

Survey of the Bible

Class 3: The Historical Books & Prophets, pt. 1 *Paul Burkhart*

PART 1: The Gospel

The Apostle's Creed

*We believe in God, the Father Almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.*

*We believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit
and born of the virgin Mary.
He suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended into hell.
The third day He arose again from the dead.
He ascended to heaven
and is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty.
from there he will come to judge the living and the dead.*

*We believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.*

*This is our identity. In short, the early Christians would have said that if it's not in this creed, we can feel free to disagree about it and still consider one another Christians. Our identity is not, *first and foremost*, what we believe about the Bible, as important as that is. So we should be generous, thoughtful, gracious, and charitable to brothers and sisters with*

very different views about the Bible, because, ultimately that is not who we are.

PART 2: The Historical Books: From Conquerors to Conquered

The Deuteronomistic History

We're now entering into narrative part of the Bible known as the Deuteronomistic History. In short, this just means that there is a certain consistent theological perspective that seems to be at play here, as if these books (including Deuteronomy, then Joshua through Kings) were written by the same group of people, with the same sort of theological perspective. They evaluate the history of Israel in light of the Deuteronomic laws and covenant.

The accepted theory is that this stuff was gathered and written by Levitical priests that were refugees from the Northern Kingdom of Israel that fled south. They carried with them the traditions from the North. Around the time of Josiah, they gathered older texts and stories (that were maybe already in collections) and brought together into one narrative. It is thought that after the Babylonian exile, these Deuteronomists went through and edited some more stuff to help explain why, even after such a good king like Josiah, they went into exile.

The central thesis of these books is this: *If Israel is led by an obedient King, then Yahweh will them protection and prosperity. They didn't do this, so they were sent into exile.*

Some features to look out for:

- An emphasis that Jerusalem is the true, centralized worship-place of God
- They are trying to stress the identity and covenant of the people to try and unite the country under the reign of Josiah
 - So, there's an general antagonism, or at least ambivalence, towards foreign peoples (you will a change in this with later writers, including the Prophets).
- a view of the King as a necessary evil ("it's not good to have one, but if you *must* have one, it *needs* to be an obedient one")
- Jeroboam is seen as the archetype of a disobedient King; David and Josiah are seen as the obedient ones (especially Josiah).
- Manasseh is seen as the reason for the exile.

The Books

Joshua

Moses having died, the last of the former generation has died and so the new generation can now enter the Promised Land under the leadership of the new leader, Joshua.

Content:

Four main sections: some introductory transitional speeches from Moses to Joshua, stories about a swift and comprehensive conquest of the Promised Land and in their indigenous peoples, reports about how the Israelites went about settling in the land, and then a few final pieces of story.

This conquest section is also in three sections: an account of the takeover of three large cities (Jericho, Ai, and Gibeon), the crossing of the Jordan river (in similar fashion as the Red Sea), and then an account of smaller cities taken by the Israelites. Before each of these three big city battles, there is a little story preceding it. The story of Rahab intros the destruction of Jericho, the story of Achan precedes Ai (he's the guy who hoards some plunder and the Israelites lose battles until he is found out and he and his family are killed), and, before the last story of the defeat of a coalition of five kings, the Israelites are tricked into exempting the Gibeonites from conquest (but he still enslaves them).

The last section is a series of confusing endings, each of which offers more problems to be solved in the rest of the Old Testament. The book ends with the Israelites at Shechem where they commit themselves to the Moab covenant that Moses had set up in Deuteronomy.

Background:

- Wow, is this book complex.
- The Septuagint, the Old Testament of the New Testament writers, is significantly different than the Hebrew versions that we base our translations on today. Our version is 4 to 5% longer and many verses are very different. Further, in the Dead Sea Scrolls, even more variations of this book are found.

- The book, therefore, looks like it has gone through a complex history of additions, subtractions, and editing.
 - There are parts that are unnecessarily repeated
 - There are several unnecessary endings to the book.
 - Otherwise coherent sections of narrative are broken up by random seemingly-unrelated bits of poetry, story, etc.
 - There are cities they end up, including the major city Shechem in which they ratify Mose's covenant together after everything is done, that are not mentioned anywhere else in the book. How they got there is never talked about.
 - Chronological and geographical markers don't make sense and are contradictory.
 - There are Kings that are talked about being conquered in Joshua that pop up in Judges as if they were never conquered.
 - The book can't seem to decide whether or not Israelites had taken the land or not, if they are obedient or not.
- These books (primarily Joshua) cause lots of problems to our modern ethical sensibilities. More conservative pastors and theologians have articulated a whole range of justifications for Yahweh's decrees, to declare them just. But still, modern atheism clings to this book more than others to show how religion only causes destruction. Further, this depiction of Yahweh appears contradictory to God as he is most authoritatively and clearly revealed in Jesus. Yet again, conservative pastors and theologians have tried to show how this is not contradictory, yet something in us still cries foul (See Excursus at bottom). Well, I have good news and bad news:
 - Good news: there is virtually zero archaeological evidence that any of these things actually happened in history.
 - Concerning the three main cities mentioned in the book: Jericho shows signs of being destroyed and having a wall fall down a thousand years before Israelites ever got there. Gibeon shows no signs of foreign occupation during this period. And Ai was only a small village, and didn't even pop-up until well after the Israelites were around. Most of the rest of the cities either show no record of having ever existed at all, or show normal migration and settlement patterns and conflicts not specific to the Israelites.

- Bad news: this challenges some of our ideas of the Bible. We need to remember:
 - These things were written later
 - They were compiled/written after the exile by a victimized people who had just gotten their land back.
 - They were written with specific agendas in mind that were much bigger than conveying history.

Purpose/Identity Formation:

- Yahweh will go to great lengths for the singular goal of getting his people home.
- The land is the tangible representation of God's work for his people.
- Even here, we see the people begin to falter in their commitments to Yahweh. This is supposed to hint at their need for a king, and how they will live without one (Judges will flesh this out more clearly).
- There are three main emphases in Joshua: possession of the land, obedience to the commands of Moses, and annihilation of the peoples of that land. These were the usual marks of a specific community in the ancient world: possession of territory, proper religious observance, and ethnic separation.
 - Through the story, each of these markers is affirmed and compromised. By the end, there is only one thing that the Israelites can base their identity on: the covenant of Yahweh, specifically, the Moab covenant of Deuteronomy, which most clearly points towards the New Testament and Jesus. The book, therefore, subtly subverts claims of divine sanction for the violence found in the book.

Interesting Bits:

- The Jordan river story interrupts the Jericho military campaign very abruptly.
- In the last chapter, in the famous "choose this day whom you will serve" section. The Israelites respond "We will serve Yahweh!" Joshua replies, "You cannot serve Yahweh, and you won't!" This is written by people that knew what was coming and was foreshadowing it already.

