

OVERVIEW OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

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OVERVIEW OF THE OLD TESTAMENT



Aim:

To gain an understanding of the order of events of the Old Testament, the main characters, the main stories, and the main verses associated with each, in order to better value the Old Testament, and it's relevance with relation to the New Testament.

Activity:

A simple lesson, can be given many ways, but two particularly engaging ways which may be applicable to your class are:

(1) TIME LINE- JIGSAW STYLE

draw up a time-line on card-board or material that can be placed up on the walls. Prepare pieces of paper of the titles of the main events of the Old testament (titles can be used from below) and get the class to place theses major events in order on the timeline. While doing so, see if they can recap the major events themselves, and fill them in (using the information below if you're a little rusty on the stories yourself) on any details they may have left out. Include key verses to refer to (also found below) to emphasis the main points, and also to fmailiarise the class with what book they would find that story/event/ or character in. If the class is feeling a little more creative, get them to think of a symbol to represent that character or event, that they can draw up on the board themselves.

(2) QUIZ

alternatively, if the class isn't too creative this lesson could be done in Quiz form- prepare a quiz based on the information below, and see if they can tell you the main stories, events, and order of events in their own words- chocolates and lollies always a good prize to get them thinking about anything.

References:

- The Story of the Bible: <http://www.bible-history.com/old-testament/>
<http://www.nisbett.com/summary/sum-ot.htm>
<http://www.biblenotes.net/oldsummary.html>

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Servant background reading:

About the Old Testament

The collection of 39 religious writings which constitute the first and longer of the 2 general divisions into which the Christian Bible is naturally divided. The name "Testament" means "covenant," or "agreement." The arrangement of the books in our English Bible is an adaptation from the Latin Vulgate, which in turn was based, at least in part, on the LXX. In our English Bible the 39 books are classified as historical (17 books), poetic (5 books), and prophetic (17 books).

The period of the writing of these books covers about 1,000 years, and perhaps some 30 writers were involved. These books contain the narrative of God's acts in history for man's redemption. They cover the period of sacred history from Creation to the restoration of the Jews after the Babylonian captivity. They do not merely catalogue a series of events, but they interpret these events in the light of God's revelation of Himself to mankind.

The OT was the Bible of Jesus and of His apostles, who used it to teach the Christian religion. It was not superseded by the New. The NT is only the advancement and unfolding of the Old.

The language in which the OT was written was for the most part Hebrew. Two sections of Ezr (Ezr 4:8 to 6:18 and ch 7:12–26), a substantial part of Dan (Dan 2:4 to 7:28), and a single verse in Jer (Jer 10:11) were written in *Aramaic, a Semitic language related to Hebrew, somewhat as modern Italian is to Spanish. Aramaic was an international language widely used in the Near East from about the 6th to the 3d cent. b.c. It became, in fact, the official language of the Persian Empire and was thus the medium of governmental, cultural, and commercial communications. Learned men such as Ezra and Daniel were no doubt at home in both Hebrew and Aramaic.

The story of the old testament:

Creation

Moses under the Inspiration of the Holy Spirit wrote Genesis, the first book in the Bible and the book of beginnings. The beginning of the world, the beginning of man, and the beginning of the Hebrew people.

God created the world in 6 days:

The First Day. Light. *Gen 1:3-5*

The Second Day. The Firmament *Gen 1:6-8* (The "firmament" here refers to the atmospheric heaven where the clouds are as well as the celestial heaven where the stars are.)

The Third Day. Land and Vegetation *Gen 1:9-13*

The Fourth Day. The Sun, Moon, and Stars *Gen 1:14-19*

The Fifth Day. Sea Animals, and Birds *Gen 1:20-23*

The Sixth Day. Land Animals, and Man *Gen 1:24-31*

On the **seventh day**, He ceased from His labor and established **the Sabbath**. Scholars disagree as to how long these "days" might have been. The Bible seems to indicate a literal 24 hour day. Scholars also differ on the date of creation. It would be impossible to know exactly the number of years back to the creation since the Bible's lists of generations sometimes skips names, and any other historical records are limited. According to

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the Bible and archaeology man has been here for about 6,000 - 10,000 years approximately. No one can be certain.

The purpose of the Bible is not to scientifically sketch every detail of creation but to reveal to man that God is prior to and distinct from His creation, that He is directly responsible for its having come into being, through His Word, that its continued existence is dependant upon Him, and that man has been given the highest position of honor and responsibility in that creation.

Ps 8:3-4

When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You have ordained, What is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that You visit him?

Isa 40:12

Who has measured the waters in the hollow of His hand, measured heaven with a span and calculated the dust of the earth in a measure? Weighed the mountains in scales and the hills in a balance?

Isa 40:26

Lift up your eyes on high, and see who has created these things, who brings out their host by number; he calls them all by name, by the greatness of His might and the strength of His power; not one is missing.

Adam and Eve

After God created Adam, He gave to him dominion over all His creation and the garden of Eden as a home to tend it and keep it. But He gave one restriction: *Gen 2:16-17*

And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; "but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."

Adam would know what it meant to participate in evil, and the result would be banishment and death. Death is separation from God.

Then God created the woman:

Gen 2:18-24

And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place. Then the rib which the LORD God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man. And Adam said: "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man." Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.

Adam loved Eve, who was later seduced by the serpent, who was actually Satan, the one who leads the evil spirits in their rebellion against God and His purposes and she ate of the forbidden fruit (the Bible doesn't say what kind of fruit it was). Then Adam, who was with her, chose to eat of the fruit also and they sinned. **When they sinned, spiritual and physical death came into the world and fellowship with God was broken.** Like a rose being plucked off the vine, they were immediately disconnected from their source of life. You can almost see the shame and guilt and fear of their new nature taking over:

Gen 3:7-10

Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked...Then the LORD God called to Adam and said to him, "Where are you?" So he said, "I heard Your voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; and I hid myself."

But all was not lost. As God was revealing the consequences of their actions He also gave a glorious promise. God promised Adam and Eve that He would send a Redeemer (Messiah), who would destroy Satan and

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restore them to a right relationship with Him (Gen 3). In the meantime they could only approach God with a blood sacrifice. This animal acted as a substitute for the penalty of sin until "the lamb of God" who is Jesus Christ would come and pay the full debt.

