

## September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2011

Why are maps useful? The answer seems obvious; they help us find our way when we're lost. Yet, the only way this can happen is if the map has a wide enough perspective for you to see where you are and where you want to go. If a map were "zoomed in" too far, its usefulness would be very limited. On the other hand, if the map has a wider perspective it is able to guide us. What this is really all about is perspective.

There are times in life when our perspective changes, when we think differently or see the world differently. For many people, one such moment was on September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001. With the attacks on the Twin Towers and the Pentagon, people began to see the world and their lives differently. One of the differences was that people began to place a higher value on reflecting on and remembering the past. Every year when the calendar hits September 11<sup>th</sup>, people remember.

Remember. This is, and has always been, one of the main purposes of the Bible, to remember what God has done in our past and in our history.

The Bible tells the life story of a number of people, yet all of these stories have the greater purpose of following the history of how God has been active in the world and especially the nation of Israel. I think we can learn much about what it means to remember God by looking at the Old Testament and how they used their history to remember the work of God in their history.

The books of history open with God's chosen people, the ancient nation of Israel, being led to the land God promised for them. It continues to the time of the judges, when the nation of Israel was led by judges who stepped in to govern during times of crisis. Then Israel's first king, Saul, was crowned. Then David, perhaps the most famous person of the books of history in the Bible becomes king of Israel, followed by his son Solomon.

Then things take a turn for the worse. The kingdom of Israel becomes divided into two kingdoms, igniting a civil war. The southern kingdom was called Judah, which included the city of Jerusalem, while the northern kingdom continued to be called Israel. The two divided kingdoms often warred with each other, weakening each. Seeing this weakness, outside powers began to attack, first capturing the northern kingdom, then the southern.

A common practice of the ancient world was to take people you've captured and to move them away from their homelands to distant countries. This is especially the case with the elite and the educated people of a captured country, who were taken into the foreign courts and trained in the ways and traditions of the foreign conquerors.

The point of this was to not only take control of a country's land, but to etch away at its very essence. The conquerors would take away everything that made a nation united, its land, its culture, its religion, and its language. The end result was people who looked more like the conquerors. The goal was to fully incorporate the conquered people

within the culture of the conquerors, because when you do you don't have to worry about revolts or rebellions. You don't have to worry about governing a foreign people, because they aren't a foreign people anymore, they are trained to be just like the conquerors. And this time frame for the nation of Israel is called the Diaspora, which is Greek for scattered.

This could have very well been the end of the Jewish faith. This could have been the end of the nation of Israel. After all, these foreign powers were trying very hard to squash both the nation and their faith. There are many reasons why both persisted, but there is a clue given in the Bible in a phrase that comes up over and over again in the books of history. It's a phrase you see when the nation is just being formed. It's a phrase you see during the years of prosperity under David and Solomon. It's a phrase you see when the Jewish people were scattered to the winds.

This phrase that is used over and over again is used to refer to God. The people of Israel would often use the phrase "the God of Israel," or "the God of Jacob," or "the God of David," or "the God of Abraham" when referring to God. Maybe the most common phrase used to refer to God in the books of history in the Bible is as "the God of our fathers."

So what's the point?

The point is this: the people of the nation of Israel, the people that these books of history are about, never forgot what God did in their past. They never lost touch with their history and God's role in it. Very often when they spoke about God, they spoke of him in relation to how he worked in the past.

So who's responsible for this victory on the battlefield? God is, the same God who was active in the life of Jacob, who protected him and his family from a great famine and who raised the twelve tribes from his sons.

How did that miracle happen? God performed it, the same God that promised Abraham in his old age that he would be the father of a great nation, which would out number the stars.

Who are you worshiping here in this foreign land? God, the same God who anointed David as a mighty king over the nation and who empowered David to victory after victory.

Why do you act differently from other people? Why are you so concerned with being holy and pure? Because we follow and worship the God of our fathers, the God that we've seen active in the history of our people and in the history of our own lives.

Imagine how this perspective would have impacted the lives of people whose faith and culture were under attack. In a world that embraced multiple gods and who worshiped tons of different deities, the people of the nation of Israel worshiped and followed a God they knew. They had a deep sense of themselves and their history. They knew where they had come from and the hardship they had been through.

Sometimes there's an impression that it's a waste of time reading and learning about things that happened thousands of years ago. I mean,

what difference does it make to us today? In our modern culture, which seems so far removed from the ancient world, what value does the history found in the Bible have for us?

The value in reading and engaging with the books of history in the Bible is that it connects us with what God has done in the past to offer us encouragement and guidance for our present, and hope for our future.

For the people of the Diaspora who were taken away from their homes and who were actively separated from their culture and their places of worship, the connection to the past and to their history supplied them with a deep basis for their faith.

The problem for us is that we very often do not have these connections. We, by in large, are a people who have no real sense of our spiritual heritage and history. Yet, when we do have a connection to the past, it can make a huge difference in our lives.

I want to encourage you to engage with or reengage with these books of history in the Bible, because they are not just general history, they hold our history as well.

## Small Group Guide

1. Describe an experience when you've used a map? What made the map useful or not useful in that situation?
2. Do you know your family tree? Why is this information interesting or useful?

### Read Hebrews 11 - 12:3

3. What stands out to you about the list of people mentioned in Chapter 11?
4. Why is it so important to know the spiritual heritage, those who came before us? Why does it matter to remember these things?
5. In what ways can people that have come before us help us to "throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles?"

6. In what ways do you need a deeper connection with the history written in the Bible to help you run the race marked out for you? What difference might it make in your life if you “remembered” well what God has done in the past?