

Old Testament Survey - Part 24

by Dick Woodward

Hebrew history is a vital part of understanding God's plan for the consummation of human history and our own personal social history.

Duration: 27:30

Scripture: Genesis 12:1

Topics: "Old Testament", "Redemption History"

Description

This sermon delves into the importance of studying Hebrew history as recorded in the Old Testament, highlighting the lessons, warnings, and examples found in the historical narrative. It emphasizes the significance of Hebrew history as a means of understanding God's plan for humanity, the chosen people of Israel, and the prophetic implications for the future. The sermon also explores the themes of leadership, obedience, apostasy, and the ultimate redemption and restoration of God's people.

Transcript

As we continue our survey now of the Old Testament, we have completed the first section of the Old Testament. We have completed our survey of the first five books of the Bible, which are known as the law books. Now these law books are called law books because they contain the giving of the law, and they contain this law of God, or that which is sometimes called the law of Moses.

There is a sense in which these books are not only law books, but history books, because there is historical narrative in some of these first five books of the Bible. There is a sense in which we can say that the first seventeen books of the Old Testament are history books, because there is history in the first five books, and then the next twelve books of the Old Testament are history books. Now, as we come to this fact that the first seventeen books of the Old Testament are Hebrew history, we might come up with this question, why should we study so much history? Why should we study so much Hebrew history? We might find ourselves asking the question, why should we study history at all, and especially why should we study the history of this one little nation, the nation of Israel? Why has God given seventeen of his inspired books in this inspired record to the subject of Hebrew history? There are several answers to that question.

One answer we've already given many times is this. All of these things happen to them for examples, and they are written down as warnings for you and me upon whom the ends of the world are come. The Apostle Paul said that in 1 Corinthians 10, verse 11.

Many feel that that verse, even though it is in the New Testament, is the key verse to the Old Testament, especially the historical narrative of the Old Testament. All these things happen to them. They are history.

They are not just myths or something. They happen to them. But in addition to the fact that they happen and that they are historical, they contain these allegories, these object lessons, these types they are sometimes called, these examples and warnings.

So we read Hebrew history looking for examples. When they obey the word of God, when they apply the exhortation of Moses and obey the word of God, God blesses them and they become examples. When they do not obey the word of God, then they live under the curse of God and their lives very quickly become warnings for you and me upon whom the ends of the world are come.

That's one reason why we study Hebrew history then. Everything that happened to them happened for our edification, for examples for us to follow or warnings for us to heed. Another reason why the Bible gives so much space to Hebrew history is because these are the chosen people of God through whom all the nations of the earth are blessed through the coming of the Messiah.

When God decided to come into this world and become man, he didn't just become a white man or a black man or a red man or a yellow man. He created a special nation of people just for the purpose of him coming into this world. When he commissioned Abraham to be the father of those people, he said, In thee all the nations of the earth will be blessed.

Since the Messiah came through these special people, that means that Hebrew history is very special history, because this is how the Messiah came into the world. The word of God came to us also through this special nation of people, and Paul will point this out to us in his New Testament epistles. They are very special people, because not only did we get the Messiah through them and salvation and redemption which came through him, but we also through these chosen people get the oracles of God, or the very words of God.

That makes their history very special. Still another reason why Hebrew history is important. Many people wear these little pins nowadays which have these letters on them, P-B-P-W-M-G-I-F-W-M-Y.

You know, some of you, that those letters translate this way, Please be patient with me, God isn't finished with me yet. That can be written over every one of us, God isn't finished with us yet, the last chapter hasn't been written, so be patient with me. We could write those letters over the nation of Israel in a very special way.

One of the great sermons of Moses that we didn't survey in our survey of the book of Deuteronomy is a great sermon of Moses toward the end of the book where he gives us a tremendous prophecy concerning Israel. He prophesies a captivity of Israel, a dispersion of Israel, and then a return on the part of Israel to their land again. He says there will be a geographical return of the chosen people back to their holy land, and there will be a spiritual return of these people to their holy God.

