

The Old Testament in 20 Minutes

1/2 Bible in 20 Minutes

Psalm 1

11 08 2009 Sam Jones Memorial United Methodist Church

PP1 MASTER SLIDE: BIBLE AND CANDLE (NO OTHER SLIDES)**Creation**

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The cosmos was empty and without form, and the Holy Spirit brooded over the chaotic darkness. Then by the divine Word, God SPOKE **creation** into being.

- God said, “Let there be light!” And there was light.
- God said, “Let there be sky!” And there was sky.
- God said, “Let there be land!” And there was land.
- God said, “Let there be plants and trees.” And there were plants and trees.
- God said, “Let there be lights in the sky.” And there was the sun, moon, and stars.
- God said, “Let there be life!” And the birds filled the air, and the fish swam in the waters, and the animals walked upon the land.
- Then God said, “Let us make man and woman in our own image, and let them have dominion over the earth.”

So the Lord God Almighty, the Creator of the heavens and the earth, knelt in the mud and shaped First Man out of the clay and named him “**Adam.**” Then God breathed into his nostrils the divine Spirit, and the man became a living being.

The Maker said, “It is not good for man to be alone.” So he made **Eve** to be his bride. *“For this reason, a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.”*

Fall

The Creator placed First Man and First Woman in the **Garden of Eden.** They served as gardeners and stewards of the divine creation. God gave them the fruit of every tree in the garden except one to eat; but the Almighty warned: *“You must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it, you will surely die.”*

All was perfect . . . until one day the serpent approached Eve. He hissed words of temptation, saying that the forbidden fruit would make her like God, knowing good and evil. When the woman saw the fruit pleased the eye, tongue, and mind, she ate of it, and her husband, also. And the serpent’s words proved unexpectedly prophetic—they DID now know the difference between good and evil, and they were ashamed.

When God discovered their disobedience, he cast them out of Eden’s Garden. And we live to this day with the consequences of their original sin. We are all sons of Adam and daughters of Eve, living in a fallen world with heartbreaking reminders of Eden’s glory.

First Family

God gave man and woman the divine ability to create life. So Eve conceived and gave birth to their first son whom they named **Cain**. Later she gave birth to his brother, **Abel**. Cain grew up to become a farmer and Abel a shepherd.

One day both boys brought an offering to God. Cain brought fruit from the ground while Abel offered the best of the flock. The Lord favored Abel's sacrifice over Cain's, and the older boy became quite angry. He followed his brother into the fields where Cain killed Abel.

When the Lord asked about Abel's whereabouts, Cain answered: "*Am I my brother's keeper?*" No, Cain was much more than his brother's keeper—he was his brother's brother. In retribution for the murder, God banished Cain from his home.

The Flood

New generations arose, and the descendants of Adam and Eve multiplied; but things went from bad to worse. The Lord witnessed the terrible wickedness of the world and regretted the creation of humanity. God decided to destroy the world with a flood.

BUT there was one man who found favor in God's eyes. **Noah** was a righteous man, blameless among the people. So the Lord told Noah to build an ark for his family and two of every kind of creature. Then God opened the floodgates of heaven. The rain fell on the earth for forty days and forty nights; but the Lord remembered Noah and his family along with the livestock. God delivered them and placed a rainbow in the sky as a covenant that never again would the world be destroyed by water.

However, the new world washed clean by the flood proved to be no better than the old one. Noah immediately planted a vineyard. Then he became drunk with its wine. And the whole sorry mess started all over again.

The Patriarchs and Matriarchs

Long generations passed before another righteous man arose to serve as God's instrument of salvation. His name was **Abram**, and he lived in the city of Ur of the Chaldeans. The Lord said to Abram: "*Leave your home behind and travel to the land that I will show you.*" God promised Abram that a great nation would arise from his descendants. The Lord would bless them in order to bless the world.

