

## Great Old Testament People

### Noah A Man of Great Faith

Genesis 6:5 says, "And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." Can you imagine people so evil they could not think of anything in a good or righteous way? They had reached the bottom in morality. God was so grieved that he made a decision to wipe out mankind from the face of the earth. This also included all the creatures he had created in the beginning. There was an exception.

It was Noah who "found favor in the eyes of the Lord." He was a "righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked with God." Seemingly he also had a great influence on his family which included his wife, his three sons – Shem, Ham and Japheth and their wives. Interestingly Noah was 500 years old before he had his three sons. God would send a universal flood which would rise above the mountains destroying all life.

To protect Noah and his family God commanded Noah to build an ark. He gave specific instructions as to how it was to be built. It was to be 450 feet long, 75 feet wide and 45 feet high. It was to have three floors (decks) with rooms on each floor. It was to be pitched within and without.

It would have a window which was probably an opening around the top rather than a single window so that sufficient light would be able to get inside the ark. A door was to be placed in the side of the ark. After hearing all God was going to do and what He expected of Noah, his head must have been spinning.

A universal flood would have been shocking. Where would the water come from? On the third day of creation it seems the entire surface of the earth was covered with water and God had to gather the water into seas. Genesis 1:9 says, "And God said, Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry land appear and it was so."

In Genesis 7:11 it is said, "In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, on the seventeenth day of the second month--on that day all the springs of the great deep burst forth, and the floodgates of the heavens were opened. And rain fell on the earth forty days and forty nights." Noah does not question God about this coming catastrophic event. He accepts it by faith.

2 Peter 3:5, 6 says, "This they willfully forget, that there were heavens from of old, and an earth compacted out of water and amidst water, by the word of God; by which means the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished." There was sufficient water for a universal flood.

While the flood would be miraculous, the construction of the ark was left to Noah. He had to do his part to save his family. Building the ark would be a tremendous task. Did Noah employ workers to help build the ark or did he and his three sons build it? Most assume the ark was a flat bottom boat. It would have required large timbers. Nothing indicates the construction of the ark was miraculous in nature. It took 120 years of hard work. This was a gigantic vessel.

It would be like a great ocean going vessel of today. What if Noah had fudged on the dimension, cut back on the scale that God called for? What if he had substituted other woods in place of gopher (cypress) wood?

Then there were all the people who watched it grow into a gigantic boat. It had to be in plain view of the people. What do you suppose they were saying? Ridicule can get so bad that some give up. Not so with Noah. Peter says that Noah was a "preacher of righteousness." Considering the people's

## Great Old Testament People

thoughts were "evil continually" he did not have a single convert. How many of us would have given up? According to 1 Peter 3:19 God was longsuffering with these people. Christ preached to them through Noah before the flood for 120 years yet without any responses.

1 Peter 3:20 says, "The longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah while the ark was preparing, wherein few, that is eight souls, were saved by water." God's patience will only go so far but there comes a time when His longsuffering runs out.

Jesus said, "And as were the days of Noah, so shall be the coming of the Son of man, For as in those days which were before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and they knew not till the flood came and took them all away; so shall be the coming of the Son of man" (Matthew 24:37-39).

The countdown gets down to seven days. In seven days the world would undergo 40 days of solid rain. No doubt the rain came down in sheets and water spouts. Also, the fountains of the deep (underground water) broke loose. The ocean itself may have overrun the land. We can imagine that people began to find higher ground with many no doubt climbing to the top of the highest mountains. Even if they did the water rose higher than the tallest mountains.

While the water saved Noah and his family at the same time it destroyed all those who were outside of the ark. Peter uses the ark and the waters that bore it up to illustrate how baptism saves us. Just as water saved Noah so it saves us today as we demonstrate our faith in God's word by being baptized.

Peter says, "The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward (God), by the resurrection of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 3:21).

How long were Noah and his family on the ark? Noah entered the ark 7 days before it rained (7:4, 10). Rain began on the 17<sup>th</sup> day of the 2<sup>nd</sup> month of Noah's 600<sup>th</sup> year (7:11). All the springs beneath the earth "burst forth" and it rained for 40 days (7:12). The waters flooded the earth for 150 days (7:24; 8:3) while the ark floated. The ark came to rest on the 17<sup>th</sup> day of the 7<sup>th</sup> month (8:4).

This may have been the little country of Armenia, which is in the northeast part of present day Turkey. Noah removed the ark's covering on the 1<sup>st</sup> Day of the 1<sup>st</sup> month of Noah's 601<sup>st</sup> year (8:13). Noah and his family left the ark on the 27<sup>th</sup> day of the 2<sup>nd</sup> month (8:14-10). They were in the ark for 1 year and 17 days (5 months floating, and 7 months on the mountain) before coming out of the ark.

Many say the flood is nothing more than a myth. If we believe Genesis 1:1 that, "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth" then there is no problem in believing that God could produce a universal flood. A universal flood would be small event compared to creating the universe.

If the flood is a myth then we cannot trust the Bible to be truthful. This leaves us in the position of asking how then did our universe come into existence? Did something come from nothing? This is not logical. For years scientists believed the universe was static, and had always existed. With more powerful telescopes it was found that the universe is actually expanding.

This led to the "big bang" theory, which assumed there was a terrific explosion, which hurled billions of planets into space.

## Great Old Testament People

Even space expanded making room for all the stars, galaxies and solar systems which originated from the explosion. But what would cause such an explosion that caused the "big bang?" Science has not yet come up with a natural explanation for the universe's origin.

Hebrews 11:3 is still the best explanation we have. "By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible." It comes down to the simple fact that the most logical explanation is that God is the true cause of the universe.

### Jacob Becomes The Deceived

Following a cruel deception carried out by Jacob but devised by Rebekah against his father, he is forced to flee for fear his half brother Esau will take vengeance against him. He is instructed by his mother to go to Haran. After spending the first night at Bethel Jacob continues his journey toward Haran. Finding a well he inquires of the shepherds concerning the family of Laban. The Shepherds knew him and said that he was well and that his daughter Rachel was coming at that time with the sheep.

Much is said about the stone, which covered the well. Its purpose of course was to protect the water. Jacob observes they were not out grazing the sheep but just sitting around. He does not like the idleness of the shepherds. Their response was they could not water until all the flocks had come together.

Rachel came with her father's sheep to water them. Jacob rolls the stone away and waters the flock. He gives her a kiss, which was an ancient way of greeting. At the same time he lifts up his voice expressing thanksgiving. He was thankful that God had brought him to his destination safely with no difficulty finding the family of his father and grandfather. Rachel runs to tell her father Laban of his arrival.

Jacob is immediately introduced to Laban. He is a very shrewd, cunning and deceiving man. Jacob will suffer many things because of Laban. Laban begins by saying he really had no right to receive Jacob's services without paying him.

Jacob was with him for a month and it was obvious to Laban that Jacob would be of great value to him, thus he wanted to secure his services permanently. Jacob the deceiver is about to be deceived reaping what he had previously sown. Jacob loved Rachel. Leah was the older daughter but Jacob loved Rachel.

Leah being "tender eyed" does not mean she had weak eyes. It is more likely her eyes were very beautiful. Tender can mean "soft, delicate, lovely." However, Rachel seems to have been a more beautiful girl. Jacob is willing to become a bondservant for her. For seven years he is willing to work for her. They seemed but a few days for his love for her was great.

Fulfilling the seven years agreement Jacob now asks for Rachel. A marriage feast is conducted. Laban pulled deceit on Jacob and substituted Leah. A bride was always veiled thus Jacob did not realize what had happened.

One wonders why Rachel did not speak up. When Jacob confronts Laban his explanation was that it was the custom for the older to be given first. [Why didn't he say this when Jacob agreed to serve for seven years?](#)

## Great Old Testament People

To fulfill the week with Lea was to continue marriage feast until it ended and then Laban would give him Rachel for whom he must now seven more years. Laban now had gained marriage for both of his daughters. This gives us an insight into what a cruel man Laban was. [Why didn't Jacob refuse on the grounds he had already put in his time for Rachel?](#)

It is said the Lord saw that Leah was "hated." The word however means to love less. God allows her to conceive and bear sons but Rachel would remain barren. The **first** son of Leah was called Reuben meaning, "behold a son." God for some reason looked upon her with favor. Her **second** son was named Simeon which means "hearing" indicating that God heard the plea of Leah and answered it.

A **third** son was named Levi which means "joined" because Leah supposed that Jacob would be joined to her with strong affection in that she had given him three sons. From Leah and Levi will come the priestly tribe. A **fourth** son is named Judah meaning "confessor" or one who acknowledges God and confesses that all good things come from Him. It would be from this tribe that Jesus would come.

We are somewhat amazed at the intense rivalry and jealousy between the two sisters. This shows polygamy never has worked. Rachel speaks to Jacob demanding children. Jacob becomes angry because he thinks this was all in God's hands. Barrenness was attributed to the influence of God.

Jacob did not feel he could do what God had refused. She gets him to agree to have children by her handmaid, Bilhah. Thus, she could claim the child by legal adoption. Any children born to a maid belonged to the wife who owned the maid. We find that slavery is a very old and ancient practice.

From this union would come Dan, which means, "he has judged." Rachel felt that God had now heard her plea for a son. Bilhah bears a second son who was called Naphtali, which means "my wrestling" indicating she had competed with her sister for children.

Leah is not to be outdone so she gives Jacob Zilpah her maid. A son is born and named Gad, meaning "a troop" which can also mean "good fortune." Zilpah bears a second son who was named Asher. His name meant "blessedness" or "happiness." Reuben the older son found some mandrakes, which was an herb that was regarded as superstitiously having fertility powers.

Rachel asked for the mandrakes. An agreement is reached where Leah can have Jacob for a night in return for the mandrakes. At this point Jacob was giving his whole attention to Rachel. Jacob suddenly becomes a pawn between two jealous sisters. Leah even tells Jacob he has been hired for the mandrakes.

She conceives and bares Issachar, which means, "wage." Again she bares Zebulun, meaning "dwelling." Leah again conceives and bears a daughter, Dinah, meaning "judgment." God hears Rachel's cry and she bears her first child, a son, who was named Joseph meaning "he who adds."

Jacob asks permission from Laban to leave with his wives and children and return to his country but Laban does not want him to leave. Jacob agrees to stay provided he can have all the speckled and spotted cattle. This would be taking the undesirable cattle thus Laban could keep the best. Since Jacob had not made the separation Laban took the kind of animals Jacob asked for with the idea that Jacob would receive nothing he asked for.

## Great Old Testament People

He set three days journey between them so these would not be available. This would not stop Jacob however. There is no scientific evidence the procedure used by Jacob would have such spectacular results. His success was due to God's providence, which prevented Laban from defrauding Jacob. It seems that by selective breeding Jacob was able to produce flocks of various colors. Like Abraham and Isaac, Jacob would become exceedingly rich.

Ill feelings developed toward Jacob along with Laban's sons. They saw how Jacob prospered and their jealousy stirred them up. Jacob resolved to return home. He did not wish to remain with all the bickering and fussing that would occur with his in-laws. The sons exaggerated when they charged Jacob had taken away all. God encouraged Jacob to return to Canaan. This is where he and his family belong.

Jacob calls for his wives, explains his plan to leave. The wives were already angry with their father knowing of his trickery. For once they were in agreement. Laban accuses Jacob of stealing his cattle and his daughters. The matter of the missing gods is brought up and Jacob is surprised and in a way so are we. Jacob is very upset and angry with Laban.

He reminds Laban he had faithfully served him for 20 years. He had earned everything he had. Laban's evil is laid out before all to hear. Laban pretends he is very generous in allowing them to leave. Laban kisses his sons and daughters to say goodbye.

Jacob must now face Esau. Esau is coming with 400 men. Jacob divides his people into two groups. This was done for protection. It seems that Esau was coming not with an army but to welcome Jacob and honor him. Jacob did not know this. Jacob goes to God in prayer. He admits his unworthiness and asks for God's help. His appeal is based on God's promise to him earlier. He knew God never failed in his promises. He sends presents to Esau, which would show good will and also would appease him.

Next, a strange event occurs. Jacob wrestles with a man all night. The significance of this wrestling is most difficult. It may indicate a number of things. His name is changed to Israel meaning "prince of God." He seems to come out of this event a stronger man than before it took place. He limps as a result of the angel touching the hip socket. Here again is a mystery.

We do not know the significance of this unusual event. Esau had obviously buried all his old resentment and forgotten his loss of the birthright. He was a rich man and evidently did not feel cheated now. No doubt a great change had come over Esau in the past 20 years. Jacob is yet to face serious trials but God was still with him until the day he died.

Shortly before arriving home Rachel bears him a son, Benjamin but she dies in childbirth. This is a sad ending for her. She had wanted children so badly and now she will not live to see her two sons grow into manhood. Isaac dies at the age of 180 years but God's plan continues to advance. We might wonder why she was not buried in the cave of Machpelah. Maybe because of distance.