The Bible mentions a lot between the time of Adam and the Flood. For example there was the first murder. Adam and Eve had many sons and daughters but there is only two mentioned because they are important to the history of redemption. Eve thought that her firstborn, Cain, was the one who would destroy Satan and deliver them from the curse of sin and death. But Cain jealously killed his brother Abel. Cain was upset at God because He would not accept his sacrifice (the best of his good works) as he accepted Abel's blood offering (God's prescribed way) so he rose up and killed his brother. God punished him by driving him out of the midst of the people who served God. Then God gave Adam and Eve another son, Seth, who replaced Abel. The redeemer of the world would come from Seth's family.

But what about Cain's family? The Bible reveals that Cain's son, Lamech, inherited Cain's evil ways (Gen 4:19-24). Sin added unto sin and Lamech boasted that he didn't need God's protection because he had his sword. He rejected God's holy standards for marriage and took many wives. He also killed a man for striking him showing his contempt for God and his disregard for human life. Evil spread very rapidly to all mankind through the ungodly line of Cain.

The Flood

Gen 6:5

Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

Gen 6:11-15

The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. So God looked upon the earth, and indeed it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth. And God said to Noah, "The end of all flesh has come before Me, for the earth is filled with violence through them; and behold, I will destroy them with the earth. "Make yourself an ark of gopherwood; make rooms in the ark, and cover it inside and outside with pitch. "And this is how you shall make it . . ."

The earth had become completely corrupt so God sent a great flood to punish sinful mankind but He would not break His promise to redeem man so He preserved the lives of Noah and His family as well as two of every kind of living creature in an ark (a large wooden ship).

Gen 7:13-16

On the very same day Noah and Noah's sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth, and Noah's wife and the three wives of his sons with them, entered the ark - they and every beast after its kind, all cattle after their kind, every creeping thing that creeps on the earth after its kind, and every bird after its kind, every bird of every sort. And they went into the ark to Noah, two by two, of all flesh in which is the breath of life. So those that entered, male and female of all flesh, went in as God had commanded him; and the LORD shut him in.

The Ark was about **450 feet long, 75 feet wide, and 45 feet high**. It had three decks and was divided into compartments. Calculations have been made estimating that there was room in the Ark for 7000 species of animals.

Gen 7:11-12

. . . on that day all the fountains of the great deep were broken up, and the windows of heaven were opened. And the rain was on the earth forty days and forty nights.

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The flood covered the entire world. After a period of 150 days the Ark rested on Mt. Ararat (17,000 ft.) 200 miles North of the ancient city of Ninevah.

Before the flood there was kind of a vapor canopy that enveloped the whole earth which preserved it in probably a tropical atmosphere so that people were recorded as living up to ages of 900 - 950 years, but when the upper waters were released upon the earth, lifespans were decreased and the physical characteristics of the world changed dramatically. After the flood, God put the fear of man on the animals, and gave man permission to eat animals for food. God commanded the death penalty for murder and ordered that men establish a form of justice. *Gen 9:6*

God also put a rainbow in the sky to be a constant reminder that He would never destroy the world again by water. Yet right after the flood, Noah's son, Ham, sinned against God by showing disrespect to his father, Noah (Gen 9) and Noah cursed Ham's son, Canaan, why we are not told. Then God spoke through Noah again and prophesied about his three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth and also that the Messiah would come through Shem's family, and Japheth's family would share in that salvation.

The Tower at Babel

According to the Bible, the families of the sons of Noah represent all of the racial groups upon the earth. Chapter 10 of Genesis lists a total of 70 individual founders of nations or racial groups, and divides them into three primary classifications: Shem, Ham, and Japheth. It is interesting to note that Ethnologists generally agree that mankind divides into three basic groups. Here is how the Bible divides them geographically:

Shem's Descendants. Central Nations

Shemites included Jews, Assyrians, Syrians, Elamites, in north Euphrates Valley and its borders.

Ham's Descendants. South Nations

Hamites went Southward. The names given seem to be South and Central Arabia, Egypt, East Mediterranean, and East Africa. There was at one point a great migration to Egypt, but Canaan (son of Ham) settled in the land later called Israel.

Japheth's Descendants. North Nations

Japhethites went Northward, and settled in the areas around the Black and Caspian Seas. They became the great Caucasian races of Europe and Asia.

Genesis 11: Proud and rebellious men desired to build a city and make a name for themselves under the leadership of Nimrod, so they built a tower, in the land of Shinar (Babel) that would reach to heaven. This was the first organized system of idolatry recorded after the flood. They also disobeyed God's command to be fruitful and fill the earth. God condemned their arrogant ways by coming down and confusing their languages (probably racial distinctions also) which forced them to scatter throughout the whole earth. Before this they all spoke one language.

So what does all this tell us? There are many things but two facts should be mentioned. **First**, man is given over to sin and rebellion, as Jeremiah' the prophet said:

Jer 17:9 "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?"

Secondly, it tells us that God loves man unconditionally and, though He will not tolerate disobedience, He will fulfill His promises to redeem humanity and go to whatever measure to keep anyone from thwarting His purposes.

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Abraham

We now move on to another very important subject. That is the subject of Abraham, who became the first Hebrew, and whose family God chose to weave His scarlet thread through the linen of humanity. It was through Abraham's descendants that the Jewish nation would arise, a people who would receive the covenant of the Lord, and that One of those descendants would be the Savior, not only for the Jews but for the whole world. Abraham lived in the city of Ur (capital of the ancient kingdom of Sumer). Sometime around 2,000 BC. God called Abraham to leave his home and go to a new land that God would show Him. The Bible traces Abraham's steps from Ur to Haran (north of Canaan), through the land of Canaan, into Egypt, and back into Canaan (which later became Israel).

God promised to give Abraham a son through his wife Sarah who was barren (unable to bear children). Through this son, a mighty nation would arise and also an uncountable amount of descendants, and One of those descendants would be a blessing to all the nations in the world.

This promise seemed impossible because they were so old but Abraham believed what God said, though later he doubted and tried to force God's hand by having a son through Sarah's servant girl, Hagar. In ancient times this was accepted, but not in God's sight. It violated His law for marriage (Gen 2), and Abraham suffered greatly for his sin. His son from Hagar, Ishmael, turned against Isaac, Abraham's son of the promise, who was born 13 years after Ishmael, when Abraham was 100 and Sarah was 90. So Ishmael had to leave Abraham's household.

God established His covenant with Abraham. This was God's promise: *Gen 12:1-3*

*Now the LORD had said to Abram: "Get out of your country, from your family and from your father's house, to a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and **in you** all the families of the earth shall be blessed." And he believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.*

Circumcision was the seal and reminder of the covenant, and so all of Abraham's male descendants would be circumcised to remind them that God would someday fulfill all the promises that He made to Abraham.

