

# The Questor

## Bible history....

### ....It's important!

There can be a view in Christian circles that only the New Testament of the Bible is important, because that's where we read about Jesus and the growth of the Christian church. But that misses the point because the story of the Old Testament is the prequel in a two book series. It provides the essential background to the gospel stories. It also documents the way in which God was developing his relationship with the human race.

Remember this was the 'bible' that Jesus was taught to read as a young man and from which he quoted numerous times during his ministry.

On the face of it, the Old Testament can appear to be rather dry and composed of a number of books which cover the history of the Hebrew people in a fairly disjointed way. But if you take the time to unravel its contents and see it in the context of the Middle Eastern world at the time, it can be illuminating and interesting.

The history of the Hebrew people doesn't play out in a vacuum; it needs to be seen in the context of its neighbours. To the south was Egypt which was at the height of its powers during the early period covered by the Old Testament; but whose power waxed and waned in the later period. To the north it was a different picture with a succession of different kingdoms, each of which had its high point and then was succeeded by the next one.

Some of these people – such as the Egyptians – were very sophisticated, others less so. But they all had their own customs, both secular and religious; and they had their various gods which were, by and large, represented by physical images or idols. These customs and religious practices were, in some cases, adopted by the Hebrews – which was a major issue in their relationship with their God – Jehovah as they called him. And it was this relationship with Jehovah that marked them out as different to the other people.

So the theme running through the Old Testament is the development of the relationship of the Hebrew people with their God.

From the outset, God gave the human race free will and the intellect to be able to use it in whatever way they saw fit – for good or evil. That even extended to the freedom to reject God and his desire for a deep relationship with them. But such a relationship depended upon people living according to the rules that God laid down. And the difficulty that the Hebrew people had in doing so is the backdrop for the Old Testament story.

There is more to the Old Testament than history. There are books of poetry such as the Psalms and Song of Songs; books of wisdom such as Proverbs and Ecclesiastes; a book of rules – Leviticus and individual stories such as Job, Ruth and Esther. The Prophets can be read in parallel with the history books because they were prophesying during a particular period of history to the people and rulers of their day.

But for our purposes in this series, we will just focus on the history books. We will think about seven broad periods in Old Testament history:

- From creation to God's contact with Abram (who became Abraham)
- The development of Abraham's family through to Joseph in Egypt
- The Exodus from Egypt and the time in the wilderness
- The settlement of the Promised Land
- The institution of kings and their period of rule
- Exile in Babylon
- Return to the Hebrew homeland

We will look at each of these periods in turn and see what lessons we can learn from them – *although we seem to struggle with learning the lessons of history don't we?*