So Abram and his wife, **Sarai**, left their home in faithful obedience. Later God affirmed his promise and changed Abram's name to "*Abraham*" which means "*the Father of Many*." The Lord also commanded that all Jewish males be circumcised as a physical reminder of the divine covenant.

The miles and the years passed. Neither the land nor a child materialized. In their old age, Abraham and Sarah began to doubt God's promise. When the Lord appeared as a visitor at Abraham's tent and restated the promise yet again, Sarah doubled over with laughter at the thought.

In God's good time, however, Sarah DID become pregnant in her old age. When she gave birth to a son, they named him "*Isaac*" which in Hebrew means "*laughter*." He represented God's promise of a great nation.

Some time later, however, God tested Abraham's faith. The Lord told Abraham: "*Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love*" and offer him up as a burnt offering. So they set off into the wilderness. Isaac asked, "*Father, the fire and wood are here, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?*" Abraham replied: "*God himself will provide the lamb.*" Just before the sacrifice, God intervened and provided a ram.

Isaac grew up and married **Rebekah**. They in turn had twins named Esau and Jacob. Jacob was a scheming trickster who swindled his older brother out of the family birthright and their father's blessing. **Jacob** married sisters named Leah and Rachel. Between the one man, two wives, and their maidservants, they had a dozen children.

Jacob loved **Joseph** more than the others and spoiled him rotten. His brothers naturally resented Joseph's favored status, so they sold him as a slave to an Egyptian caravan.

Through a series of providential events, Joseph became the pharaoh's right hand man. In a twist of fate that only the Lord could arrange, Joseph's entire family eventually moved to Egypt where they were protected from a terrible famine. The descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob grew over the years. And it would have been a good point to have written, "*And they lived happily ever after.*" But they didn't.

Exodus

Generations passed. Then a pharaoh who did not know Joseph arose in Egypt. He enslaved the Israelites and made their lives miserable. He ordered the Hebrew midwives to murder all the baby boys. However, God had not forgotten his people or his promises.

A Hebrew woman gave birth to a son and kept him hidden for three months. Then the child was placed in a basket and placed on the banks of the Nile River. It just so happened that the Pharaoh's own daughter went down to the Nile to bathe. She found the baby and adopted him as her own. The princess named the child "**Moses**."

Moses grew up as a pampered child in the king's household. But one day he saw an Egyptian soldier mistreating a Hebrew slave. Moses intervened and murdered the soldier. He fled into the wilderness and eventually became a shepherd, caring for his father-in-law's flocks.

Then one day on Mount Horeb, the Lord unexpectedly appeared to Moses. He saw a bush ablaze with fire but not consumed. God's voice spoke out of the burning bush and told Moses to go back to Egypt. Despite his many objections, Moses finally, reluctantly went. He stood before pharaoh and declared, "*Let my people go!*" It took a series of ten devastating plagues before the king finally agreed.

The Hebrew left Egypt with great rejoicing. But they had not been gone long before the pharaoh changed his mind. He led his army in pursuit of the slaves. The Israelites found themselves trapped with the Egyptian army behind them and the Red Sea before them. Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea. The Lord drove back the waves with a strong wind, and the waters parted. The Israelites reached the far side safely. But when the pharaoh's army followed, the waters came crashing back down.

At Mount Sinai, the Lord gave Moses **the Law**—summarized in the Ten Commandments—that revealed how God's people were called to live. It was a divine gift not only for Israel but also for the entire world.

The Jews proved to be a stubborn people, constantly chafing under God's guidance. They broke God's Law time and again. Due to their disobedience, the Jews did not enter into the Promised Land immediately. Instead, they wandered for forty years in the wilderness until the first generation died.

The Promised Land

After glimpsing the **Promised Land** from Mount Nebo, Moses died on the far side of the Jordan River. Joshua led the Jews into Israel where they fought for decades to make God's promise a human reality. They slowly established the nation God had promised to Abraham.

