

## **Introduction**

Let us begin by committing this session to the Lord in prayer.

*Our Father, we thank You for the wonderful privilege that is ours, that we are able to call you Father. Thank You that You have by Your grace brought us into Your family by the work of Christ. We thank You that because of Him and His shed blood and what He has done for us we can approach Your throne with boldness and without fear. We also thank You that You are God who has demonstrated throughout history that You care for Your own. Though You are high and lifted up You see fit to stretch down and look upon the affairs, needs, and cares of men, and even to enter into our history—not only in Christ but also before Him in ways that foreshadowed and testified to His coming. Thank You for this time that we can consider the historical books of the Old Testament. We thank You for what we can glean from them. We ask that You would make them effective in our lives as instruments of Your Word that would pierce our hearts and bring forth a response from them—a response that must be engendered by Your Spirit, for in and of ourselves we cannot bring any good thing to you, not even a willing heart. We pray that You would soften us, teach us by Your Word, and draw us closer to Yourself. We pray these things not for our glory, but so that Your glory may go forth, in our lives and in the lives of those around us.*

The historical books as they are designated in the English Bible are Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah. Though I do certainly consider the Pentateuch to be historical, we will be focusing on the books listed. We want to investigate their messages and the means by which these messages are conveyed. We also want to explore the significance of these important books for ourselves and for our time. I do think that these books are highly relevant, as is all of Scripture. But I particularly love the historical books, and I hope you will grow to love them as we study them together. Through this course I also want to help students gain a proper orientation to some important hermeneutical issues, issues relating to the interpretation of biblical historiography. Hermeneutics simply has to do with the principles of interpretation, the interpretive process. These historical narratives pose certain challenges for us. Thus we will need to look into that and see how we are to assess and understand them.

I also want this course to help students become competent readers of the Old Testament historical narratives for three basic purposes. First, for information. It is important that we know and understand the events of Israel's past and the ways in which Israel has experienced God in that past, the way in which the story and history of Israel prepares for Christ. Christ is Israel! He is all that Israel was meant to be. In Christ we see the fulfillment of all that was foretold in the life of Israel. Second, we want to look for points of application. We want to discover the lessons that these historical narratives have for us today. This will involve assessing the way in which these narratives addressed the original audience, how they function within the canonical context, and then how our own lives have certain points of contact with those ancient lives, thus in the way these narratives addressed them we can expect that they are addressing us as well. I do not view them as being given to a different people at a different time and therefore irrelevant to us today. Certainly we live after the coming of Christ and so we live in the age of fulfillment. But much of what we read is still applicable to us. We will have to study to discover how they are applicable to us, and hopefully we will be changed by them. Third, I hope we will be inspired to commit ourselves to lifelong study of the whole Word of God. It is understandably common among Christians to focus primarily on the New Testament. But we need to think of the New Testament as chapter four in a four chapter book. Just as you would not understand the final, climatic chapter in a novel if you have not read the previous chapters, so you will discover that we do not fully understand the New Testament until we have a fair acquaintance with how it was prepared for in the Old Testament.

The Old Testament does make up about 77% of the Bible, and a large portion of that are these historical books. Therefore we want to commit ourselves to exploring the riches of the full counsel of God, and not simply delve into those parts of Scripture that especially appeal to us.

Some might approach this course on Old Testament history thinking that it will be a reconstruction of the history of Israel, per se. But it seems to me more beneficial to look at the way God's Word depicts history to us rather than using that as one source by which we then try to reconstruct our own version of Israel's history. Given their divine inspiration, the inspired writers got it right. They have presented the events of the past in a way that is meant to benefit us in many different ways, not least spiritually. Therefore I think it is important that we understand not just the history behind the historiography, the writing of history, but we want to understand how God has chosen to recount to us the events of the past. Thus we will focus on the literature itself as a window into the historical events which are being depicted, and also as a window into the theology that is being conveyed. This course is not so much a reconstruction of Israel's history as it is a study of the historical books of the Old Testament.