

Brief Review of Ancient Israel  
Dr. Steven R. Cook

The history of Israel starts with God who chose the nation to be His representatives upon the earth. Israel was created by God (Isa 43:1, 15), and He loves them with an everlasting love (Jer 31:1-3). God chose them because of who He is, not because of any greatness or goodness in them (Deut 7:6-8). Israel began with a unilateral covenant which God made with Abraham, promising “I will make you a great nation” (Gen 12:2). The Abrahamic covenant was later expanded with the Land Covenant (Deut 29:1-29; 30:1-10), the Davidic Covenant (2 Sam 7:16; Psa 89:3-4, 34-37), and the New Covenant (Jer 31:31-34). Though Abraham had children by different women (Sarah, Hagar and Keturah), the Abrahamic promises were restated only through Isaac (Gen 17:19-21) and Jacob (Gen 28:10-15). Because of a crippling encounter with God, Jacob’s name was changed to *Israel*, which means “he who wrestles with God” (Gen 32:24-30). The sons of Israel (i.e. Jacob) went into captivity in Egypt for four hundred years as God had foretold (Gen 15:13), and remained there until He called them out through His servants Moses and Aaron (Ex 3:1-10). God delivered Israel from Egyptian bondage through a series of ten plagues that destroyed Pharaoh and the nation (Exodus chapters 5-14). The exodus generation were believers who followed God’s servant, Moses, out of captivity (Ex 4:31; 14:31; 1 Cor 10:1-4). After the exodus, God entered into a bilateral covenant relationship with Israel at Mount Sinai (Ex 19:1-8), and gave them 613 commands—which comprise the Mosaic Law—and these commands are commonly divided into moral, civil, and ceremonial codes. The exodus generation—though they witnessed God’s miraculous deliverance against the Egyptians—rebelled and complained against the Lord during the forty years they were in the wilderness. Because of their rebellion, God eventually disciplined them by prohibiting them from entering the promised land (Num 14:1-23; cf. Heb 3:15—4:1-2). This was a generation of believers who failed to live by faith, and so God withheld their inheritance of the land. The two exceptions were Joshua and Caleb, who lived by faith (Num 14:30). God then promised the second generation of Israelites would inherit the promised land, but only after their parents died in the wilderness (Num 14:31-33). The book of Numbers differentiates between a generation possessed of negative volition and their children who were positive to God. When the last person of the exodus generation died, God then delivered a message through Moses to their children, reiterating many of the commands given to the first generation. The message Moses gave is known as the book of Deuteronomy, which restates many of the laws of the covenant. Under the Mosaic Law, Israel would know blessing if they obeyed God’s commands (Deut 28:1-15), and cursing if they did not (Deut 28:16-68). After Moses died, God brought the Israelites into the land of Canaan (i.e. the land promised to Abraham) under the leadership of Joshua (Deut 31:23; Josh 1:1-9), and there the land was divided, giving a portion to each of the descendants of Jacob. After Joshua died (Josh 24:29-31),

Israel repeatedly fell into idolatry and suffered divine discipline for their rebellion (read Judges). This went on for roughly 300 years as Israel fell into a pattern of idolatry, after which God would send punishment, then the people would cry out to God, Who would relent of His judgment and send a judge to deliver them, then the people would serve God for a time, and then fall back into idolatry. The period of the Judges was marked by people who did not obey the Lord, but “did what was right in their own eyes” (Judg 17:6; 21:25). Samuel was the last of Israel’s judges, and then the people cried for a king because they wanted to be like the other nations (1 Sam 8:4-5). God gave them their request (1 Sam 8:22), and Saul became the first king in Israel (1 Sam 10:1). Though Saul started well, he quickly turned away from the Lord and would not obey God’s commands. Saul reigned for approximately 40 years and his leadership was basically a failure (1 Sam 13:1; cf. Acts 13:21). Later, God raised up David to be king in Israel (1 Sam 16:1-13), and David reigned for 40 years and was an ideal king who followed God and encouraged others to do the same (1 Ki 2:10-11). God decreed David’s throne would be established forever through one of his descendants (2 Sam 7:16; Psa 89:3-4), and this is Jesus (Luke 1:31-33). Solomon reigned for 40 years after David (1 Ki 2:12; 11:42-43), and though He was wise and did many good things (ruled well, built the temple, wrote Scripture, etc.), he eventually turned away from God and worshiped idols (1 Ki 11:1-10), and the kingdom was divided afterward (1 Ki 11:11-41). The nation was united under Saul, David, and Solomon.

Solomon’s son, Rehoboam, ruled over the two southern tribes (Judah) and Jeroboam ruled over the ten northern tribes (Israel). Israel—the northern kingdom—had 19 kings throughout its history and all were bad, as they led God’s people into idolatry (i.e. the “sins of Jeroboam” 1 Ki 16:31; 2 Ki 3:3; 10:31; 13:2). The ten northern tribes came under divine discipline because of their idolatry and were destroyed by the Assyrians in 722 BC. Judah—the southern kingdom—had 20 kings throughout its history and 8 were good (some more than others), as they obeyed God and led others to do the same (they were committed to the Lord like David, 1 Ki 15:11). However, Judah repeatedly fell into idolatry—as the 10 northern tribes had done—and were eventually destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 BC. The dispersion of Israel was promised by God if they turned away from Him and served other gods (Deut 28:63-68). Since the destruction by Babylon, Israel has been under Gentile dominance (Luke 21:24; Rom 11:25). After a temporary regathering under Ezra and Nehemiah, Israel continued under Gentile dominance with the Medes & Persians, Greeks, and Romans. Because of their rejection of Jesus as Messiah, God disciplined Israel again in AD 70, and the Jews were scattered all over the world (Jam 1:1; 1 Pet 1:1). Israel’s current state is one of judgment (Matt 23:37-39), and a “partial hardening” (Rom 11:25). Israel will be restored when Messiah returns to establish His kingdom on earth (Rev 19:11-21; 20:4-6).