

Welcome

Good Morning, my name is Sue Sweeney and I'm part of the preaching team here at Catalyst. I'm also a former high school social studies teacher. I recently accepted a new position as a social studies curriculum specialist for junior highs and high schools in the school district where I work. I love studying history.

So, let me start with this. If I were to ask you what the goal of studying history, what would you say?

I think my fascination for studying history started when I was in high school, one of my history teachers gave us an assignment. We had to choose and interview three people about an event in history that they witnessed first-hand.

One of the people I interviewed was my Grandpa Earl and we talked about his experience in WWII in the Army. Here is a picture of him when he was stationed in France in 1945.

[Picture of Grandpa] He helped drive refrigerated trucks to deliver supplies to soldiers. He told me about how tough it was trying to drive these big, giant trucks through the very narrow streets of these towns in France that were probably a thousand years old, at least- streets that were built for foot traffic and horses, not giant transport vehicles. One time, they took a corner too tightly in one of the refrigerated trucks and knocked a balcony right off of the building.

I love this story because it helps me see WWII from my grandpa's point of view. I was able to really see what it might have been like. It helped me see things from his perspective.

This morning, we're going to talk about history and perspective as it relates to the history books of the Bible. There are several books in the Old Testament known as the "historical books" because they cover approximately 1,000 years in the history of the nation of Israel and their experience with God. Although, it's not a history in the sense that these books are a comprehensive document of all the notable people, places, and events that occurred during this time period. In fact, it's not even what one might consider the "highlights."

But they reveal to us God's love and infinite patience for God's people and the rest of the world. They're history books because they tell the story of the past- but it's the story of the past filtered through the present time of the writers.

By the end of our time this morning I hope you are assured that a historical approach to the study of ancient Israel can actually be a personal, transformative spiritual experience.

For now, let's stand together and sing. As we sing together, we ask God to open our hearts to the Holy Spirit and how the history of ancient Israel, as told by these historical books in the Old Testament, can speak truth to us today.

MESSAGE

This summer, we've been talking about "How the Bible works."

We started with exploring what the Bible is - a library of books written over more than a thousand years, by more than a dozen authors in three languages. The Bible is inspired - a book that is both fully a product of human authors and full of God's spiritual authority. Because the Bible is a divine library, we can trust Scripture fully to lead us into a relationship with Jesus.

But how does the Bible work, exactly? Well, because the Bible is also a human document, the kinds of books in the Bible matter. Much like wandering the shelves in a library or bookstore, we need to pay attention to the genre. We're going to explore how they work and learn some tips for reading them. Our goal is twofold: first, we want to do the best job we can of learning what the Scriptures meant to the original readers. We want to know what the Spirit was saying *then*, through those ancient authors. All that so that, second, we can better listen for what the Spirit is saying to us today.

The goal of reading Scripture isn't to become experts on ancient literature. It's to know God. We read not to become informed but to be transformed.

We began this series with the Gospels, those ancient biographies of Jesus. After that, we explored the genre of prophecy - a timely message about how we are accountable to use the power God has given us both to remain faithful to God and to care for the most vulnerable among us. Then, we looked at apocalypse- which is a very difficult genre, but as we learned from JR. a hopeful one, because we know that in the end, God wins. Vanessa Hewitt helped us read the book of Acts. It's a narrative history- a story of how the Holy Spirit worked in the early church and works in us today. We talked about how the legal books of the Bible help us live together as God's people in society. Last week, Tim Basselin talked to us about poetry in the Bible, how to slow down and allow poetry to point to the God who is beyond us.

This week, we're going to answer the question, "How do we read the Bible's histories for spiritual formation?"

By historical books, we mean the books in the Old Testament like Joshua, Judges, Ruth, Samuel, Kings, Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther.

Remember at the beginning, I said historical books of the Old Testament don't even give the "highlights" of Israel's history. By "highlights" I mean what you would think of today as the important stuff to know about a country's history. If the Bible is supposed to be a history textbook on Israel like our history textbooks on the United States in school, the Bible is a terrible history textbook. It doesn't give us a solid sense of Israel's geopolitical significance in the world at that time. The chronology is all over the place. It's unbalanced and biased. There are chapters upon chapters on some kings and nothing but a passing reference to others.

