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The World of the Bible

The Hebrew Bible records the first thousand years of Jewish history — including the stories of the kings and judges, poets and prophets who shaped the Jewish People from the beginning.

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**The Hebrew Bible is broken down into three sections.
The acronym for these sections is:**

TaNakh

The T stands for:

The N stands for:

The K stands for:

Each week we chant a section of the Torah, called a:

We also chant a portion of the Prophets, called a:

On five major holidays we chant a book from the Writings, called a:

Sitting on my bookshelf is a comic book version of the Bible titled, *God's Redemptive Story*. I love the title, because it is almost exactly how I think about the Tanakh: First, the Tanakh is a collection of books about God — the compendium of centuries of our ancestors' thinking about who God is, how God relates to us, and what it means to be human in relation to the Ultimate. Second, it is a collection of books about God's redemption, or at least the redemptive promise God offers humanity — how all human beings struggle to flourish despite our cynicism and insecurities and how God yearns for and invites us to thrive. And,

third, the Tanakh lures us toward God's redemptive promise through story, the most powerful and unique of human communication tools. The Tanakh takes us on a journey from slavery to freedom and back again; and, through those stories, as with all good stories, talks about you and me, here and now. This all may sound kind of radical. Indeed, it may not be the Bible as it is usually referenced in our culture. But I believe it is the Bible as it was always meant to be.

Rabbi Michael Knopf
Temple Beth El, Richmond, VA

Tanakh: The Hebrew Bible

TORAH

The Five Books Of Moses

- GENESIS
- EXODUS
- LEVITICUS
- NUMBERS
- DEUTERONOMY

NEVI'IM

Prophets

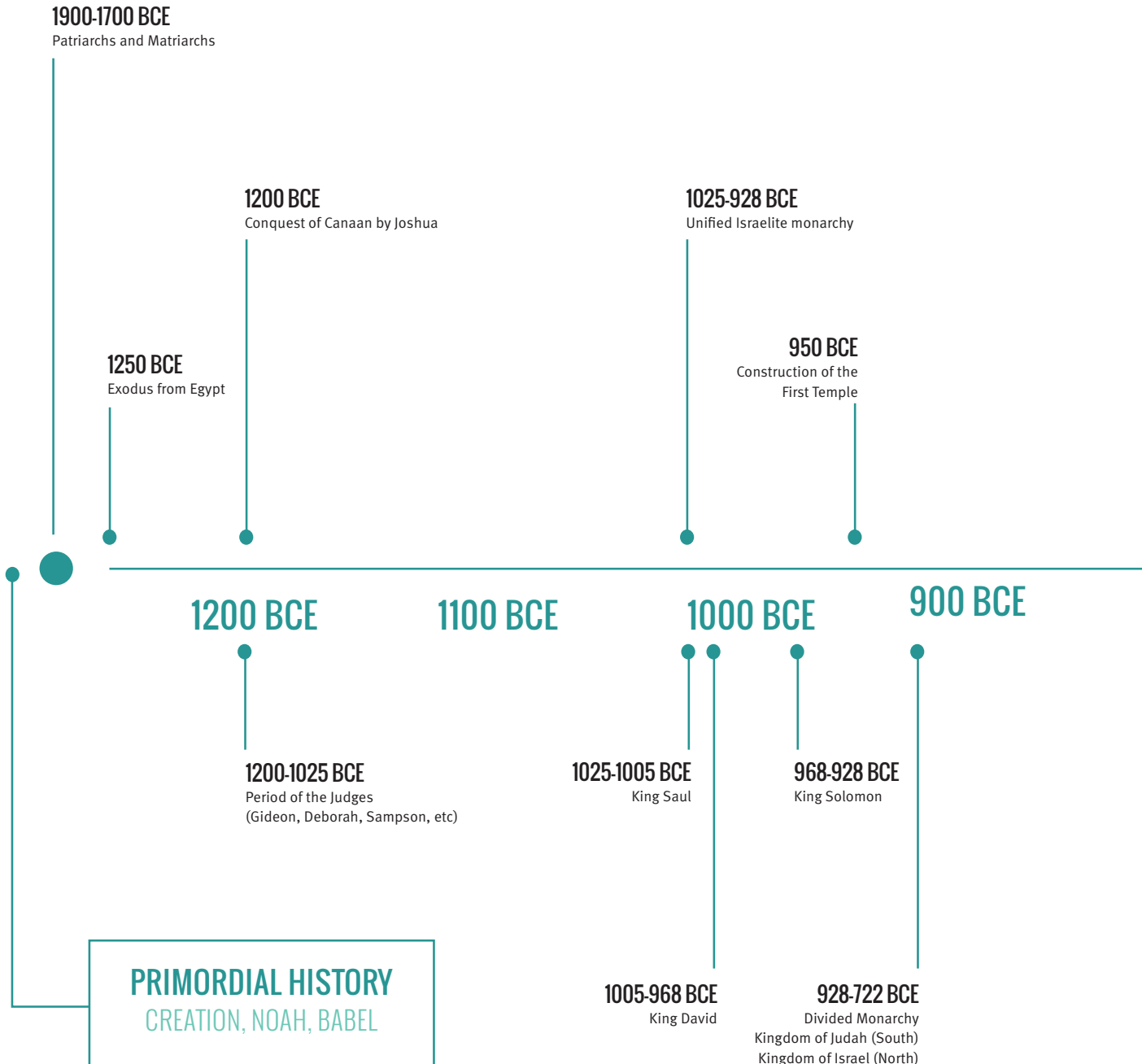
- JOSHUA
- JUDGES
- 1 SAMUEL
- 2 SAMUEL
- 1 KINGS
- 2 KINGS
- ISAIAH
- JEREMIAH
- EZEKIEL
- HOSEA
- JOEL
- AMOS
- OVADIAH
- JONAH
- MICAH
- NAHUM
- HABAKKUK
- ZEPHANIAH
- HAGGAI
- ZECHARIAH
- MALACHI

