in a general way, ask counsel of those who can be trusted and then act in humility and the fear of God.

The census taking took over nine months and was done in a general way with round numbers. Specific numbers were given when the census was done to collect the ransom money of a half-shekel to use for the tabernacle. Curiosity can open our minds to that which is wrong as well as that which is right. David's curiosity seemed to be he wanted to know what the people thought of him, not that he had been successful in battle and the expansion of the kingdom. Self-sufficiency and arrogance are pretty close to each other when self-confidence is nearby. If our "inner man" is not in fellowship with God, the outward appeal of temptation becomes a tool of Satan.

By not numbering the Levites and Benjamites, Joab may have avoided some conflict - especially from those who were Saul's kinsmen. The Levites were a blended part of the nation because of their service in the work of the Lord. Those of the tribe of Benjamin seemed to be quite touchy and cranky when it came to their tribal identity. For those who lead, it is good to know who you are leading well enough to know what to say and do, and what not to say and do. There is no real good reason to make an issue over something that is merely a difference of opinion. If the work of God and the welfare of His people is at stake, then we must do what needs to be done as soon as possible.

When we take the time necessary to get God's will about a matter through the word of God and fellowship with Him in prayer, we can avoid displeasing Him and the consequences that follow. The confession of sin is one thing, but acknowledging its seriousness and forsaking it makes the confession valid. One can admit to sinning and not admit to its seriousness. Some are mentioned in scripture who said the words "I have sinned," in a superficial way not realizing how far-reaching sin is. Justice demanded punishment and Gad the seer, who had been with David from his early days, was the one to bear the news of three choices.

Our relationship with God is permanently established when God in mercy saves us by His grace. But when fellowship with God is broken by sin, we are not walking with Him in the light. Three years of famine would be a long time of hardship for the Lord's people. Three months of warfare and defeat would demoralize and discourage the people. The sword of the Lord bringing death for three days would obviously be from God from the immediate start to the immediate conclusion. The cry because of the loss of loved ones and the widespread grief throughout the nation would make everyone conscious of their need of God and His presence with them. A loss of 70,000 men would have affected everyone nationwide all at the same time in the same way.

In an act of grace, the angel of God sent to destroy Jerusalem was restrained and he stopped still with his sword in hand over Jerusalem. David and those elders with him were wearing mourning clothes of sackcloth as a demonstration of their sincere humility and true repentance. At the sight of holy justice being restrained, David responded as a true shepherd should - as an intercessor concerned with the welfare of his sheep. He assumed responsibility for his own guilt without blaming others or circumstances as the cause of the punishment inflicted on the people. Any action carried out by those who lead will affect the people of God. How careful we must be to maintain right fellowship with God personally. The domino effect of sin is not easily stopped once it is allowed to be set in motion.

We may experience forgiveness and the problem may have been stopped, but the effects of sin cannot be stopped. 70,000 deaths had an impact on God's people for many years. A lesson to be learned is to think

before we act. Consider the reason for the action and the possible outcomes. Consequences for doing what is right can produce great benefits for other people. Consequences for doing what is wrong are bitter lasting effects that create a result that can never be changed.

At the threshing floor of Araunah (Ornan), an event happened that is still being felt today. The pestilence was stopped when the king and the elders were prostrate on the ground in true repentance. The shepherd's heart for his people was revealed rather than the smug complacency of a victorious leader. Further, an altar was built there under divine direction as evidence of God's sanction of that place to be the location of the temple that was to be built. Abraham had built an altar there many generations before. It was now a place of activity as a result of a harvest, and it was a place of reverential fear as those who were laboring there were made conscious of the presence and power of God. David paid the full price for both the threshing floor (50 shekels of silver) and the whole "place" for 600 shekels of gold.

A true sacrifice costs more than just a token payment. The acceptable sacrifices we offer are not just lip service or a small portion of our excess. A sacrifice comes from our heart and inner being where it is motivated by true appreciation and gratitude, whether it be from our finances or our bodies as a "living sacrifice." Ornan (Araunah) was ready to "give it all." David bought it all "for the Lord" and paid full price. The altar, the burnt offering and the peace offering, the fire from heaven - all assured those at that place that the Lord heard and answered because His justice was now satisfied.

David's fear of the Lord was well founded because the sword of that mighty angel was an obvious testimony to the seriousness of the event and all that happened to God's people. We might think a matter is a small thing, but to God it is much larger than we think. We must never take God for granted for any reason. A casual approach to divine things is a grave mistake. David did not inquire of God regarding the census, and then he was afraid to inquire of the Lord at the tabernacle. We must remember our God is the Almighty God, the only True God. We must never think that we can ignore His word and will about any matter. We are weak and fearful, but God is neither. "The sword of the Lord" is still His and in His hand. Righteousness and justice are still expected of us and obedience is not up to our convenience.

1st Chronicles 21:27. *"And the Lord commanded the angel; and he put up his sword again into the sheath thereof."*

DIVINE VENGEANCE.

Pride is a problem for people of all ages.
It can work its awful havoc on the young or the sages.
Self-congratulation often ends in despair
When one forgets that fact that God is everywhere.
He knows what is behind each action we do.
He knows each thought and each intention too.
To think I can get away with sin would be a great mistake,
For He knows what is ahead of each step I take.

It doesn't take much for pride to raise its ugly head.
A glance in the mirror or a word someone said
May set me to thinking along a certain line,
And before long I'm thinking everything is fine -
When in actual fact what has really taken place,
Is pride in accomplishment or pride of face
Has tripped me up and I didn't even know it -
And it takes an act of God to deal with it and show it.

The corrective acts of God often will vary.
The pressures He applies is intended to carry
The amount of impact to bring about the change
That is needed to alter the behavior that for a Christian is strange.
If an act of pride has negatively affected others -
God's divine vengeance acts to protect my brothers
Who would be hurt by my acts of pride that bring to pass
A serious problem, that might for a long time last.

"O God of righteousness and truth: preserve me today from the terrible ravages of pride and the effects that it has on others beside myself. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

1st Chronicles 22

DON'T QUIT BECAUSE YOU ARE OLD

Old age has a tendency to make us look back to the past with nostalgic fondness rather than ahead with optimism. Because of our humanity we live in a "now" instead of seeing the big picture of the past, present and future all being an "eternal now" in God's eyes. David was a man after God's own heart, so he could see what others did not for one reason or another. From the pasture to the palace he had experienced life in the big picture. He knew what it was to be overlooked as insignificant and praised as a hero. He had been loved and hated. He had been hunted like an animal and heralded as a king. He had won and he had lost. He had experienced being lied about and misrepresented, and his words had been law to millions. Old age has a way of knocking the sharp edges off the rough rocks we are by nature. But we are not done until God says we are done.

David identified the place where the temple was to be built. He could almost see it in his mind's eye. No longer will there be the dust and dirt of business on Mount Moriah. The threshing floor was where the foundation of the house of the Lord God of Israel would be located. An altar was there with the scent of burning flesh and the scent of incense that was started by fire that fell from heaven. After failures and fear, after sackcloth and face-down humble repentance, there would come blessing in that place. The house of God today is not populated by perfect people but by those who have been forgiven, set apart as a kingdom of priests, and who worship and serve as one body of believers in a local "place" where the Lord Jesus Christ calls us to meet with Him - and He is "in the midst of them."

Not all material in the house of God is alike nor are all who labor there supposed to do the same things. The laborers in the forest and in the quarries, each had a personal work to do that was unique to them. Some did the hard back-breaking labor of gathering raw material. The "work of an evangelist" is definitely a work. When one is alone, or a few labor together, far from their home "place," there can be times when they may feel sorry for themselves if they forget to look at the big picture. The commission from our Lord is to "go and make disciples..." not to stay and wait for people to come to us and ask how to be disciples.

When the rocks have been roughly cut out of the quarry and the trees of the forest have been cut down, they have to be shaped. When the copper, tin, iron, silver and gold has been dug out of the earth it has to be refined. There are those who were skilled in hewing rocks, sawing lumber and refining metal that had to go to work and ply their trade to bring the needed results from basic material to a work of useful beauty. In the same way we are all to be "workers together" as the house of God is built and maintained. All the gifts and talents of God's people have a place to be used if the workers actually work. The variety of people is essential for the purposes of the local assembly. There is a principle to follow in order for that variety to function properly and in unity. There is a plan and a pattern to follow. Planning ahead for any work keeps the unity of the people under the leadership of the Spirit and the work of God. The plans are plain. Coordination of the gifts for a united purpose is the responsibility of those who superintend the work.

When the materials are found, each item needs personal attention. The iron nails would have been made by hand to the right size for a particular purpose. Smaller nails would have been used in making doors that for hanging gate hinges. The mixing of copper and tin would be heated and watched until the right amount of each could be brought together to produce the right strength and color. Cedar logs would have to be cut to uniform sizes in order to form the right kind of structure. Each stone would have to fit properly to those stones around it. The work of God is not to be done haphazardly. Those in scripturally gathered assemblies of believers need to be aware of the fact that carelessness can bring weakness into the whole company.