Can you imagine a U.S. history textbook devoting several chapters to Warren G. Harding and only briefly mentioning Abraham Lincoln? I know, some of you are like, "who the heck is Warren G. Harding?" He was president. He died in office. His wife might have poisoned him.

The historical books of the Bible are different from our history textbooks. We have different expectations and standards for history than the ancient Hebrews did. But even though Biblical history is

different from modern history, these histories are Scripture, inspired by God. We can know God better through these histories.

One of the great things about reading the Bible is learning to see things through different points of view. This is actually really important in studying history. In fact, when we teach social studies to students here in Texas, beyond knowing the who, what, where, and when of things that happened, students need to be able to “identify different points of view about an issue or current topic”. That’s in our state standards- the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills- or TEKS. Actually, if students, by the end of the year, have only been able to identify significant individuals, events, and issues in history, they have not met the expectations of the course. The teacher didn’t do their job. A student has mastered the history course when they can evaluate perspectives, apply knowledge to multiple contexts, and make historical connections, and evaluate change over time. That’s what historians really do. They don’t just memorize facts.

Facts are still important. In order to evaluate things, you need to know the basics. So, when you start reading the text, the first time you read, you’re just trying to get the “who, what, where and when.” The second time you read, you start to make connections to other things happening before and after and the last step is to make connections to what is happening today.

[Scripture Slide] So let’s dive in. Let’s look at 1 Kings, Chapter 11 Verses 29-35. 1st and 2nd Kings are two books of the Hebrew Bible, or what we call the Old Testament. Along with Deuteronomy, Judges, and 1 and 2 Samuel, they belong to a group called the “Deuteronomistic History.” The Deuteronomistic histories were compiled after Babylon destroyed Jerusalem in 586 BCE. That event - the beginning of the Exile - was apocalyptic for God’s people. Their priests and scholars had to try to answer the question “Why?” Why did God allow God’s temple to be destroyed? Why did the God who freed Israel from slavery in Egypt allow God’s people to be taken into captivity again? Why didn’t God honor the promises God had made to Israel’s ancestors?

[Timeline] The Deuteronomistic histories are the long answer to that “Why” question. They start in Deuteronomy - just before God’s people enter into the Promised Land. The Deuteronomistic historians retold the story of Israel from the conquest and settling of the Promised Land through the time of judges to the establishment of the monarchy, the Israelite Civil War, the divided Kingdoms, the fall of Israel in the North and finally the fall of Judah in the South, to Babylon, and the Exile.

The big question throughout these books, again, is “Why?” Why did God’s people end up in Exile? Why did those slaves freed from Egypt end up in captivity again? The answer the Deuteronomists illustrate is that God’s people refused to be faithful to God, over and over. Nearly from the beginning, they chose to worship foreign gods, not to trust their God for strength, security and provision.

With that in mind, let’s look at 1 Kings 11. This is during the time of the United Monarchy, when David’s son Solomon is the king of Israel. Solomon was notable for the number of foreign alliances he made, by marrying the queens of other nations, which the ancient readers 1 Kings would recognize as a politically-savvy move. However, in order to gain favor with all these foreign alliances, Solomon allowed the queens to encourage the worship of their foreign gods in Israel.

This is cause for concern for God. God wanted Solomon (and by extension, Israel), to trust God only for political security and direction. But by marrying foreign queens and bringing worship of their gods into Israel, Solomon (and by extension, Israel) was breaking the first commandment. Over and over again,

God warns against the worship of false gods. God is the only god that matters. God wants Solomon's complete focus spiritually so he can live in God's image and be the person and leader God intended him to be.

