

Free online Bible commentary for Exodus 1-6

Introduction: In the book of Genesis we are told how that after the flood, God chose from the descendants of Shem, Noah's son, a man named Abraham from who God planned to make a great nation, his chosen people. From this nation would eventually come the Christ, the Savior of all nations. God promised Abraham the land of Canaan as a home for him and his descendants. He also promised Abraham that the whole world would be blessed through a descendant of his, referring to Christ.

Abraham had a son named Isaac. Isaac became the father of Jacob, also called Israel, who became the father of twelve sons. These sons became the patriarchs of the twelve tribes of the nation of Israel. In the latter part of Genesis we learn how Jacob and his family moved down to Egypt to find food in a time of famine. Joseph, one of Jacob's sons, had preceded the family to Egypt, sold into slavery by his jealous brothers. By God's providence, Joseph rose to second ruler in Egypt in charge of storing and dispensing food. Israel's family enjoyed kind treatment from Pharaoh, king of Egypt, because of Joseph.

At the close of Genesis, both Jacob and Joseph had died. The book of Exodus takes up the story there.

The first five books of the Old Testament, Genesis through Deuteronomy, are referred to by Jews as "The Law." Scholars often refer to these five books as the *Pentateuch*. These books were written by Moses, except for the very last part of Deuteronomy. Guided by the Holy Spirit, Moses had written the book of Genesis from the accounts of others. Still guided by the Spirit, he writes the other four books from his own experience.

"Exodus" means "Going Out," a reference to Israel's departure from Egypt and their journey to the Promised Land of Canaan. Events in Exodus span a time from the death of Jacob, about 1900/1700 BC, to the giving of the law at Sinai, about 1500/1300 BC. The dates are not certain, because we are not sure which of the Pharaohs recorded in Egyptian history are the ones Israel and Moses dealt with.

Covered in Exodus are the growth of Israel's family, their fall into Egyptian slavery, God's call of Moses as deliverer, the contest of God with Pharaoh during the ten plagues, the departure from Egypt and the crossing of the Red Sea, the giving of the law at Mt. Sinai, the construction of the tabernacle or tent of meeting for worship, and the consecration of the first priests.

Notes on Exodus 1-5

1:1 - went to Egypt - because of the famine.

1:2 - Reuben, etc. - There are eleven names here. Ephraim and Manasseh, sons of Joseph, were already in Egypt. Each of them headed a half-tribe, together making up the tribe belonging to Joseph.

1:7 - multiplied greatly - The family of Israel were in Egypt 430 years, time enough to grow into a nation. It is estimated that counting women and children, they numbered two to three million when they left Egypt.

1:11 - Pithom and Rameses - The ruins of these cities have been unearthed by archaeologists.

1:16 - kill him - Killing the males would control the population and cut off the supply of Hebrew warriors, while preserving the women for childbearing as desired and for the use of the Egyptian masters.

The killing would probably have been done by leaving the child exposed outdoors until it died from the elements, starvation, or from predators. Exposure of infants was common among ancient pagans. Our nation is no different. We have killed a million and a half babies in the womb by abortion each year for some time now. Some babies are found discarded in dumpsters and restrooms. Other babies, born abnormal, are simply not fed.

Since babies are helpless, they are easily disposed of when their presence is inconvenient, as it was to the Egyptians and as it often is for selfish people today. It is only a short step from abortion and infanticide to euthanasia and to the elimination of "inferior" and unproductive people as was done in Nazi Germany.

1:20 - God was kind to the midwives because they trusted God and risked their lives to protect the Hebrew male babies.

1:22 - throw [every boy] into the Nile - Pharaoh would not give up but tried a different approach.

2:1 - man of the house of Levi... Levite woman - In chapter 6:20 we learn their names: Amram and Jochebed. In future Levi would be the priestly tribe in Israel. Moses' brother, Aaron, became the first high priest.

2:2 - saw that he was a fine child - God had plans for this child and made the parents see something special in him. For this reason they were more determined than ever not to kill him.

