

Samuel was born and called by God to serve Him. With God's help, Samuel set the nation of Israel on the right path. Toward the end of his life, the people of Israel looked around at the rest of the world and wanted a king like they all had. Didn't they already have a king? Wasn't that king, God? God's special people rejected Him as king and settled for a human king—Saul. Saul did not do good things for Israel. He was not a good representative of the kind of person God wanted. The next king David, did a better job, but still did some pretty bad things. David was known as a person after God's own heart. God even made a special promise to David! God promised that David's descendants would never cease and that the true king of God's people would come from his royal line (maybe this will be that special baby we have been looking for?). Solomon, David's son, did some more good things, but was known for all the women that surrounded him. To his credit, Solomon was also known across the world for his profound wisdom, which came from God. Isn't it amazing that regardless of Solomon's bad choices, God still used this man to show the world His wisdom? After Solomon died, the nation of Israel split into two countries—Israel in the north and Judah in the south. The north and south did not like each other and often fought against one another. King after king did some good, but mostly bad things. God sent special messengers called prophets to tell the kings and the people to turn away from their sin. But only a few listened.

Eventually God had to act to turn the tide of sin. He couldn't have His special representatives in the world doing the kinds of evil things they were doing. God sent a foreign army in to take over the north, Israel. And then a hundred or so years later, He sent another foreign army in to take over the south, Judah. This period of time is known as the Exile, which means the people of God (Israelites) were living in a country that was not their home.

Eventually, God allowed His people to go back to their Promised Land, but they never were able to gain complete control over it. The people of God were allowed to live in the land, but another country was in charge of it. The prophets predicted that some day God would send another deliverer who would rescue His people, just like He had done through Noah, Moses and Samuel.

Who would that rescuer be? And how would they recognize him when he came? Or would they recognize him? What was God up to? What was His plan for His special people? How would God's representatives show the world what God is truly like and how to live after this new rescuer came?

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The Old Testament Story

Creation	<p>God created a beautiful and wonder-filled world in seven days with a special emphasis on people. God created people to bear his image and told people to have babies and be in charge of taking care of the earth. God placed the first two people—Adam and Eve—into a special garden where they enjoyed freedom and communion with their Creator.</p>	Journey to the Promised Land	<p>There were a lot of challenges along the way to the Promised Land. They had to get through a big sea (the Red Sea) with a bunch of angry Egyptians hot on their heels. They endured days without food or water and complained a lot. God gave them water from rocks and a sort of bread from heaven—manna. God also sent a lot of quail their way. The entire time, God led the way to the Promised Land in a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. Along the way, the people of God stopped by a mountain where God gave Moses some instructions about what kind of behavior His special people were to live out as an example to the world of what God is like and how He wants the people of the world to live. Some of those commands are famous. Have you ever heard of the Ten Commandments? Those are some of the instructions God wants His people to live by. And yet, the Israelites were so fickle. Even while God was giving Moses these instructions, the people were dancing around a golden statue of a cow, having a wild party. Not a good idea.</p>
The Fall	<p>However, one day they were deceived by an ancient serpent who was an enemy of God. The people chose to disobey their Creator and instead followed the way of the serpent. This act of sin opened their eyes to their nakedness and their shame. God banished them from the garden into a world of pain, sorrow, and hard work (even tough child-birth for women!). But not without a special promise—that one day a baby would be born that would smite the head of the serpent, while the serpent would bruise the heel of the baby. A rescue plan was initiated.</p>		
Results of the Fall	<p>People began to have babies and even more babies and they were evil. Brothers murdered each other and people did all sorts of evil things. God sent a worldwide flood, but saved a special family and each set of animals. Even after the flood, mankind continued to do evil. But God still had His rescue plan in mind.</p>	Wandering the Desert	<p>Once the Israelites arrived at the Promised Land, they got scared and decided not to go there. That was not a good decision. God punished them to wander the desert for 40 years. While they were aimlessly wandering because of their disobedience, more people rebelled against God and against Moses and suffered the consequences. The people were characterized by complaining and whining. Was that how God wanted His special people to act? Nope.</p>
Promise of Rescue	<p>God chose a special person to make a promise to. This man's name was Abraham. God promised that through Abraham, He would give lots of children, a special place (land) to call home, and His presence. This is the start of the Hebrew people. Abraham had a son named Isaac. Isaac had a son named Jacob. And Jacob, later named Israel, had 12 sons (which became the 12 tribes/states of the nation of Israel). One of Jacob's sons, Joseph, with God's help, brought all of his dad's family to the land of Egypt because of a famine. God rescued his special people (Israel) when they needed it.</p>	Entering the Promised Land	<p>After the 40 years were over and after Moses had passed away, a new leader, Joshua, led the Israelites into the Promised Land. They charged into the land of Canaan and conquered city after city with only a few minor bumps (poor decisions) along the way. Once Joshua's time was near he reminded the people to continue to conquer the land and drive out the sinful people in the land. The Promised Land was divided into 12 states or tribes—one for each son of Jacob.</p>
The Exodus	<p>After a long time (about 400 years), the people of Israel (Israelites) were still in the land of Egypt and numbered around 2 million people. The Pharaoh of Egypt was afraid of the Israelites (probably because there was so many of them) and made them slaves. One special baby was born that would eventually lead the Israelites out of slavery and into the land promised to Abraham a long time ago. His name was Moses. God appeared to Moses in a burning bush and asked Moses to be the leader of His special people—Israel. When Moses went to Pharaoh to tell him God's request to let His people go, Pharaoh refused. 10 plagues and a lot of destruction later, Pharaoh finally gave God's special people, Israel, the permission to leave. This is known as the Exodus, or the exit from Egypt. Finally, after years of slavery the Israelites were free and headed to a land of their own, the Promised Land.</p>	The Judges	<p>Over the next 400 or so years, the people decided not to drive the sinful people out of their Promised Land. Instead, they worshiped the idols of the land, Baal and Ashtoreth. The people of Israel would choose to worship idols and then God would punish them by letting a foreign army to conquer them. The Israelites would become slaves again (in their own land!). They would come to their senses and pray to God for deliverance. God in His grace and mercy would send them a deliverer, a Judge, who would help the Israelites defeat the enemy. Then the people of God would do well for a while. But as soon as the Judge passed away, the cycle would start all over again. This cycle was repeated some 13 times over a 400-year period. Talk about never learning your lesson. Finally, things got so bad that God had to intervene with another special baby.</p>