

# The Historical Books

The twelve historical books pick up the story of Israel where it left off at the end of Deuteronomy. These books describe the occupation and settlement of Israel in the Promised Land, the transition from judges to the monarchy, the division and decline of the kingdom, the captivities of the northern and southern kingdom, and the return of the Remnant.

There are three divisions to the historical books: (1) the theocratic books (Joshua, Judges, Ruth), (2) the monarchical books (Samuel, Kings, Chronicles), and (3) the restoration books (Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther).

## THE THEOCRATIC BOOKS

These books cover the conquest and settlement of Canaan and life during the time of the judges. During these years (1405-1043 b.c.), Israel was a nation ruled by God (a theocracy).

**Joshua** - The first half of Joshua describes the seven-year conquest of the Land of Promise through faith and obedience on the part of Joshua and the people. After their spiritual and physical preparation, the Israelites took the land in three campaigns: central, southern, and northern. The last half of the book details the partitioning of the land among the twelve tribes and closes with Joshua's challenge to the people.

**Judges** - The disobedience in Judges stands in contrast to the faithful obedience found in Joshua. The Israelites did not drive out all the Canaanites and began to take part in their idolatry. Judges records seven cycles of foreign oppression, repentance, and deliverance. The people failed to learn from these cycles, and the book ends with two illustrations of idolatry and immorality.

**Ruth** - This little book sheds a ray of light in an otherwise dark period. The story of Ruth occurred in the days of the judges, but it is a powerful illustration of righteousness, love, and faithfulness to the Lord.

## THE MONARCHICAL BOOKS

These six books trace the history of Israel's monarchy from its inception in 1043 b.c. to its destruction in 586 b.c.

**1 Samuel** - The prophet Samuel led Israel through the transition from the judges to the monarchy. The people begged for a king and God told Samuel to anoint Saul. Saul began well but soon degenerated into an ungodly tyrant. David became God's king-elect, but he was pursued by the jealous Saul whose murderous intentions were checked only by death.

**2 Samuel** - After the death of Saul, David reigned for seven years over Judah and another thirty-three years over the twelve reunited tribes. His reign was characterized by great blessing until he committed adultery and murder. From that point on David was plagued by personal, family, and national struggles.

**1 Kings** - Solomon brought the kingdom to its political and economic zenith, but this wisest of men played the fool in his multiple marriages with foreign women. After his death in 931 b.c., the kingdom was tragically divided when the ten northern tribes of Israel set up their own king. Only the southern kingdom of Judah (two tribes) remained subject to the Davidic dynasty.

**2 Kings** - The story of the divided kingdom continues in Second Kings as it carries Israel and Judah to their bitter ends. None of the nineteen kings of Israel did what was right in the sight of God, and their corruption led to captivity at the hands of the Assyrians in 722 b.c. Judah lasted longer because eight of its twenty rulers followed the Lord. But Judah also fell in judgment and was carried away by the Babylonians between 605 b.c. and 586 b.c.

**1 Chronicles** - The Books of Chronicles give a divine perspective on the history of Israel from the time of David to the two captivities. The first book begins with a nine-chapter genealogy from Adam to the family of Saul, followed by a spiritually oriented account of the life of David.

**2 Chronicles** - This book continues the narrative with the life of Solomon and focuses on the construction and dedication of the temple. It then traces the history of the kings of Judah only, giving the spiritual and moral reasons for its ultimate downfall.

## THE RESTORATION BOOKS

The last three historical books describe the return of a remnant of Jews to their homeland after seventy years (605–536 b.c.) of captivity. Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah are the leaders of this remnant from 536–420 b.c.

**Ezra** - Babylon was conquered by Persia in 539 b.c. and Cyrus issued a decree in 536 b.c. that allowed the Jews to return to Palestine. Zerubbabel led about fifty thousand to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple, and years later (458 b.c.), Ezra the priest returned with almost two thousand Jews.

**Nehemiah** - The temple was built, but the wall of Jerusalem still lay in ruins. Nehemiah obtained permission, supplies, and money from the king of Persia to rebuild the walls (444 b.c.). After the walls were built, Ezra and Nehemiah led the people in revival and reforms.

**Esther** - The story of Esther takes place between chapters 6 and 7 of Ezra. Most of the Jews chose to remain in Persia, but their lives were in danger because of a plot to exterminate them. God sovereignly intervened and used Esther and Mordecai to deliver the people.