There was a very beautiful yet wicked place in Canaan called **Sodom and Gomorrah** and the Lord told Abraham that He was going to destroy it but Abraham pleaded with God to spare the sinful cities for that is where his nephew Lot lived. God sent an angel to rescue Lot and his family but destroyed the cities because of their homosexualities and other abominations.

Now there were many important events that took place in Abraham's life but there is one that is important to mention. As Abraham grew stronger in faith, God told him to offer his son Isaac as a burnt offering to prove his faith (Gen 22), Abraham obeyed and brought Isaac to Mount Moriah, laid him on the altar and at the last minute the Lord told him not to kill Isaac and gave him a ram for the sacrifice. Here we see Abraham's faith (Heb 11:17-19) and a beautiful picture of Christ. The Bible calls Abraham a friend of God:

Isa 41:8

"But you, Israel, are My servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the descendants of Abraham My friend.

Before we move on keep in mind that the Lord made this peculiar promise to Abraham:

Gen 15:13-14

*Then He said to Abram: "Know certainly that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, and will serve them, and they will afflict them **four hundred years**. "And also the nation whom they serve I will judge; afterward they shall come out with great possessions.*

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Jacob

The Bible follows the messianic line to Abraham's son, Isaac, and then to Isaac's son, Jacob who lived around 1900 BC. Jacob was a shrewd and deceitful con man who tricked his brother Esau and lied to his father so he could steal his older brother's birthright. Afraid, Jacob fled to Haran, in Mesopotamia, where his uncle Laban lived, but on the way he met the Lord and saw a vision of a ladder reaching from earth to heaven with angels on it. Jacob had his first encounter with God and the Lord revealed to him the promises He had made to Abraham and how he would be part of those promises, so Jacob began to trust in God and named that place, Bethel, which means, "house of God".

Gen 28:10-19

Now Jacob went out from Beersheba and went toward Haran. So he came to a certain place and stayed there all night, because the sun had set. And he took one of the stones of that place and put it at his head, and he lay down in that place to sleep. Then he dreamed, and behold, a ladder was set up on the earth, and its top reached to heaven; and there the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. And behold, the LORD stood above it and said: "I am the LORD God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and your descendants.

"Also your descendants shall be as the dust of the earth; you shall spread abroad to the west and the east, to the north and the south; and in you and in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed. "Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have spoken to you."

Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, "Surely the LORD is in this place, and I did not know it." And he was afraid and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven!" Then Jacob rose early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put at his head, set it up as a pillar, and poured oil on top of it. And he called the name of that place Bethel; but the name of that city had been Luz previously."

When he arrived in Haran, his uncle was more shrewd than he was, con-man meets super con-man. Laban tricked him into working for him for 14 years in exchange for a wife. He wanted Rachel, but he got Leah first and then Rachel. Developing the muscle of trust was a long, slow job for Jacob. Jacob had 12 sons and great possessions when he finally returned to Canaan not because he was more shrewd than Laban but because God was with him. God protected Jacob all the way and also prepared his brother Esau's heart so that he was no longer angry. God changed Jacob's name to "Israel." Jacob was next in the Messianic line. His 12 sons became the fathers of the 12 tribes of Israel.

Joseph

Next we move on to another important person in God's plan whose name was Joseph. The story of Joseph is among those that are most favored in the Bible. As Jacob grew older, ten of his sons got jealous of their younger brother, Joseph, because Jacob adored Joseph. Joseph was receiving revelations and dreams at a very young age and dreamed they would all bow down to him someday. The 10 brothers got so mad that they sold him to a caravan going to Egypt and then told their father that he was dead. Later Joseph interpreted Pharaoh's dreams by the Holy Spirit:

Gen 41:15-16

And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I have dreamed a dream, and there is no one who can interpret it. But I have heard it said of you that you can understand a dream, to interpret it." So Joseph answered Pharaoh, saying, "It is not in me; God will give Pharaoh an answer of peace."

Joseph was faithful to God and became a main ruler in Egypt: *Gen 41:39-44*

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Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Inasmuch as God has shown you all this, there is no one as discerning and wise as you. "You shall be over my house, and all my people shall be ruled according to your word; only in regard to the throne will I be greater than you."

Just as the dream had foretold, a famine came throughout the world and in the land of Canaan it was very severe so Joseph's 10 brothers came to Egypt in search of food. They all bowed down to him, and after testing them, Joseph revealed to them his true identity, and forgave them. God saved the whole family from the famine and they came down to live in Egypt.

Later Joseph said to his brothers: *Gen 50:20*

"But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive.

Gen 50:24-26

And Joseph said to his brethren, "I am dying; but God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land to the land of which He swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob." Then Joseph took an oath from the children of Israel, saying, "God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from here." So Joseph died, being one hundred and ten years old; and they embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt.

Moses and the Exodus

Now the Bible turns its attention to Moses, who was born about 1500 BC. He was chosen to lead Israel out of slavery and give them God's laws. When the Book of Exodus begins, the Hebrews were living in Egypt and after time they grew in number and the new Pharaoh didn't remember Joseph and put them into slavery. The Hebrew slaves had been reproducing so fast that the king felt threatened by a potential revolt against his authority. He gave orders that no more male Hebrew children should be allowed to live. To save the infant Moses, his mother made a little vessel of papyrus waterproofed with asphalt and pitch. She placed Moses in the vessel, floating among the reeds on the bank of the Nile River.

By God's providence, Moses-- the child of a Hebrew slave-- was found and adopted by an Egyptian princess, the daughter of the Pharaoh himself. He was reared in the royal court as a prince of the Egyptians: *"And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and deeds" (Acts 7:22)*. At the same time the Lord determined that Moses should be taught in his earliest years by his own mother. This meant that he was founded in the faith of his fathers, although he was reared as an Egyptian (Ex. 2:1-10).

Moses was educated in a civilization unsurpassed by any people at that time. His training was designed to prepare him for a high office, or even the throne of Egypt. He became familiar with life at Pharaoh's courts and the pomp and grandeur of Egyptian religious worship. He was schooled in the writing and literary ideas of the time. He witnessed the administration of justice. When he was 40 years old, Moses became angry at an Egyptian taskmaster who was beating a Hebrew slave; he killed the Egyptian and buried him in the sand (Ex. 2:12). When this became known, however, he feared for his own life and fled from Egypt to the desert land of Midian where he married a daughter of Jethro in agreement to tend Jethro's flocks.

After about 40 more years, God spoke to Moses from a bush that was on fire but didn't burn. God sent Moses back to Egypt to lead the Hebrews out of slavery, and into the land promised to Abraham. God demonstrated His power to Moses and revealed to Him His holy Name *"Yaweh"* (Jehovah became a popular pronunciation in the 16th century through German translators although there is no "J" sound in the Hebrew).

