

# BIBLE OUTLINE: HISTORICAL BOOKS

## BIBLE OUTLINE OVERVIEW

- The Bible is a very large collection of writings that can be confusing to read. We have created these outlines as way to give you an overview of each section of the Bible and to remind each reader that the Bible is a story that points to God and is fulfilled in Christ.

## WHY WAS IT WRITTEN?

- The Historical Books are part of what some Biblical scholars call the “former prophets”, or “Deuteronomistic History”.
- They were written for a few reasons:
  - to give a historical account of Israel’s journey into Canaan, the establishment of the monarchy, the exile, and return to the land.
  - to show how Israel had turned from God and God’s Law through religious and political idolatry,
  - to show how the fall of the northern kingdom and the exile were marks of God’s judgment for turning away,
  - to show that there was still hope for the people of God because of God’s faithfulness,
  - and to call the readers to repentance from this history.

## WHAT ARE THE HISTORICAL BOOKS?

- The “historical books” are a collection of narrative stories that detail the following events:
  - Israel’s Journey into the Promised Land (Joshua)
  - Israel’s Moral and Spiritual Decline (Judges and Ruth)
  - The Formation of Israel’s Monarchy (1 Samuel)
  - The Establishment of the House of David (2 Samuel)
  - The Division of the Kingdom (1 and 2 Kings)
  - History Revisited (1 and 2 Chronicles)
  - The Exile and Restoration (Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther)

## WHO WROTE THE BOOKS?

- There are a few theories on who wrote historical books. Some believe Joshua and Samuel wrote them because of their connection to God and the stories that span their leadership. There are others who believe there was a collection of priestly writers and editors who pieced together the stories over a long period of time.
- Although authorship is important, the most important thing about the historical books is that they give us an understanding of who God is, the story of Israel’s history, and how God remained faithful even when His people did not. These books beckon us to recognize the centrality of loving God and seeing His invitation to live out His commands with repentant and faithful hearts.

## SETTING

The Old Testament is set in what is known as the “Ancient Near East,” which is located in and around the Fertile Crescent. The land was made up of the Mesopotamian valley, the Nile River delta, and the Syria-Palestine region. These settings played a major role in what was written and how it was written.

## THE NILE RIVER DELTA

The Nile River stretches from the Mediterranean Sea in Northern Egypt to Uganda. The “delta region” of the river was home to Egypt. From enslavement to alliances to refuge, Egypt played a major role in the life and journey of God’s people. Eventually, after the Old, Middle, and New Kingdom periods of Egypt, they lost power to other emerging empires such as Assyria, Babylon, Persia, and Greece. The impact of the Egyptian pharaohs, economy, languages, religions, architecture, and more left an undeniable impact on the surrounding nations, namely Israel.

## THE MESOPOTAMIAN VALLEY

Mesopotamia was the land between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. This land has a long history of being home to significant national and political powers. These key groups were:

- The Sumerians - creators of cuneiform writing, builders of many cities, and storytellers of a creation story called “Enuma Elish.”
- The Akkadians - expanded upon what the Sumerians built, including their creation story, myths, languages, and civilizations.
- The Amorites - located in ancient Babylon. Many scholars believe Israel’s ancestors were from the Amorites.
- The Hittites - formed many law and treaty texts.
- The Assyrians - a massive empire that expanded control over much of Syria, Israel, and Egypt. During the reign of Tiglath-pileser III, they conquered and exiled Israel.
- The Babylonians - they conquered Assyria and took control of the area, including Israel in 586 BC.
- The Persians - an empire that conquered Babylon and the surrounding region in the 6<sup>th</sup> century, expanding as far as India.

Mesopotamia played a very significant role in the Old Testament and gives clear understanding to its stories and themes.

## THE SYRIA-PALESTINE REGION

The Syria-Palestine region is the most frequently mentioned area in the Old Testament. This region of land included Israel, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Canaan, Philistia, Phoenicia, Ammon, Moab, Edom, and Midian. Some of the most significant groups were:

- The Philistines - inhabitants of southwest Canaan who provided a constant threat to Israel until the reign of David around 1,000 BC.
- The Canaanites - inhabitants of Palestine who were descendants of Noah’s son, Canaan.
- The Phoenicians - inhabitants of the northwest coastal shores of the Mediterranean Sea. The capital city was Tyre.
- The Arameans - inhabitants of Damascus in Syria who descended from the Amorites. They frequently had border struggles with Israel.
- The Ammonites, Moabites, Edomites, Midianites, and Amalekites - inhabitants of the land surrounding the Jordan River. These descendants of Lot and Esau held hostile postures toward Israel.

