

## Historical Books

### 1) Joshua

The book of Joshua falls naturally into two major sections. Chapter 2 to 12 describes the miraculous conquest of the land by the tribes under Joshua's leadership and chapters 13-22 tell how Joshua divided the land among the tribes and settled all the boundary and territorial disputes. (pg. 165) Israel was not fighting on its own; it was God who gave the help and strength for this small band of tribes to overcome much more powerful enemies. Even if the battles gave Israel control over only a quarter of the land that the book describes, the victory was unbelievable unless God had helped. (pg. 166) The book of Joshua shows how the spoils of war (gold, silver, weapons, etc.) belonged to God who led them to victory because the Lord fought for them. Therefore God is ruler of the land that they possessed establishing a theocracy.

### 2) Judges

The book of Judges can be divided into three major parts. Chapter 1 and 2 set the stage by describing the situation of Israel after Joshua dies. Chapter 3 to 16 tell the stories of the twelve judges. Chapter 17 to 21 give some legends about the two tribes of Dan and Benjamin. All three sections illustrate the same lesson for Israel, namely, that God stood by them when they were faithful and obedient to him, but allowed them to fall into disaster and the results of their own sins when they turned from his covenant and disobeyed. (pg. 168)

### 4) 1 Samuel

The period of Samuel, the last judge, and of Saul, the first king, marked the most desperate moments of danger Israel had ever faced; the following reign of David and his son Solomon marked the highest success the nation would ever achieve in its long history. But kings would prove to be a mixed blessing for an Israel that prided itself on being a league of tribes with a great deal of local freedom and equality. While kings provided strong government, they often did it at the expense of every Israelite's jealously guarded rights. (pg. 194)

### 5) 2 Samuel

The book known as Second Samuel centers on the reign of David. It can be divided into two parts. Chapters 1 to 8 show how David managed to consolidate power in his own hands and to win a large kingdom for the newly united Israel. Chapters 9 to 20 record the downfall of many of his hopes as struggles in his own family weaken his reign. It is the story of how his sons fight to become his successor on the throne. Much of the tragic outcome develops from David's own sin. (pg. 197)

### 6) 1 Kings

The first and second books of Kings tell the story of the period from David's death to the fall of the southern Kingdom of Judah in 586BC before the Babylonians. They include the struggles between the Northern Kingdom and Judah, the rise and flourishing of prophecy, and religious judgments on everything that happened during these four centuries. (pg. 257)

After David's death (chaps. 1-2), his son Solomon became king. Chapters 1-11 trace the life and reign of Solomon, including Israel's rise to the peak of her glory, the spread of the nation's kingdom, and the construction of the temple and palace in Jerusalem. But in Solomon's later years, he drifted from the Lord because of his pagan wives who wrongly influenced him and turned his heart away from the worship of God in the temple. Solomon's son Rehoboam was forced to go to Shechem and discuss the situation with the tribal leaders. When he refused to make any changes in his father's policies, the ten northern tribes broke away from the king and his tribe of Judah, declaring, "What share have we in David?... To your tents, O Israel! Now look to your own house, O David" (1 Kings 12:16). Rehoboam was forced to flee south to Jerusalem to save his life, while the northern leaders called on Jeroboam, a former chief of Solomon's forced labor gangs who had revolted and fled, to be their king. Now there were two kingdoms: a northern one that called itself Israel, after the old tribal customs, and a southern one, still loyal to the house of David and Solomon, and made up of only the tribe of Judah (and the remnants of Simeon). (pg. 255-256)

### 7) 2 Kings

The Books of Kings use old records taken from a number of sources, such as the chronicles of the kings in both Judah and Israel and the legends of the prophets, but they fit them into a framework that cares much more about how faithful to Yahweh these kings had been than how much they did. (pg. 263)

Second Kings continues the history of Elijah and his successor, Elisha, but it also continues what might be termed, the "Tale of the Two Kingdoms." As such, it continues to trace the history of the Northern Kingdom of Israel and the Southern Kingdom of Judah until they are finally conquered and taken into captivity. Israel fell to Assyria in 722 B.C. and Judah fell to the Babylonians in 586 B.C. In both kingdoms the prophets continued to warn the people that God would punish them unless they repented. Second Kings teaches that willful sin in a nation has a woeful end. In 1 and 2 Samuel, the nation is born, in 1 Kings it is divided, and in 2 Kings it is dispersed. After years of pleading with His people through the prophets, God's patience finally turns to discipline just as He promised. They teach us how unfaithfulness (disobedience to God's law and rebellion) must lead to God's discipline and the overthrow of the monarchy. The two kingdoms collapsed because of the failure of the kings to rule righteously and give heed to God's truth.

