

A Guide to Bible Basics

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WJK WESTMINSTER
JOHN KNOX PRESS
LOUISVILLE • KENTUCKY

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Introduction

This book invites us to become more familiar with the content of our Bibles. After all, most Americans own a Bible, maybe even two or three. We hear the Bible quoted in religious, cultural, and political discussions. We are ready to learn more about these stories. In addition to helping us read our Bibles more clearly, this book orients our reading so that we understand how particular biblical passages fit within the overall meaning of a book. Many biblical books are lengthy and complicated; even the shorter books are challenging to comprehend. My hope is that this book will be a guide for our Bible reading, that we will use this smaller book in order to organize and contextualize our reading of the larger book. This book can help us keep straight who's who and what's what. The structured information here can help us get a sense for the whole of the Bible and for the sections in the Bible that we wish to learn more about.

Nonetheless, this book should not be a substitute for reading the Bible. The best way to learn about the contents of the Bible is to read the Bible. There can be no good substitute for this activity. Yet I realize that reading such a dense and lengthy book can be overwhelming. The Bible I currently have on my desk is over two thousand pages in length, and it contains so many stories and names and places! How do we keep all that information organized?

A Guide to Bible Basics takes one step back from an ethical and theological concern for the Bible's relevance today. We want to examine the basic content of the Bible with the conviction that we first need some level of elementary comprehension of the Bible's stories, poetry, regulations, and teachings in order to imaginatively interpret them. We need biblical literacy. Interpreting the Bible requires the first step of knowing its content. What does the

Bible say? What are its narratives? How does the Bible speak about God and humanity? At the same time, this book does not strive to be exhaustive in its treatment of each biblical book. The reader will not find comprehensive lists of every single mention of a biblical character or place. In order to be useful, the book is selective in the content it presents.

This book is about the Christian Bible (Old and New Testaments). I write as a Christian and as a scholar of the Old Testament/Hebrew Bible. I hope that anyone who is curious about the Bible will find this book useful. Since the focus is content, I want to refrain from interpretive judgments as much as possible. As a result, this book does not introduce critical biblical scholarship, nor does it provide devotional readings of biblical passages.

WHAT IS THE BIBLE?

Christians use the word *Bible* to indicate both the Old Testament and the New Testament. As noted in the next section, different Christian traditions have different numbers of books included in their Bibles. As a Protestant, I open my Bible to find sixty-six books. My Catholic friend, however, finds almost a dozen additional books in her Bible. All Christians do not share the same Bible.

In addition, Christians share the Old Testament with Jews, who call it the *Tanakh*, or the *Bible*, or perhaps another name. To further complicate matters, Bible scholars often call this textual collection the *Hebrew Bible* in order to discuss this literature without demonstrating an expressly Christian or Jewish perspective. I will use the explicitly Christian designation *Old Testament*, since that is most familiar to Christians. Of course, just because something is labeled as “old” does not mean it is inferior or worthless when compared to something new.

The New Testament is not shared with Judaism. The number and arrangement of its books have been agreed upon by Christians for centuries.

WHICH BOOKS ARE IN THE BIBLE?

Each religious community has decided which books constitute its canon, its list of approved, inspired books—its sacred Scripture. Jews have a different canon from Christians. Even Christian communities have different canons from each other. I will discuss three of those canons here: Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox.

The Christian Protestant canon contains sixty-six books: the Old Testament has thirty-nine books (the same books as in the Jewish canon but in a different order), and the New Testament has twenty-seven. The Christian Catholic canon contains all thirty-nine books from the Protestant Old Testament canon plus eleven additional books, then the twenty-seven New Testament books. Protestants often call these additional books found in Catholic Bibles the *Apocrypha*. The term is from Greek and means “hidden.” Martin Luther, the Protestant Reformer, actually took these books from their place within the Catholic Bible and created a separate section with this title for his edition of the Bible. Eventually, many Protestant Bibles dropped this section altogether. Catholics call these same books *deuterocanonical*, another Greek term, which means “second canon.” All Christians basically agree on the New Testament canon of twenty-seven books.

JEWISH CANON

| <i>Torah (Instruction)</i> | <i>Nevi'im (Prophets)</i> | <i>Ketuvim (Writings)</i> |
|----------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| Genesis | Joshua | Psalms |
| Exodus | Judges | Proverbs |
| Leviticus | 1–2 Samuel | Job |
| Numbers | 1–2 Kings | Song of Songs |
| Deuteronomy | Isaiah | Ruth |
| | Jeremiah | Lamentations |
| | Ezekiel | Ecclesiastes |
| | Hosea | Esther |
| | Joel | Daniel |
| | Amos | Ezra |
| | Obadiah | Nehemiah |
| | Jonah | 1–2 Chronicles |
| | Micah | |
| | Nahum | |
| | Habakkuk | |
| | Zephaniah | |
| | Haggai | |
| | Zechariah | |
| | Malachi | |