2:3 - could hide him no longer - Probably because he cried louder as he grew, and the sound would alert the Egyptians.

put it among the reeds along the bank of the Nile - So, in one sense, she did what Pharaoh commanded, but she did it to save Moses, not to kill him. Truly at this point Jochebed, by faith, was committing the baby into God's hands - Hebrews 11:23. That is what we must learn to do with our problems, rather than succumb to anxiety, when there is no more we can do ourselves - 1 Peter 5:7.

2:4 - sister stood at a distance - We later learn that she was named Miriam.

2:8 - got the baby's mother - This was a wonderful outcome which only God could have brought about. Now the baby's own mother could care for it without being afraid. God can deliver us from "impossible" situations.

The Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials... - 2 Peter 2:9

No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it. - 1 Corinthians 10:13

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. -Romans 8:28

2:11 - went out to...his own people - Moses must have had continued contact with his parents and the Israelites. He would have learned who he was and what the promises of God were for Israel. The writer of Hebrews comments that Moses chose by faith to throw in his lot with his own people rather than the Egyptians, although he had a future as a prince of Egypt:

By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time. He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward. - Hebrews 11:24-26

saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew - If Moses had not already decided, this incident caused Moses to identify with Israel rather than with Egypt.

2:14 - Who made you a ruler...over us? As a prince, Moses had been trained in leadership. He saw

himself as a deliverer of the Israelites. To his surprise, they did not see him that way. We may have a sense of God's calling on our life, yet not fully understand God's timing.

2:15 - tried to kill Moses - Pharaoh could not allow an Israelite to kill an Egyptian, even if the Israelite was a prince of Egypt.

went to live in Midian - Moses' life abruptly underwent a great change.

2:16 - priest - Someone who officiated in worship. This man, whom we later know as Reuel or Jethro, though he was not an Israelite, did know the true God. Back in Genesis we met another non-Israelite priest, Melchizedek.

came to draw water - Moses meets his future wife at a well where flocks were watered. Isaac's and Jacob's wives were also found at a well.

2:22 - Gershom - similar to the Hebrew meaning "a stranger there" - NIV text note.

2:23 - cry...went up to God - Of course, God had never forgotten his chosen people nor his promise to give them Canaan. God was just waiting for the right time - see Genesis 15:13-16. But the increased suffering of the Israelites got God's attention in a special way.

3:1 - Horeb, the mountain of God - Evidently people considered this mountain a holy place where God could be found. The mountain was also called Sinai.

3:2 - angel of the LORD appeared to him - God was about to use Moses to do something about the suffering of his people.

3:3 - does not burn up - This got Moses' attention so that God could talk to him.

3:4 - God called to him from within the bush - We have already been told that it was an angel who appeared to Moses in the bush. This was not God himself but the angel represented God and spoke in God's place.

3:5 - Do not come any closer - God is holy, and sinful man cannot come near him - compare Exodus 19:10-24; 1 Timothy 6:16.

Take off your sandals - In those days slaves went barefoot, and to take one's sandals off in the presence of a greater person was a symbol of humility and respect.

3:6 - I am the God of...Abraham...Isaac...Jacob - It was important for Moses to know who this was, so that he might connect this visit with the promises of God Moses had been told about. Talking with the Sadducees, who did not believe in resurrection, Jesus argued from this passage. God did not say, "I was the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob," but I am the God of...etc." Therefore they must still be alive after death - Luke 20:37, 38.

hid his face...afraid to look at God - Compare the awe which Jacob and Isaiah felt when they encountered God - Genesis 28:12-17; Isaiah 6:1-5.

3:7 - I have seen the misery - God explains why he is coming to Moses at this time.

3:8 - bring them...into a good and spacious land - It is time to give Israel the land God promised to Abraham.

3:10 - I am sending you to Pharaoh - Moses is 80 years old here. He was 40 when he killed the Egyptian

and fled Egypt. He thought he was ready to be a deliverer at 40 - see Acts 7:23-25, 30. Probably now he thinks he is only qualified to be a shepherd. With this humility God can use him. He could not have used him before.

