

The Histories: Part I

The plot so far....

Genesis:

- “Pre-history” Adam & Eve, Cain and Abel, Noah, Babel
- The first Patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph (about 2000-1800 BCE)
- As Genesis ends, the Jews are with Joseph in Egypt. (about 1800 BCE)

The Exodus (Exodus – Deuteronomy):

- The Jewish people stay in Egypt for several hundred years. Eventually, the Egyptians oppress the Jews.
- God demonstrates his power so that even the Egyptians can see it (through Moses and the plagues).
- Moses leads his people out of Egypt towards The Promised Land (Canaan). (about 1450 BCE)
- At Mt. Sinai, Moses receives the law.
- Moses spent so long on the mountain, the people—even Aaron—despair and they make the Golden Calf (Exodus 32). They worship it as a god.
- At other times on their journey and at the base of Mt. Sinai, the Israelites whine and complain.
- God’s about had it with the people, but Moses intervenes again and again. Finally, the people rebel a tenth time, they threaten to stone Moses, Aaron, and Joshua, God shows up and is ready to “disinherit” them, but Moses intervenes again. (Numbers 14:1-25, pp.163-164) But the price he pays is that he is not allowed to enter Canaan, the promised land.

And then what happened?

The next 12 books tell the ups and downs of the history of the Jewish people from about 1400-400 BCE. These books present a history of the rise and fall and rise and fall again of a people—based on their being in right relationship with God.

In general, if the people, priests, and leaders follow God’s law, things go well. Alas, too often the people are lax or lazy and bad stuff happens. There are some high points—Joshua’s leading the people into Canaan, the kingdom of David and Solomon, Elijah and Elisha trying to get people to follow a righteous path, Ezra and Nehemiah and the return from Exile. However, there’s a constant struggle between being “Godly” and doing what’s “easy.”

Joshua conquers Jericho:

- On the plain outside Jericho: Joshua 5: 10-12 (p. 231)
- The conquest: Joshua 6: 8-27 (pp. 231-233)
- What did the people do BEFORE they attacked the city? What did they take with them as they marched about Jericho, laying siege? What do these two things show is most important?
- Read “Strange Tactics” on p. 232.

All's not right.... It's a time of tumult and division—with a couple of bright spots

- People disobeyed even Joshua!
- Big city captured, but what about the towns? Political realities: Conflict between the Jews and other people over land, water, and towns.
- The sexier or easier religions of some of the “native” people continually tempted the Jews to grow lax in their observances—particularly when they’d inter-marry.
- Baal, Asherah, El: Lots of fertility rituals in the religions the Jews encountered—OK, to be blunt about it, sex was part of the worship of Baal and Asherah.
- Judges: A time when the Jews wavered—the 12 tribes argued, people rejected God and turned to Baal and other gods.
- These books of the Bible contain some memorable villains. For example:
 - Goliath: (1 Samuel 17: 3-11 p. 308)
 - Jezebel: “Wild and Wicked” p. 405
 - Manasseh: (2 Kings 21: 1-9 p. 420)
 - What forces of “evil” do those villains represent?
- There is a golden age: Samuel, Saul, David, and Solomon (about 1100-950 BCE); but the rest of the Histories tell a generally bleak story.
 - Saul, the first king, begins to unify the 12 tribes and gives the people hope—like George Washington unified the 13 colonies after the American Revolution. More next time. . . .
- The Jews eventually split into 2 kingdoms: Judah and Israel (about 900 BCE).
- Israel is conquered by the Assyrians (about 700 BCE), and the people of Israel are forced into exile in Assyria. Meanwhile, the kingdom of Judah remains intact—but in turmoil.
- Thanks to Esther, Ezra, Nehemiah and others, the exiles return about 450 BCE.

What's most important?

- The blood and gore you see in these books serves as a negative example of what happens to the unrighteous. Don't be fooled into thinking that the negative examples are positive ones! Look for the righteous men and women: Elijah, Elisha, Nathan! Ahab and Jezebel have a lot of fun, but they end up being eaten by dogs!
- The stories about David and Solomon are the most important ones for us—we'll talk about them in more detail next time.
 - David expanded the strong, unified kingdom Saul had established.
 - Solomon expanded the kingdom even further.
 - Mary's and Jesus's lineage goes back to David.
 - Solomon and David were not perfectly righteous people, but they were, in general good and righteous leaders.

Homework:

For November 16: Read the Book of Ruth (pp. 282-287) and answer these questions:

- The story of Ruth happened over 2500 years ago. What things seem strange to you a citizen of the 21st century?

- What relationship does Ruth have to David?

- What “people” are Ruth and Orpah from? What people is Naomi from?

- Why does Ruth go with Naomi?

- How do we know that God looks with favor on Ruth?

- In the midst of tales of armies, conquest, kings, queens, high priests, prophets, large-scale sinning, and murder, why would this “little” story be included?