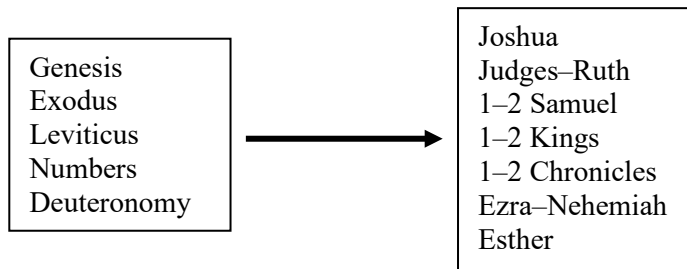


## SESSION ONE

# AN INTRODUCTION TO THE HISTORICAL NARRATIVES

### I. THE ISSUE OF GENRE

Question: As we move from the Pentateuch to the historical records of Israel's experience in the Promised Land, are we dealing with the same literary genre of material?



#### A. Response of Fee and Stuart: *How to Read the Bible for all Its Worth*<sup>1</sup>

They presented five (5) different genres for OT literature:

- Narrative
- Legal Material
- Prophetic Material
- Psalms
- Wisdom Literature

#### B. The matter of OT Genre has recently been more carefully refined:

*Cracking Old Testament Codes*<sup>2</sup>

This work (by several contributors) presented ten (10) genres for OT literature:

Narrative (or regular narrative)	Apocalyptic
History (or historical narrative)	Lament
Law	Praise
Oracles of Salvation	Proverb
Judgment Oracles	Non-proverbial Wisdom (e.g., Job, Eccl)

<sup>1</sup>Gordon D. Fee & Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for all Its Worth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982).

<sup>2</sup>D. Brent Sandy & Ronald L. Giese, Jr., ed., *Cracking Old Testament Codes: A Guide to Interpreting the Literary Genres of the Old Testament* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1995).

### C. Distinction of the Pentateuch from Historical Narrative

We must certainly grant that there is a lot of commonality of the narrative material in Genesis–Deut with that which follows. In *Cracking Old Testament Codes*, however, some distinction is made:

#### Narrative

"Studying narrative as a genre involves examining features of *form* as the layout of scenes (the dividing of the action into sequences) and the development of plot. Issues of *content* include how characters are portrayed (often with God himself as one of the characters). This is often seen in what the narrator relates of their words and actions, as well as what he relates of their thoughts and emotions. A key issue in content analysis is the critique, direct and indirect, that an author places within the text. As with stories today, narrative can serve a variety of primary *functions* such as teaching kinship obligation or personal morality."<sup>3</sup>

#### History

"Narrative (sometimes called regular narrative) and history (sometimes called historical narrative) need to be distinguished. Narrative always involves individual characters, whereas history, because of its nature as a blend of genres, can easily move in and out between groups and various individuals who are only superficially described. History *form* is a unique genre in that it is a collection and organization of other genres. The *content* of history in the Old Testament focuses on the nation of Israel and not on a specific individual, family, or tribe. History often includes narratives, but unlike narrative, history's primary *function* as a genre is to present a chronicle of Israel's relationship with God, often seen through Israel's relations with its pagan neighbors as well as through the response that her kings gave to the word of the Lord as uttered through the prophets."<sup>4</sup>

### D. Merrill's Approach

Eugene Merrill, in his chapter on "History" in *Cracking Old Testament Codes* (p 91), points out two primary factors that distinguish *history* from *narrative*:

- 1) In the Old Testament, history is *national* and not familial or tribal. Hence, in Samuel–Kings, we have a history of Israel from the viewpoint of the monarchy.
- 2) History is a *series* of accounts (involving various subgenres) with *cause-effect sequences* given much more weight than plot.

Merrill mentions two other secondary factors that also seem to distinguish *history*:

- 1) The author's/editor's *commentary* is more prevalent in history than narrative (i.e., his own personal judgment comments and evaluation of characters).
- 2) In *narrative*, God more often speaks directly, whereas in *history* He is represented by others (e.g., prophet, king).

