

Journey of Faith



In Short:

- Salvation history recounts humanity's relationship with God, starting with Abraham.
- Old Testament figures and the Israelites are our ancestors in faith.
- Jesus fulfills the covenant God made with the Israelites in the Old Testament.



Abraham, Our Father in Faith

Genesis 15–21

After Adam and Eve, humanity wandered far from God. As generations passed, God slipped from the conscious thought of the people. Only a few recognized God's presence in their lives.

Among those few was Abram. God told him, "Go forth from your land, your relatives, and from your father's house to a land that I will show you" (Genesis 12:1). Leaving their home, Abram and his wife, Sarai, traveled into the unknown.

God led them to a land called Canaan. Here, God gave them new names: *Abraham*, meaning "father of many nations," and *Sarah*, meaning "princess of the people." God promised Abraham that his children and his children's children would outnumber the stars in the sky and the sands of the earth.

A new life had begun for Abraham and Sarah, one they hadn't planned for themselves. In Canaan, they prospered and grew old but remained childless. Without losing faith, Abraham and Sarah wondered if God would be true to his promise.

When they were quite old, Sarah brought forth their first and only son. Sarah's reaction at the idea of giving birth at her age was to laugh. Sarah named their son *Isaac*, which means "God's laugh." Their faith, trust in God's plan, and patience led at last to their greatest joy.

The People of God

Your journey of faith began the moment you became aware of God's presence in your life. Whether it was a dramatic conversion experience or a gradual awakening, this awareness marked a starting point in your relationship with God. But there was never a time when you were outside of God's awareness—you were fashioned in God's thought and brought to life by God's love. His love for you is nothing new.

In the Old Testament, we find a narrative of God's relationship with his people—the awakening of their awareness and accounts of their turning toward God, turning away from God, and returning to God. You may recognize your own story in these ancient ones.

- What Old Testament stories or figures are you already familiar with?



- In what way is God leading you to new life?



Israel in a Foreign Land

Genesis 37—45

Isaac and Rebekah's son, Jacob, the younger of twins, cheated his brother, Esau, out of their father's inheritance (see Genesis 25:19—27:44). God renamed Jacob Israel. He went on to father the leaders of the twelve tribes of Israel.

Joseph, the second-youngest of Israel's twelve sons, dreamed that his brothers bowed before him like sheaves of wheat. When he shared the dream, his brothers became angry, and some plotted to kill him. Two brothers intervened, and Joseph was sold to merchants heading for Egypt. The other brothers told their father that Joseph was dead.

The merchants sold Joseph to the Pharaoh of Egypt. After Joseph interpreted Pharaoh's dreams, the powerful ruler made Joseph second in command. Through more dreams, Joseph knew to prepare Egypt for a coming famine. During the famine, Joseph's brothers traveled to Egypt to find food. Not recognizing Joseph, his brothers bowed before him, begging for food.

When they returned to Egypt with their youngest brother, Joseph revealed himself. He forgave them and told them God had used their weakness to save them all. God had sent him to Egypt ahead of them to keep them safe during the famine. Joseph sent for his father, and the whole family of Israel settled in Egypt, where they lived well for many years.

- *When have you acted selfishly, as Jacob and Joseph's brothers did?*
- *How did God's generous love make something good come out of your wrongdoing?*



Moses: Sent to Free God's People

Exodus 2—4

As generations passed, a later Pharaoh sensed danger in the growing number of Israelites in Egypt. He enslaved them and ordered the death of every newborn Israelite male.

One Israelite mother placed her infant son in a basket and hid him in the reeds of the river. Finding the baby, Pharaoh's daughter adopted him and called him Moses. His biological mother contrived to become the baby's nurse and set about teaching him his heritage.

When Moses was grown, he killed an Egyptian who was beating an Israelite. Pharaoh heard about it and wanted Moses put to death, but Moses ran away and lived as a shepherd for many years.

One day, Moses saw a bush that burned but wasn't consumed by the fire. When he approached, a voice called out:

"Do not come near! Remove your sandals from your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground. I am the God of your father, ...the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob."

Exodus 3:5–6

God gave Moses a mission: return to Egypt and tell Pharaoh to free his people. Moses made excuses. He wasn't great at speaking. But God showed him how to perform miracles and told him to bring along his brother, Aaron, who was a good speaker. Finally, Moses agreed.

- *What excuses have you used to resist God's call to follow him?*



From Slavery to Freedom

Exodus, Deuteronomy

When Moses and Aaron delivered God's command to free the Israelites, Pharaoh laughed, and a struggle between divine and earthly power began. Egypt was struck by a series of disastrous plagues. The Pharaoh still refused to free the Israelites.

Then came the final plague. Moses had the Israelites prepare their homes by marking their doorways with lamb's blood as a sign that a family of God lived there. Seeing the blood, the angel of death would pass over their homes. At midnight, death took the firstborn of every Egyptian family. Pharaoh finally understood the power of God and agreed to let the Israelites go. (This event is celebrated in the Jewish feast of **Passover**.)