God has spent 80 years preparing Moses for his great work with Israel, 40 in Egypt and 40 in the desert. Time spent in preparation is not wasted, though we hurried Westerners may think so. Jesus prepared 30 years for 3 years of ministry. One can do more in a short ministry with preparation than in a lifetime without preparation. God does not view time as we do and he is not in a hurry. With God a thousand years are like a day - 2 Peter 3:8.

3:11 - Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh - Moses does not want to go to Egypt, and this is the first of several excuses he offers to God. Moses may be thinking about how he is a wanted man in Egypt since he killed the Egyptian. He may be remembering that he tried once and failed. Or more likely he is saying, "I am no great hero; I am nothing but a desert shepherd."

3:12 - God has all the answer Moses needs: "I will be with you." God always gives us the help we need to obey him - Matthew 28:19,20; Joshua 1:5; Mark 16:15,20; Luke 21:15; Hebrews 2:3,4.

sign to you...you will worship...on this mountain - When Moses gets back to Horeb along with Israel, he will know that it is God who sent him to Egypt and made him successful.

3:13 - Suppose...they ask me, "What is his name?" This is Moses' second excuse. "I don't know how to tell them who sent me."

3:14 - I AM WHO I AM - Jesus, referring back to this passage, said to the Jewish leaders, "Before Abraham was, I am" - John 8:58.

I AM is an appropriate name for the eternal, self-existent one, the ground of all other being. God simply is. He is the eternal first cause behind everything else, and did not spring from anything that existed before him.

3:15 - The LORD - When the word LORD is written capitals in most modern translations, it stands for the Hebrew YHWH, or Yahweh when vowels are added. (This name is rendered "Jehovah" in the King James Version, but Yahweh is probably a better rendering of the Hebrew.) The letters YHWH are called the Tetragrammaton.

Why do many English versions put LORD in place of Yahweh? It goes back to the custom of the Israelites. They considered God's personal name Yahweh too holy to be pronounced by man's sinful lips, and so they substituted the word LORD (adonai in Hebrew).

Yahweh is God's personal name, whereas "God" is just a title telling what he is. Yahweh means the eternal, self-existent One.

3:16 - say to them, "the LORD, the God of your fathers...Abraham, Isaac and Jacob..." - This would remind the Israelites of the promises of God about their nation and their land.

3:22 - ask her neighbor for articles of silver and gold and for clothing - The Israelite slaves would march out of Egypt wearing these things. That looks like robbery at first glance. But this is done by the Israelites at God's command. It is the sentence of God's high court on the Egyptians. It is God's way of exacting a fine from the Egyptians for their abuse and exploitation of the Israelites for so many years.

4:1 - What if they will not believe - This is Moses' third excuse. In response God gives Moses three signs which will show that God's power is with Moses.

4:4 - Reach out...take it by the tail - Moses was afraid of the snake, but he was more afraid of God, so he did what God said.

4:10 - I have never been eloquent - Moses' fourth excuse.

4:11 - Who gave man his mouth? If God made our mouth, he can make us able to speak with we need to.

4:13 - please send someone else - Moses has run out of excuses, but he simply doesn't want to go.

4:14 - The Lord's anger burned - God is telling Moses to do something and Moses keeps resisting.

Aaron can help Moses speak, so Moses has no excuse. (Do we go through a list of mental excuses instead of submitting to what God calls us to do?)

4:16 - He will speak to the people for you - Although we think of a prophet as one who foretells the future, the word really means one who speaks for another. Aaron would be Moses' prophet (mouth) and speak for Moses just as Moses was God's prophet and spoke for God - compare 7:1.

4:21 - I will harden his heart - At first this sounds arbitrary and unfair. How can God hold Pharaoh responsible for his actions and punish him if God himself has hardened Pharaoh's heart? But the overall teaching of the Bible is that God only hardens the hearts of people who have consistently hardened their own hearts and refused the will of God until they are beyond redemption. God has created us with freedom of choice.