God anointed Aaron to go with Moses to be the spokesman and they persuaded the people of Israel to follow them but Pharaoh would not let them go. Then God sent 10 devastating plagues on the Egyptians, the last plague being the death of the firstborn in every home whose doors were not marked with blood.

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1. **First Plague: Blood**
2. **Second Plague: Frogs**
3. **Third Plague: Lice**
4. **Fourth Plague: Flies**
5. **Fifth Plague: Disease on Livestock**
6. **Sixth Plague: Boils**
7. **Seventh Plague: Hail**
8. **Eighth Plague: Locusts**
9. **Ninth Plague: Darkness**
10. **Tenth Plague: Death of the First-Born**

God commanded the Israelites to celebrate yearly the "Passover", where the death angel passed over the houses that had the blood of a lamb. (*Exod 12:1-14*)

After this Pharaoh finally gave in and agreed to let Israel go (and with all the wealth of Egypt), but as soon as they left, Pharaoh changed his mind. He sent his army after them where Israel was cornered against the Red Sea. God parted the waters and led them through on dry ground, and the waters closed in on Pharaoh's armies: (*Exod 14:21-29*)

The Israelites were guided by the mysterious Shekinah glory cloud that led them to Mount Sinai. On the way their faith was tested as they experienced intense heat, hunger, thirst, and war. God did many miracles including "manna", bread that fell from heaven.

The Giving of the Law

When the Israelites arrived at Mount Sinai, Moses went up into the mountain for 40 days. God revealed Himself and they were terrified.

Exod 19:16-18

Then it came to pass on the third day, in the morning, that there were thunderings and lightnings, and a thick cloud on the mountain; and the sound of the trumpet was very loud, so that all the people who were in the camp trembled. And Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet with God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. Now Mount Sinai was completely in smoke, because the LORD descended upon it in fire. Its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked greatly.

Out of this momentous encounter came the covenant between the Lord and Israel, including the Ten Commandments (*Ex. 20:1-17*). When Moses delayed in coming down from Mount Sinai, the faithless people became restless. They persuaded Aaron to take their golden earrings and other articles of jewelry and to fashion a golden calf for worship. When he came down from the mountain, Moses was horrified at the idolatry and rebellion of his people. The sons of Levi were loyal to Moses, however; and he ordered them to punish the rebels (*Ex. 32:28*).

Because of his anger at the golden calf, Moses cast down the two tablets of stone with the Ten Commandments and broke them at the foot of the mountain (*Ex. 32:19*). After the rebellion had been put down, Moses went up into Mount Sinai again and there received the Ten Commandments a second time (*Ex. 34:1,29*). There was given hundreds of laws in three phases:

Moral Laws (10 Commandments written by the finger of God),

Civil Laws (Dietary and Judicial also), and

Ceremonial Laws (Sacrifices, Feast Days, etc.).

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In giving the Law to the Hebrew people, Moses taught the Israelites what the Lord expected of them-- that they were to be a holy people separated from the pagan immorality and idolatry of their surroundings. Here the foundation of Judaism was laid., A God given religious system all centering around the Tabernacle (the place where the blood was sprinkled on the ark), the Sacrifices, and the Priesthood. The Levites were the priestly tribe, and Aaron (Moses' brother) was the first High Priest.

Israel was numbered and organized for war. The 12 Tribes were established (Sons of Jacob) and leaders were appointed for each tribe.

The Wilderness Wanderings

From Sinai, God led the Israelites through *"the great and terrible wilderness"* to Kadesh (the border of the promised land). Moses sent 12 spies, one from each of the 12 tribes of Israel, into Canaan to explore the land. The spies returned with glowing reports of the fruitfulness of the land.(Num. 13:1-25)

The majority of the spies, however, voted against the invasion of the land because of the huge inhabitants of Canaan, and fortified cities *"walled to heaven"*. It was a report of doom. Yet two of the spies, Joshua and Caleb, brought back a report full of faith and encouragement. *Num 13:30-33*

. . . Then Caleb quieted the people before Moses, and said, "Let us go up at once and take possession, for we are well able to overcome it."

But the people lost heart and rebelled, refusing to enter Canaan and crying for a new leader who would take them back to Egypt. To punish them for their lack of faith, God condemned all of that generation, except Caleb and Joshua, to perish in the wilderness for 40 years (Num. 14:26-38). All those 20 years old and up would indeed perish in the wilderness with the exception of Joshua and Caleb.

During these years of wandering in the wilderness, Moses' patience was continually tested by the murmurings, grumbings, and complaints of the people. At one point, Moses' patience reached its breaking point and he sinned against the Lord, in anger against the people. When the people again grumbled against Moses, saying they had no water, the Lord told Moses to speak to the rock and water would flow forth. Instead, Moses lifted his hand and struck the rock twice with his rod. Apparently because he disobeyed the Lord in this act, Moses was not permitted to enter the Promised Land (Num. 20:1-13). That privilege would belong to his successor, Joshua.

After 40 years Moses brought the tribes back to Kadesh. They camped on the plains of Moab where Moses spoke to them for the last time. Moses then turned his leadership over to Joshua. God led him to the top of Mount Nebo to see the land and there Moses died.

Joshua and the Conquest of Canaan

Then Israel finally crossed over the Jordan River (on dry land) and entered Canaan and celebrated their first Passover in the promised land. God spoke to Joshua and made him a strong leader.

Josh 1:5-6

". . . as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you nor forsake you. "Be strong and of good courage, for to this people you shall divide as an inheritance the land which I swore to their fathers to give them.

The sins of the Canaanites were at the boiling point and Joshua was to completely destroy them lest Israel inherit their evil ways. Some of the abominations happening in the land were temple prostitution, father and son committing sexual acts with the same prostitute, child sacrifice, homosexualities, idolatry, and on and on. God spoke about their evil ways throughout the entire Old Testament. *Lev 18:25-30; Deut 18:9-22*

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The inhabitants of Canaan were terrified. The first city they conquered was Jericho. It was a miracle, when the trumpets were blown, the walls fell. *Josh 6:20*

So the people shouted when the priests blew the trumpets. And it happened when the people heard the sound of the trumpet, and the people shouted with a great shout, that the wall fell down flat. Then the people went up into the city, every man straight before him, and they took the city.

Under Joshua, the Israelites conquered the entire country (Josh 21). The only defeat was at Ai, where an Israelite named Achan disobeyed God's orders. In 7 years they defeated 31 kings in the land. Joshua divided the land among the 12 tribes of Israel as God directed.

