

## *Chapter 10: Introduction to the Historical Books*

### **Key Terms**

- Deuteronomistic school: (Hypothetical) Hebrew scribal guild of the seventh century BC responsible for shaping the historical literature of the Old Testament (Deuteronomy–2 Kings)
- Deuteronomistic History: Martin Noth proposed that Deuteronomy–2 Kings is a unified work written primarily during the exilic period. This term describes Deuteronomy–2 Kings in Noth's theory, which remains a dominant theory today
- historiography: The writing of history or the product of historical writing; a collection of historical literature
- Historical Books: Old Testament books Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther
- linear model of history: view of history in which history is seen as a straight line moving from the beginning to the end along the continuum of time
- recurrence model of history: view of history in which there is a fixed sequence of several stages through which history passes, returning eventually to an original point.

### **Key Ideas**

- The Historical Books comprise Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther.
- The Deuteronomistic History, which argues that Deuteronomy–2 Kings are a unified work written during the exile, is the primary framework for most research on the Historical Books.
- People in the ancient Near East and biblical world held to a recurrence model of history rather than a linear model of history.
- The Old Testament recorded history for primarily theological purposes.

### **Chapter Summary**

The Historical Books of the OT include "the Former Prophets": Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings; and "the Writings": Ruth, Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther.

Modern scholarship has adopted the theory of Martin Noth, who proposed that Deuteronomy–2 Kings is a unified work written during the exilic period. This group of writings is referred to as the Deuteronomistic History. Variations in theories of composition center on the questions of date and the number of editions. The so-called Deuteronomistic History, like Deuteronomy, views Israelite history in light of the covenant. The kings of Israel and Judah are evaluated by their disposition toward the covenant and their attempt (or lack of attempt) to bring about reform. The books also answer the exiles' question, "Where did things go wrong?"

While it is clear that Joshua–2 Kings has many commonalities with Deuteronomy, conservative scholars have been rightfully unwilling to date Deuteronomy to such a late date. It is possible to assign Deuteronomy to an earlier date if one accepts Moses as the primary source of the material and later editors/redactors as responsible for the book in its present form. However, it must be noted that each book in the Deuteronomistic History has a distinct literary style, which may indicate different authors.

The ancients believed that the gods were integrally involved in every aspect of life. They viewed history as a series of recurring events, rather than a linear progression. Israel's unique relationship with Yahweh led them to view history through the lens of the covenant. In their view, the purpose of history was to reveal the character and actions of God in carrying out his plan.

In order to understand the Bible's historical literature properly, we must frame it as a key part of God's self-revelation. The primary function of the historical literature is not to record history, but rather to convey instruction about and knowledge of God.