

# **Adult Catechism April 4, 2016**

## *The Historical Books of the Old Testament*

### **Part 1: Scripture Readings:**

**Joshua 1:1-7**: After the death of Moses the servant of the Lord, the Lord spoke to Joshua son of Nun, Moses' assistant, saying, "My servant Moses is dead. Now proceed to cross the Jordan, you and all this people, into the land that I am giving to them, to the Israelites. Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given to you, as I promised to Moses. From the wilderness and the Lebanon as far as the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, to the Great Sea in the west shall be your territory. No one shall be able to stand against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will not fail you or forsake you. Be strong and courageous; for you shall put this people in possession of the land that I swore to their ancestors to give them. Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to act in accordance with all the law that my servant Moses commanded you; do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, so that you may be successful wherever you go.

**2 Samuel 5:1-5**: Then all the tribes of Israel came to David at Hebron, and said, "Look, we are your bone and flesh. For some time, while Saul was king over us, it was you who led out Israel and brought it in. The Lord said to you: It is you who shall be shepherd of my people Israel, you who shall be ruler over Israel." So all the elders of Israel came to the king at Hebron; and King David made a covenant with them at Hebron before the Lord, and they anointed David king over Israel. David was thirty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned forty years. At Hebron he reigned over Judah seven years and six months; and at Jerusalem he reigned over all Israel and Judah thirty-three years.

**1 Kings 3:1-14**: Solomon loved the Lord, walking in the statutes of his father David; only, he sacrificed and offered incense at the high places. The king went to Gibeon to sacrifice there, for that was the principal high place; Solomon used to offer a thousand burnt offerings on that altar. At Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream by night; and God said, "Ask what I should give you." And Solomon said . . . Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, able to discern between good and evil; for who can govern this your great people?" It pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked this. God said to him, "Because you have asked this, and have not asked for yourself long life or riches, or for the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern what is right, I now do according to your word. Indeed I give you a wise and discerning mind; no one like you has been before you and no one like you shall arise after you. I give you also what you have not asked, both riches and honor all your life; no other king shall compare with you. If you will walk in my ways, keeping my statutes and my commandments, as your father David walked, then I will lengthen your life."

**1 Kings 6:1-6**: In the four hundred eightieth year after the Israelites came out of the land of Egypt, in the fourth year of Solomon's reign over Israel, in the month of Ziv, which is the second month, he began to build the house of the Lord. The house that King Solomon built for the Lord was sixty cubits long, twenty cubits wide, and thirty cubits high. The vestibule in front of the nave of the house was twenty cubits wide, across the width of the house. Its depth was ten cubits in front of the house. For the house he made windows with recessed frames. He also built a structure against the wall of the house, running around the walls of the house, both the nave and the inner sanctuary; and he made side chambers all around. The lowest story was five cubits wide, the middle one was six cubits wide, and the third was seven cubits wide; for around the outside of the house he made offsets on the wall in order that the supporting beams should not be inserted into the walls of the house.

**Part 2: What are the Historical Books of the Old Testament?:** The Historical Books include Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther. Joshua to 2 Kings in the Jewish canon is called the “Former Prophets”. All the rest of the books are included in the “Writings”. These books are history in the best sense, that is, they do more than present data about past events. They present the data in a form that tries to explain what the events mean and how God was working in them.

The “Former Prophets” (Joshua to 2 Kings) record the history of Israel from the death of Moses to the fall of the southern kingdom of Judah, from 1200 BC to 586 BC. This period includes the settlement of Israel in the land, the tribal government under the Judges, the time of seeking a king, the golden age under David and Solomon, the division and downfall of the kingdoms. All through the narrative runs the understanding of God’s judgement and redemption in political and social life. 1 and 2 Chronicles cover much of the same history from a different perspective. The books of Ezra and Nehemiah pick up the account of Israel and Israel’s God in the period after the Exile, the time of the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the renewing of the covenant in a harsh new time.