Joshua was a great leader but he made 2 fatal mistakes. *First*, he failed to completely defeat the Canaanites (especially the Philistines, Amalekites, and Midianites), and *second*, he failed to wipe out completely the filthy and idolatrous fertility cults of the land. Joshua's failure to cut this cancer completely out of society resulted in disastrous times for about the next 400 years of Hebrew history.

The Judges

Before he died, Joshua urged Israel to keep trusting God and obeying His commands, but they didn't. After Joshua died, *"every man did what was right in his own eyes"*. They would forget God, the enemy would severely oppress them, they would cry out to God for help, and God would raise up a deliverer (Judge) to free them of their misery. This was the sad pattern for the Israelites for almost 400 years. The main deliverer-judges were: **Othniel, Deborah, Gideon, Jephthah, Samson, Eli, and Samuel**. (Ruth also lived during this period).

Probably the most important person in this era was Samuel. *Judg 2:10-19*

The message that seems to become evident during the dark period of the judges is that man is inherently sinful and will always revert back to his evil ways, and the Lord will always be there for those who cry out to Him, but forgetting God can only result in bondage and defeat.

The Judges

Some of them received only a brief mention in the Book of Judges. These minor judges were:

Shamgar 3:31,

Tola 10:1-2,

Jair 10:3-5,

Ibzan 12:8-10,

Elon 12:11-12, and

Abdon 12:13-15.

The other judges are viewed in greater detail in the Book of Judges:

Othniel 3:7-11 a nephew of Caleb, delivered Israel from the Mesopotamians.

Ehud 3:12-30 was lefthanded and killed Eglon, king of Moab.

Jephthah 11:1--12:7 was a harlot's son who defeated the Amorites.

Gideon 6:11-8:35 led 300 Israelites to defeat the entire army of the Midianites.

Samson 13:1--16:31 delivered Israel from the Philistines. Known for his great strength.

Deborah 4:1--5:31 urged Barak to attack the mighty army of the Canaanites.

Samuel the Prophet

And moving on we come to Samuel who was the first of Israel's great prophets, and the last of the judges. Samuel's mother Hannah (who was barren) had prayed for a son.

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Sam 1:10-11 She praised God when He answered her prayer and gave her a child. Hannah gave Samuel to the priest, Eli, so he could be taught to serve the Lord. As a child, Samuel, heard from God that he was going to be a prophet and judge in Israel. Before Samuel's time, a prophet was called a "seer." But Samuel was not just a forecaster of the future but became a "mouthpiece" for God. He was used by God to inform Eli that his house would be punished for the abuses and the perversions of his sons who were the priests of the people. The priest was a mediator for God to the people and for the people to God. But they were completely corrupt. Samuel also rebuked the nation about their evil ways.

The Philistines and other enemies oppressed Israel so severely that they became disheartened. They complained that the nation had no hope of survival as long as it remained a collection of tribes. They were tired of being a theocracy under God. They wanted something more tangible. They wanted a monarchy. They cried for a king. They longed for a strong nation headed by a warrior king. The more Samuel tried to wed them closer to God and His direct rule over them, the more discontent they became. They wanted what the other nations had, an earthly king. At last, a broken-hearted Samuel let them have their way. (1 Sam 1-8). -*Sam 8:4-22*

Nevertheless the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel; and they said, "No, but we will have a king over us, that we also may be like all the nations, and that our king may judge us and go out before us and fight our battles." And Samuel heard all the words of the people, and he repeated them in the hearing of the LORD. So the LORD said to Samuel, "Heed their voice, and make them a king."

Saul, the First King

The Lord had always intended to give Israel a king (Deut 17), but Israel's sin was in demanding a king from the wrong motives, in looking for that king in the wrong tribe, and in demanding a king before it was God's time to give them one. A man named Saul, from the tribe of Benjamin was chosen, a man of impressive stature, who embodied the basic ideals Israel had at the time, being much more concerned with his appearance than his heart. It's sad how Saul's character turned out to be a reflection of Israel as a whole. *Sam 9:1-2*

Saul was a weak and ineffective king who didn't do much with his life except try to murder David, his son-in-law, despite David's repeated expression of loyalty, because he knew David was destined to take his place one day on the throne. Saul's hatred and insane jealousy for David made him fail as a king and Samuel regretted anointing him. Saul's reign ended in disaster. He received no answer for his prayers, and even sought the help of a witch.

The battle that took place the next day at Gilboa was a bitter defeat for Israel, Saul himself was wounded, and he committed suicide by throwing himself on his own sword. Three of his sons, including Jonathan also died. The greatest failure for Saul, the first king of Israel, was when he disobeyed God at Gilgal. The Philistines were encamped against Israel and Saul's troops were deserting daily. The prophet Samuel had promised him that all would be well, only he must wait for God's time. Samuel would come at the end of a week and would offer a sacrifice. Then Saul's armies would have the victory. Saul impatiently went ahead and offered the sacrifice himself. No sooner had he finished than the prophet appeared. Saul had greatly sinned in officiating as a priest. *1 Sam 13:11-14*

And Samuel said, "What have you done?" And Saul said, "When I saw that the people were scattered from me, and that you did not come within the days appointed, and that the Philistines gathered together at Michmash, "then I said, 'The Philistines will now come down on me at Gilgal, and I have not made supplication to the LORD.' Therefore I felt compelled, and offered a burnt offering." And Samuel said to Saul, "You have done foolishly. You have not kept the commandment of the LORD your God, which He commanded you. For now the LORD would have established your kingdom over Israel forever. "But now your kingdom shall not continue. The

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LORD has sought for Himself a man after His own heart, and the LORD has commanded him to be commander over His people, because you have not kept what the LORD commanded you."

David, the Rightful King

Like Jesus, David was from Bethlehem. He grew up as a shepherd and was skillful in music and courageous. Samuel secretly anointed him as king and God openly showed Israel His chosen by his single handedly slaying of the giant, Goliath of Gath. *Sam 17:43-50*

Then David said to the Philistine, "You come to me with a sword, with a spear, and with a javelin. But I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. "This day the LORD will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you and take your head from you. And this day I will give the carcasses of the camp of the Philistines to the birds of the air and the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel. "Then all this assembly shall know that the LORD does not save with sword and spear; for the battle is the LORD'S, and He will give you into our hands."

But Saul began to hate David more and more. David had served at Saul's court, had been married to his younger daughter, and had gone to battle numerous times at Saul's command, and Saul began to hope that David would die in battle. When Saul openly tried to murder him was when David took to the hills.