## Joseph, A Story of the Providence of God

Joseph had reached the age of 17 and helped his half brothers with the sheep. The location is probably in the vicinity of Hebron. Jacob's love for Joseph was a very open manifestation of affection that irritated his brothers. He was given a colorful coat, which no doubt was looked upon with suspicion that Joseph would receive the birthright.

## Great Old Testament People

So great was their jealousy they continually quarreled with him. Joseph was not without blame. [Why would he tell his two dreams so openly?](#) It was very obvious the dreams inferred that Joseph would be over them and also his father and mother. This inflamed their resentment. His father understood the meaning and rebuked him for it. Jacob knew God often spoke to people by dreams he must have realized there was something unusual about Joseph that he would have such dreams.

The brothers had gone to graze the flocks, something like fifty miles away. Jacob is anxious to hear from them. Joseph was sent to report on how things were going and where they were. We today do not realize how difficult nomad life was in those days. With his coat of many colors he could be spotted a mile away. They conspired to kill their brother. This shows the low morals of this family.

One wonders if their polygamous background contributed much to their hate and jealousy. However, Reuben determined to prevent his death by rescuing Joseph. This may have been because he did not want to see his father hurt rather than any feelings he had for Joseph. He employs a delaying tactic planning to release him.

It seems Judah is the leader in the second decision to sell him into slavery. He is sold for twenty pieces of silver. Reuben is greatly frustrated when he returns to find Joseph gone. What they did with the coat was cruel deceit again showing their low morals.

Jacob naturally thought Joseph had been killed by a wild beast. His sorrow was almost more than he could bear. He went into deep mourning and refused to be comforted. [Were the brothers now satisfied? Was it really worth it? Or were they past feeling anything for Jacob?](#)

Joseph's master, Potiphar, one of Pharaoh's officials, soon found out that everything Joseph did prospered and he seems to recognize that God was blessing his house for Joseph's sake. Joseph is placed in complete charge of his entire house. Verse six implies Joseph was a handsome young man. Potiphar's wife puts Joseph to a severe test of his moral integrity and faithfulness.

Joseph gives two reasons for not giving in to her wishes. (1) His gratitude for his master, and (2) his respect for God whom he loved and served. Adultery is a very old sin but it is still wrong today. Time does not change basic morals. It is even more evident the kind of woman she was. She did not give up but consistently tried to seduce Joseph.

Finally in rage she falsely accuses him. She tells the entire household a fabricated lie and sought to blame her husband whom she had tried to dishonor. It is likely Potiphar did not believe his wife and was angry more by the embarrassing situation his wife had put him in than he was with Joseph. But God does not desert Joseph. He cared for Joseph and blessed his work in the prison. Everything Joseph did prospered.

The "butler" was literally the "cupbearer," and the baker was a "cook." They had displeased Pharaoh and were placed in the same prison where Joseph was. This was the providence of God although it took a long time for it to work out in Joseph's favor. Joseph notices that they were perplexed.

They knew their dreams must have some special meaning but there was no one to interpret them for them. Dreams were always assumed to contain some special message. There were professional dream interpreters but these men did not have any access to the interpreters.

## Great Old Testament People

Joseph tells them that interpretation of dreams belonged to God. Joseph gives them the interpretation of their dreams. Within three days their dreams were fulfilled. Joseph asked the baker to remember him and his being falsely imprisoned, but the cupbearer forgot all about him.

Pharaoh now has two dreams. In his first dream he is standing by the Nile River. Some think that the "kine" were hippopotamus, which inhabited the Nile River and frequently at night would come up out of the river to feed in the fields. Others say they were cows. The well-favored kine were devoured by the lean kine indicating the severity of an approaching famine.

Pharaoh had a second dream. He sees ears of corn, which were good but were being devoured by seven thin or poor ears of corn. Both dreams point out the same truth. There would be seven years of plenty followed by seven years of a severe famine. The magicians were the professional interpreters of dreams. They had been unable to tell the meaning.

It is now, two years after Joseph's imprisonment that the butler remembers Joseph. Joseph is cleaned up and brought before Pharaoh. No doubt he thought Joseph was a professional interpreter of dreams. Joseph corrected him by saying that his ability came only from God. God is the one who interprets dreams.

Pharaoh rehearsed his two dreams to Joseph. Joseph shows plainly the meaning of the dreams. Again it is emphasized that God showed Pharaoh what the meaning was. Joseph gives Pharaoh wise advice as to what should be done. It is doubtful that he had any idea or aspirations of being appointed as the Prime Minister of Egypt to accomplish this task.

Pharaoh was so impressed with Joseph and his wise counsel that he immediately appoints him to take charge of this tremendous food storage program. The signet ring would identify Joseph as the official representative of the king to issue royal decrees about storing the grain. He is given royal garments to wear. A gold chain would be a symbol of authority in ancient Egypt.

He was given the second chariot, which usually followed the king in public ceremonies. The rider was considered second to the king. Pharaoh makes it clear he has decreed this urgent matter and thus no one would dare go against his decree.

Joseph is given an Egyptian name, Zaphnathpaaneah. He is also given the daughter of the High Priest for a wife. Joseph immediately goes over the land for the purpose of surveying the situation. By now he is 30 years old, very young for such a high office. He proves to be a very diligent trustworthy official with great ability to organize.

He has two sons, Manasseh meaning "forgetfulness" thus God had enabled him to forget his troubles. The second son was named Ephraim meaning "fruitfulness" thus the idea that God had made him prosperous and fruitful. When the seven years of plenty ended the famine arrived just as Pharaoh had been told.

They had gathered so much it had impossible to keep accurate records. There was plenty for the lean years. However, the famine had extended beyond the Egypt causing many from surrounding countries to come searching for grain that they could buy.

Back in Canaan Jacob learned there was food in Egypt thus he sends ten of his sons to buy grain. [On the way did the thought ever cross their minds they might run into Joseph?](#)

## Great Old Testament People

Providence brings them into the very presence of Joseph. They bowed before him, unconsciously fulfilling the dream that Joseph had told them about years before. His speech, manners and dress were different. He immediately knows them but they do not know him. He speaks roughly to them to avoid recognition and to test them no doubt to see if they have changed. He accuses them of being spies.

They declare there were 12 of them but "one is not" keeping alive an old lie. Joseph demands they bring the one (Benjamin) who remained in Canaan to prove their innocence. He has them thrown into prison for three days. He will keep Simeon but they must return home and bring Benjamin.

He heard their remorseful cry, "We are paying for what we did to our brother—we saw how terrified he was when he was begging us for mercy." Joseph begins to see a spark of repentance rising from them. Their sacks were also filled and their money is restored. Later when they discover this they cry out, "What is God doing to us?"

They explain to Jacob that they must return with Benjamin if they are to get Simeon back. Jacob refuses. Reuben makes a special plea but still Jacob refuses. The famine gets worse. Soon they are out of food. Judah urges Jacob to let them take Benjamin. Jacob finally gives in. With great embarrassment they tell of the restored money to Joseph's servant.

Again they fulfill the dream of Joseph bowing before Joseph two times. Joseph is about to burst into tears but turns away from them to weep. What an emotional time for Joseph. Gaining his composure he returns.

They are seated from the eldest to the youngest but Joseph sat alone according to his high rank. Each was served separately but Benjamin receives far more than the others. Their sacks are again filled but this time Joseph's silver cup is placed in Benjamin's sack.

A steward is sent after them. They cannot believe their eyes. Judah speaks up declaring that God is punishing them. Judah makes a special plea to Joseph that if they did not return with Benjamin their father would die.

Joseph could no longer hold back his emotions. Ordering everyone else out of the room he tells his brothers, "I am Joseph, is my father still alive?" The brothers are terrified. Joseph soothes their remorse. He tells them not to blame themselves but God was behind it, sending Joseph ahead so he could save their lives and the lives of their families. [Can you imagine the shock, the emotions, that erupted among these twelve brothers?](#)

Probably the most amazing thing is that Joseph could forgive them. They are urged to return and bring their father and their families down to Egypt to stay because of the famine. Jacob could not believe what they were saying when they returned. [Was he now told what actually happened to Joseph or did they continue to hide the truth about Joseph?](#)

What a great reunion it must have been when Jacob saw his son Joseph alive, not dead, as he had believed all those years. They would be settled in a special part of Egypt called Goshen where they would have sufficient food. Also, this was because the Egyptians looked down on their nomadic neighbors avoiding as little contact as possible.

It was God's plan that from these twelve brothers would come twelve tribes who would form a nation of people who would be spiritual in nature believing in the one true God.



## Great Old Testament People

Joseph's spiritual characteristics made it possible for him to rise to the second highest position in Egypt and save his brothers and their families from starvation. The story of Joseph is a great story of the providence of God.

In spite of all the evil and wrongdoing of Joseph's brothers, God could bring about his purposes for the redemption of mankind. Just before his death Jacob instructed his sons to take his body back to Canaan to be buried in the cave of Machpelah. Joseph would go on to live a 110 years of which 93 were spent in Egypt. He is truly one of the great heroes and spiritual giants of the Old Testament.

### Moses

Between the time of Joseph's death and the birth of Moses much changed with Jacob's family. The twelve sons had now become 12 tribes with their descendants reaching two million in number. The bondage of the Israelites in Egypt is one of the most amazing stories of history.

That God would select a special people and give them laws and ordinances, but also to allow them to become slaves of a foreign and wicked ruler is hard for us to reconcile within our very limited sense of understanding God and His ways.

After all our thoughts are not his thoughts nor are our ways his ways. The task of getting the Israelites out of Egypt and to give them divine laws under which to serve God, God chose Moses to be the leader in this great effort. It would be impossible to cover the life of Moses in one lesson.

What we shall do is look at it in three forty-year periods. This involves the forty years he spent in Egypt, the forty years in the land of Midian and the forty years in the wilderness.

### THE FORTY YEARS IN EGYPT.

As we begin with the birth of Moses the Hebrew people had been in slavery in Egypt for some 400 years. Moses was born at a time when Pharaoh had given orders that no more male children should be allowed to live. The Hebrews had reproduced so fast Pharaoh felt threatened they might revolt and take over the country.

To save baby Moses, his mother made a vessel of papyrus and pitch and placed Moses in it to rest among the reeds on the bank of the Nile River. The providence of God led an Egyptian princess to find him in the reeds and also to find someone to be his nurse, which turned out to be his own mother.

Moses would be raised in the royal court as a prince among the Egyptians. **Acts 7:22** tells us that **"Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and deeds."** We must not forget that during his early years he was taught by his Hebrew mother, and was established in the faith of the great patriarchs while later reared as an Egyptian.

One day he saw a Hebrew being beaten by an Egyptian taskmaster. He killed the Egyptian and buried him in the sand. When this became known he feared for his life and fled from Egypt to the land of Midian. He was 40 years old at that time (**Acts 7:23**).

### THE FORTY YEARS IN THE LAND OF MIDIAN.

## Great Old Testament People

Moses' exile was spent in the land of Midian located in the northwest part of Arabia, in the desert between Egypt and Canaan. Moses became a shepherd and the son-in-law of Jethro, a Midianite priest. Jethro gave his daughter Zipporah to Moses to be his wife. They would have two sons, Gershom and Eliezer.

During these years as a shepherd Moses would become familiar with the wilderness area, and also learning much about survival in the desert. He also learned patience, and much about leading sheep. All these skills prepared him to be the shepherd of the Israelites later on when he led them out of Egypt through the Wilderness of Sinai.

Toward the end of this 40-year sojourn Moses experienced a dramatic call from God to lead the Israelites out of Egyptian slavery. This call was given to him from a "burning bush" somewhere near Mount Sinai. The Lord revealed to Moses His intention to deliver Israel from Egyptian captivity into a land "flowing with milk and honey" which had been promised centuries before to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

The Lord assured Moses that He would be with him, and that by God's presence, he would be able to lead the people out of bondage. God spoke to Moses from the midst of a burning bush, but it seems Moses doubted that it was God. He asked for a sign. Instantly his rod, which he used in leading his sheep, became a serpent when it was cast to the ground. In spite of the miracle Moses pleads that he was "slow of speech and slow of tongue" (Exodus 4:3).

God assures him that his brother Aaron would become his spokesman. Moses would become God's direct representative, and Aaron would be his mouthpiece and interpreter to the people of Israel. Finally Moses accepts this commission and returns to Egypt to confront Pharaoh.

### THE FORTY YEARS IN THE WILDERNESS.

Moses demands of Pharaoh "Let My people go." Pharaoh rejects this demand saying, "Who is the Lord, that I should obey His voice and let Israel go?" He shows contempt by increasing the oppression of the Israelites. Moses did not waver in his mission. He warned Pharaoh of the consequences that would fall upon his kingdom.

Ten terrible plagues were sent upon the land. The tenth one was the death of all the firstborn, which broke the stubborn and hardened heart of Pharaoh. But as soon as the Israelites left Pharaoh had his army to pursue them to the Red Sea. When Moses stretched out his rod over the sea, the waters divided and the Israelites passed to the other side unharmed.

