

MIDWESTERN BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

THE HISTORY OF ISRAEL, THE WORD OF GOD

A REFLECTION PAPER

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT

OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE COURSE

M-BS 2210 OLD TESTAMENT SURVEY I

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JULY 5, 2017

"Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth; for the LORD has spoken" (Is 1:2).¹ This prophetic declaration underscores the seriousness, and the holiness, of God's self-attesting Word. The Bible unfolds the narrative of God for the world to pay witness to, and demands a response of worship to its Creator. This is perhaps the main focus and intention of the pages, events, and stories of the Old Testament – to tell us what God has spoken. In fact, over 2,500 times in just this testament alone, the Scriptures say its words are spoken and breathed out by God.² The voice and speech of God brackets the Old Testament's contents (Gn 1:3; Mal 4:3), and therefore, one would do well to pay attention to the message God intends to communicate, and be sensitive to the development of Scripture's unfolding before his eyes. When one takes into consideration that the whole of God's Word is indeed *God-breathed* (2 Tim 3:16), even in the historical, nuts-and-bolts passages, one witnesses God intending to teach man about Himself. All of Scripture, then, is intertwined theologically. This essay, focused on a study of the Historical Books, will consider the particular theological points of the Pentateuch, using them as prisms through which to see and understand the Historical Books that follow it. To best execute this study, this essay will be divided into three major periods of Israel's history: Pre-monarchy, the United Monarchy, and the Divided Monarchy. As these periods are considered, it will be easy to see how inextricable the Historical Books and the Pentateuch are theologically.

Israel Before A King

¹ Unless otherwise specified, all Bible references in this paper are to the English Standard Version (ESV) (Wheaton: Crossway, 2011).

² John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue, eds., *Biblical Doctrine: A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2017), 69.

Before there was a king to preside over the people of Israel, they swore their allegiance to King of the universe, who created them, delivered them from captivity, and led them (slowly, but surely) to the Promised Land through patriarchs, prophets, and leaders He appointed. Joshua is the first of the Historical Books, in which the reader witnesses the Israelites' long wandering in the wilderness finally come to a relieving end under the guidance of Joshua. One of the major themes of the book of Joshua, building on what the Pentateuch has already presented canonically prior, is the covenantal nature of God's relationship with His people, and the reality of God's presence among them. Throughout the book of Joshua, the themes of the covenant and presence of God are alluded to with its inclusion of references to the Ark of the Covenant, which also finds significance in the Pentateuch.³ L.D. Hawk notes that there are three main emphases of Joshua: land possession, proper practices of worship, and ethnic separation.⁴ These emphases can easily be traced throughout the first five books of Scripture. Not only does Joshua follow Deuteronomy as the next book in the Bible, but it picks right up where Deuteronomy leaves off when it comes to the land promise.⁵ As for proper practices of worship, these are easily one of main focuses of the Pentateuch, with the Decalogue's appearing in both Exodus and Deuteronomy, as well as the laundry list of regulations found in Leviticus. Finally, the "ethnic separation" Hawk mentions finding in Joshua, where the people are reminded of their covenant

³ Jo 3:3-17; 4:7-18; 6:8; 8:33.

⁴ L.D. Hawk, "Joshua, Book of," ed. Bill T. Arnold and H.G.M Williamson, *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Historical Books* (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 573.

⁵ Oren R. Martin, *Bound for the Promised Land: The Land Promise in God's Redemptive Plan*, New Studies in Biblical Theology (Downer's Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015), 87.

belonging to God at Shechem (Jo 24:1-28), is a continuation and an added layer of the covenant previously communicated to Moses in Exodus.

