

# THE STORY OF THE BIBLE

by Joseph Schmidt

The Bible is so complex. It contains books, letters, poems and prayers written by many different people over thousands of years. The books, letters, poems and prayers are themselves very different: some are written to read like history; some are fictional stories meant to teach some truth; some use very strange symbols and images; some are fairly clear and to the point. Often, we can “get lost” in the books of the Bible and lose sight of the “story” that the Bible is trying to communicate.

The Bible is called by the Catholic Church the *story of salvation*. The Bible is essentially the story of how God saves His people. That story is in reality very complex, involving thousands of people over thousands of years. However, it is helpful to look at the most important of these stories to understand the **big picture** of the Bible.

What follows is my summary of these key stories. This is not meant to replace study of the actual Bible. Rather, this is meant as more of an introduction to reading the Bible. I suggest that the beginner read this simple summary of the whole Bible. Then, once you have that big picture in place, you should read the Gospel of Luke to explore more in depth the life of Jesus who is the central figure of the Bible and the center of the Christian life. After reading this Gospel it would be helpful to go back and read the actual stories that I summarize here.

Be sure to pray to the Holy Spirit before you begin your reading. And remember that the Holy Spirit has been given in a special way to the Popes to authoritatively interpret the Scriptures, so our personal interpretation and understanding of the Scriptures must always conform to the truths of the whole of revelation as taught by the Church.

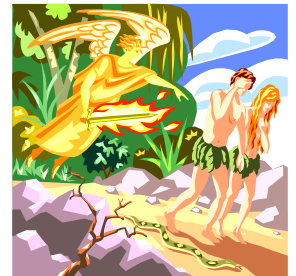
## 1. Creation and the Fall

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God created the sun and moon, the stars and the earth. He created plants, animals, and the people on the earth. After He created plants and animals He said that they were “good.” Then God created the first man and woman *after His own image*. After He created Adam and Eve (the first human beings) He said they were “very good.” God gave Adam and Eve to each other to love, and all the world to rule over it and take care of it. They lived in harmony with each other and with God, and they were very happy.

But then the Serpent came and tempted them. He told them that they didn’t need God, that they could be like gods themselves. The Serpent told them that they did not need God to tell them what was right and wrong. They could decide for themselves. Adam and Eve suddenly doubted God’s love and His authority. They pushed God aside and thought that they did not need Him anymore. This was the first sin humans had ever committed: they cast God out of their lives.

Immediately Adam and Eve felt different, but not in a good way. They felt ashamed and scared, like we always do after we commit sin. And like we sometimes do, they tried to hide it from God. But God always knows what we do. He confronted them. And instead of admitting it and asking for God’s forgiveness, they only blamed each other and the Serpent. By pushing God out of their lives they made themselves miserable. God told them all the terrible things that would happen. He had warned them about sin, but they did not listen. Now they would have to suffer the consequences of their actions – they would have to leave the Garden of Eden and suffer hardships in their lives. (An angel with a fiery sword was stationed to guard the way back to the Garden.)



But God did not abandon them forever. He still offered His love. He gave them sons. This brought great joy to Adam and Eve. But they had already brought sin into the world, and its destruction was still present. After they had grown up, their older son, Cain, killed their younger son, Abel.

Since Adam and Eve were the first human beings, and they turned away from God, all people struggle with being faithful to God. This is what Original Sin is all about. It is very difficult, as we all know, to be faithful to God sometimes. But as all of this was happening with Adam and Eve and their children, God was beginning His plan to save all people, because He still loved us. . .

[Read the full story in the Book of Genesis, chapters 1-3]

## 2. Noah

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Years and years and years after Adam and Eve died (maybe thousands of years!), the people that lived on the earth were totally wicked and evil. They had no respect for God or His laws. They committed every kind of sin. God had made people out of love, so that they would live in a loving relationship with Him. But they had utterly turned away from Him. The very reason they existed was destroyed, and God regretted having made them.

God planned to destroy these wicked people. But as He searched their hearts He found one man who was good and just: Noah. Noah, along with his family, respected God and listened to Him. So God spoke to Noah and told him about His plans to destroy the earth, and to start over with Noah and his family. God told Noah to build a

gigantic boat, an ark, so that he and his family would be safe. And God instructed Noah to take pairs of animals with him on the ark so that they would not be totally destroyed in the flood that was going to occur.

Noah did as God instructed. When the ark was completed and Noah's family and the animals were all inside, God shut the door to the ark. And the rains came. The earth flooded, and all creatures were destroyed. Eventually, the waters of the flood resided and the ark landed on solid ground.

Once Noah and his family and the animals had left the ark, God made a covenant (a sacred agreement) with Noah. God said, "Be fertile and multiply and fill the earth." He promised to never destroy the earth with a flood again. As a reminder of this, God placed the rainbow in the sky, so that people would look at it and remember His promise.

God's love was still strong. He wanted the human race to flourish, to be prosperous, and to be good. God blessed Noah and his family and sent them out to make the world a great place. . .

[Read the full story, Genesis 6:5-22, 7-9:17]

### 3. Abraham and Isaac

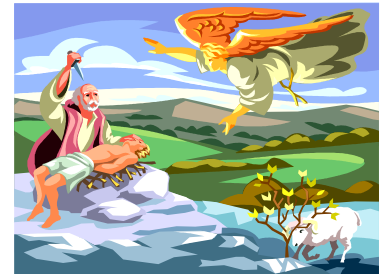
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A great time passed after Noah's death. And God called to a man named Abram. God said to him: "Leave the land of your fathers and go to the place that I will show you. I will make you the father of a great nation. I will make your name great. All the world will be blessed through you." Abram trusted God. He gathered all of his possessions, took his wife, Sarai, and his servants and set out to find this unknown land (the "Promise Land").

Through the course of his journey, Abram began to trust in God more and more. God made a covenant with Abram. God changed Abram's name to Abraham, and Sarai's name to Sarah. God promised: "I will make you the father of many nations."

But Abraham did not have any children, and he and his wife Sarah were both very old (too old to have children). But Abraham trusted God. Eventually God told him that he would have a son through Sarah his wife. They did have son, and they named him Isaac.

One day, God called to Abraham and told him to sacrifice his son to Him. It was common for the pagan people around him to kill their children as a sacrifice to their gods. God was testing Abraham's faith. Abraham knew that Isaac was his only son, and the only way to fulfill God's promise of being a father to many nations. But Abraham trusted God and would do whatever God told him. So Abraham took Isaac (without telling him what was to happen) and they went off to a mountain top to offer a sacrifice to God. Isaac carried the wood for the sacrifice (because the sacrifice was always burnt), and asked Abraham where the animal was for the sacrifice. Abraham said "God will provide one." When they got up to the mountain, Abraham tied up Isaac and placed him on the wood to sacrifice him. Just as Abraham raised his knife to kill Isaac, God sent an angel shouting: "Abraham, Abraham! Do not do the least harm to your son. I know now how devoted you are that you would not put your own beloved son before God." Then Abraham saw a sheep caught in some thorns. He untied Isaac and they offered up the sheep as a sacrifice. God again blessed Abraham.



After the death of Abraham, God spoke to Isaac and offered him the same blessing of his father, Abraham. He told him he would have many descendants, and that he would give him the land where he was dwelling (the Promise Land). Isaac himself had two sons (twins), Esau and Jacob. Even though Esau was the older son, God chose Jacob to carry on the blessing given to Abraham ...

[Read the full story in the Book of Genesis, chapters 12-28:5]

### 4. Jacob and Joseph

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One night, after Jacob had grown up, he was out in the wilderness by himself. In the middle of the night, an angel disguised as a man came out of nowhere and began to wrestle with Jacob. After wrestling all night Jacob eventually defeated him. The angel then told Jacob "You shall no longer be called Jacob. You shall be called Israel."

