

EXPLORING *the* STORY of ISRAEL

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Welcome!

Families use many ways to remember their best stories. Maybe your family has photo albums and old diaries or letters. Maybe you have a trunk full of family keepsakes in the attic, a lace tablecloth your great-grandmother made, or a sausage recipe your grandfather passed on.

You have probably heard the same family stories told again and again at Christmas or on birthdays and anniversaries. The stories stay alive in the telling. They are remembered and handed down by each new generation.

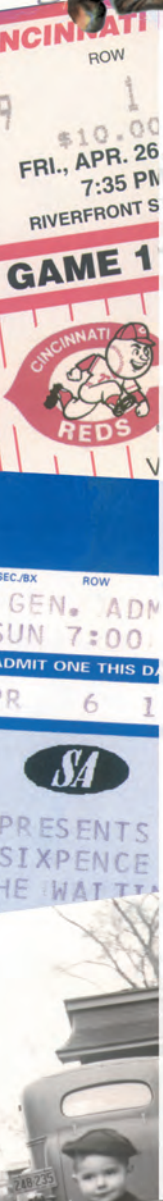
You may be a story keeper already. Perhaps you are collecting stories of your own life. Perhaps you save your baby book in your room, or help your mom frame your school pictures and hang them in the hallway, or protect a scrapbook or a diary under lock and key, or store a ratty teddy bear or worn-out Cabbage Patch doll on the top shelf of the closet, or own a sealed box of stuff you haven't looked at for over a year. This could be *your* way of keeping your story—of remembering.

When Jesus was about your age, he knew the stories of his Jewish family. The traditions and tales he inherited were told and then written in scrolls called the Jewish Scriptures. Today we call these scriptures the Old Testament.

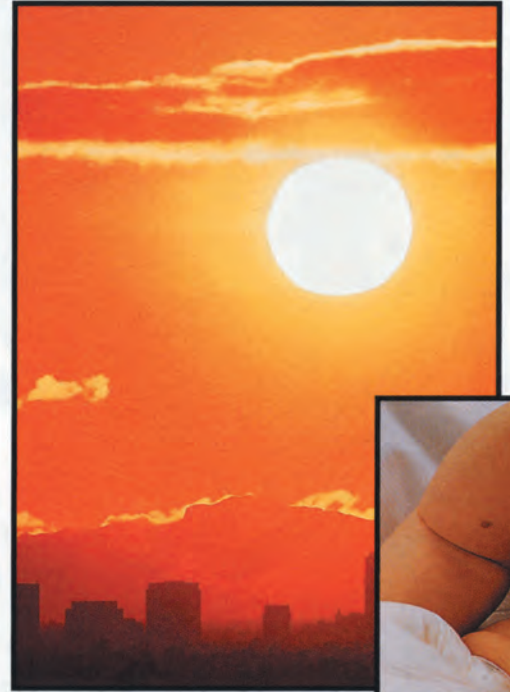
In this course you learn how the Old Testament is put together and you study some of the great stories Jesus knew. You explore the following people and events:

- Adam and Eve, God's Creation, and the response of the first human beings to God's invitation to friendship
- Abraham and Sarah and their family—the first family of faith
- Moses, who led the Israelites to freedom
- David, the great king of Israel
- the Old Testament prophets, who called the people of God to faith-filled action

As you study the great and ancient stories of the Jewish people, you can also discover the deep roots of the story of Jesus and of those who claim to follow him, Christians. And in doing that you can discover your own story as well.



For Sure!



How can we know who God is? How can we know what God really and truly cares about?

If we look at a newborn baby or a sunset or a mountain, we might guess about the Creator of all this wonder. Many people in ancient times did just this. They thought that many gods created many wonders. They believed in a god of water, a god who ruled the seas, a god who governed the skies, and on and on.

It seems that the only way we can know who God is for sure, is to learn about God from God. That is, we can learn the truth about God only through God's self-revelation. The word *revelation* means "a showing" or "a telling." The Bible shows and tells us this: God seeks a relationship with us, and God is on our side. We can be sure of these two huge truths because God has revealed them to us.

The Bible is made up of two sets of writings that are all inspired by God and all tell about God. These two main sections of the Bible are the Old Testament and the New Testament. The books of the Old Testament



contain many kinds of writings: family stories, national histories, prayers, warnings, dreams and visions, and wise sayings. These writings reveal the truth about God and the people of Israel before Jesus was born. They help us understand who God is, and also that we are invited to live as a people God calls and cares for. The New Testament continues the story of Israel as it unfolds after the birth of Jesus.

Key Understandings

Basic Facts About the Bible

- The Bible is divided into two main sections: the Old Testament and the New Testament.
- The Old Testament makes up the largest part of the Bible, and the New Testament makes up the smallest.
- The Old Testament tells the story of God's relationship with the Jewish people up to the time of Jesus.
- The Old Testament also helps us understand the New Testament.
- The New Testament tells the story of Jesus and his followers.



Bible Facts

- The Old Testament was written over the course of about a thousand years; the New Testament was written over the course of about a hundred years.
- For hundreds of years, the people of Israel passed on their family stories by word of mouth. This is called their oral, or spoken, tradition.
- The word *scripture* means "writings." Sometimes the Bible is called holy Scriptures or holy writings.
- There were at least four major authors of the Old Testament. God's inspiration guided their writing.
- The first words of the Old Testament were written on parchment made of goatskin or sheepskin. The parchment was rolled into scrolls. Many of the scrolls were stored in clay jars. These jars kept out the moisture and strong sunlight that would have faded and spoiled the parchment.

