

BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE BIBLE STORY

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Old Testament

1. **Gen. 1-11** -- God miraculously creates all things, including human beings (Adam and Eve), during the six days of creation. The humans rebel against God's authority, which ultimately leads God to judge the world through a catastrophic, global flood. Noah and his family are the only humans that survive. Noah's descendants then repopulate the earth, but the stain of human sin continues to mar God's creation.

2. **Gen. 12-50** -- Abraham (then called Abram) is born around 2166 B.C.¹ God calls him to go to the land of Canaan (Palestine). Cultures had flourished in Mesopotamia and Egypt for some time before Abraham, but these are not significant to the authors of the Bible because they are telling a theological history, a history of God's special work on behalf of mankind. Around 2091 B.C. Abraham goes to Canaan, where he lives out his life. God tells Abraham that he will give that land to Abraham's descendants. Abraham has a son named Isaac, and Isaac has a son named Jacob. Jacob (also called Israel) has 12 sons, one of whom is Joseph. Around 1898 B.C., Joseph is sold into slavery by his brothers and, by God's providence, winds up a powerful man in Egypt. During a famine 22 years later, Jacob and his family (i.e., Joseph's brothers and their families) migrate to Egypt where they live under Joseph's protection. Years later there is a change in Egypt's leadership, and the Israelites (Jacob's descendants) are made slaves.

3. **Exodus - Deuteronomy** -- Around 1446 B.C., Moses, having been called by God, leads the Israelites out of Egyptian bondage, intending to lead them back to the land of Canaan. As a result of disobedience, the Israelites remain in the wilderness for 40 years. Moses dies outside the Promised Land around 1406 B.C.

4. **Joshua - Ruth** -- Joshua leads the people into the Promised Land. They conquer it over a 20-year period and allocate it among the 12 tribes of Israelites. As a result of their repeated unfaithfulness, they face periodic oppression by their enemies throughout the period of Judges (i.e., until the reign of Saul, Israel's first king, which began around 1051 B.C.).

5. **1 Samuel - 2 Chronicles** -- Saul, David, and Solomon serve as kings of Israel.² Solomon builds the Temple in Jerusalem (begun in 966 B.C. and completed in 959 B.C.). Following Solomon's death in 931 B.C., the kingdom of Israel divides into Israel (northern kingdom) and Judah (southern kingdom, which included Jerusalem). In 722/21 B.C., the Assyrians complete their conquest of

¹ Some of the dates in this overview are more debatable than others.

² The right to rule Israel was taken by God from Saul's family and given to David's family because of Saul's disobedience. Solomon was one of David's sons.

Israel (northern kingdom) by capturing its capital city of Samaria and exiling many of its inhabitants. In 587/86 B.C., the Babylonians, having replaced the Assyrians as the dominant world power, destroy Jerusalem (including the Temple) and exile its inhabitants (although some had been exiled in 605 B.C. and 597 B.C. in earlier campaigns against the city). In 539 B.C., Cyrus the Persian conquers the capital city of Babylon and permits the Israelites to return from exile.

6. **Ezra - Esther** -- Zerubbabel and a group of Israelites return to Jerusalem and lay the foundations of the Second Temple in 536 B.C. The Second Temple is not completed, however, until 516 B.C. Very little is known of the history of Jews in Palestine from this point until Ezra leads a group of Jews back to Palestine in 458 B.C. In 445 B.C. Nehemiah returns to Jerusalem to help restore it. After serving as governor for 12 years, he returns to Persia in 433 B.C. and, a short time later, returns to Jerusalem for a governorship of unknown length. This is the end of the inspired O.T. history of Israel.

7. **The Prophets** -- They delivered God's word to Israel at different times throughout Israel's history.

Intertestamental Period

The period from 433 B.C. to 333 B.C., during which the Jews continued to live under the Persian Empire, is a period of almost total obscurity. In 333 B.C., however, Alexander the Great began to engage the Persians militarily, and by 331 B.C. he had gained control of the Persian Empire. This led to the widespread adoption of Greek culture throughout the Empire.