### 3) Ruth

The book of Ruth appears in our Bibles right after the Book of Judges because its heroine is an ancestor of King David, whose story is told in the following books of 1 and 2 Samuel. It tells of an Israelite woman, Naomi, who goes with her husband and two sons to live in Moab. They have two sons who marry local Moabite women. But soon Naomi loses her husband and both sons in death, and she decides to return home to Israel. One of her widowed daughters-in-law, Ruth decides to follow Naomi and serve her needs, even though she is a Moabitess and would be far from her own people. In this way Ruth gives a charming example of filial respect and care that

eventually leads to her fortunate marriage with Boaz, the leading citizen of Naomi's hometown of Bethlehem. From their marriage will come the house of David. And like the book of Jonah, it has an outlook definitely favorable to foreigners. It celebrates the pious person, no matter whether Jew or Gentile! The book has a simple message about true faith in Yahweh. What matters most is fidelity. Ruth, Although a Moabitess, is a perfect example of Israelite faithfulness. (pg. 434-435)

#### 8) 1 Chronicles

Because of the changed world of Israel after the exile, The priestly leaders felt the need for an updated version of Israel's history. They took up and rewrote the great Deuteronomic History found in the Books of Samuel and Kings from their own perspective. Chronicles often follows the Books of Samuel and Kings word for word through whole chapters. But we get a sense of its distinctive message when we compare the many places where it either leaves out matter found in Kings or adds to it new material. In the story of David, for example, it leaves out altogether his sin of adultery with Bathsheba and the revolt of his own son Absalom, and never mentions David's deathbed instructions to kill all his enemies. When 2 Samuel 24 reports that David sinned in taking a census, Chronicles adds that it was Satan who tempted him. For the Chronicler, David was a holy and dedicated leader who followed Yahweh faithfully. (pg. 395)

#### 9) 2 Chronicles

While 1 Chronicles parallels 1 and 2 Samuel, 2 Chronicles continues the history of David's line and parallels 1 and 2 Kings. But for all practical purposes, it ignores the Northern Kingdom because of apostasy and total absence of any godly kings who patterned their life after David. By contrast, 2 Chronicles focuses on those kings who did walk after the lifestyle of David. Chapters 1-9 describe the building of the temple during Solomon's reign. Chapters 10-36 trace the history of the Southern Kingdom of Judah to the final destruction of Jerusalem and the exile of the people to Babylon. Therefore, it devotes extended sections to the lives of those kings who brought revival and reform to the nation like Asa, Jehoshaphat, Joash, Hezekiah, and Josiah. As mentioned, Chronicles goes over some of the same history as Samuel and Kings, but from a different perspective in order to emphasize certain things: In 1 Chronicles, David is the subject while in 2 Chronicles the house of David is central. In Kings the history of the nation is given from the throne whereas in Chronicles it is given from the altar (the temple). In Kings the palace is central, but in Chronicles the temple is prominent. In Kings the focus is on the political history while in Chronicles the focus is on the religious or spiritual element of Israel's history. Chronicles is more than simply an historical record. It is God's commentary on the spiritual characteristics of David's dynasty. Because of this, the focus is on the kingdom of Judah, the Southern Kingdom where there were revival and godly kings in David's line and why the Northern Kingdom, with no godly kings, is basically ignored.

#### 10) Ezra

The book of Ezra can be divided into two major parts: Chapters 1 to 6 and chapters 7-10. Ezra 1-6 gives us some valuable information about the first two groups of returning exiles- those under Sheshbazzar, and those under Zerubbabel. This first part of the book of Ezra reaches a

climax in the rebuilding of the temple in 516. The scene shifts to many years later in chapters 7 to 10. Under the Persian king Artaxerxes, Ezra, a priest of the highest rank, a descendant of Aaron and Zadok, is sent from Babylon to restore the practice of Israelite faith according to the instructions in the “law of God”. Ezra faced two major problems. Many Israelites had married gentiles, and this prevented them from keeping the law. In addition, there was a general disregard for the regulations about sacrifice, worship, purity, and special Jewish customs. He tackled both of these head-on. (pg. 397) After solving these issues we can find that the whole scene is told not in the book of Ezra but in Chapters 8 to 9 of Nehemiah. It was put there to link Ezra’s renewal of the covenant with Nehemiah’s completion of the city walls to make Jerusalem a safe home for the temple. Ezra was able to restore the spirit of the people and set the underpinnings for the ideals of holiness, a sense of election, and a worship-centered community of faith. He gave a new charter for a new Israel- the authentic traditions of the past now written down in the Pentateuch as a normative guidebook for the future. And most important of all, the final priestly character of the Pentateuch showed a concrete way to put these traditions into daily practice for ordinary believers. (pg 398)

