



Session Eight

MORE HISTORY AND FAMOUS NAMES (The Rest of the Historical Books)

*Oh Spirit of God,
You proclaimed yourself through Moses
As the one moving over the waters,
Boundless power that you are.
And with your overwhelming care
Brooding over and protecting the newly-born
Under your wings, with compassion.
Through you shall all of us be renewed at the resurrection.
Glory to our Lord through you, and praise to you
With the Father Almighty, Amen.*

St. Gregory of Nareg (Divine Liturgy of the Armenian Church)



Word Watch**Ark of the**

Covenant: the chest containing the tablets of the law which were to rest in the tabernacle and then the temple. With the destruction of the first temple by the Babylonians in 587, the ark disappeared (see the movie "Indiana Jones and the Lost Ark" for an imaginative treatment of its whereabouts). Synagogues today have scrolls of the law stored behind a curtain in a side wall.



Victory and Loss

The dying King David chose his son Solomon to be the next ruler of Israel.

1. Read *1 Kings 3:3-14*.

What did Solomon ask for?

2. Solomon was known for his wisdom. Read the story of what is probably the most famous example of his wise decisions in *1 Kings 3:16-28*.

How do you think what he asked for (*1 Kings 3:3-14*) helped in this decision?

Dilemma

Find a story in a newspaper or magazine involving two opposing claims and apply the "wisdom of Solomon" in deciding which claim will prevail. Work in small groups and report to the class as follows:

- a. Describe the problem.
- b. Relate how you arrived at a solution
- c. Discuss how they think their decision reflects Christian love and concern and actually ends the problem so no further disputes are possible.

Solomon was an active king, building a strong navy and army, as well as many cities in various parts of the kingdom, which was truly becoming an empire. He greatly extended Israel's territory, and forged alliances and trade agreements with many foreign powers. People continued to come from far and wide to hear his wisdom, including the Queen of Sheba.

The Temple is Built

Solomon's most famous achievement was to oversee the construction of the Temple in Jerusalem. Thousands of workers labored on it, using only the finest materials and making it a truly beautiful place. When it was finished, the Ark of the Covenant was brought into its sanctuary to stay. No longer were the Hebrew people wanderers, carrying their tent of worship and the Ark with them. The Temple was situated in one place, and the Ark had come to rest in it. The celebration, when everything was ready, lasted for fourteen days.

Solomon Forgets God; The Kingdom is Divided

God had promised to reward Solomon for his faithfulness. But Solomon, for all his talents and strengths, didn't or couldn't resist the influence of some of his wives and courtiers, who pulled him away from God into idol worship in his old age. Then enemies of Israel created trouble which led to civil strife—a dangerous, difficult situation which Rehoboam, Solomon's son and heir, inherited when his father died.

Civil strife led to civil war, partly because Rehoboam could not handle the problems he was faced with, and by 930 B.C. the country had divided into two kingdoms: Israel in the north with ten tribes, and Judah in the south, retaining loyalty to David and Solomon but consisting only of the tribes of Benjamin and Judah. (There were members of the priestly tribe of Levi in both kingdoms.) Rehoboam was king of Judah, while Jeroboam, a military man, ruled over Israel. The two kingdoms co-existed from 930 to 722 B.C. But these were years of fighting between the two, as well as corruption and discontentment among the people.

The End of the Northern Kingdom

Finally, the northern kingdom of Israel was attacked by the Assyrian empire and within a year (723 B.C.) it was utterly defeated. The ten tribes were enslaved and transported eastward to the outer reaches of the Assyrian empire, which stretched as far as present-day Iran. Assyrians moved into the land the Israelites had left behind, and it became known, from then on, as Samaria. The Assyrian settlers did adopt the Hebrew God as their own, but their form of worship was not like that of the true Hebrews, and in later centuries they were looked down on by the Hebrews. The ten tribes of Israel were lost, assimilated and scattered among the Assyrians when they were transported to the Assyrian empire. Only the tribes of Judah and Benjamin (along with some Levites) remained in existence in Judah, to the south. Thus the religion and culture of the Hebrew people became known as "Judaism" and the people themselves as "Jews."