Following Alexander's death in 323 B.C., his kingdom was divided among his four generals. Ptolemy I gained Egypt, and Seleucus I gained Syria and Mesopotamia, but for some years they contended for control of Palestine. The Ptolemies succeeded in controlling Palestine until 198 B.C., at which time it fell into the hands of the Seleucid rulers.

From 198-165 B.C., Palestine was under Seleucid control. In 175 B.C. Antiochus IV Epiphanes began to rule and sought to force the Jews to adopt Greek ways, which were contrary to their religion. This sparked a successful Jewish revolt, which began in 166 B.C., known as the Maccabean Revolt (named for one of its prime figures, Judas Maccabeus).

Beginning in 142 B.C., Simon completed the work of his brothers Judas Maccabeus and Jonathan in securing for Israel autonomy and freedom from paying tribute (even if not independence from Syrian influence and authority). This autonomy endured until the Roman intervention in 63 B.C. This period of relative autonomy is generally referred to as the Hasmonean Kingdom or Hasmonean Rule.

In 63 B.C. the Roman commander Pompey took control of Jerusalem. Julius Caesar defeated Pompey in 48 B.C. and was then murdered in 44 B.C. In 42 B.C. Antony defeated Cassius and appointed Herod (an Idumean) tetrarch of Judea. Around 40 B.C., during another political uprising in Israel, Herod went to Rome where he was designated king of Judea. The revolt was put

down and Herod's rule firmly established in 37 B.C. He continued to reign until he died in 4 B.C., shortly after the birth of Jesus Christ.³

New Testament

The Gospels, with the exception of John 1:1-5 (which refers to eternity), cover the period from the birth of John the Baptist (recorded in Luke) around 5 B.C. to the ascension of Christ around A.D. 30. They are devoted almost exclusively to the years of Jesus' public ministry, approximately A.D. 26-30. After Jesus is baptized by John, he travels about doing good, performing miracles, and preaching about the kingdom of God. The 12 Apostles he selected accompany him. The Jewish leaders, with the help of Apostle Judas Iscariot, eventually have Jesus arrested and pressure Pilate, the Roman procurator of Judea, to crucify him. Jesus dies and is entombed on Friday, but on Sunday morning he is resurrected. Over the next 40 days (Acts 1:3) he appears to his disciples on various occasions, encouraging them, teaching them, and finally giving them the Great Commission. He then ascends back to heaven.

The Book of Acts, written by Luke, tells of the church's spread from Jerusalem to Rome. It covers the period from Christ's ascension to Paul's first Roman imprisonment around A.D. 60. In the face of strong opposition, God uses men and women of faith to take his saving message to Jews, then to Samaritans, and finally to Gentiles throughout the Mediterranean world.

Romans through Jude are letters written during the first century to various groups of Christians for various reasons. They were written by Paul, James, Peter, John, and Jude (the author of Hebrews is unknown). Revelation was also written by John, the bulk of which is a prophetic vision given to him by the Lord Jesus.⁴

Elaborating on the Story

God in the beginning miraculously created all things, including human beings (Adam and Eve), during the six days of creation. The creation was at first an ideal place in which all things were acting in the way God desired. But soon Adam and Eve, who were to be God's representatives on earth, rejected his rule by disobeying him. By bringing sin into the human

³ The oddity of Jesus being born around 5 B.C. ("B.C." stands for "before Christ") is the result of a mistake by Dionysius Exiguus, the Roman monk who in A.D. 525 instituted the practice of dating events from the birth of Jesus. He figured that Jesus was born 753 years after the founding of the city of Rome. This translates to 1 B.C. because there was no year 0 in the calendar. But Jesus was born before Herod the Great died, and since most scholars now believe that Herod died around 750 years after the founding of Rome (which translates to 4 B.C.), Jesus' birth must be moved to around 749 years after the founding of Rome (which translates to 5 B.C.).