#### 11) Nehemiah

Nehemiah began his work in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes I, that is about 445BC. He was a high official in the court despite the holy sounding title he bore, “royal cupbearer.” Nehemiah was a Jew, and had received a heartbreaking letter from his own brother in Palestine describing the terrible conditions that existed there. Since he was an advisor of the Persian king, he had no difficulty in getting the king’s ear. He persuaded Artaxerxes to make Judah an independent province, name him its governor and allow him to rebuild the city walls of Jerusalem. He was skilled enough in political matters to foresee that he would face great obstacles from local officials who did not want any change in the power structure. Nehemiah quickly surveyed the situation and made preparations to start on the walls shortly after his arrival. The book of Nehemiah is but up around the memoirs of the governor in chapters 1 to 7 and 11 to 13. The nature of such an ancient “autobiography” was to leave a pious record of the leader’s achievements. Thus we can express a rather glowing account of his sense of duty and his success in carrying out his tasks. At the same time, it is an extremely valuable glimpse into the life and thought of a Jew from the fifth century BC. (pg. 399) Only first person narrative in the Old Testament and he established the law of God and the Sabbath observances.

#### 12) Esther

The book of Esther contains a thrilling tale of escape from mortal danger for the Jews. It is set in the Persian period under King Xerxes, who ruled from 486-464 BC, and tells the story of a beautiful young Jewish maiden, Esther who is chosen to be his queen when he becomes angry with his first queen and divorces her. Esther brings along her cousin and guardian, Mordecai, but he soon enrages the Persian prime minister, Haman, by refusing him the preparer sings of respect. In anger, Haman convinces the king that he should destroy all the Jews in a day of slaughter because they follow their own religion and do not worship as the Persians do. In this crisis, Mordecai convinces Esther to go before the king and change his mind. The king is won over when he realizes Haman’s evil intentions. He orders the prime minister to be slain instead of

Mordecai, while he gives the Jews permission to have their own day of slaughter against their enemies. The book ends with the establishment of the Feast of Purim, to be kept forever as a memorial of this great day of victory. (pg 432-433)

## Poetic Books

### 1) Job

The book is a theodicy (a vindication of God's goodness, justice, and sovereign character in the face of the existence of suffering and evil). As such, the book wrestles with the age-old question: Why do righteous men suffer, if God is a God of love and mercy? It clearly teaches the sovereignty of God and the need for man to acknowledge such. Job's three friends gave essentially the same answer: All suffering is due to sin. Elihu, however, declared that suffering is often the means of purifying the righteous. God's purpose, therefore, was to strip away all of Job's self-righteousness and to bring him to the place of complete trust in Him. Gleason Archer gives an excellent summary of the theme: This book deals with the theoretical problem of pain and disaster in the life of the godly. It undertakes to answer the question, Why do the righteous suffer? This answer comes in a threefold form: (1) God is worthy of love even apart from the blessings He bestows; (2) God may permit suffering as a means of purifying and strengthening the soul in godliness; (3) God's thoughts and ways are moved by considerations too vast for the puny mind of man to comprehend. Even though man is unable to see the issues of life with the breadth and vision of the Almighty; nevertheless God really knows what is best for His own glory and for our ultimate good. This answer is given against the background of the stereotyped views of Job's three "comforters," Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar. A further purpose is certainly to demonstrate the conflict of the ages between God and Satan and to show the relationship of suffering to this conflict. In the end, it demonstrates the truth of Romans 8:28.

### 2) Psalms

The psalms provide us with a message of hope and comfort through the common theme of worship. They are, in essence, an antidote to fear and complaining. through a personal response to the person and work of God. They are an expression of the worship, faith, and spiritual life of Israel. In the psalms we have a mirror of the heart of God's people recording the simple, universal human experiences of man in the light of God's person, promises, plan, and presence. As a collection of a 150 psalms they naturally cover a great variety of feelings, circumstances and themes. This means it is difficult to make any generalizations about a theme or purpose, but it is safe to say that all the psalms embody a personal response on the part of the believer toward the goodness and grace of God. Often they include a record of the psalmist's own inner emotions of discouragement, anxiety, or thankfulness even when faced with the opposition of God's enemies or in view of God's varied providences. But whether the psalmist is occupied with a mournful or a joyous theme, he is always expressing himself as in the presence of the living God. Many of the psalms survey the Word of God, His attributes, and are Messianic in their scope in anticipation of the coming Messiah.