Jesus/New Testament:

- The name "Jesus" is the English translation of the Greek transliteration of the Aramaic translation of the name "Joshua" (sorry, I know that's confusing). So, Jesus' name is a direct reference to Joshua, as the one who leads his people into a conquest of the land to receive their promise.
- Just like the Israelites at the end of the book, we live in a land that is under the rule and reign of our God, and yet still inhabited (both within and around us) by those elements that keep God's intention for this world from becoming reality. The "borders" and "contours" of what this world will/should be has, in a sense, been mapped out for us and we've moved into those areas. And so, as we fight to make this land look like the one to come, we are, in effect, fighting to bring about a future world and shape to things into the present. But, we fight with the weapons that Jesus offers us: love, service, and grace-- a system that flips Joshua on its head and shows how every other violent, selfish attempt at imposing rule on this world does not lead to a complete conquest, but only a partial one, and one that leads to more pain in the long run.
- The end of the book explicitly points out the human frailty and impossibility of following God's Covenant. It highlights the need for God to do something more

Application/Why Would You Go Here?:

- To see just how far God would go to bring his people into their promise, even upending the laws of nature (making the Sun stand still, for example). This shows us a God who would even reverse death for the sake of his people.
- Knowing the ending of this story in the long run, we can see the little compromises this people begin doing even at this point in the story. It begins to grow your sense of impending failure on their part, and therefore growing your sense of need for Christ to come as the "better" and "true" Joshua.
- Though the book is trying to show how the Israelites needed a king, we know from the rest of the Bible that even kings fail to keep us in obedience to the Covenant. We need Yahweh as our earthly King.
- If the book is seen more allegorically for spiritual "battle" (if we can even use that language properly without cultural baggage) as articulated above, one can read the book and gain a very real

excitement, encouragement, spurring on, and rallying for the mission of God in this world.

- Keeping the historical and literary difficulties in mind, it can serve as a reminder of just how "organic" our faith is, and how amazing it is that God would stoop so low, and take on such a messy human culture to work his will out in the world. It also reminds us that Israel's faith really didn't look much different than the hundreds of other faiths existing right along side of them. And yet, *every one*, of those other faiths fell away, and yet somehow, the faith of these nomadic farmers has become the greatest faith and force in the history of the world. No other thing, in my opinion shows God's Providence more than that.

Judges

The Israelites now having settled in their respective disjointed territories, they are now confronted with two related problems. First, they haven't actually cleared out the land of all other people (contrary to what the book of Joshua said--three times) and so God has given them over to be conquered by these very people. Secondly, the disjointedness of this nation keeps them from helping one another as they are attacked and taken over. The book of Judges is a profound and beautiful work of art with a very tight structure and progression, that doesn't seem to lose any of the individual narratives in the midst of agenda.

Content:

In one way, the book is quite straightforward. **In the first part**, the structure is sort of like a helix: cyclical, yet moving forward. The cycle is simple and repeated ten times throughout the book: *Disobedience, God's Anger, Israelites Cry Out, a Judge Rises Up, and then there's "Rest" in the land.*

The Israelites "forget God and do what's right in their own eyes", so God let's them be conquered by a neighboring people. They then repent of their sin and God raises up a charismatic leader called a "Judge" to help overthrow these oppressive people. This is followed by a period of prosperity for the people. But, they eventually slide right back into idolatry and forgetting God, and so it all starts over again.

The "moving forward" part (or rather, "downward", to be more accurate) is separated into four "movements": The first Judge, Othniel, is presented as the best Judge possible. This is the first movement. Then next movement consists of the next three Judges and their *triumphs*. The next follows two more significant Judges, and mentions some minor ones, and marks a *transition* towards growing ambiguity about these Judges. The last movement describes the *tragedy* of Israel's last Judges, ultimately lamenting over the tragic end of its weakest Judge, Samson.

The second part, describes what life looks like when there is no leadership in Israel. The book make a point to say there "was no king" and "everyone did what was write in their own eyes". This section has some of the most gruesome and horrific stories of the Bible. One of the tribes of Israel is almost entirely destroyed by the other 11 tribes. In other words, *it's bad*.

Background:

- The "Canaanites" that are talked about in Joshua and Judges are not a single ethnic people. That is a catch-all term to refer to *all* of the various indigenous peoples living in the land that Israel wanted.
- Historically, it seems like every group that lived in this area at the time were having these constant skirmishes with random and varied peoples. Judges appears to depict a fairly accurate representation of the cultural situation. Egypt, which still technically "owned" all this land, was busy fighting the Hittites in the North, and so their influence, power, and support for their "property" was waning and being neglected, so there was a power vacuum here that let all the nations in this area have a free-for-all fighting for new territory. This is the situation from which the Israelites find themselves emerging.
- Towards the end of Judges, the "Philistines" start playing a bigger and bigger role. It was around this time historically, that an entire population of people (including women and children--not just soldiers) randomly showed up on Canaan's shores and wanted a piece of the land there. In the historical documents of many different nations at the time, these are referred to as "The Sea Peoples". The Philistines, it is believed, were a part of the group of people. They came from the area of Greece and came by the Aegean Sea to Canaan's shores. They were an annoyance to everyone and were fighting many peoples at this time for control of parts of the land, not just Israelites.

They ended up settling in the coastal areas, not being able to move inland very far.

- There is a belief that, similar to ancient Greek and Roman tribal associations, this group referring to themselves as "Israel" were actually different ethnic peoples that gathered around central places of worship (as it seems the city of Shechem is in Joshua, and Shiloh is later on). Each "tribe" would take turns caring for the tabernacle on a monthly basis, which is why most all of these groups would consist of either 6 or 12 tribes (like Israel). It is thought that is why--even in spite of many impracticalities and issues that arise--Israel is *insistent* that they *must* keep 12 tribes--no less, no more. At the end of Judges, this is why they stop in their destruction of the smallest tribe, Benjamin: not because they're merciful, or think that they've learned their lesson, but because they don't want to go to less than 12 tribes. This might also be why the Israelites split Joseph's tribe into two for their apportionment of the land, to make up for the tribe of Levi not having one for themselves.

Purpose/Identity Formation:

- The point of the book: without a King, people will do what's right in their eyes, which is what is evil in the eyes of Yahweh. The people need a good king, in order to follow Yahweh. A King like... Josiah!
- The Israelites (and indeed all of humanity) seem to have a "soul-gravity" that, apart from a stronger force acting in the opposite direction, will move ever more downward into rebellion against Yahweh and his covenant.

Interesting Bits:

- In the Samson story, the people don't cry out, nor does the land have rest.
- Samson's famous wife, Delilah, is actually a Philistine, a member of the very people he's trying to clear out. This shows his duality and weakness, marrying a Philistine on one hand, while trying to kill them on the other. He is trying to serve two masters, getting what he wants.
- In the section recounting Judges who were triumphal, but still "unnatural", we have a "left-handed" Judge and a female Judge.

Jesus/New Testament:

- At the risk of sounding too allegorical, one could point out how the ultimate enemy inhabitant of our "land" as God's people are no ethnic group, but sin and death itself. And these enemies have been conquered by our true and perfect Judge, Jesus.
- Samson ultimately takes death on himself in order to try and save his people.
- Similar to Joshua, this book is a clear apologetic for the need we have as humans for a flesh-and-blood leader. An abstract, high-in-the-sky God as King does us no good. We need our kingship to be exerted in front of us in real, tangible, dirt and sweat kinds of ways.