Jacob himself had 12 sons from two different wives. His favorite son was Joseph. Joseph's brothers were very jealous of him. They wanted to kill Joseph. When they were in the field alone, they seized Joseph and sold him as a slave to some people that were on their way to Egypt.



God blessed Joseph and took care of him. Everything that he did went well. After a long series of events, and many years, Joseph was eventually made the Governor of Egypt, second in command to Pharaoh (the title of the King of Egypt). His job was to keep Egypt from being destroyed by the famine that was striking the whole world.

Eventually the famine struck the land where Jacob and his sons lived. Jacob sent his sons to Egypt to buy food. Egypt was the only place that had extra food because of God's blessing through Joseph's work. After testing his brothers and seeing that they had repented and changed, Joseph revealed himself to his brothers.

He invited all of them to move to Egypt to a special land prepared for them. Jacob moved all his sons, and their families, and his possessions to that place and they prospered for many years ...

[Read the full story in the Book of Genesis, chapters 32:23-33, 37, 39-47]

## 5. Moses

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The Israelites, the family of Jacob who was called Israel, lived in Egypt for years and years, and they were very prosperous. (Note: The Israelites were also called Hebrews.) But, after some time, a king came into power who did not know the blessing that Joseph had been to the nation of Egypt. The Egyptians despised the Israelites because they were so prosperous. The king (called the Pharaoh) looked about and saw how well this group of foreigners (the Israelites) was doing, so he had them all enslaved.

For hundreds of years the Israelites were slaves in Egypt. But they always believed that God would free them and lead them back to the land that he promised to Abraham and his descendants. At one point Pharaoh worried because there were too many Israelites. "Eventually they may outnumber us and take over," he thought to himself. He ordered that all the baby boys be thrown into the river and drowned. One woman tried to save her baby by placing him in a basket and letting him float down the river, hoping that someone would find him and take care of him. Pharaoh's daughter found the little baby and adopted him. She named him Moses (which means something like "Out of the Water").

Moses grew up as an Egyptian, but he knew he was really an Israelite. One day, he saw an Egyptian overseer beating an Israelite slave. Moses grabbed the Egyptian and killed him. Then he had to flee from Egypt to keep from getting killed for his act. He went very far away from Egypt and ended up at Mount Sinai, a holy place of God, where he lived for many years, married and had children of his own. It was there that God spoke to him through the burning bush. (This was a miraculous event: the bush was on fire but did not get burnt.) God told Moses to go back to Egypt and free His people from slavery.

Moses returned to Egypt, obedient to God's word. He went right to Pharaoh and demanded that he release the Israelites. Pharaoh would not listen, so God unleashed 10 plagues on Egypt: all the water turned to blood; thick swarms of flies filled every single house; sickness and disease killed all their animals; and so on. Only the Egyptians suffered from the plagues; the Israelites were never affected by them. Pharaoh resisted the first 9 plagues, so God was forced to unleash the worst plague: the death of the firstborn. God told the Israelites through Moses what they needed to do. Each household was to get for itself a lamb. It had to be a perfect lamb without any defects. They were to sacrifice the lamb and smear some of its blood on the door posts of their homes. Then they were to eat the lamb in a special meal: the Passover Meal. During the night the Angel of Death went through the whole land of Egypt striking down the first born of every family. But when the Angel of Death saw the blood on their homes he would pass over them and not take their lives inside. After the last plague Pharaoh gave up and released the Israelites. Moses gathered them and they fled from Egypt. They journeyed to the Red Sea at the edge of Egypt. By this time Pharaoh had changed his mind. He sent his army to catch the Israelites. But God split the sea open so that the Israelites could pass through. As the Egyptians pursued the Israelites through the opening of the sea, God closed the sea upon them. The Egyptian army drowned, and the Israelites were safe.



