

Introduction to the Historical Books

B. 12 Historic Books

1. Introduction

The historical books trace the history of Israel from a theological perspective from the conquest of the land of Canaan under Joshua around 1400 BC to the return from the Babylonian captivity and the close of the Old Testament around 430 BC. Thus, almost 1000 years of Israel's history are included.

The historical books fall into 2 fairly distinct categories.

a. Pre-exilic (9 books) 1400-586 BC

1. Time of conquest and the judges (3 books) 1400-1051 BC
 - Joshua
 - Judges
 - Ruth
2. Time of the kings (6 books) 1051-586 BC
 - 1 Samuel
 - 2 Samuel
 - 1 Kings
 - 2 Kings
 - 1 Chronicles
 - 2 Chronicles

b. Post-exilic (3 books) 538-400 BC

- Ezra
- Nehemiah
- Esther

Following the historical books, the 5 books of poetry (except for Job which depicts life during the patriarchal period) fit into the times of the kings during the United Kingdom (1050-931 BC), under Saul, David and Solomon. The poetic books add spiritual, emotional and philosophical commentary to the United Kingdom period.

The 17 prophetic books fit into the times of the kings during the divided kingdom (931-430 BC) and record the spiritual reasons for the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities. So, the chronological advancement of the Old Testament ends essentially with the historical books.

As we study the historical books, keep in mind God's covenant with His people Israel under which He promised blessing for obedience and adversity for disobedience. The historical books show the consequences of sin in the life of the nation culminating in the 70 year Babylonian captivity (605 - 535 BC). Also watch as God continually fulfills every promise He had made to Abraham for God remained faithful even though Israel was unfaithful. And the post-exilic historical books prove God's faithfulness to bring a redeemed remnant back to the land after He had judged their sin.

Themes of the historic books (adapted from ESV study bible)

1. Gods Sovereignty: Over Israel and the Nations
 - a. Miraculous control of nature
 - b. controlling the affairs of nations
 - c. His authority, care, and protection of Israel
2. God's Presence: Near and Far
 - a. He is involved in the designation of Joshua, David and Saul as leaders
 - b. He is a source of help to godly judges, kings, and prophets who looked to Him for aid.
3. God's Promises: Present and Future

- a. Abrahamic Covenant
 - i. A nation
 - ii. A Land
 - iii. A blessing to the nations
 - b. Non-Israelites are blessed when the trust God
 - i. Rahab, Naaman (2 Kings 5)
- 4. God's Kingdom: Both Divine and Human
 - a. God is sovereign king over all creation
 - b. He chooses to exercise His rule through human kings
 - i. Kings in Israel are spoken of in Gen 17:6 & Deut. 17:14-20
 - ii. Davidic kings set the stage for the one true King.
- 5. God's Covenant: Reward and Punishment
 - a. These books record the successes and the failures of the people to obey under the Sinaiatic covenant.
 - b. The focus is not necessarily the moral condition of the people as a whole, but with the king as their representative.

Introduction to Joshua:

- 1. Author:
 - a. Book itself does not say.
 - b. Jewish Talmud ascribes all but the account of his death to Joshua
 - c. There are references that seem to indicate it was written a significant amount of time between the events and the writing. ("To this day" 4:9, 5:9, 6:25) 10:13.
- 2. Theme:
 - a. Continuation of the unfolding of the promises of the Abrahamic Covenant (A people, a land, a blessing to the nations)
 - i. In the Pentateuch, we saw God rescue his people from bondage and establish them under a covenant.
 - ii. In Joshua we see God leading his people into the Land.

4. Summary of content

Chapter 1-5 Preparing for the conquest

The new generation had been instructed in the law and ways of God and Israel was now ready to enter the promised land of Canaan. God commissioned Joshua as His leader to

1. be strong
2. be courageous
3. be careful to be obedient.

Commission of Joshua

- 1:5-9
 - o Bookended by promises of divine presence.
 - o Repeated call to be strong and courageous
 - o Multiple references to knowing and obey God's Law
 - o Numbers 14:9 This seems to be the character of Joshua

God promised Joshua that He would be with him and grant him great success. Joshua then commanded the people to get ready and sent two men into Jericho to spy out the situation. A woman named Rahab saved the two spies from being caught and the stage was set for victory (see **Heb. 11:31**).

Spies sent to Jericho

- Rahab helps the spies 2:8-13
 - o Hebrews 11:31
 - o James 2:25
 - Was Rahab saved by her works? No. Cause and Effect
 - o Matthew 1:5

By faith the Jordan River was crossed in a miraculous way reminding the people of the earlier miracle of the Red Sea crossing out of Egypt. After cleansing the people and circumcising the men, Joshua made ready to begin the conquest from Gilgal. But before he did, the Lord encountered Joshua in the person of the captain of the Lord's host who demonstrated that the battle was really God's and God was in charge.