⁴ In A.D. 70 the Romans crushed a Jewish revolt against Roman rule, destroying the Second Temple in the process. It has never been rebuilt. This was foretold by the Lord, but the actual event is not recorded in Scripture. A second Jewish revolt led by Simon bar Kosiba (called bar Kokhba, "son of the star," by his supporters), was subdued in A.D. 135. The Jews were expelled from Jerusalem, and the city that arose from Jerusalem's ruins was renamed Aelia Capitolina.

world, they spoiled God's very good creation. As a result, creation is not now the way it is supposed to be. It is no longer a paradise where all things work together in peace and harmony under God's rule. Instead our world now includes things like anger, division, hatred, violence, destruction, death, decay, lying, stealing, suffering, sorrow, and pain. In that sense, it is a creation that is sick as a result of sin. It has fallen from its original state of glory, which is why Adam's sinning is known as "the Fall."

The story of the Bible is the story of God's work through the people of Israel to rescue his creation, which includes mankind, from its fallen state. People are the high point of God's creation, but his rescue effort includes all of creation because all of creation was harmed as a result of sin. That is why Paul in Rom. 8:19-22 says that creation itself looks forward to the day it will be freed from the consequences of human sin. To pick just a few Bible texts, the original ideal state of creation is indicated in Genesis 1-2. The "Fall" is indicated in Genesis 3. The glory of the healed creation, the new heavens and new earth, is pictured in Rev. 21:1-5 and 22:1-5. That is where God, in his own timing, is going to make things end up.

In reaction to increasing sin on the earth, God flooded the entire world in the days of Noah. Everyone was killed except the eight people from Noah's family who were on the ark. Despite this chance for a new beginning, mankind continued on its sinful course, living in rebellion to God.

Abraham was born around 2166 B.C. God chose Abraham to be the person through whom all nations would be blessed. This meant that God was going to bless the nations, the people of the world, by using Abraham in his plan for healing the sick creation. The fulfillment of this promise involved Abraham's descendants becoming the nation of Israel. That happened when God led them out of Egyptian slavery under Moses around 1446 B.C., an event known as "the Exodus," and brought them into the Promise Land (Canaan) under Joshua around 1406 B.C., an event known as "the Conquest."

Israel was to live in the land God gave them as a holy and obedient people so that the nations around them would see the greatness of God and the goodness and blessedness of life lived under his rule (Deut. 4:6-8; Ezek. 5:5; Isa. 42:6, 49:6). But Israel was unfaithful to God. Because of their continual disobedience, God had Israel's enemies defeat them and sent them into exile in foreign lands as he had warned them he would do.

Rulers called "Judges" ruled in Israel from the time of Joshua's death around 1366 B.C. until Saul became Israel's first king around 1051 B.C. The right to rule Israel was taken by God from Saul's family and given to David's family because of Saul's disobedience. David was king over all Israel from around 1004-971 B.C. God promised David that the Messiah, the special Jewish man through whom God would heal creation, would be one of his descendants.

David's son Solomon ruled Israel after David died. He completed building the temple in Jerusalem around 959 B.C. Solomon died around 931 B.C., and soon after that the kingdom of Israel divided into two kingdoms. This happened as punishment for Solomon's disobedience.

Israel was the name of the northern kingdom; Judah, which included Jerusalem, was the name of the southern kingdom.

In 722 B.C., the Assyrians completed their conquest of Israel (northern kingdom) by capturing its capital city of Samaria and exiling many of its inhabitants. In 605 B.C., the Babylonians, having replaced the Assyrians as the great world power, sent some of the people from Jerusalem into exile, including Daniel and his companions. In 597 B.C., they took more people from the city into captivity, including the prophet Ezekiel. Finally, in 587/586 B.C., the Babylonians completed their conquest of Judah (southern kingdom). They destroyed Jerusalem, including the temple Solomon had built, and took still more people into captivity. In keeping with God's promise, Cyrus the Persian conquered the Babylonians in 539 B.C. and permitted the Israelites to return home.