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<sup>3</sup>Ronald L. Giese, Jr., in *Cracking Old Testament Codes*, 20.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

## II. THE CORPUS OF JOSHUA–2 KINGS

### A. The Distinctiveness of Joshua–2 Kings

1. Although the genre of "historical narrative" includes 1–2 Chronicles, Ezra–Nehemiah, and Esther, there seems to be some validity for distinguishing these books from Joshua–2 Kings.
2. The Hebrew Bible is composed of three sections:

TORAH	PROPHETS	WRITINGS
Genesis	1. Former Prophets	Psalms
Exodus	Joshua	Proverbs
Leviticus	Judges	Job
Numbers	1–2 Samuel	Song of Songs
Deuteronomy	1–2 Kings	Ruth
	2. Latter Prophets	Lamentations
	Isaiah	Ecclesiastes
	Jeremiah	Esther
	Ezekiel	Daniel
	12 Minor Prophets	Ezra
		Nehemiah
		1–2 Chronicles

3. Point: The Material in Joshua–2 Kings seems to "tell" one coherent story:

**The Pentateuch**  
 God's election of Israel and constituting her as a covenant people (who agree to worship Him only and obey His Law) in preparation for blessing her in the promised land

**Joshua–2 Kings Corpus**  
 The tragic story of Israel's covenant unfaithfulness and expulsion from the promised land in contrast to God's patience and grace (epitomized in the Davidic covenant promises)

- a. Joshua - God's faithfulness to give Israel the land of promise
- b. Judges - Israel's utter failure under the theocratic arrangement
- c. 1–2 Samuel - Israel's demand for a monarchy, and God's intention to bless through the line of David.
- d. 1–2 Kings - Israel's failure under monarchy, highlighting how both kingdoms came to be exiled.

## III. DIVERGENT APPROACHES TO JOSHUA–2 KINGS

### A. Conservative Evangelical (holding to the inerrancy of Scripture)

1. It is very difficult to even describe a "conservative evangelical" opinion of these books. Historically, they have been viewed as being authored by different people (even the material in Samuel–Kings). However, in none of these books do we have a definite acknowledgment of authorship or date. With Judges, there is some evidence that it may have been written before the conquest of Jerusalem under David (i.e., before 1004 BC; note Jud 1:21 - "so the Jebusites have lived with the sons of Benjamin in Jerusalem to this day"). Certainly, the material in Kings was written after the Babylonian exile of 586 BC. Often, 1 Samuel 1–24 has been viewed as the work of Samuel himself, with the assumption that others (perhaps Nathan and Gad; note 1 Chron 29:29) wrote the remainder of 1–2 Samuel.
2. There is some evidence throughout both 1st and 2nd Samuel that the writer(s) wrote from a time after the division of the kingdom in 931 BC:
  - a. In 1 Sam 27:6, the *narrator* refers to Ziklag, a Philistine city, as a city which "has belonged to the kings of Judah to this day."
  - b. At several points he makes reference to Judah in distinction from Israel (1 Sam 11:8; 17:52; 18:16; 2 Sam 5:5; 11:11; 12:8; 19:42–43; 24:1,9).
3. A Post-Exilic Compilation of Samuel–Kings?  
It is not altogether impossible that the material presently comprising 1 Samuel–2 Kings was the product of one hand (an editor) who compiled the whole thing at some point after the Babylonian exile of 586 BC. These books do seem to share a common perspective (evaluating the rise and fall of the monarchy). If this were the case (and we probably can't be sure), he no doubt drew on many sources including court records and first-hand accounts that had been passed down through the centuries. Such a scenario, however, should be carefully distinguished from a redactionary view of the literature (as described in the following section).

## B. Critical Scholarship

There is no single view that could be said to represent all critical scholars. In general, they would not accept the notion of biblical inerrancy, and they would tend to see the present material of 1 Samuel–2 Kings as the product of redaction and reworking over several centuries. Here, I can only highlight some of the more noteworthy trends.

1. The work of Martin Noth (1943)  
Noth, like others who had been schooled in the theology of source analysis, denied the Mosaic authorship of Deuteronomy. For him, Deuteronomy was written late (sometime in the 7th cent. BC). He took the view that all the material in Deut–Kings was the product of a single author which represented a single view of history. This author, writing during the period of the exile, took an existing core material of Deuteronomy and re-edited it in light of his theological outlook from an exilic perspective. The remainder of Joshua–Kings was added to this to show how history developed in light of the anticipations in Deuteronomy. Crucial to his view were the anticipations of a centrality of worship at Jerusalem, the rise of kingship, and a philosophy of history based on covenant failure that resulted in exile.
2. General View of the Developments
  - a. The production of the core of Deuteronomy after 700 BC

This was written by someone who hoped to affirm Jerusalem as the divinely chosen center of the nation's worship, authenticate the Levitical priesthood, and support the Davidic line of kingship.