This passage in 1 Kings is where we see how Israel is going to fall apart because of Solomon's choices. God sends word through a prophet, Ahijah, that it's time for a new king. Jeroboam, a rising star in Solomon's royal ranks, rebels against Solomon and becomes king. God, being disappointed in Solomon's idol worship at the expense of his devotion to God, promises the kingdom to Jeroboam- but not the kingdom as a whole. Solomon's divided loyalties will lead to a divided nation. Jeroboam will be the leader of a weakened kingdom. Let's read together.

29 About that time Jeroboam was going out of Jerusalem, and Ahijah the prophet of Shiloh met him on the way, wearing a new cloak. The two of them were alone out in the country, **30** and Ahijah took hold of the new cloak he was wearing and tore it into twelve pieces. **31** Then he said to Jeroboam, "Take ten pieces for yourself, for this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: 'See, I am going to tear the kingdom out of Solomon's hand and give you ten tribes. **32** But for the sake of my servant David and the city of Jerusalem, which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, he will have one tribe. **33** I will do this because they have forsaken me and worshiped Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, Chemosh the god of the Moabites, and Molek the god of the Ammonites, and have not walked in obedience to me, nor done what is right in my eyes, nor kept my decrees and laws as David, Solomon's father, did.

34 "But I will not take the whole kingdom out of Solomon's hand; I have made him ruler all the days of his life for the sake of David my servant, whom I chose and who obeyed my commands and decrees. **35** I will take the kingdom from his son's hands and give you ten tribes.

If we read this text with an understanding of history that stops at the literal account over everything that happened- just the who, where, and when and goes not further, then our interpretation begins to break down.

So, let's not stop here. I recommend you do what we do with students when we study a historical text. You do a couple reads and then you "**Google, Noodle, and Doodle.**"

Not only is it fun to do, it's fun to say. So how does this work?

First, **Google**. For the first read, you for the main idea, meaning the five "W's" and an "H." This is the "Who, What, Where, When, Why" and "How?" Try to create a summary of the main idea in your head. This is the "Google part" (*point to the text*) - You stick to what's right there in the text. You develop what we formally call in education a "G.I.S.T." which stands for "Generating Interactions between Schemata and Text." This is where you connect what you're reading with the background knowledge you already have about the historical context of the Bible.

If you're like most people, you probably have not had the opportunity to garner a whole lot of historical background knowledge. It's ok. That's no problem. There are resources to help. I like to start with study

bibles. Often, these bibles will have an intro to each book. Sometimes, you can even just read the Wikipedia page for that book of the Bible and you get a pretty good overview. There are also Bible commentaries that offer a lot of insight.

With this particular text in 1 Kings, we know that Solomon is king and there started to be some rebellions. Jeroboam, a talented fellow in Solomon's administration meets a prophet, Ahijah. Ahijah and Jeroboam go out to the country and talk and Ahijah symbolically tears up his coat. Ahijah tells Jeroboam that God wants him to be king since Solomon is allowing the worship of other gods in Israel. Solomon finds out that Jeroboam is going to be king and tries to kill him, but is unsuccessful. God promises to be with Jeroboam during his rule.

Now for the second read: This is where we use or "Noodle" (point to head) we start to make connections between what we're reading and to what else the Bible says about God. We identify any phrases that evoke a response or an emotional reaction. You can Jot down, highlight, or underline any interesting ideas, emotional arguments, provocative statements, author's claims, facts, data, and other supports.

We know that King Solomon is David's son. We make a connection to what happened before when God and David made some important promises to each other. No matter what mistakes David made, and there were many, his faithfulness seemed to always return to God and God alone.

We know that Solomon allowed himself to get distracted. He began to encourage the worship of other gods. He splits his allegiances. He moves from God and thus moves away from the core of his being. He lives for himself instead of God. While he works on building the temple for God, he builds temples for the gods of his wives as well. Eventually, this allegiance to things apart from God split God's kingdom apart. As a leader, Solomon lost a sense of who he truly was. God no longer became the core of his identity, so the core of his nation, one originally devoted to God, dissolved over the next few generations.