Pharaoh often hardened his own heart against God - Exodus 8:15, 32; 9:34. Although God does not want anyone to perish, and never destroys anyone arbitrarily, he does give people up to the delusions they desire if that is their confirmed choice - 2 Thessalonians 2:10-12; Romans 1:24,26,28; Matthew 13:14,15; Jeremiah 18:1-10. God may even make an example of such people to show his power and glory, as he did with Pharaoh - Romans 9:14-23.

4:23 - I will kill your firstborn son - God is fair to Pharaoh, warning him from the beginning what the outcome will be if he refuses to yield to God.

4:24 - The LORD met Moses and was about to kill him - God was angry with Moses for neglecting the command given to Abraham and his descendants to circumcise their children as a sign of their covenant with God. Had Moses neglected circumcision because of Zipporah who was not an Israelite? Her comments during this incident are hard for us to interpret.

Notice that although God had been working with Moses, this problem existed between God and Moses. Servants of God must be as clean as possible of disobedience. We need to search our lives for areas of resistance to God's will and take concrete steps to eliminate them so that they do not affect God's ability to use us.

4:31 - they believed, contrary to what Moses had feared. Miraculous signs are intended to produce faith.

bowed and worshiped - This would change when the people met adversity later in the process of being freed.

5:7 - no longer...supply...straw - Archaeologists have discovered in the ruins of the cities of Pithom and Rameses that the lower courses of brick have straw, but straw is lacking in the upper courses, a remarkable confirmation of the Biblical record.

5:21 - May the LORD...judge you - The people turn on Moses when the process of liberation gets rough.

Pharaoh's action was probably calculated to make this happen.

5:22 - Moses returned to the LORD - Moses did not turn on the people in anger, but turned to God. We will see him doing this again and again during his ministry to Israel as leader. This is characteristic of Moses who is regarded as the meekest (gentlest) man in the Old Testament.

Whether we are leaders or followers, we need to learn from Moses example what to do with our stresses and frustrations. God invites us to cast our anxieties on him - 1 Peter 5:7; Philippians 4:6, 7.

Notice: opposition and reverses do not mean that God is not in our work.

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Survey of Old Testament History

Look at your "World History Time Chart."

On your time charts, dates are given with the designation "B. C." or "A. D." "B. C." means "Before Christ" and is used with dates counting backward from the birth of Christ. "A. D." means "Anno Domini" (Latin for "the year of our Lord") and is used with dates counting forward from the birth of Christ till the present.

This way of counting years did not begin until the middle ages and those who calculated the years did not have completely accurate information. They missed the time from Jesus' birth by about 4 or 5 years. This was discovered centuries later. Rather than change the year on the calendar throughout the whole world, we now adjust our estimate of the actual time of Jesus' birth to 4 or 5 BC. The year 2004 is about 2,000 years after the birth of Christ, but actually 2,008 years. Jesus lived about 33 years but the actual date of his death was about 29 AD.

The date of Adam is shown on your charts as "Over 4,000 BC." Using the Old Testament genealogies, Bishop Ussher calculated Adam's date as 4,004 BC. But because the Israelites often skipped over generations in their genealogies and went from grandfather to grandson or great grandson, and because Hebrew use of numbers was not as exact as ours, the date of Adam may have been much earlier.

Major dates in the Old Testament period are the flood (c. 2500 BC), the call of Abraham (c. 2,000 BC), Moses (c. 1,500 BC), David (c. 1,000 BC) and Malachi, the last prophet (c. 400 BC).

Look at your Old Testament and Jewish History Time Chart.

Creation: God made everything good.

The Fall: Satan, God's enemy, tempted Adam and Eve and mankind fell into sin. Man became mortal and death entered the world. Man's fellowship with God was broken. Man lost his dominion over the creation and it was taken over by Satan. Man became the slave of sin.