For some 20 years David hid in the wilderness from Saul where he gathered an army from the outcasts of Israel. David wrote most of the Psalms at this time and God called him, *"a man after My own heart."* Finally, 7 years after Saul died, the tribes crowned David king at Hebron. (about 1000 BC). He brought the Ark of the covenant (gold box containing the 10 commandments and symbolizing the throne of God) to Jerusalem, which he established as the capital (2 Sam 1-5).

David was Israel's greatest and truly ideal king. He was a great warrior and a man who loved God. He brought great peace and prosperity to the land. But David also had his weaknesses. He took many wives, like other kings, and this was forbidden by God. He even arranged the murder of one of his soldiers so that he could marry the man's wife who he had already seduced. David was a great sinner, but he was also very remorseful and repentant. David also took a census (headcount) of his army, showing a lack of trust in God. God punished David and Israel for his sins. The good qualities found in David are a picture of Christ who would be a descendant of David.

As David, in his old age, looked back on his life and pondered on how God had delivered him from all of his enemies. *2 Sam 23:1-2*

Now these are the last words of David. Thus says David the son of Jesse; thus says the man raised up on high, the anointed of the God of Jacob, and the sweet psalmist of Israel: "The Spirit of the LORD spoke by me, and His word was on my tongue. . ."

The next king was Solomon.

Solomon

David ordained that his son Solomon become the next king. He then gave Solomon the plans for the Temple and said: *Chr 28:9-11*

"As for you, my son Solomon, know the God of your father, and serve Him with a loyal heart and with a willing mind; for the LORD searches all hearts and understands all the intent of the thoughts. If you seek Him, He will be found by you; but if you forsake Him, He will cast you off forever. "Consider now, for the LORD has chosen you to build a house for the sanctuary; be strong, and do it."

Soon after this, the Lord appeared to Solomon and offered him anything he wished for: *1King 3:5-14*

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At Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream by night; and God said, "Ask! What shall I give you?" And Solomon said: ...give to Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people, that I may discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Yours?"

*The speech pleased the LORD, that Solomon had asked this thing. Then God said to him: "Because you have asked this thing, and have not asked long life for yourself, nor have asked riches for yourself, nor have asked the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern justice, "behold, I have done according to your words; see, **I have given you a wise and understanding heart, so that there has not been anyone like you before you, nor shall any like you arise after you. "And I have also given you what you have not asked: both riches and honor, so that there shall not be anyone like you among the kings all your days.**" So if you walk in My ways, to keep My statutes and My commandments, as your father David walked, then I will lengthen your days."*

Afterwards Solomon became Israel's most magnificent king. He built the marvelous Temple and God's favor was with him. When he had finished the Temple he made sacrifices and said a public prayer (*1 King 8:27-30*) to which God revealed His glory in *2 Chr 7:1-3*

During his reign he made Israel a world power and great wealth flowed into the kingdom. He had such great wisdom from God that people came from distant lands to hear him. He taught many proverbs and wrote **Ecclesiastes** and **Songs**. Yet Solomon did more than any other king to break down the kingdom and to destroy its true foundations. **His biggest mistake was in disobeying God by taking many wives, and marrying the daughters of foreign kings.** He had 700 wives and 300 concubines. He allowed them to build altars to "Astarte" (Ishtar in Babylonia and Astoreth in Phoenicia) the fertility goddess and other pagan gods.

The instructions in the Law for a king were as follows: *Deut 17:14-20*

... "you shall surely set a king over you whom the LORD your God chooses; one from among your brethren you shall set as king over you; you may not set a foreigner over you, who is not your brother. "But he shall not multiply horses for himself, nor cause the people to return to Egypt to multiply horses, for the LORD has said to you, "You shall not return that way again." "Neither shall he multiply wives for himself, lest his heart turn away; nor shall he greatly multiply silver and gold for himself.

"Also it shall be, when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write for himself a copy of this law in a book, from the one before the priests, the Levites. "And it shall be with him, and he shall read it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the LORD his God and be careful to observe all the words of this law and these statutes, "that his heart may not be lifted above his brethren, that he may not turn aside from the commandment to the right hand or to the left, and that he may prolong his days in his kingdom, he and his children in the midst of Israel."

Though Solomon was gifted with incredible wisdom, his heart led him astray. Toward the end of his life troubles began to appear through powerful factions, and enemies rose up both within and without the nation. Though Solomon made Jerusalem one of the wonders of the world, the kingdom was ready for a collapse. When Solomon died (about 922 BC) the kingdom split in two.

The Divided Kingdom

After Solomon the fame and fortunes of Israel went downhill. The nation rebelled against God and his laws. God might have destroyed Israel had He not promised to Abraham a redeemer and He still planned to use the house of David for this.

When Solomon died a civil war broke out as Solomon's sons and generals fought for the throne. Rehoboam had his father's blessing to be the new king, but Jeroboam had more military influence. In the end, Rehoboam took the southern half of the country and called it "Judah". Jeroboam took the northern half and kept the name Israel. Each claimed to be God's chosen king.

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OVERVIEW OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

The Kings

The Kings of Israel (all wicked)

Jeroboam I
Nadab
Baasha
Elah
Zimri
Omri
Ahab
Ahaziah
Jehoram (Joram)
Jehu
Jehoahaz
Jehoash (Joash)
Jeroboam II
Zechariah'
Shallum
Menahem
Pekahiah
Pekah
Hoshea

Kings of Judah (8 were good)

Rehoboam
Abijam
Asa (Good)
Jehoshaphat (Good)
Jehoram
Ahaziah
Athaliah
Joash (Good)
Amaziah (Good)
Azariah (Uzziah) (Good)
Jotham (Good)
Ahaz
Hezekiah (Good)
Manasseh
Amon
Josiah (Good)
Jehoahaz
Jehoiachim
Jehoiachin
Zedekiah

The Northern Kingdom (Israel)

The Northern Kingdom **consisted of 10 of the tribes** (excluding Judah and Benjamin). It lasted for about 210 years until it was destroyed by Assyria in 722 BC. Its capital was **Samaria**. Every king of Israel was evil. In the northern kingdom there were 9 dynasties (family lines of kings) and 19 kings in all. An average of 11 years to a reign. 8 of these kings met death by violence.

The epitaph written over every one of its kings was: *1King 15:34* and he did evil in the sight of the LORD, and walked in the way of Jeroboam, and in his sin by which he had made Israel to sin.