Now we arrive at the last step- "The Doodle" (*draw a squiggly line in the air.*) This is where we make a connection to something outside the text. We create a picture in our minds of what this means for us. This is where it's useful to think about Solomon's point of view. The author here even uses a couple puns in Hebrew regarding Solomon's heart and the cloak torn or split apart by Ahijah. It's like the splitting or turning away of Solomon's heart. His heart is only partly devoted to God. The other part is devoted elsewhere. Solomon is only truly himself when his heart is turned all the way toward God.

Let's "Doodle" this out here. This message rings true for us. What are the consequences that result when our hearts are not turned all the way toward God? What happens when our allegiances are split? Things start to fall apart. We find our self-worth in our jobs instead of God so we pour ourselves into our work and neglect our family and friends. We fill our lives with addictions that distract us and leave no space to allow ourselves to be guided by the Holy Spirit.

These are the things the Holy Spirit is looking to grow in us as we read the Bible:

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. -- Galatians 5:22-23

So as we read, we think about perspective. We think about how we, might in our own lives, find

ourselves in a situation not unlike King Solomon's. Divided loyalties wreaking havoc on our lives.

So when we read the historical books for spiritual transformation, we read to see what is always true about God. When we listen to God, we become our true selves. When we falter and pull away from God and make a mess of things, God is still always there, waiting for us and ready to dust us off and set us back on our path.

So, for spiritual transformation, you go through the steps we talked about before. You read for the main idea. You take a second read and think about how this connects to other things you've read in the Bible. You use bible study tools to help you understand the context and what life was like for this ancient audience. Then, you allow the Holy Spirit to help you draw a picture in your mind of what this means for you and your life.

I know sometimes we think of history as boring or irrelevant. We think about the study of history like that scene in the movie *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* where the actor, Ben Stein, plays a high school history teacher. He stands before a classroom of bored students and says, "In 1930, the Republican controlled House of Representatives, in an effort to alleviate the effects of the... Anyone? Anyone? The Great Depression."

The historical books of the Bible recount Israel's 1,000 years of history. The authors of these books of the Old Testament were not writing so we could have an account of everything that happened to the people of Israel and when it happened. As I've explained, that's not what studying history is really about, although that is a part of it.

It is a story of God's relationship with his people, the Israelites, and by extension, because of the death and resurrection of Jesus, us... today. We are the people of God. We are The Church and this is our history yesterday and our story of tomorrow.

The way we think and write about history is always in the service of the present. That's what professor of Biblical Studies and author Peter Enns says. The past serves the needs of the present. For the people of Israel reading this history a thousand years ago, the purpose was to help them make sense of the world they were living in.

Communion + Examen

[Communion Slide] We receive communion together every week. This is a ritual that points us back to a historical event - the meal Jesus shared with his disciples the night before he was killed. But we don't receive communion together because we're obsessed with the past. No, we remember this past to remember how Jesus is with us in our present. So before we receive communion together, we're going to do a prayer of examen together. I'm going to ask you some questions and give you some time to reflect and pray with them. Then I'll pray for us all together.

1. When in the last week did I devote myself wholly to God?
2. When in the last week did I allow my loyalties to be divided?
3. How might I be tempted to look somewhere other than God for my security and thriving this week?
4. How can I trust God with my whole life this week?

Prayer

God, you have gathered us today that we may know you are the God of the whole human story. From our earliest beginnings, through every hardship and trial, you have been present to your people. Through these faithfully remembered stories, we learn to see you present with us today. And so we come to your table now to receive these wafers and juice, or whatever elements we have found. We pray they would be a spiritual food for us. Open our eyes to how you are at work in our stories. Help us to learn the stories of our ancient mothers and fathers, that we may be more faithfully your people in the world.

We offer these prayers and approach your table today in the name of your son, Jesus.

The night he was betrayed, Jesus ate with his disciples. During the meal, he broke bread and offered it to them, saying, “This is my body, broken for you. Take and eat.” After the meal was over, he gave them a cup of wine, saying, “This is my blood, poured out for the forgiveness of sin. Drink it all.” So too, we eat and drink and announce Jesus’ death until he returns. [Receive Communion]

Assignment + Blessing