



Lesson 1  
**A Brief History of Israel**

## **I. Introduction and Narrative Synopsis:**

### **1. The Age of the Patriarchs**

Human occupation can be found around the land of Israel dating back to the Stone and Bronze ages (6000-4000 B.C.). Abraham, the ancestor of the Israelites, was the father of Isaac, who was the father of Jacob. Abraham was called by God to leave the Chaldean city of Ur to settle in the land of Canaan at around 2000 B.C. (Genesis 12:1-4). God changed Jacob's name to Israel. His twelve sons were the ancestors of the twelve tribes of Israel. One of Jacob's sons, Joseph, rose to become the second most powerful man in Egypt. Joseph brought his entire extend-

ed family into Egypt during the famine. These Israelites multiplied and lived in Egypt in slavery for approximately 400 years. Finally, Moses and Joshua led them out of Egypt. They wandered in the desert for forty years, and then went across the Jordan River to settle in the land of Canaan once again.

When Joshua led the Israelites into Canaan, the Jebusites were already living in and around Jerusalem. It was a city in the Judean Mountains, between the Mediterranean Sea and the Dead Sea. The tribe of Benjamin was unable to conquer this city, so they cohabited with the Jebusites (Judges 1:21). The people of Israel formally became a nation when Saul was anointed and became the first king. Following Saul, King David reigned from 1010 to 970 B.C., and King David conquered the Jebusites making Jerusalem the capital of Israel. He built walls around the city and called it the “City of David” (II Samuel 5:6-12).

## **2. The First Temple Period**

When Solomon, a son of David, became king, the Israelite nation was at its peak in prosperity. Solomon built the Temple for the Lord (I Kings 4:21-6:38), but his son Rehoboam was unable to hold the kingdom together. The kingdom was divided into two: the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah (I Kings 12).

The northern kingdom was conquered by the Assyrians in 722 B.C. (II Kings 17). In 586 B.C., King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon marched into Judah and destroyed the Temple that was built by King Solomon. He captured the citizens of Judah including many of their officials and took them back to Babylon. This was the end of the southern kingdom of Judah (II Kings 25), and the end of the First Temple period.

### **3. The Babylonian Captivity**

The city of Babylon was the capital of the Babylonian empire. This city was located in present-day Iraq, about 90 kilometers south of Baghdad. The Bible describes Babylon as a “great city” and a “mighty city” (Revelation 18:10). The Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar conquered Jerusalem in 598 B.C., and again in 586 B.C. During his first conquest of the kingdom of Judah, the 18-year-old King Jehoiachin, who reigned for only three months, surrendered to Nebuchadnezzar together with his mother, his attendants, his nobles, and his officials. Nebuchadnezzar took all the treasures from the Temple and the royal palace. In addition to capturing tens of thousands of officials, warriors, and craftsmen, he deported all the residents of Jerusalem except for the poorest among the people of the land (II Kings 24:8-16).

Pergamon Museum in Berlin, Germany, displays a

clay tablet unearthed from the ruins of Babylon. This tablet is known as “Jehoiachin’s Rations Tablet”. It dated back to 595 B.C., three years after King Nebuchadnezzar’s first conquest of Jerusalem. It records the food rations for Jehoiachin and his five sons, listing wheat, oil, dates, etc. The content of this tablet confirms what was recorded in the Book of Jeremiah regarding the good treatment of Jehoiachin (Jeremiah 52:31-34): “In the thirty-seventh year of the exile of King Jehoiachin of Judah, in the twelfth month, on the twenty-fifth day of the month, King Evil-merodach of Babylon, in the year he began to reign, showed favor to King Jehoiachin of Judah and brought him out of prison; he spoke kindly to him, and gave him a seat above the seats of the other kings who were with him in Babylon. So Jehoiachin put aside his prison clothes, and every day of his life he dined regularly at the king’s table. For his allowance, a regular daily allowance was given him by the king of Babylon, as long as he lived, up to the day of his death.”

King Nebuchadnezzar’s second conquest of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. ended the dynasty of the “House of David”. More people of the kingdom of Judah were taken captive and carried off to Babylon. This is known as “the Babylonian Captivity”.

## 4. The Second Temple Period

In 539 B.C., King Cyrus of Persia attacked the Babylonian Empire and conquered it overnight. Shortly after, he started the “voluntary repatriation policy”, allowing the Jews to return to Jerusalem. They rebuilt the Temple under the leadership of Zerubbabel (Ezra 1-6). Two hundred years later, in 334 B.C., Alexander the Great conquered the region and introduced Greek culture to the people who resided in the land. After Alexander died in 323 B.C., his kingdom became divided. The Land of Israel was ruled first by the Ptolemy Dynasty of Egypt, then by the Seleucid Dynasty of Syria. When Antiochus IV of the Seleucid Kingdom defiled the Temple in 175 B.C., the Israelites revolted. The rebels, led by Judas Maccabee, gained victory in 168 B.C., thus forming the second independent dynasty of Jerusalem after the House of David. They cleansed the Temple and restored the sacrifice system. Since the Maccabees came from the priestly family of Hasmoneus, this was known as the “Hasmonean Dynasty”.