Teachers and their teaching can make or break the testimony of an assembly very quickly. Paul urged those who build on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, fundamental doctrines, need to be committed to take the time necessary to smelt the gold and silver, and dig out the precious stones. "Wood, hay and stubble" can be found on the internet or in books written by people. It may be fast, and look and sound okay, but it does not stand the test of fire either now for present uses, or in the day of recompense. It is not only what we build as to the material we use, but how we build as to the way it is done. Scriptural truth slapped at people is often rejected out of hand because of the way it is presented. Truth patiently and carefully presented with both compassion and faithfulness is much easier to take by the hearers, than a confrontational belligerent presentation.

David was old but not finished. Instead of fighting battles, he was wanting to build a house for the Lord God. But his past work for the Lord had involved him for most of his life in confrontation with enemies. Bloodshed and conflict were not consistent with the purpose of this house for the Lord's name. We all have our limitations for one reason or another. Some may have been of our own making and others by divine sovereignty. Those limitations should not stop us doing what we can for the benefit of others who may do far greater things than we could ever do. David was not jealous but zealous. Advancing years greatly enlarges our scope of viewing the world in a scriptural way so that we can look ahead beyond our life to the value of

the work and potential of others. Those younger people who follow can be helped if we pass on what we have learned to those who want to hear.

It is incumbent on us to do what we can for the following generation. We need to pass on what we have gathered over a lifetime of living for the Lord. We need to seek to see things through their eyes rather than insisting they see things through ours. When we do our part in the work of the Lord, He can consolidate the variety of gifts, of age differences and of designated responsibilities to make the house of God a wonderful dwelling place for Him with His people. It perhaps could be a place of wonder for those who look on from outside. The uniqueness of a scripturally gathered assembly hopefully makes those who wonder how it can work without man-made organization, consider the word of God and how it can be applied to them.

Solomon would have been a teenager when all of those materials were being prepared and gathered to the "place." He had older brothers who resented him and his mother. He was a peace-loving person who was used to the finer things of life. He likely had never killed another person nor had anyone hunt him with the purpose of killing him. He didn't have the vision of the promised kingdom in the same way David did, but he was told by his father there would come a King who will reign forever. This is the only specific reference to our Lord Jesus Christ in the book of 1st Chronicles. There is coming One who is "greater than Solomon." Even though he seemed to be a person who only lived for the present, God used him as a builder, and gave him a special gift of wisdom - and riches and honor.

We can learn some important lessons in mentoring when we read the words of David to Solomon. Solomon was given a charge. That means something serious is to be discussed and when it is given seriously the one hearing the charge will realize this is no small matter. The reason for the charge was also given as David explained his limitations and why God could not use him to build the temple. He made it plain to Solomon why he was given this work to do and when. The immensity of the work and the urgency to do it right and finish it would have made it plain to the young man that much was expected of him. Everything he needed was there for him to begin "the work." He was to oversee the workmen and use his wisdom as a builder and not only as a counselor.

There were personal things for Solomon to also consider that we need to attend to ourselves. We need to be wise and discreet when we are living for God. It takes time and concentration to be understanding of things and how to bring the desired results. In order for this to be real to us rather than just a natural inclination, we need to study and apply the word of God. "Statutes and judgments" are divine decrees and laws, not just from Moses, but from the Lord through Moses. Success comes when we approach the work of the Lord with a positive attitude that comes from strength and courage given by Him. Fear and discouragement are negative things that come when we rely only on ourselves or are criticized by others. David's life's work was done. Now it was time for Solomon to go to work. Let us pray that God will give those who come after us the needed fortitude and vision to accomplish greater things for the Lord than we could ever do.

There are others with whom we do not have the same ties or affinity but who are important to God and His work. We can encourage them and challenge them to support the work and those who lead in it. They need to get involved and stay involved and everyone participate with heart and soul. Those princes (leaders) had peace after the wars were over, but were not to get lazy and sit back and just enjoy what they had for themselves. Tranquility has conditions that we are responsible to keep. We need to maintain our commitment to God's things, not just rest at ease with the temporal things of life to enjoy. The work of God goes on and will continue until the Lord comes. Then there will be rest in the kingdom of peace but will not be a lazy group of people with no meaning to our existence. We must not stop until the work of building is done. Then there is the work of maintaining what we have and pressing forward in kingdom work to the glory of the "Name of the Lord."

1st Chronicles 22:19. *"Now set your heart and your soul to seek the Lord your God; arise therefore, and build ye the sanctuary of the Lord God, to bring the ark of the covenant of the Lord, and the holy vessels of God, into the house that is to be built to the name of the Lord."*

ARISE AND BUILD.

There is a work that needs to be done, but it requires a man of vision;
Who knows how to approach the work, and can make wise and good decisions.
The material is abundant and ready, but to see the big picture
Is not easily done unless one the whole completed structure
Can visualize in its completeness and then that one knows
What is expected of each laborer in each area of work, and why he chose
That person or group to fulfill a given - and perhaps - difficult task.
And then the visionary leader knows the answers when asked.

But knowing what to do is not really enough -
To accomplish a work, one must be able to stir people up
To leave what they are doing that is of small consequence
And arise up and build for God in view of the needed advance
Of the affairs of God's kingdom that needs attending to,
And press on with His work until this day of grace is through.
We need a leader who is aware of the times and the needs -
A man to rally God's people, whose words the people heed.

Another time of visitation is needed right here.
The saints need to arise and build, there is material near
That is waiting to be harvested, to be shaped or to be mined.
We need leadership to challenge us to the potential of our times.
There were times of dearth, and times of visitation in the past -
We need to be revived up to arise and build a work to last.
The Lord is the same - new material can be found all around.
There is abounding sin here - this is where grace can much more abound.

The harvest is great and it seems like the laborers are few.
But the ones we have know how to shape and how to weave
The material that is brought into the form that will fit
The living stones around and can make good use of it.
What we need is young strength to arise up and build -
We need laborers unafraid who will go out into the field
And get what God has there to dig for and to bring
To the house now being built that will bring honor to His name.

“Lord God, there is a lot of work to be done here. These people Thou hast saved in the past are getting older. Give us young laborers to build the work here again. Help me to help them. Please give us again a time of visitation. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

1st Chronicles 23

ORDERLY TRANSITION

It is a wise man who is willing to face his limitations and who knows when to step back from leadership gradually. In this way a smooth transition can take place to the next generation as duties are shared and explained. The older brother knows his physical capacities are waning. Physical disability may come gradually and that gives opportunity to explain how and why certain things are done, how best to do it and then watch it being done by the younger man.

Mental acuity slows, and the decision-making process that should be sharp, gives way to a common attitude to those who are older when they say, "That's the way we always did it." That way may not be possible or acceptable for the present need. Emotional pressures come when one has endured a sickness of some kind, and they become emotional or sentimental over something that is trivial. Memory loss happens when people get older and even names of new believers and new situations cannot be processed in a reasonable way.

"David was old" was a nice way of telling the returned Jews how they should transition from slavery to responsible people. The chronicler did not want them to get sidetracked from the goal of rebuilding that was before them. By reviewing the beginning of the temple and the practice of scriptural worship, the point was being made to the as to how they should address the work before them. The fact that David was a sickly old man who hardly knew what was going on around him would have served no purpose for the present need. Not everything has to be exposed when a matter needs to be clarified. Some things are best not mentioned because that would have a negative, rather than a positive effect.

A very good point is emphasized here that is helpful in the transition of leadership in an assembly. Keep people in the loop. A gathering of those involved was especially useful when David called the "princes (leaders), priests and Levites" together. Not everyone in the nation was included in this gathering. Just those who were qualified to fill the roles they would be given. It is true that David made Solomon king but he did not do this arbitrarily. He took this action under God's direction. There was a lot of bitterness from Solomon's older brothers who were not qualified either personally or spiritually for the role of king.

Certain principles of leadership have to be considered when seeking out those who are qualified to lead the people of God. Spiritual things take precedence over physical things. In order of importance, people are far more important than things. More than that, leaders need to know that eternal things are of greater value

that temporal. They are even measured differently. Money changes in value as do all temporal things. Truth, righteousness, holiness, mercy, grace and justice along with all the other attributes of eternal things are not measured by human measurements.

To those returning Jews who would likely have wanted to get on with their own lives, on their own land, in their own houses, with their own families - they had to be made aware that spiritual things had priority over secular things. In their case it was the building of the temple, or "religious things" we might say, that was of first importance to both unify the people and restore public worship. God's people were to be unified as one people, not now under a king but under divine authority. So the temple had to be built. Ezra's temple wasn't the same in glory as the one Solomon built, but it was the dwelling place of God with His people.

