

General Introduction to the Old Testament Historical Books

The notes below are adapted from the teaching materials of Annie Kartozián (1906-1989). In 1934 Annie became a missionary in China with OMS. During World War II she spent 21 months in a Japanese concentration camp as a prisoner. She was repatriated in 1943 and sailed on the famous vessel Gripsholm. In 1949 she made a miraculous last-minute escape from Beijing before it fell to Mao's Communists. When she could no longer enter China, Annie went to Taiwan. Annie and her family have been life-long friends of our family. In 1989, while pastoring with the United Armenian Congregational Church of Hollywood I had the honor of participating in her funeral. It was during those years in Los Angeles that Annie gave me her teaching notes (including the notes below) - laboriously typed on what is now yellowed paper with hand written marginal notes, many of which are in Chinese. - Pastor Steve

INTRODUCTION

If the Pentateuch is included, the historical books comprise over one half of the Old Testament. The study of these books is often neglected in favor of other portions of the Old Testament which are studied for inspiration and help. But it is here that God gives us illustrations of truths and precepts that are elsewhere stated.

Below are some examples of how the historical books illustrate the teachings of the Old Testament contained in the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1-17; Deuteronomy 5:6-21).

1. You shall have no other gods before me.
Elijah and the prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18)
2. You shall not make for yourself a carved image...
Jeroboam and the worship of the calves (1 Kings 12:26-30)
3. You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain...
Saul's ill-advised adjuration (1 Samuel 14:24)
4. Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.
Nehemiah and the Sabbath breakers (Nehemiah 13:15-21)
5. Honor your father and your mother.
Ruth's filial piety (Ruth 1:16-18)
Absalom's rebellion (2 Samuel 15:10-12)
6. You shall not murder.
Joab's vengeance (2 Samuel 3:27)
David and Uriah (2 Samuel 11:14,15)
7. You shall not commit adultery.
David's sin (2 Samuel 11:4)
8. You shall not steal.
Micah robbing his mother (Judges 17:1,2)
9. You shall not bear false witness...
Jezebel against Naboth (1 Kings 21:7-10)
10. You shall not covet...
Gehazi (2 Kings 5:20ff)

The historical books relate to three promises which are basic thoughts of the Old Testament.

1. God's promise to Abraham (an individual) - Genesis 12:1-3
In Abraham's seed all nations should be blessed.
2. God's covenant promise with the Hebrew nation (a nation) - Deuteronomy 27:1,9
 - a. If they were true to Him they should prosper in Canaan - Deuteronomy 28:1-14
 - b. If they were untrue to Him (serve idols) they should be removed from the land - Deuteronomy 27:15-68
3. God's promise to David (an individual) - 2 Samuel 7:12-16
His family should reign over God's people forever

God chose Israel because of His love (Deuteronomy 7:7,8; Ezekiel 16): 1) to witness of the One true God (Deuteronomy 6:4; 1 Kings 9:4-9; Jeremiah 13:11); and 2) to prepare the way for the Messiah (Genesis 49:10).

The history of the children of Israel from the time of Joshua to Nehemiah is both tragic and unique. It is as if a young man of good birth and ability had entered upon a noble inheritance which had been long waiting for him. He had been trained and prepared to manage and enjoy this inheritance. His career began brilliantly but later through mishandling and misconduct he lost the inheritance altogether. He became a slave and an outcast. After weary years of struggling the outcast won his way back to his former possession which he had lost through his own carelessness and sin. What a contrast between the first taking possession and the second! The joy of returning is almost counterbalanced by the misery of contrasting the past with the present, and what is with what might have been. This is the picture of the main events of this period of history. Israel was as the young man who lost his inheritance and then returned to it.

OUTLINE AND NOTES

I. Conquest of Canaan - Book of Joshua

Joshua spent about seven years conquering and subduing the land. He lived twenty-three years longer, settled the tribes, and established their hold in the land. The victories of Joshua were not only the subject of prophecy themselves but they were in turn a prophecy - a type of the blessings which Jehovah had in store for His people.

II. Age of The Judges - Books of Judges and Ruth

The chronology of this period is obscure. The whole period is generally spoken of as from 150 to 300 years. Ancient writers give double that amount of time. This confusion is due to the fact that the judges were not a succession of governors, but occasional deliverers in different parts of the land, their administrations to some extent contemporaneous and overlapping.

III. Transition: Judgeship of Eli and Samuel - 1 Samuel

The histories of these two men were not included in the Book of Judges. Not one of the earlier judges was connected with the priesthood. In Samuel and Eli the work of judge and priest was combined and the office was apparently inherited.

IV. Monarchy - 1 and 2 Samuel; 1 and 2 Kings; 1 and 2 Chronicles

The monarchy was established at the request of the people.

A. United Kingdom - 1 and 2 Samuel; 1 Kings 1-11

1. Saul - the choice of the people - 1 Samuel

In a certain sense Saul was the chosen of God; in the fullest sense he was not. The Almighty gave them a king such as they had longed for to show them that, although when such men have His blessing they succeed, yet without it they are powerless as the smallest child. Saul was both a judgment and a blessing. His reign punished the people for the wrong spirit in which they had demanded a king, and at the same time it disciplined them for the future when a worthy king was found.

2. David - first kind of the line of Judah - God's choice - 1 and 2 Samuel

The age of David was the grandest epoch that the nation had as yet known. His record has been preserved with a fulness of detail found no where else in the historical books of the Bible. We have a full account not only of the opening and close of his reign, but of the whole of it. There is also a very vivid account of a great deal of David's life previous to his ascending the throne.

3. Solomon - last kind of united Israel - 1 Kings 1-11

Under Solomon Israel reached its height of glory. Yet his reign is not greater than his father's, which was a continual growth from first to last. From the elevated place that Israel enjoyed under him, there began a decline which ended in the captivities, although the division of the kingdom was the immediate punishment of Solomon's apostasy.

B. Divided Kingdoms of Judah and Israel - 1 and 2 Kings; 1 and 2 Chronicles

During the history of the ten tribes that formed the northern kingdom of Israel there were nine dynasties and 19 kings. They reigned for more than two hundred years. All of them followed the worship of the golden calf. Some of them served Baal. Not one of them ever attempted to bring the people back to God.

During the history of the two tribes that formed the kingdom of Judah there were twenty kings all of the house of David except Athaliah. Most of the kings of Judah served idols but some served Jehovah and at times there were great reformations. Kings of Judah reigned for nearly three hundred and fifty years.

V. The Captivity of Israel - 2 Kings

After a duration of nearly two hundred and fifty years the kingdom of Israel came to an end in the reign of the nineteenth king. They were carried captive into Assyria.

VI. The Captivity of Judah - 2 Kings

After nearly three hundred and fifty years the kingdom of Judah came to an end. The people of Judah were carried into Babylon. Their seventy years' captivity was the duration

of Babylonian world rule.

(The Dispersed Jews - Esther)

Esther gives history during the captivity. 1 and 2 Chronicles are largely a repetition.

VII. The Return From Captivity - Ezra and Nehemiah

The return from captivity was permitted by Persia. Only about fifty thousand returned under Ezra and Nehemiah. The temple was rebuilt but the throne of Israel was not established.