In 64 B.C., the Hasmonean Dynasty was defeated by the Roman general Pompey who invaded Jerusalem. The Hasmonean Dynasty came to an end. Israel did not become an independent nation again until the twentieth century. The Romans made Israel a vassal state and appointed an Edomite ruler, Herod the Great, as the client king in 37

B.C.. Herod was a great architect and builder. He renovated and expanded the Second Temple. Jesus Christ was born around 6 to 4 B.C.. He was crucified around 30-33 A.D. to save mankind. The Jewish people revolted against the Romans in 66 A.D.. By 70 A.D., the Roman general Titus destroyed the Second Temple and expelled the Jews from Jerusalem ending the Jewish revolt. This also marks the end of the Second Temple period. The Jews continued to conduct their religious activities in various synagogues throughout the land.

## **5. The Jewish Diaspora**

In the year of 135 A.D., the Roman Emperor Hadrian sent an army to crush the second Jewish revolution. The Jews suffered an estimated 600,000 casualties. Hadrian exiled the remaining Jews from the Land of Israel and scattered them among many nations. He also changed the name of the land to Palestine (a variation of “Philistine”). This change became a source of conflict between Israelis and Palestinians which continues to this day. At the beginning of the 4<sup>th</sup> century, the Roman Emperor Constantine declared Christianity to be the official state religion of the Roman Empire. Therefore, the Romans built many churches and monasteries in Palestine in remembrance of Jesus and his disciples. Recognizing the looming threat from the east, Constantine moved the capital from Rome

to Byzantium, and changed its name to ‘Constantinople’, which is modern-day Istanbul in Turkey. Thus the Eastern Roman Empire was also referred to as the Byzantine Empire. The Persians took Palestine in 614 A.D. and destroyed hundreds of churches. The Muslims followed and defeated Jerusalem in 638 A.D., making it one of the holiest cities for themselves, even until today. The Seljuqs from Turkey took Jerusalem in 1071 and stopped Christian pilgrims from journeying to the Holy Land. In 1095 A.D., Pope Urban II organized a Crusade and demanded the routes for pilgrimage be opened. The Crusaders took Jerusalem in 1099 A.D. and named it the “Latin State of the Near East”. It was invaded by Saladin, the Sultan of Egypt. In 1187 A.D., Jerusalem was returned to Islamic rule. The Mamluks, commonly refers to Muslim slave soldiers or Muslim rulers of slave origin, ruled Egypt and Palestine for the next two and a half centuries. In 1453 A.D., Ottoman armies from its capital Bursa in Turkey, conquered Constantinople and made it to be the capital of the Ottoman Empire and changed its name to “Istanbul”. In 1517 A.D., the Ottoman Empire defeated the Mamluks and expanded their territory to include Syria, Palestine, Egypt, and Northern Africa. The Ottoman Empire survived for more than four centuries. One of its Sultans, Suleiman the Magnificent, built the walls around the Old City of Jerusalem in the 16<sup>th</sup> century that still stand today.

## 6. Return to Zion

During World War I, Jewish scientist Dr. Chaim Weizmann contributed significantly to the British war effort. He convinced the British government that the Jews wanted to return to their homeland in Palestine. On November 2, 1917, the British government made the now famous “Balfour Declaration” stating that it would “view with favor the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people.” After the war ended in 1918, the Ottoman Empire collapsed and the League of Nations after WWI gave Great Britain the mandate to rule Palestine for 25 years.

The British Mandate for Palestine began in 1923. The local Palestinians and the returning Jews (about 11% of the population) often came in conflict and clashed. The League of Nations and Great Britain made several proposals to separate the people, but they all failed. Due to the Holocaust, when more than 6 million Jews died under Hitler from 1941 to 1945, the global community became sympathetic to the Jewish plight. With increased immigration to Palestine, Jews constituted about 33% of the population. On November 29, 1947, the United Nations passed the resolution to partition Palestine which included recommended boundaries. The city of Jerusalem was divided between Jews and Palestinian Arabs. The Jews welcomed



the resolution, but the Palestinian Arabs rejected it. The British army withdrew from Palestine in April and May of 1948, as their Mandate ended.