There didn't seem to be the same age limitations for service at the time of this writing as in the time of Moses. The lower age was now twenty years old instead of thirty, and the age of fifty did not seem to be the cut-off age. There were reasons for this. Instead of carrying the tabernacle from place to place, and raising and lowering it, the temple was a permanent structure. When it was built it needed a different type of maintenance and was much larger in size. The Levites were to take shifts in assisting the priests if they were Kohathites. The Gershonites and Merarites were to keep the temple and courts around it clean and in good condition. Thousands of people would be coming and going as well as bringing animals for sacrifice. They were also to bake the bread, be doorkeepers against any entering places they should not, and provide the music that was appropriate. They would bring the animals to designated places and in a general sense keep everything running smoothly and looking right.

When all of God's people are each doing their part in assembly life, there is a wonderful atmosphere that is conducive to worship and service. Each of us has a role to fill and when it is well coordinated with those of our brothers and sisters, assembly life is effective and meaningful to all who are a part of that holy fellowship. Separation from the world's ways is obvious. The world's religions are run like a business with tiers of man-designed authority. A scriptural assembly of believers is like a well functioning body in which all parts are needed for the purpose of the body - to glorify God. Some body parts are hidden doing their work unnoticed. Other parts are out in the open and obvious. They use the hidden strengths of the unseen parts that make them work and produce an outward testimony to a watching world of men and angels.

The mature priests of the family of the Kohathites were to sanctify the holy things. They had to have spiritual discernment so were responsible to know, practice and pass on the words of the law to those younger priests who would follow them. The practiced eye could look at an animal, and in a moment could tell if something was wrong with it. If it had a runny nose, he could see it. With experienced hands he could feel if a bone had been broken. He would pass on to the twenty-year old apprentice priest, techniques for discerning what is clean or unclean. Also, what was suitable for a holy sacrifice and what was counterfeit or substandard.

Priests were also to burn incense at the hour of prayer, so would have to help the younger ones learn how to smell the right mixture of ingredients. He would be able to tell if someone is being careless in their preparation for approaching God. Priests ministered before the Lord, or to the Lord. This is no casual act of duty, but an awesome responsibility and privilege given to those who are a "holy priesthood," as a "peculiar people." When we worship the Lord, this is no light-weight matter, nor is it something we do unprepared. To minister in the confines of an assembly gathering is certainly an important part of the practice of the priesthood of all believers. But it does not stop there.

Like the priests were to do in the past, so we too are to "bless His name forever." That is when we go public in our testimony and demonstrate our faith in God and His word to be seen and heard by all. A priest represented the people to God, and he also represented God to the people. It is a very important part of our Christian testimony to "Bless His name forever." There are eternal matters at stake when we are involved in the work of the kingdom of God.

In a way similar to those returned Jews who were to begin the worship and service of God in "the place of His name," so we today who have the maturity of years behind us, need to pass on to new believers an orderly, reasonable clear definition of what the "house of God" is. In this way continuity of testimony to the Lord's name will continue and be a blessing to God's people - and, most important, bring glory to God.

1st Chronicles 23:32. *"And that they should keep the charge of the tabernacle of the congregation, and the charge of the holy place, and the charge of the sons of Aaron their brethren, in the service of the house of the Lord."*

MAINTENANCE.

For years they watched and waited to move things toward the goal.

But now their work has changed, not less in value or more.
God's house has been established, there is a work here to maintain.
And the roles are different even though their calling is the same.

For they were called to serve God through His people - ready to minister -
Ministry included things from helping people to repairing a broken fixture.
In the early years, before there was a fixed place for God to dwell,
Their obligation was to be ready on a moment's notice, their moving role to fill.

Now God's house is placed where His people can attend
To the work He has for them to do, and to go where He will send
Them to bring what is needed to the place of His holy name.
Everything that God wants done there, they are to maintain.

Not everyone does the same things, but each his work does know.
Some are there to judge the people, others to guard the door.
Some were to keep the house clean, others to raise the hymns.
Some were there to prepare the bread that God's people use in worshipping Him.

Sacrifices were to be offered there; the Lord's house is a holy place.
The times and seasons when they meet, and God's ways with them retrace,
Are holy times and orderly; nothing is to be haphazard.
The maintenance of the house is obvious wherever God's people gather.

The house today is composed of living stones that fit
One next to the other in a perfect fashion, we are to maintain it
By considering one another, each with gifts that vary.
Those in charge of maintenance have a responsible load to carry.

"O God, we who dwell in Thy house are thankful for the order we see when the divinely given gifts are properly used. It is remarkable to me that whether a group is small or large; Thou hast arranged an orderly way for each group to do what is expected of them. Enable me I pray to fill the role Thou hast given me to the best of my ability. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

1st Chronicles 24

TEAM WORK

Those who returned from Babylon were beginning a whole new way of life as individuals that could have made the coordination of the restored group difficult. The historical account of how temple worship began would have helped them understand how a whole group of individuals can use their unique differences to benefit everybody in the nation. Continuity of the past temple worship and service was being passed on to them. The value of doing things in a certain way is because it works right. It works right because it is what God arranged and He knows and decides what is right or wrong.

Beside the visible temple worship and service, was the fact that the unseen responsibility to the law and the prophets who spoke for God, was to be kept. Outward visible practice is indicative of inward appreciation and worship. Obedience to God and His word is much more than a form. We can go through the motions of doing what is right, and still be far away from God. Those unseen parts of our life are far more important and valuable than submission to a form or a king. The returned Jews did not have a king but they had the Lord God of Israel, His word and His revealed will by the law and the prophets who spoke for Him.

Israel's hope lay in the concern of individuals for "all Israel," and the promise of a new day when the Messiah would come and fulfill all the promises of God to His earthly people. Our present-day hope and our commitment are not to what pleases or makes me fulfilled, but what pleases God and blesses His people through my participation in worship and service. When my part in the things of God is done in coordination with others, the whole company of saints is blessed. This legacy which we have been left of worship and service as a testimony to our Lord Jesus Christ is best served and kept when there is order maintained. Order in the work of God is able to be maintained by delegated responsibility.

The list of priests begins with the sixteen sons of Eleazar and the eight sons of Ithamar. The sin of Nadab and Abihu is not mentioned here because it would serve no purpose in establishing the order and structure of the priestly ministry that was to begin again. When things are done "decently and in order" we are free to respond to the guidance of the Holy Spirit without confusion. The Spirit controls the participation in ways that are appropriate to the event and the need. In that way we can bring glory to God, and there is a calmness and freedom because preparation in advance has opened the under divine guidance.

Eleazar had the place of the firstborn after his elder brothers died. He had the double portion of the firstborn and the leadership responsibility that goes with that position. He had a larger number of sons than Ithamar, and they perhaps had better leadership ability, that was passed on to his progeny. Zacharias the priest who was the father of John the Baptist, was one of the future priests from Eleazar's son Abijah. He was living in the "hill country" of Judea and got word of the miracle of John's birth when he was fulfilling his course in the temple. Each of those priests had a two-week shift to fill as their "course." Then they were free to return to their homes and families. John was a prophet from the priestly family.

The Levites listed in this chapter would have been those who had specific assignments to fulfill in their shifts at the temple. The variety of duties was quite clear so each one who came to do his service would know what to do to maintain continuity in the flow of temple service. In assembly life there is plenty of opportunity for service for all who love the Lord and want to participate in whatever way they can. Not everyone has the "out-front" work of public speaking or public service. There is equally important work to do that is really only known by the Lord and He is the One who counts when it comes to making our lives count.

There were those who served as administrators, like supervisors over the work, and there were judges. Those who were responsible for the ministry were the priests and those who assisted them. Caretakers and bakers were the service department of the temple. Financial duties were delegated to those who kept the treasury and the gifts that were given. They would have to keep close account of those things lest there be a charge of theft or fraud relating to those things that belong to the Lord.

The artistic people would be singers and musicians who had to know the psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Perhaps there were also artisans who had to maintain the decorative parts of the temple. The protection detail of the temple was the responsibility of the gatekeepers who would have to know who and why people were coming into the temple, where they were going and who they would see. In the whole teamwork process, there would be an order maintained even though it may have seemed confusing at first to one looking on. That is actually what happened in the temple when our Lord was here. Order had broken down, and there were all kinds of confusion that mixed worship, business and pleasure so that there was really nothing for God in it.

In the work of the Lord today, in a similar way to the ancient days, there was specific work designated for individuals. Ezra was a scribe. Gad was a seer/prophet. There were, and still are "chief men among the brethren." These responsibilities would not run contrary to the united teamwork of the temple service. There are places for private exercise in the assemblies of God's people but it has to be consistent with the overall objectives that are guided by the Holy Spirit. This is done through those He has raised up to lead and feed the Lord's people.