PROTESTANT OLD TESTAMENT CANON

| <i>Pentateuch</i> | <i>Historical Books</i> | <i>Poetry and Wisdom</i> | <i>Prophets</i> |
|-------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------|
| Genesis | Joshua | Job | Isaiah |
| Exodus | Judges | Psalms | Jeremiah |
| Leviticus | Ruth | Proverbs | Lamentations |
| Numbers | 1–2 Samuel | Ecclesiastes | Ezekiel |
| Deuteronomy | 1–2 Kings | Song of Songs | Daniel |
| | 1–2 Chronicles | | Hosea |
| | Ezra | | Joel |
| | Nehemiah | | Amos |
| | Esther | | Obadiah |
| | | | Jonah |
| | | | Micah |
| | | | Nahum |
| | | | Habakkuk |
| | | | Zephaniah |
| | | | Haggai |
| | | | Zechariah |
| | | | Malachi |

CATHOLIC OLD TESTAMENT CANON

| <i>Pentateuch</i> | <i>Historical Books</i> | <i>Poetry and Wisdom</i> | <i>Prophets</i> |
|-------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| Genesis | Joshua | Job | Isaiah |
| Exodus | Judges | Psalms | Jeremiah |
| Leviticus | Ruth | Proverbs | Lamentations |
| Numbers | 1–2 Samuel | Ecclesiastes | Baruch |
| Deuteronomy | 1–2 Kings | Song of Songs | Ezekiel |
| | 1–2 Chronicles | Wisdom of Solomon | Daniel (with additions) |
| | Ezra | Ecclesiasticus | Hosea |
| | Nehemiah | | Joel |
| | Tobit | | Amos |
| | Judith | | Obadiah |
| | Esther (with additions) | | Jonah |
| | 1–2 Maccabees | | Micah |
| | | | Nahum |
| | | | Habakkuk |
| | | | Zephaniah |
| | | | Haggai |
| | | | Zechariah |
| | | | Malachi |

ORTHODOX OLD TESTAMENT CANON

| <i>Pentateuch</i> | <i>Historical Books</i> | <i>Poetry and Wisdom</i> | <i>Prophets</i> |
|-------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Genesis | Joshua | Psalms | Hosea |
| Exodus | Judges | Job | Amos |
| Leviticus | Ruth | Proverbs | Micah |
| Numbers | 1–4 Kingdoms | Ecclesiastes | Joel |
| Deuteronomy | 1–2 Chronicles | Song of Songs | Obadiah |
| | 1–2 Esdras | Wisdom of Solomon | Jonah |
| | Nehemiah | Wisdom of Sirach | Nahum |
| | Tobit | | Habakkuk |
| | Judith | | Zephaniah |
| | Esther (with additions) | | Haggai |
| | 1–3 Maccabees | | Zechariah |
| | | | Malachi |
| | | | Isaiah |
| | | | Jeremiah |
| | | | Baruch |
| | | | Lamentations of Jeremiah |
| | | | Epistle of Jeremiah |
| | | | Ezekiel |
| | | | Daniel (with additions) |

CHRISTIAN NEW TESTAMENT CANON

| <i>Gospels and Acts</i> | <i>Paul's Letters</i> | <i>General Letters and Revelation</i> |
|-------------------------|-----------------------|---|
| Matthew | Romans | Hebrews |
| Mark | 1–2 Corinthians | James |
| Luke | Galatians | 1–2 Peter |
| John | Ephesians | 1–3 John |
| Acts of the Apostles | Philippians | Jude |
| | Colossians | Revelation |
| | 1–2 Thessalonians | |
| | 1–2 Timothy | |
| | Titus | |
| | Philemon | |

BIBLE TRANSLATIONS

The Old Testament was written primarily in Hebrew, although sections of Ezra and Daniel are in Aramaic, a closely related language. The New Testament was written in Greek. The Bibles we read today are translations. In fact, most Christians throughout history have only encountered the Bible through translation.

A Guide to Bible Basics uses the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), a readable English translation completed by a committee of scholars including women and men representing Protestant, Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and Jewish communities of faith.

If you have only heard or read a certain translation, I recommend you try a different one. If you are accustomed to the King James Version, try the New Revised Standard Version. If you are familiar with the New Revised Standard Version, try the Common English Bible. For the names of biblical people and places, I follow the spelling of the New Revised Standard Version for ease of use. If you prefer to use a study Bible (a Bible with study notes at the bottom of the page) to help your understanding of specific passages, I recommend *The New Interpreter's Study Bible*, published by Abingdon Press, or *The Oxford Annotated Study Bible*, published by Oxford University Press. The notes in these two Bibles are written by reputable biblical scholars with commentary on historical, literary, and theological aspects of the text.

BIBLICAL TIME PERIODS

To provide an overview of the biblical story, I have divided it into nine time periods. For each period, I note some of the major events that are presented in the Bible as well as the biblical books that tell the story of the period. The biblical texts themselves have a more complicated history concerning their dating and editing. Therefore, I have organized the biblical books by the stories they present and when those stories most likely would have occurred, not by when the stories were written down.

