

LECTURE 7
HISTORICAL BOOKS OVERVIEW
REDEMPITIVE HISTORY

INTRODUCTION

I. AUTHOR(S)

- The Deuteronomic History: Joshua, Judges, 1&2 Samuel, 1&2 Kings.
- The Chronistic History: 1&2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah
- Others: Ruth and Esther

Before considering these divisions in further detail the traditional Jewish view of authorship will be tabulated.

Book	Author
Joshua	Joshua
Judges	Samuel
Ruth	Samuel
1 & 2 Samuel	Samuel, Nathan, Gad
1 & 2 Kings	Jeremiah
1 & 2 Chronicles	Ezra
Ezra/Nehemiah	Ezra
Esther	Mordecai/Esther

A. THE DEUTERONOMIC HISTORY

Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings

1. Critical Views

a. Otto Eissfeldt: Hexateuch

Otto Eissfeldt regarded the book of Joshua as the concluding volume of a Hexateuch in which the documentary sources (J, E D & P) could also be traced. The “Documentary Hypothesis” has already been critiqued in our study of the Pentateuch.

Much of critical scholarship has been characteristically preoccupied with the history of the book’s composition. Some advocates of the documentary hypothesis in the Pentateuch sought to trace the putative pentateuchal sources into both Joshua and Judges. This approach has now all but been abandoned in these books, largely due to the influence of M. Noth’s monumental thesis in 1943 regarding the “Deuteronomistic History” (DH).¹

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b. Martin Noth: Tetrateuch

Martin Noth rejected attempts to trace Pentateuchal sources into the Historical books. Instead, he separated Deuteronomy from the Pentateuch and joined it with Joshua through Kings (excluding Ruth). He argued that this material was put together by a post-exilic pro-Josianic redactor (the "Deuteronomist") using different sources. Utilizing Deuteronomy as an introduction, and emphasizing its covenantal retribution theology, the Deuteronomist traced the punishments of the Israelite kingdoms to their idolatry and wrote a history of Israel which supported Josiah's centralization of political and religious power in Jerusalem.

c. Frank Cross: Two Deuteronomists (Dtr1 and Dtr2)

Frank Cross argued for two Deuteronomists (Dtr1 and Dtr2) who were distinguished by their different attitudes to the monarchy. Cross believed that Dtr1 wrote during the time of Josiah (640-609 BC), emphasizing the sins of the North and the "unconditional" nature of the divine choice of King David in the South. Since he wrote before the exile, he was more optimistic than Dtr2.

Dtr2, writing during the exile, took Dtr1, updated the history, and added the events from Josiah to the fall of Judah (586 BC), which he blamed on the sins of Manasseh. This material emphasizes the conditionality of the Davidic promises and has a more pessimistic tone.

2. Evangelical View**a. Advantages of the Noth/Cross theory**

The Noth/Cross theory is useful in that it highlights two important elements which link the four historical books: Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings.

(i) A unified philosophy of history

The idea of reward for obedience to the covenant and punishment for disobedience is foundational for the historical books. Just as Deuteronomy 32 is a "Bible," or phrase book, for the Old Testament prophets, Deuteronomy 28 may be seen as the "Bible" for the authors of the historical books.²

(ii) The Law of the King and the Prophet

The continuity between Deuteronomy and the historical books is also seen in how the law of the king (Dt.17:14ff) and the law of the prophet (Dt.18:9ff) influence the later history dealing with political and spiritual leadership (Jos.23; 1 Samuel 12; 1 Kgs.19).

b. Difficulties with the Noth/Cross Theory*(i) Late date*

² B Arnold and B Beyer, *Encountering the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), 162.

(ii) Literary disjunction

Such a division also denies the canonical function of Deuteronomy in its authoritative reinterpretation of the first four books.³

(iii) Many Differences

They undoubtedly share a common worldview, a deuteronomistic world-view. But they are also quite distinct in many ways.⁴

*(iv) A Deuteronomistic Testament*c. Summary

To what extent the anonymous author of Kings had a hand in the compilation of Joshua, Judges, or Samuel is impossible to determine. But he conceived of his work as a continuation and culmination of that history. To that extent we may refer to a Deuteronomistic historian.⁵

Surely the historical books do reflect the theology of Deuteronomy in significant ways. The term *Deuteronomistic* can thus be used in a more neutral, descriptive way to refer to those books or ideas reflective of the distinctive viewpoints found in Deuteronomy – with no conclusions concerning authorship of Deuteronomy or the other books inherent in the use of the term. This is the understanding of the term when it is employed in the present work.⁶

Conclusion: In view of the historical, theological and literary connections between Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings, we shall call the author of the four latter books “The Deuteronomist.” This, however, does not exclude the possibility of more than one author, though each writer shared the same “Deuteronomistic” outlook.

