

# Apostolic Handbook Series

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*Handbook on the Pentateuch*

*Handbook on the Historical Books*

*Handbook on the Psalms and Wisdom Literature*

*Handbook on the Prophets*

*Handbook on the Gospels*

*Handbook on the Book of Acts*

*Handbook on the Epistles of Paul*

*Handbook on the General Epistles and Revelation*



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In memory of Noble Ray Carson



(November 19, 1938 – November 30, 2011)

Pastor and Bishop

Goodlettsville Pentecostal Church

Goodlettsville, Tennessee, 1969–2011

This book is dedicated to the leadership,  
saints, and future generations  
of Goodlettsville Pentecostal Church  
in Goodlettsville, Tennessee.

# Contents

Editors' Preface.....	ix
Acknowledgments .....	xi
Part I	
1. Overview of the Historical Books .....	3
2. The Promise of the Land.....	19
3. The Days of the Judges.....	39
4. The Rise of Kings .....	55
5. The Temple .....	77
6. A Faithful Priest .....	91
7. Challenge of the Prophets .....	107
8. The Book of the Law .....	117
Part II	
9. Sermon Ideas.....	127
10. Word Studies .....	143
11. The Bible and Biblical Culture.....	157
For Further Reading.....	167
Notes.....	173
Bibliography .....	177
Subject Index.....	181
Scripture Index.....	187

# 1 | *Overview of the Historical Books*

Joshua, Judges, Ruth, I and II Samuel, I and II Kings, I and II Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther form the Historical Books in the Christian canon. These texts feature some of the most well-known biblical stories, including the tumbling of the walls of Jericho, Samson's defeat of the Philistines, David's victory over Goliath, and the miraculous stories of the prophets Elijah and Elisha. The books span several eras including the Premonarchic Period, the United Monarchy, the Divided Kingdom, the Exile and the Post-Exilic Period. The Historical Books emphasize the highs and lows in Israelite history. While Joshua describes God's people as triumphant heroes who capture the land of Canaan, II Chronicles ends with Cyrus the Persian's call for the Jews in Babylonian exile to return home and begin the process of rebuilding their lives and their country. Both Esther and Nehemiah became part of the Persian court. Esther's role as queen allowed her to save the Jews. Nehemiah's position as the king's cupbearer created the perfect opportunity for him to seek and receive permission to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem.

This book examines key themes in the blossoming, withering, renewed flourishing, near destruction, and resurrection

of the Jewish people. These themes include the conquest of the land, the restoration of the cry in Israel, and the building, destruction, and reconstruction of the Temple. Along the way, the lives and ministries of various leaders including judges, priests, prophets, and kings are explored.

Israel's struggles reveal the need for solid leadership. Joshua arrived on the scene as the new Moses only to be replaced by judges whose sporadic appearances failed to create consistency among God's people. At one point, the Lord grew weary of the erratic nature of His subjects and refused to heed Israel's calls for help. Nevertheless one judge restored Israel's ability to cry out to God.

Because of this judge's inconsistent leadership and lifestyle, I Samuel begins with the quest for a faithful priest to stamp out corruption and bring purity to God's people. The prophecy of a priestly family devoted to God would be made during Eli's tenure as priest, pass over Samuel's unscrupulous sons, and ultimately be fulfilled when Solomon came to power.

While an unnamed prophet foretold the rise of the faithful priest, other prophets—both named and unnamed—attempted to return Israel to the right path. Prophets preached against glorifying idols and worshiping in high places. These practices ceased for a while when the Temple became the focal point for prayer and devotion to the one true God, but civil strife soon divided the people into adversarial kingdoms with competing holy sites. Good kings worked in conjunction with priests and prophets to rescue God's people from their failings. Bad kings, false prophets, and debased priests came along and undid most of the progress, leading to volatility in the land.

The Historical Books and Jewish history ultimately reveal that only the Book of the Law could preserve Israel through times of prosperity and calamity. When the people became the conquered instead of conquerors, the Word sustained them. When the people found themselves facing judgment, the Book of the Law offered mercy. When leaders

like priests, kings, and prophets failed to live up to the Lord's ideals, the Word of God drew them to a place of repentance.

The Book of the Law served as a light in the valley of the shadow of death. As one of the darkest periods in Jewish history, the Exile illumined a great truth to God's people. They could survive without the land and without the Temple. However, they could not survive without the Book of the Law of God. The Historical Books reveal the indispensable nature of the Book of the Law of God. A brief look at the eras presented in these texts sets the stage for analyzing the key events and leaders in Israel, leading into a discussion of the composers and editors of Joshua–Esther.

## **THE PREMONARCHIC PERIOD**

In the Premonarchic Era, Joshua and the Israelites cashed in on God's pledge to Abraham by claiming the Promised Land. A dream deferred became a reality. The Lord's assurance that He would grant land to Abraham seemed like a forgotten vow when the patriarch's descendants faced slavery in Egypt, wandered aimlessly through the wilderness, and defaulted on their faith by refusing to believe that God would give them victory over the giants in Canaan. Joshua's faithful warriors boldly set the past and all of their doubts aside to achieve what previous generations of Israelites could not.

The Israelites crossed the Jordan, defeated Jericho with divine help, and conquered the land. Their victory, however, was short-lived. Failing to truly follow Joshua in his choice to serve the Lord, the Israelites succumbed to various enemies in the Book of Judges. A succession of foes subdued God's people as they squandered the success promised by the Lord (Joshua 1:8) and achieved by Joshua.

In the mercurial age of the judges, the Israelites fluctuated between freedom and oppression as they returned to the Lord in the face of disaster only to turn away from their God after He restored them. Deliverers known as judges rose and fell in

a cycle of idolatry, oppression, victory, and overall instability that the Israelite tribes seemed unable or unwilling to overcome. A new hope arose in the form of a long-haired judge called from his mother's womb to save God's people from the encroaching Philistines. And yet, Samson could only "begin" to deliver Israel (Judges 13:5) because he allowed his personal weaknesses to overcome the strength provided by the Lord.

The Book of Judges ends with an extended narrative of horror and war ignited by an unspeakable atrocity in which men from a Benjamite city repeatedly raped a Levite's concubine and left her for dead. Benjamin found itself in the crosshairs of the remaining tribes. A civil war broke out that nearly decimated the Benjamites.

The Book of Ruth and the beginning of I Samuel offer a brief and welcome interlude from the depravity that concludes Judges. Children bring hope to women facing the despair of death, lost love, and infertility. When Naomi's sons died, she pleaded with her daughters-in-law to stay in Moab. Ruth refused. Cleaving to Naomi, she helped her mother-in-law overcome the bitterness of loss that would produce a bountiful harvest of descendants. After marrying Boaz, Ruth gave birth to Obed, starting a line that would lead to David, the man who would completely deliver Israel from the Philistines and begin a dynasty.

## **RUTH & PENTECOST**

*In Jewish tradition, the Book of Ruth is associated with Pentecost. The harvest time setting of Ruth fits the holiday's connection to reaping (Exodus 23:16) and first fruits (Numbers 28:26). Jews also commemorate God giving the law to Moses on Pentecost. The Book of Acts has many parallels to Ruth and the feast. As a Moabite who married an Israelite, Ruth serves as a type of the Gentile bride that God chose to receive His Spirit in Acts 10. On the Day of Pentecost, God reaped a great harvest of souls, writing the law upon the hearts of the people. The 120 original Holy Ghost-filled people would soon be joined by three thousand new souls as well as Samaritans and Gentiles.*