"Casting lots" or impartial designation of a work to be done is to keep from showing favoritism or "respect of persons." David, the priests and the leaders of the people were all observers when lots were cast to witness to its fairness both to those who are older and to the younger.

1st Chronicles 24:4. *"And there were more chief men of the sons of Eleazar than of the sons of Ithamar, and thus they were divided. Among the sons of Eleazar there were sixteen chief men of the house of their fathers, and eight among the sons of Ithamar according to the house of their fathers."*

SIXTEEN CHIEF MEN.

I wonder how many there really are willing to commit to the service of the Lord?

Are there those who are willing to step out in real faith and trust God?

Can they trust God to lead and feed them and use what they have for Him?

Am I ready to step out in faith; am I willing to help and guide them?

On George's lips were words like this; I wonder what he really meant?

Was it a prayer or a challenge to carry on the work to which he was sent?

Sixteen chief men would do a lot of work if they were sent into God's field today.

Are here those that will rise to the work and do whatever God will say?

Eight groups of two by two or four groups of four by four -

The impact sixteen men would make would stir up the hearts of more.

Perhaps it would lead to a revival among the Lord's people here -

Then a time of visitation would begin and affect God's work elsewhere.

Sixteen men with Bibles and committed to getting God's Word in their hearts -

Sixteen men who are willing and although they don't know where to start -

Sixteen men who want what is right and are willing to pay the price

Of committing themselves unreservedly and going out to do what is right.

Sixteen men willing to venture beyond their present comfort zone -
Men who are willing to be used that can catch a vision of their own -
Faithful men who can be trusted to serve God faithfully -
Who know the consequences of their work, will influence others for eternity.

I wonder if I have been blind to the gifted people I already know.
Are there those who will rise to the challenge if I in them an interest show?
If I have been remiss in overlooking some who want some leadership -
Then I'm the one at fault who needs my heart to be stirred up.

If there are those God has called to serve, I want God to open my eyes.
If I in pride spend my time looking back, I need to be pared down to size
And make myself available once again to be used in other ways to serve the Lord.
Then maybe revival and times of visitation will come when I heed God's Word.

“O Lord God, have I been overlooking what is right in front of me? Have I been so self-centered that I haven't shown interest in those who are looking for leadership right in this place? Forgive me O God, and please open the way for me to take young men with us again to labor in the field. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

1st Chronicles 25

MAKING MUSIC

Occasionally people have made comments about the kind of music we have in assemblies of believers who gather in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Some have said, "Why don't you have music?" Other comments are made regarding the singing of hymns by the whole congregation rather than the congregation sitting in silence and listening to trained singers or a choir of select people. Actually, we each bring our own personal instrument with us when we come together (our voice) and are able to use it to edify ourselves and others as we participate in this "service of the Lord." This chapter gives some practical principles relating to music when the people of God gather together to worship the Lord. David the king, and the "captains" of the army recognized music as a way to keep order when a large company of people are gathered in one place. A structured method that has been used throughout history is to use music. Otherwise the sounds of a large gathering of people are only discordant noises that sounds like a riot rather than worship and praise.

Music is the coordinated combination of sounds made by the vocal cords in each human or by instruments played by humans to produce a form of beauty, harmony and a means to express emotions. Organized sounds affect us by impacting our perception of a subject. One kind of music can make us feel happy and carefree, and another can make us sad and serious. Even our body movements are influenced by music. Our feet move when certain musical sounds are produced. Order can be maintained by a large group who march together by the sound of music. A melody is a sequence of tones that are quite close together that conveys to our brain thoughts and actions. It is hard to listen to music without some kind of physical and emotional response.

Linked with melody is harmony; the combination of tones that go well together. The pitch of a melody is a vibration that produces a certain kind of "color" in our minds. A high soprano or tenor linked with a low alto or bass - and the other tones in between, has the ability to make us shed tears of joy or sorrow. The very rhythm - sounds that are linked in time to a heart-beat, creates suggestions to our mind that can move us to act in a certain way. The loudness or softness of music, the dynamics if you will, can make us march in time and order with thousands of other people. That is why soldiers are taught to march in basic training. Order and control over hundreds and thousands is made possible by band music. But that is control, not instruction or edification.

The quiet harmony of "soft" music creates reflection and a restfulness that controls our emotions and pacifies us because it has the ability to focus one's attention on a subject or matter at hand without being too intrusive. Repetition of sounds creates an atmosphere or an ambience we associate with certain events of the past or situation in which we are at present. Repetition can be very annoying if only two or three varying sounds are made or if the sounds are too close together like "a broken record."

In the context of spiritual things, the sounds must be connected by words to have any real value in our worship and service. The sounds themselves have no instruction for us. They only give us feelings of emotion. Really, in themselves they are valueless. David and the leaders with him knew how important it was to have the structure of music to focus the attention of large numbers of God's people on God Himself rather than on the place or people who were gathered at the temple. So they chose certain people to make

sure this structure was made and maintained. David had written and sung many psalms in his life before the temple was built and had apparently accompanied himself and kept tune by playing the harp.

The psalms he wrote were mainly a repetition of thoughts rather than mere tones. So any music that he was arranging for ahead of time, even before the temple was built, was to emphasize the words he wrote because this was a means of "prophesying." This was not for entertainment. The words were what was important and were able to be effective by an appropriate melody that accompanied them. The unity of words sung by the whole congregation was kept orderly by the use of instruments that were louder and sharper in tone than voices. Asaph and his sons "prophesied according to the word of the king," his supervision. They did this with singing the words. Jeduthun and his sons were to use instruments to "give thanks and praise." Heman, the king's seer, with his sons and daughters apparently were those who organized and made sure that all was done right by the 4000 musicians and singers in their two-week shifts. There were 288 of them who were in charge of groups who came at their appointed time throughout the year.

The "songs, hymns and spiritual songs" we sing when we gather together at assembly meetings should be suitable for the event. In our remembrance meetings we reflect on our Lord by praise in which we focus our attention on Him personally as to who He is and what He means to us. We also give thanks to Him for what He has done for us and the blessings that come to us because of His grace. Our Gospel testimony is greatly enhanced by spiritual songs of testimony, "Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound," "Power in the Blood," and other similar messages as words of instruction, reflection and serious warning. Order is maintained and minds are directed to specific truth when a whole congregation says the same thing at the same time in a way that impresses them with the value of the message. Our children learn and remember much from their childhood through the songs they sang when they were young.

"The service of the house of God" is why the singing of the saints is important. In this way we exalt Him, or "lift up His horn," and testify to our faith in Him. Those ancient people were instructed in "the songs of the Lord," that they would sing together when God's people gathered at the temple. Appropriate songs and hymns for each gathering of God's people is learned by instruction. The people of God were "instructed in the songs of the Lord" when David was king, and now many years later, the Jews who returned from Babylon had to be reminded of their heritage of music, how it was to be done, and why. Our children should learn from us how and why we make music the way we do. We "edify" ourselves and we "edify one another." We should give our music our best effort and sing with enthusiasm and skill to the Lord with the best of our ability.

Probably all who read this will remember the singing of our mother as she went about her work, or the words our fathers read as he gave out an appropriate hymn at a meeting. "Man of sorrows, what a name, for the Son of God who came..." or "When I survey the wondrous cross, on which the Prince of Glory died," will stick in our minds because we sang it with meaning and harmony, and in unity with many others. The songs of the Lord are out of place "in a strange land." To sing them at a drinking party in a worldly way merely for entertainment, is not right. But in the house of God where entertainment is not the point of music. The "Lord's songs" can be sung from the heart, and joy with united fellowship with God's people, ministers to our hearts and strengthens us in our resolve to live and walk by faith.

1st Chronicles 25:7. *"So the number of them, with their brethren that were instructed in the songs of the Lord, even all that were cunning, was two hundred fourscore and eight."*

TWO HUNDRED EIGHTY-EIGHT.

You could hear them practice, the teacher and the scholars
Preparing for the service of God.
At first the notes would be discordant and harsh
Until long practice made the music good.
As time went by they were readied to serve
When the time of their responsibility was ripe.
The harps and the cymbals, the psalteries and horn,
And the piper to make music on his pipe.

It was worked out exactly as God had planned -
There were twenty-four families, each with twelve.
Around the clock, every hour of every day,
These used their musical talent to serve.
Their service was for the king as he gave each one
A time by lot to be there.
Sometimes people heard the music in the middle of the day -
Other times only a few would hear.

But the Lord heard each song and how it was played -
 Those were the songs of the Lord.
 Whether few or many, His songs we must sing -
 Praise is comely for the people of God.
 It was important for them to make music in God's way -
 The ultimate listener was the Lord Himself.
 When I sing my praises and make music in my heart -
 I am passing on to Him what He first to me dealt.

 The number was precise for each, how they would play -
 Praise was rising continually to God.
 When I make music, and to God I give my praise -
 It often serves to lift someone's heavy load.
 We too prophesy by comfort, edification and exhortation
 When our voices as instruments in tune -
 Are lifted in testimony of God's grace and salvation -
 And tell of His coming for us soon.

