

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 centuries 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 1043 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

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.