- b. The Deuteronomic Reformation (*ca.* 621 BC)  
Supposedly, the *Book of the Law* found during the time of Josiah was this Deuteronomic work. It was made to appear as from Moses in order to give more credence to it.
- c. First Edition of the Deuteronomistic History (*ca.* 610 BC)
- d. Final Edition of the Deuteronomistic History (*ca.* 550 BC)

Note: Some would hold to even more than two editions of the Deuteronomistic History, each time being redacted to conform with the current theological outlook.

#### IV. VARIOUS MODELS OF THE EXODUS AND SETTLEMENT IN CANAAN

##### A. Dating of the Exodus

- 1. Late Date: Critical Scholars & Some Conservatives (*ca.* 1275 BC)
- 2. Early Date: Some Conservatives (*ca.* 1446 BC)

My personal conclusion is that the Exodus event is connected with the early date.

##### B. The Historical Reliability of the Exodus Tradition

Today, there are scholars who would go so far as to deny that there ever was an exodus from Egypt (or that the Hebrews were ever in Egypt).

##### C. Proposed Models for the Settlement In Canaan

- 1. The Biblical Model

History happened exactly as we have it recorded in Exodus and Joshua.

Proponents: Conservative evangelicals who have a high view of Scripture

- 2. Military Conquest Model

This would be similar to the above. Proponents would hold that the Israelite occupation was initiated by several lightning military attacks on major Canaanite cities and was followed after some time by an occupation of adjacent areas. However, proponents of this view would not hold that the biblical account was entirely accurate in every detail. They would acknowledge historical inaccuracies in the biblical record and even conflicting accounts.

Proponents: W. F. Albright, Yigael Yadin<sup>5</sup>, and Abraham Malamat<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Yigael Yadin, "Is the Biblical Account of the Israelite Conquest of Canaan Historically Reliable?" *Biblical Archaeology Review* 8 (Mar-Apr 1982): 16-23.

<sup>6</sup>Abraham Malamat, "How Inferior Israelite Forces Conquered Fortified Canaanite Cities," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 8 (Mar-Apr 1982): 24-35.

### 3. Infiltration Model

Basically, this view denies any outright military conquest and asserts that the occupation was initiated by peaceful Israelite infiltration of largely unoccupied hill country. In time, increasing Israelite pressure led to the collapse of the main Canaanite cities.

Proponents: Albrecht Alt, Martin Noth<sup>7</sup>, Manfred Weippert<sup>8</sup>, Yohanan Aharoni<sup>9</sup>

Notes: Not all would agree as to the status of Israel prior to the settlement in Canaan. Most would be sceptical of the Exodus tradition, especially the idea that there was a united group of all 12 tribes in Egypt that came out together. Rather, they would tend to believe that the tribal units existed at one time independently as disassociated nomadic clans, but they had come together into a confederacy known as Israel by 1200 BC. This confederacy came about because of political expediency. Merrill describes this view: "The Israelite tribes, it is held, were primarily if not totally non-Canaanite, and in the face of Canaanite and especially Philistine pressures were forced to align themselves together to preserve common interests and avoid destruction or assimilation."<sup>10</sup>

### 4. Revolt Model

According to this model, indigenous, lower-class underprivileged elements of the peasant population (some would even say they were Canaanite) rebelled against the urban oligarchy. Rather than conquest as portrayed in the Bible, we have a class struggle between peasants (Israel) and nobility (Canaanite lords). This resulted in a tribal confederation and overthrow of the Canaanite nobility.

Proponents: George Mendenhall<sup>11</sup> and Norman Gottwald<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Martin Noth, *The History of Israel*, 2d ed. (New York: Harper and Row, 1960), esp. 53-163.

<sup>8</sup>Manfred Weippert, *The Settlement of the Israelite Tribes in Palestine*, trans. James Martin (Naperville, Ill: Allenson, 1971).

<sup>9</sup>Y. Aharoni, "The Israelite Occupation of Canaan," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 8 (Mar-Apr 1982): 16.

<sup>10</sup>Eugene Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1987), 123.

<sup>11</sup>George E. Mendenhall, *The Tenth Generation: The Origins of the Biblical Tradition* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973).

<sup>12</sup> Norman Gottwald, *Tribes of Yahweh* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1979).