The first promise of redemption was given in Genesis 3:15 - The descendant of woman would someday bruise the head of the serpent, Satan. Angels and prophets longed to see into what God was planning for mankind's salvation - I Peter 1:10-12.

God taught Adam's sons, Cain and Abel, how to offer animal sacrifices for forgiveness of sins. But Cain murdered Abel in jealousy.

The Flood: Evil grew in the world and the world became so corrupt that God decided to wash the world with a flood - Genesis 6-9. Righteous Noah and his family were saved in the ark. The earth was repopulated from Noah's three sons, Shem, Ham and Japheth. Some of Noah's descendants tried to build a tower to heaven at Babel and were scattered when God confused their languages - Genesis 11.

The Call of Abraham: One of Shem's descendants was a man named Abram (later called Abraham by God). He lived in Ur of the Chaldees. God called Abraham to leave his country and to go to a country that God would show him - Genesis 12. Abraham would become the father of the chosen nation, Israel. Abraham was not chosen by God because of his race or appearance but because of his faith in God. God did not choose Abraham because God loved Abraham alone, but so that through him God could bless all nations.

God gave Abraham **three great promises:** he would give Abraham a land, he would make a great nation of Abraham, and through Abraham's descendants all nations would be blessed - Genesis 12:1-7. Everything else in Bible history grows out of these three promises. God gave Abraham and his

descendants the promised land of Canaan. God made the nation of Israel and other nations from Abraham. And through Abraham's descendant Jesus Christ the people of all nations have been blessed - Matthew 1:1; 28:19, 20. It is easy to see that one must know the Old Testament in order to really understand the New Testament.

The "Patriarchs": Abraham became the father of Isaac, who became the father of Jacob (also called Israel) who became the father of twelve sons. From these twelve sons came the "twelve tribes of Israel." As Jacob was blessing his sons before his death, he prophesied that "the scepter will not depart from Judah [the tribe from which Jesus was born] until he comes to whom it belongs" [referring to Jesus] - Genesis 49:10.

Egyptian Bondage: Because of a famine, Jacob and his sons were moved to Egypt by one of the sons, Joseph. Eventually King Pharaoh of Egypt made the Israelites slaves.

Moses and the Exodus from Egypt: The Israelite slaves cried out to God to deliver them from their suffering. God raised up Moses to deliver them. After God defeated Pharaoh through great plagues, the Israelites marched out of Egypt and crossed the Red Sea on dry land by the power of God. See the book of Exodus.

The Covenant at Mount Sinai: Moses led the people to Mount Sinai where God gave the people the ten commandments and his other laws and statutes. God made a covenant with Israel as his chosen people based on the laws given. This covenant lasted until God made a new covenant through Christ. We call the covenant at Sinai the "Old Covenant." It established a place of worship (the "tabernacle" or tent of meeting), a priesthood and a system of sacrifices and worship. Moses wrote the first five books of the Old Testament, Genesis through Deuteronomy, sometimes called the "Pentateuch."

Moses led the people to a place near the border of Canaan but Israel failed to enter Canaan because they were afraid and failed to trust God's power. God sentenced them to wander in the wilderness for 40 years. During this time a prophet, Balaam, spoke of Christ who would someday come: "A star will come out of Jacob; a scepter will rise out of Israel..." - Numbers 24:17. Moses himself prophesied of Christ: "The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him." - Deuteronomy 18:15, 18.

The Conquest of Canaan: Joshua succeeded Moses and led Israel to conquer Canaan. He divided the land among the tribes of Israel.

The Period of the Judges: After Joshua's death "another generation grew up, who knew neither the Lord nor what he had done for Israel" - Judges 2:10. The people often forsook God and worshipped idols. As punishment God would let Israel fall into the hands of their enemies. They would cry to God in repentance and God would raise up a judge to deliver them and rule over them. But they reverted to idolatry again and again. During this period of about 400 years the people were led by such judges as Ehud, Deborah, Gideon, Samson, Jephthah and Samuel.