Matriarchs and Patriarchs: 2000–1500 BCE

The biblical story begins with the creation of the world but quickly moves to the time period of the ancestors of the book of Genesis. These matriarchs and patriarchs include Abraham, Sarah, Hagar, Ishmael, Isaac, Rebekah, Jacob, Esau, Rachel, Leah, Zilpah, Bilhah, Dinah, Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah,

Tamar, Issachar, Zebulun, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, Asher, and Joseph. The story takes place mostly in Canaan, but by the end, Jacob's children are in Egypt.

Book: Genesis

Exodus and Wilderness: 1500–1200 BCE

The children of Jacob, the Israelites, are enslaved in Egypt. They are liberated with the help of their leader, Moses, and his siblings, Miriam and Aaron. The story continues with the Israelites' journey through the wilderness to Mount Sinai, where they receive divine instructions. Then the Israelites wander again through the wilderness as they prepare to enter the promised land.

Books: Exodus; Leviticus; Numbers; Deuteronomy

Promised Land and Judges: 1200–1000 BCE

With Joshua as their leader, the Israelites enter the land of Canaan and conquer various cities and peoples in order to occupy the land. They divide the promised land among the twelve tribes. A series of judges (e.g., Deborah, Gideon, and Samson) help deliver them from various oppressors.

Books: Joshua; Judges; Ruth

United Monarchy: 1000–922 BCE

The reigns of King Saul, King David, and King Solomon bring the monarchical state together.

Books: 1 and 2 Samuel; 1 Kings 1–11; 1 Chronicles 10–29; 2 Chronicles 1–9; Psalms

Divided Monarchy: 922–587 BCE

The sons of King Solomon divide the monarchy into two kingdoms: Israel in the north and Judah in the south. The northern kingdom of Israel survives until 722 BCE, when Samaria falls to the Assyrians. The southern kingdom of Judah survives until 587 BCE, when Jerusalem falls to the Babylonians.

Books: 1 Kings 12–22; 2 Kings 1–25; 2 Chronicles 10–36; Isaiah; Jeremiah; Ezekiel; Hosea; Amos; Jonah; Micah; Nahum; Habakkuk; Zephaniah

Babylonian Exile: 587–539 BCE

Some of the people of Judah are taken into captivity in Babylon. In exile, they have no temple and no monarchy.

Books: Lamentations; Ezekiel; Daniel 1–5, 7–8

Persian Period: 539–332 BCE

The people in Babylon are allowed to return home from exile and rebuild the Temple. Judah becomes a province of the Persian Empire.