Palestine and Canaan are how scholars refer to the land of Old Testament Israel. This “land flowing with milk and honey” was located alongside the Mediterranean Sea and stretched to the eastern lands of the Jordan River, and from Mount Hermon in the North to the Negev in the south.

## JOSHUA OVERVIEW AND OUTLINE

Joshua is the first book of the historical books. The content of the book explains the manner in which Israel entered and possessed the Promised Land. After Moses' death, Joshua was selected as the leader of God's people, who was called to lead them into the Promised Land and keep them centered on the Law as they lived holy lives according to God's Law and Word. The historical narrative of Joshua reveals God's leading of His people through Joshua into the land of promise.

The content of Joshua can be broken into the following parts:

- Entering the Land - Joshua 1:1-5:15
- Possessing the Land - Joshua 6:1-12:24
- Distributing the Land - 13:1-21:45
- Joshua's Death and The People's Renewed Commitment to God - 22:1-24:33

Key Characters, Themes, Terms, Locations, and Stories:

- God the Creator, Blessing, and Redeemer of Creation
- Joshua - Joshua is chosen to be the leader of Israel after Moses' death. He was instructed by God to lead the people into the land and to call them to keep God and God's Law central in their lives.
- Crossing the Jordan - Led by Joshua, the Israelites cross the Jordan River as they enter into the Promised Land carrying the ark of the covenant (which contained the Law of God and was a visual reminder of God's covenant faithfulness). This moment was similar to the crossing of the sea that Moses and Israel experienced in the Exodus, and it was marked by setting up 12 stones to remind God's people from generation to generation of His faithfulness.
- Jericho and Rahab - Jericho was the first nation Israel conquered in possessing the land. They did so by sending spies that were hidden by a non-Israelite prostitute named Rahab (revealing God's inclusion of all people into His redemption story and promise), and by obediently walking around the fortified city seven times before it miraculously came falling down.
- Total Destruction - God called His people to "totally destroy" idols, structures, and even groups of people in Israel's conquest of the land. This action was to be done as an act of worship. As troubling as this may be, this command was also not given without warning to these groups of people who had been doing tremendously evil and horrific things to their own people and the surrounding nations.
- Achan - After Israel was unsuccessful in their attack on Ai, they discovered that Achan had taken items that were supposed to be devoted to the Lord. He and his family were put to death, and the story revealed that the land was never for personal gain but rather a holy gift from God.
- The Gibeonites - During Israel's conquest, the Gibeonites deceived Israel into providing protection for them. When Joshua found out, the Israelites defeated the Gibeonites and formed the southern land for the tribe of Judah.
- Hazor - this northern region of the land was attacked and conquered by Israel, and once they obtained it, they then were able to "take the whole land" and "give it as an inheritance to Israel" (Josh. 11:23).
- Distribution of the Land - Joshua distributed the land as God commanded to the twelve tribes of Israel. This also included creating cities of refuge for persons who had committed serious crimes to have a fair trial and Levitical towns as places that the priests could reside since no specific territory was given to them.
- Shechem - After the conquest, the book ends with worship, Israel's covenant renewal, and Joshua's death. This took place at the site known as Shechem and included Joshua's farewell message to God's people, beckoning them to remember God's faithfulness, grace, and Law, and to live whole and complete lives of holy worship, devoted only to God and abstaining from idolatry in any form. The people commit to this and Joshua dies, buried in Shechem.

## JUDGES OVERVIEW AND OUTLINE

Judges is the second of the historical books and it details the life of God's people as they make the Promised Land their home. After Joshua's death and settling in the land, Israel repeated a cycle of turning from God to worshipping "Baal", being handed over to other nations in judgment, crying out to God to save them, and being given a deliverer or warrior-judge to fight off the enemies. During the reign of these judges, although there would be rest in the land, the people of God continued to choose idolatry and would reveal this most specifically once a judge died. The book of Judges reveals the moral and spiritual crises that Israel engaged in through idolatry, and God's covenantal faithfulness to deliver them and call them back to His plan of redemption.

The content of Judges can be broken into the following parts:

- Introduction - 1:1-2:3
- The Judges of Israel - 3:1-16:31
- The Final Days of the Judges - 17:1-21:25

Key Characters, Themes, Terms, Locations, and Stories:

- God the Creator, Blessing, and Redeemer of Creation
- Canaanites - although Israel had conquered most of the inhabitants of Canaan, many still remained. The Canaanites both attacked and were attacked by Israel. During these encounters, Israel was exposed to the Canaanite religion of Baal and Asherah worship. They believed Baal and Asherah would help their agriculture depending on their worship of them. During Israel's conquests, they disobeyed God's instructions to get rid of the Canaanites and their worship, and it led to their cycle of retribution for the next 200 years.
- Othniel - was the judge who delivered Israel from the hands of Aram.
- Ehud - was the judge who delivered Israel from the Moabites and King Eglon.
- Shamgar - was the judge who delivered Israel from the Philistines.
- Deborah - was the judge who delivered Israel from Hazor. King Jabin and his general Sisera waged war against Israel, but Deborah appointed Barak to lead in battle. During this battle, Sisera was driven into the tent of Jael, who drove a tent peg through his skull. Deborah sings about these events in what is known as "Deborah's Song".
- Gideon - was the judge who delivered Israel from the Midianites. This victory was won with 300 soldiers selected from the 32,000+ army of Israel. Gideon was asked to be king, but he declined because he believed only God could be king of Israel.
- Abimelech - after killing 70 of his brothers, he tried to claim the throne of Israel. Jotham prays and warns the people against Abimelech because of his murderous ways. God judges Abimelech and he is killed by a woman dropped a stone upon him in battle.
- Tola and Jair - two judges who are mentioned to save Israel after the time of Abimelech.
- Jephthah - was the judge who delivered Israel from the Ammonites. Before going to battle, he vowed to sacrifice the first person he saw upon his return if he was victorious. After winning the battle, he returned home to see his only child, his daughter. He fulfilled his vow and sacrificed his daughter, which was an abomination to God and His people.
- Ibzan, Elon, and Abdon - judges who judged after Jephthah.
- Samson - was the judge who delivered Israel from the Philistines. Samson was a Nazarite who was supernaturally empowered by God in battle. However, although he was consecrated Nazarite, he made many terrible and idolatrous decisions. Yet, God still empowered him to overcome the Philistines and deliver His people.
- Judges 21:25 summarizes well the contents of the book of Judges: "In those days there was no king in Israel; all the people did what was right in their own eyes."

## RUTH OVERVIEW AND OUTLINE

Ruth is the third of the historical books in the Old Testament. The book of Ruth reveals a play-like story during the time of the Judges in which Ruth, a non-Israelite, is given extreme generosity and provision to join the people of God. The story reveals interactions between Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz, with the redemption of Ruth into a family by Boaz as her “go’el” or redeemer. This is marked by the latter depiction of Ruth in the lineage of David and Jesus in Matthew 1. And ultimately, this builds an expectancy and vision of God’s providential care for all, inclusion of all into His unified family, and redemption offered to all through our Redeemer, Christ Jesus.

The content of Ruth can be broken into the following parts:

- Naomi and Ruth - 1:1-22
- Boaz and Ruth - 2:1-23
- Naomi’s Plan - 3:1-18
- Boaz Marries Ruth - 4:1-21

Key Characters, Themes, Terms, Locations, and Stories:

- God the Creator, Blesser, and Redeemer of Creation
- Naomi - the wife of Elimelech and mother of Mahlon and Kilion. This Israelite woman lived in Bethlehem when famine struck, and they relocated to Moab where their sons married Ruth and Orpah. During this time, her husband and sons died, and Naomi returned home. Orpah went back to her home, but Ruth went with Naomi, saying, “Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God (1:16).”
- Ruth - a Moabite woman who married one of Naomi’s sons. Instead of returning home after her husband died, she traveled with Naomi back to Bethlehem, where she met a man named Boaz.
- Boaz - a relative of Naomi’s husband, Elimelech. He met Ruth in his field when she was collecting leftover stalks in the field and he was impressed by her knowledge of God’s Law and her devotion to Naomi. He invited her to eat with him and asked for his servants to treat her kindly. Boaz was the “go-el” or redeemer of Naomi and Ruth.
- Ruth and Boaz - Naomi created a plan to win the favor of Boaz so that he would marry Ruth. She endeared herself to Boaz, and Boaz promised that he would act as her “go-el” or redeemer. As he promised, Boaz brought this matter to the city gate and made the official transaction. Because Ruth’s deceased husband had another relative, they had to decline marriage to Ruth, and when this happened, Boaz proceeded to act as her redeemer and married her.
- Obed - the son of Boaz and Ruth. As the book concludes, we discover that Obed is the father of Jesse and Jesse is the father of David.

## 1 SAMUEL OVERVIEW AND OUTLINE

1 Samuel is the fourth of the historical books. The book is named after Samuel, who was the last judge and first prophet of Israel. The book details Israel's life under the leadership of Samuel and then becoming a monarchy under King Saul. 1 Samuel reveals the rebellion and corruption of God's people (including priests), the ongoing struggles with surrounding nations (such as the Philistines), and their continued desire to seek a leader other than God through asking for a king. The book sets up the rest of the historical books that document the monarchy (2 Samuel, 1 Kings, 2 Kings), and points to a need for the True Judge, Prophet, Priest, and King.

