

1 Chronicles 5:2

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

For Judah prevailed above his brethren, and of him came the chief ruler; but the birthright was Joseph's:)

Analysis

Genealogical Significance: This verse appears within the Trans-Jordanian tribes and their failures section of Chronicles' genealogical framework. The Hebrew term **מַעַל** (ma'al) - unfaithfulness/treachery is central to understanding this passage's purpose. The Chronicler, writing to post-exilic Israel (c. 450-400 BCE), uses these genealogies not merely as historical records but as theological statements about covenant continuity and divine faithfulness.

The genealogical structure serves multiple purposes:

1. establishing Israel's connection to God's creation plan from Adam
2. legitimizing post-exilic community's claim to covenant promises
3. emphasizing Judah and Levi's special roles in God's redemptive plan,
4. demonstrating that despite exile, God's covenant purposes continue.

The selection and arrangement of names is intentional, highlighting consequences of covenant unfaithfulness.

Chronicles diverges from Genesis and Samuel-Kings in its genealogical presentation, reflecting the Chronicler's distinct theological agenda. Where earlier texts focus on narrative history, Chronicles emphasizes continuity, legitimacy, and hope for restoration. This verse contributes to the larger argument that the post-exilic community is the rightful heir of God's ancient covenant promises.

Historical Context

Post-Exilic Context: The Chronicler wrote during the Persian period (450-400 BCE) to a community returned from Babylonian exile, struggling with identity and purpose. These genealogies answered crucial questions: Who are we? What is our relationship to ancient Israel? Do God's promises still apply to us?

The historical setting influences the text's emphasis on Trans-Jordanian tribes: Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh. Ancient Near Eastern cultures valued genealogies for establishing land rights, royal legitimacy, and tribal identity. Chronicles' genealogies served similar functions while adding theological depth. The inclusion of specific names and details reflects the author's access to temple archives, royal records, and earlier biblical texts.

Archaeological evidence from Persian-period Judah shows a small, struggling community centered around Jerusalem and the rebuilt temple. The genealogies reinforced their connection to the glorious past and provided hope for future restoration through God's covenant faithfulness.

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Study Questions

1. How does understanding genealogies as theological statements rather than mere historical records change your reading of Chronicles and other biblical genealogies?
2. What does this verse teach about God's faithfulness across generations, and how does that apply to your own family's spiritual legacy?
3. How does Consequences of covenant unfaithfulness connect to the New Testament revelation of Jesus Christ as the fulfillment of Old Testament promises?

Interlinear Text

וְלֹא־כִּי־יָד	בְּאֶחָד	רַבְּרַבְּה	יְהוּדָה	גַּבְּרָה	כִּי	וְלֹא־כִּי־יָד
H5057	H251	H1396	H3063	H3588	For Judah	prevailed
H3130	H1062	H4480	but the birthright	was Joseph's		

Additional Cross-References

Matthew 2:6 (Parallel theme): And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel.

Micah 5:2 (Parallel theme): But thou, Beth-lehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.

Hebrews 7:14 (Parallel theme): For it is evident that our Lord sprang out of Juda; of which tribe Moses spake nothing concerning priesthood.

Psalms 60:7 (Parallel theme): Gilead is mine, and Manasseh is mine; Ephraim also is the strength of mine head; Judah is my lawgiver;

Psalms 108:8 (Parallel theme): Gilead is mine; Manasseh is mine; Ephraim also is the strength of mine head; Judah is my lawgiver;