It's been exciting to watch the geographical return of Israel to the holy land. We saw them become a nation in 1948. Ezekiel prophesied this, Jeremiah prophesied this, Isaiah prophesied this, and Moses prophesied this.

If you are interested in what we call biblical prophecy, if you are interested in what we call eschatology, which means the study of the last things, if you are wondering what in the world is going to happen, how is

human history going to consummate, and you know that the Bible has a lot to say about that, that God has a great plan and he will consummate human history according to that plan, you know probably that Israel is right at the heart of that plan. If you are interested in God's plan for the consummation of human history, keep your eye upon Israel and upon that holy land, because it's all going to consummate there, and it's all going to consummate around these people. The Apostle Paul tells us in one of the greatest prophetic passages that he writes, Romans 9-11, that one day all Israel will be saved.

They are going to turn back to God, and God is going to turn back to them. The Apostle Paul tells us this amazing thing, that to chastise Israel for rejecting the Messiah, God has permitted Gentiles, non-Jewish people, to be saved. He tells us in Romans 9-11, when enough Gentiles or non-Jewish people have been saved to sufficiently chastise Israel for rejecting the Messiah, then he is going to turn back to them again and all Israel will be saved.

Zechariah the prophet in Zechariah 8 tells us that one day the Jews will be great prophets again. Ten men will hold a Jew by his coat and say, God is with you, tell us of your God. Now if you get into this study of biblical prophecy, you realize that Israel is the key to that.

We've seen a geographical return on the part of Israel to their land. We have not seen, in my opinion, the spiritual return of Israel to their God. There are some very interesting rumblings in this direction.

There are some interesting happenings, like Messianic synagogues. We do see God's chosen people being born again and converted and forming Messianic synagogues. Any sign that we see that there is going to be a spiritual as well as a geographical return on the part of Israel is exciting indeed, as you consider the consummation of all things, because that's going to be a big factor in the way history is going to consummate.

So that's still another reason why we study Hebrew history. We study Hebrew history because God isn't finished with them yet, and as God does finish with them, he's going to finish with the whole world at the same time. So we should study Hebrew history for that reason.

Another reason why we study history as we embark on our study of the history books of the Old Testament might be put this way. Suppose you woke up in a hospital tomorrow and they tell you that you suffered an accident on the way home from this class, and as a result of that accident you are experiencing total amnesia. Let's suppose you don't have a clue in the world who you are or where you've come from.

You don't know who this woman is who keeps coming in and seems to be on intimate terms with you and gives you toilet articles, and these teenage kids that come in and call you Dad and you don't have any idea who they are. You're just absolutely disoriented because you've got total amnesia. That happens to people.

What would be the most important thing in the world to you at a time like that? It would be what we call your social history. I used to write social histories for a psychiatrist when I was a social worker. When a psychiatrist wants to help someone, when he wants to meet them where they are and take them on to where they should be, before he meets them he wants a social history.

He wants to know where they've been, because he believes the past has a profound influence upon the present and the future. If you found yourself suffering from amnesia, you would have an obsession to

discover your own personal social history. You simply could not get on with your life and determine where you're supposed to be and where you're supposed to be going until you could discover where you've been.

Now that's really what history is, and that's why we study history. If you want to understand the human family, where it is and where it should be and where it should be going, in order to get perspective on those things you need to get some perspective on where it's been. When you come to the Scripture, if you want to understand the people of God to whom you belong, now that you're part of the people of God, you need to understand something about the people of God, where the people of God should be, where they should be going, what their goals and values and aspirations should be.

Now in order to understand where the people of God should be and where they should be going, you need some perspective on where they've been, not just the Hebrew people of God, but the people of God. Now for all of those reasons, we're going to begin our study of the history books of the Old Testament, and we're going to study Hebrew history in the Inspired Record in the Bible. Now I'd like to give you a history lesson by way of some visuals.