Some Jews returned at that time and began rebuilding Jerusalem. They eventually rebuilt a very modest version of the former temple (it was completed in 516 B.C.). Ezra went to Jerusalem around 458 B.C. Nehemiah went to Jerusalem around 445 B.C. and served as governor there for twelve years. He returned to Persia in 433 B.C. and a short time later returned to Jerusalem for a governorship of unknown length. That is where the history of the OT ends.

The prophets delivered God's word to Israel at different times throughout Israel's history. Their messages related to the circumstances in which they lived, but a frequent theme of those messages is that the people will face judgment if they do not change their ways and that there is hope for a glorious future for God's creation, a glory in which the faithful will share.

The OT ends on a note of unfulfilled hope. The glorious state of peace, harmony, and complete blessing – the healing of creation – that the OT suggested God was going to bring about did not arrive when the Jews returned from Babylonian exile. Israel continued to be ruled by foreign powers instead of a son of David, and the marks of this old fallen creation continued to exist. When Jesus came in the first century, hundreds of years after the Jews returned from Babylonian exile, and announced "the kingdom of God is at hand," the people were excited. They were hoping that God at long last was going to heal the sick creation and bless his people by having them live in that glorious state.

Jesus' claim that he was bringing in God's final state, the kingdom of God, raised a question in the mind of Jews. How could Jesus be bringing in the glorious eternal state of perfect love, peace, and fellowship when the signs of the old fallen order – things like sin, death, sorrow, suffering, and pain – continued to exist? Jesus explained, especially in some of his parables, that people were mistaken in thinking that the coming of the kingdom of God would mean the *immediate* removal of all bad things. He taught that the kingdom, the final state, comes in two stages. He was introducing or inaugurating the kingdom with his first coming, but it would not be finalized or consummated, fully manifested, until he returned from heaven.

So the kingdom of God is already here in a beginning or initial sense. The new age has already begun to exist, but the old age is still present. The two ages will overlap until Jesus

Christ will return with mighty angels and will take vengeance, inflict punishment, on the unbelievers of the world (2 Thess. 1:7-8; Jude 14-15). Until Christ's return, dead people exist as conscious, bodiless spirits in a place of blessing or suffering depending on their relationship with God at the time of their death. At Christ's return, they will be resurrected, meaning their spirit will be united with a glorified and transformed body that is suited for eternal existence, what Paul describes as an immortal and imperishable body, and they will then be assigned their permanent dwelling places. God's children will spend eternity in the love and joy of the new heavens and new earth. Those who are not God's children, meaning those who sinned and did not receive his forgiveness, will spend eternity in the sorrow of hell.

Revelation, in my view, is largely a symbolic representation of the wrath and judgment that surround Christ's return, but it also contains the grandest depiction of the eternal state of the new heavens and new earth. It is a visionary elaboration of the final chapter of the Bible story. The paradise that was lost in Genesis is regained in Revelation and regained to a transcendent degree, regained in even greater form. Revelation pictures the restoration of all things promised by God through the prophets, the restoration mentioned by Peter in Acts 3:21. The curse that followed sin in Genesis is removed in Revelation, and the creation that was defiled by sin in Genesis is transformed into the new heavens and new earth in Revelation. The tree of life from which mankind was banished in Genesis because of sin is part of the eternal home of the redeemed in Revelation.

Jesus is the center of this entire effort. It was decided from eternity that to solve the sin problem that would infect creation God the Son would become the God-man Jesus Christ and would take on himself the penalty that all human sin deserved. This allows God to forgive sinners without making light of the horror of sin, without trivializing sin. It allows God to forgive in a way that is consistent with his nature, a way that expresses his love without neglecting his holiness and justice.

Christ's sacrifice is therefore the key to healing all the consequences of sin, even the damage it caused to the nonhuman creation. Thus Paul in Col. 1:19-20 speaks of Jesus as the one through whom God the Father reconciled *all things* to himself, making peace by the blood of his cross. He says in Eph. 1:9-10 that the mystery of God's will for the administration of the fullness of the times is to bring *all things* together in Christ, the things in the heavens and the things on the earth. "For all the promises of God find their Yes in him" (2 Cor. 1:20, ESV).