When the Egyptians tried to cross the Red Sea after the Israelites the water swallowed them up. This one miracle should have convinced the Israelites of God's care for them but they were a stubborn people and would continue they're murmuring.

In obedience to God, Moses led the people to Mount Sinai. During the journey through the desert, the people murmured because of the trials they faced. Through it all, Moses was patient, understanding the harshness of the desert and the blessings of God's provision for them. When they arrived at Mount Sinai, Moses went up into the mountain for 40 days (Exodus 24:18).

Out of this momentous encounter with God came the covenant between the Lord and Israel, including the Ten Commandments.

## Great Old Testament People

In giving the Law to the people, Moses taught the Israelites what the Lord expected of them. They were now to be a holy people, separated from the pagan immorality and idolatry, which surrounded them.

God also gave them the Tabernacle with certain ceremonial laws concerning their worship and the offerings of sacrifices for their sins. They were given a priesthood who would lead and train them in spiritual matters. Laws were issued which covered civil matters and sanitation.

Leaving Sinai, the Israelites journeyed toward the land of Canaan arriving at Kadesh Barnea on the border of the "Promised Land." Twelve spies one from each tribe was sent to explore the land. They returned with glowing reports of the fruitfulness of the land but ten of them spoke fearfully of the inhabitants of the land.

Caleb and Joshua urged that they go ahead and take the land. However, the people lost heart and refused to enter clamoring for a new leader who would take them back to Egypt. To punish them for their lack of faith, God turned them back into the wilderness to wander about by adding 38 years to the already 2 years spent in reaching Canaan.

During these years of wandering, murmuring, grumbling, and complaining the people continually tested Moses' patience. At one point Moses' patience reached its breaking point and he sinned against the Lord, in anger against the people. They had complained about not having water. God told Moses to speak to the rock and water would flow from it. Instead Moses lifted his hand and struck the rock twice with his rod.

Because he disobeyed the Lord he was not permitted to enter the Promised Land (Numbers 20:1-13). When he led the Israelites to the borders of Canaan, his work was finished. They had now become a nation. Moses was allowed to climb Mount Nebo and view the Promised Land from afar and then died. The circumstances regarding his death and burial remain a mystery (Deuteronomy 34:1-8; Jude 9).

To this very day Moses is remembered as one of the greatest leaders that have ever lived. What he was able to accomplish is truly remarkable. Of course we recognize that God was with him and without His help he never would have been able to complete the task that God gave him. He led a people who were in the rough, living in bondage in a pagan nation (Egypt).

They were unlearned, undisciplined, stubborn and rebellious and turns them into a Theocracy ruled by spiritual laws. He is able to turn their hearts away from paganism, focusing their attention on the one true God willing to submit to His authority. Time and again his patience was tested but he prevailed changing a people living in slavery into a nation that served God.

It has been our purpose in the study of these great characters of the Bible to see how through them God unfolded his plan for the redemption of mankind. It began with Abraham a man who demonstrated great faith in God. It is his faith that begins the scheme of redemption. This faith was passed down to his son Isaac and then to Jacob and his twelve sons.

It took some time for these twelve sons to develop their faith. The twelve tribes at first had their problems. By the time of Moses' death they have changed. Having followed the leadership of one the greatest meek men that ever lived they now became the people of God.

## Great Old Testament People

After his death, Moses continued to be viewed by Israel as the great servant of the Lord ([Joshua 1:1-2](#)) and as the one through whom God spoke to Israel ([Joshua 1:3](#); [9:24](#); [14:2](#)).

Although it was the Law of God, it became known as the Law of Moses ([Joshua 1:7](#); [4:10](#)). Joshua's generation also remembered Moses as the man of God ([Joshua 14:6](#)). This high regard for Moses would continue throughout the history of the Israelites. Moses was held in high esteem by Samuel on down to those who survived the 70 years of captivity. He is held in high regard by the psalmist as an example of a great man of prayer and one that God worked through.

The prophets of the Old Testament also remembered Moses as the leader of God's people, the one by whom God brought Israel out of Egypt, and one of the greatest of the intercessors for God's people. Jesus showed clearly, by what He taught and by how He lived, that He viewed Moses' Law as authoritative for the people of God ([Matthew 5:17-18](#)).

It is said that on the road to Emmaus, Jesus showed to the two disciples things concerning Himself written in the Law of Moses. At the transfiguration, Moses and Elijah appeared to Jesus and talk with Him on a mountain where three of the disciples of Jesus were present. The New Testament, however, shows that Moses' teachings were intended only to prepare the Jews for the coming Jesus Christ and a greater Law.

What Moses promised, Jesus fulfilled: "For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ". The Lord paid a great tribute to Moses after his death. "And there arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face" ([Deuteronomy 34:10](#)). Truly Moses was one of the greatest men ever to live.

### Joshua, God's Dependable Man

Joshua succeeded Moses as the leader of the Israelites after the death of Moses. We know about Joshua long before he became their leader. We learn how he received his name in [Numbers 13:16](#), Moses gave Hoshea (one of the twelve spies) son of Nun a new name--- "Joshua" (meaning God saves). Joshua shows his ability to be a military leader early. When Israel left the Red Sea and began their march to Sinai at a place called Rephidim the Amalekites confronted Israel.

Moses told Joshua to select some men and go out to fight them. As long as Moses lifted up his hands Israel prevailed. Aaron and Hur stood on each side of Moses holding up his hands and Israel prevailed. Moses must have known of the leadership ability of Joshua by the fact he chose him to lead Israel into battle with the Amalekites.

Later on when Moses ascended Sinai to receive the two tables of stone, Joshua, who is called his servant accompanied Moses probably only part of the way until a cloud covered Moses. Evidently Joshua remained on that part of the mountain until Moses came down. It is Joshua that hears the commotion that was going on in the camp of the Israelites at the foot of the mountain.

The day came when the people reached the border of Canaan. Joshua was selected to be one of the 12 who would explore the land of Canaan. When they returned from their mission Joshua and Caleb were the only ones to give an encouraging report of their journey, and exhorted the people to go up and possess the land.

Because the people refused to enter Canaan, God sent them back into the wilderness where they would wander for the next 38 years.

## Great Old Testament People

Near the end of their wandering the people complained of a lack of water. Moses struck the rock instead of speaking to it as God had commanded; thus Moses and Aaron were not allowed to enter the Promised Land.

When it was revealed to Moses that he was soon to die he was ordered to appear with Joshua at the Tabernacle. While in the presence of God, Moses gave Joshua a commission from God: **"Be strong and of a good courage: for thou shalt bring the children of Israel into the land which I swore unto them: and I will be with thee"** (Deuteronomy 31:23). We also learn that Joshua was **"filled with the spirit of wisdom"** (Deuteronomy 31:14, 23) and assumed full command.

Having crossed the Jordan River spies were sent to Jericho who were lodged and hidden by Rahab when they were discovered. They returned and reported to Joshua. Joshua broke camp and crossed over the Jordan, which at the time was overflowing its banks but became dammed up about 20 miles above so the people could cross over as they had done at the Red Sea. The bed would have been dry giving the Israelites the needed time to cross over.

They entered Canaan on the 10<sup>th</sup> day of the first month, which corresponds, to our March-April season. They encamped at Gilgal, in the plains of Jericho, and there Joshua set up twelve stones taken from the Jordan as a perpetual memorial of the dividing of the water. The Promised Land now before them would take three major campaigns for them to conquer the land, which probably lasted 10 to 15 years.

### THE CENTRAL CAMPAIGN (Josh. 3 –8)

Jericho was the key city of east Canaan. The story of its fall is a powerful lesson for us today. The defeat of Jericho is one of the favorite stories of the Old Testament. Here again their faith is put to a test. They had to march around the city once each day for six days, and seven times on the seventh day before the walls would fall and they would take the city.

The people's faith and willingness to do this stands in contrast to the faith of those who refused to cross over into Canaan 38 years before. God could have caused the walls to fall instantly but their faith needed to be tested first. **Would they obey or turn back as their ancestors did?** They passed the test.

Their biggest defeat was the taking of Ai, which the spies informed Joshua would be easily accomplished. Only 3000 men were sent to take it. They were repulsed and chased away with a loss of 36 men. This was all the result of greed. One man, Akan, had taken some of the spoils from Jericho. This was a powerful and grave lesson for Israel. The taking of these two cities was a part of the first campaign into Canaan.

When the kings of the Hittites and other nations west of Jordan heard of the fall of Ai, they armed themselves against Joshua. But the Gibeonites, a confederacy of several cities not far from the encampment of the Israelites, sent ambassadors in torn clothes, with old sacks and dry bread, pretending that they had come from a distant country and wished to make a covenant with Israel.

They obtained a treaty and were made "hewers of wood and drawers of water for the whole congregation (Chap. 9).

### THE SOUTHERN CAMPAIGN (Josh chapter 10)

## Great Old Testament People

Hearing of the progress of Israel the king of Jerusalem became an ally of the kings of Hebron, Jarmuth, Lachish, and Eglon and laid siege to Gibeon who had tricked Israel into a treaty. Joshua hastens to the aid Gibeon, marching by night and taking the Amorites by surprise.

Joshua was helped in this battle by an unprecedented hailstorm, which killed more than fell by the sword and by a miraculous lengthening of the day which enable him to pursue the fugitives to Makkedah. In subsequent battles Joshua subdued the southern half of Palestine from Kadesh-Barnea to Gaza, the eastern and western limit of the southern frontier.

### THE NORTHERN CAMPAIGN (Josh 11, 12)

Jabin, king of Hazor, commanded a combine of Canaanites, Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Jebusites and Hivites but were defeated at Lake Merom. There were certain parts of the land that were left to the people who lived there. This mistake would come back to haunt them in later years. Not until David and Solomon would the borders of Israel extend to the areas that God intended to be a part of the Promised Land.

Finally the land is divided among the tribes, chiefly by naming the cities within their respective allotments. These chapters of Joshua might be called the "**Biblical Geography of Palestine.**" The tribe of Levi received no inheritance but were given 48 cities. However, Joseph's two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim, each received tribal shares making a total of 12 divisions. The Tabernacle, the center of worship was placed at Shiloh.

God fulfilled the promise he made to Abraham that he would give him this land as an inheritance for his posterity. This promise was fulfilled over three thousand years ago and is not to be fulfilled at some future time as some claim today.

God said, "Be strong and of a good courage: for unto this people shalt thou divide for an inheritance the land, which I sware unto their fathers to give them" (Joshua 1:6). It is also said, "And the Lord gave unto Israel all the land which he sware to give unto their fathers; and they possessed it, and dwelt therein. And the Lord gave them rest round about, according to all that he sware unto their fathers; and there stood not a man of all their enemies before them the Lord delivered all their enemies into their land. There failed not ought of any good thing which the Lord had spoken unto the house of Israel; all came to pass".

### FAREWELL ADDRESSES OF JOSHUA (Josh 23-24)

After an interval of rest Joshua called all Israel to an assembly and delivered to them two solemn addresses concerning the marvelous fulfillment of God's promises to their fathers. He warned them of the conditions which would assure them of keeping their property. This caused them to renew their covenant with God at Shechem.

Joshua died at the age of 110 years and was buried in his own city, Timnath-Serah. Mention is made of the death of Eleazer the priest and mention is made of the burial of the bones of Joseph, which they had brought up out of Egypt.

It is difficult to give full credit to Joshua's character, because he is overshadowed by the greatness of the events, which he directed and participated in. This is not a dishonor to him, but a great honor. A lesser man would have been seen and heard more. His life, though recorded with fullness shows no stain.

## Great Old Testament People

His greatness can be found in his final address to the Israelites. "Choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" (Joshua 24:15). This describes his true character the best of all. He was a faithful and loyal servant of the Lord. What is greater than being called a servant of the Lord?

### Samuel the Judge, Prophet and Priest of Israel

Samuel was a Levite the son of pious parents. He was a child of prayer and was given in answer to prayer. The circumstances of the birth of Samuel is one of the most beautiful stories of the Old Testament. His mother Hannah was childless. One year when she went up to worship at Shiloh she prayed to God. "O Lord Almighty, if you will only look upon your servant's misery and remember me, and not forget your servant but give her a son, then I will give him to the Lord for all the days of his life, and no razor will ever be used on his head."

It is said that Eli the priest was sitting at the door of the temple and noticed her lips were moving but he heard no voice. Eli supposed she was drunk and rebukes her. She explains to him her situation and Eli tells her "Go in peace, and may the God of Israel grant you what you have asked of him."

Her prayer was answered. As soon as Samuel was weaned Hannah brought him to Shiloh and gave him over to Eli. Thus from a very early age Samuel served as a boy before the Lord, clothed with an ephod. Samuel is the first boy priest and prophet.

It is said of Samuel "But Samuel was ministering before the Lord—a boy wearing a linen ephod. Each year his mother made him a little robe and took it to him when she went up with her husband to offer the annual sacrifice.....Meanwhile, the boy Samuel grew up in the presence of the Lord." Later the Lord gave Hannah three sons and two daughters.