After centuries of slavery, the Israelites were free. They were grateful at first but soon started to complain. God gave Moses the *Ten Commandments* to guide them in right living. They wandered forty years in the wilderness as God changed their hearts and taught them to be faithful to him.

When they reached the Promised Land, their **exodus** from Egypt was over and their relationship with God had again become vital to their worship and identity.

From Judges to Kings

1 and 2 Samuel

As the years passed, the people strayed again from following God. He sent judges to rule them, but the people wanted a king. God warned them that a king wouldn't be as lenient or generous as he was.

The first king, Saul, grew jealous of the popularity of the young shepherd, David, who was well-known for killing the Philistine warrior Goliath with a sling and stones.

David became king and led Israel to prosperity. But David encountered tragedies in his personal life: his sons betrayed him, he committed adultery, and he caused the death of his lover's husband. David asked for God's forgiveness. God forgave him and

promised that David's kingdom would never end and that one of his descendants "shall be a son to me" (2 Samuel 7:14). Christians believe this refers to Jesus, who was born into the line of David.

- How did God "write straight with the crooked lines" of David and others he chose to lead his people?



Split Kingdom, Prophets, and Exile

1 and 2 Kings—1 and 2 Maccabees

David's son Solomon built the Temple in Jerusalem but eventually turned away from God. After his death, the kingdom split: Israel to the north and Judah to the south. These kingdoms often warred against each other and continued to worship idols. Many prophets warned them to reform their lives and return to living the covenant made with God. The warnings of the prophets often fell on deaf ears.

The prophets' main role wasn't to predict the future but to "speak for God" on the issues of the day. The prophet *Isaiah*, however, is believed to have foretold the coming of a messiah who would bring salvation to the Israelites and people (see Isaiah 7:14, 9:6–7, 11:1–10, 49:6).

- Why didn't the people listen to the prophets? When has someone told you a truth you didn't want to hear?



Just as prophets had warned, the Babylonians conquered Israel, destroyed the Temple, and took many into exile. A small number called a "remnant" remained faithful (Zephaniah 3:12–13). They looked with hope to reconciliation with God and a return of the glory of King David's reign.

The Babylonian exile ended when the Persians conquered the Babylonians and allowed the Israelites to return to their homeland and begin rebuilding the Temple. From 63 BC, the Roman Empire extended its control over the region.

Place these people and events on the salvation history timeline in chronological order:

Abraham

Babylonian exile

David

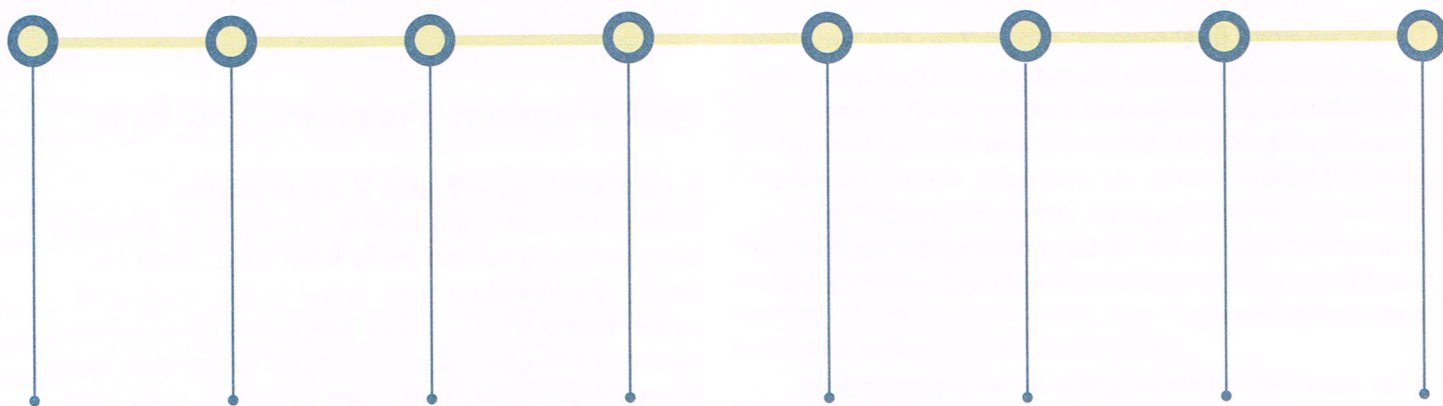
exodus from Egypt

Isaiah

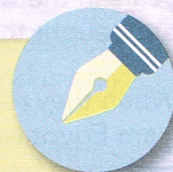
Joseph

Moses

Ten Commandments.



- In what ways does your personal journey of faith mirror the path taken by the people named in this lesson?
- What have you learned about God and following God from these stories?



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