It was **king Ahab** who introduced Baal worship to them. (*1King 16:30-33*)

The last king was Hoshea (2 Ki 17). The petty wars of the past, wars with Syria and Edom, Ammon and Philistia, were now to give way to war on an ominous new scale. A world empire was being gathered into the ruthless hands of the Assyrians. The ruthless and cruel Assyrians (under Sargon II) besieged Samaria for 3 years and finally it fell, Israel was doomed. **The Assyrians hauled them away into captivity (722 BC)**. But the Lord always reminded them of why judgement came: *II Kings 17:7-23*

The Southern Kingdom (Judah)

The Southern Kingdom consisted of 2 tribes (Judah and Benjamin). The kingdom extended in the north as far as Bethel, while in the south it ended in the dry area known as the Negev. Its eastern and western boundaries were the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea. **Jerusalem was its capital** and it lasted from about 922-586 B.C.,

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Judah was left suddenly independent when Rehoboam flatly refused to lighten the heavy load of forced labor and high taxation imposed on the Israelites by his father Solomon (1 Kin. 12:1-24). Upon Rehoboam's refusal, the ten tribes living north of Bethel promptly declared their independence.

But something else occurred along with this Division. An entirely unexpected blow that devastated Judah. Shishak, Pharaoh of Egypt, invaded the country, plundered the treasures of the Temple and the royal palace, and destroyed a number of newly built fortresses (2 Chr. 12:1-12). Judah never recovered from the sudden loss of her national wealth. Because her land was not as fertile as that of the northern kingdom of Israel, Judah never enjoyed the same degree of prosperity. Rehoboam wanted to attack Israel and reunite the kingdom by force, but a Word from the Lord came to Shemaiah the prophet saying, *"You shall not go up nor fight against your brethren the children of Israel."* 1 King 12:24

Judah had somewhat of a better record. Only 8 of Judah's kings served God. The rest of the 20 kings were wicked. In the southern kingdom there was only one dynasty, that of king David, except usurper Athaliah from the northern kingdom, who by marriage, broke into David's line, and interrupted the succession for 6 years, 20 kings in all. An average of about 16 years to a reign.

Jehoshaphat's son Jehoram (about 848-841 B.C.) married Athaliah, daughter of king Ahab and the wicked Queen Jezebel; and their marriage led to Baal worship also being established in Jerusalem (2 Kin. 8:18). Jehoram's son Ahaziah reigned only for one year (841 B.C.) before he was killed. The pagan queen-mother Athaliah seized the throne and nearly brought the Davidic line to extinction by killing most of Ahaziah's sons. Only the infant Joash escaped; he was rescued by his aunt Jehoshabeath and her husband Jehoiada, the godly high priest (2 Chr. 22:10-12). After six years Joash was proclaimed the lawful king, and Athaliah was executed.

Baal worship climaxed in Judah during the reign of Ahaz (2 Ki 16). Ahaz (about 732-715 B.C.), was faced with Assyria's rise to power under TiglathPileser III; but Ahaz resisted the urgings of Rezin of Syria and Pekah of Israel to join an alliance against Assyria. Instead, Ahaz sought help from Assyria, against the prophet **Isaiah's** advice, and received assistance in return for heavy tribute. Syria and the kingdom of Israel were destroyed in **722 B.C.**, leaving **Judah at the mercy of the Assyrians.**

When Hezekiah (about 714-686 B. C.) succeeded Ahaz, he also disregarded Isaiah's advice and became involved in a coalition with Babylonia and Egypt against Assyria. Assyria, now ruled by Sennacherib, moved against Jerusalem in 701 B. C. It was at this time that Hezekiah constructed the Siloam Tunnel to bring water from the Spring of Gihon into the city of Jerusalem (2 Chr. 32:30). But then something very strange happened. Somehow, miraculously the Assyrians withdrew from attacking Jerusalem after suffering heavy losses, perhaps from a plague. History leaves a big question mark at this point. Why didn't Sennacherib build a siege mound against Jerusalem and completely conquer it? The Bible reveals something very interesting: *Isa 37:33-38* **"Therefore thus says the LORD concerning the king of Assyria: 'He shall not come into this city, nor shoot an arrow there, nor come before it with shield, nor build a siege mound against it. By the way that he came, by the same shall he return; and he shall not come into this city,' says the LORD. 'For I will defend this city, to save it for My own sake and for My servant David's sake.'** "Then the angel of the LORD went out, and killed in the camp of the Assyrians one hundred and eighty-five thousand; and when people arose early in the morning, there were the corpses-- all dead. So Sennacherib king of Assyria departed and went away, returned home, and remained at Nineveh. Now it came to pass, as he was worshiping in the house of Nisroch his god, that his sons Adrammelech and Sharezer struck him down with the sword; and they escaped into the land of Ararat. Then Esarhaddon his son reigned in his place.

Revival came during the reign of Hezekiah but it was immediately swept aside by **Manasseh, who was Judah's most wicked and longest ruling king.** The nation never fully recovered from the effects of this evil king. Manasseh's son Amon continued in his father's depravity, but he soon was murdered. His successor Josiah (about 640-609 B.C.) restored traditional covenant religion, which was based on the Book of the Law newly discovered in a Temple storeroom (2 Chr. 34:14). Many did not follow Josiah's example, however, and

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the prophet **Zephaniah** foretold disaster for the nation. By 610 B.C. the Assyrian Empire had collapsed under Babylonian attacks, and Babylon prepared to march against Egypt, which had been helping the Assyrians. Against Jeremiah's advice, Josiah intervened and was killed at Megiddo.

After Josiah there was no hope for Judah, the last 3 kings were all evil. The Babylonians swept down upon Jerusalem in 597 B. C. and captured it. A second attack led to Jerusalem's second defeat in 586 B. C. Captives from both campaigns were taken to Babylonia to mark the captivity of the Southern Kingdom.

The Babylonian Captivity

Around 605 BC. Nineveh and Assyria had fallen. It was just Egypt and Babylon who were seeking world supremacy. The young brilliant new king of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar, went out and defeated the Egyptians at Carchemish. He marched on to Judah, during Jehoiakim's reign, and took thousands of Hebrews back to Babylon (including **Daniel**, who became one of the greatest prophets). Nebuchadnezzar made two more attacks when he heard of rebellion in Judah. Each time he took captives (including **Ezekiel** the prophet). Only a remnant of the weakest, poorest, and least threatening Jews remained. King Nebuchadnezzar set up a puppet king (Zedekiah) of David's line to sit on the throne of Judah and made him swear an oath of allegiance (2 Chr 36:10-12).