### GOD SPEAKS TO SAMUEL WHILE YET A BOY

One night as Samuel slept where the ark rested he heard his name called. Supposing it was Eli he ran to hear what Eli said. Eli told him he had not called him and sent him back to his bed. This happens two more times. Eli perceived that the Lord was the one who had called Samuel and instructed how to act should he hear the voice again.

When called he responded, "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth." The Lord revealed to Samuel the doom of Eli's house which he reluctantly made known the next morning to the aged priest.

In a battle with the Philistines the Israelites were defeated. They suffered heavy losses (30,000 soldiers) and the Ark of God was captured. The two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas died in the battle. When the news reached Eli he fell backward from a chair breaking his neck which caused his death. The story of Eli and his sons is tragic. While he may have faithfully discharged his religious duties he miserably failed as a father. His failure was that "He restrained them not."

### SAMUEL BECOMES JUDGE OF ISRAEL

Having suffered a disastrous defeat by the Philistines (4:1-11) Samuel does not appear again in history for a period of twenty years. During this the Philistines kept the Ark.

## Great Old Testament People

Realizing the only way for Israel to gain victory over their enemy was to turn back to God, Samuel summoned the tribes to assemble at Mizpah to spend a day in penitence and prayer. At this assembly they confessed **"We have sinned against the Lord. And Samuel was leader of Israel at Mizpah."**

This event almost turned into a disaster with an attack from the Philistines. The philistines advanced while Samuel was engaged in sacrifice and prayer but were thrown into total confusion by a terrific thunderstorm sent by Jehovah. The Philistines were defeated and pursued to a place called Beth-car. The godly Samuel erected a memorial stone to commemorate God's deliverance. He called it **"Ebenezer,"** saying **"Thus far has the Lord helped us."**

We are told that he traveled **"from Bethel to Gilgal to Mizpah, judging Israel in all those places. But he always went back to Ramah, where his home was, and there he also judged Israel. And he built an altar there to the Lord."**

Judges were not like our legal judges today. During the leadership of Joshua Israel remained true to Jehovah. Afterwards they lapsed into idolatry for which they were punished by being brought into servitude to idolatrous nations. When in distress they would cry out to Jehovah. Judges were raised up to deliver them from their oppression.

Samuel now became the entire government of Israel discharging his judicial duties as well as his priestly duties. However, he would become the last judge of Israel. During these years of judging Israel a most important office is instituted—that of the prophet.

In **Acts 3:24** Samuel is spoken of as the first in a long line of prophets. Samuel gathered a band of men who were called the **"Sons of the Prophets."** They banded together into **"schools"** where **"the word of Jehovah"** was communicated to them.

One of the tragic aftermaths of this story is that Samuel failed to learn a lesson from Eli. He had appointed his sons, Joel and Abiah, as judges in his old age. Samuel followed closely in the steps of Eli in his responsibility as a father. The only blot recorded against Samuel was that, **"his sons did not walk in his ways. They turned aside after dishonest gain and accepted bribes and perverted justice"** (1 Samuel 8:3).

### SAMUEL ANOINTS ISRAEL'S FIRST KING

Seemingly because of the conduct of Samuel's two sons the elders of Israel entreated him to appoint them a king to judge them after the manner of all the nations around them. The proposed change of government displeased Samuel; thus he laid the matter before God in prayer. Samuel took this as a rejection of his long years of godly service on behalf of the people. He also was aware of the evils that went along with the establishment of a royal house.

The Lord helped Samuel to see the real issue. **"Heed the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them"** (1 Samuel 8:7). In spite of Samuel's warning of the tyrannies of a king, Israel insisted on having one, **"like all the nations,"** to **"judge"** them and **"fight their battles."**

They preferred a man of flesh to Jehovah's spiritual defense under Samuel. The people were sent to their homes, and Samuel proceeded to select a king. Saul was pointed out by Jehovah as the man whom he was to set apart as the king of Israel and was anointed.



## Great Old Testament People

Samuel then summoned the people to Mizpah, but before proceeding to recognize Saul as the king he charged the people with their sin of rejecting God by their demand for a king. Israel's first king was of the tribe of Benjamin.

At first we are impressed with the character and looks of Saul. He was handsome, likeable, tall in stature and appears at first to be very humble. But he had some tragic flaws that would lead to his ultimate ruin. Although Saul had begun his reign, Samuel continued to exercise his functions as priest, prophet and judge. At times he crossed the path of Saul.

Saul was engaged in war against the Philistines and, having mustered his forces at Gilgal, awaited the coming of Samuel to offer a sacrifice to Jehovah. As Samuel did not appear at the time appointed, Saul, in his anxiety lest the people should lose heart and desert him, resolved to offer the sacrifice himself—a fearful violation of God's law.

The offering of the sacrifice was hardly finished when Samuel arrived. Rebuking Saul for his presumption, Samuel made known to him that the kingdom would not be ruled by his descendants. He then left him and went to Gibeah of Benjamin.

Later on Saul was charged by Samuel to put to death the Amalekites. But Saul spared their king Agag, and spared the best of the cattle, merely killing such as were worthless. Samuel announced to Saul that his disobedience had secured for him his rejection by Jehovah. Although He had no further dealings with Saul, Samuel mourned for him.

### SAMUEL ANOINTS DAVID TO BE THE NEXT KING

Samuel was sent by the Lord to Bethlehem, to the house of Jesse, where he anointed his youngest son David who at the time was a shepherd. We learn an important lesson as Samuel looked over the sons of Jesse. "The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7).

Later when Saul, in his insane rage, endeavored to slay David, the latter fled to Samuel and they both went to and lived in Naioth. King Saul pursued David, but when he came to Naioth and saw Samuel and the prophets, the Spirit of the Lord came upon him and he was obliged to relinquish the attempt to seize him.

### CHARACTER OF SAMUEL

He was dedicated to the service of God by his mother and that service never stopped or waned. In all his difficulties he turned to God for counsel. In all his acts and decisions he was guided by the word of Jehovah. His advice to the Israelites was the motto of his own life, "Do not turn aside from following the Lord, but serve the Lord with all your heart."

When Samuel died he was buried in his hometown of Ramah and was mourned by the nation. In many ways he resembles Christ who now reigns over His kingdom as our King, High Priest and Prophet.

### David, A Man After God's Own Heart

When we think of David we think of many good and great traits of character. First, and above all, he was a man after God's own heart. He was a musician who displayed outstanding musical talent. He wrote many psalms. He was a very brave man, a warrior, a hero, and a great leader.

By Jimmy Eaton

## Great Old Testament People

He became a great king. His youth was spent in Bethlehem. He was the son of Jesse a respected citizen of Bethlehem being the youngest of eight brothers.

He was a keeper of his father's sheep during which time he killed both a lion and a bear, which had attacked the flock. At a young age he was anointed to be the King of Israel. This was done privately and apparently there was no public announcement made of this event. **We wonder if his family fully comprehended the significance of that event?** There was never any hint in his early life that he expected to be king.

We first begin to know him as he served under Saul, the King who had been forsaken by God and troubled by an evil spirit leaving him subject to moods of depression and insanity. Saul was advised to secure a harpist whose music would help soothe his troubled mind.

David was recommended for this task. Early in his life he became known as the **"sweet psalmist of Israel"** (2 Samuel 23:1). As harpist for Saul, David no doubt became exposed to governmental affairs. However, He did not remain with Saul all the time since the Bible indicates he returned to Bethlehem to continue caring for his father's sheep.

### DAVID BECOMES AN INSTANT HERO.

During this early period in his life the Philistines invaded the country and camped about 15 miles west of Bethlehem, David's home. Saul led his army to meet the enemy. Three of David's brothers were in Saul's army, and Jesse their father sent David to the battle area to inquire about their welfare.

While on this visit he heard the challenge of Goliath, a giant, who challenged anyone to come and fight him. No one had volunteered to go. David offered his services saying that he had no fear, as he knew the Lord would be with him. Goliath was equipped with heavy armor for close-range combat. David's strategy was to fight from a distance.

Taking five smooth stones from a brook, David faced Goliath with only a sling and his unflinching faith that God would give him victory over the giant. Goliath was struck in the forehead by the tremendous force of one of the stones from David's sling and fell dead. For this victory David immediately became a hero in the eyes of the people.

Saul had promised to make the victor his son-in-law giving him one of his daughters for a wife, even removing any taxation on the family of the victor. After the battle David would remain at Saul's palace. Due to his bravery Saul's son Jonathan admired David and they became closest of friends. This friendship would last until Jonathan's death.

Saul gave David his daughter Michal for a wife. However, she was not the one promised. It was not long before David began to participate in the battles the Israelites fought against their enemies. David rose to a prominent position being in charge of those who went out to battle. His success was such that the people began to sing his praises.

It is said when he would return from battle with the Philistines that the women would come out **"singing and dancing,"** saying, **"Saul, hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands."** Saul became very displeased at this and began to keep an eye on David. Jealousy began to develop within Saul over David and he attempted two times to kill David with a javelin. It is said, **"Saul was afraid of David, because the Lord was with him, and was departed from Saul."**

## Great Old Testament People

### DAVID SOON BECOMES A FUGITIVE

As David's popularity grew, Saul's fear increased until he could no longer hide the fact that he wanted to kill David. Thus, David was forced to flee with Saul almost always in pursuit. David was able to gather a handful of fugitives as his followers and fled from Saul. On at least two occasions, David could have killed Saul while the king slept, but he refused to kill him.

Many days were spent in fleeing from Saul. There were several close calls where David barely escaped. Saul was relentless in his attempt to kill David. Eventually Saul was killed in battle along with Jonathan in a battle with the Philistines at Gilboa. When David received the news of their deaths, he mourned their fate (2 Samuel 1).

### DAVID BECOMES KING OF JUDAH, THEN LATER KING OF ALL OF ISRAEL

At Saul's death the tribe of Judah, to whom David belongs, elected him to be their king and placed him on the throne in Hebron. As popular as David had been the rest of the tribes set up Ishbosheth, Saul's son, as king at Mahanaim. For two years there was civil war between the two factions. It ended in the assassination of Ishbosheth, an event that saddened David.

At the death of Ishbosheth, David was elected king over all the people of Israel. He immediately began to work toward establishing a United Kingdom. One of his first acts as king was to attack the fortified city of Jebus. Those who lived there thought it was safe from being captured but David and his army took it by storm. He then made it the capital city of his kingdom and erected his palace there. This is the city that would come to be known as Jerusalem.

He also worked to strengthen the worship of God. He then moved the Ark of the Covenant from Kirjath Jearim and placed it in a tabernacle which he set up in Jerusalem thus making it the center of worship for the Jews.

He organized worship on a magnificent scale and began plans to build a house of worship, but God would not permit him to do this informing him that being a man of war the building of the Temple would be left to someone else to build. He would however, gather material for the temple to be built later. It was David's son Solomon who finally erected the first temple in Jerusalem.

### DAVID'S SIN

Although a righteous man he was subject to sin like all mankind. Even though David was a man after God's own heart he was human and was capable of sinning. On one occasion when his army went to battle, David stayed home. This led to his sin with Bathsheba. While Uriah, the Hittite, Bathsheba's husband was away in battle, David committed adultery with her.

Then in an effort to cover up his sin, he had Uriah placed so he would be killed in battle. David was confronted by the prophet Nathan, who courageously exposed his sin. Faced with his sin, David repented and asked for God's forgiveness. His prayer for forgiveness is recorded in Psalm 51.

Although God forgave David of his adultery and his responsibility for the death of Uriah. The consequences of his sins continued to plague him. The child born to David and Bathsheba died. The example he set as a father was a bad influence on his sons. One son, Amnon raped and humiliated his half-sister. Another son, Absalom, rebelled against David and tried to take away his kingdom by force.

## Great Old Testament People

David was such a hero and great man that we are disappointed that our hero fell into this terrible sin. **How can we call him a great man?** Because he showed true repentance. This should be true of all of us. We must be willing to confess and ask God's forgiveness out of true repentance when we sin. The amazing thing is that God is willing to forgive when we approach him with the right attitude. David died at the age of 71 after a total of over 40 years as a king.

As a warrior and military man, he was resourceful and courageous. As a king, he was without equal in the life of his nation. As a religious leader, he was exceptional. Many of his writings still continue to be the favorite devotional literature for those who seek to walk closer to God today and glorify His name.

Jesus was referred to as the Son of David. The genealogy of Jesus as recorded in three of the gospels traces Jesus back through the ancestry of David. God promised David a kingdom that would have no end. This prophecy was fulfilled in Jesus, who came to establish the Kingdom of God.

Jesus was born in Bethlehem the "**city of David**" the birthplace and boyhood home of David. That kingdom with no end came into existence on the day of Pentecost as recorded in **Acts 2**. It is a spiritual kingdom with no end.

## Solomon, A Man of Great Wisdom

Solomon (**which means peaceful**) the son of David and Bathsheba became the third king of Israel. His rise to the throne was met with widespread approval from the people, but David's older remaining officials were slow to accept their new king. They eventually warm up to him when they realized David was determined to anoint Solomon as his heir.