Application/Why Would You Go Here?:

Primarily, to see the logical conclusion of our hearts. To see what life looks like when we "have no King", when our "land has no rest", and when we "do what's right in our eyes." We should see ourselves in this book and our helpless addiction that cycle. It should lead us to "cry out" for our Judge, Jesus, longing for him to bring us rest and leadership.

Ruth

In the time of the Judges, amidst all the insanity and instability, there is set this little story from the Bible. It's the story of a foreign Moabite woman who casts her lot with the people of God, and through her faithfulness to Yahweh, finds blessing and hope for her and her family (from which David will ultimately come)

Content:

This is a story that deals with the royal family line of Israel. The "House of David." This was super important to ancient people's and this should explain its place in the Biblical corpus. There's lots of dialogue in Ruth. This has led many to wonder if Ruth is meant to be an ancient play in four acts:

Act 1: The Royal Line is put into crisis. Ruth's husband dies, has no sibling (or other relative) to help Ruth continue the family line. Ruth and her sister-in-law Naomi commit themselves to one another and the people of God. In

Act 2: We begin to see God move and hope begins to form that God might do something to keep it going. They move to another city and just happen to stumble across a relative of Ruth's dead husband!

Act 3 surrounds Naomi forming of a scheme and them implementing it to try and get Boaz to fall for Ruth and take her as his own.

Eventually it works and in **Act 4:** all is made well as the court ratifies it. The book ends with that Royal Line written out for all to see.

Background:

- Technically, this isn't part of the "Deuteronomistic History". It was probably written at the time of David, not after the Northern Kingdom went into exile.
- Ruth was David's great-grandmother. Many scholars believe Ruth to have been written to justify David's Kingly reign. It describes David's humble hometown of Bethlehem as a calm oasis and a land of honor in the midst of the craziness of the Judges. As we'll see, opposition to David's Kingship lasted, throughout his reign, especially by the tribe of Benjamin (where Saul had come from) because they felt that David was giving extra attention to his home tribe--Judah. Many think this book was written to help assert his rightful and honorable place as King.
- It's very hard for scholars to know when this book was written. It contains Hebrew grammar and turns of phrase that, by definition are ancient and well before the exile, yet many think that it uses other Aramaic expressions that they wouldn't have been exposed to until after the exile. Further, there is a local custom involving a sandal in 4:7 that is explained to the reader, meaning it had to have been written (or at least edited) after a time when people stopped knowing about this custom on a wide scale. But, it also includes this custom, implying *some* connection with the ancient context in which it takes place.

Purpose/Identity Formation:

- Even in the midst of the madness of Judges, God was still working and moving to care for the future Kingly line.
- David is the result of the direct and Sovereign work to maintain a kingly line. Don't doubt God's intention to have him be King.
- Contrary to popular opinion at the time, Bethlehem is an appropriate place for a Kingly line to come from, no matter it's size. It was at "rest" even when the rest of the land was not. So stop beating up on David's hometown!
- Interestingly, Ruth is not an Israelite, but is a Moabite--from a nation that was frequently at war with Israel. This is one sign that this is not part of the Deuteronomistic History, because it is a favorable representation of a foreign woman in the story of Israel.

Interesting Bits:

- There's a weird bedroom scene in the book where Ruth climbs into Boaz's bedroom and lies down at his feet. This was her way of saying "Hey, I'm interested in you." Similar to the Shulamite woman in Song of Solomon, Ruth takes charge in the book, taking the initiative to make her desires known and pursue Boaz--not desperately, but intentionally.
- Ruth is one of the favorite books of the Bible for study by feminist theologians because of the relationships amongst women, how they are spoken of, how they speak to one another, and how they are used by God in his plan.

Jesus/New Testament:

- Jesus is our "kinsman-redeemer". This is one of the most beautiful parallels to Jesus in the Bible. He is our "kinsman", being referred to in the New Testament as our Brother *and* our Redeemer. It's a beautiful and paradoxical look of how one can--and must--be *of us*, in order to *save us* from certain death.
- This also establishes Bethlehem as the "City of David" from whence Jesus himself will be born about 1200 years later. Interestingly, Jesus is also made fun of for his hometown. God brings about amazing things from smallness and unexpected places.

Application/Why Would You Go Here?:

- To see how the sovereignty of God works.
- To be reminded of the importance of community and close relationships.
- Yes, there is a happy ending, but a whole lot of unfortunate pain and suffering is gone through before the "kinsman-redeemer" shows up. Ruth teaches us patience in the midst of suffering.
- To enjoy a good story.

(1 & 2) Samuel

The books of Samuel (they were originally one book--and still are in the Hebrew Bible) lay out the events occurring right before Israel became a monarchy, and what happened those first few decades of the monarchy. The book is some of the most beautiful narrative theology in the Bible, containing some of the most formative and significant theological ideas, but without breaking the flow of the story at all, it seems to explain these things. The stories are *that* powerful. (That begin the case, I may err on the side of a more cursory overview of these books as their contents are both straightforward and available.)

Content:

Five Acts: (1) Israel needs a King: if you remember, Judges didn't close out very nicely. It's very unstable and chaotic. The book opens with Samuel's story, which emphasize how sensitive he is to hearing the word of the Lord and obeying it. Samuel is Israel's last judge and first "proper" prophet. He delivers the people from the Philistines before settling in and faithfully serving in the tabernacle at Shiloh, who's head priest is named Eli. He's a very bad priest, and, in a way, to foreshadow how God will deal with Saul, Yahweh rejects Eli as priest and exalts Samuel to replace him. Then there's a section talking about how Israel lost its most saved object: the ark of the Covenant. They eventually get it back and feel bad for disobeying Yahweh, but it serve as a stark reminder of the realities that come with disobedience.

(2) The reign of Saul: The elders of Israel come to Samuel, and say "Hey, we're not doing to well without a king like everyone else. Can we have?" Samuel is mad, because, Yahweh is supposed to be King! He takes this request to Yahweh, and He obliges, allowing them to have a king, as long as this is a king Samuel has a few sermons he gives critiquing the idea of a king, trying got show the Israelites how putting their hope in a king will not work (foreshadow alert!), the people do not hear this, and God allows a King. Saul is found, anointed king, and has some victories over the Philistines. Saul gets cocky and out of impatience waiting for Samuel, he offers the sacrifice before a battle. At first, God says that Saul's kingly line would not continue to his son, but after repeated rebellion by Saul, God says that he needs to be replace *now*.

(3) The rise of David: Samuel is led to David, a young farmer and poet, and anoints him king. Now, it gets awkward. Israel has two anointed kings, and one that doesn't want to give up power. The rest of 1 Samuel, leading into 2 Samuel talks about this strained transition. At first it's just an annoyance as David gets more military battles than Saul (as in the case of Goliath), but eventually Saul becomes obsessed with killing David. David flees with 600 of his "fighting men", moving further and further from Saul's capital (Gibeah) and having interesting encounters with others, at one point living in hiding *with the Philistines* and fighting *with* them as mercenary. Eventually, at the end of 1 Samuel, Saul dies.