Books: Ezra; Nehemiah; Esther; Daniel 6, 9–12; Joel; Haggai; Zechariah; Malachi

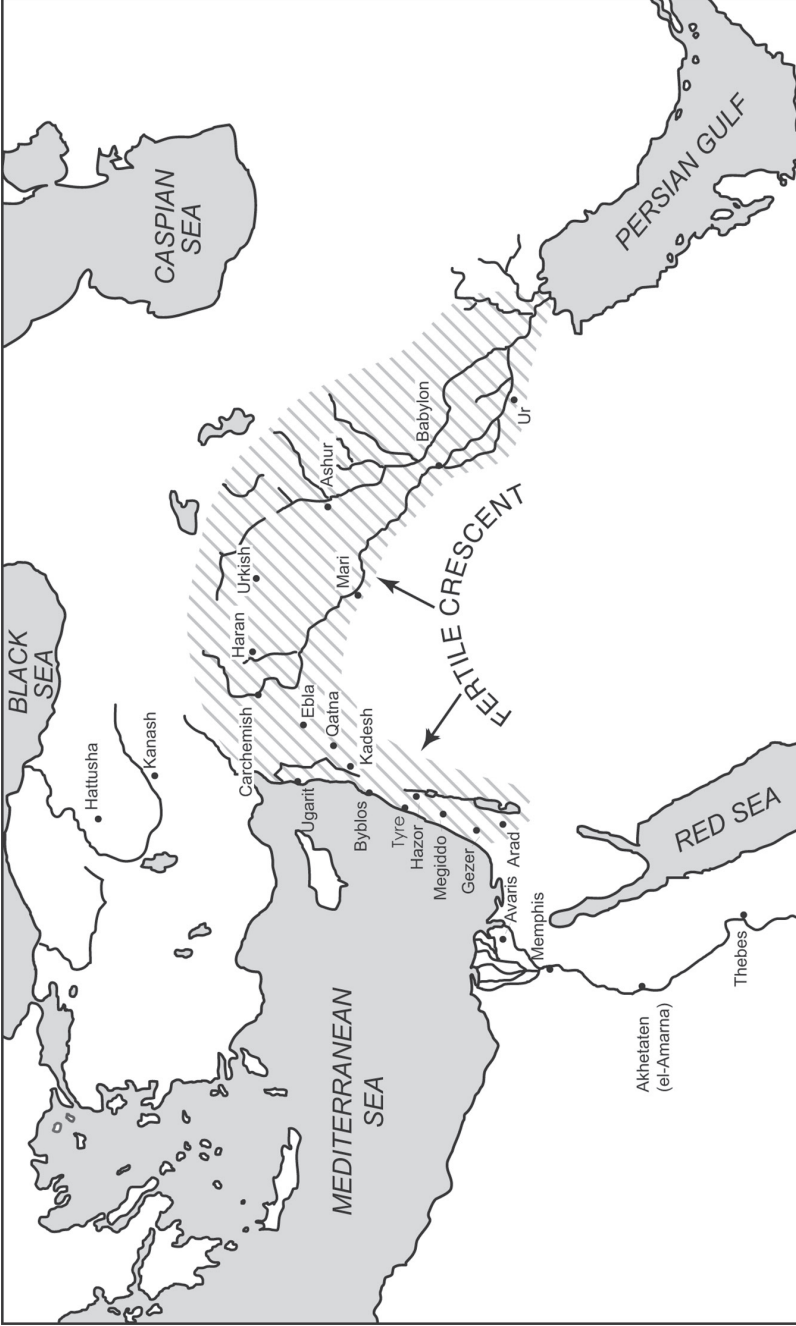
Hellenistic Period: 332–63 BCE

Alexander the Great conquers the area, and the Jews become increasingly under the influence of Hellenism.

Roman Period: 63 BCE–476 CE

The Romans take Jerusalem, and eventually Judea and Galilee come under the control of the Roman Empire. The events of the New Testament take place entirely during this period.

Books: New Testament



Map 1. Fertile Crescent with Egypt

(Originally published in J. Maxwell Miller and John H. Hayes, *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah*, 2nd ed. [Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006], 8.)

The Pentateuch

The Greek word *Pentateuch* translates into English as “five scrolls” and is a standard Christian designation for the first five books in the Old Testament: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. Jews often refer to these same books as *Torah*, a Hebrew word meaning “instruction.” These books are also referred to in both Judaism and Christianity as the *Five Books of Moses* in deference to the ancient tradition of Moses as the author.

PENTATEUCH CONTENT OUTLINE

The beginnings of humanity (Gen 1–11)

Abraham’s story (Gen 12–25)

Jacob’s story (Gen 26–36)

Joseph’s story (Gen 37–50)

Israelites in Egypt (Exod 1–12)

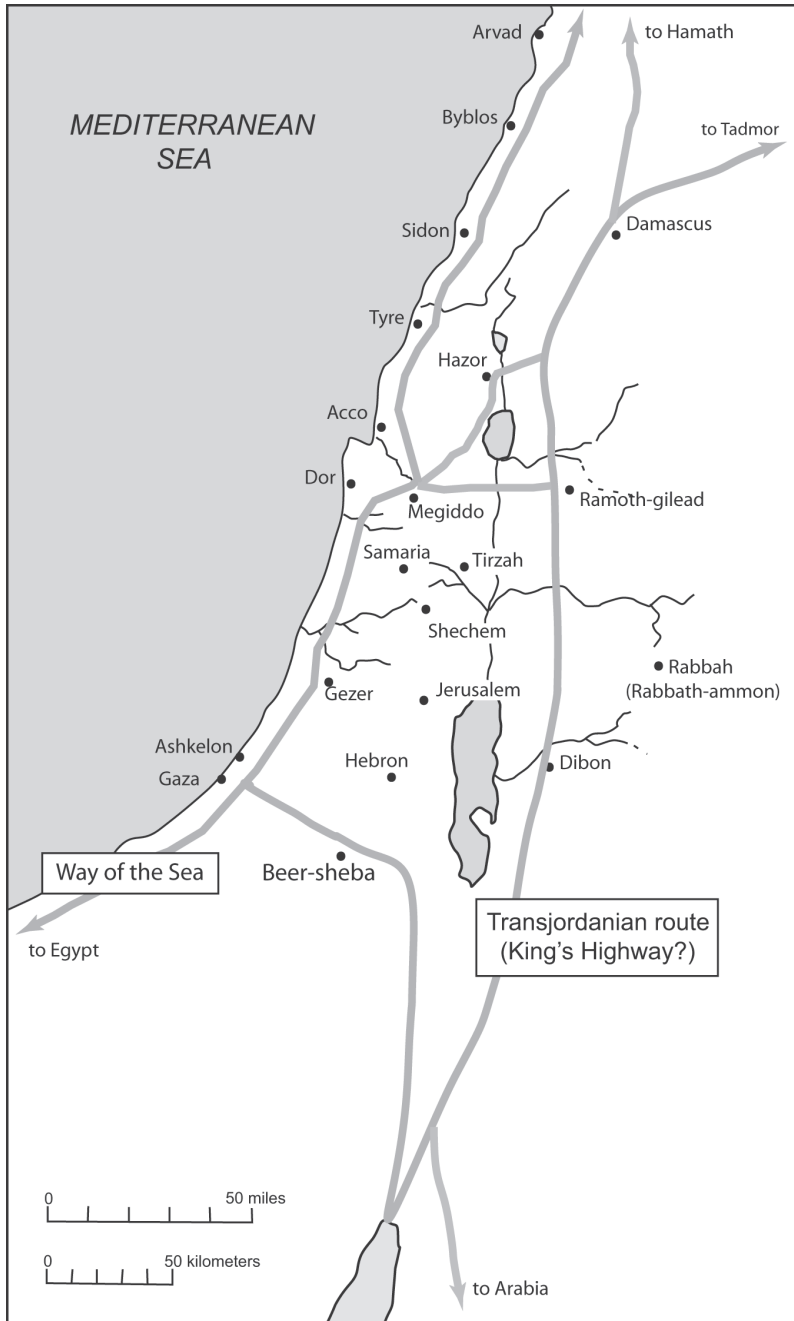
Israelites delivered from Egypt (Exod 12–15)