The United Kingdom: In the days of Samuel the people demanded to have a king. Saul was chosen as their first king. Saul became proud and was rejected by God for disobedience. David was chosen to succeed Saul. God promised David that if David's sons would obey God, one of them would always rule on David's throne - 2 Samuel 7; Psalm 89. This was ultimately fulfilled in Jesus, descendant of David, who was born to be king of the Jews - Luke 1:31-33. Some Old Testament prophets refer to the coming Christ as "the branch" that would sprout from the stump of the tree of David's royal family.

The Divided Kingdom: Solomon, David's son, succeeded David. He turned away from God toward idols during his later life and God caused the ten northern tribes to rebel against Solomon's son, Rehoboam. Only Judah and Benjamin remained loyal. From this time the northern tribes were called "Israel" and the two southern tribes were called "Judah." This division of the kingdom happened in about 933 BC. In order to keep the northern tribes from going south to Jerusalem to worship at the annual feasts (and

perhaps returning to Rehoboam's rule), the northern king Jeroboam set up golden calf-idols in the north for his people to worship.

Captivity: The northern kingdom (Israel) slid quickly into idolatry and God sent prophets to warn them of coming punishment if they did not repent. They would not listen, and the Assyrians carried the Israelites into captivity in 721 BC. They were scattered among the nations and were never restored as a nation again. They seemed to have vanished, and so the expression, "the ten lost tribes of Israel." Actually a number of Israelites from the north migrated to the south and were absorbed into Judah, so that the Jews actually contained people from all the 12 tribes.

The southern kingdom of Judah took a little longer to slide into idolatry but eventually became more corrupt than Israel had been. They ignored the prophets sent to warn them. Judah was carried captive to Babylon in three raids, 606, 597 and 586 BC. The beautiful temple of Solomon was destroyed by the Babylonians in 586. Daniel the prophet was carried away to Babylon as a boy in the raid of 606.

In Daniel chapter 2 Daniel interpreted a dream of Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar. He had seen a large statue made of four kinds of metal. It represented four successive world empires, Babylon, Medo-Persia; Greece and Rome. Daniel prophesied that the kingdom of God would be set up during the days of the fourth kingdom or empire, Rome. This was fulfilled when Christ was born during the Roman rule and the church was established.

Restoration: When the Persians overcame Babylon in 536 BC, they allowed the Jews to return to their homeland and to rebuild the temple and Jerusalem. Many Jews remained abroad in various countries and worshipped God in their churches called synagogues. These were known as the Jews of the Dispersion (or "Diaspora"). A Jewess, Esther, became the queen of Persia and saved the Jewish people from destruction at one time.

The restoration of the Jews to their homeland is recorded in Ezra and Nehemiah. Ezra helped restore the worship of God in the temple and taught the people God's law. The people had learned their lesson and never again returned to idolatry. Nehemiah rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem. The prophets Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi were active during this restoration period.