Remember we said that the history of the Hebrew people began with God. God according to Genesis, which is like that great book on genetics, sources, God is the source of these people and of all people. According to Genesis, through the man named Adam, who is the father, the federal head of the human race, the human family comes into existence.

Now these special people, the chosen people, we hear about them right away in the book of Genesis. Before we've even covered 11 chapters in the book of Genesis, we hear about these special people, not just the whole human family, but these special chosen people of God. They come into existence through the patriarchs, three men, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

This is the way their beginnings are reported to us in the book of Genesis. When the book of Genesis ends, remember, the three patriarchs have become twelve tribes, or twelve families, and they are in Egypt in order to survive a famine. The book of Genesis ends with these twelve families, these twelve tribe leaders in the book of Genesis, are in the land of Egypt when that book of Genesis concludes.

Remember we said, tracing Hebrew history further through the Pentateuch, when the book of Exodus opens 400 years later, these twelve families have become a multitude. In the United States of America, in about 200 years, we multiplied from a few people in some small colonies to about 200 million people. In 400 years in Egypt, those twelve families became somewhere between 2 and 3 million people, a great multitude.

But they are just a multitude, they are just almost a mob, and one of the first things that God feels they need as he develops their history is they need a leader. So Moses is called and commissioned to be the leader of this multitude of people. We saw in the law books that Moses couldn't lead these people without some structure within which to lead them.

So he asked God on Mount Sinai to give him some structure within which to govern these people. In answer to his prayer, and I believe he was up there at least three times for 40 days and nights, fasting and praying, God gave Moses the law of God, the first five books of the Bible. That law became the structure within which Moses could lead these people.

So as their history develops, now they are not just patriarchs or tribes or an undisciplined mob or multitude of people. Now they have a leader and they have some structure for their government, and they are shaping up into a nation. As you continue in the Pentateuch, they have a big problem, and that problem is that they are in the wrong place.

They are in Egypt, even though they are now a large multitude of people with a leader and some laws, they are in the wrong place. God has a place for them, it's not Egypt, it's Canaan. So they have to experience the great deliverance from Egypt, and they do experience that deliverance from Egypt through the leadership of Moses.

That's the book of Exodus. In the book of Numbers we saw that they did not come out of Egypt and go into Canaan, but they went around in circles in the wilderness for 40 years. That's the historical narrative, essentially, in the book of Numbers.

The book of Numbers records the awesome message of the death of a generation, the death of a whole generation of these people. It's perhaps, as we said, one of the most awesome books in the Bible. The book of Joshua we'll pick up at this point.

In obedience to the exhortations of Moses in the book of Deuteronomy, they do go into the land of Canaan. Under the leadership of Joshua, they do go into the land of Canaan, and that is the message of the book of Joshua. It's a superb message, it's a superb book.

Just as the book of Numbers was a message of unbelief, they did not enter in because of their unbelief, the book of Joshua is a book about faith. Because they did have the faith, they entered in, and they did conquer Canaan and possess their spiritual possession. But the next book in the Bible, continuing just the historical thread through these books, is the book of Judges.

This comes as a link between the book of Joshua and the book of Samuel. The book of Judges covers a period of 400 years again. That's a lot of years, when you think about the fact that we've only been existing for 200 years, I think you have to conclude that Hebrew history has been going on for a long, long time.

Just between Genesis and Exodus you have 400 years. Just to cover this one book, the book of Judges, you have a 400-year period of history. During this 400 years, they go through a transition.

Seven times they commit the sin of apostasy, which means they stand away from a position that they take with God. Moses exhorts them at the end of Deuteronomy to take a position and put God first. Joshua does the same thing at the end of Joshua.

They take a position and they say, We will put God first, we will serve God. But in the book of Judges we're told that seven times in 400 years they stand away from that position. When they do, God raises up an enemy who conquers them and enslaves them.

