



Old Testament Times

“Everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of Scriptures we might have hope.” Romans 15:4

The history of the United States is rather brief when placed beside many of the ancient countries of Asia and Europe. Our country can claim a history of about 250 years while many other countries can trace their histories back thousands of years.

When God’s people open the covers of the Bible, they are treated to a vast, detailed history that reaches back to the very beginning of civilization. Here the Lord presents **His Story** as he outlines the plan of salvation from the beginning of time. Paul put it quite aptly when he wrote, *“Everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of Scriptures we might have hope”* (Romans 15:4).

Many Bible historians and Creationists estimate the world’s history to be about 6,000-10,000 years old. If we believe in the 6,000 year assumption, we can divide those years by placing the first 4000 years within the Old Testament and the remaining 2000 years from the birth of Christ up to today. In this lesson, we will take a brief look at the 4000 years covered within the Old Testament.

How Could They Believe?

Before we look at the individuals, it would be good to discuss how it could be possible for those living before the birth and death of Christ to gain salvation. What was the means of salvation back

then? In what did those ancient people place their hope before Jesus was born?

First, we must realize that throughout the Old Testament as well as today, the means of salvation was and will always be **faith** and the object of that faith will always be **Jesus Christ**. Eternal salvation was based on faith in Jesus Christ in the days of Abraham just as it is today. Never has there been any other route to heaven. *“There is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved”* (Acts 4:12). Twenty-eight times the writer of Hebrews 11 mentions the importance of faith in the lives of the Old Testament heroes. *“These were all commended for their faith”* (Hebrews 11:39,40). Romans 4 explains the situation well. Here Paul uses Abraham as an example of the means of salvation. *“Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness”* (Romans 4:3). Good works did not save people then, and they will not save people today. (Read Hebrews 11). Every time the people of the Old Testament sacrificed a lamb, a ram, a turtle dove, or a pigeon, it was a picture or type of Christ. From the days of Adam and Eve onward, God’s people knew that there was coming one who would pay the penalty for their sins; one who would serve as the ultimate sacrifice.

Jesus witnessed to the fact that he was the object of faith about whom the Old Testament spoke. Jesus said, *“These are the Scriptures that*

testify about me” (John 5:39). And “*Beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself*” (Luke 24:27).

It is true that as we go back to the earliest patriarchs, the detailed picture of Christ was faint. Adam believed with whatever information he was given regarding the Messiah. As years went by, the Lord added more and more details to the one who was to be the Messiah. Family lines, place of birth, type of death, the betrayal, the burial, all these things were added prophecies as the time for Jesus’ incarnation came ever closer. Abraham was given more knowledge than Adam, and David, and Isaiah even more. As the Old Testament took form, the picture of the coming Savior became more detailed.

Today we have the advantage of seeing the Messiah in bodily form as the gospel writers give us their personal witness. We can treasure the details of the nails, the manger bed, Jesus’ fishing expeditions, and sermons on mountain tops.

The Holy Spirit has worked faith in the hearts of God’s people since the beginning of time. “*I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. . . You will be my people, and I will be your God*” (Ezekiel 36:27,28).

Why is it important to know that salvation has and will always be through Jesus Christ?

Period 1: Creation to Abraham 4000 B.C.– 2000 B.C. (Genesis 1-11)

The Old Testament can be divided in several different ways. This lesson will present 9 divisions or periods of the Old Testament. These divisions will help to better organize the chronology of the Old Testament as God’s plan of salvation unfolds.

It is amazing to realize that as one closes the book of Genesis nearly 2500 years of the world’s history is already past.

It is equally amazing to find that some of the ancient patriarchs in Genesis 1 to 11 lived for nearly 1000 years or 1/6th of the world’s entire history. The Lord used their long lives to pass on his unwritten Word for over 2000 years. Since the average age of the early patriarchs was over 850 years, there was considerable overlapping from one generation to the next. Adam lived alongside nine of the ten pre-flood patriarchs and thus had ample opportunity to pass on

the story of the Garden of Eden and the first promise of a Savior.

