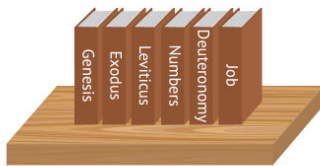


Old Testament: Beginnings Through Settlement

Our Daily Bread Christian University
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Beginnings (?–1440 BC)



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The Bible opens with the words, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” The first two chapters of Genesis tell how God made the world in six days and rested on the seventh.

The crown of creation is humankind. Adam, the first man, was placed in a garden paradise called Eden, where he was to care for the garden. The animals were created in pairs, but Adam was alone. So God made him a woman and told them to have children and to populate the earth.

The Garden of Eden was theirs to enjoy—with one exception. They were told not to eat of one tree called “the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.” But Eve gave in to the temptation of Satan, God’s adversary, and ate of the forbidden fruit. So did Adam, and they fell. They were driven from the garden: Eve to have sorrow and pain in childbirth,⁹ Adam to a life of hard toil to produce food from the earth.

Sin had entered the race and would be part of all humankind. Yet God promised salvation through the seed of woman and pictured that salvation through the provision of coats of skins.

So Adam and Eve began to live outside the garden. The tragedy of the fall was demonstrated early when one of Adam and Eve’s sons, Cain, killed his brother Abel. As the race increased in number, it became more and more wicked. Finally, God destroyed it in a great flood. Only Noah found grace in God’s eyes, and through the building of an ark he and his family were spared.

From those eight people, the race again multiplied. At Babel, man sought to defy God by building a tower to heaven, but God

scattered them and gave them different languages.

Genesis 12 marks a change in God's dealings with people. The Lord singled out one man, Abram, who lived in the city of Ur in Chaldea, and designated him and his offspring as His special people. God would make Himself known through them. Abram's name was changed to Abraham, and he was instructed to journey to a land God would later reveal to him. That land was Palestine, and God gave it to Abraham and his children forever.

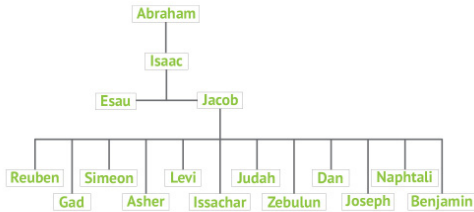
Abraham and his descendants—Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph—lived as nomads, much as the Bedouins of today. Their homes were tents. They raised cattle and sheep. The sense of family was strong, with the oldest living male member serving as patriarchal leader and family priest.

For a long time it seemed that Abraham would die without a son—in spite of God's promise. But in their old age, Abraham and Sarah miraculously had a son—Isaac. Isaac's son Jacob continued the family with 12 sons, men who became the heads of the tribes of Israel. The family stayed in Palestine until a famine drove them to Egypt. One of the 12 sons, Joseph, had risen to prominence in Egypt, and he became their protector and benefactor.

The family stayed in Egypt 430 years and multiplied rapidly. Gradually, however, they became enslaved. The future of the family, now a sizable nation, was threatened by a royal order for all male children to be killed. God called a man named Moses, who had been raised in Pharaoh's court, to lead Israel to freedom. After a bitter contest with Pharaoh, they marched across the Red Sea (which God parted miraculously) and into the wilderness, heading for Canaan, the Land of Promise.

On the journey, Moses received the Law of God on Mount Sinai, as well as instructions for building a tent of worship. They arrived at the edge of Canaan and sent in spies. But the courage they had when they confronted Pharaoh left them, and the people refused to undertake the conquest of the Promised Land. Because of their unbelief, God sentenced them to wander 40 years in the desert wilderness until the entire generation had died.

As the first five books of the Old Testament (the Pentateuch) conclude, Israel is assembled on the banks of the Jordan River.



Moses, their great leader, is dead; but a new leader, Joshua, is ready to lead the march into Canaan.