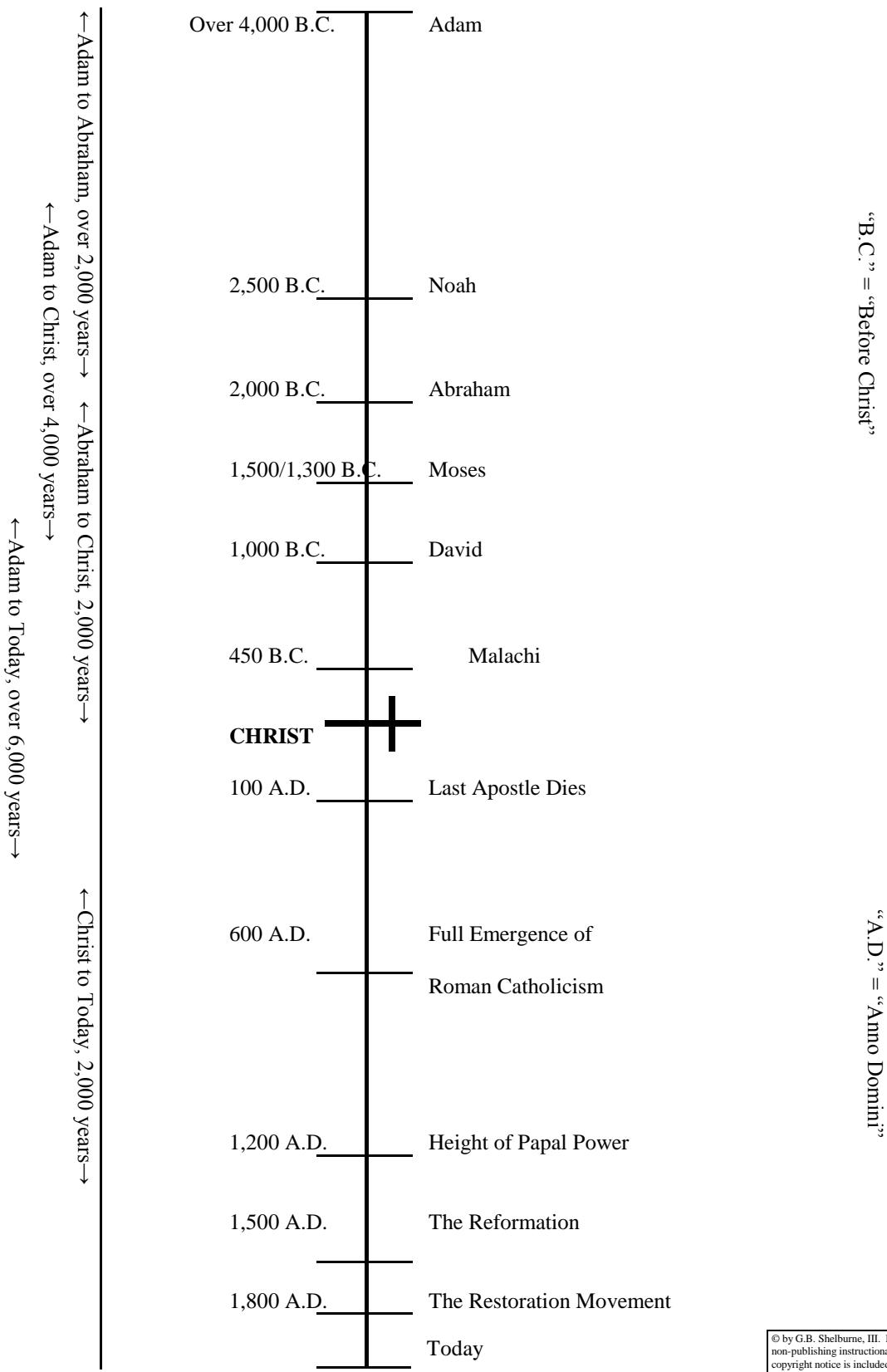
Between the Testaments: The Old Testament records history down to about 450 or 400 BC. We rely on other historical sources to know what happened to the Jews between the close of the Old Testament writings and the coming of Christ.

The Greek empire succeeded Persia in 332 BC. In 167 BC the Jews were freed from Greek domination in the Maccabean revolt. In 63 BC Palestine was conquered by Rome and became part of the Roman Empire. Jesus was born in about 4 BC.

Israel and the Gospel: Most of the Jews rejected Jesus and the gospel. Though the church started out among the Jews, it became more and more a church of Gentiles (non-Jews). Paul writes in Romans chapters 9 through 11 about God's purpose for Israel even though Israel has largely rejected Christ. Paul says that because of their unbelief, the Jews have been broken like branches from the tree of God's grace. Gentile branches have been grafted in. But the Jews can also be grafted back into the tree of God's grace if they will believe in Christ. Romans 11 seems to indicate that the time will come when many Jews will turn to Christ.