“O God, may the music we make to Thee be acceptable and suitable. May we not treat it as only entertainment, but as worship, testimony and service. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

1st Chronicles 26

DELEGATED DUTIES

In a theocracy such as Israel was at the time of the building of the temple there was no division between that which was secular and that which was sacred. The national treasury was the temple. The important events were held at the temple, not at the king's palace. A true theocracy is a government of a nation ruled by "divine guidance" by officials who are expected to be guided by a divine mandate. Iran and Saudi Arabia and some other Muslim countries today claim to be theocracies. Such nations say they are governed by Allah through Ayatollahs, kings or priests who claim to have been given leadership by divine authority. Josephus used the word theocracy to define the government of the Jews who had left slavery in Egypt under the invisible leadership of the Lord God of Israel. The nation was subject to His divine authority and His word was communicated to them through prophets, the greatest of which was Moses.

The fact that a church if a "kingdom of Priests" is not well accepted in this day of democracy. The United States of America fights to preserve "government by the people, for the people." In reality the church is a body, not an organized system that has been brought together like building an automobile. The living body of which Christ is the Head is made up of a variety of parts created by a common Source without human intervention. We are not able to give life to a blade of grass let alone such a complicated unity as a body. There is a sense in which the rule of a benevolent dictator best describes the ideal government. However, that can only be done by the Benevolent Creator in the way of His choosing. He has the right to form it in the way He wants so it will best fulfill the purpose for which it is made.

The testimony of creation, "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth His handiwork," reveals the reality of our great God. The testimony of the survival of the Jews as a unique entity for thousands of years among nations that want to annihilate them, the testimony of the Bible and the testimony of the changed lives of human beings who believe in Him all show evidence of God. The love of Christ that was demonstrated at the cross, and the actions of those who have put personal faith in Christ as their Savior, testify to what God is like. The returning Jews who had been captives in Babylon needed to learn the nature of the government they were a part of and under whose authority they were to conduct their lives.

Priests, Levites and singers were all identified and their role in national life was defined. They knew their obligation to the nation would require them to be away from home for two weeks of service at the temple plus the time it would take them to go and come from the capital city of Jerusalem. The rest of the time was their own to work and provide for their families. There were occasionally national emergencies in which they were expected to do what was needed for the good of the nation as a whole. Also, there was the obligation to observe the national holidays (feasts of Jehovah) at certain times of the year.

Structure is needed for a society to function properly and those who came back to Israel would be able to read from the Chronicles how things had been done in the past. In that way they would have a general idea as to what God wanted in the present and the future. The passing of time inevitably brings about deterioration of everything. That is one of the laws of thermodynamics. So, nothing is quite as good as it was

when it was first made. They would build a temple, but not as elaborate as the one Solomon built. However, the order of things that affect the people does have a pattern to be followed because it works.

In the last year of David's reign there were "porters" (gatekeepers) appointed who were trained, qualified men to preserve the integrity of the temple of God and protect the worship that took place there. Obed-edom had been faithful when he kept the ark of God in his house. Shortly before the temple was built David gave Obed-edom, his sons and grandsons administrative responsibilities that were consistent with their ability. They were to guard the center point of the nation's activities and treasures. The eight sons were because "God blessed him" by giving him "mighty men of valor" who were "strong" and "able." Their personal courage and bravery, their strength physically, and ability made them the kind of people who could keep the national treasury safe. They were also able to discern who should be allowed into the temple and who should be kept out.

Training of younger people by those who are older and experienced is the way we can pass on "the things that are most surely believed among us" from one generation to the next. Gifts have been given by God to His servants to be used for the benefit of the whole body and the local assemblies of His people. Those whose faithfulness has been tried and proven, and in whom justifiable confidence is placed, are God's way of maintaining and promoting His work.

The areas of responsibility to be filled do not depend on one's social status or educational background. Social standing was neither a help nor a hindrance in being given a role to fill in the house of God. The same is true now. The background of an individual may be a help in their training but it is not one of the qualifications for a spiritual work. Gatekeepers were well rounded men who could be counted on because their heart was in the work. They knew they were responsible for holy things and they took that seriously. One man was noted as a "wise counselor." He would not be one who looked at things through the eyes of the world's system, but would recognize spiritual needs when he saw them and could give counsel from the best possible source.

The four gates into the temple came from four directions. The eastern gate was the one most used so there were six doorkeepers there, and four at each of the other three gates. One was entered by a paved highway that would be used by the king. In whatever place one serves the Lord, let us do it "with our might, as unto the Lord, and not unto men." To compare my place of service with that of others serves no good purpose in our Lord's sovereign plan of things. He knows who is best suited for a particular place and work. It is a reason for joy to know I am in the right place, doing the right thing for the right reason. The results are up to our Master.

Inside the temple was kept the treasures of the nation. Dedicated things, spoils of war, the precious material of the temple itself was to be protected, and was to be used for the right reasons. The gatekeepers would make sure that all the utensils that were used each day was returned and stored in the right place. They would store food supplies, care for the furniture, mix the incense and do whatever was needed to maintain the temple and its service. The house of God today, the local assembly of God's people. is a place of great treasure. There are finances that need to be carefully tended to and used consistently with the purposes of the assembly. But there are spiritual treasures are well.

Moses' grandson was the chief of the treasurers who would know what was there for temple uses. There were others there who kept track of everything, where it was needed and what it was used for. Careful accounting is done when there are a number of people responsible for the treasure that belong in the house of God. Spiritual treasures are related to fellowship and how it is to be maintained. The welfare of the saints and how each one is cared for and helped is part of the responsibility of those who are in charge of the treasury. "Tithes and offerings" are wonderful testimonies to the faithfulness of God's people toward each other and society in general. We are to "do good to all men, especially those of the household of faith." Our young and old people; our poor and bereaved; our widows and orphans all need our care and concern.

Even before he died, David understood the need of having the nation unified and kept safe and orderly by officers and judges throughout the whole country. The judicial system was such that in every area of the nation there was recourse to upholding the law and maintaining order. It appears that the area east of the Jordan River was of particular concern because there were more judges and officials there than in other parts of the nation. There could have been an "us versus them" attitude that is quite common today. Sometimes it is because of the geography or whether one lives in the city or rural areas.

Wisdom is needed when carrying out justice. Officers enforce the law, and the judges define and interpret the law. When both are functioning properly, there is a peaceful society. In the house of God order is taught

and done when we carry out the teaching of the truth of God we learn every time the scripture is opened. Those whose spiritual maturity and experience qualifies them to give instruction, correction and comfort will apply the truth to individuals on a personal basis with spiritual wisdom. When done properly, difficulties between people are settled personally with one or two witnesses, and never needs to be known by the whole church. Delegated duties performed in the right way make the fruitful and normal life of God's people a joy.

1st Chronicles 26:8. *"All these of the sons of Obededom: they and their sons and their brethren, able men for strength for the service, were threescore and two of Obededom."*

ABLE... STRONG...WISE...MIGHTY.

Sometimes services are done because we are gifted by God to do them.
Other times God uses what is by nature when we were formed by Him.
Some are able to do things with natural skill and expertise.
In the work of the Lord we are called to, there is a place for all of these.

There are those that are strong and are capable to do heavy tasks.
Such people usually are ready to do whatever they are asked.
They know their capabilities and do their work as to the Lord.
Whatever the work God calls us to, for that work He will give reward.

Some have a natural wisdom to see more than what is front of their nose.
Not everyone sees the big picture, but the wise are some of those
Who know then to move ahead with a project because they know what to do -
And once a work has started, they are there to see it through.

The mighty men of valor are not intimidated or afraid.
They have learned to trust God personally and turn to the work ahead.
Their joy is to see accomplished a victory in which they had a part.
They are wise enough to know God initiated that work from the start.

In the house of God, we need those who are skillful in word and deed.
Able men are those who know what's to be done and will get out in front and lead.
They know how to begin a task and see it through to the end.
They also are able to unite diversity and use what God does send.

The strong in body and faith are a great asset to the work of God's house
They will accept a designated work and make sure it is carried out.
Here is no tendency to slack or leave the work in their hand undone.
The part of the work they've been given they finish even when left alone.

Wise counselors are needed when problems do arise.
They hear all the issues surrounding a problem and then they can apprise
The situation and find the solution to bring about a good conclusion
And when necessary, take advice from others in serious collusion.

The mighty are on guard, they stand their ground against an implacable foe.
They have learned by experience to act in faith, so are not afraid to go
To the source of the evil that threatens to stop the work of the house of God.
Each one filling the work that has been given, and are doing it for the Lord.