B. THE CHRONISTIC HISTORYChronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah

The “Chronistic History” consists of Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah. It is the third major “family” of Old Testament narratives (following the Pentateuch and the Deuteronomistic history).

There are three general views on the authorship of the Chronistic History:

1. Ezra was the author of both 1 & 2 Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah. This is the view of the Talmud.
2. The author of 1 & 2 Chronicles also wrote Ezra-Nehemiah (or edited them into a final form), but this person was not Ezra.

³ B Arnold and B Beyer, *Encountering the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), 163.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 163.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 163-164.

⁶ D M Howard, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Historical Books* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1993), Electronic Edition.

3. The author of Ezra and Nehemiah was (were) different from the author of 1 & 2 Chronicles.

E J Young highlights four features which connect and unite Chronicles with Ezra/Nehemiah.

- The same religious standpoint, centering about the Temple and priesthood, is found in all these works.
- The same interest in statistical records and genealogies appears in all these works.
- The language and style of the books is similar.
- The similarity between the conclusion in Chronicles and the beginning of Ezra.⁷

In addition to this, scholars also point to the non-canonical 1 Esdras, which retells the same story as the end of 2 Chronicles and Ezra, and does so without showing a break between the two.

On the other hand, critical scholars with an interest in denying single authorship have been anxious to sever Chronicles from Ezra/Nehemiah. They, therefore, strive to highlight the differences. For example:

- The weekly Sabbath which features prominently in Ezra/Nehemiah (Neh.9:14; 10:31; 13:15-22) has no role in Chronicles
- While Chronicles is anxious to incorporate Northern Israel (1 Chron.11:1-3; 12:23-40; 2 Chron.19:4; 30:1-2; 34:6-7), Ezra and Nehemiah sometimes seem opposed to those living in the North (Ez.4-6; Neh.2:19-20; 4:1-15; 6:1-14; 13:4-29).
- Solomon's sins of immorality are not mentioned in Chronicles but are used as a warning against mixed marriage in Nehemiah 13:26.
- Chronicles emphasizes David and Kingship, whereas Ezra/Nehemiah focuses on Moses and the Exodus.
- The fall of the northern kingdom is essentially ignored in 1 & 2 Chronicles but referred to in Ezra 4.
- Prophets and miracles abound in 1 & 2 Chronicles but are absent in Ezra-Nehemiah.

C. ESTHER AND RUTH

Liberal scholars describe Esther as a literary romance with a kernel of truth in it, while Ruth is regarded as a post-exilic tract against the harsh nationalistic exclusiveness of Ezra and Nehemiah. Evangelical views will be considered in the relevant lectures.

⁷ E J Young, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (London: Tyndale Press, 1953), 382.

II. DATE(S)

Historical distance between events and writing does not, in and of itself, necessitate the conclusion that the writing will be less than accurate. On the one hand, records or traditions could easily have preserved earlier events for access in later times. On the other hand, the divine author of Scripture could have directly revealed to the human authors the necessary information – otherwise unknown and unrecorded – for certain portions of their works. Many who affirm Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch have little problem with the historical distance between Moses and all the events in Genesis. By the same reasoning, there is no *necessary* compulsion to argue for early authorship of the (anonymous) works found in the historical corpus.⁸

III. HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

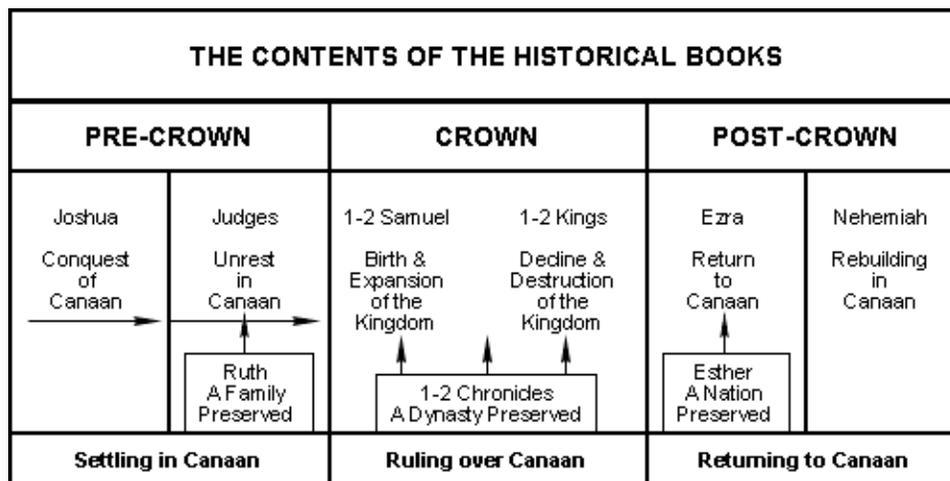
1. Chronology

The history related in the historical books (Joshua-Esther) is usually divided into seven periods.