The content of 1 Samuel can be broken into the following parts:

- Samuel and The Transition to Monarchy - 1:1-12:25
- King Saul and David - 13:1-31:13

Key Characters, Themes, Terms, Locations, and Stories:

- God the Creator, Blessing, and Redeemer of Creation
- Hannah - the mother of Samuel, who pleaded for God to give her a child and devoted him to the Lord.
- Samuel - God chooses Samuel to become His spokesperson and leader in Israel after the failings of Eli and his sons in the priesthood. Samuel is both a judge (military hero) and a prophet (one who speaks for God to God's people). He continually calls Israel back to the way of God despite their rebellion, idolatry, wars, and request for a king.
- Eli - the priest at the time of Hannah and Samuel. He and his sons, Hophni and Phineas, were corrupt, and God proclaims their downfall because of their sin through Samuel.
- Philistines - the Philistines continued to attack Israel, and early in 1 Samuel, they overcame Israel and took the ark of the covenant from them. However, when they took the ark into the temple of their idol, Dagon, the Philistines found Dagon without his head and hands before the ark the next day, proving the might of Yahweh. The Philistines then found themselves experiencing a plague and returned the ark to Israel. As the Israelites responded with worship, the Philistines attacked once again, only to be overcome by Israel. In response, Israel raised an "Ebenezer" as a marker of God's help.
- Saul - the first king of Israel. Although God warned Israel of the downfall of being led by a human king in Deuteronomy and through Samuel, they still asked for a king, and God had Samuel anoint Saul as king. Samuel challenged Saul and Israel to fear God and serve Him wholeheartedly as Saul became king. However, Saul disobeys God before battle by offering a sacrifice (which was Samuel's job) and by not obeying God's command against the Amalekites. In both these ways, Samuel tells Saul that God rejects him as king over Israel.
- David - the son of Jesse, who was a shepherd. Samuel declared that God wanted a person who "was after His own heart" and David was anointed by Samuel to become king of Israel after Saul. This is revealed through God's Spirit coming upon David (16) and David's triumph over Goliath (17). David was supported by Saul's son, Jonathan and he even married Saul's daughter, Michale. Throughout David's life, Saul's jealousy and hatred of David increased to the point of trying to murder David. Through these attacks, David was supported by God and those around him, and even had the chance to take Saul's life, but refrained because of his honor of God and Saul as king. Ultimately, Saul took his own life after his sons were killed in battle against the Philistines, elevating David to become King of Israel.

## 2 SAMUEL OVERVIEW AND OUTLINE

2 Samuel is the fifth historical book. Although the book was named after the deceased prophet, Samuel, its main focus is on the reign of King David. 2 Samuel details the death of Saul, the rise of King David, the establishment of his dynasty, the giving of the “Davidic Covenant” from God to David, the struggles of David and his family, and the faithfulness of God to restore David and his family in commitment to His covenant.

The content of 2 Samuel can be broken into the following parts:

- King David and the Covenant (1-12)
- King David's Family and Rebellion (13-18)
- Restoration of King David's Reign (19-24)

Key Characters, Themes, Terms, Locations, and Stories:

- God the Creator, Blessing, and Redeemer of Creation
- Saul - Saul was the first king of Israel who dies in the opening of 2 Samuel. His son, Ishbosheth, and the commander of the military, Abner, are contenders to the throne. As they rose to power, they also created civil war and died in the violent aftermath.
- David - David was anointed to be king and, following Saul's death, is crowned king at Hebron in Judah. He then becomes king of Israel following the death of Abner and Ishbosheth. During his reign, he cleared the Jebusites from what he would name “the city of David” or Jerusalem. David also overcame the Philistines, Moabites, Syrians, and Edomites in battle. Hiram built a palace for David in Jerusalem, and David moved the ark of the covenant into Jerusalem. He then made plans to build a house or temple for God, but was instructed by the prophet Nathan that his descendants would do so.
- Nathan - the prophet of Israel during David's reign. He announces the promise of the “Davidic Covenant” to David.
- Davidic Covenant - in 2 Sam. 7, God promises David that there would never be an ending to the lineage of David sitting on the throne in Israel. This is ultimately pointing to and fulfilled in a descendant of David, Christ Jesus of Nazareth.
- Covenant Faithfulness and Breaking - David and his family show signs of faithfulness to God's promise, but they also reveal patterns of breaking that covenant.
- Mephibosheth - in a display of generosity and justice, David invites Jonathan's crippled son, Mephibosheth, to sit at his table and receive income and care from royal lineage.
- Bathsheba and Uriah - David sins by not going out to battle, lusting after and raping Bathsheba, and then forcing her husband, Uriah, to the frontlines of battle where he is killed. Bathsheba becomes impregnated by David and the child does not live. However, God stays faithful in the midst of David's covenant breaking and gives restoration through allowing Bathsheba to marry David and having Jедidiah, also known as Solomon.
- David's Family - David's oldest son, Amnon, raped his half-sister, Tamar. Following this awful incident, Tamar's brother, Absalom, killed Amnon in retaliation. Absalom then fled Jerusalem and returned years later. He was reconciled with King David, who welcomed him home, only to turn in violent aggression toward David and made efforts to take the throne. David fled for his life and Absalom pursued him, ultimately leading to a battle between their supporters and the death of Absalom at the hands of Joab.
- Sinful Census - David takes a census that is displeasing to the Lord and leads to judgment.
- Gad - the prophet of the Lord that brings about God's offer of judgment to David, through which 70,000 people are killed by pestilence in judgment of David's unfaithfulness.
- Restoration and Offerings - David is restored through the action of a costly sacrifice at the threshing floor of Araunah. This act led to God hearing David's prayer and the revelation of God's faithfulness despite David and his family's infidelity.