So Solomon became Israel's third king because God had told David that Saul's heirs would not follow him to the throne. Solomon was about 20 years old when he was crowned king. He assumed leadership of Israel at a time of great material and spiritual prosperity.

During his 40 reign (**970-930 B.C.**), he would expand his kingdom until it covered about 50,000 square miles – from Egypt in the south to Syria in the north to the borders of Mesopotamia in the east, and westward to the Mediterranean Sea.

## SOLOMON ENDOWED WITH GREAT WISDOM

We are impressed that his first act as king was to go to Gibeon to worship and offer sacrifices to the Lord. That night in a dream God asked Solomon "**What shall I give thee?**" Saul demonstrating great humility in saying "**I am but a little child: I know not how to go out or come in. Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad.**" God was pleased with Solomon's request and would give him much more than what he had asked for.

Solomon organized Israel much as David had done, but he enlarged and expanded its government. He divided the country into 12 districts, each of which was responsible for providing the court with regular supplies which included a supply of officers in charge of each district. As the years passed, Solomon's court reached a standard of luxury that had never existed in Israel's history before.

When we think of Solomon we usually remember him as a man of great wisdom. His proverbs and his "**Song of Songs**" demonstrate his deep knowledge of the natural world.

By Jimmy Eaton

## Great Old Testament People

He also had a great understanding of human nature, as was demonstrated by the two women who claimed the same child. His suggestion that the child be physically divided between the two was a masterful strategy for finding out who the real mother was.

His wisdom concerning everyday living is clearly seen in his **Proverbs**. They show he loved wisdom and was always trying to teach it to others. They also indicate he was a keen observer who could learn from the mistakes of others. His sayings are just as true today as they were when first spoken. His fame as a man of great wisdom spread near and far.

Men came from other lands just to hear him speak. The Queen of Sheba came to test his wisdom by presenting to him some very hard and difficult questions. He answered all her questions with ease.

After she saw the extent of his empire and what he had accomplished as master builder and the vastness of his knowledge, she confessed that she had underestimated him and that half of what had been told about him that not even half had been told.

## SOLOMON'S TEMPLE

His greatest masterpiece was the construction of the Temple in Jerusalem as a place of worship to the God of Israel. The task was enormous, involving much planning and many workmen. A work force of 30,000 was employed in cutting timber from the cedars of Lebanon. Also working on this massive project were 80,000 cutters of stone in the rock quarries of Jerusalem. There were many highly skilled craftsmen who designed and built the furniture of the Temple.

Besides this there were 70,000 ordinary workmen, and many superintendents. Gold, silver, and other precious metals were imported from other lands. Hiram, king of Tyre (**Lebanon**) sent cedar, architects and other craftsmen to assist with this great project.

Materials from other lands were brought in. This indicates that Solomon was a good statesman also, as he had peace and the respect of the nations that surrounded Palestine. The building was completed in seven years. It would not be famous for its size but for the quality of its workmanship (**1 Kings 6-7**). Everything that was a part of the building was so precise in the way it was cut that the sound of a hammer was never heard as it rose up from its foundation.

Later as pilgrims would approach the city they could see it in the distance as it sat upon the highest point in the city. They marveled at its beauty. Today it is recognized as one of the **"Seven Wonders of the Ancient World."**

After the Temple was completed Solomon planned an elaborate program of dedication. He invited the leaders of the twelve tribes to attend. The Ark of the Covenant was brought into the most sacred place as a cloud filled the room to hide God's presence. Long prayers of dedication were offered at the altar. This reveals the admirable spirit of devotion in Solomon's heart.

The dedication ceremony lasted for seven days and was followed by the observance of the Feast of Tabernacles. Immediately after the dedication, the Lord appeared to Solomon. He assured the king that his prayers had been heard and that the Temple had been blessed.

He also warned Solomon that His divine favor and protection, which had been bestowed upon Israel, would continue only if their faith remained uncorrupted. If idolatry should be introduced Israel would be punished and the Temple would be destroyed (**1 Kings 9:1-9**).

## Great Old Testament People

After completing the Temple, Solomon built a palace complex which was a series of five structures that took 13 years to complete. He also built many cities to assist in the development of trade with other nations. He built fortresses and lodgings for his army. The use of horses and chariots was now used by Israel to build up his mighty army.

He also had a Navy. While he had a strong army, he relied more upon a system of treaties with his neighbors to keep peace. He conducted trade overland by way of camel caravans. His most significant trade was by sea across the Mediterranean Sea. His ships apparently went as far west as Spain. They also went down the eastern coast of Africa.

## THE DOWNFALL OF SOLOMON

It is difficult to believe that one who was so devoted in his worship to God could turn away from God. Near the end of his life he lost the ideals of his youth, becoming restless and dissatisfied. His writings in *Ecclesiastes* proclaiming that "all is vanity," supports the view that the world's wisest man had become a pathetic pagan in his old age. This began as a result of the constant influx of wives and concubines from other nations into Solomon's court.

He broke the Mosaic Law and violated the warning of God not to stray away from the path of his father David. The large number of foreign women in Solomon's court tragically made many demands upon the king. He allowed these "outsiders" to practice their pagan religions. The result was that Jerusalem, and even its holy Temple, was the scene of pagan practices and idol worship (*1 Kings 11:1-13*).

His faith was weakened and eventually he approved of, and even participated in these idolatrous acts. The example he set for the rest of the nation must have been demoralizing. This tragic error was a severe blow to the security of Solomon's throne and to the nation he had built.

Also, the immense building program in Jerusalem and in other parts of the kingdom resulted in his placing a heavy tax burden upon the people, which helped to bring about unrest and rebellion.

In many ways, Solomon's 40 year reign, as king of Israel is a puzzle. In his early years he was both noble and humble-minded and one of the great and righteous rulers of his day. Although he was surrounded by wealth and luxury as a young man, he seemed at the time not to be led astray but was a person of honor and integrity. The glory of his empire was a reflection of his own royal tastes, which he accomplished by a successful foreign policy.

Unfortunately, Solomon was not strong enough to withstand the temptations that go along with a long life of luxury. When you look at his life and his contribution to the nation of Israel it can be largely figured only in material terms, not in spiritual growth. He will be remembered as the builder of one of the most beautiful cities of the ancient world, but not as a spiritual builder.

The tragedy is that after the building of the Temple, Solomon did very little to promote the religious life of his people. It is almost unbelievable that he turned to paganism. [With all his great wisdom how could he turn to idols?](#)

## WHAT WAS SOLOMON'S FATE?

We cannot help but wonder, [did Solomon repent and return to the Lord at the end of his life, or did he die without ever truly repenting and turning to God?](#)

By Jimmy Eaton

## Great Old Testament People

Unsuccessful in his efforts to find happiness in wisdom, wealth and prestige, Solomon plunged wildly and unrestrained into gross fleshly indulgence thinking this would bring him happiness.

He openly admitted at the conclusion of Ecclesiastes, "And I turned myself to behold wisdom, and madness, and folly." But what were the results? He said, "I perceived that this also was a striving after the wind." It became apparent that earthly wisdom, material wealth, worldly fame and forbidden pleasure are powerless to produce happiness in the human heart.

He draws the conclusion. "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil."

We would like to believe that considering his conclusion about life and that he did repent and returned to God. He died at the age of 60. Solomon is not the only man who has lived to regret the lifestyle he has lived in the past. This world with all its pleasures may satisfy the flesh but it can never fulfill the needs of the soul.

## Job an Example of Great Faith and Patience

The book of Job seems to be chronologically out of order. We really are not absolutely sure where it belongs in Bible history. It makes no mention of Israel. The Exodus is never mentioned. The fact that Job offered sacrifices for his family would indicate he lived in the Patriarchal age.

His living in the "East" might imply a time even before Abraham. Thus the book could be the oldest book of the Bible. The book has been placed along with books that are written in verse. Why?

Sometimes prose is incapable of expressing deep emotions. Men for centuries have expressed their strongest feelings with the aid of figurative language and the rhythm of poetry. Since the book deals with suffering, it seems the author could best express the sufferings of Job in poetry.

Most of us who read the book fail to recognize it as poetry because it does not rhyme. But it was characteristic of Hebrew poetry that it had neither rhyme nor a metrical pattern. We are also not certain who the author was either.

Job is presented as a very successful man with great material wealth. He had 7,000 sheep, 3,000 camels, 500 yoke of oxen, 500 female donkeys, and a large household, consisting of seven sons and three daughters. He was also "blameless and upright, and one who feared God and shunned evil" (Job 1:1).

He also had a wonderful and loving family and everything we say it takes to have "a good life." Job offered sacrifices to the Lord indicating he was a very devout religious man and was concerned for his children. It is said that Job "was blameless and up right; he feared God and shunned evil."

Suddenly Satan enters the scene. Satan tells God that Job would remain righteous as long as it was profitable for him to do so and God was making it profitable by blessings him with so much. To refute Satan's charge, God permitted a test where Job's children and possessions would be taken away from him. Catastrophic events destroyed all his possessions and his children. Job refuses to be critical.

We are told that he "shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in worship" (1:20). He said, "The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised."

## Great Old Testament People

Probably not many of us today could stand such a shock of losing all we have in this world including our own flesh and blood children. [Would we praise God?](#) Satan did not give up.

He said, **"Touch his bone and his flesh, and he will surely curse You to Your face!"** (Job 2:4). To prove Job's integrity God allows Satan to afflict Job with painful boils from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head. Job sat in the midst of ashes and scraped his sores with a piece of pottery. His wife asked him. **"Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die!"**(Job 2:9). His wife is very angry with God, not unusual with some.

The book questions the reasons for suffering, especially the suffering of people who love God. Job wrestles with the age-old question of **"Why does God allow bad things to happen to good people?"** **How can one reconcile the sufferings of the godly with the love of God?"** Does suffering contradict God's love?

The Sadducees of Jesus time believed that for one to be poor or in bad health was a sign of sin and that God was punishing them. If a man served God he would receive earthly rewards. Even today there are those who hold to certain aspects of this theory. Job's three friends insisted that he was suffering punishment for his sins. Job insists that he has done nothing seriously wrong.

He was not being self-righteous in denying sin in his life. Job's sufferings were severe. He knew he was innocent of sin, yet, he suffered. **Why?** Job's chief agony was not so much his accumulated losses and sufferings, not even his being misunderstood by his friends, but that God hid His face from him and gave him no answers to his misery.

Three friends of long standing come to help but are shocked at his physical condition. While they were sympathetic and felt he must have sinned to bring on all his misery they really lost confidence in Job and begin to accuse him of sin. The debate goes on for some time with three cycles of discussion between Job and his friends.

They reason he must have sinned, but feel he will not admit it. While Job contends he is innocent, he feels that for some unknown reason, the innocent suffer. Even if God has been unfair and unjust there will be a final vindication.

Elihu next appears as a young man **"with all the answers."** Often young men seem to feel they know the answers, where men of more mature years remain baffled. Essentially his reasoning was the same as the three friends. I would seem that he was only adding insult to injury.

Finally God speak to Job in a series of questions in **chapters 38 and 39**. They serve the purpose of restoring a stronger faith in Job. Job is given an examination. In this examination he is asked a number of difficult questions which made Job realize how little he really knew about God; His plans, purposes and ways.

This examination made Job see that his faith had really been buried in his own self-concern, and he needed some way to rise up and get a glimpse outside himself. After further examination concerning the hippopotamus and crocodile, Job was completely humbled before God.

He made a marvelous confession in **42:1-6**. **"Then Job replied to the Lord: "I know that you can do all things; no plan of yours can be thwarted. You asked, Who is this that obscures my counsel without knowledge?' Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know. You said, 'Listen now, and I will speak; I will question you, and you shall answer me.' My ears**



## Great Old Testament People

had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes.”

Job came to realize that God has a great overall plan for all humanity, and that Job was only a small part of God’s total plan. God had not forgotten Job. He was very much aware of him. God keeps every individual in mind constantly is seen when he asked Satan, “Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil” (Job 1:8).

Job as well as those of us who live today, cannot expect God to change his overall plan to suit our personal desires. When we are confronted with suffering we must live and walk by faith. Job admits he does not know he can’t always expect an answer for everything. The whole problem of suffering must dissolve into a faith that God is, and that He cares, and that He has a plan which includes each of us.

When we get into the motives of God, questioning them, then we are getting into deep water that is way over our heads. If you notice closely God never did give Job an answer to his question of why he suffered. There are certain things that God does not choose to reveal to us. We must learn to be satisfied with what God has revealed and trust him in those things which he has not revealed. (See Romans 8:28.)

In the end Job is restored to his former estate and is commended by God, while the friends are rebuked for their unsatisfactory consolation of a suffering man. He died at the age of 140 years. Job is a model of spiritual integrity – a person who held fast to his faith, without understanding the reason behind his suffering.