**Joshua** marks the end of the Exodus period. Israel enters the land under a new generation of leaders, conquers the hill country, and enters into a great ceremony of covenant renewal at Shechem.

**Judges** is a collection of accounts of tribal heroes and heroines from the period between the time of Joshua and the call of Samuel. These are accounts of charismatic leaders who, in times of crisis, were called by God to save a part of the tribes from the oppression of an enemy. They teach an understanding of history in a pattern of faithfulness, unfaithfulness, judgement, and salvation in the political world.

**Ruth** emphasizes God working through a foreign woman to bring forth King David. It carries a strong warning against excluding anyone from a place among God’s people.

**1 and 2 Samuel** record the end of the period of the judges and the rise of the kingship in Israel, with all the accompanying tensions between old ways and new ways. The narratives include the lives and rules of the prophet Samuel, and Kings Saul and David.

**1 and 2 Kings** are the history of the monarchy from King Solomon to the Exile. Solomon’s glory, the building of the temple, the division of the Kingdom, the destruction of the two kingdoms, and the rise of prophecy (Elijah and Elisha) are important themes in these books. Faithfulness to God is defined in social and political terms as well as religious terms.

**1 and 2 Chronicles** were written after the destruction of Jerusalem and try to answer the question: “Why did God choose to punish His people in such a way?” The answer is found in history. God’s people were unfaithful and what happened in social and political history is an expression of God’s judgement on an unfaithful people.

**Ezra** picks up on the themes of Chronicles and argues for national purity and exclusiveness.

**Nehemiah** is the account of the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem and the re-establishment of the covenant. It too, argues for exclusiveness.

**Esther** is a delightful account of a Jewish heroine whose faithfulness saved her people from certain death.

**Part 3: The Book of Joshua:** The book of Joshua takes the biblical storyline from the plains of Moab into the promised land. It narrates Israel’s history from the crossing of the Jordan River to the fall of Jericho to the conquest of the land. The book tells us how the land was divided among the tribes and includes Joshua’s last speech to the people before his death.

At the beginning of the book, the Lord commissions Joshua to take on the leadership of Israel as the successor of Moses. Before his death, Moses and the people had defeated two kings east of the Jordan: Sihon of Heshbon and Og of Bashan. He gave their land to Reuben, Manasseh and Gad on the condition that their men would help the other tribes conquer the rest of the promised land (Deut 3). Joshua

reminds them of their commitment (Josh 1).

Then Joshua sends a group of spies into Jericho and they stay at the house of Rahab, making a deal with her that when the people of Israel conquer Jericho they will not kill anyone in her house. When the people cross the Jordan, the Lord miraculously parts the waters by having the Levites with the Ark of the Covenant stand in the middle of the river bed. Just as at the Red Sea, the people cross with dry feet.

The people set up camp on the west side of the Jordan at Gilgal. There they celebrate the Passover, the men are circumcised and the miraculous manna ceases. Joshua has an angelic vision in which he receives the Lord's "battle plan" for taking Jericho. The people are to walk around the city with the Ark for six days in silence and then on the seventh day they are to shout loudly as they walk around. When they follow these instructions, the walls of Jericho collapse. Later on in the book, Joshua apportions the land to the various tribes. Depending on the size and requests of each tribe, they get different portions. Yet most of the land is distributed by casting lots at Shiloh. In this section, Joshua also establishes cities of refuge and cities for the Levites. The land distribution was very important for an ancient agrarian society because it determined the livelihood and wealth potential of each family.

Joshua then shares his last thoughts with the leaders and people of Israel: to drive out the other peoples from the land, to avoid intermarrying, to follow the Law and to reject idol worship. Most of all, he urges them to serve the Lord and they pledge themselves to be faithful to him. The book of Joshua illustrates the people's struggle with fulfilling God's calling, but also shows his fidelity to his promises. It is a call for us to be faithful to him who is faithful to us.

**Part 4: The Book of Judges:** Judges covers the period from Joshua's conquest of the promised land to the life of Samuel. The "judges" are leaders that God raised up in Israel to defeat the nation's enemies and bring about God's righteous rule.

