
a *Grace Notes* course

History I

by Warren Doud

Lesson 1

Old Testament History (Part 1 of 4)

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Lesson 1 Quiz.....6

Instructions for Completing the Lesson

Begin each study session with prayer. It is the Holy Spirit who makes spiritual things discernable to Christians, so it is essential to be in fellowship with the Lord during Bible study.

Instructions

1. Read the lesson notes carefully.
 2. Look up and study each passage of the Bible that is mentioned.
 3. Complete the answers to the Questions and send your response to *Grace Notes*.
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History I - Lesson 1

INTRODUCTION

Any study of the Old Testament must include the study of history from the divine viewpoint. This type of study usually provides the Christian with a viewpoint that is quite different from that taken by many historians. The reason is that many of the histories that you will read take no account of God's sovereign purpose or His activity. They deal only with surface issues in the interpretations of history.

For example, economists might interpret history from the viewpoint of economics, trade, money, and balance of industrial and commercial power. They try to make all shifts in history fit an economic framework. A geographer might interpret history according to geographical circumstances, indicating that tribes and nations move about and settle where they do or fight for new territory because of the locations of rivers and valleys or because of climatic conditions. There are those who advocate a "strong ruler" interpretation, that history is directed by the powerful people in society. There is also the cataclysmic interpretation, that the human race moves in response to acts of nature. There are many theories, and some may involve a combination of several philosophies.

But historians almost always deal with these results of the sovereign activity of God as if the events or conditions were the causes of history rather than the effects of the execution of the Plan of God.

Because many historians ignore God in their investigations, they make suppositions which are fatal to their conclusions. They decide for example that there is no God, or if there is a God, He holds Himself aloof and doesn't interfere (except that they blame Him for all catastrophes). Therefore, they conclude, there is no such thing as the supernatural, or miracles, and therefore we live in a closed system into which no outside influence comes - there is no God directing human affairs.

This paper, however, acknowledges the personal involvement of almighty God in the story of mankind. It deals with the history of the Eastern

Mediterranean region of the world leading up to the life and career of Daniel the prophet. The objective of this study is to supply a brief but thorough historical background for the study of the Old Testament book of Daniel and the minor prophets. The earnest student of Ruth and other Old Testament books, must become very familiar with the following subject matter:

- * The Jews as a nation, as individuals, including their very longstanding culture, tradition, and religion.
- * The Gentile nations surrounding the Jews, their character, culture, religion, and their relationship to the Jews as both friends and conquerors.
- * The individuals, both Jews and Gentiles, who are central to the history of that period of time, their personalities, characters, and activities.
- * The movement of the tribes and nations in the general motion of history under the sovereign direction of God.

Daniel's story, and those of his contemporaries, gives the true interpretation of history at an extremely critical historical juncture. Among the Gentile nations, during the period from about 1000 B.C. to 300 B.C. there arises a turning point. The Gentile nations were often at war among themselves; but in general they were separated from each other, and each nation developed according to its own desires. And during the time that Israel lived within its ancient borders under immediate divine guidance, the nations living around them came into many hostile conflicts with them. God used these conflicts as a rod of correction for His rebellious people, when needed from time to time.

From the most ancient historical times the great kingdoms on the Nile and on the Tigris-Euphrates system had for centuries struggled to expand their influence and to enlarge themselves into world powers. The Phoenicians, for example, on the Mediterranean coast, gave themselves to commerce, seeking to get rich through marketing the treasures of the earth and economic empire building. They built the great Carthaginian empire which lasted for centuries until its fatal confrontation with Rome.

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Small nations and large acquired strength and influence. God permitted each of them to follow its own way for a time, and He had, in fact, given them many good things along the way in order that they might be free to seek the Lord and find Him through the riches of His grace.

But their negative volition and the principles of the Sin Nature dwelling in these tribes and nations poisoned their natural development so that they went farther away from God and sank deeper into idolatry and immorality of every kind. God began to sift the world through the use of great judgments. The Chaldeans raised themselves to world power, overthrowing the Assyrians, conquering lesser tribes and nations and breaking the world domination of Egypt and the Phoenicians.

In succession, the Medo-Persian Empire, the Greeks, and the Romans subdued the Mediterranean world. The history of the ancient world came to a close, in a sense, at the appearance of Jesus Christ on the earth.

In this repeated rise and fall of nations and tribes, people were driven to the knowledge of their helplessness and the vanity of their idolatry. They learned the fleeting nature of earthly greatness, wealth, and glory. God placed strict limits on the egotistical establishment of nations in their special interests and the resulting deification of their separate identities of culture, art, science, language.