## Isaiah, A Man of Great Courage

We know very little about the personal life of Isaiah the prophet. He is referred to as one of the Major Prophets of the Bible. This is mainly because his book is composed of 66 chapters, one of the longest books in the Bible. But when we look at his life, writings and preaching he has to be one of the greatest prophets to have lived.

He was probably born in Jerusalem the son of Amoz (not Amos) who is thought to have been related to the royal family. He lived in Jerusalem and prophesied in the days of four kings: Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah. He was married to a woman described as “the prophetess” (Isaiah 8:3).

This may imply that she had the gift of prophecy too. They had two sons. There is no record of his death. Tradition says he was sawn asunder with a wooden saw during the reign of Manasseh. Some think that Hebrews 11:37 refers to the fate of Isaiah.

Isaiah was called in a vision at the Temple (Isaiah 6). When the Lord asked, “Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?” it is said that Isaiah responded “Here am I. Send me!” His prophetic labors extended over a period of about 60 years. His book is quoted 80 times in the New Testament showing fulfillment of his prophecies. He is called by name 21 times in the New Testament.

He was also a historian (2 Chronicles 26:22) and a statesman-adviser to kings. His writings illustrate each of these. Truly he was one of the great characters of the Bible.

## Great Old Testament People

To fully appreciate Isaiah and his book one must understand the moral decay that Judah (**Southern Kingdom**) had fallen into. Following the death of Jehoshaphat, Judah entered into a period of moral decline. Jehoram, son of Jehoshaphat married a daughter of Ahab and Jezebel.

She was as bad as her mother and exerted a great influence for evil in Judah. During the reign of Ahaz the southern Kingdom sank even lower. However, the next king, Hezekiah raised the moral standards of the nation greatly. He was aided in this by the prophet Isaiah.

This is the setting from which we view Isaiah and his work of preaching. This great prophet was God's spokesman to denounce the sins of that day. The priests merely taught rites to be performed while the prophets taught spiritual and moral principles.

Thus, Jehovah's voice to his people was through the prophet Isaiah who proclaimed God's words of warning of what would happen to them for their revolting against God. To read this book is to realize that this great spokesman was intensely devoted to the task God gave him to perform. Someone has said that Isaiah is to the Old Testament what Paul is to the New Testament.

After Isaiah was called God told him that most of his work would be a ministry of judgment against the people. Even though he would speak the truth, the people would reject his words (**6:10**). Jesus used these words of Isaiah's calling as a prediction of the rejection of His own message by many of the people who listened to Him when he lived on earth. (**See Matthew 13:14-15.**)

Isaiah's ministry extended from about 740 B.C, until 701 B.C. His years of preaching doom and the punishment that would come did not turn the nation of Judah from its headlong rush toward destruction. But Isaiah faithfully preached the message God gave him until the very end. It was not an easy task that God assigned Isaiah. Isaiah's courage and bravery is to be admired.

In Deuteronomy, chapter eighteen, we are told that the test of a true prophet is the coming to pass by what he wrote about future events. [What about Isaiah's prophecies? Did his prophecies come to pass?](#) It is an interesting study to look at the prophecies uttered by Isaiah, which were fulfilled in detail.

Some came to pass during his life time.

1. Judah (**Ahaz**) would be delivered from Syria and Israel (**7:4-7, 16**).
2. Assyria would invade Judah (**8:7-8**).
3. Jerusalem would be delivered from the Assyrian army (**37:5-7**).
4. Hezekiah's life extended 15 years (**38:4-5**).

Some predictions were fulfilled after Isaiah's death.

1. Babylonian captivity (**39:5-7**)
2. Desolation of Babylon (**13:20-22**).
3. Cyrus named to be God's "shepherd" (**44:28, 45:1, 4**).
4. Liberation of captives (**45:13**).
5. Rebuilding of Jerusalem (**44:28; 45:1, 4**).
6. Israel's restoration (**27:12-13**).

Many of his prophecies were Messianic.

1. Preparatory work of John the Baptist (**40:3-5, Matt. 3:3**).
2. Jesus would be born of a virgin (**7:14, see also Matt. 1:23**).
3. Scenes of Christ's ministry (**9:1-2, see Matt. 4:15, 16**).

## Great Old Testament People

4. Deity and eternity of throne (9:6-7).
5. Sufferings (53:5).
6. Would die with the wicked (53:9).
7. Make his grave with the rich (53:9).
8. Bear our griefs (53:4, Matthew 8:16-17).
9. Be as a lamb led to the slaughter (53:7-8, Acts 8:32-33).
10. Christ's work (61:1, Luke 4:18-19).
11. Christ's kingdom (2:1-4, Acts 2, 1 Timothy 3:15).
12. New name for his followers (62:1-2, Acts 11:26).

For years critics of the Bible said that the book of Isaiah was written many years after the death of Christ because Isaiah was not inspired and could not make such clear predictions about events in the life of Christ. Thus, it had to be written by someone who lived as much as 2 to 3 hundred years after Christ forging Isaiah's name to the book.

The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in the spring of 1947 has completely destroyed this theory. Among the scrolls were two complete copies of the book of Isaiah. This proves the book was written before the time of Christ and copies of the book were being made long before the coming of Christ. The date for the writing of these scrolls has been fixed as much as 200 years before Christ.

The many clear and detailed prophecies made by Isaiah can only be explained by the fact that Isaiah was inspired as he wrote this book. This is the only plausible answer that can account for these fulfilled prophecies uttered 700 years before the actual events took place.

## Jeremiah, the Weeping Prophet

Jeremiah was born in the little city of Anathoth just north of Jerusalem in the territory of Benjamin. It was one of the priestly cities (Joshua 21:18). His father Hilkiah served as a priest. Jeremiah was called to be God's spokesman to the people at an early age of about twenty in the 13<sup>th</sup> year of King Josiah's reign over Judah, about 627 B.C.

He hesitated on the grounds of his youth; but when God said, "Behold, I have put my words into your mouth," God also told Jeremiah, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations (Jeremiah 1:5).

Thus, Jeremiah began his work as a prophet which lasted for 40 years down to the very last days of the nation when the city of Jerusalem was destroyed in 587 B.C. He continued to preach to the close of his life in Egypt.

His work began about 60 years after the death of Isaiah in Jerusalem in the thirteenth year of Josiah, king of Judah. Under this king Judah attempted its third and last reform. For 40 years Jeremiah was to be God's messenger to Judah. He lived through the reign of the last five kings of Judah. He saw his nation pass from a happy and prosperous condition into a state of iniquity. Finally he saw the invasion of the Babylonians and the destruction of the city.

Jeremiah is known as the "weeping prophet." He has been called the most miserable prophet, the most pessimistic priest and the most unpopular preacher that the world has known. He was very unpopular with the people. At one point he is certain that his people would "put me to death" (26:15).

## Great Old Testament People

Yet, Jeremiah is one of the most noble and sterling characters to be found in the scriptures. He has been labeled, "the greatest of the great prophets of Israel." Some say that Moses and Paul of Tarsus are the only men who can stand beside Jeremiah.

God gave Jeremiah a two-sided commission. "I have set you this day over the kingdoms, to root out and to pull down, to destroy and to throw down, to build and to plant" (1:10). This commission was both negative and positive, destructive and constructive. He preached doom but predicts restoration. In addition to diagnosing the sickness, he also prescribed a remedy.

Jeremiah lived during one of the most vital and tragic periods in the history of Israel. Because of the negative nature of Jeremiah's ministry, he was destined from the very beginning to be a prophet of doom.

He was even forbidden to marry so he could devote himself fully to the task of preaching God's judgment (Jeremiah 16:1-13). A prophet of doom cannot be a happy man. All of Jeremiah's life was wrapped up in the knowledge that God was about to bring an end to the holy city and cast off His people.

Jeremiah is often called "the weeping prophet" because he wept openly about the sins of his nation (Jeremiah 9:1). He was also depressed at times about the futility of his message. As the years passed and his words of judgment went unheeded, he lamented this unfortunate state: "O Lord, You induced me, and I was persuaded; You are stronger than I, and have prevailed. I am in derision daily; everyone mocks me" (Jeremiah 20:7).

Jeremiah did not weep and lament because he had a weak character, nor did he proclaim evil because he had a dark and gloomy personality. He cried out because of his love for his people and his God. This characteristic of the prophet is actually a tribute to his sensitivity and deep concern.

Jeremiah's laments remind us of the weeping of the Savior in Matthew 23:37. "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing!"

He indicts his people on two counts. "My people have committed two evils; they have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns, which can hold no water" (2:13). The sum and substance of this proclamation is clear. They had left God and had sought for a more exciting place to drink from.

The sin of Judah is quite plain. They had courted idolatry openly while clinging to a kind of legal observance of the Law. God rejected their service by saying, "The burnt offerings are not acceptable nor the sacrifices sweet unto me" (6:20). Also, he said, you "have forsaken Me and burned incense unto other gods" (1:16).

We are also aware that Jeremiah wrote the book of Lamentations. As the title suggests this book expresses lament, grief, sorrow and anguish. It can rightly be called the masterpiece of anguish of all the literature of the world.

It is actually a group of funeral hymns written shortly after the fall of Jerusalem when the people were carried away into Babylonian captivity.

## Great Old Testament People

One is impressed with the fact that these poems were written by an eye-witness, by one who stood in the midst of the ruins of the city and who saw the overthrow of the city by the Babylonians. The scene was so fresh that it had lost none of its ugliness and horror in his mind.

During the latter part of the reign of Zedekiah the last king, Jeremiah was put into confinement. Later he is placed in prison where he predicted the certain return of the Babylonians. Jeremiah's sufferings reached its climax during the siege of Jerusalem. Here he was accused of disloyalty and siding with the Chaldeans. In spite of his denial, he was cast into prison where he would have perished had it not been for the intervention of one of the royal eunuchs (37:12-38:13).

The king seemed to be favorably inclined toward the prophet and consulted with him secretly. In one of these secret meeting Jeremiah obtained a milder imprisonment in the guardhouse which was a part of the royal citadel where he was given "a loaf of bread daily from the baker's street, until all the bread in the city was gone." (37:17-21)

As Jeremiah predicted the nation of God would be eventually punished because of its sin and disobedience to God. Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, took the city in 587. Jerusalem was destroyed and the leading citizens were taken to Babylon. Jeremiah was freed from his prison and given a choice of either going to Babylon or remains with his own people. He chose the latter and went to be with Gedaliah who had been appointed governor of Judea.

However Gedaliah was murdered. After the death of Gedaliah, Jeremiah advised the recognized leaders of the people to remain in the land of Judah. The people refused to heed his advice and went to Egypt and took Jeremiah with them. While in Egypt he still sought to turn the people who had so long rebelled against the Lord to turn back to the Lord.

Thus, he continued his preaching in Egypt (Jeremiah 43-44) warning his people that God would punish them. Their answer was, "As for the word that thou hast spoken unto us in the name of the Lord, we will not hearken unto thee." Their rejection must have been difficult for Jeremiah to hear. However, there was one consolation.

Jeremiah knew and had already prophesied that those in Babylonian captivity would be allowed to return to Jerusalem after seventy years had passed by. "For thus saith the Lord, That after seventy years be accomplished at Babylon I will visit you, and perform my good word toward you, in causing you to return to this place" (Jeremiah 29:10).

It was a sign that God had not completely given up on His people but would make it possible for them to be reunited with Him again. There is no record of what happened to Jeremiah during these last years of his ministry while in Egypt. There is a tradition that the Jews stoned Jeremiah to death.

Another tradition says he escaped from Egypt and went to Babylon where he lived out his life in peace. Throughout the centuries including the Christian age, the voice of Jeremiah still cries out, "The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved" (8:20). Modern man too has hewed out cisterns of their own, thinking it will render them independence of the "fountain of living waters."

## Daniel, A Prophet To Kings

Around 606 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came into control of Palestine. Then after a battle with the Egyptians he returned home.

By Jimmy Eaton

## Great Old Testament People

During his absence Judah rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar under **Jehoiakim**. So troops are sent to Judah in December 598 B.C. Jehoiakim was bound in chains and later killed.

It was during the reign of **Jehoiakim** that **Daniel** and his three friends, *Shadrach, Meshack and Abendnego* were taken captive to Babylon. **Ezekiel** was also taken at this time. His son **Jehoiachin** took control but he and his mother and leading citizens were carried to Babylon along with many of the vessels of the temple and other treasures. He lived in captivity for 37 years.

His brother **Zedekiah** came to the throne and ruled from 597 to 587 B.C. He was a weak ruler. Zedekiah sided with Egypt. Babylon again fought Egypt with the victory going to the Babylonians. In July 587 B.C. the Babylonians breached the walls of Jerusalem. Zedekiah the last king of Judah tried to escape but was captured near Jericho. He was blinded and taken in chains to Babylon where he later died.

A month later the Temple, palace and private houses of Jerusalem were burned. The walls of the city were broken down and 832 of the Jewish inhabitants were carried to Babylon. Many Jews escaped to Egypt. **Jeremiah** was still in Jerusalem at the time but would be forced to go to Egypt. This left only the poor classes of people to remain behind.

