

The Books of History - Part 1

If the Bible were a golf bag, we're simply talking about the woods and irons and putters. Rather than actually playing, by the time we finish, you'll at least know where to find the clubs!

The Bible has two main sections. The Old Testament is the story of the nation of Israel. The New Testament is the story of God coming to earth in the form of Jesus Christ. That is the central event in all of history; it's what divides B.C. from A.D.

The most important single statement in the Bible is that CHRIST ROSE FROM THE DEAD! The O.T. sets the stage for it. The N.T. describes it.

The Bible was written over at least 1,500 years by some 35 authors.

The first five books are the *Pentateuch*, written by Moses. They start with the creation and conclude as the Jews are about to enter the Promised Land of Canaan.

Now we turn to the twelve Books of History. They start with Joshua and go through Esther, documenting the history of the Israel from the time Joshua led them across the Jordan River into Canaan, their Promised Land, until about 400 B.C.

JOSHUA

Scholars tell us that large sections were written by Joshua. Other authors took his writings and completed this book between the 14th and 12th centuries B.C.

This book follows Moses' successor Joshua tells of his conquest of Canaan, a land that under his leadership was settled and divvied up among Israel's twelve tribes.

As the book opens, Moses had just died after leading the Jews out of Egypt where they slaved in bondage under the wicked Pharaoh. They cross the Red Sea on dry ground, passed Mt. Sinai where God gives him the Ten Commandments, and take a meandering path criss-crossing the Sinai desert for forty years.

God appoints Joshua as Moses' successor. He leads the Israelites across the Jordan River into Canaan which is divided among the twelve Jewish tribes who conquer the inhabitants, godless bands of idol worshippers. You'll recall the story of the Israelites marching around the walled city of Jericho seven times, then blowing their trumpets whereupon the walls crumbled and fell.

JUDGES

Judges picks up where Joshua dies and runs through the coronation of Israel's first monarch, King Saul. For 410 years prior to Saul's taking the thrones God had appointed a series of fourteen judges to lead the Israelites against their foes. Even with "commanders from God," after each conquest the Jews promptly turned their back on Jehovah.

The unknown author, writing in about the 11th century B.C., teaches that the Jews were covenant-breakers who failed to abide by the rules of God's theocracy, continuously falling into backsliding, repentance, renewal, then more backsliding.

The book's key phrase is 21:25 -- "There was no king in Israel in those days, and every man did whatever he thought was right."

Judges includes the story of legendary strongman Samson.

RUTH

Jewish tradition says the prophet Samuel wrote I and II Samuel, Judges and Ruth, probably during the time of King David in the 10th century B.C. Ruth takes place during the time of the judges.

It was a lawless era of total permissiveness and anarchy. Waves of nomads roamed the land in search of food and safety, yet ordinary people survived these turbulent times, somehow managing to raise their families and love God.

Ruth is a Gentile who forages for left-over grain in the fields. The wealthy landowner Boaz, a Jew, marries her. She converts to Judaism, and they have a son whose grandson was King David. Ruth is very loyal to her mother-in-law and, even though a Gentile, becomes an ancestor of Jesus.

I and II SAMUEL

I and II Samuel as well as I and II Kings deal with the history of the kingdoms of Israel (the northern kingdom) and Judah (the southern kingdom). Their author was probably Samuel, a much-revered prophet, priest and judge who bridged the era of the judges and the beginning of the monarchy.

In I Samuel we learn about Samuel the prophet who made his mark in history by anointing Israel's first two kings, Saul and David. This book covers the period from the end of the judges to the death of the Jews' first king, Saul. The Jews saw all the nations around them with their kings and demanded that God give them a king, too. Reluctantly, God agrees, and Saul begins his reign doing good, but turns to worshipping idols.

At this point we read about the young shepherd David who slays the giant Goliath, setting the stage for him to succeed Saul on the throne.

In II Samuel we read of the reign of David, anointed king over Judah after Saul's death had triggered a civil war. David consolidates the two kingdoms, moves the capital to Jerusalem and becomes king over all Israel.

He wants to build a magnificent temple where he can worship God, but because he'd committed adultery with beautiful Bathsheba, then killed her husband Uriah, God denied him the privilege of constructing the temple. That's left for David's son Solomon to do.

I and II KINGS

These books cover from David's death and Solomon's coronation in 971 B.C. to the defeat of Judah by Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon in 586 B.C. Spanning more than four centuries, they were probably written by several prophets who wanted to preserve their religious history.

The books of kings chronicle the names of the kings of the two kingdoms, when they took the throne, what they accomplished, when they died, evaluating their faithfulness, or lack thereof, to God.

Following the golden age of Solomon when Israel thrived as a world power, the rulers of the ten Jewish tribes in the Northern Kingdom, known as Israel, were a succession of tragic reprobates. Late in his reign Solomon himself forsook God, letting his hundreds of foreign wives lure him into worshipping their idols.

The two tribes of the Southern Kingdom, known as Judah, enjoy periodic revival under some good kings. We'll read about King Hezekiah in II Kings 18-19.

Kings relates the stories of two of Israel's greatest prophets, Elijah and Elisha.

I Kings 18:21 "How long will you waver between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal is God, follow him." There on the steep slopes of Mount Carmel politically incorrect Elijah, regarded by the establishment as a troublemaker, is blamed for Israel's problems. Arrayed against King Ahab's 850 false prophets, he was forced to stand alone, pleading with his nation to follow the one true God. His question was simply, "Who do you follow?"

Asking that question then and now demands courage, yet the destiny of men, women and children depends on their personally answering that question for themselves, then placing their faith in God through what Jesus Christ did for each of them on the cross.

Those who follow Christ have the awesome privilege of telling others about Him. Paul put it this way (2 Corinthians 5:20): "We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making His appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: be reconciled to God."

These two books narrate the spiritual decline of God's people and their loss of affection for God's laws. Their unfaithfulness to God led to Israel's defeat by the Assyrian marauders who

took them captive in 722 B.C. Judah was overrun and taken captive by the Babylonians in 586 B.C.

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