The Roman Empire paved the way for the spreading abroad of the culture and language of the dominant Romans and for the removal of the isolation of the tribes which had been scattered. Thus, the way was opened for the revelation of the Gospel at the same time that the faith of the heathen in their institutions and gods was being severely shaken. So we see God always working to reveal Himself and His plan to every human being.

DIVINE DISCIPLINE

It is important to understand the doctrine of Divine Discipline as it relates to the interpretation of history. Whom the Lord loves, He chastens,

whether it is an individual, a city or community, or a nation. Because God loves the whole world, there has always been a lot of chastening going on. The history of the Jews as a nation is, in part, a story of the cycles of discipline and recovery they experienced throughout all their generations. There are many parallel lessons to be learned by individual believers regarding the way the Lord handles the individual and nation in Grace when either is disobedient.

Divine Discipline of the Christian Believer

Chastisement of individuals is for believers only (Heb. 12:5). God's discipline is based on love, and when a believer is out of fellowship, discipline is aimed at only one thing, to get the believer to acknowledge his sin to God, to confess in order to be restored to fellowship (Heb. 12:6).

Discipline never means a loss of salvation (Gal. 3:26; Heb. 12:6). Divine discipline is chastisement for sins of the believer in the immediate context of the sin that was committed. And discipline is removed by Biblical confession of sin (1 John 1:9; 1 Cor. 11:31), "...if we judge ourselves...". [Read Confessing Sin Biblically]

Suffering may well be part of the chastisement, and confession does not remove the suffering. However, when suffering continues after the believer has been restored to fellowship, the cursing is turned to blessing; that is, the suffering is for a positive purpose. [Read Christian Suffering, by R. B. Thieme] (Job 5:17,18).

If a believer continues in sin and refuses to repent and confess, the chastisement will become more and more severe. Certain sins bring compounded discipline, particularly those in which the believer is acting as a stumbling block to others (Matt. 7:1-12). In extreme cases, the believer could suffer the Sin Unto Death. However, all chastisement is confined to time; there will be no discipline for believers in eternity (Rev. 21:4)

The believer can avoid divine discipline through a consistent exercise of the principles of Christian living outlined in the Word of God, as illustrated by the passage in Heb. 12:16.

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Confession is equivalent to "laying aside the weight" of Heb. 12:1. The result is production and the fruit of the Spirit. The phrase "...let us run with patience" refers to the Faith-Rest life. This is Faith-Patience, also spoken of in James 1.

The next recovery principle is Occupation with Christ, the "looking unto Jesus..." of Heb. 12:2. Then, avoid sins of the mind; avoid becoming "wearied", a reference to mental depression resulting from sin in Heb. 12:3. If any of the following are harbored continually, mental illness can result: A guilt complex; bitterness or hatred toward others; jealousy or envy; fear about the present or future; anxiety or worry about little things; desire for revenge; arrogance; judging another or running him down to others.

Heb. 12:4 refers to having victory over the Sin Nature. Confess, keep moving, separate from the sin, grow up in Christ, stand on Grace principles, exercise Faith-Rest, rely on positional truth.

Live in the Word, Heb. 12:5.

Divine discipline is designed to restrain us from sin and to teach us lessons which will result in growth (Heb. 12:11).

Divine Discipline for a Nation

The Bible has many examples of divine discipline being brought against communities or nations. The most dramatic discipline of a city occurred at Sodom and Gomorrah when God destroyed the cities and their inhabitants at one stroke. There had not been even a remnant of faithful people there in order to preserve the cities from final judgment. Even Lot and his family protested against having to leave.

Another example is the destruction of heathen Jericho in which all inhabitants were killed except for Rahab and her family. Rahab obviously had positive volition toward the Gospel, and her family enjoyed blessing by association in their narrow escape.

As the individual goes, so goes the nation. In order for a nation to avoid divine discipline, there must be at least some of its citizens who live in fellowship with the Lord. A question arises as to

how many positive believers constitute a remnant, a "quorum". The answer is that at least some of the citizenry and some of the political leadership of a nation must be faithful believers and have enough influence to maintain the Divine Institutions in that nation. It's possible that the remnant could be very small if it is composed of the most influential and powerful citizens, such as kings, presidents, or other top political and business leaders. In a democracy, the remnant would probably have to be fairly large in order to have divine viewpoint influence in elections.

The key is this: in order for a nation to survive there must be freedom and morality. These are vital for the preservation of national integrity and for the maintaining of the Divine Institutions of volition, marriage, family, and nationalism.