Then Moses led the Israelites to Mount Sinai where God made a new covenant with them. They were to be His people, and He would be their God. He would bless them and be faithful to them. They were to follow His laws, the most important of which were the Ten Commandments. Throughout this time, the Israelites complained about what God was doing. They constantly worried that they were going to die in the desert, and said it would have been better to stay in Egypt as slaves. God took care of them in miraculous ways: He provided a strange bread that appeared on the ground of the desert (manna); He sent quail on their camp for them to easily gather and eat; He even brought water from a rock for them to drink. Moses led them to the edge of the Promise Land, the land promised to Abraham and his descendants by God (which was called Canaan). God told them it was theirs to take and that He would help them claim it. But the Israelites would not trust God, even after all He had done for them. So God instructed Moses to lead them around in the desert for 40 years to get them to prepare to go into the Promise Land and to purify them ...

[Read the full story in the Books of Exodus, chapters 1-17:7, 19-20:17, Numbers 13-14]

## 6. Joshua, the Conquest and the Judges

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After 40 years of wandering through the desert, after the faithless generation of Israelites died off, the Israelites again came to the edge of the Promise Land. This time the Israelites trusted God and were ready to claim their land. God appointed Moses' assistant, Joshua, to lead the Israelites into the Promise Land. God is the true owner of the earth, not us. God, the owner, gave the land to the Israelites, and they took what God had given them from the various peoples who were living in that land at the time.

In the hundreds of years that followed, the Israelites were very fickle in their devotion to God. At first they were very devout, but they gradually forgot about Him. So God would allow a strong nation to conquer Israel, so that they would realize they had rejected God and failed to live up to their end of the covenant. The Israelites would then repent and turn back to God. God would raise up some person to lead the Israelites against their enemy; this person was called a Judge. The Israelites would conquer their enemy by God's power and live in harmony again as long as they observed God's laws. And God would bless them. But ... after a while they would forget about God and the whole process would begin again. This same

thing happened again, and again, and again. It seemed that the Israelites never learned. And God never totally abandoned them. He always welcomed them back after they repented ...

[Read the full story in the Books of Joshua, chapters 1-11, Judges 1-16]

## 7. The Kingdom of Israel

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Eventually the Israelites begged God for a permanent King to rule over them. They told God that every other nation had a king and that they needed one too. God was heartbroken. He Himself was the King of Israel. But they rejected Him as King and wanted an earthly king. God warned them through the prophet Samuel (the last of the Judges) that a king would be very cruel to them and eventually unfaithful. But the people would not listen. And so, God let them have their way. He appointed Saul to be king of Israel.

At first Saul was a great king. He bravely defended Israel against their enemies and made the Israelites proud. But later he became very unfaithful to God. He eventually was killed.

God rose up David after Saul. David was a good king. But the power of being king eventually got to him too. He committed adultery and murder. David repented and God forgave him, but he still had to live with the consequences of his sins: David's whole reign as king was marked with war. But God loved David, and He revealed that a son of David would reign over a united kingdom for all time (which is fulfilled much later through Jesus).

David's son, Solomon, became king after David. He was a wise and noble ruler. He built a great temple for God. But he too eventually fell under the temptation of power. He had many, many wives who were pagans. He began to worship their false gods and turned away from the true God. He was to be the last king of a united Israel.



After Solomon's reign, the nation of Israel split in two. The ten northern tribes formed a kingdom they called Israel, and the two southern tribes formed a kingdom they called Judah (after the tribe of Judah). For hundreds of years, kings sat on the thrones of these two kingdoms. Most of these kings were wicked and did not honor God. Throughout this time God sent dozens of prophets to teach the Israelites and get them to be faithful to God. The people rarely listened. Eventually, both of these kingdoms were destroyed by pagan countries. The northern kingdom was destroyed first by the nation of never to exist again. Later the southern kingdom fell. The Temple, which was in the city of Jerusalem in the southern kingdom, was destroyed and many of the people were sent into exile ...

[Read the full story of Saul, David and Solomon in the Books of 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 Kings 1-12:24]

## 8. The Exile and the Return

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After the southern kingdom was destroyed by the Babylonians, the Israelites were sent into exile. This is very significant because they were driven out of the Promise Land. While they were in exile, God sent prophets to them to teach them. The prophets helped the people to understand God's law in a whole new way. It was during this time that God revealed to the Israelites that He would some day send them a Messiah, a Savior who would reunite them to God and make them a unified people again.