After being enslaved by these conquerors for various periods of time, they have a revival, they have a spiritual revival. When they cry out to God for deliverance, just like they experienced from Egypt, God raises up a judge, and that's what this person is here in this symbol. God raises up a judge who is really a Savior or a deliverer, just like Moses was when they came out of Egypt.

This judge comes and leads them for various periods of time after their deliverance. They have peace for usually the lifetime of that judge, but then when that judge dies, they go through the cycle again. During

the period of the Judges they have three civil wars.

We have had a civil war in our history, and it's a very important part of our history, the Civil War, or the war between the states, as we call it in the southern states. In the book of Judges they have three of those, and especially the third one is a very severe one. That's something of the historical thread as it goes through the book of Judges.

The next book in the history books is the book of Samuel. When you come to the time of Samuel, you see this leadership factor. God always wanted to be their king.

God's directive will for their government always was what we call a theocracy, God ruling the people. In order to do that, all God really needed was a prophet-priest like Moses, who would come up on the mountain and intercede with God for the people, and go down from the mountain and speak a word to the people from God. He would be a priest when he came up there and interceded for them, he would be a prophet when he went down and spoke to them for God.

That's all he really needed in order to rule the people, and Samuel was that kind of a leader, prophet-priest. But it's during the time of Samuel that the people come to Samuel, the leader, and they say to him, We don't like this arrangement, God being our king, this theocracy business and prophet-priest and all of that. We want to have a king just like other people have kings.

Well, Samuel is greatly distressed. There are many scriptures that will emphasize that God never wanted them to have kings, but we saw it in the book of Numbers. When they wanted meat, he gave them meat until it came out of their nose, until it was loathsome to them.

And when they said they wanted kings and Samuel was upset, God said to Samuel, Samuel, don't take it personally, they're not rejecting you, they're rejecting me. And if they want kings, Samuel will give them kings. So you have six books in the Old Testament, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles.

At one time, all of those books were listed as kings. Actually they're classified as the kingdom literature, because they tell you all about those kings. When the king comes to power, the first one is named Saul, and he won't obey God.

Samuel has the thrill of hiring that first king. Wouldn't it be fun to hire a king? But after he hires that first king and ordains him and puts him in office, he finds out that king won't obey God. And so Samuel has the joy of firing the first king of Israel, and he just plain fires him.

He says, this is an unworkable situation. God can't work through you if you won't do what he tells you. So God is going to take the kingdom from you and give it to a man after his own heart who will do all his will.

God has found such a man. When this king comes to power, you still have this prophet-priest in the picture. The prophet is always just a little bit off stage, and if the king doesn't obey God, look for the prophet to come on stage, and boy, he'll get that king straight.

This will happen to all the kings. They always have to put up with that prophet, because that was always God's directive will, to lead through the prophet-priest. And when the king won't obey, the prophet-priest will come and be the spokesman for God.

The second king of Israel is David, and David is a man after God's own heart who will do all the will of God, and so God works through him. David still has this prophet-priest. When David sins, the courageous prophet Nathan comes on stage, and he points his finger at David and says, Bow at the man you sin, and he spells things out for him.

David has this prophet-priest. But David is a good king, because David has a heart to do all the will of God. David is followed by his son Solomon, and at first Solomon looks like he's a king through whom God is going to work.

He gets off to a beautiful start, beautiful prayer, and God answers his beautiful prayer. But then, as we're warned back there in the book of Deuteronomy, Solomon is turned away from God, and he commits apostasy, and God can't work through him. The consequences that follow the reign of Solomon as you go through Hebrew history are absolutely awesome.

The consequences that come upon the nation of Israel, which are called the divided kingdom and the captivities, these awesome consequences do not come as a result of the sin of David. David's sin was confessed, it was repented of. David ruled altogether for 40 years.

He ruled for about 24 years after he sinned. God didn't throw him away when he sinned, because he repented of that sin and confessed that sin. It was the sin of Solomon that brought calamity upon the kingdom.