God had always served as Israel's king. However, the people clamored for an earthly ruler like the pagan nations around them. So Samuel reluctantly anointed **Saul** as the first king of Israel. He unified the Israelites against their enemies, but they began to trust more in a man than their God.

A young shepherd boy named **David** served in Saul's courts. After defeating the giant Goliath in single combat, David was catapulted to national acclaim. Saul attempted to kill the young upstart, but God was with him. When Saul died, David became the new king of Israel.

In many ways, David epitomized the best and worst of the Jewish people. He shone bright with God's presence, and he wrote many of the Psalms which reflected his faith in God. But David also proved to be all too human. When he spied a married woman named Bathsheba bathing in a courtyard, he committed adultery and murder to possess her.

Solomon followed David as king. His reign represented the zenith of Israel's power and prestige. He oversaw the construction of God's Temple in Jerusalem. He was world-renowned for his wisdom and wealth. The books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes contain some of his insights and knowledge.

However, the seeds of Israel's destruction were sown during his monarchy. His hundreds of wives and concubines brought their foreign gods with them. Once again Israel began to stray from their devotion to the one and only God.

After Solomon's death, the nation divided into **two kingdoms**: Israel to the north and Judah to the south. A series of kings ruled them—some good, some bad, some holy, some evil. At times, they worshipped God; and at other times, they worshipped other gods. Eventually both nations were conquered, and their best and brightest were exiled to foreign lands. They eventually returned, but it was never quite the same again.

The Prophets

The Old Testament story reveals a depressing **pattern** that repeated over and over again. God would save his people; and for a time they were grateful and obedient. Then the old, sinful habits would emerge. The people made compromises with the culture

around them. Soon they turned their backs on God. Then disaster struck and they turned back to God. Disobedience, punishment, repentance, and restoration.

Time and again God sent his messengers or prophets to call the people back to faithfulness. Occasionally, the prophetic message addressed future events. However, these righteous men were more concerned about the present. They called Israel back to God's side in the here and now.

The prophets emphasized both inward attitudes of piety and outward deeds of righteousness. The Jews practiced circumcision as a physical reminder of their covenant with God. However, the prophets called them to a circumcision of the heart that transformed their souls. The ancient cry from Deuteronomy known as *the Shema* declared: "*Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is ONE. And you will love the Lord your God with all of your heart and soul and mind and strength.*"

But inward piety must be accompanied by outward righteousness. The words of the prophet Micah ring down through the years: *And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.*" (Micah 6:8)

God's Promises

The story of the Old Testament reveals a covenant-making, covenant keeping God and a covenant-making, covenant-breaking people. Even when humanity was unfaithful, however, the Lord remained true to his promises.

- 1) God promised Abraham and Sarah that they would become the parents of a chosen race. Their descendants grew to become the great nation of Israel. The Lord said that Israel would be blessed to be a blessing to the world.
- 2) God also upheld his promise of a Promised Land for the Jewish people. Over the centuries, political powers have risen and fallen. Boundaries and names have changed in the shifting sand. Israel has been divided and destroyed, the Jewish people dispersed in exile to the four corners of the world. But the nation still perseveres today.
- 3) God gave to his chosen people the Law which reveals the Lord's divine nature and attributes. The Ten Commandments and other portions the Law have stood through the long test of time, forming the backbone of every society today.
- 4) And the Lord gave one final promise. He told Abraham that Israel would be a blessing to the world. Over the years the Jews began to anticipate a messenger from God who would deliver them from sin and death. The prophets foretold the anointed one of God whom they called the Messiah. In Greek, the word "*messiah*" is "*Christ*." And Israel waited with bated breath for the day when God's anointed one would save the world.

The last book of the Old Testament is Malachi written in the fifth century B. C. In the final chapter, the prophet spoke of the coming day of the Lord. And then four hundred years passed—year after year, decade after decade, century after century. Waiting . . . waiting for the Lord to speak again.

Next week the story continues. We will hear how God once again spoke, and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.

Amen.