(4) The reign of David: 2 Samuel opens up with David finding out about Saul's death, his mourning. David returns and wins a civil war with Saul's son. Then, settling in as King, he makes several key changes to the life of Israel. He makes Jerusalem the new capital city of Israel, builds a palace, clears the Philistines out of "their" area, and makes some religious reforms concerning the ark and such. He appoints a priest from the North, Nathan (where David is not from) and a priest from the South, Gad, (where David is from *and* Jerusalem is). Nathan is always shooing down David and calling him out, while Gad continually offers forgiveness to him. There's a discussion about how David wants to build the temple, but God say no, David's son will. Then the story turn to military stuff again, and this is where David has his affair with Bathsheba. This is looked down on *greatly* in the text and David's personal sin breaks forth into sin in his whole family. His son rapes his half-sister, and his other son kills that son and then tries to overthrow David, and that son dies. A clearly worn-out

and tragic David has a few more small skirmishes and conflicts, and this part ends.

(5) A concluding Epilogue: These last four chapters of the book have pretty random, non-chronological stuff thrown at the end. It serves to emphasize, even after that tragic ending, David is still the ideal king of Israel (it shows how Yahweh's anger is more towards Israel than David, and has some songs of praise and his last words, and lists of people that did heroic things under David's reign.

Background:

- Remember, at the end of Judges, the main people Samson is fighting are the Philistines. As a reminder: they were the part of the Sea Peoples that came in and started settling in the area, mainly in around the coast. They popped up around the same time Israel and both were duking it out for the land. The Philistines were annoying to *everyone* in the ancient world at this time. They are complained about a *lot*. These are the people that Saul and David spend their time trying to fight.
- Many scholars believe that the writers of Samuel combined three previously written documents into this one and then built off of that. These three documents are considered some of the oldest and finest pieces of ancient history writing and are thought to have been written right at or shortly after the events they describe, and so are considered pretty "literal" history (in the modern sense):
 - The "Ark Narrative" (1 Samuel 4:1b-7:1)
 - The "History of David's Rise" (1 Samuel 6:14-2 Samuel 5:25 [or all the way through chapter 7])
 - The "Court History" (or "Succession Narrative") (2 Samuel 9-20, 1 Kings 1-2)

Purpose/Identity Formation:

- This book greatly shapes and articulates Israel's concept of a king. They are wrestling a lot with this. What is a "good" king under Yahweh? What will this kingship look like, and how do we decide on who the king is?
- The book has both positive and negative evaluations of the idea of kingship. It's a tension it strives to hold well.

- Saul's selection and reign, as Israel's king "training-wheels", coupled with Samuels' critiques of him helps describe what a true Israel king should *not* look like.

Interesting Bits:

- The People and the Priest choose the King. The Prophets are King-makers and King-Breakers.
 - There is a caution and ambiguity about the King.
 - They felt like he was a necessary evil, but came with his own problems (similar to our debates about State's rights vs. Federal)
- Twice in the book, the divided Kingdoms of Israel and Judah are mentioned (even before they have divided!)
- Saul is so weak and passive as a King that many scholars don't even consider him one. They consider him more like Israel's kingly "training wheels".

Jesus/New Testament:

- *King & Messiah:* In light of the other political structures that were crumbling all around the Israelites, the King took on a an almost "savior" quality to it. God promises David that through his seed will come the most perfect King. The rest of the story shows how this is highly unlikely in David's own literal kids. And so, anticipation began rising for this "perfect" King in the line of David.
- Jesus ultimately comes from the line of David.
- Samuel is the first book to contain all three of the divine "offices" of Jesus: Prophet, Priest, King. In this book, we see what obedient and disobedient version of these offices look like, hearkening to the eternal and perfect fulfillment of where these people are lacking.

Application/Why Would You Go Here?:

- A discussion about and reminder that Yahweh is King. Not David. Not the President. No dictator the world has ever known. Yahweh is King and to focus your efforts any hopes on political power is to focus it in the wrong place.
- There is a stress on repentance and forgiveness throughout the book. The book is full of people repenting or not, and the

consequences they face. This book shows us what it looks like. In response to his sin, David simply says "I have sinned" and then goes away to pray. Nathan speaks forgiveness to him.

- David shows us what a very real, human leader looks like who is also "good". He models for us a man that screws up time and time again, and yet is still called a "man after God's own heart."
- To be reminded of who God reveals himself, communicates himself, and accomplishes his purposes, not through propositions, but through the medium of *story*.

(1 & 2) Kings

The book of Kings, talks about the monarchical period (simple enough, right?). Well, this book is where the can get *really* hard to follow.

It gives Israel's history from Solomon to when Babylon conquered Judah in the South (roughly a 350 year span). In the middle section of the two books of Kings, the story jumps back and forth between these kingdoms. It can be very confusing. Ultimately, though, this book was written for Israelites while they were in exile, to tell their story in such a way that (1) the exile made sense, but (2) Yahweh could also be trusted. And what *is* that story? *It's your fault for worshipping false gods, and the fault of our bad kings for leading us there.*

Content:

This book has three large sections: (1) Solomon (1 Kings 1-11), (2) the two-kingdoms (1 Kings 12-2 Kings 17), and (3) just Judah (the Southern Kingdom) (2 Kings 18-25). The book opens with the building of the temple, and ends with its destruction.

Section 1 opens with David preparing to move things over to Solomon as king, and then his death. Almost immediately, Solomon begins working on the temple. The rest is then a detailed account of his reign and subsequent "turning" from the Lord, followed shortly by his own death.

In **Section 2**, the Kingdom goes to Solomon's son, Rehoboam. Or rather, it's supposed to. The Northern Kingdom rebels under the young and gifted

Jereboam, thereby forming Israel in the North, which establishes its capital at Shechem.

Why did this rebellion happen? Theologically, the Bible says it was because of Solomon's sin. Politically, it was similar to our own North/South division--except opposite. The North exerted a heavy hand of authority over the Northern tribes. They gave away their land, had high taxes, and imposed heavy labor and manufacturing requirements on the North. With this new king, and as Jeroboam as their representative, they ask Rehoboam for their load to be lightened. Solomon's son consults his advisors and they encourage him to threaten to increase their load and double-down. For some reason, he agrees this is best and does it.

Strangely, though the text says rather snarkily that Rehoboam "did not listen to the people", Jeroboam is seen as the bad guy here, and it's his legacy of idol worship as the first King of Israel that sets the tone for all the other Kings of Israel to be bad.

The book then, starting with the North (with Jeroboam) goes back and forth, chronicling each successive King of each Kingdom. This can make the book confusing. Add to the mix that most of the prophets pop up in this time and you have names flying all over the place.

According to this Deuteronomistic History, though, the most important people in this story are Hezekiah and Josiah, the two best Kings Judah ever knew. They led great revivals of the people, although both of their children were some of the Judah ever had (especially, Manasseh, Hezekiah's son).