Israelites in the wilderness (Exod 15–18)

Israelites at Sinai (Exod 19–40; Leviticus; Num 1–10)

Wilderness wanderings (Num 11–21)

Encampment on the Plains of Moab across the Jordan from Jericho (Num 22–36; Deuteronomy)



Map 2. Main Roads and Cities of Ancient Palestine

(Originally published in J. Maxwell Miller and John H. Hayes, *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah*, 2nd ed. [Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006], 8.)

GENESIS

The English word *Genesis* is the Greek word for “origin” and was used to title this biblical book in the Septuagint, a Greek translation of the Old Testament from the original Hebrew that was produced in the third to second century BCE. In the Jewish tradition, the book is entitled *Bereshit*, which is the first Hebrew word in the book and means “in the beginning.”

Synopsis

The book of Genesis tells a story of beginnings: the beginning of the world, of humanity, and of God’s relationship with all creation. After the creation, the first human couple, Adam and Eve, disobeyed God, and the relationship between humans and God was immediately challenged. Their son Cain murdered their other son, Abel. Violence persisted, prompting God’s decision to destroy the earth by a flood. After the flood, God promised never to destroy the earth or its creatures again and made a covenant with Noah and every living creature.

The book then turns from a more universal, worldwide perspective to focus on a single family. Abram/Abraham and his wife Sarai/Sarah made a journey to the land of Canaan, where God promised them land and numerous descendants. They traveled to Egypt and ventured through multiple Egyptian cities, encountering various leaders including the pharaoh of Egypt and the kings of Salem and Gerar. The story focuses on the divine promise to Abraham of a son; however, Sarah was barren. In her despair, she attempted to give Abraham a son through her Egyptian slave-girl, Hagar. Her plan succeeded, and Ishmael was born. However, God’s promise was for Abraham’s heir to come through Sarah. Finally, at an advanced age, Sarah bore a son and named him Isaac, the child of the promise. God asked Abraham to offer Isaac as a sacrifice. Abraham obeyed, but God provided a ram in Isaac’s place. After Sarah’s death and burial in Hebron, Abraham arranged a marriage between Isaac and Rebekah before marrying Keturah himself. Abraham died at 175 years old.

Isaac and Rebekah had twin sons, Esau and Jacob, who immediately engaged in sibling rivalry. Esau, the firstborn, sold his birthright to Jacob for a bowl of stew. Jacob tricked his father, Isaac, into giving him the blessing that was due Esau. Jacob had to leave home to escape Esau’s anger. While away, Jacob had a dream at Bethel, encountered Rachel, and eventually married both Leah and Rachel, the daughters of Laban. Through these two sisters and their two slaves, Bilhah and Zilpah, Jacob had twelve sons and one daughter. Jacob became a wealthy man with large flocks and numerous slaves. Ultimately, Jacob and his family fled from Laban and his sons. Laban pursued

Jacob, and the two men made a covenant. After Jacob reconciled with Laban, he traveled to reconcile with his brother, Esau, sending presents in advance of their meeting. The night before he reached Esau, Jacob wrestled with a man (or God?) who dislocated Jacob's hip. After the brothers' reconciliation, they went in separate directions, with Jacob going to Succoth and Esau to Seir. Meanwhile, Jacob and Leah's daughter, Dinah, was raped by Shechem the Hivite, and her brothers took revenge on him and his city. The attention to Jacob ends with the birth of Benjamin and the deaths of Rachel and Isaac.

At this point, the focus of Genesis shifts to one of Jacob's sons. Joseph, the second to the youngest, dreamed of his brothers bowing down to him. These dreams, combined with his father's favoritism, caused great jealousy to arise in his brothers. They connived to get rid of Joseph, first throwing him in a pit and then selling him to a passing caravan. Joseph ended up in Egypt and rose to power in Pharaoh's administration as a trusted adviser after interpreting one of Pharaoh's dreams. When the famine predicted in Pharaoh's dreams arrived, ten of Joseph's brothers came to Egypt to buy grain. Joseph, whom they did not recognize, gave them the grain but demanded they return to Egypt with their youngest brother, Benjamin. Eventually, Joseph revealed himself to his brothers and brought all his family, including his father, to Egypt. As Jacob grew ill, he blessed Joseph's two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, and offered final words to each of his own sons. Jacob died and was buried with Sarah, Abraham, and Isaac. Joseph forgave his brothers for their poor treatment of him. Joseph died in Egypt.