"Help me O God this day, to use what I have been given for Thee. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

1st Chronicles 27

ORDER AND ADMINISTRATION

For the Jews who returned from Babylon to get on with the rebuilding of a properly functioning nation, and more specifically, a nation conscious of their spiritual heritage as the people of God they needed guidelines. The chronicler, for the most part, gave the positive side of the nation's history to give them understanding for the present need. We can learn by mistakes but we waste effort and time dwelling on the past mistakes we have made. Successful succession will happen when action is taken on principles that have been tried and proven and are now applied to the present.

In view of establishing the spiritual life and order in the temple, lists of names of suitable people in the past was given that would define areas of responsibility in temple worship and the people who were qualified to meet that need. In this chapter the military, tribal leaders, financial and agriculture business, and counselors were identified with the purpose that order and administration of life as a society might function smoothly. In

the house of God, the order needed for effective worship and service depends on the quality of leadership among us. Some have natural leadership qualities but have little spiritual discernment. For us to have elections and choose who we want as leaders would make an assembly of no more value than a business. The spiritual life and purpose of a New Testament church cannot work right that way. That is why the Holy Spirit is the One who raises up divinely appointed leadership.

The safety of Israel was pressured by a "National Guard" of 288,000 men. 24,000 men were called to national service each month to be armed and ready to defend the nation from disorder within or attacks from without. On the occasion of a national emergency they could be called. Because of their military service for a month each year they would be trained and ready to act in defense of the people. Of particular importance in this military organization was the leaders. Those leaders were David's "mighty men" and others who had proved themselves to be trustworthy in their "service for the king." They were loyal men whose allegiance to David was unquestioned and who could take initiative on their own when it was obviously called for.

Among God's people today the Holy Spirit raises up those to lead who have been tried and proven to be reliable and trustworthy in difficult circumstances. They are loyal to the Lord and His people and take initiative in furthering the work of the Lord. Their example is worth following and is often seen when their own sons follow their father's walk of faith. They are qualified to lead the saints of God by their character and experience. Such men are not novices who have the answers but don't know the problem. Any changes they would initiate have been well thought through as to why and how things could be made better, and more importantly, what the results would be in the long run.

For order to be maintained in all areas of assembly life, we need to make sure those who are raised up to lead have been given the necessary training and appropriate opportunity to contribute significantly to the work of God. Those who are mature believers need to mentor those who are younger so that when the time comes, or the need arises, there are those qualified people the Holy Spirit can raise up and use to guide God's people. Those under twenty years old in Israel weren't conscripted or under the obligation associated with leadership, but were not ignored as if they had no responsibility or purpose. God saw the people as "stars" in number. We can probably see one million stars with our naked eyes when we look up at night. God knows each one of them by name, how much more each of us.

Those in charge of the safety of the nation of Israel were qualified by their character and experience. Those leaders of the tribes were qualified by their connections to their heritage of Israel's sons. They were family members who had the same interests and attitudes toward those with whom they had a shared heritage. A person who comes among God's people from some other group or religious persuasion needs to be proven by the passing of time and practice to represent what the assembly holds to be true and practices in public testimony.

When one says, "We didn't do it that way where I came from," or "Everybody else does it differently," or "You are really old-fashioned," you know there is one among you from a different heritage. That doesn't mean they can't be part of the assembly but they are not able to be one who leads the Lord's people. Confusion and division come when one tries to impose practices that are not tried and proven locally. The autonomy of an assembly suits it to the locality in which it is found. Assemblies are not franchises designated and controlled by a central authority except that of our Risen Lord and presided over by the Holy Spirit.

True, there is obvious likeness in scripturally gathered assemblies of God's people, but there are also differences. A rural population thinks and acts differently than those who live in a big city. Different languages and different nationalities carry out public testimony in ways suitable to them and the place where they live. There are a lot of different stars in the heavens, but they are all stars and are kept in order and position by divine control. We are limited by our humanity as to who we are, where we are and what we are like. The only way to maintain order and administration in an assembly is to see the people through God's eyes as much as possible. This can only be done through reading the scripture and applying what it teaches to the present event in this particular location.

David had a lot of people he was responsible for, not only as their leader but also their provider. Those who served in his army would be able to meet their own needs during the eleven months of the year they were home tilling their own land and providing for their own families. But there were also those who served the king continually. To provide for them the king had stewards who tended the financial and agricultural affairs of his government. Those identified were given areas of responsibility that were quite precise. Warehousing and finances needed people who were trusted to keep careful accounting of everything lest there be pilfering and stealing. Trustees over assembly property and finances should be those who can be counted on to deal as carefully with the things of God and others as they would over their own business.

Skill in one area of life does not mean one person can do everything. Those who were administrators over the laborers knew what should be done and how to do it. Those who grew the grain in the fields had a different proficiency in agriculture than those who grew the grapes in the vineyard. One who knows how to tend vines is not necessarily good at knowing how and when to trim the trees of an orchard to best produce fruit and/or olives. One who knows how to breed cattle and feed them best is not likely able to train touchy camels or stubborn donkeys. There is even a difference as to how and where feed sheep and goats.

God knows who we are and where we can be best used in His service. It may take quite some time before we find the niche we are to fill, but the training process is very important and is not time wasted. In our anxiety to get on with life and be productive, we naturally have a tendency to want to rush forward before we are ready. David knew the king of Israel was not to have horses lest they depend on the horses to give victory and rush into a thing without being qualified or ready. Each person needs to be ready - and waiting - until the opportunity comes to use our stewardship in the right place for the right reasons.

Not every person who offers advice is a person of insight. David had an uncle named Jonathan whose counsel was able to be trusted, and was willing and able to put down in writing those things that were said. Advice is always needed but the source is important. Insight is gained by experience or as a particular gift from God. Insight is not an "off the cuff" comment, but has been thought out carefully and adapted to each situation in a way that is suitable to the event. A variety of viewpoints is always useful to get the best perspective of anything before taking action.

To get wise counsel we need to consult with those who are most knowledgeable in various fields of expertise. David had one who knew the law, one who knew the people, one who knew what they were capable of accomplishing, one who knew the spiritual condition of the people - and likely other things as well. Not everyone knows all about anything. Usually people know a little about a lot of things. That is why there is safety in a multitude of counselors. The Lord Jesus Christ gave gifts that were actually people who were able to be effective communicators. The Holy Spirit gave gifts that are the capacity to do what is needed in an assembly when coordinated with one objective of bringing glory to God and benefit to His people. God gave gifts to be used in faith without even knowing what the final outcome will be.

When order is maintained with grace and truth, and the ministry of service in the on-going affairs of God's people is consistent, impartial, fair and effective then there will be peace and strength. Exercise of heart and daily fellowship with the Lord on the part of qualified leaders, helps us to maintain healthy assembly fellowship. In that way the assembly in turn can be a blessing to others.

1st Chronicles 27:33. *“And Ahithophel was the king’s counsellor; and Hushain the Archite was the king’s companion.”*

THE KING’S COMPANION.

In the service of the king each one has an appointed task -
No doubt for the work for which each was suited.
Some were good with animals; others went into the military when asked -
Still others tended the orchards that were fruited.
There was a main counselor, there were wise men and scribes -
But there was one man closer than them all.
Wherever you saw the king, this man was at his side -
His companion was always at his beck and call.

Sometimes we have special friends; companions we can trust -
A person we trust and in whom we can confide.
My wife is such a person; she can correct me if she must -
She can point out the things my ego tries to hide.
We travel the land together; we share in work and in walk -
Though we are together, each one has a work to do.
Some folks turn to me, others want with her to talk -
Our differences make possible a larger point of view.

I wonder if I could be trusted to be a companion of the heavenly King -
If I was living when He was here, would I be one He chose?
I am not sure if I would be an asset or what I could bring
To be a benefit as a companion if I was one of those.
But I'm not living back then, it is now I journey through life with Him -
And where I am, with many others, He is there too.
An unseen King's companions are conscious of God's presence with them.
They live consciously of the King who knows all they say and do.

People who know me should be able to sense another Presence.
My talk and deportment should bring honor to His name.
I can never be like Him in my person or my essence -
But when it comes to showing love, I can do the same.
I can show others mercy and my speech can be with grace.
I can befriend sinners and show compassion like He did.
I can be a companion if I will live and walk by faith.
Through me He should be able to be seen, though His visible presence hid.

“O Lord God, this day I would like to be a disciple who knows Thou art with me and I am near Thee as a companion. I would like to hear Thy voice in many ways and rejoice in all of Thy many works here. When I speak, may I speak as Thy mouthpiece - particularly tonight in the meeting. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

1st Chronicles 28

THE GREAT GATHERING

The main point of the book of 1st Chronicles is now addressed in a great gathering of all the leaders of Israel. Those who returned from Babylon would have been impressed with the importance of the work they were to do for the Lord by reading about the arrangements made for the original temple. It is a valuable way of passing on truth, to recount the origins of what we believe and how it came into practice. The four Gospels recount the life and teaching of the Person to whom we gather and to whom we are responsible. The book of Acts gives an overview of how it was first practiced in a variety of cultures and how the work of the Lord spread. It also gives accounts of how various difficulties were faced and how problems were solved. The application of the truth of God in a wide variety of nations is written about in the church epistles, and how it is applied locally in the pastoral epistles. Cross-cultural teaching is given as to how God's people give testimony to our Lord Jesus Christ in those first and second generations of assembly believers.