KETUVIM

Writings

- PSALMS
- PROVERBS
- JOB
- THE SONG OF SONGS
- RUTH
- LAMENTATIONS
- ECCLESIASTES
- ESTHER
- DANIEL
- EZRA
- NEHEMIAH
- 1 CHRONICLES
- 2 CHRONICLES

Biblical Historical Timeline



850 BCE
Prophet Elijah

722 BCE
Northern Kingdom of Israel falls
to Assyria — Ten Lost Tribes

586 BCE
First Temple is destroyed
by the Babylonians

515 BCE
Reconstruction of the
Second Temple

539 BCE
Decree of Cyrus II of Persia,
ending Babylonian Exile

800 BCE

700 BCE

600 BCE

500 BCE

586-539 BCE
Period of Babylonian Exile

450 BCE
Canonization of the Torah under Ezra

750-550 BCE
Classical Prophets
(Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, etc)

What Manner of Man is the Prophet?

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Prophets*

What manner of man is the prophet?

A student of philosophy who turns from the discourses of the great metaphysicians to the orations of the prophets may feel as if he were going from the realm of the sublime to an area of trivialities. Instead of dealing with the timeless issues of being and becoming, of definitions and demonstrations, he is thrown into orations about widows and orphans, about the corruption of judges and affairs of the marketplace.

Instead of showing us a way through the elegant mansions of the mind, the prophets take us to the slums. The world is a proud place, full of beauty, but the prophets are scandalized. They make much ado about paltry things, lavishing excessive language upon trifling subjects. Why such immoderate excitement? Why such intense indignation?

Indeed, the sort of crimes and even the amount of delinquency that fill the prophets of Israel with dismay do not go beyond that which we regard as normal, as typical ingredients of social dynamics. To us, a single act of injustice — cheating in business, exploitation of the poor — is slight; to the prophets, a disaster. To us, injustice is injurious to the welfare of the people; to the prophets, it is a deathblow to existence; to us, an episode, to them, a threat to the world. The prophet's words are outbursts of violent emotions. His rebuke is harsh and relentless. But if such deep sensitivity to evil is to be called hysterical, what name should be given to the abysmal indifference to evil, which the prophet bewails?

The prophet is a man who feels fiercely. God has thrust a burden upon his soul, and he is stunned at man's fierce greed. Prophecy is the voice that God has lent to the silent agony. It is a form of living, a crossing point of God and man. God is raging in the prophet's words.



Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel (second from the right to Dr. King) was one of the spiritual giants of the 20th century. He spent his career as Professor of Jewish Ethics and Mysticism at the Jewish Theological Seminary. Heschel was famous both for his beautiful and stirring writings and for his involvement in the social justice issues of his day, particularly the American Civil Rights Movement and the struggle against the Vietnam War.

Is This The Fast I Have Chosen?

Isaiah 58:1-8

Shout it aloud, do not hold back!
Raise your voice like a trumpet!
Declare to my people their rebellion
and to the descendants of Jacob their sins.