The Israelites were purified and became even more devout than ever before. They entered into a new relationship with God, and He called them back to the Promise Land.

Once they returned they tried to start over again. The first thing they did was to rebuild the Temple and to worship God the way Moses had instructed.

For years and years they struggled to be faithful to God. As always they fell away from God and repented. The Israelites were conquered by the Greeks, and then by the Romans. They waited in hope for the coming of a Messiah.

## 9. Jesus

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When God decided the time had come to send the Messiah, He sent the angel Gabriel to a young woman named Mary. God asked her if she would be the Mother of His Son. She asked how it could happen because she was a virgin and not yet married to Joseph her betrothed. God explained that the Holy Spirit would make her pregnant, and that this child would be God Himself. Not truly understanding all of this, and not knowing what was to happen, Mary trusted God and she said "Yes!" At that moment, God became human! God had spoken to His chosen people through Moses and the prophets. Now He sent His very own Son, who was Himself God.

Joseph found out that Mary was pregnant and decided to break off their engagement. But God spoke to Joseph through a dream and told him that it was by the power of the Holy Spirit that Mary conceived. Joseph took Mary as his wife and raised Jesus as his own son. Joseph was a descendent of David, so Jesus is called a son of David through Joseph his stepfather.

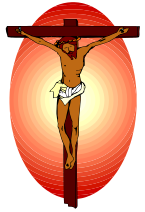


Jesus lived a normal life until he was 30 years old. Then he began to proclaim the Good News of God's love and forgiveness. He worked many miracles and taught the people about God in a way they had never experienced. Jesus revealed God as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, through His actions and teachings. During His years of preaching and teaching He chose twelve men to be His Apostles. These were the men that he taught and trained to carry on His message and to lead the Church that He founded.



After Jesus had taught, healed and forgiven the people for three years, He embraced the main reason He came down from heaven. The Father sent the Son, Jesus, to offer up His life for the sake of all people. Just as Moses sacrificed the lamb to save the Israelites from death and deliver them from slavery, Jesus came as the Lamb of God to save us from the death and slavery of sin by offering up His own Body and Blood. And just as the Israelites ate the Lamb they had sacrificed, Jesus gave us His Body to eat in the Eucharist.

So Jesus was brought to trial on false accusations by the corrupt Jewish leaders. They presented Jesus to Pontius Pilate, the Roman Governor of Israel (since the Roman Empire ruled the land). Pilate tried Jesus and found him innocent, but decided to kill Him anyway because he did not want the people to riot. Jesus was crucified, dying a horrible death. But to the end He loved the people and even asked the Father to forgive them as He hung dying on the cross.



After Jesus died, He was placed in a tomb. And three days later He rose from the dead, exactly as He had predicted earlier. He appeared to His Apostles, His Mother, Mary, and to many of His other followers. He proclaimed to them that all people are offered forgiveness of their sins through Him. After this was finished He promised that He would send the Holy Spirit upon them after He returned to the Father. And Jesus ascended into heaven, rising up as if on a cloud, and He was seen no more ...

[Read the full story in the Gospel of Luke]

## 10. The Apostles and the Church

While Jesus was going about His earthly ministry He gathered twelve men and taught them. For three years they shared an intimate life with Jesus as His closest friends. Jesus called them Apostles. These men would become Jesus' leaders after His ascension into heaven.

After the ascension, the Apostles gathered to pray for the coming of the Holy Spirit, following Jesus' instructions. They gathered secretly because they were afraid that the Jewish leaders would kill them like they killed Jesus. They prayed for nine days. And then, on the day called Pentecost, the Holy Spirit descended on them and they were filled with strength and courage. They rushed out into the streets from their hiding place and proclaimed for all to hear that Jesus was the Messiah and that we can only have true life through Him. On that very day, 3000 people heard their witness and were baptized into Jesus Christ.



