

1 Chronicles 5:3

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

The sons, I say, of Reuben the firstborn of Israel were,
Hanoch, and Pallu, Hezron, and Carmi.

Analysis

Genealogical Significance: This verse appears within the Trans-Jordanian tribes and their failures section of Chronicles' genealogical framework. The Hebrew term מַ'ל (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

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

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

בְּנֵי י	רְאוּבֵן	בְּכֹר	יִשְׂרָאֵל	חֲנֹךְ	וּפָלִי וְאֵל
The sons	I say of Reuben	the firstborn	of Israel	were Hanoch	and Pallu
H1121	H7205	H1060	H3478	H2585	H6396
חֲזֵרֹן	וְכַרְמִי				
Hezron	and Carmi				
H2696	H3756				

Additional Cross-References

Genesis 46:9 (Parallel theme): And the sons of Reuben; Hanoch, and Phallu, and Hezron, and Carmi.

Exodus 6:14 (References Israel): These be the heads of their fathers' houses: The sons of Reuben the firstborn of Israel; Hanoch, and Pallu, Hezron, and Carmi: these be the families of Reuben.