As a result of Solomon's sin, his 700 wives and his 300 concubines, the kingdom was divided into two sections. There was a northern kingdom called Israel, the ten tribes of Israel, and in the south two little tribes, Benjamin and Judah, which went by the name of Judah. This is where they get the name Jew, because of the kingdom of Judah, and Jew is just short for Judah.

But there were two kingdoms as a result of Solomon's reign, and both kingdoms are carried off into captivity. The northern kingdom is taken away, captured by the Assyrians. The worst enemy the Hebrew people ever had was the Assyrians.

The Assyrians march the ten tribes of Israel off into captivity, and they are never heard from again. They are called the lost tribes of Israel. They absolutely are just extinguished off the face of the earth.

That leaves just that little kingdom in the south called Judah, just the tribes of Benjamin and Judah. In these historical books and this kingdom literature, the kingdom of Judah will also be carried off into captivity into Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar. Now as you continue the historical thread, this is what you end up with.

Now they have a land, but there ain't nobody home, there's nobody there. The land is empty. The northern kingdom is gone, the southern kingdom is gone, there's just an empty land.

And that's what you have in this kingdom literature as a result of their apostasy and especially the reign of Solomon. Now after the Babylonians take them off the southern kingdom into Babylon, we do follow the thread of the Babylonian captivity. We never hear about that northern kingdom anymore, but that southern kingdom, the historical thread continues with them.

Because the southern kingdom is captive in Babylon for 70 years. During that period of time, the great Persian empire conquers Babylon, and so after 70 years they're not in Babylon, they're in Persia. And you

have the Persian empire.

Now whenever Cyrus the Great comes into power in that Persian empire, he is moved upon by God to issue a decree that any of these people in Persia who want to go back to their land and rebuild their temple and their land are free to do so. This is one of the great miracles in Hebrew history, the return from the Babylonian captivity. Now the message of Nehemiah, Ezra, Haggai, some of these books, is that there were several returns, not just one, but several returns under great leadership of the people who were willing to leave media Persia and go back to Israel.

There was a return from the Babylonian captivity, and that's the great ministry of Nehemiah and Ezra and some of the prophets who were contemporary with them. Now they didn't all decide to go back to Israel. Many of them didn't want to go back.

They say that they became shopkeepers and really got into business when they were in media Persia, and for many, many reasons they didn't want to go back, many of them. So many of them stayed in media Persia. Here is an interesting thing in all of this Hebrew history.

You see this phenomenon of leadership. God's preference, it seems to me, his directive will, is the prophet-priest. When they want kings, God says, All right, we'll give you kings, but that doesn't seem to work because most of those kings won't obey him.

But that doesn't mean God can't work. When they are actually conquered and taken off as captives, God even works through the bad guy. God works through Nebuchadnezzar.

God works through Cyrus the Great. He works through these evil leaders. The book of Esther tells us about a historical setting, and it's the last of the history books in which media Persia is a place where God works in a mighty way, and he works through an evil emperor of media Persia.

He works through a courageous woman like Esther. But when he does that work, they are actually in media Persia because these are the Jews who did not go back to Israel. Now, that's kind of a brief history lesson on the subject of Hebrew history.

Hebrew history, as we said, can be a very difficult subject, but what we've covered really is just seven facts of Hebrew history that I think you need to know if you're going to read the history books with understanding. Those seven facts of Hebrew history are the kingdom, the divided kingdom, the Assyrian captivity of the northern kingdom, the extinction of that northern kingdom, the Babylonian captivity of the southern kingdom, the conquest of Babylon by Persia, and then the return from the Babylonian captivity. I know that's somewhat academic, and I know that's just plain history, but believe me, if you want to read these history books with some understanding, these are the historical facts you must understand.

You just won't know what the prophets are talking about when we get to the prophets, because they run along with this Hebrew history. You just won't understand these historical books unless you have at least that much insight into Hebrew history. So even though we're not trying to make this academic, this is primarily devotional, we do recommend that you make yourself very familiar with those historical facts, just seven facts of Hebrew history.

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