Compare the life spans of those before and after the flood.

Before the Flood		After the Flood	
Adam	930	Shem	600
Seth	912	Arphaxad	438
Enosh	905	Shelah	433
Kenan	910	Eber	464
Mahalalel	895	Peleg	239
Jared	962	Serug	230
Enoch	365*	Nahor	148
Methuselah	969	Terah	205
Lamech	777	Abraham	175
Noah	950	Isaac	180
Shem	600	Jacob	147

*Enoch never died but was taken directly to heaven.

When hearing the great Bible stories of Genesis it is easy to disconnect the people from one generation to the next. But consider the following:

- Adam and Noah’s father overlapped by 56 years.
- Methuselah, at age 969, died the same year as the flood.
- Noah died well after the incident at Babel.
- Jacob was 48 years old when Noah’s son, Shem, died.
- The first eight patriarchs were contemporaries of one another.
- After the flood, ages declined significantly, perhaps caused by changes in genetics, the disappearance of the vapor canopy, or even change in diet.
- Moses died at age 120 which may have been quite old for his day for he wrote in Psalm 90:10, “*The length of our days is seventy years-or eighty, if we have the strength.*”

Genesis is named the book of beginnings for here we see the first of many things that still affect us today. The first marriage, family, death, customs, nations, wars, languages, cultures, and human experiences are all established in Genesis 1-11. We also witness the first sin, judgment, promise of a Savior, prayer, and worship. Thus we can appreciate the importance of believing every word recorded in Genesis 1-11. To remove anything contained there is to remove the very foundation of humanity.

What do you think it was like living to be nearly 1000 years old? What might you have witnessed had you been born 1000 years ago?

Period 2: Abraham to Moses 2000 B.C.-1500 B.C. (Genesis 12-50)

Where Genesis 11 closes with the tower of Babel and the beginnings of many nations, so Genesis 12 begins the story of one family and one race. Often referred to as the Patriarchal Period, this era concentrates on the three major Hebrew patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (renamed Israel). Beginning with the call of God to Abram and his journey to Canaan, this period details three generations, ending with special emphasis on Jacob's sons, especially Joseph. We begin this section with God showing Abraham the land of promise. When we leave Genesis, God's people have been removed from that land and have relocated in Egypt.

Throughout these chapters we follow God's promise of a Savior. To Abraham God pledged that, "All people in earth will be blessed through you" (Genesis 12:3). To Isaac God said, "Through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed" (Genesis 26:2). And to his son, Jacob, God said, "All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring" (Genesis 28:14).



Cave of Machpelah today

(Interestingly, these patriarchs and their wives are all buried in the cave of Machpelah. Jacob said in his dying words, "There Abraham and his wife Sarah were buried, there Isaac and

his wife Rebekah were buried, and there I buried Leah" (Genesis 49:32). And after Jacob's death, "They carried him to the land of Canaan and buried him in the cave in the field of Machpelah" (Genesis 50:12). The only wife not buried there is Rachel, Jacob's second wife, who died in childbirth in Bethlehem.)

During the first 2,500 years there still is no written Word from God for the people to read and treasure from generation to generation. God's promise of salvation was to be passed down through the oral teaching of fathers to their families.

After the death of Joseph there is a silent period of nearly 400 years in which we have no recorded word of God until Moses is commissioned by God to lead his people back to the Promised Land. "Now the length of time the Israelite people lived in Egypt was 430 years. At the end of 430 years, to the very day, all the Lord's divisions left Egypt" (Exodus 12:40,41). After that time span, we read, "Then a new king, who did not know about Joseph, came to power in Egypt" (Exodus 1:8). (Note that two other similar "400 years of silence" took place: one at the time of the judges and the other between the Old and New Testaments.)