The Apostles carried on the message of Jesus. They taught with authority about Jesus. They cured the sick and worked miracles. Gradually they spread the Christian faith to every corner of the known world, founding Churches wherever they went.

As time went on they chose other men to minister as Apostles. One of the best-known Apostles was St. Paul. He apparently never met Jesus when He was alive. After Christ's death, St. Paul persecuted the early Christians, having them arrested for their faith. On one of his trips to capture Christians, Jesus revealed Himself to Paul, and he experienced a great conversion. St. Paul became the great missionary of the early church, spreading the teachings of Christ to very distant lands. St. Paul also wrote many letters about Jesus and the Christian faith which are preserved in the Bible. Letters from other Apostles are also preserved in the Bible. Just as they taught the earliest followers about what it means to be disciples of Jesus, so they also teach us what discipleship is all about.

The Church of Christ continues to grow and spread waiting and hoping for the Jesus return in glory ...

[Read the full story: the beginnings of the Church (Acts 1-15); the journeys of Paul (Acts 16-28)]

## 11. The Second Coming

While Jesus was on earth he told His Apostles that he would eventually return in glory. Jesus revealed this especially to the Apostle John who wrote the Book of Revelations\*. In this book John describes Jesus sitting on the throne of God, at the right hand of the Father (and therefore equal to God).

All peoples will bow down to Christ and recognize Him as Lord and God. Jesus will judge all people according to how they lived their lives. The just will be received into heaven to live with the Blessed Trinity forever. The wicked will be sent to hell where they will be tormented because they did not respond to God's loving invitation.

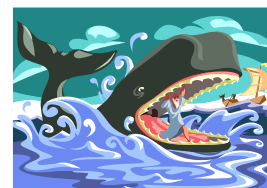
*\*The Book of Revelations is an unusual book filled with lots of symbols and strange imagery. Although it does teach us some things about the end times, the Catholic Church does not believe that it is a blue print for the end of the world. To learn more about the Book of Revelations, check out "The Lamb's Supper" by Scott Hahn.*

## OTHER STORIES

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The Bible contains all kinds of interesting, inspiring, and amusing stories. Here are some other stories you might want to look up.

1. Jacob's dream (Genesis 28:10-22)
2. The Israelite spies saved by Rahab and the capture of Jericho (Joshua 2; 3:14-17; 5:13-6:27)
3. The story of Samson (Judges 13-16)
4. The Prophet Elijah's challenge to the false prophets (1 Kings 18:1-40)
5. The Prophet Elijah is taken up to heaven in a fiery chariot (2 Kings 2:1-14)
6. The birth and the calling of Samuel (1 Samuel 1:9- 2:11, 3:1-11)
7. The story of Ruth, the great grandmother of King David (Ruth 1-4)
8. David and Goliath (1 Samuel 17)
9. Jonah and the whale (Jonah 1-4)
10. Tobiah and the Archangel Raphael (Tobit 1-12)
11. King Nebuchadnezzar and the fiery furnace (Daniel 3:1-97)
12. Daniel in the lion's den (Daniel 6)
13. Ezekiel and the vision of the dry bones (Ezekiel 37: 1-14)
14. Jesus forgives a woman caught in adultery (John 8: 1-11)
15. Jesus appoints Peter head of the Church (ie, the first Pope) (Matthew 16:13-20)



## PRAYERS

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The Bible has a wealth of prayers. Here are several passages that make great prayer-reading:

1. The Lord is my Shepherd (Psalm 23)
2. The Canticle Mary, called the Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55)
3. The Canticle of Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist (Luke 1: 68-80)
4. O Lord you formed me in my mother's womb (Psalm 139)
5. King David's prayer of repentance (Psalm 51)
6. Out of the depths I call to you, O Lord (Psalm 130)
7. Humble trust in God (Psalm 131)
8. O God I long for you (Psalm 63)
9. Lord, I believe; help my lack of faith (see Mark 14-29)