## 1 KINGS OVERVIEW AND OUTLINE

1 Kings is the sixth historical book. This book details the kings of Israel, including events leading up to Solomon becoming King as the successor to David. 1 Kings also explains the positive and negative aspects of Solomon's and other kings' reigns in Israel, including the building and dedication of the temple in Jerusalem, the splitting of the kingdom into the north (Israel) and the south (Judea), and the ongoing political, economic, and religious impacts of the monarchy and prophets such as Elijah.

The content of 1 Kings can be broken into the following parts:

- Solomon's Reign (1:1-11:43)
- The Divided Kingdom and Its Kings (12:1-22:53)

Key Characters, Themes, Terms, Locations, and Stories:

- God the Creator, Blessing, and Redeemer of Creation
- David, Adonijah, Nathan, Zadok - David was the anointed king of Israel, was in his last days, and was looking for a legitimate successor to the throne. Adonijah was David's oldest living son and took claim to the throne in Jerusalem, but this was challenged by many followers of David including Nathan the prophet and Zadok the priest. Both Nathan and Zadok convinced David to declare Solomon as heir to the throne. David agreed, and Zadok anointed Solomon as the next king of Israel. As king, Solomon had Adonijah murdered to stop his pursuit of the throne and appointed Benaiah as commander of the army to secure his reign.
- Solomon - As Solomon took the throne, his father, David, encouraged him to obey the ways of God. Much like the rest of the people of God, Solomon both obeyed and disobeyed, but God remained faithful. We see this through Solomon having 700 wives and 300 concubines for the purpose of international diplomacy, which led to a marriage of Israel with other nations and their idolatry. We also see Solomon making sacrifices and being given a "discerning heart" from the Lord. In his reign, there were signs of heavy "syncretism" or a blending of religious ways. Solomon both followed God's ways and also sought after other gods. Although this led to the building of the temple and the flourishing of Israel's economy and military, it also planted seeds of rebellion, division, and idolatry in Israel. Solomon eventually fell into idol worship, and just like his heart was divided, Israel would soon be divided too.
- Solomon's Temple - this extravagant temple was constructed under Solomon's reign on David's land for the purpose of worship of Yahweh. The architecture, building, and dedication all revealed God's power, reign, centrality, and unlimited nature. Even though this beautiful temple was constructed, Solomon and the nation still blended their worship of Yahweh and other gods.
- Jeroboam and Rehoboam - One of Solomon's officers who rebelled against God and Solomon. The prophet Ahijah proclaimed that 10 of the 12 tribes would be given to him. After Solomon's death, his son, Rehoboam, was crowned king. Instead of lifting heavy taxation on the people, he continued this strategy, which led to a revolt led by Jeroboam. Because of this, the 10 tribes of the north split from the 2 tribes of the south. Jeroboam was king of the northern kingdom (Israel/Ephraim), and Rehoboam was king of the southern kingdom (Judea).
- Dan and Bethel - these two locations were the main worship sites for the Northern Kingdom. Both places quickly adopted "baal" worship and included the imagery of this Canaanite deity.
- Omri, Samaria, Ahab, Jezebel - Omri was a king in the Northern Kingdom who had great success politically, economically, and internationally. He built Samaria as his capital city and his son, Ahab, succeeded the throne. Ahab was given into a political marriage with Jezebel, who brought Baal worship into Israel.
- Elijah - after many prophets of God were killed by Jezebel, Elijah rose up as a prophet of the Lord. He stood in opposition to Ahab and Jezebel and challenged and overcame Baal worship at Mount Carmel. Finally, Micaiah prophesied the downfall of Ahab and Jezebel by the hands of the Syrians, which Elijah saw come to pass but still saw the people of God in disloyalty to God.

