

Journey of Faith



In Short:



- The Old and New Testaments record key events of our salvation history.
- The New Testament continues the Old Testament.
- We share a covenant with our ancestors in faith.

The People of God

Your journey toward faith began the moment you became aware of God's presence in your life. Whether a powerful conversion experience or a gradual awakening, this awareness marked a starting point, the beginning of your active relationship with God.

This wasn't the start of God's relationship with you, though. There has never been 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. Your relationship is nothing new to God.

Your relationship with and experience of God is unique to you. But the experience of awakening to God and discovering his presence is common to all believers. The Old Testament tells the story of God's relationship with his people, the awakening of their awareness, and their flights from or journeys toward God. In these ancient stories, you may recognize your own. Seeking God and meaning in your life are journeys as old as humankind.

- Was your journey to God smooth or rough?
- Are there any obstacles in your way going forward?



Beginning With Abraham

Genesis chapters 15—21

"The word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: Do not fear, Abram! I am your shield, I will make your reward very great."

Genesis 15:1

After Adam and Eve, humanity wandered from God. After a while, only a few people who recognized God's presence in their lives were left. Among these few was a man called Abram.

God asked Abram to take his wife, Sarai, and go to a distant land. Leaving everything familiar behind and putting all their faith in God, they were led many miles to a land called Canaan. Here, God gave Abram and Sarai new names: Abraham, which means "father of many nations," and Sarah, which means "princess of the people." When God named someone, it meant that this person now belonged to God. Then God promised Abraham that his descendants would outnumber the stars in the sky and the sands of the earth. God's promise that Abraham would be the father of many nations is known as God's **covenant** (sacred promise) with Abraham or the old covenant.

Abraham and Sarah prospered in their new land and grew old, but they were childless. Still they trusted in God's promise of parenthood. When Sarah was very old, she finally gave birth to Isaac, whose name means "God's laugh."

The faith of Abraham and Sarah, their complete trust in God's plan, and the patience with which they waited for God's promise to be fulfilled led to their greatest joy, the miracle of Isaac.

- Have you ever had to leave something familiar (perhaps a school or neighborhood) and trust that God would be with you as you faced the unfamiliar?



Israel in a Foreign Land

Genesis chapters 37—45

"Jacob settled in the land where his father had sojourned, the land of Canaan."

Genesis 37:1

Isaac's son, Jacob, became the father of twelve sons. His second-youngest son, Joseph, was sold into slavery by his jealous brothers.

Joseph became a slave to Pharaoh in Egypt, but when Joseph helped Pharaoh interpret his troublesome dreams, Pharaoh rewarded Joseph by making him second in command.

Joseph's talent with dream interpretation helped him prepare Egypt for a terrible famine. During the famine, Joseph's brothers came to Egypt in search of food. His brothers bowed down before him when they realized that Joseph had saved Egypt (and his family) from starvation.

Joseph kissed his brothers and forgave them for their wicked act. Eventually the entire family of Israel lived in Egypt for many years with the blessing of Pharaoh.

- Like Joseph's brothers, have you ever learned something important from a mistake you made?



Moses as Leader

Exodus chapters 2—4

"A long time passed, during which the king of Egypt died. The Israelites groaned under their bondage and cried out....God heard their moaning and God was mindful of his covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob."

Exodus 2:23–25

For a while, things went well for the Israelites in Egypt. As generations passed, the people experienced the kindness of God.

But a new Pharaoh felt threatened by the growing numbers of Israelite people and ordered soldiers to kill every newborn Israelite boy. One ingenious mother placed her baby son in a basket and hid him in the reeds by the river. Pharaoh's daughter found the baby and, though she knew he was an Israelite, disobeyed her father's command and adopted the baby, Moses. Moses' birth mother cleverly took a job as the baby's nurse so she could secretly teach him his heritage and his faith.

When Moses was grown, he left Egypt and lived as a simple shepherd. One day, while leading his sheep, Moses was struck by the sight of a burning bush. As he approached the bush, the voice of God commanded him to return to Egypt and tell Pharaoh to free his people.

Moses was frightened and wanted to refuse.

But God wouldn't let Moses off the hook. He gave Moses the power to perform miracles and allowed him to take his brother, Aaron, who was a good speaker.

- Has there ever been a time when you argued with God because you felt God asked too much of you?