Israel's "rebirth" in crossing the Jordan. 3:10 – 17

- Reminiscent of the crossing of the Red Sea
- Just as the Nation was originally "birthed" out of the Red Sea, so too the new Generation is birthed after the cleansing in the wilderness.
- 5:2-9 An event marked with circumcision
 - o v.5 – this is a re-institution of circumcision
 - Genesis 17 – Abraham's household is circumcised as a group
 - Practice seemed to continue on at the time of birth until the wilderness period

Passover Celebrated 5:10-12

- There is a parallel with the original Passover.
- The original Passover marked the beginning of the Exodus – Leading out of bondage into wilderness
 - o Preceded crossing through the water
 - o Marked the beginning of the period in which God sustained them with Manna.
- This Passover marks the coming out of the wilderness and into the promised land
 - o immediately following the crossing of the Jordan
 - o Marked the end of the need for Manna
 - o compare Josh 4:19 and Exodus 12:3

Joshua meets the commander of the Lord's Army 5:13-15

- This is another Theophany.
 - o "his drawn sword in his hand" This is a descriptor of the Angel of the Lord defending the Honor of God (Num. 22:23, 31; 1 Chron.21:16)
 - o v. 14 Joshua worshipped him without being corrected
 - o v. 15 The Commander of the Lord uses same phrase as Ex. 3:5
- Signifies that God is Sovereign and that it is His Glory that he is serving.
 - o v. 14

Chapters 6-12 Conquering the land

The military strategy was very sound as Joshua and the Israelites drove a wedge through the middle of the country beginning at Jericho — divide and conquer worked.

God miraculously enabled the fall of fortified Jericho and sent a clear message to the inhabitants of the land that God and Israel would prevail.

Chapter 6 Victory at Jericho

- The defeat of Jericho is described in greater detail than the other conquests because
 - o It follows the literary tradition of conquest narratives in which the first battle is described in greater detail.
 - o It is a symbolic first victory in which:
 - The victory is due to an obvious miracle only attributable to God
 - Unlike other cities it is to be completely destroyed (6:15-19)
 - This is a symbolic "first fruits" offering to God as a symbol of trust that victories will continue.
- Rahab and her family are spared
 - o 6:22-23; 25

After the initial victory at Jericho, a stern reminder of Israel's need to be holy and depend on the Lord was provided by the defeat at Ai because of Achan's sin. Later Ai was taken after the sin in the camp was dealt with. Israel had a hard time learning that God could not bless where sin abounded.

Ch.7 Defeat at Ai

- Sin of Achan
 - o Representative of all of Israel. Why?
 - they are a covenant community. All are affected by the presence of sin
 - o Chronicles uses Achan's sin as the archetypal example of Israel's sin throughout their history (1 Chronicles 2:7)
 - Whose genealogy is mentioned shortly after?
- Compare 6:2 & 8:1 with 7:2-3
- Achan and his line are completely removed from Israel
- Again follows this follows the pattern of sin entering into God's chosen people
 - o Adam and Eve
 - o Noah
 - o Israel (grumbling in wilderness, golden calf, failure at Kadesh-Barnea)

Ch. 8 Victory at Ai

- 8:1 They seek the Lord and receive His blessing prior to this campaign.

The conquest then turned first to the south with the foolish Gibeonite covenant and the defeat of the Amorite kings. Joshua and Israel next turned north and finished the initial phase of the conquest. **Chapters 11:16–12:24** summarize the military campaigns (see chart near Joshua 14, in the NIV/NASB/KJV. r Study Bibles, look for related charts, maps, articles, study notes, etc.).

Ch. 9 Gibeon Deception

- 9:9-11; 15
 - o recognition of the Power of God
 - o underscores the sacredness of a Covenant
- How is this covenant allowed to stand in light of Deut. 7:1-2? (also consider Rahab)
- People are cursed to act as servants.
 - o This is something they were already willing to do (v. 8, 11)
 - o They are appointed as servants of the place of worship (v. 27)
 - Psalm 84:9-10
- Immediately in Ch. 10 Israel has to honor this covenant by defending the Gibeonites
 - o God gives them victory through a miraculous event.
 - 10:8-14

Ch. 10-12 The Southern and Northern Campaigns

Chapters 13-24 Dividing the land

All that was left was for the land to be apportioned and divided among the 12 tribes (see color map in the back of your Study Bible). The faith of Israel in **Joshua** stands in sharp contrast to the lack of faith in **Numbers**.

The tribes of Reuben, Gad and 1/2 of Manasseh settled on the east side of the Jordan River (trans Jordan area) and the remaining 9-1/2 tribes on the western side in Canaan proper.

Judah settled in the southern part of the country which included Jerusalem. Caleb was given the city of Hebron. Cities of refuge were set up and the Levites were given 48 cities because they got no inheritance in the land itself.

Significantly though, it was left to each tribe to rid its territory of remaining sinful Canaanite influence which was not done completely and which would contribute to idolatry and spiritual pollution of the nation of Israel.

Dividing the Land

13: 1 Joshua is unable to complete the task of conquering the land.

- God Himself will complete it. v. 6
- Joshua's failure stands in stark contrast to the complete victory we see in Rev. 19-21
 - o Jesus successfully defeats all of his enemies.
 - o He ushers in the New Heaven and New Earth
 - o He brings His people into the perfect rest that Joshua could not (Hebrews 4)
- Yet despite the unfinished conquering, God allows them a glimpse of the promise, having Joshua separate out the allotments of land.
- 13:13 an ominous foreshadow

Ch. 20 Cities of Refuge

- Show God's commitment to a land of Justice
- This Justice is extended even to those outside of the covenant people (Numbers 35:15)

Ch. 21 Cities allotted to Levi

- Shows God's desire that the land be a land of worship.

Ch. 23 Joshua gives Charge to Israel's Leaders

- 23:5-6
- v. 6-9; 12-13 a warning

Ch. 24 Joshua renews the Covenant

- 1-13 A summary of all that God has done for them until now (Summary of Gen – Joshua)
- 14-18
- V. 19-21 ; 22-23

- v. 31 is encouraging, until you realize it is temporary.
- 29-33 marks the passing of an era.
- see study note on 24:32 and 24:33