Content Outline

The Beginnings of Humanity

| | |
|--|-----------|
| The world is created in six days | Genesis 1 |
| The man and the woman are created | Genesis 2 |
| The man and the woman listen to the serpent, disobey God, and are punished | Genesis 3 |
| Cain kills Abel, his brother; Cain's descendants; Seth is born | Genesis 4 |
| The ten generations from Adam to Noah | Genesis 5 |
| God plans judgment via a flood; God instructs Noah to construct an ark | Genesis 6 |
| Noah's family and pairs of animals board the ark; the flood begins | Genesis 7 |

| | |
|--|------------|
| The flood ends; Noah sacrifices; God promises not to destroy the earth again | Genesis 8 |
| God establishes a covenant with Noah and all living creatures; Noah curses Canaan | Genesis 9 |
| The descendants of Noah's three sons | Genesis 10 |
| City and tower of Babel; the ten generations from Noah to Abram | Genesis 11 |
| <i>Abraham's Story</i> | |
| Abram, Sarai, and Lot migrate to Canaan following God's direction, then journey to Egypt | Genesis 12 |
| Abram settles in Canaan; Lot settles in Sodom | Genesis 13 |
| Abram rescues Lot from battling kings and is blessed by King Melchizedek | Genesis 14 |
| God establishes a covenant with Abram; God promises descendants and land | Genesis 15 |
| Ishmael is born to Abram and Hagar | Genesis 16 |
| God establishes a covenant with Abraham using the sign of circumcision | Genesis 17 |
| Abraham hosts three visitors; Sodom and Gomorrah | Genesis 18 |
| The wickedness of Sodom's men; the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah | Genesis 19 |
| Abraham passes Sarah off as his sister to King Abimelech of Gerar | Genesis 20 |
| Sarah gives birth to Isaac; Hagar and Ishmael are sent to the wilderness | Genesis 21 |
| Abraham's near-sacrifice of his son Isaac | Genesis 22 |
| Sarah dies and is buried in the cave of the field of Machpelah in Hebron | Genesis 23 |
| Abraham sends his servant to get Isaac a wife; Rebekah is brought to Isaac | Genesis 24 |
| Abraham marries Keturah; Abraham dies; Esau and Jacob are born to Rebekah | Genesis 25 |

Jacob's Story

| | |
|---|------------|
| Isaac passes Rebekah off as his sister to King Abimelech of Gerar | Genesis 26 |
| Jacob tricks Isaac into blessing him instead of Esau | Genesis 27 |
| Esau marries Ishmael's daughter; Jacob flees from Esau and dreams at Bethel | Genesis 28 |
| Jacob encounters Rachel; Laban deceives Jacob; Jacob marries | Genesis 29 |
| Leah, Rachel, Bilhah, and Zilpah bear children | Genesis 30 |
| Jacob and his family flee from Laban; Laban pursues them; Laban and Jacob make a covenant | Genesis 31 |
| Jacob prepares to meet Esau; Jacob wrestles at night at Peniel | Genesis 32 |
| Esau and Jacob are reconciled | Genesis 33 |
| Dinah is raped by Shechem; Simeon and Levi massacre the men of Shechem's city | Genesis 34 |
| Jacob goes to Bethel; Rachel gives birth to Benjamin and dies; Isaac dies | Genesis 35 |
| Descendants of Esau | Genesis 36 |

Joseph's Story

| | |
|---|------------|
| Joseph dreams and his brothers sell him; Joseph ends up in Potiphar's house | Genesis 37 |
| Judah unknowingly has sex with his daughter-in-law, Tamar; she gives birth to twins | Genesis 38 |
| Joseph refuses to have sex with Potiphar's wife; he goes to prison | Genesis 39 |
| Joseph interprets the dreams of Pharaoh's cupbearer and baker while in prison | Genesis 40 |
| Joseph interprets Pharaoh's dream and is promoted to a top position in Egypt | Genesis 41 |
| Joseph encounters his brothers in Egypt; the brothers return to Canaan for Benjamin | Genesis 42 |

| | |
|--|------------|
| The brothers return with Benjamin and dine with Joseph | Genesis 43 |
| Joseph schemes to keep Benjamin in Egypt with him | Genesis 44 |
| Joseph reveals himself to his brothers; the brothers return to Canaan to get Jacob | Genesis 45 |
| Jacob and his entire family go to Egypt; Jacob and Joseph reunite | Genesis 46 |
| Famine occurs in Egypt; Jacob requests to be buried with his ancestors | Genesis 47 |
| Jacob blesses his grandsons Manasseh and Ephraim | Genesis 48 |
| Jacob utters his last words to his sons; Jacob dies | Genesis 49 |
| Jacob is buried with his ancestors; Joseph reassures his brothers; Joseph dies | Genesis 50 |