Eventually, Israel, because of these sins, is taken into Exile, and the **Section 3** of the book just focuses on Judah, until they are also taken into exile by the Babylonians.

The Final, Kingly Scorecard:

Israel, the rebellious Northern Kingdom, had 20 kings over a period of 200 years, all evil. They had no revivals, and 8 of them were either killed or committed suicide. After these 200 years they were taken into exile under the Assyrians.

Judah fared a little bit better than Israel. Judah, the Southern Kingdom, had 19 kings and one queen over the span of almost 350 years. They had occasional revivals, and 8 righteous (or at least mostly righteous) kings and 11 unrighteous kings.

Background:

- We must remember, when reading this book that it is written from a *very* biased perspective. This is the main part of the story that the Deuteronomists compiled the rest of the Historical books to tell. For that reason, strange irregularities when it comes to the background of this book should not surprise us.
 - There are several Kings who are very well-attested to in extra-biblical literature, who according to other nations' writings, did amazing things in the ancient world and on behalf of their country, and yet Kings dedicated a mere verse or two that person's reign.
 - The biggest battle Israel was *ever* involved in was called the battle of Qarqar. King Ahab of Israel helped lead a coalition of 10 other kings to defeat the King of Assyria. And it seems they were victorious (even though the Assyrian King claims victory in his records, he didn't get any further than this battle and returned four more times to the area to try to get control of it and couldn't). It was the biggest battle the ancient world had ever seen, and it's talked about in lots of other kingly writings. And yet it's not mentioned in the Bible. At all. Ever. Why? It was a seemingly good thing that an Israelite King did, and remember, from the perspective of our the writers of this book, Israel did *nothing* good. Ever. Even if they did.
- Refer to the Prophets intro below. When reading this book, if you can remember which Prophets spoke where, that really helps (and it's easy. Only four Prophets functioned in the North, and only 3, maybe 4, functioned after the exile. All there set were in Judah. Find those names and read the book).

Purpose/Identity Formation:

The book has two main purposes of identity formation. Remember earlier when we said that this Deuteronomistic History went through two "editions":

one after the North had been sent into Exile, and then one after the South had been sent into Exile.

- The main (historical) point of the "first edition" of Kings, was to rally support for the best King the nation had had since David: Josiah. From the perspective of these Northern refugee Priests, who had been unsuccessful (in their opinion) in bringing about true, religious reform to their side of the country, it seemed like this was a new era for the nation. Finally! A King that wanted to do what was necessary to eradicate the worship of *any* other god in Judah. But, Josiah was getting lots of crap for this from the people (as the "folk religion" of Judah was still very polytheistic, even if the institutional religion was not). So, they compile and edit this history to tell the Israelites "Hey! Listen to King Josiah! Look at what happened when your King was *not* doing these reforms! Things went *very* badly. In fact, look what happened in the North with Assyria!"
- Well, the reforms were instituted, and it seemed like all would be well for the nation. But...then they slipped into rebellion, bad Kings came about, and eventually, Judah got sent into Exile as well. So, a new "edition" was issued that explored this. The main point of those edits was to emphasize that not even an earthly king can hold back the tide of sinfulness that was seemingly engrained in the Israelites, even from their earliest days. This edition focused on the sinfulness of even the Southern Kings, trying to remind the people that they really *should* only have one King: Yahweh.

Interesting Bits:

- Most of the book is some of the most fascinating and interesting politics you can read. The way that the kings leveraged alliances, resources, and planning is very sophisticated. If you pay attention, and keep the big picture in mind (or at least read a good commentary along with it), it's actually a very exciting book.
- There's also lots of exchange/communication between the North and South (even some intermarriage of kings with the daughters of the king in the other kingdom)!

Jesus/New Testament:

- By the end of the book there's a strange tension: a King is the forerunner of his people; where he goes, so will his people. And yet, even among *all* of these Kings, in all their glory and all of their tragedy, there was not found *one* that could truly *change* the people in such a way that this fate of their's was not inevitable. In other words, according to the Deuteronomistic History, it seems we need a human king in order to keep us from chaos, and yet, a human king is not enough. Somehow, we seem to need *both* a human king *and* have Yahweh as our king. If *only* Yahweh could become our human king...
- Throughout the Gospels and the rest of the New Testament, Jesus is identified through several primary metaphors through which he exercises his presence and authority among us. All of these elements are seen in 1 and 2 Kings, and we can see how these things each function together in the whole life of the community: Prophet, Priest, King, Sacrifice, Word, Temple, and others. As you read, pay attention these things and see *them* as metaphors of the One who was to come.

Application/Why Would You Go Here?:

- To lose your idealistic hope even in the best of human political leaders; to remind yourself that no matter their righteousness, they cannot change the heart.
- To hear the growing crescendo of the Old Testament get louder, leading up to final resolution in Christ.
- To see that our need for Christ as King is universal, total, and all-encompassing.
- To look for shadows of how Jesus exercises his own Kingship in your life and over his people today.
- Lastly, to make sense of the books of the Prophets. Most of the prophets by we have books written, find themselves writing and speaking to *these* very Kings, and even find themselves spoken of in these narratives. Reading the Prophets alongside these stories gives context and shape to the words they wrote.

The Priestly History

Having not completed the Deuteronomistic History, we now enter into what scholars call the Priestly History in Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah. These all may have been one book at one point (Ezra and Nehemiah certainly seem to have been). After some of the Israelites returned to Jerusalem, they were absolutely dismayed and discouraged. What did it mean to be the people of God with no land to call their own, no temple, and no king? If these were the markers of their identity, and they were now gone, what do they make of their faith?

With no King around, the Priests took on a *much* more active role in the daily lives of the Israelites. This Priestly History marks the beginning of a radical shift and redefinition of Judaism that will continue to blossom and see its fulfillment around the time of Jesus. Prophets were also speaking during this time (Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi, and maybe Joel), and they spoke very optimistically about the political future of the Jews should they maintain their obedience to Yahweh. The Priests, though, took a slightly different approach, as represented in this History. Things to look out for and notice:

- Reading the Deuteronomistic History, one would think that the most important litmus test for the country was the King. The Priests went about starting to re-locate the Jewish faith from one concerning land and kings to one concerning personal purity and piety. Look for emphases on "mercy" and "obedience" rather than "sacrifice".
- If the role of the Jewish nation was no longer to grow and sustain an independent political entity, then now it was to be a light to other nations; to be a blessing to them, and show them what life could look like under the reign and rule of Yahweh. They were to seek the service and conversion of other nations' inhabitants to be Yahweh-worshippers. Look for a more optimistic view of foreign nations.
- In trying to rebuild the broken identity of these Israelites, there is a much larger emphasis on the *covenant* rather than *the nation* or *the land*. There are a lot more statements re-affirming the eternality of God's plan and promise. Look for much more lofty and elevated and abstract language that *spiritualizes* the things that were once thought of as *material* promises from God.
- And lastly, and most importantly, look for a radically positive re-interpretation of Israelite History. The Priestly re-telling is trying to

build up the people's confidence that they are a glorious people who are the recipients of the eternal promises of God! If they can just get their own personal, present piety in line, then all can be well once more (even if it is "redefined").