## 2 KINGS OVERVIEW AND OUTLINE

2 Kings is the seventh of the historical books. This book details the aftermath of the divided kingdom by explaining the impacts of Jehu's revolution, the reigns of Jeroboam II and Uzziah, the reforms of Jehoash, Hezekiah, and Josiah, and the ongoing prophetic voice of Elisha, the successor of Elijah. In the midst of these events, 2 Kings reveals the downfall of Israel to Assyria in 722 and the downfall of Judah to Babylon in 586, setting up the need for restoration, repentance, and God's redemptive work.

The content of 2 Kings can be broken into the following parts:

- Israel's Downfall (1:1-17:41)
- Judah's Downfall (18:1-25:30)

Key Characters, Themes, Terms, Locations, and Stories:

- God the Creator, Blesser, and Redeemer of Creation
- Ahaziah - the son of Ahab who succeeded his father and continued his ways of Baal worship.
- Elisha - the successor to Elijah, who was given the mantle of Elijah and performed many miracles directed toward the poor, sick, and even dead. He played a vital role in Jehu's ascension to the throne. His prophetic mantle and miracles point expectantly to the Messiah.
- Jehu and Jehoash - Jehu was anointed to be king of Israel by one of Elisha's followers, and immediately went to Jezreel to revolt against the monarchy. He killed Ahab's sons, Joram and Ahaziah. He also had Jezebel killed violently and had supporters and family members of Ahab put to death. He restored Yahweh worship and destroyed Baal worship sites. After Ahaziah's death, his mother, Athaliah, usurped Judah's throne and tried to kill all the male members of David's lineage. Jehoash was preserved and rose to power after the priest, Jehoiada, killed Athaliah. Jehoash led a reform in Judah, bringing back Yahweh worship. However, he did not remove the "high places" of Baal worship, which continued after his death.
- Jeroboam II and Uzziah - Jeroboam II rose to power in Israel (Northern Kingdom) and led the nation to immense economic prosperity and development during his reign. His political power and military prowess led Israel to a luxurious and lavish lifestyle. It was during this time that Amos and Hosea were raised as prophetic voices from God to His people, warning them of their love of wealth and the calling for them to pursue justice and righteousness. Uzziah came to power after the death of Amaziah (who led a civil war battle against Israel and lost, leading to a plundering of the Jerusalem temple). Uzziah led Judah to expanded territories, economic wealth, and great military and political power. However, much like many other kings, he did not remove the high places of Baal worship in Judah.
- Ahaz - After the reigns of Jeroboam II and Uzziah, Syria allied with Israel and attacked Jerusalem. This forced King Ahaz to ally with Assyria to fight back. Because of this alliance, he brought Assyrian worship practices into Judah and was condemned for adopting these forms of idolatry, even through the sacrifice of one of his children.
- Assyria and Exile - Both Tiglath-pileser III and Shalmaneser V forced Israel to pay large tributes and even sieged Israel for three years. Following Shalmaneser, Sargon II brought an end to the nation between 724-721. This led to the exile of the Northern Kingdom and the destruction of many places within Israel. This also led to greater Israelite syncretism with Assyrian idolatry.
- Hezekiah and Josiah - After Ahaz's reign, his son, Hezekiah, led a religious and political reform. This included the removal of Baal worship places, Asherah poles, and Baal altars. Hezekiah's life was spared through a severe illness, and the life of Judah was preserved after King Sennacherib of Assyria attacked Jerusalem. God intervened in both instances and brought deliverance. Hezekiah's son, Manasseh, undid many of the reforms his father had brought to Judah and became a vassal to Assyria. However, when his son, Josiah, rose to the throne, he brought a large revival of the ways of God and pointed people back to the "book of the Law".
- Babylon and Exile - Even after these reforms, Babylon attacked and besieged Jerusalem in 586, leading to the downfall of the southern kingdom. Despite this fall, the failed leadership of Judah, and the idolatry of God's people, God remained faithful to His people by preserving David's lineage on the throne, calling them out of their sin, and inviting them back into the ways of God.

## 1 AND 2 CHRONICLES OVERVIEW AND OUTLINE

1 and 2 Chronicles are part of the historical books, but they are also the first of the postexilic books. These postexilic books were written after the Babylonian exile and contain the record of events during that period. 1 and 2 Chronicles include events spanning from David's rise to kingship to the time of Nehemiah. Although 1 and 2 Chronicles seem repetitive, they explain Israel's history through a fresh perspective and a theological framework that anchors in the priestly tradition and beliefs that God is Lord, there is judgment for sin and blessing for obedience, and a call for hope in God.