Slavery to Freedom

Exodus, Deuteronomy

Moses' mission proved to be very difficult. When Moses and Aaron delivered God's command, Pharaoh laughed. So Egypt was struck by a series of disasters. But each time a plague would end, Pharaoh would break his promise to free God's people.

Then came the final and most terrible sign of all.

Moses told the Israelites to prepare their homes by smearing the blood of a lamb on their doorways. This would be a sign that they were a family of God, and the angel of death would pass them by. Death took the firstborn of every Egyptian family at midnight. But the angel of death passed over the homes of the Israelite families. The feast of the Passover is still an important Jewish holy day.

When at last Pharaoh understood the true power of God, he agreed to let the people go. But even then, Pharaoh had a change of heart and sent his army after the Israelites. Moses helped the Israelites escape by parting the Red Sea, through the power of God, allowing the Israelites to cross and preventing Pharaoh's guards from following them. After centuries of slavery, the Israelites were free.

Though God would always grant their requests, the Israelites quickly forgot how much God had done for them, and they started worshiping idols. They would only turn back to God when threatened with death. The forty years they wandered in the wilderness is a story of human promises made and broken—and a story of God's faithfulness in the face of people's unfaithfulness. When they reached the Promised Land at last, the relationship between God and the Israelites had become a vital part of their worship and their history.

- Do you find yourself turning to God only when you need something?
- Why is it so easy to overlook the things God does for us?



God's People as Community

"I will raise up your offspring after you...and I will establish his kingdom. He it is who shall build a house for my name, and I will establish his royal throne forever. I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me."

2 Samuel 7:12–14

After Moses, God's people began to see their journey as that of a community. God was the head of this community, but when the people continued to be unfaithful, God sent female and male judges to guide them. Through bravery and wisdom, these judges sometimes saved Israel from being conquered.

The people begged God to send them a king, even though God warned them that a king would not be as generous as God. The first king, Saul, grew jealous of the popularity of a young shepherd boy, David, and tried to have him murdered (1 Samuel 19). While David was forced to flee for his life several times, he continued to show mercy to Saul and Saul's descendants.

When David was finally proclaimed king after Saul's death (2 Samuel 2), he led his people to years of prosperity, yet his own life was filled with tragedy. His sons betrayed him, and he selfishly committed the sin of adultery and murder. Unlike Saul, David admitted his sinfulness and asked God for forgiveness. God promised his kingdom would never end and that one of David's descendants "will be a son to me." This promise to David hints at the new covenant that would be fulfilled in Jesus, the Son of God.

Israel in Captivity

David's son, Solomon, turned Israel into a powerful nation and built the first Temple in Jerusalem. But Solomon became too attached to worldly things and began worshiping other gods. He lost touch with the one, true God. As a result of Solomon's unfaithfulness, the kingdom was split in two. Israel became the kingdom in the north and Judah in the south. These two kingdoms often warred against each other, and the people continued to worship false gods.

Many prophets warned the people to reform and return to living the covenant made with God. The warnings of the prophets fell on deaf ears. The kings listened instead to false prophets who told them all was well (2 Chronicles 18:5–34).

In 587 BC, the Babylonians captured Jerusalem, the capital of Judah. A few people remained faithful to God and began to hope for the time when they would be reconciled to God. In exile in Babylon, the Israelites finally began to form the image of themselves as a people held together by God. Several legends of heroism came out of this period, many of them about great women like Esther (Book of Esther) and Susanna (Book of Daniel).

When Cyrus conquered Babylon, God inspired him to let the Israelites return to their land and rebuild their Temple. This period of rebuilding lasted about 200 years. Then the Israelites were conquered by Alexander the Great, and they again came under foreign rule. From 63 BC, the Roman Empire controlled the region and allowed the Temple in Jerusalem to be rebuilt, though on a smaller scale. The Israelites' desire for reconciliation with God once again grew with the appearance of the desert prophet, John the Baptist, who proclaimed the coming of the Messiah, "the one who is coming after me is mightier than I" (Matthew 3:11).

As the new covenant, Jesus fulfills God's promise to Adam and Eve and to Abraham and Sarah. Jesus restores David's kingdom, though in new glory, much different from that anticipated by the Israelites.

For each of the following biblical figures, list what they are best known for and something you can learn from their example.

Look up their stories in the Old Testament for help:

Abraham	Joseph
Moses	David
Cyrus	John the Baptist (New Testament)

Compare your personal faith journey with the faith journey of the Israelites.

When in your life have you been closest to God? Where are you now?



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