In all Nebuchadnezzar was 20 years in taking and destroying Jerusalem. The reason for this delay was that he would have preferred to receive tribute (**taxes**) than to have a destroyed and desolate city which would furnish no income.

Very little is known of the early life of Daniel. It appears he was a member of the royal family which probably means he was born and lived in Jerusalem. It is also obvious that he had good training. He was very young (**around 15 or 16**) when Nebuchadnezzar took him captive to Babylon in the third years of the reign of Jehoiakim.

While Daniel was very young he was determined to serve the true God, even in the midst of an idolatrous nation. Taken captive to this heathen city the future must have looked very gloomy with no future for him. In the midst of this gloom, a message came that he had been selected to be an officer in the king's court. This position of high honor he no doubt gladly accepted.

However, Daniel is faced with a great crisis when he must eat the special diet supplied by the king. To do so would be to violate God's command not to eat certain meats. The decision to choose between glory, honor, prestige, power and God's righteousness has always been a difficult choice. His decision is found in **1:8**. **"But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat, nor with the wine which he drank."**

The sterling character of Daniel stands out again when later during the reign of **Darius** a Persian king; Daniel was faced with another crisis. The king was persuaded to pass a decree that for 30 days no one should present a petition unto any god or man. If he did he was to be cast into a den of lions. But Daniel continued his custom of facing Jerusalem and praying unto God three times a day as if there had never been a decree forbidding him to do this.

An accusation was brought against Daniel. **"Daniel, who is one of the exiles from Judah, pays no attention to you, O king, or to the decree you put in writing. He still prays three times a day."** While the king would liked to have rescued him yet because of his decree Daniel was thrown into the den of lions (**6:12-16**).

## Great Old Testament People

The king went early the next morning and cried, "Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to rescue you from the lions?" The answer came back, "O king, live forever!" What a great lesson! We should not fear man, the world, or Satan. Only "Fear God and keep his commandments" (Ecclesiastes 12:13).

One of the most amazing prophecies in the Old Testament is found in the second chapter of Daniel. About 600 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar dreamed a dream and forgot it. Daniel by the help of God recalled it and gave the interpretation. In the dream there was a great image whose form was terrible.

The head was of fine gold, his breast and arms were of silver, his belly and thighs of brass, his legs of iron, his feet were part iron and part clay. A rock smote the image upon the feet and the entire image was crushed, and vanished. The rock became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.

The interpretation and fulfillment of this prophecy is truly amazing. The image represented four kingdoms. The king who had the dream was the head of gold – thus Babylon was the **first** of these kingdoms. A second kingdom inferior to the first would arise later to take its place. Proud Babylon bowed its head in 536 B.C. to rise no more to power.

The **second** kingdom was to be the Medo-Persian Empire under **Cyrus** and **Darius**. It was built upon the ruins of the old and was represented by the breast and arms of the image. Later a **third** empire would arise. This was the belly and thighs of brass and was the famous Macedonian Empire under **Alexander the Great**. The **last** kingdom was represented by the legs and feet of the image, the Roman Empire.

It was this last kingdom that the stone came into contact with. Daniel said, "In the time of those kings, (Roman Caesars) the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever" (2:44).

This was the kingdom of God, the church. While earthly kingdoms have vanished the kingdom of God still exists today. It will always exist for the "gates of hades will not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18). Rome persecuted Christians, yet, in time they passed from the scene to become ancient history whereas God's people still continue today. The superiority of God over the kingdoms of men has always been evident.

One of the most dramatic events in the life of Daniel is found in Daniel, chapter five. **Belsazzar** the king makes a great feast. Suddenly there appeared the finger of a man's hand and wrote on the wall. All of the wise men were called in but no one could read the writing. Daniel is called and interprets it as a warning of doom to Belshazzar. The warning is fulfilled when Belshazzar is slain. Darius the Mede then took the kingdom.

Another great event is in Chapter three. Nebuchadnezzar erects a golden image 90 feet high in the plain of Dura and requires that his subjects upon penalty of death must worship it. Certain Chaldeans inform the king that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego have not worshipped the golden image.

In rage, the king commands the three of them be cast into a furnace heated seven times hotter than ordinary. The commands are carried out, but in the furnace the king sees the three men plus another person unharmed. Their confidence was in God who would deliver them.

## Great Old Testament People

In close connection with the coming of the kingdom, Daniel pictures the coming of Christ, the Prince of Peace, the King of the kingdom, the Savior of man. Christ is distinctly set forth as the head of a fifth and everlasting kingdom.

He writes, "In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed" (7:13, 14).

Daniel was placed in a high position in Babylon and he used that position to magnify God. Very few men could occupy such a high position and still be loyal to God but Daniel did. Moses, Joshua, Esther and others were also able to accomplish this.

Daniel foretells the future of Zion, the coming of the Messiah and His church, which would bring to mankind the saving gospel leading to eternal life. Daniel's life spanned a very important period of ancient history.

During his lifetime he saw his beloved nation overrun by the Babylonians and carried into Babylonian captivity. He saw this great kingdom fall to the Persians. He served during this time of captivity under many of the kings of Babylon and Persia. He also lived to see a remnant of the Jews return to their native land after seventy years of captivity.

### Ezra A Man Prepared To Restore the Law

Because they had drifted into idolatry God punished the Jews by allowing them to be carried away into Babylonian captivity for 70 years. However, it was 20 years from the beginning of the captivity until the final overthrow of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple took place as the people were carried away in different contingents at different times.

This means that some were not in captivity the full 70 years. Some of the people would have died by the time of Zerubbabel returning to Jerusalem but some would have been young enough that they could remember the temple that Solomon built and the city of Jerusalem

Jeremiah had prophesied they would return from captivity after 70 years. This would be fulfilled as the Lord stirred "up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia" to allow them to return to their homeland. A decree was issued by Cyrus liberating the Jews. Cyrus actually allowed them to carry back many of the things that had been taken from the temple during the Babylonian invasion of Jerusalem.

While liberated no one was forced to return. Those who did not wish to return were to assist those who did return by contributing money to help them make the long journey back to their home land. The first contingent of 50,000 returned under the leadership of Jeshua a priest and Zerubbabel about 525 B.C. This was only a remnant of those who had been carried into captivity. It has been estimated the Jewish people in Babylon now Persia may have numbered at least two million.

We are somewhat surprised that more did not want to return, but obviously most did not want to return. They were satisfied to remain in Persia. They had now established their homes, attaining some degree of prosperity. They did not wish to return to a depopulated country and go through the hardships of rebuilding their cities and homes.



## Great Old Testament People

Many who were young had never lived outside of Persia thus it was difficult for them to appreciate what a privilege it would be to return. They could not understand what it would be like to see the glory of the temple and Jerusalem. We can see this even today.

Most immigrants who come to America have no desire to return to their original homes in Europe and certainly not their children. It is a credit to those Jews who wanted to return and to undertake the work of rebuilding. Those who returned did so with great joy.

In the seventh month the first contingent assembled in Jerusalem and the altar of burnt offerings was erected with the burnt offerings restored. The second month of the second year work started on the temple. Using the old foundation they began to rebuild the temple. The work was accompanied by praise and weeping. It is said, **"The people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping of the people."**

This was a very emotional time for the Jews. The second temple would never have the magnificence of the Solomon's temple. It would be 70 years from the destruction of the first until the completion and dedication of the second. The people of Samaria hearing of the rebuilding of the temple came to Zerubbabel and asked to be permitted to help in the work.

They said, **"For we seek your God, as you do."** But they were rejected. **But why was their offer rejected?** The greater portion of the people of the Northern Kingdom was carried away into Assyrian captivity. A few of the poor were left. These intermarried with the heathen colonist and there resulted a mixed race with a mixed religion of idol worship associated with the worship of the true God. Judah had learned their lesson about idolatry and its consequences, so they very wisely refused the help of the Samaritans.

This resulted in opposition by the Samaritans. Thus the work was suspended for two years. Two of the Minor Prophets, Haggai and Zechariah did much to encourage the resumption of work on the temple and finally in the sixth year of the reign of Darius the temple was completed.

As we come to the end of **chapter 6** we find there is a gap of 57 years until the beginning of chapter 7. Zerubbabel and Jeshua have now passed away and there was no one to take their place. At this critical moment Ezra rose to meet the need for a strong leader of the people. Aartaxeres, the Persian king was very friendly toward the Jews. He authorized Ezra to go to Jerusalem.

There were 1,754 males in this second contingent who made the four-month journey around 458 B.C. Ezra was well qualified. He was a descendant of Aaron through Eleazar. He was a skilled scribe and teacher with extensive training in the Books of the Law (**Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy**).

After his return to Jerusalem, he apparently did a lot of work on the Hebrew Bible of that time. ). He is supposed to have decided the O.T. cannon having restored, corrected, and editing the entire volume. If he did then it would have been by the inspiration and direction of the Holy Spirit. He was also a priest and it is believed by some that he is the one who instituted the synagogue while back in Babylon.

He refers to himself in his own book as a **"skilled scribe" (7:6, 12)**, whose task was to copy, interpret and transmit the books of the law. He himself tells us that he, **"had prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments."** (7:10)

## Great Old Testament People

Ezra arrived in Jerusalem in the fifth month in the seventh year of the reign of Artaxerces. He left on the first day of the first month on his journey from Babylon and on the first day of the fifth month he came to Jerusalem "according to the good hand of his God upon him." He carried a special letter that Artaxerces had given him which authorized him to rule over the people once he arrived. He could also "set magistrates and judges" to judge the people.

It is interesting that Artaxerces said that he was to teach the laws of God to the people. Artaxerces must have been impressed by the laws of God, but had he been converted to the truth that there is but one God? This is not likely. Artaxerces also sent gifts for the temple. The people were encouraged to send free will offerings to help in the restoration of the temple.

Ezra said, "Blessed be the Lord God of our fathers, who has put such a thing as this in the king's heart, to beautify the House of God which is in Jerusalem." Ezra paused at the river Ahava for a fast and prayed that God would help them on their way of Jerusalem. He writes, "And the hand of our God was upon us, and He delivered us from the hand of the enemy and from ambush along the road."

When he arrived in Jerusalem, Ezra discovered that many of the Hebrew men had married foreign wives from the surrounding nations (9:1, 2). After a period of fasting and prayer (9:3, 15), he insisted that these men divorce their wives (10:1, 17). He feared that intermarriage with pagans would lead to the worship of pagan gods among the restored community of Judah.

It was intermarriage with pagans in previous years that had led to their turning away from God to serve idols. Ezra did not want them repeat their old mistakes. It was important that they remain faithful to God. Ezra also led his country to give attention to the reading of the Law.

Several priests helped Ezra read the Law, translating and interpreting it so the people would have a clear understand in their new language of Aramaic. The reading went on for seven days as the people focused on God's commands – thus a reformation began.

This was not the first time the people had the Law read to them. In Joshua 8:33 while standing in front of Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal Joshua read "all the words of the law, the blessings and the cursings, according to all that is written in the Book of the Law." This was not long after they had entered the Promised Land. They needed to be reminded of God's law as they now are moving into a land filled with paganism.

Thus Joshua renews their covenant with God by requiring everyone to hear God's Law. In much later years the temple had fallen into bad condition. During the reign of Josiah, one of the few good kings, he ordered it to be repaired. While work was underway a copy of the "Book of the Law" was found (evidently misplaced for years).

Can you imagine what a terrible spiritual condition they were in without God's law? Upon hearing it read to him Josiah tore his clothes. He said, "For great is the wrath of the Lord that is poured out on us, because our fathers have not kept the word of the Lord to do what is written in this book".

Thus he then required the people to gather together to hear the reading of the Law. It is amazing how quickly people can forget God's Word. Even the disrepair of the Temple shows great disrespect on the part of the priests.

## Great Old Testament People

We need to realize that it will only take one generation failing to teach God's word for the church to go into apostasy. The work of restoring New Testament Christianity is an unending work that must be in constant progress. We need men today like Ezra who are determined to preserve the teachings of the Lord. Every new generation needs to realize the importance of preserving God's Law.

### Ruth, A Woman Of Deep Love And Dedication

The events of the little book of Ruth occurred during the period of the Judges. It is a beautiful story of providence in the life of one family, which would have a great effect on a Moabite woman who will play a part in the genealogy of David and finally Jesus.

Some think of this as a love story but it is really more than a love story. It is a story about devotion, dedication and loyalty. Ruth is not the only Gentile who played a part in the lineage of Jesus, as we know that Tamar and Rahab the harlot made their intrusion into the genealogy of David and the Lord.

Rainfall was never plentiful or adequate for the basic crops of barley and wheat in Bethlehem. Elimelech and Naomi with their two sons Mahlon and Chilion fled from Judah into the land of Moab. The country was named for the son of Lot whose birth was the result of drunkenness and the incestuous relation of Lot with one of his daughters. It was in Moab that Balaam was hired to curse Israel during their pilgrimage to Canaan ([Numbers 22:1-8](#)).