The book describes a cycle of sin and deliverance which the people of Israel fell into during this period of their history. The cycle begins with sinful idolatry followed by the Lord's judgment at the hands of the nations. Then the people repent and the Lord sends a judge who establishes peace for a period of years. Finally, the cycle restarts: sin to judgment to repentance to deliverance.

There are six major judges about whom we know details: Othniel, Ehud, Deborah, Gideon, Jephthah and Samson. Deborah initiates the defeat of Sisera and his Canaanite armies. The Song of Deborah follows the story of the battle. Gideon is the ideal judge of Israel. The angel of the Lord calls him to attack the vast armies of Midian with a mere 300 men and Gideon prevails. Unfortunately, Gideon falls into idolatrous worship in his old age (8:27). Samson is dedicated to the Lord from birth to be a Nazirite (Num 6). Yet an unholy rage accompanies his legendary strength and brings him to do some cruel deeds. Eventually Delilah deceives him and gives him up to the Philistines. Samson is the tragic hero of the book of Judges. Though he has God-given strength, he yields to his weaknesses.

During the period of the judges, Israel does not have a king and everyone does "what is right in his own eyes" (21:25). Some of the men in the town of Gibeah in Benjamin become so evil that they abuse and kill a woman. Her husband asks Israel to war against the Benjamites because of their wickedness. All the tribes gather together and attack Benjamin. Before the battle, the tribes vow not to give their daughters in marriage to any Benjamites. But after Benjamin sorely loses the battle, the few remaining men have no women to marry. The other Israelites then devise a plan for the Benjamites to gain wives without breaking the vow they had made (21). The point of Judges is that God rescues his people when they repent and executes his judgment on them when they rebel. It also shows us that righteous behavior is really important for the proper functioning of society. The Israelites should have conquered the whole land. They should have listened to the judges. They should have avoided idol worship. And they should have stayed away from infighting. We can also learn from the mistakes of the judges themselves: strength and power should be used for good and not for selfish or evil purposes.

**Part 5: The 1st and 2nd Books of Samuel:** These books describe the rise and development of kingship in Israel. Samuel is a pivotal figure. He bridges the gap between the period of the Judges and the monarchy, and guides Israel's transition to kingship. A Deuteronomistic editor presents both positive and negative traditions about the monarchy, portraying it both as evidence of Israel's rejection of the Lord as their sovereign (1 Sm 8:6–22; 12:1–25) and as part of God's plan to deliver the people (1 Sm 9:16; 10:17–27; 2 Sm 7:8–17). Samuel's misgivings about abuse of royal power foreshadow the failures and misdeeds of Saul and David and the failures of subsequent Israelite kings.

Although the events described in 1 and 2 Samuel move from the last of the judges to the decline of David's reign and the beginning of a legendary "Golden Age" under Solomon's rule, this material does not present either a continuous history or a systematic account of this period. The author/editor developed a narrative timeline around freely composed speeches, delivered by prophets like Samuel (e.g., 1 Sm 15:10–31; 28:15–19) and Nathan (2 Sm 12:1–12), who endorse Deuteronomistic perspectives regarding the establishment of the monarchy, the relationship between worship and obedience, and the divine covenant established with the house of David.

These books include independent blocks (e.g., the Ark Narrative [1 Sm 4:1–7:1], Saul's rise to power [1 Sm 9:1–11:15], David's ascendancy over Saul [1 Sm 16–31], the Succession Narrative [2 Sm 9–20; 1 Kgs 1–2]), which the editor shaped into three narrative cycles, the last two marked by transitional passages in 1 Sm 13:1 and 2 Sm 1:1. Each section focuses on a major figure in the development of the monarchy: Samuel, the reluctant king maker (1 Sm 1–12); Saul, the king whom the Lord rejects (1 Sm 13–31); David, the king after the Lord's own heart (2 Sm 1–24). A common theme unites these narratives: Israel's God acts justly, prospering those who remain faithful and destroying those who reject his ways (1 Sm 2:9). Along with the rest of the Deuteronomistic History, the Books of Samuel become an object lesson for biblical Israel as it tries to re-establish its religious identity after the destruction of Jerusalem and the loss of its homeland (587/586 B.C.).

