

## January 12

**Scriptures:** Read 1 Chronicles 8 & 9

**Key Verse:** "...They were very able men for the work of the service of the house of God." (1 Chronicles 9:13)

### Overview

Much emphasis is placed upon the tribe of Benjamin. After Judah and Levi, Benjamin is written of more than any other tribe. Three genealogies are given for this tribe; one in chapter seven (7:6-12), an expanded genealogy comprising the whole of chapter eight, and one again in 9:35-44 as it relates to Saul (serving as a point of transition and an introduction to the end of Saul's reign as recorded in chapter 10). There are probably a number of reasons for Benjamin receiving much attention. Firstly, this tribe provided Israel with Saul, their first king; thus the Benjamites became very influential and affluent. Secondly, they had many famous warriors and men of valour. Thirdly, they, along with Judah, the priests, and some levitical families, were the main occupants of the royal city of Jerusalem (9:3). Finally, they were the second largest tribe after Judah to return from the exile. A large population of Benjamites who returned from Exile resettled in Jerusalem, where all the heads of their clans had previously lived (8:28; cf. Nehemiah 11:4). This was natural, since Jerusalem had been originally in the territorial allotment that fell to the tribe of Benjamin and bordered the territory of Judah (Joshua 15:8;18:16).

It is interesting to note that there is one person in the genealogy of Benjamin, an ancestor of King Saul, named "Baal" (8:30), which simply means "master", "lord", or "husband". Saul also had a son named "Esh-Baal" (8:33, meaning "man of Baal") and a grandson, the son of Jonathan, named Merib-Baal ("warrior of Baal"). This may be confusing to some who know that Jonathan's son was named Mephibosheth. Apparently, at this time, the word "Baal" was still used of the Lord God, but because of the introduction of worship to a heathen deity called "Baal", and the confusion and negative connotation this caused, these names were changed. For example, rather than using the word "Baal" in the name, the writer of 2 Samuel replaced it with the Hebrew word for "shame", since the god Baal was a shameful thing. The name of Esh-Baal was changed to Ishbosheth, the better known name of the son of Saul (cf. 2 Samuel 2:8). Likewise, the writers of Scripture changed Merib-Baal's name to Mephibosheth (possibly meaning "scatterer of shame" or "from the mouth of shame"). This is the name commonly used of Jonathan's lame son whom David took in as his own (2 Samuel 4:4; 9:6-7).

Chapter nine describes the inhabitants of Jerusalem prior to the captivity. The translation of 9:2 in some versions of the Bible may lead some to believe these are the names of those who returned from the Exile, but this cannot be substantiated. In the actual listing of Jerusalem's post-exilic groups found in Nehemiah 11, the differences between these lists far outweigh any similarities. It is more likely that the compiler, whom we assume to be Ezra, listed those living and those Levites working in Jerusalem before the captivity. In this way, those who returned could validate their right to live in Jerusalem and the Levites could inherit a certain office, having this knowledge of their ancestors.

Recorded in chapter nine are the genealogies of the priests (from the line of Zadok and Eleazar, son of Aaron) and Levites, whose service to God was in association with the Tabernacle or Temple. They, naturally had to live in and around Jerusalem in close proximity to their work (9:27). Those Levites who had the trusted office of gatekeepers (9:22, 26) surrounded God's House as their ancestors had done in the wilderness (9:24, 27; Numbers 3:23, 29, 35, 38). Another group of inhabitants in Jerusalem was the "Nethinim" (9:2), meaning "given ones". They were non-Israelite temple slaves; the descendants of both the Midianites (Numbers 31:47) and the Gibeonites (Joshua 9:23) that had been given to help the Levites, whom King David had organized (Ezra 8:20).

A great compliment is paid to those who served the Lord at His Holy House; they are spoken of as "very able" to carry out all their various responsibilities (9:13). No doubt the Spirit of the Lord was the One who enabled them to successfully carry out their ministry. How wonderful it would be to one day be commended by God for carrying out the responsibilities He has given to us. Let us strive to hear the words "well done, my good and faithful servant."

## **Prayer**

Lord, You have responsibilities for us. Grant us the honour of serving You today. Help us to listen carefully for Your directions from Your Spirit and Your Word, doing as You, Lord Jesus, would do.