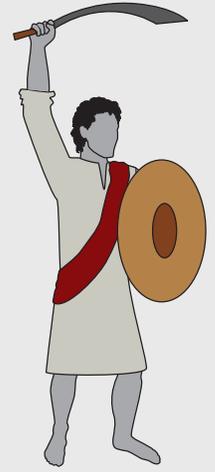


Lesson 6: The Rise and Fall of Israel

Introduction: Israel in the Promised Land

By the time Israel arrived at the Promised Land, Moses had died. A new leader, Joshua, led them on a military campaign of conquest. The Bible records the history of these times in a book named after their leader: *Joshua*. Like the people during the times of Noah and the flood, the nations in Canaan were completely depraved. They were a cancer of sin that could potentially infect the whole world. In His mercy, God used Israel to destroy these nations. Israel was to be a holy nation and a beacon of hope that would bring mankind to God.



Cycles of Sin and Repentance

While Israel had many victories and conquered much of the Promised Land, there were times when they permitted these wicked nations to live. Instead of cleansing the region from sin, they became ensnared and sometimes gave in to temptation. Many Israelites betrayed their faith in God and worshipped false idols.

A cycle of events followed: First, Israel sinned by worshipping false idols. Next, as punishment, various nations were sent to oppress them. Later, Israel was reminded how bad sin was and repented. Finally, God sent great heroes called *Judges* to bring the Israelite people back to God. (These mighty men and women did incredible deeds written down in a book in the bible called Judges.) This part of Israel's history ended with a gloomy observation. After hundreds of years of this cycle, the nation was aimless and without a clear direction. The Bible says:

*In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes.*¹



¹Judges 21:25

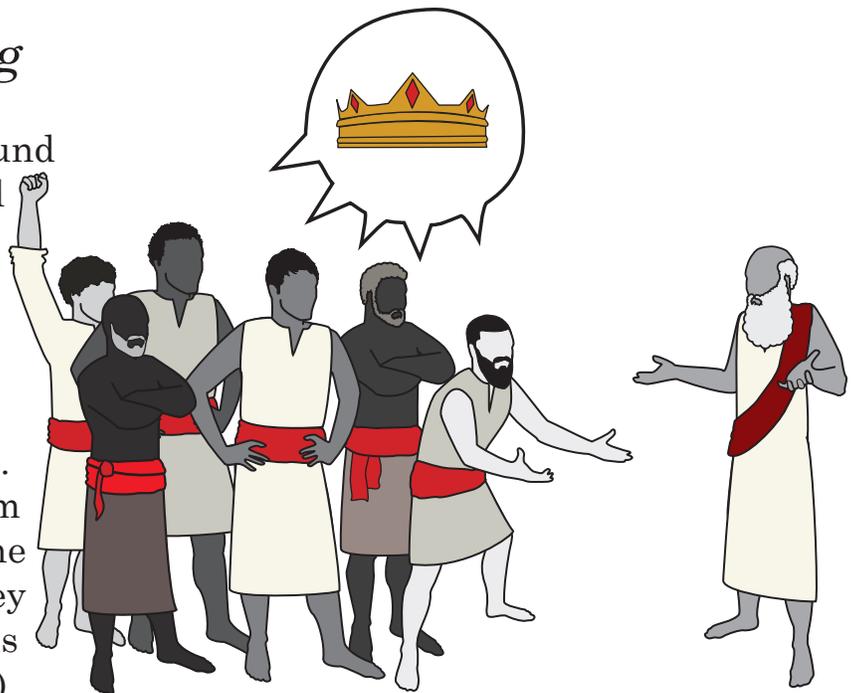
Discussion Questions:

- What are some false idols we might be tempted to worship today? (Hint: They may not always be statues.)
- What lessons can we learn from this cycle of sin and deliverance?

Israel Demands a King

Looking at the nations around them, Israel saw that they had kings. Israel was different. God was their King and the Judges were His representatives. Israel grew tired of serving God and wanted a human king.² God warned them by using prophets. (The prophets were men to whom God spoke directly. They told the people what He had said. They often were given miraculous power to prove their authority.)

God warned that if Israel had a king, he may not honor God and would lead the people into sin. However, the people would not listen. So God permitted them to have a king.³ We can see that God still gave people the gift of choice. Even when people made bad choices, God desired a relationship based on choice and motivated by love.



A Golden Age

The first king was named Saul. He was chosen directly by God and ordained by the prophet Samuel. When Saul chose a pattern of disobeying God, Samuel was sent to declare this message:

But now your kingdom shall not continue. The Lord has sought for Himself a man after His own heart, and the Lord has commanded him to be commander over His people, because you have not kept what the Lord commanded you.⁴

The second king was named David. He was indeed a man after God's own heart. He honored God and led the people in God's holy way. For this, the Lord blessed him. His family became the royal family. David's family remained in power until the Israelites sinned so badly that God sent them into captivity hundreds of years later. Jesus was a descendant of this great king. This family connection demonstrated that Jesus was worthy to be the Savior and Redeemer of the world.

² 1 Samuel 8:5; See *Christian Basics: Give Us a King!*
A Warning About Idolizing the World

³ 1 Samuel 8:11-22

⁴ 1 Samuel 13:14; See *Christian Basics: How Can We Be Men and Women "After God's Own Heart?"*

Discussion Questions:

- Why do you think God continues to give the gift of choice instead of creating us as "worship robots"?