People

Adam and Eve—first couple

Cain, Abel, and Seth—sons of Adam and Eve

Noah and his unnamed wife—characters in the flood story

Shem, Ham, Japheth—sons of Noah and his wife

Terah—father of Abram/Abraham

Abraham (aka Abram)—husband of Sarai/Sarah; father of Ishmael and Isaac

Sarah (aka Sarai)—wife of Abraham; mother of Isaac

Lot—Abraham's nephew; Haran's son

Lot's unnamed wife and two daughters

Melchizedek—king of Salem

Hagar—Sarah's Egyptian slave-girl; Ishmael's mother

Abimelech—king of Gerar

Ishmael—Abraham and Hagar's son

Moab and Ben-ammi—sons of Lot and his two daughters

Isaac—Abraham and Sarah's son; father of Esau and Jacob

Rebekah—wife of Isaac; mother of Esau and Jacob; daughter of Bethuel the Aramean

Keturah—Abraham's wife

Esau—first son of Isaac and Rebekah

Jacob—second son of Isaac and Rebekah

Judith, Basemath, Adah, Oholibamah, Mahalath—the names of Esau's wives

Laban—Rebekah’s brother; father of Rachel and Leah

Leah—Jacob’s elder wife; daughter of Laban

Rachel—Jacob’s younger wife; daughter of Laban

Zilpah—Leah’s maid

Bilhah—Rachel’s maid

Deborah—Rebekah’s nurse

Reuben—Jacob and Leah’s first son

Simeon—Jacob and Leah’s second son

Levi—Jacob and Leah’s third son

Judah—Jacob and Leah’s fourth son

Issachar—Jacob and Leah’s fifth son

Zebulun—Jacob and Leah’s sixth son

Dinah—Jacob and Leah’s daughter

Dan—Jacob and Bilhah’s first son

Naphtali—Jacob and Bilhah’s second son

Gad—Jacob and Zilpah’s first son

Asher—Jacob and Zilpah’s second son

Joseph—Jacob and Rachel’s first son

Shechem—son of Hamor the Hivite

Benjamin—Jacob and Rachel’s second son

Tamar—wife of Er, Judah’s first son

Perez and Zerah—twin sons of Judah and Tamar

Potiphar—official in Pharaoh’s court

Potiphar’s unnamed wife

Pharaoh—king of Egypt

Asenath—daughter of Potiphera, wife of Joseph

Manasseh—Joseph’s first son

Ephraim—Joseph’s second son

Places

Garden of Eden—Adam and Eve’s first habitat

Land of Nod—Cain settles here after killing his brother Abel

Mountains of Ararat—place where the ark lands after the flood subsides

Land of Shinar—where the Tower of Babel is built

Ur of the Chaldeans—Abraham and Terah’s original homeland

Canaan—area that will become biblical Israel

Shechem—Abraham stops here and sets up an altar

Bethel—place associated with Abraham and Jacob

Egypt—Abraham and Sarah, as well as Joseph’s brothers, journey here because of famine

Sodom and Gomorrah—cities destroyed by God
Gerar—Abraham and Sarah stop here; Isaac settles here
Wilderness of Paran—Ishmael’s home
Land of Moriah—site of Abraham’s near-sacrifice of Isaac
Beersheba—place associated with Abraham and Sarah
Hebron—place associated with Abraham and Sarah
Peniel—place associated with Jacob
Edom—place associated with Esau and his descendants
Goshen—area of Egypt associated with Joseph

Key Concepts

Creation—beginning of the world, of plants and animals and humanity
Flood—water covers the earth; Noah and his family survive in an ark
Noahic covenant—first covenant in the Bible between God and the world; rainbow is its sign
Tower of Babel—structure built by humans to reach the heavens
Promise of land and descendants—God’s promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob
Abrahamic covenant—made between God and Abraham; includes land and many descendants; circumcision is its sign
Circumcision—sign of the Abrahamic covenant between God, Abraham, and his descendants
Birthright—special inheritance given to the firstborn son
Chosen—God’s election of Abraham and his family to be God’s people

Important Quotations

“So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.” (Gen 1:27)

“And the LORD God commanded the man, ‘You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; 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 die.’” (Gen 2:16–17)

“This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called Woman, for out of Man this one was taken.” (Gen 2:23)

“Am I my brother’s keeper?” (Gen 4:9)

“I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth.” (Gen 9:13)

“Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.” (Gen 12:1–2)

“The LORD said to Abraham, ‘Why did Sarah laugh, and say, “Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?” Is anything too wonderful for the LORD? At the set time I will return to you, in due season, and Sarah shall have a son.’” (Gen 18:13–14)

“Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains that I shall show you.” (Gen 22:2; God speaking to Abraham)

“Give me children, or I shall die!” (Gen 30:1; Rachel speaking to Jacob)