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World History Time Chart

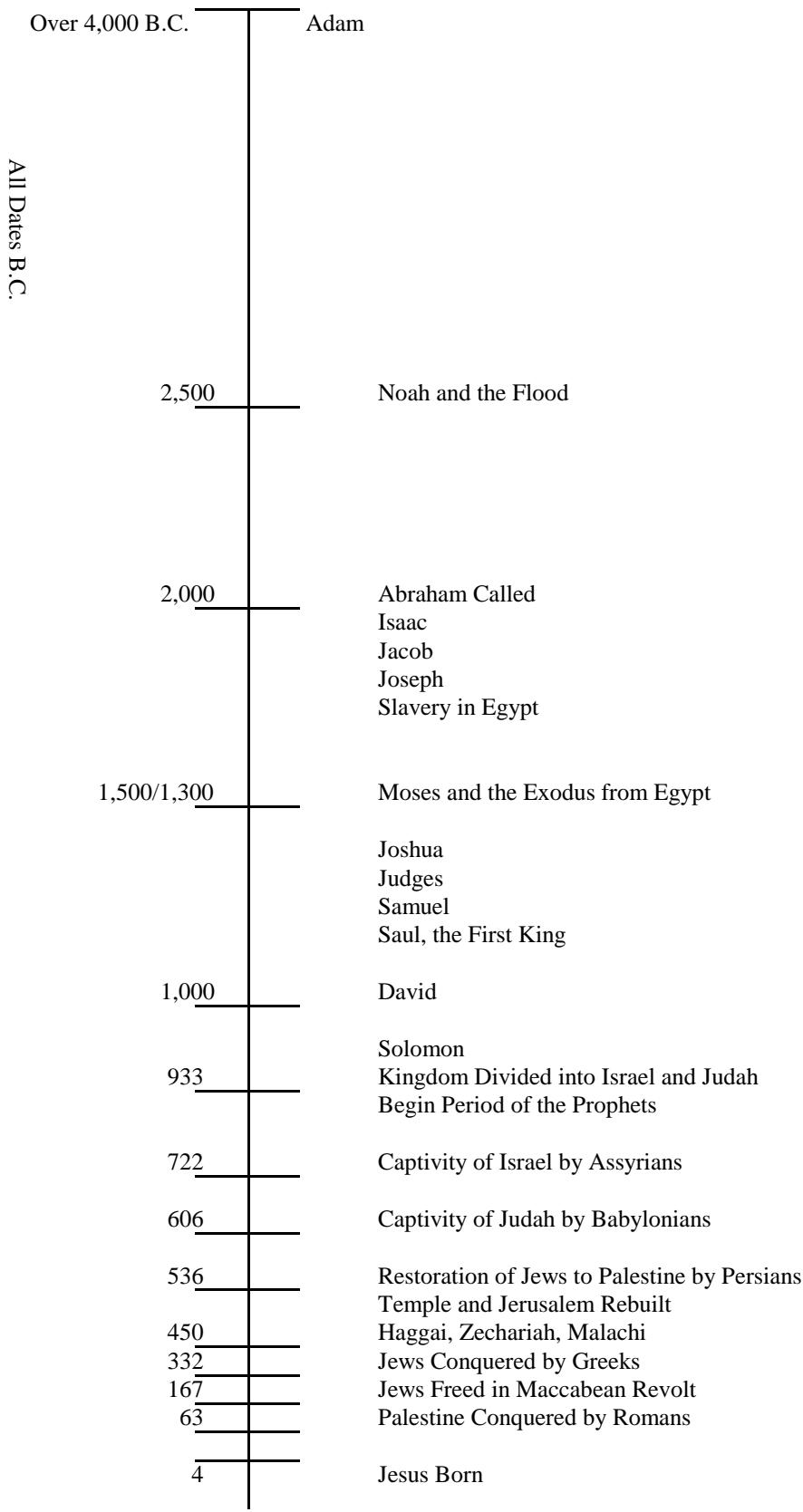


“B.C.” = “Before Christ”

“A.D.” = “Anno Domini”

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Old Testament and Jewish History Time Chart



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