**Part 6: The 1st and 2nd Books of Kings:** First and Second Kings, originally one book (like 1 and 2 Samuel and 1 and 2 Chronicles) and simply called "Kings" in the Hebrew tradition (Melechim), are appropriately titled since they trace the history of the kings of Israel and Judah from the time of Solomon to the Babylonian captivity. First Kings abruptly ends with the beginning of the reign of Ahaziah in 853 B.C.

After David's death (chaps. 1-2), his son Solomon became king. Chapters 1-11 trace the life and reign of Solomon, including Israel's rise to the peak of her glory, the spread of the nation's kingdom, and the construction of the temple and palace in Jerusalem. But in Solomon's later years, he drifted from the Lord because of his pagan wives who wrongly influenced him and turned his heart away from the worship of God in the temple.

As a result, the king with the divided heart leaves behind a divided kingdom. For the next century, the book of First Kings traces the twin histories of two sets of kings and two nations of disobedient people who are growing indifferent to God's prophets and precepts. The next king was Rehoboam, who lost the northern part of the kingdom. After this the Northern Kingdom, which included 10 tribes, was known as Israel, and the Southern Kingdom, which included the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, was called Judah. In the last chapters of 1 Kings, the focus is on the evil of King Ahab and righteous prophet Elijah who condemned Ahab's wickedness and Israel's disobedience.

The central theme, therefore, is to show how disobedience led to the disruption of the kingdom. The welfare of the nation depended on the faithfulness of its leadership and people to the covenants of God with Israel. First Kings not only gives a record of the history of these kings, but it demonstrates the success of any king (and of the nation as a whole) depends on the measure of the king's allegiance to God's law or truth. The book truly illustrates how "righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to

any people" (Prov. 14:34). Unfaithfulness to God's covenant resulted in decline and captivity. The key chapters are 11 and 12 which describe the demise of Solomon and the division of the kingdom. Other significant chapters that have key roles are 3 and 4 dealing with Solomon's choice of wisdom and wise rule, chapter 8 the dedication of the temple, chapters 17 through 19 recording the great ministry of Elijah.

Second Kings continues the history of Elijah and his successor, Elisha, but it also continues what might be termed, the "Tale of the Two Kingdoms." As such, it continues to trace the history of the Northern Kingdom of Israel and the Southern Kingdom of Judah until they are finally conquered and taken into captivity. Israel fell to Assyria in 722 B.C. and Judah fell to the Babylonians in 586 B.C. In both kingdoms the prophets continued to warn the people that God would punish them unless they repented. Second Kings teaches that willful sin in a nation has a woeful end. In 1 and 2 Samuel, the nation is born, in 1 Kings it is divided, and in 2 Kings it is dispersed. After years of pleading with His people through the prophets, God's patience finally turns to discipline just as He promised. Because both books were originally one, 1 and 2 Kings share the same theme and goal. They teach us how unfaithfulness (disobedience to God's law and rebellion) must lead to God's discipline and the overthrow of the monarchy. The two kingdoms collapsed because of the failure of the kings to rule righteously and give heed to God's truth.

***Part 7: The 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Books of Chronicles:*** The two Books of Chronicles are the 13th and 14th books of the Old Testament in the Authorized Version of the Bible. The name Chronicles is a free rendering of the Hebrew title "events of past times." The author, known as the chronicler, is sometimes identified with Ezra. Those scholars who believe that Chronicles and Ezra and Nehemiah were written by a single author date the work in the period 400 - 250 BC; others date Chronicles as early as 515 - 500 BC. Chronicles recounts biblical history from Adam to Cyrus the Great (d. 529 BC), paralleling and often directly excerpting from Genesis through Kings, but with additional sources, frequent omissions, and different emphases. Extracts from Samuel and Kings, historical and legendary materials, sermons, oracles, and prayers are included in a genealogical framework.

