

Old Testament survey

• Origins

The first eleven chapters of the Bible cover the origins of the universe, the world and the human race. The wonderful account of the creation of mankind is followed by the tragic entry of sin into humanity through Adam and Eve. The spread of wickedness was such that God found it necessary to bring judgment by a flood and by confusion of languages.

• Abraham — Covenant of promise and faith

God made a covenant with Abraham promising various things about his descendants: they would become a large nation who would possess the land of Israel — they would have a special relationship with God who would bless them — and they would be a blessing to the other nations of the world particularly through one descendant. Abraham is the spiritual father of those who have faith. Abraham's grandson, Jacob, changed his name to Israel and his sons gave rise to the 12 tribes of Israel. These developed into a nation over 400 years in Egypt (around 1700 - 1300 BC) where they became slaves.

• Moses — Covenant of law

Under Moses the Israelites escaped miraculously from Egypt. God appeared dramatically to Moses and gave him the 10 commandments and many other laws and instructions about worship and sacrifice. After 40 years wandering in the desert, Joshua led the people into the promised land where they settled.

• David — Covenant of kingdom

After a period of rule by judges, Samuel appointed Saul as the first king of Israel. David succeeded him and established the kingdom of Israel and Jerusalem as the capital city. God made a covenant with David that his kingdom would last for ever. David's son, Solomon, built a magnificent temple in Jerusalem but after his death the kingdom was divided into the northern kingdom of 'Israel' (10 tribes) with its capital in Samaria and the southern kingdom of 'Judah' (2 tribes) which retained Jerusalem as its capital.

• Exile

Following a succession of bad kings, the northern kingdom of Israel was defeated by the Assyrians in 722 BC and the ten tribes were deported and lost. The southern kingdom of Judah had some good kings and lasted longer but eventually fell to the Babylonians in 587 BC. A large proportion of the population (including Ezekiel and Daniel) was deported to Babylon for 70 years in exile.

• Restoration

After the Babylonians were defeated by the Persians, the Jews (from the word Judah) gradually returned to the land of Israel and restored their national life. They rebuilt a smaller version of the temple, repaired the walls of Jerusalem and reinstated the law of Moses under Zerubbabel, Nehemiah and Ezra. They continued to be dominated by larger foreign powers (Greece, Egypt and Syria) until the Roman Empire enveloped the land of Israel around 63 BC.

