THE CHRONICLES OF REUBEN, GAD AND THE HALF TRIBE OF MANASSEH

Text: I Chronicles 5:18-26

The chronicler is believed to be Ezra. The people of God have returned from captivity and Ezra tells of the rise and fall of these three tribes. He explains what God did for them, the victory God gave them and how they lost their gains. The events spoken of in our passage seem to have taken place during the reign of King Saul (I Chronicles 5: 10). The Apostle Paul tells us in I Corinthians 10:11, 12: “Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come. Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.”

I. THE CAUSE OF THE CONTENTION

I Chronicles 5:18-19

This land was given to Israel and it was their right to claim. In the early promises as Israel journeyed from their Egyptian captivity back to the land promised them through Father Abraham, there was a warning given in Exodus 23:29-33. And the sons of Ishmael were waiting to challenge their claim and even execute genocide as revealed in Psalm 83: 1-6.

II. THE MOLTEN MOMENT

I Chronicles 5:20

During my college years and while working at Inland Steel Mill in East Chicago I developed a fascination of America’s great days of steel industry. China began to steal our steel-making methods and had the nerve to export cheaper steel than we could make back to the United States. Hopefully, with the observable recent resurgence, America will come back to her glory days of industry. One of the most fascinating parts of steel manufacturing is the making of the seamless tube. The molten metal would come slithering into an area of incredible heat, then it would begin to spin and as it spun, the centrifugal force would begin to open the steel up from the inside in. As the hot steel had opened seamlessly to its molten moment, extremely cold water would be jettisoned onto the steel and a product is made that could last for many years in continual use. The three tribes experienced their proverbial molten moment.

A. They were helped; "…they were helped…." In John 14:26 our Lord teaches us that the Holy Spirit will come and be our *paraklētos,* which means He is one called to one's side to help. He is our Helper.

B. They were hurting; "…they cried…." Exodus 3:7: "And the Lord said, I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows."

C. The tipping point; "…for they cried to God in the battle, and he was intreated of them; because they put their trust in him." The tipping point is when a threshold is reached that causes a change and often a reversal. And that is the case when these three tribes cried to the Lord in a spirit of trust. This tipping point bears the connotation not only that <u>can</u> God deliver, but in desperation they believed that God <u>shall</u> deliver.

<u>III. THE VICTORY AND THE SPOILS</u>

I Chronicles 5:21-24

What a victory! They claimed 50,000 camels; 250,000 sheep; 2,000 donkeys and 100,000 enemies were captured.

A. There was a price; "…there fell many slain…."

Luke 12:31, 32, 41, 48-53.

B. There was an assured victory; "…because the war was of God…."

Romans 8:31: "What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?"

C. Their coast was enlarged: they "…dwelt in the land: they increased from Bashan unto Baalhermon and Senir, and unto mount Hermon." We are reminded of Jabez in I Chronicles 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."

The cattle of Bashan were known to be strong, healthy and fat (Psalm 22:12).

<u>IV. THE AGONY OF DEFEAT</u>

I Chronicles 5:25, 26

Every baby-boomer is familiar with the famous ABC television show, "Wide World of Sports." There was an iconic opening narration by commentator Jim McKay: "Spanning the globe to bring you the constant variety of sport: the thrill of victory...and the agony of defeat." The phrase became popularized and used in matters of sports, business, community, school and home. The "agony of defeat" was visually represented by the

horrific, but ultimately survivable, crash of Slovenian ski jumper, Vinko Bogatai during a 1970 ski flying competition.

The agonizing defeat of the three tribes is explained in I Chronicles 5:25: “And they transgressed against the God of their fathers, and went a whoring after the gods of the people of the land, whom God destroyed before them.” There is a prescient passage of Scripture that shows a proclivity toward their future actions found in Numbers 32:1-9; 20-23.

Conclusion:

There is a propensity to fall into the mode of temptations that easily beset our ancestors as understood from Deuteronomy 5:6-10. Compare with Genesis 49:1-4. In this passage of Scripture we observe that Reuben, the firstborn of Jacob, who should have inherited the blessing, was “…unstable as water….” Hebrews 12:1b, 2a: “…let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us…Looking unto Jesus….” Rather than Reuben taking the leadership morally, he had severe moral failure with Bilhah (Genesis 35:22). Reuben, as the firstborn was in charge of the other brothers. When the other brothers wanted to kill Joseph, Reuben compromised by talking them out of it and throwing Joseph into a pit instead. Reuben had the intention of delivering him, only to find when he had returned that Joseph had been sold to the Ishmaelites and ended up in Egypt. So instead of standing strong against the evil intentions of his younger brothers, he showed himself unstable as water. Genesis 39:20, 21, 29, 30. We further see the weakness of Reuben when he foolishly offers his own two sons’ lives in exchange for Benjamin’s. Jacob would have none of that (Genesis 42:36-38).

Ending on a positive note; never forget Deuteronomy 5:10: “And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me and keep my commandments.” Ezekiel 18:20: “The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him.” The Bible is replete with examples of a son rising far above a father’s failures:

A. Hezekiah and Ahaz: II Chronicles 28:24, 25; II Chronicles 29:1, 2.
B. Josiah and Amon: II Kings 21:19, 20; II Kings 22:1, 2.
C. Jonathan and Saul: I Samuel 18:1; I Samuel 23:16, 17.

Joel 2:21, 25a: “Fear not, O land; be glad and rejoice: for the Lord will do great things….And I will restore to you the years that the locust hath

eaten….” Our Lord is a God of restoration! We all have the opportunity to end well. May that be said in the chronicles of our lives!

-Pastor Pope-