One reading the biblical narrative might think that after settling into the land promised to them, the natural next step for Israel would be to anoint a king to be their leader. Surprisingly, however, this is not how history tells the story:

And Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died at the age of 110 years. And they buried him within the boundaries of his inheritance in Timnath-heres, in the hill country of Ephraim, north of the mountain of Gaash. And all that generation also were gathered to their fathers. And there arose another generation after them who did not know the LORD or the work that he had done for Israel. And the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD and served the Baals. And they abandoned the LORD, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt. They went after other gods, from among the gods of the peoples who were around them, and bowed down to them. And they provoked the LORD to anger. (Jgs 2:8-12)

In the period of the Judges, immediately following the death of Joshua and following, there was revolt. Social unrest, political unsteadiness, and an outright refusal to follow God's commands highlights a spiritually dark time for Israel. This strikingly mirrors the reality of the opening of the Pentateuch, the very beginnings of creation. God's presence with humanity is found in Genesis 1-2 and throughout Joshua, but sin creates a chasm between God and man in Genesis 3 and throughout Judges. The Pentateuchal theology of sin and its separating man from God in events such as the Garden of Eden, the flood, and the Tower of Babel run concurrently with much of the timeline of Judges, save a few righteous men and women.

Finally, a king arrives on the scene. Eight chapters into 1 Samuel, Israel begins making demands of the prophet Samuel:

Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah and said to him, "Behold, you are old and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now appoint for us a king to judge us like all the nations." But the thing displeased Samuel when they said,

“Give us a king to judge us.” And Samuel prayed to the LORD. And the LORD said to Samuel, “Obey the voice of the people in all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them...obey their voice; only you shall solemnly warn them and show them the ways of the king who shall reign over them...So Samuel told all the words of the LORD to the people who were asking for a king from him...But the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel. And they said, “No! But there shall be a king over us...And the LORD said to Samuel, “Obey their voice and make them a king.” (1 Sm 8:4-7, 9-10, 19-20, 22)

The king that would go on to rule Israel is the infamous Saul, a man driven by pride and thirst for war. Compellingly, Samuel never pronounces Saul as a king (1 Sm 10:1), but is rather called king by the people, a “king on demand” of sorts.⁶ Most of his reign as king of Israel was tainted with sinfulness and a rejection of God’s law and order. This only created significant problems for Israel, and for Saul himself. Israel got her wish, but lived to regret it. Such desires to reject the kingship of God to follow someone else are reverberations of the Fall itself. Perhaps the absence of a flesh-and-blood, bona fide “king” that worked to unify Israel was intended to remind the people of their ultimate allegiance to God, and the consequences for failing to follow Him as their King of Kings, no matter their leader. These theological reminders are not unique to the Pentateuch’s writings.

A King Who Brings Israel Together

Fortunately for Israel, their time of waiting on God’s chosen king, the promised anointed one, would not be long. In 1 Samuel 16, David is crowned unexpectedly as fitting this bill, unbeknownst even to his own family. God’s choosing David is significant, because it signifies that God has sovereignty in instituting who rules the world, and is an expression of God’s

⁶ A.E. Hill, “History of Israel 3: United Monarchy,” ed. Bill T. Arnold and H.G.M Williamson, *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Historical Books* (Downer’s Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 449.

commissioning of His image-bearers (Gn 1:26-28). Finally, God is making good on His promise in Genesis 17:6, where God promises Israel that He “will make you into nations, and kings shall come from you.” David certainly was not a perfect leader, but he is described as a man after God’s own heart (1 Sm 13:14), a ruler committed to keeping the covenant as passed down to him from previous generations. In fact, in 2 Samuel 7, God furthers the covenantal nature of His relationship with His people through David’s kingship by making what is often called the Davidic Covenant. David’s focus on the temple and his shepherd-like disposition confirms that one of his primary functions as a God-anointed king is to unite God’s people. Hill comments:

David’s legacy included his role as the architect and general contractor for Yahweh’s temple (1 Chron 28-29), and he is credited with the reorganization of the Levitical priests and the creation of the temple liturgy (1 Chron 22-26). David became the model of the “ideal king” ...and the prototype of the Messiah as the ultimate “shepherd-king.”⁷

Solomon, the son of David, is also a part of this time period, at least starting out. He furthered the unity of the kingdom by “[establishing] Yahweh’s temple as a ‘house of prayer’ and emphasized the centrality of prayer for Israel in maintaining covenant relationship with the God of their ancestors (1 Kings 8:30; 2 Chron 6:21).”⁸ But Solomon’s final years as king did not quite follow the same trajectory. Pursuing a lifestyle of getting whatever he wanted led to moral decline, which in turn had negative effects on his leadership of Israel, leaving them in political and economic chaos, just as in the days of the judges.

It is clear that what Samuel prophesied to the people in 1 Samuel 8:11-18 did not only live on in their proposed King Saul, but even beyond David and into Solomon’s reign. These kings, while they certainly had a newfound unity within the nation, would not be free from

⁷ *ibid.*, 450.

⁸ *ibid.*

troubles and would ultimately become divided, with Israel sadly returning to its old ways of demanding a king on their terms (1 Kgs 12:16). Israel's united monarchy was marked by the reality of the sinful human heart, and what happens when power goes corrupt. As the events occurring in Israel continue to verify Pentateuchal prophecies, so they also serve as tangible examples of the kinds of judgments and consequences for sin as expressed in the Pentateuch.

The Kingdom Splits

Humanity does reap what it sows, as Galatians 6:7 promises. Somewhere along the way, all of the seeds that Israel had planted would have to grow and bear their fruit. Beginning with the death of Solomon, a new wave of leadership begins in Israel with Rehoboam. Israel saw this transition of power as one of hope, where their burden of labor would be decreased and the king would serve them. But instead, the opposite happened: Rehoboam threatened to make their work even heavier (1 Kgs 12:14). This resulted in rebellion by many, and ultimately birthed a division in the kingdom. The northern tribes defected and appointed Jeroboam, a former servant of Solomon, as their king; only the tribe of Judah remained under the leadership of Rehoboam. This proved to be a great mistake for these Israelites in the northern kingdom. The spiritual apostasy that followed this people was severe. There was golden calf worship, a strict and explicit violation of the Decalogue. Not only this, but Jeroboam referred to these gods as the ones who delivered Israel from Egypt's captivity (1 Kgs 12:28). McKenzie notes that "every one of Jeroboam's successors 'walked in the way of Jeroboam son of Nebat who caused Israel to sin,'" which is an apt and unfortunate description of Jeroboam's kingly legacy.⁹

⁹ S.L. McKenzie, "History of Israel 4: Division in the Monarchy," ed. Bill T. Arnold and H.G.M Williamson, *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Historical Books* (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 453.

In keeping with what one witnesses in the Pentateuch, the sins of Israel and its leaders during this period of division take serious harmful effects upon the people. Martens notes that within the Pentateuch, humans tangled in sin experience alienation, guilt, shame, and divine punishment.¹⁰ The alienating nature of the kingdom's division is clear throughout Kings and Chronicles, but these other factors are also experienced corporately and individually by those in both the northern and southern kingdoms. As an example, the LORD promises to strike Israel for their idolatry in 1 Kings 14:15. Much later, in 2 Chronicles 28:13, the chief leaders of the men of Ephraim say that their "guilt is great, and there is fierce wrath against Israel." These effects of sinful behavior upon the kings and people of Israel would not and should not come as a surprise if they had familiarity with the Pentateuch.

This is what makes God's covenant faithfulness jump off of the pages of Scripture. To witness time and time again Israel's failure to worship God by obeying His words and following His leadership, one unfamiliar with God's plan of redemption would easily see the merit for utter destruction; for the wages of sin is death (Rom 6:23). To see these historical accounts of how man drifted from God, and yet, how God rescued man and was patient with Him, is overwhelming confirmation of the Pentateuchal covenants established in Scripture.

Conclusion

The theology of the Pentateuch lives on beyond Deuteronomy. Many believe that reading the Historical Books is nothing more than useless information for today's world, serving as simply historical, recorded happenings that have little theological impact on the Bible. This is

¹⁰ E.A. Martens, "Sin, Guilt," ed. Alexander, T. D. and Baker, D. W., *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 771-772.

completely incorrect. The Historical Books are the practical demonstrations of everything Christians have been reading about in the Pentateuch. He is a God of love, and a God of justice one and the same. He is a God with a mission to redeem this people out of a broken and sinful humanity. He is passing down His Word in a form that can be witnessed by reading and hearing for all of humanity to observe, that they might repent and believe in the gospel. Bible readers should be thankful for the droves of insights and wisdom that can be gleaned from the Historical Books and how they bridge a gap for readers from the Pentateuch to other portions of Scripture.