THE STORY OF ISRAEL

OLD TESTAMENT

Genesis
Exodus
Leviticus
Numbers
Deuteronomy
Joshua
Judges
Ruth
1 Samuel
2 Samuel
1 Kings
2 Kings
1 Chronicles
2 Chronicles
Ezra
Nehemiah
Tobit
Judith
Esther
1 Maccabees
2 Maccabees

WISDOM BOOKS

Job
Psalms
Proverbs

Ecclesiastes
Song of Songs
Wisdom
Sirach
(or Ecclesiasticus)

PROPHETIC BOOKS

Isaiah
Jeremiah
Lamentations
Baruch
Ezekiel
Daniel
Hosea
Joel
Amos
Obadiah
Jonah
Micah
Nahum
Habakkuk
Zephaniah
Haggai
Zechariah
Malachi

NEW TESTAMENT

GOSPELS

Matthew
Mark
Luke
John

Acts of the Apostles

Romans

1 Corinthians

2 Corinthians

Galatians

Ephesians

Philippians

Colossians

1 Thessalonians

2 Thessalonians

1 Timothy

2 Timothy

Titus

Philemon

Hebrews

James

1 Peter

2 Peter

1 John

2 John

3 John

Jude

Revelation

Original Blessing

THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL TOLD A STORY ABOUT THEIR GOD AS LORD OF all the universe. They believed that the God of Israel created everything and found it all very good.

The people believed that in the best possible world, each and every creature came forth from God's hand and received God's blessing. Each was commanded to grow and spread and fill the earth.

This Creation story was Israel's very own family faith story. The people could easily remember this story, for it followed a seven-day pattern.

God's Creation began on the first day, in darkness and confusion. God called light into being, and there was light. Then each day dawned more beautiful than the one before it and was filled with amazing creatures.

On the sixth day, human beings were made in God's image and likeness. They were God's finishing touch. God gave them the task of caring for the earth and keeping it new and fresh.

And then God stopped. The seventh day was set aside to be a day of joy and peace. It was a holy day, a day for all Creation to rest and be with God.



A New Song



This song is from the Book of Psalms of the Old Testament. It tells of creation, and praises the wonderful order of God's creation and our place in it.

*¹ O God, our God,
How glorious is your name over all the earth!
Your glory is praised in the heavens.*

*² Out of the mouths of children and babes
you have fashioned praise . . .*

.

*³ When I look at your heavens, the work of
your hands,
the moon and the stars which you created—*

*⁴ who are we that you should be mindful of us,
that you should care for us?*

*⁵ You have made us a little less than the gods
and crowned us with glory and honor.*

*⁶ You have given us rule over the works of
your hands,
putting all things under our feet:*

*⁷ all sheep and oxen,
yes, and the beasts of the field;*

*⁸ the birds of the air, the fishes of the sea,
and whatever swims the paths of the seas.*

*⁹ God, our God,
how glorious is your name over all the earth!*

*(Psalm 8, from Nancy Schreck and Maureen Leach,
Psalms Anew, page 23)*

Key Understandings

The First Creation Story

- The God of Israel is the Creator of the world.
- God finds all of creation good.
- Human beings are made in God's image and likeness.
- Human beings are responsible for caring for the world.
- Human beings are given one day in seven to rest in God.



Our Place

The Hebrew people developed a second Creation story, which helped them explain how sin and loss came into the world. This story can be found in Genesis, chapters 2 to 3. In it God created human beings a little lower than the gods. God then created a perfect garden of delights. But a tempter moved through the garden, in the form of a serpent. And the serpent challenged the first human beings, Adam and Eve, to think about their place in God's created world. Adam and Eve had to choose between the tempter and God.

Adam and Eve chose the tempter and lost their friendship with God, their Creator. They also lost their harmony with the created world. The Old Testament records a long human struggle with sin and loss and our need for a redeemer. Christians believe that Jesus is the obedient Son of God who cancels the disobedience of Adam. Jesus is the redeemer who overcomes sin and brings us back to the full life with God that was lost in the Garden of Eden.

Paradise

In the beginning a stream of water flowed across the empty land. There God knelt down and formed Adam from the clay of the ground.

Then God planted a garden called Eden. It was beautiful to see. It was filled with all good foods to eat. A single tree of wisdom grew in the center of the garden. This tree gave knowledge of what was good and what was evil, and it was for God alone. Everything else was for Adam's delight.

God wanted more for Adam. So God created birds to fill the air and fishes to fill the sea and animals to roam the earth. Adam named all the animals.

Even with all that God had given him, Adam was still lonely. So God created Eve to be his partner and life companion.



Temptation

One day a clever serpent drew near to Eve. The serpent convinced Eve to try the fruit from the one tree that was God's alone. Eve saw how good this fruit would be to eat, and thought how wonderful it would be to be wise. The serpent said: "You do not have to obey God. Why, you can even replace God! Think of that! You can know evil and good, just as God does."

Loss

So Eve ate some of the fruit, and she gave some to Adam. At that moment they knew they had disobeyed God. They were so ashamed they hid in the deepest part of the garden, far, far away from God.

At sundown, when the evening breezes stirred, God called out to Adam and asked him why he was hiding. Adam answered that Eve had made him eat the fruit of the tree of wisdom. Then God asked Eve why she had done that. Eve replied that the serpent had tricked her into eating the fruit.

Adam and Eve had turned the beauty and the order of Creation upside down. They did not want to be "a little less than the gods." They tried to be smarter and greater than God, rather than grateful children of God. Their choice meant that they lost the joy of God's familiar presence.

The garden was no longer a place of ease and rest. Adam and Eve and all human beings after them would have to work hard to harvest the goods of the earth. They would experience pain as they bore and raised their children. They would have to struggle to overcome pride and selfishness. They had lost the Paradise God had given them.

Key Understandings

The Second Creation Story

- God gives us the freedom to choose.
- We find our happiness in faithful obedience to God.
- Sin is the human failure to be obedient servants of God.