The work focuses on David and Solomon as founders of the Temple and its priestly and musical orders. The departure of the northern kingdom of Israel from the Davidic dynasty is deplored, and the history of the southern kingdom of Judah is told with the intent of reuniting all Palestinian Jews in the purified temple worship at Jerusalem in postexilic times (after 537 BC). Chronicles gives a more flattering view of Judah's kings than do the books of Samuel and Kings, and it emphasizes the element of miraculous divine intervention in biblical history.

The two books were originally one. They bore the title in the Massoretic Hebrew *Dibre hayyamim*, i.e., "Acts of the Days." This title was rendered by Jerome in his Latin version "Chronicon," and hence "Chronicles." In the Septuagint version the book is divided into two, and bears the title *Paraleipomena*, i.e., "things omitted," or "supplements", because containing many things omitted in the Books of Kings. The time of the composition of the Chronicles was, there is every ground to conclude, subsequent to the Babylonian Exile, probably between 450 and 435 B.C. The contents of this twofold book, both as to matter and form, correspond closely with this idea. The close of the book records the proclamation of Cyrus permitting the Jews to return to their own land, and this forms the opening passage of the Book of Ezra, which must be viewed as a continuation of the Chronicles.

The author of Chronicles does not give prominence to political occurrences, as is done in Samuel and Kings, but to ecclesiastical institutions. "The genealogies, so uninteresting to most modern readers, were really an important part of the public records of the Hebrew state. They were the basis on which not only the land was distributed and held, but the public services of the temple were arranged and conducted, the Levites and their descendants alone, as is well known, being entitled and first fruits set apart for that purpose." The "Chronicles" are an epitome of the sacred history from the days of Adam

down to the return from Babylonian Exile, a period of about 3,500 years.

There are in Chronicles, and the books of Samuel and Kings, forty parallels, often verbal, proving that the writer both knew and used these records (1 Chr. 17:18; comp. 2 Sam. 7:18-20; 1 Chr. 19; comp. 2 Sam. 10, etc.). As compared with Samuel and Kings, the Book of Chronicles omits many particulars there recorded (2 Sam. 6:20-23; 9; 11; 14-19, etc.), and includes many things peculiar to itself (1 Chr. 12; 22; 23-26; 27; 28; 29, etc.). Twenty whole chapters, and twenty-four parts of chapters, are occupied with matter not found elsewhere. It also records many things in fuller detail, as (e.g.) the list of David's heroes (1 Chr. 12:1-37), the removal of the ark from Kirjath-jearim to Mount Zion (1 Chr. 13; 15:2-24; 16:4-43; comp. 2 Sam. 6), Uzziah's leprosy and its cause (2 Chr. 26:16-21; comp. 2 Kings 15:5), etc.

**Part 8: The Book of Ezra:** The books of Ezra and Nehemiah are regarded as a single book in the Hebrew Bible. They describe the era in Jewish history: the Restoration. The Restoration is the time period in which the Babylonian exile ends and the Jews return to the Holy Land to rebuild the Temple and Jerusalem. Both books are written by the same author who compiled their content in late biblical Hebrew with a few sections in Aramaic

The events in the book of Ezra take place during the rule of Cyrus, the Persian king who took over the Babylonian Empire and the whole mid-east region. Cyrus institutes an empire-wide policy of religious toleration, sending people groups back to their native lands and funding the reconstruction of their holy places. This policy benefited the Jews greatly, allowing them to return to the Holy Land in 537 BC. Sheshbazzar leads the first group of exiles home. Scholars do not agree on his exact identity, but it is clear that he was of the royal line of David. Zerubbabel, also of the royal line, succeeds him as the leader of the returning exiles.

The Jews first build an altar and celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles. When they lay the Temple foundation, people groups in the land want to join the effort. But Zerubbabel does not allow them to participate because they are not Jewish and they worship many gods. After this, the groups oppose the Temple's reconstruction and for about 10 years, the Jews made no progress on the Temple. Finally, with the prophetic encouragement of Haggai and Zechariah, Zerubbabel takes up the project again. This time the opposition is overruled by the new Persian king, Darius. The Jews complete the Temple in 516 BC, celebrating its dedication and the Passover.

Ezra does not appear in the book until Ch. 7 when Artaxerxes I, the current ruler of Persia sends him to Judah in about 458 BC. Ezra is a scribe, a Persian official and a Levitical priest. He leads a group of exiles back to Judah. The lists of exiles in Ch. 2 and 8 show that the continuity of the exiles with their Jewish forefathers was essential to their preservation of the covenant. Their covenant faithfulness to the Lord hinges on their identity as the people of God. They therefore took great care to preserve their family histories in these lists.

Zerubbabel's refusal to let the "people of the land" join in reconstructing the Temple indicates the importance of Jewish identity in relation to the covenant. These non-Jewish polytheists in the land are not part of the same covenant as the Jews. Likewise the last two chapters of Ezra emphasize the importance of Jewish identity. Some of the men who stayed behind in Judah during the exile intermarried with non-Jewish women in the land. This act was against the covenant, since the Law of Moses forbade intermarriage with other people groups which had led many Israelite ancestors to worship foreign gods (Deut 7:3). After much prayer, deliberation and mourning over the crisis, Ezra and the Jewish leaders require the men who had intermarried to divorce their foreign wives. Spiritually, we see in Ezra that God fulfills his promises and yet sometimes his plan of fulfillment includes serious effort on our part in the face of opposition.

**Part 9: The Book of Nehemiah:** Nehemiah is the 16th book in our Catholic Bibles. Just as Ezra (the Scribe) of the previous book rebuilt Jerusalem's temple, Nehemiah (the Governor) rebuilt

Jerusalem's walls. The first six chapters address the rebuilding of the walls themselves. The remainder of the book deals with the rebuilding of the community within those walls. Like Ezra, his writing dates from the middle of the 5th century B.C. (In some Bibles, the Book of Ezra is called the First Book of Esdras and the Book of Nehemiah is called the Second Book of Esdras. To add to the confusion, if your Bible has Books by all four of these titles, then the one that is called the First Book of Esdras is really a different book altogether that in yet other Bibles is the Third Book of Esdras. There's also a Fourth Book of Esdras, but that's not related to any of these.) In Nehemiah's pages, you'll read about: Nehemiah's call (he had been the butler of the Persian king beforehand); the Dragon Spring Gate and the Dung Gate which Nehemiah constructed; how Nehemiah had his full heart in the project he was about; how the workers had some very difficult working conditions (working with one hand while holding a weapon for defense in the other); how God's People had to sell themselves due to bad economic times; how Nehemiah's enemies tried to trick him; how singers were important to the rebuilding; how Ezra really took his Bible reading seriously (reading it publicly from dawn until Noon); how 1/10 of the population would live in Jerusalem; how two choirs on the wall met at the dedication (under the baton of director, Jezreiah); and how Nehemiah struggled for the purity of the line of David's succession.

***Part 10: The Book of Ruth:*** Ruth is a family story. The family is struck by tragedy when the father (Elimelech) and his two sons (Mahlon and Kilion) die, leaving behind three widows (Naomi, Ruth and Orpah). In the Ancient Near East, women were economically dependent on the men in their families. Thus Ruth and Orpah can return to their parents' homes for security, but Naomi is abandoned. Orpah decides to go to her parents, but Ruth decides to go with Naomi despite her desperate situation. The pair leaves Ruth's native Moab to go to Bethlehem where Naomi is originally from. Ruth's decision is all the more remarkable because she is a Gentile while Naomi is an Israelite. Ruth not only forsakes her homeland and her family, but her religion as well (1:16). Her whole-hearted devotion is subsequently rewarded in the story. Upon their return to Bethlehem, Naomi asks that her name be changed from Naomi, which means "pleasant," to Mara, which means "bitter," because of the suffering she has endured (1:20).