Conquest	40 years (1407–1367 BC).
Judges	324 years (1367–1043 BC).
United Monarchy	112 years (1043–930 BC).
Divided Monarchy	210 years (930–722 BC).
Judean	135 years (722–586 BC).
Exilic	48 years (586–538 BC).
Postexilic	106 years (538–432 BC).

2. Monarchical eras

While the time of composition may be much later, the events narrated in the Historical books may be divided into three monarchy-related eras:



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⁸ J E Smith, *The Pentateuch* (Joplin, Mo.: College Press Pub. Co., 1993), Electronic Edition.

⁹ Ibid., Electronic Edition.

3. The Importance of History

God's word for the world is largely a narrative of his relationship with one nation, and his plan for establishing a relationship with all humankind.¹¹

The Bible's message is given, to a large extent, through historical writings, and not, say, abstract philosophical treatises. It is through historical writings about historical events that we learn much about God and His purposes for humans. As noted, the intent of these historical writings is to provide an accurate account of the history of God's people, and their message is undermined if their historical accuracy is compromised.¹²

The study of history ought to inspire students with generous ideals of active and responsible citizenship, with sincere ambitions for sane, strong leadership, with convictions regarding national policies and the power to distinguish between that which is clever and that which is fine and noble. No history surpasses that of the Hebrew people in its power to transmit and impress such results as these.¹³

4. Historical selectivity

The modern writer's purpose in writing a history, then, is important, and it is usually inseparable from his or her own background, experience, philosophies, and so on. The purpose may be reportorial, proclamative, didactic, nationalistic, hortatory, or polemical. We may apply this same insight into our evaluation of biblical writers. That is, our evaluations of them must include a sensitivity to their own purposes as expressed in their works and to their own biographies and experiences, insofar as these may be identified as essential parts of their works' purposes. Thus, in the chapters that follow, close attention will be paid to listening to these works on their own terms – their own stated (or visible) purposes, methods, and emphases.¹⁴

IV. LITERARY ANALYSIS

1. Literary Arrangement

a. The Hebrew Bible

¹⁰ Ibid., Electronic Edition.

¹¹ B Arnold and B Beyer, *Encountering the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), 159.

¹² G L Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1998), Electronic Edition.

¹³ F K Sanders, *The History of the Hebrews* (New York: Scribners, 1914), pp. 6–7.

¹⁴ G L Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1998), Electronic Edition.

b. The Christian canon

The Christian canon separates and groups together all the books that are predominantly historical in nature. These historical books narrate the story of Israel's history from a religious viewpoint.

c. J. Sidlow Baxter⁴

J Sidlow Baxter has proposed a modern threefold breakdown of Old Testament books as they appear in the English Bible. He classifies the first seventeen books as history and the last seventeen as prophecy. Sandwiched between are the five experiential books which focus on the inner life of Old Testament believers

I. HISTORY (17)

A. *Basic Law* (5)

B. *Pre-exilic Records* (9)

C. *Postexilic Records* (3)

II. EXPERIENCE (5): the heart**III. PROPHECY (17)**

A. *Basic Prophecy* (5)

B. *Pre-exilic Prophets* (9)

C. *Postexilic Prophets* (3)

2. Literary Continuity

Although each book is a separate entity, the authors seem to have been conscious of contributing to an ongoing work of history.

a. Deuteronomy and Joshua

The divine promises and exhortations that introduce Joshua (1:1-9) are almost all found in Moses' speeches in Deuteronomy. Compare: Deut.10:11/Joshua 1:2; Deut.11:23-25/Joshua 1:3-5a; Deut.31:6-8,23/Joshua 1 :5b-7a,9; Deut.5:32-33/Joshua 1 :7b-8

b. Joshua and Judges

After an introduction (Jdg.1:1-2:5), Judges refers back to Joshua (Jdg.2:6-10), quotes from it, and parallels it in some of the historical narrative.

c. Judges and Samuel

Judges shows the need of a Judahite king and Samuel records the provision of this. The early parts of Samuel seem to still reverberate with the refrain of Judges "in those days Israel had no king."

d. Samuel and Kings

Some scholars have argued that 2 Samuel 9-10 is a continuous narrative with 1 Kings 1 and 2, therefore

⁴ J. Sidlow Baxter, *Explore the Book* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1960), 1:15–20.

suggesting a common author.

An obvious discontinuity appears to separate The Deuteronomic History from the Chronistic History. After Kings, Chronicles begins with genealogies stretching back to Adam. However continuity occurs again with the opening verses of Ezra repeating the concluding verses of Chronicles.