1 & 2 Chronicles

The book of Chronicles can seem like *deja-vu*. It's a great example of how the Israelites sought to stay faithful to their tradition in changing times by updating and (dare I say?) even *changing* their tradition to make sense of their current circumstance. Chronicles was written to those that had come back from the exile and were super depressed with the state of things.

Content:

Chronicles is a retelling of the material found in Kings. Some of the differences? Kings is a political account from the prophet's viewpoint; Chronicles is the religious account written from the priest's viewpoint. Kings emphasize the sins of the nation; Chronicles emphasizes the glory of the nation, especially the four revivals in Judah.

This is why Chronicles omits almost *all* the bad stuff from the lives of David and Solomon. No conflict with Saul, no Bathsheba, no rebellious son, no sins of Solomon, and almost the entire history of the Northern Kingdom.

It's much more aware of the surrounding nations and how Israel is called to *serve* them.

Background:

- The author(s) of Chronicles wanted to root this moral and religious history of the people in as much of the Bible as possible, and so they take much from other books of the Bible. Genealogies, quotes, poetry, history, and laws, are copied verbatim from almost every other book of Scripture, especially the Pentateuch and Samuel-Kings. It seems like the author(s) used Samuel-Kings as a base text and then edited it and built off of it, incorporating quotes from all the other books as well. Remember, this was meant to be a glorious celebration of Israelite History.

- There are some historical events that are not talked about in the other historical books that are found only in Chronicles (the Egyptian Shistak's campaign and Hezekiah's protection of the Israelite water supply before the Assyrian attack are two examples).
- Several other books are quoted and referenced that we no longer have, such as a book called *Acts of Solomon*. There are also Prophets included in Chronicles that are not written about elsewhere, like Ahijah and Shilonite.

Purpose/Identity Formation:

- The main question of the book is this: *who are we now that we've lost everything?* This book attempts to retell their history in such a way that the file can happen and they can *still* be the glorious people of God.
- The book is not trying to "hide" the "bad" parts of their history. After all, the book is *right next* to Kings. It's rather trying to *emphasize* what the Deuteronomists did not: *that God is bigger than the king. God is bigger than the nation. God is bigger than the temple. And he has chosen us. And he has been working his purposes in and through us then entire time, in spite of our sin.*

Interesting Bits:

- Concerning the Passover lamb: Exodus 12 says to take the lamb and roast it, but *not boil it*; Deuteronomy 16 says to boil it, but not roast it; 2 Chronicles 35 says to *roast it in water*. Chronicles represents a *combing* of the traditions. (By the way, some translators, due to a commitment to try and diminish any "apparent" "contradictions" in Scripture translate that word "boil" in Deuteronomy 16 as "roast", but I promise, in Hebrew, it does not mean roast--it means boil.)
- If you want one of the most well-known differences between Kings and Chronicles, read about the dedication of the temple by Solomon in both 1 Kings 8 and 2 Chronicles 7. They are *very* different and, in the account, you can pick up almost every distinctive feature of the Priestly History I mentioned above.
- Just Google "chronicles contradictions" to find list after list of the *many* differences of Chronicles with other places in the Bible. You will also find people's attempts at "resolving" many of these "discrepancies", under an assumption that these differences does

damage to the Bible, rather than it just being a different emphasized history.

Jesus/New Testament:

- As said before, Chronicles begins retelling the Israelite History in a way that sets the groundwork for a new era of Jewish theology that can be compatible without the temple, a king, or an independent land. By extension, this means that Chronicles is also setting the stage for Christianity to come out of Judaism and it be a more logical development than if Christianity had just popped up during the time of David (for example).
- It represents various Kings as being part of a cosmic plan of redemption, bringing about God's promises in the world. The nation seems to have been swept up into the great universal story of which Jesus will be the climax. Chronicles starts lifting our eyes upward towards the *God of Israel*, rather than just the *God of Israel*.
- As said before, promises that were seen primarily as material, are now seen in bigger, more eternal, more cosmic terms. This allows room in their theology for Yahweh to fulfill these old promises of land, peace, and political influence in more "spiritual" or abstract ways. Jesus will ultimately be the bridge between Kings and Chronicles, by accomplishing abstract spiritual goals (defeating sin and death, and ushering in a New Creation), but by very material, earthly, blood-and-sweat sort-of ways (his ministry, cross, and Resurrection).

Application/Why Would You Go Here?:

As said above, the main question of the book is this: *who are we now that we've lost everything?* This is a season we all find ourselves in now and then. Chronicles is an amazing book to visit when you feel like you've lost everything that made you a child of God. Either your church has failed you, your marriage is gone, or you feel you've sinned away your day of grace. Reading Chronicles reminds us of the promises of God and how God works in spite of how life, our leaders, our churches, and our own sin tend to muck it up.

Ezra & Nehemiah

Contents:

In these books, we see the beginning of the rebuilding of Jerusalem. First, we hear about the rebuilding of the temple, then we read about the rebuilding of the city walls--a necessary defense in the precarious area in which the Israelites find themselves.

Ezra

Cyrus the Great, prophesied about in Isaiah, takes over Babylon and with it, takes all of its vassals as his own. He appoints Sheshbazar to begin laying the foundation for the Jewish temple, and this is finished by Zerubbabel.

Part 1 of the book is about the return of Jews to Israel and the rebuilding and completion of the new temple, started by Zerubbabel, completed under the guidance of Ezra. In the beginning of the book, as they start rebuilding, we see a letter written by one of the neighboring peoples to the King of Persia warning him that if he lets the Israelites grow too much in power, they will try and rebel. The Persians look back in their archives, find Cyrus' decree and allow the Israelites to continue work. Ezra leads them to rebuild and then dedicate the temple.

Part 2: Years later, Ezra returns to purify the Israelites as a people. He reinstates the Mosaic law, and even carries with him the authority of the Persian King saying that they *must* follow the rules of Yahweh. There is a heavy emphasis by Ezra to purify the Israelites from their intermarriage to other foreign, local peoples.

Nehemiah

Nehemiah is working in the court of King when he hears about the city's lack of walls. He asks if he can go help rebuild them, and is appointed governor of the area. He leads the people in rebuilding the walls, and then leads the people back into obedience to the laws of Moses. He leaves for roughly twenty years, then comes back for a visit, only to see the Israelites have backslidden and have taken foreign wives again. He decides to stay

to enforce the marital ethnic purity. The book oddly ends with a condemnation of mixed marriages.