## **7. Restoration of Israel**

On May 14, 1948, Israel declared independence. The “Land of Palestine” was renamed the “Land of Israel”. Israel was immediately attacked by the armies of the Arab League. However, the Israelite army repelled the attackers and took on more land than the UN Resolution had assigned. This war for independence generated many Palestinian refugees. In 1964, Egypt launched terrorist attacks against Israel under the assistance of Palestinian Liberation Organization. Egypt also led the armies of the United Arab Republic, which was formed in 1958, and threatened to wipe out Israel. But in June 1967, Israel launched a surprise attack against the United Arab Republic, achieving victory in only six days. The city of Jerusalem was captured by the Jews and united. This situation remains to the present day.

## **II. Video Viewing:**

Play DVDchapter “01. Introduction”.

### III. Study Questions:

#### 1. Fill in the blanks:

- (1) King \_\_\_\_\_ of Israel conquered the city of the Jebusites and made it the capital of Israel. He changed its name to \_\_\_\_\_.
- (2) In history, \_\_\_\_\_ was destroyed in one night, and replaced by \_\_\_\_\_; it was a great surprise that the Persian King \_\_\_\_\_ allowed the Israelites to return to Jerusalem from captivity!
- (3) In the \_\_\_\_\_ Museum in Berlin, there is a clay tablet created during King Nebuchadnezzar's time. It is a record of food rations for King \_\_\_\_\_ of Judah, who was taken captive in 598 B.C., when Jerusalem was raided by the Babylonians for the first time.

#### 2. Scripture Study:

- (1) Find the Bible passages that refer to David's establishment of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel.

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### 3. Discussion and Sharing:

- (1) God promised to bless Abraham and his descendants, yet the kingdoms of Israel and Judah were both destroyed. What can we do to ensure that we properly receive God's blessings?

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- (2) Are there other passages in the Bible that discuss the possible exile of Israel from their promised land? Can those passages help us understand God's character and actions?

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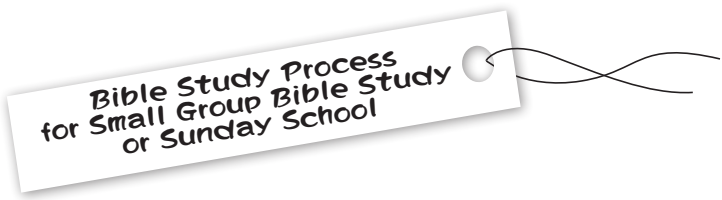
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**Bible Study Process  
for Small Group Bible Study  
or Sunday School**

This part supplies reference for small group leaders and Sunday school teachers. If needed, please refer to Appendix: “Instruction for Small Group Leaders and Teachers”. Feel free to use according to time limits and needs.

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## **A. Preparation (5-15 minutes)**

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**1. Ice-breaker:** Conduct the following activities before starting the study:

- a. Group leader and members take turn to give brief introductions about themselves. Exchange greetings with one another.
- b. Ask group members this question: Has anyone seen pictures of the “Wailing Wall (i.e., The Western Wall)”, or the “Dome of the Rock” in Jerusalem? Or, has anyone visited these places? Encourage group members to share their thoughts or experiences.

**2. Introduction:** After the ice breaker, the group leader

gives a brief description of the Bible study program in the Multimedia Bible Teaching Materials of the Bible Study series published by Spring of Water International Ministries.

**3. Opening Prayer:** The group leader prays for the Holy Spirit's presence and guidance, that group members' hearts be opened, and God's Word in the Bible be the spiritual food for each, that the living water from Christ Jesus be nurturing the growth of the spiritual lives of the group leader and the members.

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## **B. Development (40-90 minutes)**

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### **I. Overview:**

The group leader gives a brief overview of the history of Israel from the beginning to the present.

### **II. Synopsis:**

1. The Age of the Patriarchs
2. The First Temple Period
3. The Babylonian Captivity
4. The Second Temple Period

5. The Jewish Diaspora
6. Return to Zion
7. Restoration of Israel

### **III. Video Viewing:**

Play DVD chapter “01. Introduction”.

### **IV. Study Questions:**

1. Fill in the blanks: Questions (1) - (3)
2. Scripture Study: Question (1)
3. Discussion and Sharing: Questions (1) - (2)

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### **C. Conclusion (5-15 minutes)**

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**1. Summary:** The history of Israel speaks about the love, faithfulness, and righteousness of our God.

#### **2. Homework Assignment:**

- a. Find out some information about the “Dead Sea Scroll”.
- b. What do we know about the Persian Empire?

\* **Closing Prayer:** \*

Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for letting us see your faithfulness in the history of Israel. Your faithfulness is a great encouragement to me. We shall be faithful to you. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen!