

THE EQUIP INSTITUTE

Theme: Christian Story

Topic: OT Survey – Historical Books

Fall 2026

Introduction

The Equip Institute exists to equip members of Taylors First Baptist Church to think rightly about God and his Word for the sake of living rightly before God in his world. Our theme for this fall is Christian Story. This session is an introduction to the OT Historical Books.

An Introduction to the Historical Books

The Historical Books tell a unified story—sometimes from different, but complementary perspectives— but this section is not a single literary unit like the Pentateuch. Rather, it is a collection of books written by several authors covering a period of approximately 1000 years.

According to the *ESV Study Bible*, the Historical Books tell the story of (1) Israel’s entry into Canaan under Joshua’s leadership; (2) Israel’s life in the promised land under the judges and the transition to kingship; (3) the division of the nation into two rival kingdoms (Israel and Judah) and life in both; (4) the downfall and exile of each kingdom; (5) life during the exile; and (6) Judah’s return from exile.

In English Bibles, there are twelve Historical Books: Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1–2 Samuel, 1–2 Kings, 1–2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther. These are not modern works of history but are **theological interpretations of the past** that are meant to demonstrate God’s sovereignty over all nations and His ongoing presence among His chosen nation as He remains faithful to His promises and His covenants, despite Israel’s continual drifting into sin (especially idolatry).

The Historical Books

Joshua

The name *Joshua* comes from the main figure in the book. Joshua means “Yahweh delivers.” *Jesus* is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew name *Joshua*. The authorship is anonymous, though many Jews believe Joshua wrote the book himself. It was likely written sometime between 1400 and 1350 BC. Chapters 1–12 focus upon the conquest of

- The Lord is sovereign over all nations, but He has a special relationship with Israel and especially Judah
- The Lord is the only God, and all other so-called gods are idols
- The Lord alone is worthy of worship, and only on His terms
- Sin, and especially idolatry, leads to division among God's people
- God will keep His covenant promises to Abraham and David
- Repentance leads to forgiveness and possibly wider renewal

1–2 Chronicles

The name *Chronicles* simply refers to the work the author(s) did in recounting much of the same stories as 1–2 Samuel and 1–2 Kings, but from a complementary perspective that gives greater emphasis to the Davidic covenant. In the earliest Hebrew Scriptures, 1–2 Chronicles was a single book. The authorship is anonymous, though many Jews believe either Ezra or his followers wrote this material (and possibly Ezra and Nehemiah). They were possibly written later than 1–2 Kings, though would have also been completed by 330 BC. 1 Chronicles 1–9 focus upon a genealogical account of Israel's tribes. 1 Chronicles 10–29 focus upon the unified kingdom under David and Solomon. 2 Chronicles focuses upon Judah's history from the divided kingdom, to exile, to the restoration to the land under the Persian King Cyrus. In the traditional Jewish canon, 1–2 Chronicles is the final book, ending on a messianic note that anticipates the end of Judah's exile.

²² Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom and also put it in writing: ²³ "Thus says Cyrus king of Persia, 'The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever is among you of all his people, may the Lord his God be with him. Let him go up.'" (2 Chron. 36:22–23)

- The uniqueness of Israel as a people in God's redemptive purposes
- The importance of the David covenant for Israel and eventually all nations
- The centrality of the Temple to Israel's identity, worship, and monarchy

The name *Ezra* refers to the main character in the book. The authorship is anonymous, though many Jews believe either Ezra or his followers wrote Ezra (and possibly 1–2 Chronicles and Nehemiah). The latest events covered in the book date to 433 BC, so the book was likely completed shortly after that. Chapters 1–2 focus upon Cyrus’s decree and the return of Judah from Babylon. Chapters 3–6 focus upon rebuilding the Temple. Chapters 7–8 focus upon reinstituting God’s Torah. Chapters 9–10 focus upon Ezra’s response to the problem of Jews intermarrying with pagan peoples.

The name *Nehemiah* refers to the main character of the book. The authorship is anonymous, though many Jews believe either Ezra or his followers wrote Nehemiah (and possibly 1–2 Chronicles and Ezra). The latest events covered in the book date to 433 BC, so the book likely completed shortly after that. Chapters 1–2 focuses upon Nehemiah's return to Jerusalem to build its walls. Chapters 3–7 focuses upon the difficulties encountered in rebuilding the wall. Chapters 8–10 focus upon reinstituting God's Torah. Chapters 11–13 focus upon miscellaneous issues with administering the nation after its return.

- God answers the prayers of His people
- God is working providentially to bring about His purposes, sometimes even through pagan nations
- God keeps his covenant promises to Israel, though final fulfillment is still in the future
- God's people demonstrate their loyalty to Him by right worship and faithful observance of Torah

Esther

The name *Esther* refers to the main character in the book. The authorship is anonymous. Ahasuerus reigned from 485–464 BC, so the book was probably written shortly after that. Chapters 1–2 focus upon the circumstances of Esther's rise. Chapters 3–10 focus upon Haman's plot against the Jews and their deliverance through Mordecai and Esther. Of note: Esther is the only book in the Bible that does not mention God.

- God's providential preservation of His people
- God uses the lowly to bring low the haughty
- God's judgment upon the wicked, especially those who hate His people

Recommended Resources

Christopher J.H. Wright, *The Old Testament in Seven Sentences: A Small Introduction to a Vast Topic* (InterVarsity, 2019).

Andrew E. Hill and John H. Walton, *A Survey of the Old Testament*, 2nd ed. (Zondervan, 2000).

Eugene H. Merrill, Mark Rooker, and Michael A. Grisanti, *The World and the Word: An Introduction to the Old Testament* (B&H Academic, 2011).

Charles Swindoll, *David: A Man of Passion & Destiny* (Thomas Nelson, 1997).