

## Introduction to the Bible

### Week 2: Old Testament Historical Books & Wisdom Literature

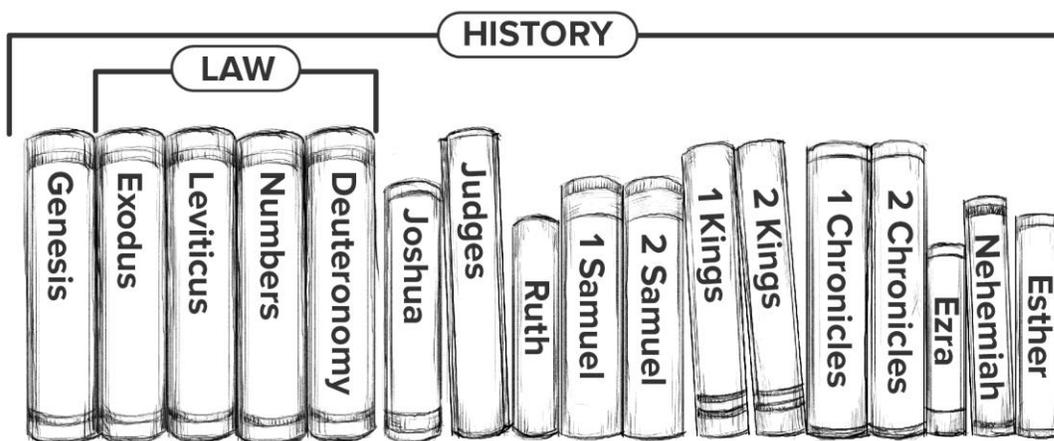
#### Introduction

Two general points about reading the Old Testament:

- On the one hand, we should (generally speaking) read the New Testament more than the Old Testament.
  
- On the other hand, the New Testament itself says that the Old Testament is important for Christians because:
  - It provides basic instruction on salvation by grace through faith through its sacrificial system (Heb. 7-10).
  - It provides a variety of faith-building predictions about Jesus' First Coming – especially His death and resurrection (Lk. 24:25-27,46).
  - It provides encouragement through its promises and examples of God's faithfulness, so that we might have hope (Rom. 15:4).
  - It provides warnings against ways of life that are contrary to God's design and destructive to us (1 Cor. 10:6,11).
  - It provides practical, real-life examples of living by faith in God (Heb. 11:1-12:1).
  - It can transform our characters and equip us to be effective servant-workers (2 Tim. 3:15-17).

#### Old Testament historical books

BOOKS INCLUDED:



**TYPE OF LITERATURE:** These books are historical narrative. Like all historical narratives, biblical historical narrative is selective, not exhaustive. God includes what it is important to His priorities, and leaves out the rest.

**EXAMPLE:**

**TIME PERIOD:**

- Prior to Gen. 12
- Gen. 12 – Esther (see overview on p. 5)

**HUMAN AUTHORS:** The historical books were written by Old Testament prophets.

- A succession of prophets
- Tests all prophets had to pass
  - Deut. 18:20 **“But the prophet who speaks a word presumptuously in My name which I have not commanded him to speak, or which he speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die. <sup>21</sup> You may say in your heart, ‘How will we know the word which the LORD has not spoken?’ <sup>22</sup> When a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the thing does not come about or come true, that is the thing which the LORD has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him.”**
  - Deut. 13:1 **“If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you and gives you a sign or a wonder, <sup>2</sup> and the sign or the wonder comes true, concerning which he spoke to you, saying, ‘Let us go after other gods . . . and let us serve them,’ <sup>3</sup> you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams; for the LORD your God is testing you to find out if you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul. <sup>4</sup> You shall follow the LORD your God and fear Him; and you shall keep His commandments, listen to His voice, serve Him, and cling to Him. <sup>5</sup> But that prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death, because he has counseled rebellion against the LORD your God . . . So you shall purge the evil from among you.”**

**HISTORICAL ACCURACY:** Critics have long attacked the historical accuracy of these books, but actual evidence (including archeological evidence) has consistently confirmed their reliability.

## EXAMPLE: The Ebla Tablets



## WHY THE HISTORICAL BOOKS ARE IMPORTANT:

- God teaches through redemptive *acts* as well as through redemptive *words*. The narrative portions of the Bible record God’s redemptive acts.
- God builds our faith as we learn about His past faithfulness (see Ps. 77:1-15).  
 Ps. 77:7 <sup>7</sup> **Will the Lord reject forever? And will He never be favorable again? <sup>8</sup> Has His lovingkindness ceased forever? Has His promise come to an end forever? <sup>9</sup> Has God forgotten to be gracious, Or has He in anger withdrawn His compassion? Selah. <sup>10</sup> Then I said, “It is my grief, That the right hand of the Most High has changed.” <sup>11</sup> I shall remember the deeds of the LORD; Surely I will remember Your wonders of old. <sup>12</sup> I will meditate on all Your work And muse on Your deeds. <sup>13</sup> Your way, O God, is holy; What god is great like our God? <sup>14</sup> You are the God who works wonders; You have made known Your strength among the peoples. <sup>15</sup> You have by Your power redeemed Your people, The sons of Jacob and Joseph.**
- Some of the events they describe point to Jesus (see Num. 21:4-9).  
 Num. 21:6 **The LORD sent fiery serpents among the people and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died. <sup>7</sup> So the people came to Moses and said, “We have sinned, because we have spoken against the LORD and you; intercede with the LORD, that He may remove the serpents from us.” And Moses interceded for the people. <sup>8</sup> Then the LORD said to Moses, “Make a fiery *serpent*, and set it on a standard; and it shall come about, that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, he will live.” <sup>9</sup> And Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on the standard; and it came about, that if a serpent bit any man, when he looked to the bronze serpent, he lived.**  
 John 3:14 **“As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; <sup>15</sup> so that whoever believes will in Him have eternal life.”**

## KEY THEME:

- God is faithful to preserve His people and fulfill His promises.
  - He is faithful to fulfill the promise He made to Abraham – especially the “nation” and “land” portions (e.g., Gen. 15:18-10; Deut. 1:7,8; 1 Kings 4:21).
  - He is faithful to enforce the Law He gave through Moses – especially the “nation” and “land” portions (e.g., Lev. 25:1-3; 26:33-35; 2 Chron. 36:21).
  - He is faithful to fulfill the promise He made to David by preserving his descendents (1 Chron. 17:11-14; 2 Kings 25:27-30; Matt. 1:1,6-17).