“Then the man said, ‘You shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with humans, and have prevailed.’” (Gen 32:28)

“But Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept.” (Gen 33:4)

“Now Israel loved Joseph more than any other of his children, because he was the son of his old age; and he had made him a long robe with sleeves.” (Gen 37:3)

“Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good, in order to preserve a numerous people, as he is doing today.” (Gen 50:20)

Days of Creation in Genesis 1

1st day: light, darkness, day, night

2nd day: sky and sea

3rd day: dry land and plants

4th day: lights in the sky (stars), the greater light, the lesser light

5th day: living creatures in the waters, birds, sea monsters

6th day: living creatures on the earth, wild animals, humans

7th day: God rests

Life of Abram/Abraham

Abram before the Journey to Canaan

- Abram is mentioned for the first time in conjunction with his father, Terah, and his brothers, Nahor and Haran; there is no birth story (Gen 11:26–27)

- Abram takes Sarai as his wife; she is barren and without children (Gen 11:29–30)
- Abram journeys with his wife, father, and nephew from Ur to Haran (Gen 11:31)

Abram without Children

- God calls Abram to leave his father and go to the land of Canaan with his wife and nephew (Gen 12:1–9)
- Abram and Sarai journey to Egypt because of famine; Abram tells Pharaoh that Sarai is his sister (Gen 12:10–20)
- Abram separates from Lot when he comes out of Egypt and settles in Hebron (Gen 13)
- Abram rescues Lot from captivity and is blessed by Melchizedek (Gen 14)
- God makes a covenant with Abram, promising him land and descendants (Gen 15)

Abraham and Ishmael

- Abram has his first son, Ishmael, through Hagar; although Sarai devised this plan, she deals harshly with Hagar (Gen 16)
- God changes Abram's name to Abraham and Sarai's name to Sarah; God makes an everlasting covenant with Abraham, promising him land and descendants; the sign of this Abrahamic covenant is circumcision (Gen 17)
- Three men visit Abraham and promise Abraham and Sarah a son; Sarah laughs because of her old age (Gen 18:1–15)
- Abraham and God negotiate about the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 18:16–33)
- Abraham and Sarah journey to Gerar; Abraham tells King Abimelech that Sarah is his sister (Gen 20)

Abraham and Isaac

- At age 100, Abraham has a second son, Isaac, through Sarah; Abraham sends Hagar and Ishmael away (Gen 21:1–21)
- Abraham makes a covenant with Abimelech at Beersheba (Gen 21:22–34)
- God commands Abraham to sacrifice Isaac but provides a ram instead at the last moment (Gen 22)
- Abraham mourns Sarah and buries her (Gen 23)
- Abraham sends his servant back to his homeland to get Isaac a wife (Gen 24)
- Abraham marries Keturah and has six children with her (Gen 25:1–6)
- Abraham dies at age 175 (Gen 25:7–11)

Life of Jacob

Esau and Jacob at Home

- Jacob is born after his twin, Esau (Gen 25:19–28)
- Clever Jacob gets the birthright from Esau (Gen 25:29–34)
- Trickster Jacob gets the blessing from his father, Isaac, by disguising himself as Esau (Gen 27:1–29)
- Esau wants to kill Jacob, so Rebekah schemes to get Isaac to send Jacob away to find a wife (Gen 27:41–28:5)

Jacob Leaves Home

- Jacob dreams at Bethel (Gen 28:10–22)
- Jacob meets Rachel, daughter of his uncle Laban (Gen 29:1–14)
- Jacob works seven years for Rachel but is tricked into marrying Leah (Gen 29:15–25)
- Jacob works another seven years and marries Rachel (Gen 29:26–30)
- Jacob has children with Leah, Bilhah, Zilpah, and Rachel (Gen 29:31–30:24)
- Jacob acquires wealth, while Laban does not (Gen 30:25–43)
- Jacob flees from Laban; Laban pursues him; they make a covenant (Gen 31)
- Jacob begins his journey to meet his brother, Esau (Gen 32:1–21)
- Jacob wrestles with a man at Peniel, who changes Jacob’s name to Israel (Gen 32:22–32)
- Jacob reconciles with Esau (Gen 33:1–17)
- Jacob returns to Bethel (Gen 35)

Jacob in Canaan

- Jacob settles in Canaan (Gen 37)
- Jacob mourns the “death” of his son Joseph (Gen 37)

Jacob in Egypt

- Jacob journeys to Egypt to see Joseph (Gen 46)
- Jacob settles in Goshen (Gen 46)
- Jacob requests to be buried with his ancestors (Gen 47)
- Jacob blesses Joseph’s son (Gen 48)
- Jacob says his last words to his own sons (Gen 49)
- Jacob dies (Gen 49:33)
- Jacob is buried with his ancestors (Gen 50)

Jacob's Twelve Sons and One Daughter

Sons: Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Zebulun, Benjamin, Dan,
Naphtali, Gad, Asher, Joseph

Daughter: Dinah