

# Old Testament History



A 12 point summary of the  
story of God's people





When I first became a Christian at 18 from a non-churched family, and having never gone to Sunday school, it was quite evident that I did not have a good big picture understanding of the history of God’s dealings with His people in the Old Testament. I wanted to be able to open up the Old Testament and be able to answer the question, “what time is it in the history?” For my own benefit I came up with a 12 point schema that helped me to remember the flow of the history and the key events to anchor it on. It turned out that it was helpful for others because, to my surprise, I was meeting lots of Christians who had grown up in a Christian home and in a Christian church, who, despite knowing lots of the Bible ‘stories’, were sketchy on how they all fitted together. This paper is my attempt to provide a resource to help with this.

Compiled by Chris Parker from many sources, 2003

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1. The Beginnings	
<b>GENESIS = BEGINNINGS</b>	<p>Bible begins with the basic premise – God is the creator of the whole world.</p> <p>Three fundamental points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• God made all – Gen 1:1</li> <li>• Creation was Good – Gen 1:31</li> <li>• People are at top of creation – Gen 1:26,27</li> </ul>
<b>CREATION CONTROVERSY</b>	<p>Creation story is not a scientific account (in a literary sense)</p> <p>There is room for different views on the scientific accuracy.</p> <p>NOTE – Science asks how while the Bible gives the answer to why and who.</p>
<b>THE FALL</b>	<p>Man chose to please himself and turn away from God – Gen 3.</p> <p>Result is that the world became contaminated. (Sin involves the whole of Human character and the whole of nature).</p> <p>The seriousness of sin is that it damages relationships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• with God</li> <li>• with each other</li> <li>• with the environment</li> <li>• within oneself.</li> </ul> <p>Sin then started to spread</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cain and Abel (Gen 4)</li> <li>• Becomes unbearable, leads to destruction by the flood (Gen 6)</li> <li>• But Noah (the “Saved One”) is still tainted (Gen 9:20,21)</li> <li>• Growth of competing nations (Gen 10)</li> <li>• God’s perfect creation is grossly disfigured and Humans (who were designed for fellowship with God) are totally out of step with Him and in rebellion.</li> </ul>

## 2. The Patriarchs (The fathers of Israel)

God speaks to ABRAHAM in Ur

God makes a promise of blessing to ABRAHAM (covenant or binding agreement) which has three parts:

- descendants will become a great nation
- his people to possess a special land (The promised land - Canaan)
- all nations blessed through his descendants (Gen 12:1-3)

ABRAHAM has the two sons, ISAAC and Ishmael (Gen 21)

- God's promise is to pass through ISAAC

ISAAC has the two sons, JACOB and Esau. (Gen 25:19ff)

- God's promise to pass through JACOB

JACOB is also referred to as 'Israel'

JACOB returns to Mesopotamia and has twelve sons known as the twelve tribes or sons of Israel.

1 Simeon	7 Gad
2 Levi (priestly tribe)	8 Asher
3 Judah	9 Reuben
4 Dan	10 Zebulun
5 Issachar	11 Benjamin
6 Naphtali	12 Joseph (divided into half tribes of Manasseh and Ephraim).

JOSEPH is sold into slavery in Egypt by his brothers where he rises to power as a senior administrator.

Famine/drought brings JOSEPH'S brothers as well as JACOB to Egypt (Gen 42-46).

JACOB'S (ISRAEL'S) family settle and grow in number in Egypt.

## 3. The slaves

There is a change in the political dynasty in Egypt.

The new Pharaoh begins oppression of Israelites due to fear of being over-run (Ex 1:8-10).

The Israelites begin to doubt the promises of God (no land and a real possibility of extermination).

MOSES is born in Egypt with God's specific involvement in his life.

- protection as baby
- training and education within Pharaoh's court

While MOSES is out in the desert, God speaks to him through a burning bush

MOSES is called to command Pharaoh to let God's people go.

MOSES reluctantly obeys but Pharaoh won't listen.

God confronts Pharaoh with 10 plagues (Ex 5-10)

Blood Flies Hail Frogs Cattle virus Locusts Gnats Boils Darkness

The 10th plague is the death of the 1st born male by the angel of death.

## 4. The Exodus

MOSES tells the Israelites that obedience and faith is required for their freedom.

They must slaughter a lamb and sprinkle blood over their doorway and the angel of death will 'Passover' them.

All the eldest sons of the Egyptians died and they then requested the Israelites to leave.

Divine intervention enables them to cross the Red Sea (or Red Sea?) and they then gather at Mount Sinai.

## 5. The Covenant

God appears to MOSES again and gives them three precious gifts:

- a renewed covenant (a promise that they are His children Ex 19:4-6)
- a moral law (in essence the ten commandments)
- a generous provision for breaches in this law.

God also commanded the construction of the Tabernacle (“tent of God’s presence”)

## 6. The Wilderness

Not too long after the giving of the covenant at Mount Sinai, God led them to the outskirts of the Promised Land.

They sent spies into the land; however, all but two of them believed the inhabitants to be invincible.

CALEB and JOSHUA pleaded that they not disobey God as He would deliver them into the land.

They rebelled and God’s judgment fell on them. God said that the only adults alive at this point who would enter the Promised Land would be CALEB and JOSHUA.