Although the Lord was silent in his revelation, his plans were still moving forward. The Lord had promised Abraham, Isaac and Jacob that he would make their descendants into a great nation. Whereas Jacob and his family traveled to Egypt as a clan of a few people, during the next several hundred years they multiplied and grew into a mighty nation numbering perhaps as many as two million people at the time of the exodus.

Name some ways in which we can see God's plans unfolding throughout the Old Testament.

Period 3: The Exodus & Conquest 1500 B.C.-1450 B.C. (Exodus. Leviticus. Numbers. Deuteronomy. Joshua)

Fearful of their size, the Egyptians attempted to lessen their numbers. God chose Moses to lead the Israelite people out of their Egyptian bondage back to the land of Canaan, the land that was promised to Abraham. Moses received expert leadership training during his first 40 years living in the palaces of Egypt as Pharaoh's adopted grandson. He was then trained by the Lord for 40 additional years in the desert. At age 80 Moses was ready to lead God's people.

Within a few months after leaving Egypt, the Israelites arrived at Mount Sinai. During that short journey, water miraculously came from a rock, manna was sent for food, and Moses' father-in-law advised him on how to lessen his workload. The camp established at Mount Sinai was home to the Israelites for nearly a year. During that time Moses made two 40-day trips up the mountain to meet with the Lord. The incident of the golden calf took place between them. It was also while camped at Mount Sinai that the tabernacle was built and dedicated as the house of the Lord.

The Israelite journey then took them to Kadesh-Barnea where they were poised to end their trip in less than two years. While traveling to Kadesh-Barnea their ration of quail began. Spies were sent into the land to prepare them for their victory over the Canaanite people, however because of their unbelief in God's promises, they were punished to spend another 38 years wandering in the desert. *"The Lord's anger burned against Israel and he made them wander in the desert forty years, until the whole generation of those who had done evil in his sight was gone"* (Numbers 32:13). During those years, we learn of the deaths of Miriam, Aaron, and eventually Moses. Yet it is important to note that prior to Moses death, he left a treasury of writings



for the people to study and to pass on to future generations. *"After Moses finished writing in a book the words of this law from beginning to end. . ."* (Deuteronomy 31:24). These were the books of Genesis,

Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy—the Pentateuch. We also witness several rebellions put down during these 38 years such as the bronze snake incident.

Under the leadership of Joshua, Moses' successor, the Israelites gained control of Canaan and divided the land among the twelve tribes.

Why did the Lord need to give the extensive laws that he did at Mount Sinai? Why was it important that now the people had the written Word of God?

Period 4: The Judges 1450 B.C.-1100 B.C. (Judges, Ruth)

After the death of Joshua, even though the Israelites had a proper set of laws to govern them, they experienced terrible days because of their apostasy. This section of Jewish history is known as

the period of the judges. In the wilderness, God had provided for his people a theocratic form of government. God would govern them and watch over them and they would be his people. If they would follow in his ways, their lives would be filled with peace and prosperity. Yet the people repeatedly fall into the same rebellious pattern: 1) Israel sins, 2) God chastises them through their enemies, 3) they repent, 4) God sends a deliverer. During this 350 year span, there was no centralized leadership or capital, although the tabernacle was kept at Shiloh. During these years the Lord sent fifteen judges or deliverers at specific times and to specific tribes to rescue them from their enemies. As God's chosen, they were often military leaders.

Because the books of Moses were now available for the people to read and study, Samuel, the last of the judges, established schools for prophets which were similar to our seminaries. These prophets were then sent to educate the people in the Word of God. *"They [the prophets] taught throughout Judah, taking with them the book of the Law of the Lord; they went around to all the towns of Judah and taught the people"* (2 Chronicles 17:9).