### 3) Proverbs

The author of the book is king Solomon. Solomon's reputation for wisdom was so great that Israel considered him the founder of their wisdom tradition. (pg. 418)

As suggested by the title and the meaning of the term proverb, the theme and purpose of the book is wisdom for living through special instruction on every conceivable issue of life: folly, sin, goodness, wealth, poverty, the tongue, pride, humility, justice, family (parents, children, discipline), vengeance, strife, gluttony, love, laziness, friends, life, and death. No book is more practical in terms of wisdom for daily living than Proverbs. The fundamental theme is "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge" (1:7a). The absence of a fear of God leads to an unbridled and foolish life. To fear the Lord is to stand in awe of His holy character and power. At the same time, Proverbs shows that true wisdom leads to the fear of the Lord (2:1-5). "Fear of the Lord" is a somewhat misleading translation; the Hebrew is best rendered as "the revering of Yahweh," which implies both honoring God through rituals and prayer and obeying his laws. (pg. 418)

#### 4) Ecclesiastes

The basic theme is the futility of life apart from God. In the development of this theme, four key purposes emerge. First, in seeking to demonstrate that life without God has no meaning, Solomon is seeking to demolish confidence in man-based achievements and wisdom; he shows that all of man's goals or the "way that seems right to man" must of necessity lead to dissatisfaction and emptiness." Solomon recorded the futility and emptiness of his own experiences to make his readers desperate for God. He sought to show that their quest for happiness cannot be fulfilled by man himself in the pursuits of this life. Second, Solomon affirms the fact that much in life cannot be fully understood, which means we must live by faith, not by sight. Life is full of unexplained enigmas, unresolved anomalies, and uncorrected injustices. There is much in life that man cannot comprehend nor control, but by faith, we can rest in the sovereign wisdom and work of God. Much like the Book of Job, Ecclesiastes not only affirms that man is finite, but that he must learn to live with mystery. Life down here on earth, "life under the sun," cannot provide the key to life itself for our world fallen, bankrupt. In view of this, man must have more than a horizontal outlook; he must have the upward look to God, fearing and trusting Him. Enigmas and injustices must be left in His hands to resolve. Third, Ecclesiastes presents a realistic view of life that counterbalances the optimism of Proverbs. It shows there are exceptions to the laws and promises of proverbs, at least from the standpoint of this life. Proverbs 10:16 affirms that justice is meted to the righteous and the wicked, but Ecclesiastes 8:14 observes that this is not always the case, at least not in this life. Are these contradictions? No, because Proverbs is noting the general laws of God without noting the exceptions that occur because we live in a fallen, sin-ridden world. Ecclesiastes points out that while a righteous order exists, as affirmed in Proverbs, it is not always evident to man as he views life "under the sun" from his finite perspective. Fourth, Solomon showed that man, left to his own strategies will always find life empty, frustrating, and mysterious. The book, however, does not mean that life has no answers, that life is totally useless or meaningless. Meaning and

significance can be found, he explained, in fearing God. Frustrations can thus be replaced with contentment through fellowship with God.

#### 5) Song of Solomon

The Song of Solomon is a love song filled with metaphors and imagery designed to portray God's view of love and marriage: the beauty of physical love between man and woman. The book which is presented as a drama with several scenes, has three major players: the bride (Shulamite), the king (Solomon), and a chorus (daughters of Jerusalem). The purpose of the book will depend on the viewpoint taken as to the way the book should be interpreted. The following will illustrate this in the discussion of the three views presented here. In summary, there have been three basic views on the interpretation of this Song of Solomon.

- (1) Purely an Allegory: Some have regarded it only an allegory portraying fictional characters employed to teach the truth of God's love for His people.

\*Page Numbers are attributed to the book titled "Reading the Old Testament An Introduction" by Lawrence Boadt 2nd Edition.

Other books are also used "The Old Testament Introduction" by Paul Nadim Tarazi volumes 1,2,3

Websites used [bible.org](http://bible.org) which is a very good resource when matched with the above books and when the above books seemed inadequate or away from Coptic understanding.