Zedekiah was as faithless as the rest of the evil kings of Judah. He then rebelled and allied with other enemies. When Nebuchadnezzar heard he came back for the last time (586 BC) to reduce Jerusalem to rubble and send the Temple up in flames. Zedekiah was forced to witness the slaughter of his sons, then his eyes were put out, and he himself was carried off to Babylon. The Kingdom was over and the "times of the gentiles" had begun.

2 Kin 24:13-14 13 And he carried out from there all the treasures of the house of the LORD and the treasures of the king's house, and he cut in pieces all the articles of gold which Solomon king of Israel had made in the temple of the LORD, as the LORD had said. 14 Also he carried into captivity all Jerusalem: all the captains and all the mighty men of valor, ten thousand captives, and all the craftsmen and smiths. None remained except the poorest people of the land.

The Captivity to the Return

The Return from Babylon

The people of Judah were horribly distressed. They lost their home, their city, their pride, their Temple, the Ark of the Covenant, and they were taken as prisoners to Babylon, the homeland of idolatry. But God raised up great men to remind them of **Jeremiah's** prophecies that they would only be there for 70 years. Babylon would not be their home:

Jer 29:10-14

For thus says the LORD: After seventy years are completed at Babylon, I will visit you and perform My good word toward you, and cause you to return to this place. For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart. I will be found by you, says the LORD, and I will bring you back from your captivity; I will gather you from all the nations and from all the places where I have driven you, says the LORD, and I will bring you to the place from which I cause you to be carried away captive.

They would return and the temple would be rebuilt, and the Messiah would still come. Daniel and Ezekiel sought to keep the true faith alive.

The Decree of Cyrus

By 538 BC. Babylon had passed into history and the Medo-Persian Empire took its place. Cyrus the Persian issued a decree to allow the Jews to go back to their land, and with the blessing of The Persian Empire. The

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Jews were hardly moved. Babylon was their home. Only a portion returned (Neh 7) and only 74 of the Levites, who were supposed to be known for their dedication to the things of God.

Zerubbabel

The first move back to Palestine was led by Zerubbabel, of the house of David. He was the only one of royal blood to pay any attention to the decree of Cyrus (Ezra 2). When he returned, he found just rubble. No temple, torn down walls, and a mixed breed of corrupt Jews (Samaritans) living there. In 536 BC. he laid the foundations for a new temple, built an altar and worshipped the Lord. The prophets **Haggai** and **Zechariah** helped urge the Jews on. They finished the work on the Temple in 516 BC. (exactly 70 years).

Ezra and Nehemiah

58 years later (458 BC) more Jews returned (Ezra 7) under the leadership of Ezra. 12 years later, Nehemiah, received permission to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem and to govern Judea. He arrived in 444 BC. Despite much opposition, Nehemiah completed this seemingly hopeless task in 52 days. Then a revival followed. Ezra and Nehemiah canonized the books of the Old Testament. They read aloud to the people and gave interpretation. About 40 years later, the prophet **Malachi** condemned the people for slipping back into their sinful ways.

The Prophets

The history of the rise and fall of the Hebrew nation are found in the history books (Genesis-Esther). The prophets appeared during the days of the fall of the Hebrew nation. At the moment of the apostasy of the 10 tribes at the close of Solomon's reign and Israel's golden age the ministry of the prophets began. **The prophets gave a wake up call as soon as people began to forget God.**

Prophets of the Assyrian Period: Jonah, Joel, Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Micah, Zephaniah, Nahum

Prophets of the Babylonian Period: Jeremiah, Habakkuk, Ezekiel, Obadiah, Daniel

Prophets of the Persian Period: Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi

God warned Israel and Judah over and over again through the prophets. The people forsook God, worshipped idols, did injustice, and loved evil. But God was kind enough to forewarn them of coming judgments because of sin and apostasy, and he would do marvelous miracles through the prophets that would give them hope and encouragement. The prophets even revived their faith in the coming Messiah and His glorious Kingdom. Prophets like Jeremiah warned both Israel and Judah even after it was too late and there was no chance for recovery.

"Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: 'Behold, I will bring on this city and on all her towns all the doom that I have pronounced against it, because they have stiffened their necks that they might not hear My words.'"

God was also very clear about prophets who spoke falsely and worked miracles to back up their words: *Deut 13:1-3*

"If there arises among you a prophet or a dreamer of dreams, and he gives you a sign or a wonder, "and the sign or the wonder comes to pass, of which he spoke to you, saying, 'Let us go after other gods'-- which you have not known--' and let us serve them,' "you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams, for the LORD your God is testing you to know whether you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul.

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Short Summary

From Abraham came Isaac, then Jacob (whose name was changed to **ISRAEL**), who had twelve sons, giving rise to the twelve "tribes" of Israel. One of Jacob's sons, Joseph, was sold into slavery in Egypt, leading to Jacob and his family coming to Egypt and later their descendents becoming slaves in Egypt. Moses (about 1250 B.C.) led the Exodus (freeing of Israelites from bondage) from Egypt and the Covenant of God with the Hebrew nation was made:

Hebrew People's Covenant (Old Covenant) with God (Exodus 34:27-28)

God gave the people the Ten Commandments for the people of Israel to obey in order that He be their God.

There were constant problems with the Jewish people believing in idols and other "gods." Finally the people reached the Promised Land and settled there after Moses' death. "Judges" led the people until about 1000 B.C. when Kings were installed, yet these were still thought of as people doing God's bidding (not as other nations' kings which had all power being theirs alone). King David and King Solomon led a united, strong country -- which became divided after Solomon's death:

Southern Kingdom -- called Judah, though consisting of both the "tribes" of Judah and Benjamin; this group included the city of **Jerusalem**.
The Southern Kingdom fell to the Babylonians in 586 B.C.

Northern Kingdom-- called Israel, consisting of the other 10 "tribes";
this group included Samaria.
The Northern Kingdom fell to the Assyrians around 722 B.C.

Although the Hebrews rebuilt the Temple in Jerusalem in 520 B.C., they never regained strength and were eventually conquered by Rome.

The struggles of the Hebrew people and their dispersion from their country were thought to be from their belief in idols and heathen "gods" (mostly resulting from their marrying non-Jews who brought in outside religions). The prophets (including Elijah, Elisha, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel) were spokesmen for God to the people and to their leaders: they often disagreed with the men in power and had no fear of expressing their messages from God -- generally directing against the idolatry and "false gods."

There are many points of wisdom (Books of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Job). Poems and hymns of the Hebrew people are expressed in Psalms. In the latter writings, there was a general belief in **the "last days"** (of the future around their time or at a time to come) and of **the Messiah** who would lead them with great power.