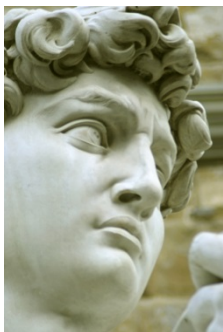
The Judges of Israel		Tribe
Othniel	40 years	Judah
Ehud	80 years	Benjamin
Shamgar		
Deborah/Barak	40 years	Ephraim/Naphtali
Gideon	40 years	Manasseh
Abimilech	3 years	
Tola	23 years	Issachar
Jair	22 years	Manasseh
Jephthah	6 years	Manasseh
Ibzan	7 years	Judah
Elon	10 years	Zebulun
Abdon	8 years	Ephraim
Samson	20 years	Dan
Eli	40 years	
Samuel/sons	? years	

Glance through Judges 3-6 and notice the number of times the people leave the Lord. Why was the Lord so patient with them?

Period 5: The United Kingdom 1100 B.C.-970 B.C. (1 & 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings, 1 & 2 Chronicles)

Sadly, the book of Judges ends with the words, *"In those days Israel had no king; everyone*

did as he saw fit” (Judges 21:25). Law and order were nonexistent, and the people were in dire need of a unifying leader. To the people, the only model they saw for such a leader was the same as the countries around them, a king. *“But the people refused to listen to Samuel, ‘No!’ they said. ‘We want a king over us. Then we will be like all the other nations, with a king to lead us and to go out before us and fight our battles’”* (1 Samuel 8:19,20). The Lord granted their request. (Read Deuteronomy 17:14-20.) Although the motive of wanting a king like the other nations was wrong, a king had already been in God’s plans. Many years earlier God had said to Abraham, *“I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you”* (Genesis 17:6). As a result of the establishment of a kingship, Christ could come from the royal line of David to establish his own kingdom. *“The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David. . . His [Christ’s] kingdom will never end”* (Luke 1:32,33).



King David

The united kingdom of the 12 tribes lasted only 120 years under the leadership of three kings: Saul (40 years), David (40 years), and Solomon (40 years). This period was the golden age of the Jewish nation. Art and architecture were greatly advanced, and the government was wealthy, powerful, and respected throughout the world. The

beauty and grandeur of Jerusalem was known by foreign nations, and the might of their army was unsurpassed.

With what purpose did the Lord comment to Samuel, “It is not you they have rejected as their king, but me. As they have from the day I brought them up out of Egypt until this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so they are doing to you. Now listen to them; but warn them solemnly and let them know what the king who will reign over them will do” (1 Samuel 8:7-9).

Period 6: The Two Kingdoms 930 B.C.-606 B.C. (1 & 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings, 1 & 2 Chronicles)

The dangers of a king that Samuel had warned against soon became a reality. In a little over 100 years the unified kingdom began to crumble.

Rehoboam, son of Solomon, began his rule by severely taxing the people. This caused a revolt, and the 10 northern tribes established their own kingdom with Samaria as their capital. The northern kingdom was known as **Israel** and would be ruled by nineteen kings, all of them wicked and ungodly. In 722 B.C. Assyria defeated the northern tribes and carried them off to exile. They never returned! *“The Lord removed them from his presence, as he had warned through all his servants the prophets. So the people of Israel were taken from their homeland into exile in Assyria, and they are still there”* (2 Kings 17:23).

The Kings of Israel

Jeroboam I	22 years
Nadab	2 years
Baasha	24 years
Elah	2 years
Zimri	7 days
Omri	12 years
Ahab	22 years
Queen Ahaziah	2 years
Joram	12 years
Jehu	28 years
Jehoahaz	17 years
Jehoash	16 years
Jeroboam II	41 years
ANARCHY	11 years
Zachariah	6 months
Shallum	1 year
Menahem	10 years
Pekahaiah	2 years
Pekah	20 years
ANARCHY	8½ years
Hoshea	9 years

The remaining two tribes of Benjamin and Judah kept Jerusalem as their capital city and worship center. The southern kingdom was known as **Judah**. This kingdom had a total of twenty kings of which eight were considered godly (*). Judah outlasted the northern kingdom by about 135 years until they were taken into captivity by the Babylonians. It was through God’s plans that the Savior would come from a remnant of Judah.