David once found refuge there while fleeing from Saul ([1 Samuel 22:3-4](#)). There was no specific condemnation in the Law for their sons' marriages, although orthodox Jews would have frowned on it since the Moabites worshiped Chemosh a pagan god ([Numbers 26:29](#)).

Living in Moab the sons probably had no other choice but to marry Moabite women. We assume that Elimelech; Naomi and their sons retained their loyalty to God although they were not able to carry out their sacrificial duties living in a pagan land. It is plain they left because of a famine. Survival was their motive for moving.

After living there for several years Elimelech and both sons die. Naomi learns that the famine in Bethlehem had ended. With family ties there, she decides to return to her native home. The two daughters-in-law were obviously deeply attached to their mother-in-law and were determined to follow Naomi to Bethlehem. Naomi did not consider this as wise.

Their desire to follow her to Bethlehem is a tribute to Naomi and the influence she had over her daughters-in-law. Naomi insists that they remain in Moab. This was for two reasons. **First** they would not likely find husbands in Bethlehem being foreign women from a pagan background. Also it is difficult to move into a new and strange culture where you have never lived before.

They wept aloud but after their emotions of grief had subsided, Orpha yields to her mother-in-law's dissuasive admonition moving regretfully and tearfully away. She may have been afraid, perhaps, that if she did return with Naomi she and Ruth would be just too much of a burden to Naomi. Naomi herself had nothing to sustain them with.

It is said that "[Ruth clave to her mother-in-law.](#)" No reasoning or dissuasive admonitions from Naomi would let her part from her. [Verses 16 - 17](#) are esteemed one of the most touching passages in all of literature.

## Great Old Testament People

"Entreat me not to leave you, or to turn back from following after you. For wherever you go, I will go; and wherever you lodge, I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God. Where you die, I will die, and there will I be buried. The Lord do so to me, and more also, if anything but death parts you and me" (NKJV).

Ruth in effect renounces all she leaves behind in Moab and voluntarily chooses to go to Judah and there begins an entirely new life with her mother-in-law. There are both religious and cultural overtones in her words. They serve as a testimony both to her deceased husband and mother-in-law. She solemnly affirms her desire to be loyal to Naomi and entrusts herself to the care of God.

The return of Naomi to Bethlehem caused quite a stir. Naomi and Elimelech with their two sons had left healthy but now Naomi's very appearance bore testimony to her hardships and sorrow. She tells them, "Call me not Naomi, call me Mara: for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me."

This has led some Jewish scholars to say God punished the family for leaving Bethlehem to go into Moab. [If true why was Naomi spared?](#) There is more to the story than this. Circumstances brought about the men's deaths but God used this tragedy to bring about good.

Of necessity Ruth had to find work to support herself and her mother-in-law. By chance she sought out a field where the harvesting of barley was taking place which happened to belong to Boaz, a relative of Elimelech. Probably because she dressed differently than Hebrew women he asks who she was and learns she had come with Naomi from Moab.

He kindly gave her permission not only to glean ears in his field and even among the sheaves and also to satisfy her hunger and thirst with the same food and drink of his reapers. When she returned to her mother-in-law with a plentiful gleaning, and told of Boaz's kindness she learns Boaz was a relative. She continued to glean in his field.

Boaz directed the reapers to make intentional provision for her by dropping in her way grain from their bundles. She remains and gleaned with his maidens throughout the barley and wheat harvest.

Naomi is aware that Boaz is attracted to Ruth. She devises a plan whereby they could be married. Ruth is to wash and anoint herself, put on attractive clothes other than what she had worked in while gleaning. She is to wait until he is asleep on the threshing floor then lay down at his feet. Ruth follows her instructions waiting until Boaz was asleep. She goes and uncovers his feet and lies down at his feet. About midnight Boaz awoke and was frightened to discover a woman lying at his feet.

He said, "Who art thou?" She answers, "I am Ruth, your maidservant, take your maidservant under your wing, for you are a near kinsman." This event seems strange to us today. What she had done was to remind Boaz of his duty as a near kinsman. When someone was forced to sell their property on account of poverty or some other cause it was the duty of the nearest kinsman to redeem it that it might remain in the family.

Also there was an old custom that if an Israelite who had been married died without children, it was the duty of his next of kin to marry the widow. By begetting a son through the sister-in-law, the child would be named after the deceased brother. The name would not become extinct in Israel. In time the son became legal heir of the land. Land was considered a sacred gift from God thus families guarded it faithfully.

## Great Old Testament People

Boaz praises her that as a young widow she had not sought to win the affections of a young man but had turned trustfully to an older man, that he might find a successor or become the successor himself. He advises her that there is one who nearer kin than he was. He would talk with this kinsman about the situation.

Boaz saw nothing wrong in the fact that Ruth had come to him, and regarded her request to marry her as a redeemer as perfectly natural and right. He was ready to carry out her wish as soon as circumstances would permit.

He promises, "And now, my daughter, do not fear. I will do for you all that you request, for all the people of my town know that you are a virtuous woman. Now it is true that I am your near kinsman; however, there is a kinsman nearer than I. Stay this night, and in the morning it shall be that if he will perform the duty of a near kinsman for you—good; let him do it. But if he does not want to perform the duty for you, then I will perform the duty for you as the Lord lives!"

He tells her to remain at his feet until the morning. It should not be known that a Woman had come to the threshing-floor. It would have injured the reputation not only of Ruth, but also Boaz himself. Before leaving early in the morning when no one would recognize her he had her to bring her shawl in which he measured six measures of barley to take home. Naomi is anxious to hear what happened.

She tells Ruth, "Sit still, my daughter, until you know how the matter will turn out; for the man will not rest until he has concluded the matter this day." Boaz goes to the city gate and waits for the kinsman. He takes the kinsman aside before 10 elders and explains the need for the property to be redeemed. The man agrees. Boaz explains if he does buy back the land he must also marry Ruth.

The kinsman refused saying it was not possible for him to do this. To legalize the matter a sandal is removed and given to the other person. Ruth would now become the wife of Boaz. The marriage was greatly approved by the people.

A son is born to Ruth. The women of the city congratulated Naomi that the continuance of her family and property was now assured. Naomi soon becomes the child's nurse. The name Obed was given to the boy. He would become the grandfather of David.

## Esther, A Woman Of Great Courage

She was born in Persia and was of a family that chose to remain in Persia instead of returning to Jerusalem. She lived at Shushan, the capital city of Persia. She had been adopted by a man named Mordecai. It is thought that he probably held some office in the palace. Esther's original name was Hadassah, which means "myrtle." Her Persian name Esther is akin to the word "star."

The name of God is not used in the book that bears her name but His presence can be felt and seen throughout because of the obvious providence of God as he spares the lives of his people.

The events described in connection with her life begin with the third year (1:3) during the reign of Ahasuerus. It is believed the events surrounding her took place a little over 50 years after the first contingent of Jews left for Palestine or 33 years after the completion of the second Temple in Jerusalem. It would fit somewhere between the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> chapters of Ezra.

## Great Old Testament People

While the book of Ezra focuses on the temple in Jerusalem, the book of Esther focuses on events that were going on in Persia involving the Jews who did not return to their native land. The king is the famous king who in history was known as Xerxes. His kingdom was very extensive, extending from India to the Red Sea and bounded on the North by the Euxine Sea and on the South by Ethiopia.

History indicates he was a fickle and capricious king who was extravagant in his habits. The extravagance and luxury of this king can be seen in the first chapter in the description we have of a great feast he made to the people. Luxury was characteristic of Eastern monarchs, especially the Persians. In these feasts the king's wealth, grandeur and power were put on display that he might receive praise and flattery from his royal visitors.

During his reign the Persian Empire was in a state of decline. He lost two major wars with the Greeks. It was about two years after this second defeat that Esther became queen. He was assassinated in his palace

While the king's feast was going on the queen Vashti, had a feast for the women. In the East women never mingled with the men in public. The wine flowed freely so that on the seventh day the king, being under the influence of wine decided to bring Vashti before the men that he might show off her beauty to the drunken revelers.

He probably only wanted to bring her before the crowd unveiled, so that he could boast of her beauty. The refusal of Vashti to obey the king gives us an insight into her character. Her name Vashti meant "beautiful." She was correctly named. For her to appear before a vast company of boisterous and half intoxicated men would have disgraced her before all of Persia.

Had the king really loved her he would not have made such a demand. Her humility is evidenced by her refusal to make such an appearance. Her courage was equal to her modesty in that she resisted a royal command knowing that it could bring serious reprisals. Her virtue and honor were at stake and she was not about to sacrifice these.

In chapter two we become acquainted with the great hero of this story – Mordecai. He was the son of Jair, a Benjamite, son of Kish. He was the great grandson of king Jehoiachin who, with many of the Jews was taken to Babylon 120 years before in the first deportation of Jews to Babylon. Being an older man he had adopted Esther his cousin who was the daughter of Mordecai's uncle when her mother and father died.

Hearing that queen Vashti had been expelled as queen he brought Esther to Hegai, keeper of the woman that she might be trained to be a queen. It was not known that she was a Jew. After twelve months of training and preparing she is brought before Ahasuerus and he was very pleased with her and selected her to be the next queen.

Afterwards Mordecai became aware of a plot to have the king killed. The information was passed on to Esther who informed the king which placed Mordecai in a favored spot.

Haman, a very evil person had been promoted to a high position by the king. All "bowed and revered" him except Mordecai. His refusal to bow down before Haman was not that he refused to show respect for a civil authority but the acts of prostration was looked upon as an act of worship and it was not proper to worship anyone except God.

## Great Old Testament People

Haman became very angry and not only wanted to destroy Mordecai but the entire Jewish race in Persia. It is almost inconceivable that a man's hatred could be so great that he would plot for the extinction (**genocide**) of an entire race. History records many such people. He even offered to pay the king to have all the Jews executed.

Letters were sent by the king to the different provinces to kill all Jews who he accused as violating the laws of the king. Mordecai rent his clothes, put on sackcloth and cried bitterly. Esther receives news of this decree. He sent word for her to go before the king and request that the Jews not to be harmed. She says that she is not allowed to approach the king unless he extends the golden scepter toward her and she touches it.

Also she has not been invited to come before him. He informs her that she is the only hope that if she does nothing even her father's house will be destroyed. She is the only hope. Mordecai says who knows whether **"thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"** She requests they fast for her and **"neither eat nor drink three days."**

She will go before the king and **"if I perish, I perish."** What a great decision Esther had to make when Mordecai appealed to her. It took a great amount of courage. It could mean her death. But she was resigned to do what she could.

**"Esther put on her royal apparel and stood in the inner court of the king's house."** When the king saw Esther she obtained favor in his sight and he extended the golden scepter to her. She requested the king and Haman to come to a banquet she had prepared for them. They came and she extended a special invitation for a second banquet.

Haman was elated but resented Mordecai who would not stand up when he left the palace. His friends suggested he have a gallows made fifty cubits high and then ask the king that Mordecai be hanged. Haman comes to the court the next day. The king finds out that it was Mordecai who discovered the plot to kill the king and had not been rewarded for doing this.

So the king asked Haman, **"What shall be done unto the man whom the king delighteth to honor?"** Haman vainly thought the king was thinking of him and suggested the person be given royal apparel and ride the horse of the king with a royal crown on his head. This really backfired. Haman could only go home and sulk and mourn. His ego was shattered.

The king and Haman came to special banquet Esther had prepared. When the king asked for her request she speaks of the death threat to her people. The king asked who had instigated this. She advises him it was Haman. Haman falls on the bed of the queen to plead that his life be spared.

The king seeing this is enraged and said, **"will he force the queen also before me in the house?"** The result was that Haman was hanged on the **"gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai."** Haman was reaping what he had sown. His sins had caught up with him.

Esther again approached the king in behalf of her people. The king authorizes Mordecai to command the Jews in the kingdom to gather together and to **"stand for their life, to destroy, to slay, and to cause to perish all the power of the people"** that would assault them. While the king's decree could not be changed he made it possible for the Jews to defend themselves. The result that not many tried to do anything against the Jews.

## Great Old Testament People

Mordecai along with all the Jews rejoiced over their favored situation. They could defend and destroy those who would attempt to kill them. In Shushan they slew five hundred men. The ten sons of Haman were also slain. Later three hundred more at Shushan were killed. Total number killed in the kingdom came to 75,000.

From the book of Esther we learn the origin of the Jewish feast of Purim (9:26-28). This feast is perpetually kept to this day by the Jews to commemorate the Jews' preservation and the destruction of Haman. The hand of God's providence is seen throughout the book. The deposing of Vashti, the appointment of Esther to become the queen, Haman's plans backfiring, Esther's plea to the king, Mordecai being honored, all point clearly to God's providence.

Perhaps the most significant statement in the book is Mordecai's "And who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" Preserving the Jews while in bondage was essential to their return to Jerusalem, to reestablish themselves in Palestine, rebuild the temple and the walls of Jerusalem and eventually to prepare for the coming of the Messiah, Jesus Christ.