



## 2. Moses, Joshua, Judges, Kingdoms and Exile and Restoration

Trying to sum up most of the narrative in the Old Testament in two pages is sort of a ridiculous endeavor, but with that caveat in mind here goes. We have already covered Adam and Eve a bit and most everyone is aware that their two children, Cain and Abel had a little run in wherein Cain killed Abel because God liked Abel's sacrifice better. Because of this Cain is made to be a wanderer on the earth. Adam and Eve then have another son to replace Abel and name him Seth. After this there is Noah's Ark which preserved Noah, his family and the animals of the earth. Also a quick bit of trivia one of Noah's sons was named Shem and it is from this name that we get the word Semite. With the conclusion of the story of the Ark we have the Tower of Babel (wherein humanity seeks to build their way up to God and God is not impressed).

After the collapse of the Tower of Babel and the confusion of the languages on the earth we are introduced to Abraham who is such a big deal that three religions claim him as their founder (Judaism, Christianity and Islam). We have covered some of the basics of the story but the quick version is God chooses Abraham (who was called Abram at this time) and tells him that he will make his descendants as numerous as the stars and that they would possess the Land of Canaan (more or less Israel). They go to Egypt and at his wife Sarai's (later called Sarah) urging Abraham has a son by a their slave Hagar named Ishmael, which ended up being as weird and awkward as it sounds. Meanwhile, the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah are destroyed because they really did have it coming. Eventually Sarah has a son by Abraham when she was quite old. He was named Isaac, which essentially means he laughs because this is what Sarah did when God told her she was going to have a son at her age. Then, if things could not get any more awkward, God asks Abraham to sacrifice Isaac but then says that he is just kidding. Isaac grows up and marries Rebekah and they have two sons Esau and Jacob. Even though Esau is older, Jacob convinces him to give up his privileges as first born for a bowl of soup. Jacob then marries two sisters, Leah and Rachel. He also married two more women named Zilpah and Bilhah. For a while he had children with everyone but Rachel who finally gives birth to Joseph and later Benjamin, for a grand total of twelve sons (later to be the twelve tribes). Joseph is Jacob's favorite and has dreams of his brothers bowing down to him, which gets on their nerves. They sell him into slavery in Egypt and tell their dad that he was eaten by a wild animal. Joseph ends up in Egypt and eventually in prison after resisting the wiles of his master's wife. Strangely while in prison where things start looking up when he shows a knack for interpreting dreams which eventually catches the eye of the Pharaoh. He interprets his dream about a famine and uses the knowledge to store up a lot of grain and make Pharaoh very wealthy. As luck would have it Jacob's family also are caught up in the famine and decide to go to Egypt to buy some of Joseph's grain (although they don't know that it is Joseph). It all works out and Jacob invites his family to come live in Egypt, which works out great until it doesn't.

The new pharaoh does not like the Israelites (a reference to Jacob's other name – Israel). He is mean to them but God raises up Moses to set his people free and move to the Promised Land. Pharaoh is against this idea because he likes having a slave class to build things. Moses tries persuasion as well as a bunch of plagues. Killing off of the firstborn finally makes Pharaoh conclude that it might be in his best interest to let the people go. They leave but Pharaoh changes his mind and goes after them. Pharaoh's soldiers follow them into the Red Sea, which Moses had parted (not a good idea) and they drown. Moses and the Israelites then wander around the desert for forty years and frequently get on God's nerves by complaining a lot and

worshipping an idol here and there. While in the wilderness they also get the Ten Commandments and the Ark of the Covenant. Moses also gets on God's nerves so he is not allowed to see the Promised Land. Joshua takes over and after winning a few battles they all settle in the Promised Land.

Things go okay for a while with the Israelites being ruled over by a series of Judges and then people started making nuisances of themselves and demanding that they get rid of the Judges and get a king, using the impeccable logic that everyone else has a king. They first choose Saul because he is really good looking, but that does not work out real well and so they move onto David who ushers in a golden time in Israelite history. David is of course not perfect (see Bathsheba) but he is according to the Book of Samuel, "A man after God's own heart." After David, his son by Bathsheba, Solomon takes the throne and things continue to go well even though Solomon had 700 wives and 300 concubines which probably made for a very expensive Mother's Day. He built the Temple and their enemies were defeated.

After Solomon's death the kingdom would be divided with Israel in the north and Judah in the south. This division was along tribal lines with the tribe of Benjamin and Judah in the south and everyone else in the north. This division would continue for another 160 years or so until the Assyrians defeated Israel and drove them into exile. The kingdom of Judah would survive for another 160 years or so before the Babylonians conquered them and sent them into exile. The most famous Book of the Bible to emerge at this time is probably the Book of Lamentations, which begins, "How lonely sits the city that once was full of people! How like a widow she has become, she that was great among the nations!" This destruction naturally led to a lot of soul searching. It was difficult for God's chosen people to understand how a kingdom promised to them by God could be destroyed and the people carted off to exile. The general consensus fueled by many prophets was that the Israelites had been disobedient to God and that this was their punishment.

This exile formally ended in 538 when Cyrus the Great gave them permission to return home. Most did, but some did stay and some of these communities still exist. What happened after their return is mostly told in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. The quick outline of what happens is that they return, rebuild the Temple and later Ezra comes back with a group of exiles and finds that people have not been living according to the will of God, by intermarrying with the locals and dabbling in a little religious pluralism. As you can imagine with the understanding that the exile was largely the result of disobedience Ezra is not happy and sets about to purify things.

This is more or less where the history ends in the Old Testament. For more history we have to go to the Apocrypha, which we will get to next time.

### ***Questions***

1. What do you think the history as found in the Old Testament is useful for?
2. What do you think that it means for a person with imperfections like David to be called a man after God's own heart?
3. There seems to be a pattern of sinning and returning to the Lord, where do you see this pattern play out today?
4. Does the issues we see in the Old Testament give you a better understanding of the need for a savior?
5. Moses was not allowed to see the Promised Land because of his sin. What does it say about God that even the all stars of the faith are disciplined?