This resulted in 40 years of wandering in the wilderness (even MOSES would only look into the land).

## 7. The Conquest (Book Of Joshua)

New generation were camped east of the Jordan looking into the land when MOSES dies.

Before he dies he appoints JOSHUA as new leader.

Under JOSHUA they capture central area and city of Jericho (Josh 5-6).

Capture city states to the North and South (Josh 9-11).

Land divided among the tribes and the Canaanites (and their religious contamination) removed.

JOSHUA again summons them to follow God (Josh 23-24).

## 8. The Cycles (Book Of Judges)

The Israelites end up spread out with the Canaanites still present.

Canaanites are hostile neighbours and more successful farmers.

Israelites begin to worship Baal the Canaanite fertility god and participate in Baal worship practices.

Result was a complex mixture of Baal worship and the worship of God.

A cycle emerges:

- movement away from worship of God
- external oppression
- a “judge” raised up by God
- a call to repentance followed by military deliverance
- faithfulness to God during life of Judge
- death of judge
- movement away from worshipping God

Notable Judges were EHUD (Judges 3), DEBORAH (Judges 4-5), GIDEON (Judges 6-8), ABIMELECH (Judges 9), JEPHTAH (Judges 10-12) and SAMSON (Judges 13-16).

This period is typified by considerable confusion - local rather than national religious patterns are evident.

## 9. The Royalty

SAMUEL becomes the last judge - he is to set Israel on a new path to a united monarchy.

- The sons of SAMUEL turn out to be failures and the people ask the aging SAMUEL to give them a king.
- SAMUEL warns them that they don't need a King (God is their King 1 Sam 8:6-9).
- Israel's request for a king was sinful but God promised to bless the king and nation if they both obeyed Him.
- So SAUL becomes the first king (1 Sam 10:20-24).
- SAUL appears to be an ideal king but he had the fatal flaw of disobedience to God.
- DAVID is chosen by God as SAUL'S successor.
- As SAUL gradually declines in popular appeal and personal godliness DAVID correspondingly rises.
- DAVID establishes Jerusalem as the capital and moves the ark from the tabernacle and places it in the Temple (permanent tabernacle).
- Although DAVID is flawed he loves God and he establishes unified ISRAEL who is safe from her enemies.
- SOLOMON is DAVID'S son and during his reign Israel reaches the peak of its magnificence.
- However, SOLOMON'S success was only on the surface (he did not love the Lord God with all his heart).
- His prosperity was at the sake of oppression of the people.

When SOLOMON dies and his son REHOBOAM is to become king the people demand that he ease up on them.

- He does not, and the nation splits with ten tribes to the north and two to the south.
- The southern kingdom becomes Judah under REHOBOAM as king.
- The northern kingdom becomes Israel under the leader of the rebellion, JEROBOAM as king.
- Capital of north is Samaria.
- Capital of south is Jerusalem.
- This division never healed.

## 10. The Split

KINGDOM OF ISRAEL (Northern)

JEROBOAM stopped the religious pilgrimage to Jerusalem by creating two golden calves at Dan and Bethel (a form of Baal worship).

A succession of kings perpetuated the oppression of the people and rebellion to God (1 Kings 16:26).

God sent prophets to warn them of their ways:

ELIJAH and ELISHA

AMOS

HOSEA

The nation of Israel just fell apart - Samaria was captured and destroyed by the Assyrians from the north.

Most of the people were scattered throughout the Assyrian empire but some remained.

Racial and religious contamination with other local remaining people resulted in the Samaritans (despised 'half-breeds').

KINGDOM OF JUDAH (Southern)

Continued for a further 135 years.

- A succession of little known kings associated with a succession of progressive rebellion and reform.

## 10. The Split (continued)

- Prophets sent to warn wayward kings of their rebellion and consequences.
- ZEDEKIAH was the last king of Judah, he rebelled against the Babylonians.
- NEBUCHADNEZZAR the king of Babylon besieged Jerusalem and reduced the temple to rubble.
- Majority of the Jews carried off to Babylon (the Exile).

## 11. The Exile

Some turned away from God for good while in exile in Babylon and surrounding areas.

Some believed that it was God's plan but was unfair.

Others remained faithful believing it was their just deserts.

God still spoke to them during the exile through the prophet EZEKIEL.

EZEKIEL told that although they were suffering due to their own guilt they should not be without hope.

## 12. The Return

While the Jews were in exile the Persians over-ran Babylon.

CYRUS king of Persia enabled the Jews to return (2 Chronicles 36:22-23).

Many stayed away but most returned to home in several waves led by ZERUBBABEL, NEHEMIAH and EZRA.

Upon return the going was very tough:

- land agriculturally neglected
- suffered bad harvests and inadequate housing
- much aggression and political unrest from people who had moved into the land.

- Prophets sent to the Jews at this time were:

HAGGAI

ZECHARIAH

MALACHI

## Further biblical study

You might like to consider the following core unit with the National Institute for Christian Education:

### **ED500 Foundations of Christian Education**

This unit promotes an authentic and robust understanding of the Bible as the core foundation for the development of Christian education. Starting from a recognition of the Bible's inspired and divine character, this course enables students to develop a sound biblical understanding of the theology, history, and literature of the canonical books of the Old and New Testaments, and to be prepared to apply this growth in educational planning and decision making at all levels.

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