

Introducing the Bible
Worksheet for Week 4
God Pursues His People

This week, we will cover nearly 1000 years of Israel's history, from their entry into the Promised Land after Moses' death to the end of the Old Testament story. This worksheet will introduce you to the material we'll talk about in class this week and provide you with a structured set of daily Bible readings.

1000 Years!

Last week, we saw how God saved his people, liberating them from their Egyptian masters and entering into a binding covenant with them. But still, the Old Testament can be very intimidating with all the strange names, places, and just plain weirdness! This week, we'll look at nearly 1000 years of Israel's history. This may seem pretty overwhelming, but in the larger sense, the story of Israel is rather simple.

After Moses' death, Joshua led the Israelites in a war of conquest, occupying much of the land of Canaan. Over a period of a couple of hundred years, the Israelites consolidated their conquests and settled large portions of the Promised Land.¹ During this period, the Israelites were governed by judges; people such as Deborah, Samson, and Samuel who guided Israel under God's kingship. But the book of Judges paints a rather bleak picture of the inability of God's people to live under God's Law – read the last verse of the Book of Judges! God gave his people judges because he did not want Israel to have an earthly king. God himself was to be their King. However, God's people kept demanding a king such as all their neighbors had and God finally relented, anointing Israel's first king, Saul. There were only three kings of a united Israel – Saul, David, and David's son, Solomon. Saul was a disappointment, but David was to become Israel's greatest king, the person whom Israel would always see as the idealized king of Israel.² Solomon ruled at a time when Israel reached the peak of its political power and wealth, enabling Solomon to build the temple which stood for more than 400 years. But Solomon also planted the seeds of Israel's eventual destruction, for he allowed the worship of foreign gods.

After Solomon's death in 922BC, Israel split into two kingdoms. The ten northern tribes formed themselves into a nation called Israel. The two tribes that lived in the southern portion of the Promised Land, the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, formed themselves into a nation called Judah. The story of these two kingdoms, Israel in the north and Judah in the south, are told in parallel in the book of Kings (I and II).

Beginning in the time of Saul, God sent prophets to his people. For more than 500 years, these prophets would bring God's word to the people, calling them back to God and pronouncing judgment on them if they did not. Some prophets worked in Israel (e.g., Elijah), others worked in Judah (e.g., Isaiah), and some worked after the exiles. However, despite God's relentless pursuit, the people of Israel and Judah would generally insist on going their own way. Of all the kings of Israel and Judah, only a few kings “did what was right in God's eye.”

When the northern kingdom of Israel was crushed and scattered by the Assyrians in 721BC, God's people saw this as God's judgment on them for their sin. The southern kingdom of Judah held out for about another 150 years, but they too were crushed by an opponent, Babylonia, in 587BC. Jerusalem was sacked. The glorious temple built by Solomon was destroyed and the Ark of the Covenant disappeared for all time. The leaders of Judah were exiled to Babylon. Though the Persians defeated the Babylonians and allowed Jews to return to Jerusalem in 538BC, in many respects the exile never ended. Never again would Israel be free, led by a rightful king. By the time of Jesus, the Jews had been trading one oppressor for another, one pretender for another, for more than 500 years! The Jews knew that there was one God, who had created everything, and who had chosen them from among all the peoples of the earth to be the ones through whom God would renew and restore his creation – it just surely didn't look like it! They wondered when they would be vindicated, when all the world would see that the Jews had been right all along, when God's kingdom would come!

¹ If you have a study bible, the maps in the back will probably help you see what is going on in Israel's history.

² David was king of united Israel in roughly 1000 BC. The timelines in your notebook will help.

Bible Readings for Week 4

Before reading each passage, take a few minutes to get a sense of the context. Your study bible should help. Jot down a few questions that come to mind from your reading of the passage. What do you find most surprising in these readings?

<p>Day 1 2 Samuel 7 God's covenant with David</p>	<p>Day 2 1 Kings 18 Elijah confronts the priests of Baal</p>
<p>Day 3 Jeremiah 31:31-34 Jeremiah brings God's promise of a new covenant with his people</p>	<p>Day 4 Isaiah 40:1-11 God announces the end of Jerusalem's suffering</p>
<p>Day 5 Micah 6:6-8 God wants people's hearts, not their sacrifices!</p>	<p>Weekly Prayer Concerns</p>