The Southern Kingdom is Conquered

The southern kingdom of Judah continued as an autonomous state until 586 B.C. The Assyrians had tried and failed to conquer it, and finally they themselves were overthrown by the Babylonians (sometimes called the Chaldeans). The formidable leader of the Babylonians was Nebuchadnezzar, who entered Jerusalem in 586 B.C. and destroyed both the beautiful Temple built by Solomon and the Ark of the Covenant. The Hebrews were carried off to slavery in Babylonia. The empire of David and Solomon, the great empire of the Hebrews, had come to an end. The long history of the Hebrews' lack of faith in God had destroyed it. But God still did not abandon His people.

A New Beginning

History often seems to be a series of conquests of one great empire by another. In 539 B.C. the Persian empire conquered the Babylonians. The Persian leader, Cyrus the Great, presided over the largest empire the world had ever seen up to that time.

Cyrus made an important decision: He allowed the Jews enslaved in Babylonia

Did You Know

The "Babylonian captivity" or "exile" lasted nearly fifty years. Read Psalm 137, verses 1-6 to get an idea of the Hebrews' sadness and longing after this terrible event. Many Armenians read this Psalm and remember their own despairing songs of massacre and exile in 1915.

Looking In

As you read about the lives, accomplishments, and challenges of the men and women of the Bible, you can't help but notice the very different strengths these people brought to their lives. What's one of your outstanding qualities? Bravery? Kindness? Vision? Humor? Identify it and thank God!

to return to their homeland. The First Book of Chronicles gives us a history of the Hebrews from the time of Adam, through the life of David, up to the Babylonian captivity. The Second Book of Chronicles continues the story up to the time of this Persian king, Cyrus.

The Book of *Ezra* and the Book of *Nehemiah* tell us about the Jews who returned to Canaan (now called Palestine) and how they rebuilt the Temple in Jerusalem as well as the wall around the city.

The Book of *Esther* is a story about the Jews who stayed in Persia, and how God protected them there. The books of Tobit and Judith are set in the time of the Assyrian conquest and give us history of that time (though they were written later.) Judith, one of the deuterocanonical books, is a wonderful companion to Esther, both of which offer powerful images of determined and courageous women.

The Maccabees: The End of Old Testament History

Alexander the Great defeated the Persians in 330 B.C. The Jews of Palestine, along with the whole Middle East, came under Greek control, first under the Ptolemies of Egypt (who were of Greek background) and then the Seleucids, led by Antiochus the Great. When Antiochus tried to force Hellenistic (another word for Greek) culture and values on the Jews, they revolted under their leader Mattathias the Levite and his sons. Mattathias' name in Greek is "Maccabeus", and the Books of the Maccabees tell of the success of this revolt. An independent Jewish state was established in Palestine, governed by the Maccabees.

This independent state did not last long. The Roman Empire began expanding into the Middle East, and the struggling remnant of God's people found themselves under the control of yet another foreign power. After 40 B.C., with the Romans in control, the history of Israel in the Old Testament comes to a close. The new covenant, or "New Testament" of Jesus Christ, would transcend the Old, bringing God's promise of the Kingdom into completion.

Order, please!

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____

Quick Quiz #8

① to ⑤ **Either/Or. Circle the correct answer.**

Solomon's greatest achievement was building the:
Ark of the Covenant The Temple in Jerusalem

This leader let the Jews return to their homeland:
Nebuchadnezzar Cyrus

This book tells the story of a Jewish revolt:
Maccabees Nehemiah

These two tribes made up the Southern Kingdom:
Judah and Benjamin Judah and Israel

Solomon was best known for his:
Wisdom evil

⑥ to ⑩ **True or False?**

The Queen of Sheba admired Solomon
 T F

Solomon's father was King Saul
 T F

The historian Yeghishe wrote about Nehemiah
 T F

The Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed by the Babylonians
 T F

Solomon was a powerful and energetic leader
 T F

The Armenian Angle

The Book of Maccabees has had a big influence on the language and imagination of Armenian historians. The cleric Yeghishe, who wrote his famous book "Vartan and the Armenian War" in the 5th century, often alluded to the Maccabean revolt. In his mind, the stories of the Maccabees revolting against Rome and the Armenians fighting the Persians shared images of purpose and valor.