For day after day they seek Me out;
they seem eager to know My ways,
as if they were a nation that does what is right and has not forsaken the commands of its God.
They ask Me for just decisions and seem eager for God.

“Why have we fasted,” they say, “and You have not seen it? Why have we humbled ourselves,
and You have not noticed?”

Yet on the day of your fasting, you do as you please and exploit all your workers! Your fasting ends in quarreling and strife, and in striking each other with wicked fists! You cannot fast as you do today and expect your voice to be heard on high!

Is this the fast I have chosen?
Only a day for people to humble themselves?
Is it only for bowing one’s head like a reed and for lying in sackcloth and ashes? Is that what you call a fast, a day acceptable to Adonai?

Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen:
To loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter — when you see the naked, to clothe them, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?

Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear.

Discussion Questions:

Drawing from Isaiah and Heschel, how do you understand the role of the Prophets?

Who, in your opinion, are some contemporary heirs of the Prophets?

Megillot for the Holidays

Song of Songs

Pesach

Ruth

Shavuot

Lamentations

Tisha B'av

Ecclesiastes

Sukkot

Esther

Purim

Megillat Ruth

1:1-16, 4:13-17

In the days when the judges judged, there was a famine in the Land of Israel. So a man from Bethlehem, which is in Judah, went to dwell in the Plains of Moab, together with his wife and two sons. The name of the man was Elimelech, and the name of his wife was Naomi, and the names of the two boys were Machlon and Kilyon. They were from the tribe of Ephraim, from Bethlehem in Judah. Elimelech, the husband of Naomi, died and she and her two sons remained. They married Moabite women, Orpah and Ruth, and lived there for about ten years. Then Machlon and Kilyon died, leaving Naomi without her husband or sons.

So, she got up — along with her daughters-in-law — and left the Plains of Moab, for she had heard that God had taken notice of Israel and had given them food. She and her two daughters-in-law left that place and traveled on the road back to Judah.

Naomi said to her daughters-in-law: “Go back and return to your mothers’ home. May God deal compassionately with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me. And may God grant that you find comfort with another spouse.” And she kissed them, and they lifted their voices and wept — saying: “We wish to return with you, to your people.”

Naomi said: “Turn back, my daughters. Why would you come with me? Do I have any more sons in me to give you as husbands? Daughters, I am too old to marry again. Even if I were to conceive tonight, would you wait until they are grown and remain in chains on their account? Don’t do it, my daughters, for my life is truly more bitter than yours and the hand of God is against me.”

Once again, they lifted their voices and cried. Then Orpah kissed her mother-in-law one last time and departed, but Ruth hung on to her. Naomi said: “Your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and her gods. Return with her.”

But Ruth said: “Do not ask me to leave you, or to keep from following you. For, wherever you go, I shall go. Where you stay, I shall stay. Your people shall be my people. And your God, my God.”

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So Boaz married Ruth. She conceived and bore a son... They named him Obed; he was the father of Jesse, the father of David.

Reflection on Chapter 2



Three key takeaways from today were:

1.

2.

3.

My experience with the Bible in my life so far has been:

Additional Readings

Books

- *The Jewish Study Bible*, eds. Adele Berlin & Marc Brettler
This edition includes the Jewish Publication Society's excellent translation of the Tanakh, along with outstanding commentary, maps, and essays. Leading scholars offer detailed introductions to each book. The best edition of the Jewish Bible available to English readers.
- Marc Brettler, *How to Read the Jewish Bible*.
A detailed, yet accessible, introduction to Jewish Bible study, with a focus on learning about the history and culture that shaped the Hebrew Bible.
- Richard Elliott Friedman, *Who Wrote the Bible?*
Friedman's book reads like a mystery novel, as he seeks to uncover the identity of the authors who shaped the Torah. An entertaining and engaging introduction to the academic study of Biblical literature.
- Robert Alter, *The Book of Psalms*
Psalms are the Jewish People's earliest poetry, capturing the heights and depths of the human experience. The language used for this translation is beautiful and accessible, while retaining the poetic feel of the original Hebrew.
- Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Prophets*
An essential classic for those interested in the theology of the prophets, the world's first social justice activists. Poetic and soulful, this volume is great to read with a study partner.
- Tikva Frymer-Kensky, *Women of the Bible*
This artfully written work is a detailed and thorough overview of the major female characters of the Bible, and provides significant insight into how women were viewed in Biblical culture.