**<sup>2</sup> Pet. 1:3 His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. <sup>4</sup> Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.**

## TIPS FOR READING:

- Look for the tension between what God promised and the circumstances of the main characters. Are there perceived obstacles? How does God overcome them?  
EXAMPLE: A son for Abraham and Sarah (Gen. 12-21)
  - God’s promise
  - The obstacles to God’s promise
  - How God overcomes the obstacles
- Look for the priority of faith and how God builds individuals’ faith.  
EXAMPLE: How God prepares Elijah for his ministry (1 Kings 17,18)
  - 1 Kings 17:1-7  
PROMISE >> COMMAND >> FAITH >> PROMISE FULFILLED
  - 1 Kings 17:9-16  
PROMISE >> COMMAND >> FAITH >> PROMISE FULFILLED

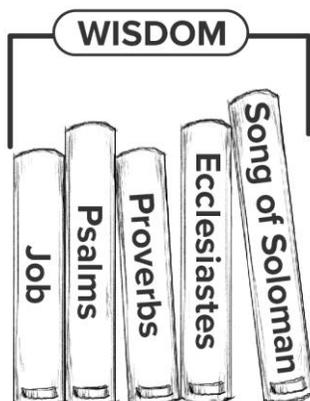
- 1 Kings 18  
PROMISE >> COMMAND >> FAITH >> PROMISE FULFILLED

#### OVERVIEW OF OLD TESTAMENT (DATEABLE) HISTORY:

- Patriarchs (2100 – 1850 BC)
- Egyptian Sojourn (1850- 1440)
- Exodus (1440 – 1400 BC)
- Conquest (1400 – 1350 BC)
- Judges (1350 – 1050 BC)
- United Monarchy (1050 – 950 BC)
- Divided Monarchy & Exiles (950 – 590 BC)
  - Israel (northern 10 tribes) – exiled ~ 720 BC
  - Judah (southern 2 tribes) – exiled ~ 600 BC
- Post-Exilic (~500 – 400 BC)

### Wisdom literature

WHICH BOOKS?



TYPE OF LITERATURE: Old Testament wisdom literature utilizes several different literary styles:

- Poetry/song
- Dialogue
- Pithy observations and maxims

WHAT TIME PERIOD?

WHO WROTE THEM?

WHY THE WISDOM BOOKS ARE IMPORTANT:

- They are inspired responses to God’s revelation in the Law and the Prophets.
  - Inspired prayers
  - Inspired reflections on the moral structure of human life in a fallen world.
  - Inspired celebration of sexual love within God’s design of heterosexual monogamy

KEY THEMES:

- God’s wisdom and the fear of God (Job 28:28; Ps. 111:10; Prov. 15:33; Eccles. 12:13) – “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.”
  - Wisdom is the philosophy of life that is rooted in God’s revelation (versus philosophies of life rooted in fallen human autonomy and speculation).<sup>1</sup>
  - Fearing God is the key means to gaining God’s wisdom. Fearing God means humbly trusting God and obeying His revelation (versus prideful self-sufficiency and self-exaltation).

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<sup>1</sup> “In Scripture, wisdom is a moral as well as an intellectual quality . . . For us to be truly wise . . . our intelligence and cleverness must be harnessed to a right end. *Wisdom is the power to see, and the inclination to choose, the best and highest goal, together with the surest means to attain it.*” J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (InterVarsity Press, 1993), p. 90.

- Because God’s wisdom accords with His design for life, following His wisdom often leads to positive results in this life (Proverbs – e.g., Prov. 15:1; 22:6; some Psalms – e.g., Ps. 19:10,11).
  - But because the world is deeply fallen, following God’s wisdom does not always lead to positive results in this life (Job’s sufferings; see Ecclesiastes section below; Psalms of lament; Prov. 15:1 and 22:6 do not always happen).
  
- Communing personally with God takes various forms because of life’s complexity (e.g., lament, praise, confession, thanksgiving, supplication, intercession, etc.).
  
- Meditation on God’s Word is crucial for becoming wise (Ps. 1; 63:6; 77:12; 143:5). Meditation involves memorizing portions of scripture, prayerfully speaking them to yourself, and pondering their application to your life.

**PRIVATE MEDITATION:** Choose a small passage that grabs your attention, memorize it, recite it to God and ask for illumination, and recurrently ponder it for at least one day.

**GROUP PRACTICE:** When your cell group is transitioning between biblical books or other topics, spend a week doing this:

- Each person chooses to memorize and meditate on a new verse or passage.
- Share why you chose this passage.
- Recite the passage.
- Share how memorizing and meditating on it affected you.
- Others share anything relevant.

#### TIPS FOR READING:

- Job: Focus on the early and late chapters and skim the middle chapters to get the main message.
- Psalms
  - Ask “What does this Psalm teach about God’s character? What does it teach about trusting God?”
  - Some Psalms are Messianic (Lk. 24:44; e.g., Ps. 22; 2; 118). Don’t be dogmatic about this unless the New Testament quotes them as Messianic.