The Chronicles follow a similar pattern. The actual events are not described in detail in the Chronicles because the purpose was to motivate the present generation to do in their day what God wanted, by using what they had. The gathering of all the leaders was necessary so that there would be no confusion or misunderstanding as to what was being done. Those involved in business would be called upon to do what was in their area of expertise for the common goal. Those engaged in agriculture, civil servants and the military all needed to know the objective clearly so that in whatever way they could, they would be part of the temple-building project.

Even though David was old, he was determined to pass on his enthusiasm for building the temple to others so they could catch his vision and assist his inexperienced son. Experienced believers who know what God has done and still can do because He is unchanging, need to help younger Christians to get a sense of the value of spiritual things in a secular age. There is much more to life than survival. To spend all our energy on what we eat, drink, own or use for our pleasure is very shallow living and does not satisfy the heart. Lofty goals give us a sense of real purpose in life and establishes in us values that lift us above the mundane, to those things that are holy and lasting.

I see in my mind's eye, David struggling to his feet and standing in respect for those who have gathered, for the God he loves, and for the importance of the work before the people that he wants to impress upon them. This was not a casual approach to an important work. Even though he was old and weak in body, he wanted full participation. So, he did not address them as subjects who were being told what to do by their king. Rather he speaks to them as "my brethren, my people." There was equality of value in each person even if their calling and roles in life were different. His ambition was to build a house for the Lord as a "footstool" for the Almighty God. In his use of words, he was able to transmit the importance of the project.

He had received plans from God the Spirit, so the project was not insignificant. This was similar to the way Moses received the plans for the building of the tabernacle. God's promise was to have Solomon carry out the project, and the was necessary for all the national leaders to know. They would have become serious, and perhaps cautious and even afraid, when they were told this was to be the "throne of the kingdom of the Lord over Israel." This was not a mere building project to impress people. The fact that God chose Solomon to be king was made clear to all the leadership. The affair of Adonijah and conflicts in the family of David were not addressed by the chronicler because it would have served no positive purpose as far as building a new temple. The returned Jews just had to know that God was with them in the work before them in the same way He was with the building of the original temple.

Principles of gathering are given for the house of God today. We are not left to decide how we will do it to suit ourselves. Our objective is not in the style of the building in which we meet but the in "living stones" that compose the building. Saved people are the silver vessels that have been redeemed by the blood of Christ. Gold reminds us of the divine nature of God that is displayed by the new nature of those who "walk with the Lord in the light of His word." Some are solid gold and others are gold overlay, but God is the One who knows the depth of our devotion, love and commitment. We praise God for every evidence of the divine life we see in His people when we are in fellowship in the house of God.

The Lord searches every heart and understands every motive behind every activity in which we are engaged. He is "near unto all that call upon Him out of a pure heart," but rejects those who forsake Him. How awesome is the thought that every thought, action, word and attitude I have, is known by Him. He has plans for me - I should have plans for ways to serve Him. God chose David to be the head of a dynasty of leaders in Israel forever, but not to build the temple. David's role was not to be the one to outwardly display the physical glories of the temple to the "Ohh's and Ahh's!!!" of men. That was what Solomon was chosen to fulfill. He was commissioned to fulfill the task in spite of the difficulties that were associated with such a great work. Solomon was chosen as a "son" of the Lord.

Our understanding of our calling and election as to what we do as well as who we are, makes it possible for us to face and work through difficult things without resentment or self-pity. When we know what we are responsible for, we can expect God to be with us in that work because we are confident He gave it to us. David put down in writing all that God wanted done. We have in writing all we need to be effective in what God expects from us. Cooperation with God and fellowship with other believers makes a work for the Lord a joy to us, and a privilege rather than a tedious task.

There was no hidden agenda in this work. David called leaders from all parts of the nation who represented the people, and openly in sight of all who gathered there spoke of the objective of building the temple, and who God had chosen to lead the project. In that way there was no reason for anyone to misunderstand what was going on or what was expected of them. He spoke of God's plans for the nation of Israel and for his own descendants. He openly gave charge to Solomon to fulfill the work and made plain the way the Lord views His work.

Cooperation and delegation in a work is not complicated nor hard to commit to if there is an openness regarding the work and the reasons for it. Our greatest motivation to get at a work and keep at it until it is finished is that we have received this commission from God. The Lord makes His requirements clear and His expectations are not unreasonable. When we know what God wants and are careful to carry out His commands, spiritual prosperity and continuity of the work will follow. It is our duty to know His word. The key to success in His work and happiness in our souls is that we search His word and do what He says. When we are engaged in a work and it is doing without shortcuts for our own selfish reasons, and justice is done in the work according to His word, then we can rest in quiet confidence.

To ignore God's word or neglect it, and not be willing to do His will, the work in which we are involved will fail. We have to consistently follow through with that for which we have been chosen by the Spirit of God. Nothing can be hid from God who knows every thought and intention of our hearts. To follow His guidance and try to hide anything from Him enables us to live and labor with joy.

Solomon may have been afraid of the weight of responsibility, so he was challenged by his father who knew the pain of sin and the blessing of forgiveness to have his own personal experiences with God. He had to commit himself to know God and serve Him with a perfect heart and willing mind. Devotion to God makes working for God a joy to us and gives to us a real meaning for the effort it takes to continue in the work. Seeking God when in doubt will result in Him finding us and making us conscious of living in fellowship with Him. Our work for God comes from Him and we should not forsake it, or Him for any reason. When we have been given a work - "Do it!!"

The pattern of the temple was not an easy work to do. The immensity of the task and the amount of the material needed was astounding and the labor needed was daunting. There are times when we feel totally inadequate, for the tasks we are called upon to accomplish. But when we know the pattern is from God, the materials we need will be supplied from His abundant storehouse through His omnipotent hand. He had chosen us to do this work - then move ahead confidently. David had received divine communication, and Solomon had written communication. So, he was to be strong and courageous - and get to work. To start a work is often the most fearful part of it because we are building on nothing but instructions. God has given us the pattern, "Go ye into all the world..." is His commission. So now it is up to us to start - and do it.

There are principles that we live by and pass on to our children that are tried and proven. We need to pass them on to the Lord's people so they will not be afraid or discouraged. A person needs to know God personally so that when He gives guidance in life, we take it personally from Him. By reading the scriptures (listening to our Father), we learn what His commands are and how to carry them out. Our heart has to be in the work. This is only possible if we love and appreciate our Lord and find our joy in bringing Him joy.

Our service for God is to be done with a willing heart and mind in the same way we share with an earthly father who is teaching us how to do things in the right way. When I have learned how to do a work, I should be consistent and faithful in it, in spite of obstacles or opposition. To know the will of God and do it, should be enough to keep me from being discouraged. It is expected that a work for God is a work - not a "situation." It is not spending an easy day in the park in which we relax, play and sleep, or only work when we feel like it.

We are not involved in building a temple for God to use as a footstool, but in building a church which "the gates of hell" cannot overcome. The Head is in place. The foundation is laid. Others have been building on that foundation for generations. Now it is our turn to continue the same building project that Peter, James, John, Paul and others down through the years had been working on. It is our turn to do our part and pass on to others following us the training and skill to do their part after we are gone.

1st Chronicles 28:19. *"All this, said David, the Lord made me understanding the writing by his hand upon me, even all the works of this pattern."*

UNDERSTAND IN WRITING.

The words were spoken, how do I know the words that were really said?
How can I check to see what is really right, not wishful thinking instead?
The answer is simple, but very profound - God made His words to be written down -
So there is no mistaking what He had in His mind, so His intention is easily found.

He gave the pattern of His house, the ordering of those who serve.
There is no confusion as to what He intended, what not to do and what to observe.
He searches the hearts and understands my thoughts, nothing from Him is hid.
The words are written that I might act on what His will does me bid.

He expects of me to go forward and claim the inheritance of the redeemed.
Often there is hesitation when I come across obstacles unseen.
But then I go back to the writings; the scriptures of truth unchanged.
And find when I search them honestly, the answer is right there so plain.

The Lord God is right there to be found as the writing to me unfolds.
The results that He wants are attainable when I do what I am told.
When I seek for and keep His commandments, reality there is mine.
And the complicated things are made understandable by what in His Word I do find.

There are a couple of requirements to be met so I can understand.
I have to seek for all of His commandments, and keep them to possess the land.
For me it is not acres of fields or forests or towns to possess.
But a good land of a ripe harvest of souls who are looking for a place to rest.