The Kings of Judah

Rehoboam	17 years
Abijam	3 years
Asa*	41 years
Jehoshaphat*	25 years

Jehoram	6 years
Ahaziah	1 year
Queen Athaliah	6 years
Joash*	40 years
Amaziah*	29 years
Uzziah*	52 years
Jotham*	16 years
Ahaz	16 years
Hezekiah*	29 years
Manasseh	55 years
Amon	2 years
Josiah*	31 years
Jehoahaz	3 months
Jehoiakim	10 years
Jehoiachin	3 months
Zedekiah	11 years

In spite of the warnings of the prophets, Judah also fell deeper and deeper into sin and idolatry. Finally God also gave them over to a foreign nation. *“Your fathers forsook me, and followed other gods and served and worshiped them. . . So I will throw you out of this land into a land neither you nor your fathers have known, and there you will serve other gods day and night, for I will show you no favor”* (Jeremiah 16:11,13). Their beautiful city of Jerusalem and the magnificent temple of Solomon were completely destroyed. After a little less than 1000 years, God’s people were once again leaving their Promised Land. *“Nebuzaradan, commander of the imperial guard, an official of the king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem. He set fire to the temple of the Lord, the royal palace and all the houses of Jerusalem. Every important building he burned down”* (2 Kings 25:8,9).

List some Bible stories that took place during the divided kingdom.

Period 7: The Captivity 606 B.C.-536 B.C.
(Daniel, Ezekiel, Esther)

The destruction of Judah, its power and its people, came about slowly. Several deportations are mentioned in Scripture. Each time the king of Judah rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar, a more severe punishment was carried out and another deportation took place. Daniel was perhaps in the first deportation. The temple and walls of the city were destroyed during the last deportation. Several

thousand Jews were carried off to Babylon and remained there for nearly seventy years.

But the Lord was once again gracious to his people and placed in power foreign leaders who were sympathetic to the Jewish people and allowed their safe return to Judah.

List some Bible stories that took place during the captivity.

Period 8: The Restoration 540 B.C.-400 B.C.
(Ezra, Nehemiah)

Those taken into captivity served under two foreign governments, the Babylonians and the Medes/Persians. Eventually, *“the Lord moved the heart of Cyrus king of Persia”* (Ezra 1:1). He issued a decree that allowed the Jews to return to their homeland. Ezra gives the number of 50,000 people who were so inclined. However, not all of the Jews returned. Some decided to remain in Persia, which accounts for many Jewish settlements there in later years. Those who stayed were asked by Cyrus to donate toward the rebuilding of the temple. Cyrus also sent back to Jerusalem 5000 vessels of gold and silver that Nebuchadnezzar had plundered. Zerubbabel was to be the leader.

Nearly eighty years later, Ezra asked Persian king Artaxerxes for permission to return with another group of Jews. Ezra was to teach his people the Law of the Lord. The king permitted his return and he granted him a blank check to requisition any funds he needed.

A third emigration of exiles took place thirteen years later under the guidance of Nehemiah. Artaxerxes was still the Persian king. Nehemiah’s mission was to rebuild the city and its walls.

God’s people were once again safely in their land of promise. The time had come for the Old Testament curtain to be pulled down as the stage was being readied for the coming Savior. For nearly 400 years there would be no more recorded words from the Lord. The next one to deliver God’s prophetic message to the people would be John the Baptist.

How do we see the divine hand of God guiding history in the Bible? Today?

Period 9: The Silent Years 400 B.C.-1 B.C.

To learn about the silent years, see the lesson titled “The 400 Silent Years.”

The Lives of the Patriarchs (Counting up from the Year of Creation)