There must be freedom so that the Word of God can be taught clearly and every citizen be given a chance to decide on issues of salvation and Christian living. People need freedom so that, under positive volition to the Word of God, they can keep their marriages and their families together. Families and nations are a part of God's plan for the human race. Satan's program is immorality, family breakup, and internationalism. The Divine Institutions were given to preserve the human race after the Fall and to protect the nations from the inroads of Satan's program.

There must be morality in order to protect people from criminality, disease, and the other consequences of unchecked sinfulness. In particular, the institutions of marriage and the family are very much dependent on a high level of morality in the community so that parents can maintain positive momentum for long periods of time while they are training and nurturing their children. It is the breakdown of morality which is the first and most obvious indication that both the individual and the nation are in trouble.

The Five Cycles of Discipline - Leviticus 26

The five "cycles" of discipline refer to the five levels, or increments, of chastisement which God brings on a nation which steadfastly refuses to repent of its immorality and live according to

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God's plan. When a nation at first very subtly begins to drift away from the Lord, indicated by a laxness in morality in many of its citizens and an indifference to the Word of God, the Lord begins the discipline with relatively gentle reminders in the form of a loss of peace, a reduction in prosperity, and so forth. At the other end of the scale, God allows the complete destruction of a nation which has defiantly ignored all levels of discipline. This destruction is analogous to the Sin Unto Death suffered by an individual who is intractable in his defiance of God (Nadab and Abihu, Saul, Ananias and Sapphira).

At this point you should read Leviticus 26:14-29. That chapter provides a concise outline of God's warnings about the levels of punishment He will bring on the nation of Israel if they will not turn from their sinful rebellion. Discipline of the nation begins with relatively mild problems, including people's loss of inner peace and mental depression. There will be great fear and paranoia among the people, accompanied by lack of success in business and agriculture, poverty, sickness, and defeat in battle.

Verses 18 to 20 show the second stage of discipline which is characterized by a continued

lack of fellowship with the Lord, loss of national prestige and honor, a cessation of God's grace provision for the nation, and a great barrenness in the land.

The third cycle, verses 21 and 22, includes great plagues, no control over natural enemies, a general inability to subdue the earth, the death of children, and the beginnings of great desolation among the people.

In verses 23-26 chastisement becomes severe, with increased attacks by enemies, invasions by foreign powers. There is extreme economic adversity and poor productivity, even in the production of necessities, resulting in famine. Some national sovereignty remains, but invaders have ever-widening influence in all areas of life. There are increases in plagues and disease.

The fifth cycle of discipline involves complete loss of personal and national sovereignty, the destruction of the family and the nation. Offerings to God are unacceptable. Nations which have undergone this destruction have experienced slavery, cannibalism, and the assimilation of its surviving citizens into other cultures.

History I, Lesson 1 Questions

Instructions

The following questions relate to your study of this lesson.

Respond to the questions as required.

You have choices about sending the quiz back to *Grace Notes*.

- If you received an email file containing the questions, you can use the REPLY feature of your e-mail application to open the file. Enter your responses in the reply message. Then SEND the message to *Grace Notes*.
- You can enter your answers on these pages, then send the whole file back to *Grace Notes* as a file attachment. This is handy, but these lessons will average 100K to 200K in size. As an alternative,
- After you answer the questions here, copy and paste the whole list of questions into a new MS Word document; then, send the new file to *Grace Notes* as an attachment. The new file will, of course, be much smaller than this main file.
- Finally, you can print the Quiz pages on your printer and send your response back to *Grace Notes* in the regular mail. If you do this, send the mail to:

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Grace Notes

% Warren Doud

1705 Aggie Lane

Austin, Texas 78757 USA

Whichever transmission method you use, when Grace Notes receives your response, we will send you the next lesson in the series.

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Questions on History I, Lesson 1

1. The events that occur in history are the inevitable result of human activity and acts of nature. [True/False]

Answer:

2. The _____ are the main race of people who are central to Old Testament historical times.

Answer:

3. God permitted the Jews to have hostile conflicts with neighbors for the purpose of _____.

Answer:

4. From the Bible point of view, when did the history of the ancient world come to a close?

Answer:

5. On what two important river systems did the great kingdoms develop in Bible historical times?

Answer:

6. What great empire succeeded the Medo-Persian Empire?

Answer:

7. God will allow hardship and even disaster to come upon a nation which does not obey Him. [True/False]

Answer:

8. The first step in the removal of divine discipline (chastisement) is _____.

Answer:

9. What must a nation do to recover from divine discipline?

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Answer:

10. The second stage of national discipline is characterized by _____.

Answer:

End of Quiz