As soon as they get settled in Bethlehem, Ruth seeks work to provide for their needs. She goes to glean in the fields and happens to work in the field of Boaz (2:3). Gleaning is the process of picking up leftover grain by hand after the initial harvest is completed using scythes. Once Boaz finds out who Ruth is, he is impressed by her faithfulness to Naomi and so invites her to keep coming to his field to glean (2:8). This invitation is an act of great generosity because Boaz's grain is his own income. Boaz even allows Ruth to eat the food provided for the harvesters at mid-day. She stays gleaning in Boaz's field for the whole harvest season (2:23). Later on in the story, Ruth asks Boaz to marry her and provide for her and Naomi (3:9). Boaz wants to marry her, but there is another relative who is closer and has the legal right to marry Ruth (3:12). This other relative is not named in the book. Boaz offers Elimelech's property to him, which he accepts (4:4). Then Boaz informs the relative that in order to get the property he must marry Ruth, which the relative does not want to do. He gives up his right to Boaz (4:6). Boaz then marries Ruth and the two become the great-grandparents of David, the king of Israel. The book ends with David's genealogy, which is an essential part of the story (4:18-22). The genealogy connects the faithful Ruth with the faithful king. It relates the story to the present time of the original readers.

The book illustrates the Lord's faithfulness to those who love him like Naomi and Ruth. It also shows that God had mercy on the Gentiles, like Ruth, even during Old Testament times. It foreshadows the gift of salvation to all the Gentiles which Jesus brings. When people are faithful to the Lord, he is faithful in return.

***Part 11: The Book of Esther:*** The Book of Esther tells a story of the deliverance of the Jewish people. We are shown a Persian emperor, Ahasuerus (loosely based on Xerxes, 485–464 B.C.), who makes momentous decisions for trivial reasons, and his wicked minister, Haman, who takes advantage of the king's compliance to pursue a personal vendetta against the Jews by having a royal decree issued ordering their destruction. The threat is averted by two Jews, Esther and Mordecai. Their influence and intervention allow

the Jews to turn the tables on their enemies and rout their attackers. This deliverance is commemorated by the inauguration of the Jewish festival of Purim on the fourteenth and fifteenth of Adar (mid-February through mid-March). The book confronts the modern reader with important themes, the evils of genocide and racism.

Esther's character matures over the course of the narrative. As a girl she is recruited for the king's harem because of her physical beauty. But at a key moment in the book (chap. 4), she rises to the challenge to risk her life for the salvation of her people. At that point, she transforms her status as queen from a position of personal privilege to one of power and public responsibility. Esther's uncle, Mordecai, appears first as an adoptive father, whose solicitude for Esther leads him to the king's gate, where he foils a plot to assassinate the king. When he learns of the edict against the Jews, he encourages Esther to confront the king. The book ends with Mordecai as the king's chief minister.

The book is a free composition, not a historical document. The book was probably written in the third or second century B.C. It has come down to us in two versions: an older Hebrew version, and a Greek version based on a text similar to the Hebrew, but with additions and alterations. One striking feature of the Hebrew version of the Book of Esther is that no divine names or titles are employed here; God is not mentioned at all. The Greek additions to Esther have many explicit references to God, as well as explicit descriptions of the beliefs and emotional states of Esther and Mordecai. They also elaborate on the content of the edicts from Ahasuerus as illustrations of Gentile attitudes toward Jews. While there are only a few contradictions between these Greek additions and the older Hebrew text, reading the book with these additions is a very different experience from reading the book without them. The additions to Esther are an excellent example of a process that occurs throughout the Bible: further reflections on the story become part of the story itself. Although the Book of Esther was questioned by some early Christians, even St. Jerome, the whole book, including the Greek additions, was included in the canon of Scripture by the Council of Trent.