3. Literary Genre

Although we can find poems, lists, genealogies, and songs in the historical books, they are largely historical narrative written in prose form. They record sacred history, an account of past events with the purpose of edification and instruction. Some of the distinctive features of sacred history are:

a. Historical

Biblical history tells a true story of the past in a literary form.

b. Artistic

Historical narrative is a work of art, with careful attention paid to how it is crafted. A writer not only asks, “*What* do I want to say?” but also, “*How* do I want to say it?” The presence of artistic touches does not mean, of necessity, that a text is historically inaccurate.

c. Diverse

No one Bible book contains all that God has to say about a particular subject. The emphasis of each historical book has to be balanced by what is said elsewhere. Implicit lessons from the narratives have to be balanced by explicit teachings in the more expository parts of Scripture.

d. Unified

Despite the diversity there is a remarkable unity of purpose and subject matter.

e. Revelatory

God uses biblical history to reveal himself. Events are given a divine perspective and evaluation.

f. Inter-active

The narratives require and evoke a response.

In this sense, it is “rhetorical,” that is, it attempts to convince and persuade. The historical narratives do that more indirectly than, say, epistolary works but, nevertheless, the authors of the historical narratives clearly had certain purposes in mind that were to encourage, warn, and persuade people of their right and wrong attitudes and courses of action. What Amos Wilder aptly says of the gospels applies equally to the historical narratives of the OT: “It is as though God says to men one by one: ‘Look me in the eye.’¹⁵

g. Theological

In the end, God is the subject and the hero of the Bible.

Even in works that emphasize human individuals, such as 1 & 2 Samuel, which highlight David, these individuals are important only as they are instruments in God’s plan. In the end, God’s dealings with humans in the historical narratives reveal to us much about Himself. We are more than entertained; we are taught.¹⁶

¹⁵ D M Howard, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Historical Books* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1993), Electronic Edition.

¹⁶ G L Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1998), Electronic Edition.

4. Literary Sources

From these ancient sources the biblical historians selected the strands of raw material with which they wove their account of covenant history. The Holy Spirit guided in the selection process so that no erroneous material was incorporated into the text.¹⁷

5. Original Meaning**V. THEMATIC ANALYSIS**

This brings us on to consider the theology of the Historical books.

Besides their historical worth, these books are also important for what they teach theologically. They describe Israel's history, but they are more than history or a record of mere historical facts. They are God's word today for all Christian believers. The church has always affirmed the value of these books for "teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness" (2 Tim.3:16). We read these books for more than their historical value. They trace the history of God's relationship with his nation, revealing his faithfulness and steadfast love for his people even when they broke covenant. These are important events to learn from, not merely *about*.¹⁸

We shall consider the theological themes of the Deuteronomic Books, then of the Chronistic family of books.

A. THE DEUTERONOMIC BOOKS**1. Covenant****2. Kings**

The history ends with sinful King Jehoiakin in exile; nevertheless, he is elevated to a seat of honor higher than those of other captive kings in Babylon. That glimmer of hope will not be extinguished but will shine ever brighter until the coming of the greater son of David, the true Son of God, Jesus Christ.¹⁹

¹⁷ Smith, J. E. 1995. *The books of history*. College Press: Joplin, Mo.

¹⁸ B Arnold and B Beyer, *Encountering the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), 158.

¹⁹ *Spirit of the Reformation Study Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 305.

3. Prophets

4. The Sanctuary

5. The Land

6. Apostasy

7. Punishment

8. Repentance

B. THE CHRONISTIC BOOKS

Some of the themes of the Deuteronomic books are continued into the Chronistic History. However, the Chronistic themes do further develop and focus some of the Deuteronomic themes.

1. Restoration of the Davidic Throne

2. Renewal of the Temple

3. Reunification of God's people

4. Reformation under Mosaic Law/ Divine blessing and judgment

5. Response: Call to decision

VI. NEW TESTAMENT ANALYSIS

The Deuteronomic History emphasizes failure and encourages the reader to look beyond mere human kings for their salvation. The Chronistic History emphasizes hope of restoration and rebuilding and, again, encourages the reader to look forward to a unique Davidic King who will restore and rebuild His people and His Church. Ruth and Esther show God working away “behind the scenes” working all things together for the good of His people despite all outward appearances.

From the vantage point of the New Testament, Old Testament history consists of a myriad of arrows pointing to the fullness of times (Gal 4:4–5). Even so, Old Testament history is not merely a period of aimless waiting. Throughout these millennia God was moving decisively toward the goal of redemption in Christ Jesus.²⁰

VII. THE MESSAGE OF THE HISTORICAL BOOKS

Original Message:

Present Message:

²⁰ Walter Roehrs, *Survey of Covenant History* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1989), p. 11.