Seeing God. Now that we have reviewed the history recorded in the Pentateuch, let's go back for another look. Remember, our goal is not merely to know the story of the Bible but to know the God behind the story—and to see ourselves in relationship with Him. The first five books are packed with information that helps us know God, so let's look at one representative incident: the story of Noah in Genesis 6–8. As you read the account of Noah's rescue from the flood, you will see these truths about God:

- He is a God to be feared.
- He is able to create and to destroy.
- He is patient with sinners, but His patience has limits.
- He is not just loving and kind; He is also a God of righteousness, justice, and anger.
- He is concerned about what is happening in His world.
- He has complete control over His creation.
- He has the power to interrupt history.
- He is the God of new beginnings.
- He rescues those who trust in Him.
- He makes and keeps promises.

Seeing Ourselves. In the early chapters of Genesis, we are told of Adam and Eve's decision to disobey God. In that act we see our own willfulness and our readiness to break His commandments. Here are several other ways we may see ourselves in the first five books of the Old Testament and in Job:

- In Cain's jealousy, we see our own sense of competition (Genesis 4:5).
- In Noah's need for an ark of salvation, we see our own need of rescue from God's judgment (Genesis 6–8).
- In Abraham's faith in following God, we see our own potential for belief (Genesis 12).
- In Jacob's scheming, we see our own inclination to trust in ourselves (Genesis 25, 27).
- In Joseph's kindness to his brothers, we see our own responsibility to forgive (Genesis 42–45).
- In Israel's unwillingness to enter Canaan, we see our own weakness of faith (Exodus 14).

Settlement (1440–1050 BC)



- In Job's response to suffering, we see our own feelings when things turn against us (Job 3).

Settlement (1440–1050 BC)

When the section of “Beginnings” ended, Israel was positioned on the bank of the Jordan River, ready to invade Palestine. Israel's leader, Moses, was dead; but God had raised up Joshua, a new leader, to take the people into Canaan. Their first obstacle was the Jordan River. Walking behind the Ark of the Covenant, the entire nation moved forward. When the feet of the priests carrying the Ark touched the river, the waters “piled up” and the people crossed into the land promised to Abraham.

Directly in their path was Jericho, a walled and fortified city. By a miracle, the walls fell flat and the city was conquered. After a brief delay at Ai because of Achan's sin, the armies marched into Canaan. In a brilliant military campaign, they conquered most of the Promised Land. The tribes settled in the regions allotted them by God, and tribal leaders ruled the people. Conquered cities became tribal strongholds and the people became craftsmen, farmers, and shepherds. After Joshua died, the tribes became more and more independent. There was little central government. Judges arose to give regional leadership—men like Othniel, Gideon, Jephthah, and Samson—but conditions generally deteriorated until Israel was in a state of anarchy. We are told that “everyone did what was right in his own eyes.”

A beautiful little love story is told about Ruth, a Moabitess widow of an Israelite, who was rescued from poverty by Boaz. Because he was a relative through her mother-in-law Naomi, he could marry her and thus buy back her husband's land for her inheritance.

As the 10th century opened, the tribes of Israel were threatened by the Philistines. Samson held them back for a while, but after his death the danger increased. The need for the tribes to combine their strength became evident.

Seeing God. As we look back on the period of Israel's settlement, we can see God in a way that will help us know Him better. For example, if you read the account of Israel's crossing of the Jordan River (Joshua 3–4) you can observe these truths about God:

- He keeps His promises.
- He gives His people directions (3:8).
- He promises to be with those who move forward with Him (3:7).
- He supports His appointed leaders (3:7).
- He has the power to turn formidable obstacles into safe pathways (3:15).
- He makes His presence known (3:15-16).
- He has the power to control nature (3:15-16).
- He wants His mighty works remembered and recounted to our children (4:1-7).
- He wants nations to know of His might (4:21-24).

Seeing Ourselves. The people of ancient days were very much like us. Consider, for example, the following:

- In the confirmation of Joshua's call, we see our own need for assurance (Joshua 1-2).
- In Achan's sin of coveting wealth, we see our own greed (Joshua 7).
- In Gideon's fleece, we see our own desire for a visible communication from God (Judges 6).
- In Jephthah's vow, we see our own rash bargaining with God (Judges 11).
- In Ruth's plight, we see our own need for a kinsman-redeemer (Ruth 4).
- In Israel's constant relapses into sin, we trace our own spiritual experience.