The content of 1 and 2 Chronicles can be broken into the following parts:

- Genealogies - 1 Chronicles 1:1-9:44
- Narratives of David - 1 Chronicles 10:1-29:30
- Narratives of Solomon - 2 Chronicles 1:1-9:31
- Narratives of Other Kings - 2 Chronicles 10:1-36:23

Key Characters, Themes, Terms, Locations, and Stories:

- God the Creator, Blessing, and Redeemer of Creation
- Genealogies - 1 Chronicles 1-9 includes genealogies from Adam to Saul. Genealogies were important lists of generations of families that gave clarity on significant relationships and connections. What we can learn from these historical writings is the emphasis on the connection between God's people and all people, and the offer of redemption to the creation. We can also see the delineation between the various tribes of Israel, with much emphasis on the importance of the Levites (priestly, connected to the temple) and Judahites (lineage of David). Finally, we see the names of those who returned to Judah after the exile.
- David - 1 Chronicles details David's ascension to the throne after Saul and explains his godly heart and character, God's blessing upon his life, and God's promise to build a lasting dynasty of kings in David's lineage. This ultimately points to and is fulfilled in Jesus the Messiah. 1 Chronicles ends by detailing how David prepares the building of the temple that his son, Solomon, would take on during his reign. This portion highlights the centrality of worship and prayer.
- Solomon - 2 Chronicles begins by exploring the narratives connected to King Solomon. Like his father, David, Solomon sought the Lord. Although they both had their imperfections and sinful behaviors, they also both continued to seek God and experience His blessing in their lives and kingdom. Solomon finishes the construction of the temple with the finest materials and artisanship, and dedicates it with beautiful declarations, worship, and prayers to commit this central location of worship to the Lord. This humble act portrays a central theme of God's offer of forgiveness, mercy, and faithfulness as people come humbly to God and dedicate themselves to Him. In this way, Solomon is blessed with God's favor, and the nation thrives.
- Other Kings
  - Asa, Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah, Josiah - these kings are all described as those who "do what is right in the eyes of the Lord". This is a callback to David and a way in which these kings centralized prayer, worship, and a humble posture to seek God. We see God's response and blessing on these kings through helping in battle, extending life, and supporting them as they made worship and the book of the Law central once again.
  - Jehoram, Ahaziah, Amon, Jehoiachin, Zedekiah - these kings did evil in God's eyes. They would not humble themselves before God, and they syncretized themselves and the nation to idol worship. This led to the downfall of God's people through exile.
  - Manasseh - one of Israel's worst kings, he led the nation to a dark period, ultimately ending in imprisonment in Assyria. He turned to the Lord during this time and was restored to kingship, revealing a central theme of these books: God's faithfulness to offer forgiveness and mercy to those who humbly turn to Him.

## EZRA AND NEHEMIAH OVERVIEW AND OUTLINE

Ezra and Nehemiah continue the postexilic books and detail the events of God's people during the time after the exile, when Persia ruled Israel and the Jewish people returned to their land to rebuild and restore the temple and their way of life. In Hebrew tradition, Ezra and Nehemiah are one unified work explaining the stories of the priest Ezra and Nehemiah, who was cupbearer to the king. Both men were central in restoring the Law, the temple, and the walls of Jerusalem.

The content of these books can be broken into the following parts:

- Restoring the Temple - Ezra 1:1-6:22
- Restoring Purity in Marriage - Ezra 7:1-10:44
- Restoring the Walls - Nehemiah 1:1-7:73
- Restoring the Law - Nehemiah 8:1-13:31

Key Characters, Themes, Terms, Locations, and Stories:

- God the Creator, Blesser, and Redeemer of Creation
- The stories of Ezra and Nehemiah both include repeated structures:
  - Kingly Decrees
  - Return of the People
  - Opposition to Rebuilding
  - Success over the Opposition
- Ezra details the edict of Cyrus, King of Persia, who allows for a group of Hebrews to return to their land. Sheshbazzar leads the first group back to the Promised Land. Zerubbabel leads another group, and upon their arrival, he became the leader of the community along with Jeshua, the high priest. They started by rebuilding the altar and temple, but were met by opposition from neighboring groups, and the work stopped.
- The Prophets, Haggai and Zechariah, both inspired God's people to take up rebuilding the temple once again. Neighboring governors questioned this, but Darius the Great reissued the decree allowing the Jews to rebuild the temple.
- After some time, Ezra was commissioned to return to the land by King Artaxerxes I. Ezra, a priest, taught the Law and discovered the intermarriages between Hebrews and others. This was against the Law, and Ezra confessed this sin, leading others to the same, and causing a national repentance to keep their marriages pure and according to the Law.
- Nehemiah was granted permission by the Persian King to return to Jerusalem to rebuild its walls. Like Ezra's story, Nehemiah begins the work but is met by opposing neighbors who attempt attacks towards those rebuilding. Through confession of sin, a call to rebuild no matter what, and an encouragement to defend themselves, Nehemiah led the Jews to rebuild the walls and overcome the opposition. Both Ezra and Nehemiah reveal a beautiful promise that God's people can trust in His reign over all of the world.
- Nehemiah also focuses on the reading of the Law of Moses and a renewal of the covenant of God for God's people. Much like Ezra teaching the Law to the people, Nehemiah's story details similar social and spiritual revivals. They commit themselves to this Law that was read to them through actionable steps such as revoking mixed marriages, caring for the Temple and sacrificial system, and repopulating Jerusalem with God's holy people.
- In both accounts we see the faithfulness of God to forgive His people and influence leaders in the world to empower His people to be part of His redemptive and restorative work. We see God's compassion to offer mercy and direct His people into holiness through faithfully and carefully guiding them. It is through their confessions of sin and commitments to the covenant of God that they experience these blessings and the restoration of the Land, Temple, and Law in their midst.

## ESTHER OVERVIEW AND OUTLINE

Like Ezra and Nehemiah, Esther continues the postexilic books and details the events of God's people during the time after the exile, when Persia ruled Israel and the Jewish people returned to their land to rebuild and restore the temple and their way of life. Esther is a book detailing two Jews in exile in Persia who, through a series of events, are exalted to the king's court and influence relief, rescue, and restoration to the Jewish people. Ultimately, Esther reveals God's favor to bring His people into redemption despite their choices and others' choices of great evil.

The content of Esther can be broken into the following parts:

- The Setting - 1:1-2:23
- The Conflict - 3:1-5:14
- The Climax - 6:1-7:10
- Final Resolution - 8:1-10:3

Key Characters, Themes, Terms, Locations, and Stories:

- God the Creator, Blessing, and Redeemer of Creation. Although God is not mentioned by name, we see the work of God in bringing redemption through the events of this story.
- Xerxes I - King of the Persian Empire during the events of Esther. A pompous man who displayed great wealth and extravagance through various banquets. His queen, Vashti, did not want to attend his banquet, and so he banished her from the land, leading to the search for a new queen.
- Mordecai - A Jewish man living in exile in the Persian Empire who becomes the guardian and adoptive father of his cousin, Esther. He plays a crucial role in protecting the Jewish people by uncovering an assassination plot against King Xerxes I and later by opposing Haman's genocidal plan against the Jews, ultimately leading to their salvation.
- Haman - An official in the court of King Xerxes I and the primary antagonist in the biblical Book of Esther. He was an enemy of the Jews who plotted to destroy them after Mordecai, a Jewish official, refused to bow to him. His plot was ultimately foiled when Queen Esther revealed his evil scheme, and the king ordered Haman to be executed on the gallows he had prepared for Mordecai.
- Esther - a poor Jewish exile who is elevated to become the queen of King Xerxes I. While in her position of power, her Uncle, Mordecai, challenges her to use her seat to rescue the Jewish people from an evil decree that a political leader named Haman enacts against every Jew under Persian rule. In response to this challenge, she calls a fast and utilizes her power to influence another decree to be made that allowed the Jewish people to defend themselves against anybody enacting the first decree that sought to eliminate the Jewish people by force. This ultimately led to the elimination of many Jewish enemies and a reminder to God's people that God will not abandon His people no matter what evil they have chosen or evil that is enacted against them.

## BIBLE RESOURCES

You will find that there are many challenging passages to understand and apply to your life in Christ. We suggest the following resources to aid your study and application of Scripture.

- **Scripture Reading Practices:**

- SOAP
- Discovery Bible Study
- Lectio Divina
- Communal Reading of Scripture

- **Websites:**

- The Bible Project
- Bible Gateway

- **Commentaries:**

- New Beacon Bible Commentaries
- Word Biblical Commentaries
- Anchor Bible Commentaries

- **Books:**

- *How to Read the Bible for All It's Worth* by Fee and Stuart
- *Seven Things I Wish Christians Knew About the Bible* by Bird
- *Discovering the Old Testament* by Alex Varughese
- *Reading the Pentateuch* by John McDermott
- *Left of Matthew* by Norman Hubbard
- *Bruce and Stan's Guide to the Bible* by Bruce Bickel and Stan Jantz
- *Exploring the Old Testament: A Guide to the Historical Books* by Philip E. Satterthwaite