Background:

- Babylon gave themselves up to Cyrus after one battle. Even before gaining Babylon, Cyrus had amassed the biggest empire the world had known at that time. Babylon was terrified of him and knew they would lose. They tried to fight him once, it didn't work, so they just surrendered.
- After Cyrus died, there was a lot of drama for his throne, so eventually, when the Kingship was settled, it is only natural that the King didn't know what a past King had decreed about the temple of a small random province in his Kingdom. This is why they had to go into their archives.
- It was the regular practice of the Persians to allow local peoples to worship freely and maintain their cultural autonomy.
- A few things to remember about the Israelites at this time:
 - When the Babylonians took the Israelites into exile, they only took the "most important" Israelites--the "cream of the crop"; they didn't take them all. They left a lot of Israelites behind.
 - These Israelites had moved on. They had moved into the abandoned city center, kept talking Hebrew (there returning comrades spoke Aramaic now), and had even assimilated themselves with the local religions and culture.
 - There was, needless to say, a lot of cultural tension between all of these "important" Israelites returning and all of the poorer Israelites who were now being displaced by them.
 - Also, there weren't that many Israelites returning. It wasn't like a mass exodus back to Jerusalem or anything. The city was just rubble, for the most part. Most Jews still lived abroad, scattered throughout the world, having created lives for themselves wherever they were, and they would stay that way, even to today (this is why a Jew like Esther is still living in the Persian capital years after the Jews are allowed to return home).
- The man Ezra was also a priest, and is considered by Judaism one of the most influential people of the faith since Moses. An old Jewish saying says "if Moses hadn't written the Law, then Ezra surely would have."

Purpose/Identity Formation:

As part of the Priestly History, the main point is that God has a great cosmic plan he is working in this world and he has invited his people to be a part of it. They need to turn their focus from their woes and difficulties and begin really focusing on their own personal obedience and holiness, because *that* is now the locus for God's work in the world: the righteous lives of his people.

Interesting Bits:

- No one knows what happened to the first two governors of Judea. Both Sheshbazar and Zerubbabel just disappear after the first few sections of the books.
- The books of Ezra and Nehemiah are really interesting, as they are very inconsistent in their storytelling. They jump from third-person into the first person "memoirs" (as they are called) of Ezra and Nehemiah. They include legal correspondence and letters that are thrown into parts of the story that don't match when they were written (the letter that opens up Ezra, for example: though it is in the part of the book talking about the very beginning of the building project, it's addressed--and was sent to-- a King that ruled twenty years after this part of the story).
- Scholars argue whether or not Ezra or Nehemiah came first. No one knows, and there are good arguments for both sides.
- Ezra begins with the last verse of 2 Chronicles, showing how these books are connected.

Jesus/New Testament:

If Chronicles laid out the history that enabled Jesus to make sense as part Judaism, then Ezra was the one that ushered in the theology. He was the one that drew the people into a Judaism based around personal faith and piety, while maintaining a corporate identity. It was no longer the case that the people could more or less do what they want while the leaders were the representatives of the nation. No. They were, as God had called them on Sinai, a "nation of priests".

Application/Why Would You Go Here?:

- To see what it looks like for people to pick up the pieces of their life and identity. There's "happiness" in Ezra-Nehemiah, but it's not a "happy book". It depicts real-life: even in the midst of trying to regain your own stability and composure you will have to deal with annoying and unnecessary set-backs (like annoying neighbors). Even after the joyful dedication of the temple, the older Israelites who could remember the previous temple tear their clothes in mourning because this temple just isn't the same as the other one.
- The book stresses continued faithfulness and obedience in life's difficult seasons in response to God's continued faithfulness towards us.
- Many sermon series on leadership base their sermon points on these books (mainly Nehemiah). Many lessons on leadership can be gleaned by watching these governors successfully lead the people in these building projects.

Esther

Welcome to one of the most unexpectedly difficult books in the Bible. It does not read like religious literature, God's name is not mentioned there, and our oldest collections of Hebrew Scriptures do not include it. It has no connection with the rest of the Bible, except that it involves Israelites. It takes place after Cyrus' decree for the Israelites to return, but there's no mention of Israelites returning, Jerusalem, the covenant, or *anything* like that. Further, there's nothing *distinctively* "Jewish" about Esther. She does not seem to keep dietary laws, there are no prayers, songs, nor visions. She freely hides her Jewishness and pleases the King one night with all the other virgins. She ultimately helps her people only after Mordecai points out she will die as well if she does nothing. This is morally ambiguous literature at *best*.

Content:

The book opens with Xerxes wife, Vashti defying her husband. She's deposed, and when Xerxes anger dies down, he seeks a new wife. They gather a bunch of virgins for him to choose from, and he chooses Esther because of her beauty. When her cousin Mordecai doesn't give honor to

an official named Haman, Haman's anger leads him to call for a genocide of all of the Israelites. Xerxes agrees, not knowing his wife is one of them. Esther defies her husband's privacy requests and tells him about Haman's true intentions. Haman ends up being put to death, the Israelites become an exalted people, and Mordecai is exalted in the administration of Xerxes.

Background:

- Though many point out the literary and artistic flourishes to the book, there does seem to be a historic "core" to the book of some kind, and though no name of Vashti or Esther appear in relation to Xerxes outside this story, there is a reference that seems to be of a "Morduku" working as official around the time Esther is to have taken place.
- But, most scholars, even super-conservative ones, see this book as mainly historical fiction, perhaps building off of the fact that there seems to have been a Jew in the administration of the King at the time. And that's okay: the biblical writers were allowed to do that.

Purpose/Identity Formation:

This is a tough one. The only connection that Rabbi's have been able to find with this book and the rest of the OT is when Deuteronomy says that God will "hide his face" from the Israelites. If taken prophetically, this Hebrew word for "hide" is sort-of the same word (consonants-only) for the name *Esther*. And so, in Rabbinic tradition, they would say that this is a time when God was "hiding his face" from the Israelites. In other words, it's to encourage Jews living abroad that even though they are away from their people and their land and their temple, God is still moving among them in these foreign lands (remember that Priestly History! Although, most scholars don't include Esther in that History).

Interesting Bits:

- The Book of Esther is the only book of the Old Testament not represented or even mentioned in the Dead Sea Scrolls.
- The King here is the same King Xerxes in the movie *300* who tried to take over Greece to no avail.

- From a feminist perspective, Esther is an interesting book, as it shows Esther using her sexuality to make a place in the kingdom that Xerxes' previous wife did not have. In the end, it seems to exalt authoritative women in the redemptive plan of God.

Jesus/New Testament:

- In Jesus' own ministry and "working out of the redemption of his people", you see him empowering and using women who had, for the most part, abused their sexuality. Esther almost "feels" like a proto-Mary Magdalene.
- In a more allegorical sense, we see in the story that a sentence of death has been declared over God's people, and it isn't until one of their own, who happens to be at the right hand of the king, enter into the presence of the King and offers both intercession and propitiation (a substitute--Haman: the one man who would die to save all of God's people. Interestingly, Haman is served a "Last Supper" by Esther with the King before being sent to his death).
- The "silence" of God in the passage hints that the nature of our God is one of humility, quietness, and meekness. He need not always be flashy or over-the-top. This hints at how he he will accomplish his greatest miracles and acts of salvation: quietly, in a human being, from a small town, in relative obscurity, surrounded by a group of sinners and fisherman.

Application/Why Would You Go Here?:

Historically, there is a long tradition of emphasizing the doctrine of Providence in this book. In other words, in this book, you can see how God often works in this world to bring about the salvation of his people. Sometimes he is never named, sometimes he uses sinful people, sometimes he uses people that are not his own, and sometimes he uses people when they are far from his temple. It's to be reminded of the subtle, humble, quiet ways that God often works in our lives.