To sit with and hear the worship and praise of those who God saved -
Is music of the highest order to my ears and there arises within me praise.
For God has used these feeble hands and weakness, to perfect His strength.
Souls are added to this inheritance that will come to light at length.

The writing remains the same though the seasons of man do change.
The commitment to obey what is written, and do what is said remains.
I commit myself to seek Him and not forsake Him ever -
And trust Him to fulfill His written promise to bring blessing from this endeavor.

"O Gracious Father, the words of this man resonate with me. I want to keep and seek Thy commands. I want to leave a good inheritance for my children. I want to serve Thee with a willing heart and mind and never forsake the words of Thy writing. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

1st Chronicles 29

SUPPLICATIONS, PRAYERS, INTERCESSION, GIVING THANKS

In my mind's eye, I saw David, the sick old man who was near death's door, rally with enthusiasm and vigor to that which was closest to his heart. The great culminating event of his lifetime was the privilege of gathering that which would bring glory to God. His affection and devotion were centered on the Lord God of Israel. He had experienced a lot in his seventy years, but of all the events in which he was involved, this was

the greatest. There was going to be built a house for "the holy name of the Lord God of Israel." The abundance of material collected was there ready to be used. The land on which the temple was to be built was purchased and ready. He had done all he could and was allowed to do, and now it was time for him to die so the actual building of the temple could begin.

There is a timetable of events in all of our lives. When a believer is conscious of the presence of the Lord with him or her, life is purposeful and even the small things that happen to us have a spiritual meaning. An extra good harvest, an unexpected bonus, an opportunity to meet someone's need and similar events in our lives assure us of a divine purpose for us. When the way opens up before us and divine guidance is given, then we can move forward in faith to fulfill that work God has for us.

David had been a poor man who became wealthy. He had been handsome in his younger years, and now was weak and cold as an old man. He had killed Goliath, led a victorious army and established a workable kingdom in previous years, and now was not even able to care for himself. But he knew that of all the things he had accomplished, this task of preparation for a "house to the name of the Lord" was the most important single work he would do. This was entirely for God. Other things had happened for his benefit and for the benefit of the nation of God's people. This was for God alone. Generations of Israelis would find blessing at the house of the Lord. To that end David gave all his resources and personal treasure. His personal fortune was freely given.

Example is a great motivator when it comes to using our influence wisely. It provides incentive for others when our devotion and affection for our Lord Jesus Christ is obvious. Others often catch a vision from someone else that soon becomes their own. The faithful commitment of one person challenges others to look at the reason for such commitment and then they can see what they had never understood before. An act of faith, an attitude of grace, words of appreciation, a timely gift are all ways people learn from others that which should be important to them. The tasks associated with living for God in a godless age are hard and many. The commission under which we live and work is great. But when God's people are able to see consistency, commitment and faithful service in spiritual things, then they are inclined to participate in those things themselves.

David knew his son Solomon, would need all the help he could get to build the temple. He knew God had chosen Solomon to be king and to fulfill a work that was not usually given to a young inexperienced man. Yet God knew who He had chosen and why. It would take divine guidance and experienced people to build the temple because "the work was great." David's affection for God and God's people was not a hidden thing. His faith and devotion were open for everyone to see. His son was for the most part unknown. When we know someone has a great task to fulfill and it is more than they can handle, it is only right that we move alongside and lend our weight, our strength and our guidance for their benefit and the accomplishment of their work. When it is completed, don't try to take some of the credit. One businessman well said to his salesman, "Never mind who gets the credit as long as the firm shows a profit." That principle should characterize all of our work for the Lord.

David's gifts were freely and gladly given. David's joy was that of a "hilarious giver" and when he gave of his abundance, others were led to give. He was joyful when in the great meeting of the leaders and people he got their commitment to be a help to Solomon. This led to David's psalm of praise to God for who He is, what He is like, His character and His glory. "Supplications, prayers, intercession and giving of thanks" to God for all men is an essential part of our own joy and fellowship with God. Praise to God is always in order as we count our blessings and seek the blessing of others. This praise led right into David's prayer of intercession for the people and for Solomon.

Effective communication with God keeps us with a right perspective about ourselves. We then acknowledge the fact that everything we have comes from God, and we owe everything to Him. All of the abundance we have, whether it be food, raiment, shelter or wealth - it all comes from the "fullness of the Lord." In prayer we understand the need of others. "A perfect heart" or "whole-hearted devotion" actually has its source in God when we appreciate Him for who He is. Our preservation of life itself depends on God, and the preparation of our heart to accomplish a work for God comes from God in the first place. Everything: life, health, wealth, the necessities for survival - all come from the One who created it and sustains it "by the word of His power."

The influence of a trusted leader no matter how old he is, is not lost when his sincerity, his devotion, his faith and his joy is obvious. When David gave all he had of resources and personal treasure, the leaders of the people and those who followed them gave whole-heartedly of what they had. Not everyone is able to give the same amount or the same things. Some who support "the house of God" give money. Others give their time and skills. When it is all put together, people and treasure, the work of God is able to go forward. Then

all the people bowed in worship and reverence because of the impact of David's leadership. The practice and principle of giving is the same today.

Reverence and respect for the Lord involves true humility that is able to be expressed physically by the bowing of the knees and head, but more importantly, by the bowing of one's heart. Respect and honor given to our Lord is often evident by the tone of voice, not just a quiet voice but gladness and joy with dignity and sincerity. One who leads God's people audibly in prayer has the privilege and responsibility to say in words, on behalf of all the saints, what is appropriate to the need. They put into words the mind of the people and the will of God.

The young inexperienced son of David, Solomon, was identified by David as God's chosen leader of the nation. The people accepted that choice and he sat down on David's throne. The negative family dynamics was not mentioned, just the positive side of the event as it pertained to the need of the moment and the building of the temple. He "prospered" and the nation of Israel obeyed him as their new leader who the Lord had highly exalted. From the Lord came a splendor and "royal majesty" that had not been seen before nor since. The Jews who returned to the land of their fathers came to a poverty-stricken area and the ruins of what had once been a great nation. They were given a written glimpse into their past to be reminded of what their heritage was, and why the work ahead of them was so important.

Lists of names and details of some events in 1st Chronicles served to motivate them and move them to action and labor for the Lord. The establishing of temple worship was vital to their unity. It was important that their history was received and understood in order that their chapter in history would become significant to them. A knowledge of our spiritual heritage helps us to maintain a good relationship with God even though things are deteriorating around us. The example of David as a man after God's own heart would make their own relationship with God of great significance to them. After all, he had his "day and generation" to serve, and now they had theirs. It is very important that we stay close to God through prayer and the reading of God's word so that our communication with Him is right and meaningful.

David had been threatened with death many times in his life. The lion and the bear who came after his sheep when he was a shepherd did not move him from fulfilling his obligation to protect the sheep. Goliath could say what he wanted, but David knew God would deliver the nation through him. His own father-in-law pursued him as a criminal but to no avail. Armies and enemies all failed to defeat this man who had been both an outlaw and a hero. But there is no escaping "the preacher of the old school" because "death has passed upon all men, for all have sinned." In old age David had not lost his sense of humility before God. His wealth and honor had not gone to his head and were of far less importance to his devotion and love for God. In spite of, and apart of his past failures, he is a man for us to emulate and follow as one who knew how to truly worship, praise and pray. His devotion and verbal expressions in the psalms are for our learning and admonition, our comfort and exhortation.

1st Chronicles 29:3. *"Moreover, because I have set my affection to the house of my God, I have of my own proper good, of gold and silver, which I have given to the house of my God, over and above all that I have prepared for the holy house,"*

MY AFFECTION.

Where should I place this unique part of me?
This is one of the parts other people cannot see.
God knows and I know where my affection is set.
It is to be set on a Person, not on the things I might get.

Where do I put these emotions from within?
They should be on holy things, not on those that cause sin.
The house of God is one place that deserves my attention.
It is on God and those within it upon who I focus my affection.

Where will I set my affection in days that are yet to come?
To direct it toward God's house and His work yet to be done
Is where it should be that I might bring to Him glory -
And the success of His work is to be the theme of His story.

I look back and I see some serious mistakes I have made.
And the cost of failure is a price that must be paid.
I also can see ways God has abundantly blessed
Those objectives of mine that served Him the best.

Even today there are subjects before me

That I have set my affection on knowing what can be
Of profit to many, maybe a benefit to all -
If my affections are set on the house of my God.

Looking ahead great potential I see,
If the people of God will take His work seriously.
I want to be ready to accept whatever role -
God intends me to take that others can be made whole.

“Father God, I look to Thee to direct me this day in thoughts and deeds that my affection will be only on those things that please and honor Thee. I want to be well prepared for the meeting tonight. Please instruct me as to what is appropriate and needed by those who will attend. Help me also to be sensitive to the needs of my family. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”