David and his son Solomon led Israel into great prosperity. David brought peace to the region and inspired the people to honor and worship God. Solomon built a great temple for Israel to come and worship God. Surrounding nations sent tribute to pay their respects. The kingdom grew in strength, riches, and glory. Israel seemed to be the holy nation and inspiration for a worldwide revival to return to God.

The Fall of Israel

The devil is always lurking, tempting, and corrupting mankind. He often tempted the people of Israel to sin as well. Although David and Solomon were some of Israel's greatest kings, they still struggled with sin. They were guilty of adultery, murder, idolatry, and arrogance. By the end of Solomon's reign, Israel was tired of the royal family. They felt like the nation was working too hard for the royal family's profit. In a dramatic showdown the majority of the Israelites split away and began a new nation, keeping the name *Israel*. (All of the kings of this rebellious nation were wicked. Eventually, they were carried away into slavery.)

The faithful remaining people became the kingdom of *Judah*. They gradually began to be called *Jews*. In Judah, there was a mixture of righteous and wicked kings; however, more were wicked. Judah fell in sin and ruin. God sent the Jews away in slavery and destroyed the temple and city of Jerusalem to teach them a lesson. Eventually, He let some return to the Promised Land. Judah was never the same country as it was in the days of Moses, Joshua, David and Solomon.⁵



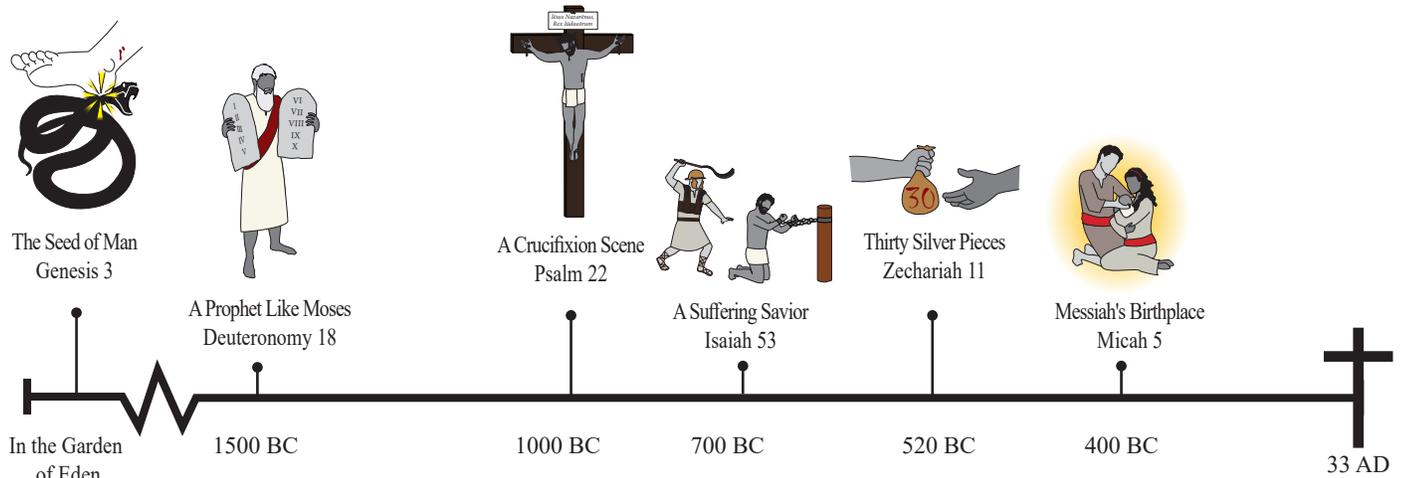
⁵ For Biblical history of these times. see 1-2 Kings, 1-2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther.

Discussion Questions:

- *If Israel was God's special nation, why did He allow them to be carried away into captivity?*

Prophets Show the Way

God called prophets to preach during these times. They preached that God's people needed to repent.⁶ They foretold historical events hundreds of years in advance.⁷ They declared God's judgment on the wicked.⁸ They also prophesied a Messiah would come (which means Anointed One). He would be anointed with God's power to save those who had faith and obeyed God. There were numerous prophecies about this Messiah. We will see that Jesus is the fulfillment of them all! He is the Way that God planned to redeem mankind from sin. Here are a few prophetic examples:



In Review: The Rise and Fall of Israel

When Israel arrived in Canaan, they began to conquer and settle down. Sin was not removed completely and began corrupting the nation. While Judges, Kings, and Prophets tried to lead and preach God's ways, they were unable to stop Israel's sinful decline. Eventually the kingdom was destroyed and only a remnant remained. Israel's decline is a dark example of how sin was a problem that humanity could not solve alone.

But God had a plan. All of history, creation, and time was preparing itself for the arrival of Jesus. At just the right time, the redemption plan was ready to arrive. For thousands of years, people had been looking and longing for a way back to God. God's plan for the redemption of humans everywhere was about to begin. What an amazing God we serve! There are none who love and care for us the way God does.

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."—John 3:16

⁶ See books such as Jeremiah, Micah or Zephaniah

⁷ See the book of Daniel

⁸ See books such as Obadiah, Jonah, or Nahum

⁹ John 14:6