PART 3: The Prophets, Pt. 1

There were two groups (almost like political parties):

The Ephraimite/Israelite Prophets

- took on name of Nabi
- Northern Kingdom
- Marginal (they did not have the ear of the King. Not part of the "central" prophets)
- Typically "heard" the Word of Yahweh
- Associated with Deuteronomistic Literature

The Judean Prophets

- called themselves Hozeah ("Seers") - Received messages through visions
- Southern Kingdom
- Access to central powers of Jerusalem society
- Ezekiel: one of the first people deported (along with other "high up" people)
- Associated with Priestly Literature

Israelite prophetic history follows their political history. Saul tore country apart. David, wanting to unite nation, appoints two different prophets--one from the North, one from the South. Nathan seems to be Ephraimite = loyal to centralized temple in Jerusalem, but he's also critical of David (he's the one that condemns David after Bathsheba stuff). There was also Gad = Judean, offers a way of forgiveness for David so they can move on.

Divided Kingdom comes. Ephraimites (1 Kings 12:31 & 13:33) = allied with David and Temple, so they were out of power and judgmental of all kings of the North. They were the ones that collected many of the Northern traditions and brought them down to the South after Assyrians. They then worked with Josiah to put together the D stuff. Elijah/Elijah are good examples of an Ephraimite Prophet. Isaiah and Nahum are great examples of Judean prophets. Nahum attacks Assyria a lot. Seems to reflect thoughts of Jerusalem folks

Exile and Post-Exile happens. These two "parties" begin to blend behind a more urgent and common goal and identity. Distinctions begin to fall away.

- There comes a loss of confidence because of the fall of the city

- There were so *many* differing prophetic voices
- So, they relied more upon the already-written prophecy which they *knew* were right
- Eventually, this gives rise to Apocalypticism (seen most clearly in the Book of Daniel). As they begin to realize that their political fortunes aren't changing anytime soon, they look *outside* for their salvation. For a Messiah. Cosmic battle. Time will end. History will end. The Garden of God will be bought back and everything will be "right" again. This is when Daniel comes into play.

Israel only has four prophets that speak specifically to them: Elijah and Elisha, Amos, and Hosea. Judah and the post-exilic.

The post-exile community has Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi (there's some disagreement as to whether Joel might have been here also, as well as some parts of Isaiah).

It's helpful to remember that every other Prophet spoken about is speaking to Judah, the Southern Kingdom, for whom there seems to be more "hope" that they might stay righteous and obedient.

Excursus

What do we make of the atrocities of God's people?

In the books of Numbers and Joshua, God commands the Israelites to commit genocide on many different people, including their women and children. He also commands them to forcibly enslave others. And in still another story, he commands Moses to take the remaining virgins of this particular people of which they disobediently did not kill all, and divide them evenly among the soldiers and the "rest of the Israelites". We can only imagine what for.

A few quick thoughts: One, you can't appeal to any standard of "iniquity" or "sinfulness" or "all people deserve that kind of justice" because Yahweh says *specifically*--several times--what his reasoning for commanding this

was. It was *not* because these people were evil. It was simply because they lived in the land that Yahweh wanted to give to the Israelites, and there was a fear their faith would woo the Israelites away.

Every Christian needs to figure out what they're going to do with this. This is the main attack of our generation of atheists, and so each of us needs to figure out how we might sleep easy while worshipping the God of this Bible.

But first, there's a temptation some times when it comes to this stuff to try and find the answer in studying the history/archaeology/cultural context for these texts. This is certainly what I've done, and I've found a lot of help in that. But, whatever you might want to do with this history of the text, there *has* to be a way to appropriate these texts *regardless* of how much studying the reader has done. We can and should investigate the backgrounds of these books, but at the end of the day, the only *truly* satisfying answer should come from within the materials we have to work with here.

In other words, if our response is not something readily available to even the most un-educated among us, then it won't be ultimately helpful in the ways it needs to be.

While there's *much* more that can/should be said about this than what we can do in this class, here's what I'll say to try and help us: our interpretive framework and presupposition with which to approach these texts *cannot first and foremost* be a belief about the Bible itself. The primary filter we bring to this should not be a belief about the historicity or literalness of the Bible--one way *or* the other. Our interpretive filter ***must be Jesus himself.***

Why? The Bible says that *he* is the clearest and truest revelation of the nature of God--*not* the Bible. As I've said in an earlier class, *the Bible itself is not the revelation of God*; it's the place where the Holy Spirit *reveals* God to us *within* the text. Some writers have poetically articulated this by

saying that God is revealed "behind" or "in-between" the letters of the Bible's words and not "within" them. The words on the page are not God, no matter how "clearly" it seems to be making some claim as to his nature or his prerogative. Jesus is.

So what does this mean practically? Well, lots of people whose *most important* belief seems to be "the Bible is such-and-such kind of way" seem to inadvertently prioritize the Bible over Jesus. They will twist and force our picture of Jesus to fit him into the harder parts of Scripture, rather than vice versa. They would rather greatly de-emphasize--and in some cases, completely toss out--clear parts of Jesus' revelation of God in order to make him seem in line with this God of Numbers and Joshua.

And though those justifications may satisfy us intellectually for a time, I hope we all agree that these explanations still feel deeply hollow and unsatisfactory at a spiritual and worshipful level.

As Christians, we have a responsibility to choose Jesus over the Bible. And so, when you have to choose between God as revealed in Joshua, and God as revealed in Jesus, being a Christian means you *have to choose Jesus*. You must be at least *willing*--if necessary--to twist, reinterpret, change your perspective on, and, yes, maybe sometimes even *toss some ideas out* when *anything* goes against who God is as seen in Christ. Many Christians will say that we'll never have to make that choice, but the older I get, I personally have to question that.

The Bible is a human book. It itself is no more divine than a church building. But, it is the sovereignly chosen meeting place of God with His People, when used by the Holy Spirit to that end.

We also have to understand that in the whole sweep of redemptive history, the Israelites at this point still have only a fuzzy picture of who Yahweh is. He has not revealed very much about his nature yet at this point in the story. In these early books, we have hardly any statements referring to the afterlife, angelology, life after death, any sort of "heaven" idea, or *even that*

Yahweh is the only God in existence (the Israelites, for most of their pre-exilic history, believed in the *existence* of other gods, they just believed there's was superior)!

As an analogy, if you want as comprehensive and accurate of a picture of someone's father as possible, would you rather talk to one of their children when that child is two, or 42?

The book of Joshua is when the Israelites are still two, using whatever words they can to describe their Daddy. The New Testament is, in a sense, God's older children--with perspective, age, and wisdom--talking about this Father. And ultimately, in Jesus, we're talking to the Father himself.

I hope these things begin a conversation and some thoughts that lead us to seeing God more clearly--as he is seen in Jesus--and not more confusedly as he is sometimes made in our silly attempts at resolving things that need not ever be brought together.