

## **The Plot of the Old Testament**

A quick overview of a millennia or two.

An interactive dramatic sermon for all-age worship.

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### Places

*(put signs on the wall: Iraq to the North, Israel in the middle, Egypt south)*

Israel

Egypt

Iraq

People *(make name labels & give out to church folk. As each person's name is called they stand & join in the action, and when their part is finished they sit down again)*

Abraham and Sarah

Isaac

Jacob

Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Zebulun.

Joseph, Benjamin. Dan, Naphtali. Gad, Asher

Moses, Joshua

Saul

David

Solomon

Isaiah *(Isaiah needs a script of his part)*

Cyrus

Micah

Ezra

Nehemiah

### Props

Crown

A gold chain for when Joseph is made Governor and Solomon (also stolen by Babylon & returned by Cyrus)

Blocks for building the temple (twice, and knocking down by the Babylonians) We used small drums which worked well – also makes the point that the Temple was also for music – and they made a great sound when knocked over!)

**God** needs a copy of the script, and a microphone!

The Old Testament begins not in Israel, but in Iraq. Back long long ago, before deserts, when the land between the Euphrates and Tigris rivers was a lush Fertile Crescent, a true Garden of Eden. The main problem with these mighty rivers was that occasionally they raged in a Great Flood, destroying everything. Then came the civilization of Sumeria, which built great towers – actually square pyramids – including one in a place called Babel.

And so we come to Genesis 11, almost but not quite exactly 4,000 years ago, with a young couple called **Abraham and Sarah**. They came from a Sumerian city called Ur at the mouth of the Euphrates River in what is now in Iraq. And out of the blue God spoke to Abraham:

**God:** *Go from your father's home to the land that I will show you and I will make of you a great nation, and through you all the nations of the world will be blessed.*

So they went *(they walk from Iraq to Israel)*

and it was a bit touch-and-go but EVENTUALLY they had a son

**Isaac**

and one of his 2 sons was **Jacob**

and Jacob had 12 sons, each of whom founded one of the 12 tribes of Israel

**Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar , Zebulun.**

**Joseph, Benjamin. Dan, Naphtali. Gad, Asher.**

*(Abraham, Sarah, Isaac & Jacob sit down. The 12 sons stay through the drama representing the nation of Israel)*

Joseph did not hear God speak in words, but in dreams, vivid pictures which spoke to him of greatness. which made his brothers so wildly mad at him that they tried to kill him, but in a strange twist of fate Joseph was taken as a slave to Egypt. *(get someone to drag him off to Egypt)*

And in Egypt lots of strange things happened to him, and bizarrely he ended up as governor of all of Egypt, *(put a gown and gold chain on him)*

leading the disaster preparedness programme which paid off very well when drought led to mass famine. And refugees came from all over the place, including his 11 brothers. *(they move to Egypt, some hug Joseph)*

So they all settled in Egypt.

About 400 years later the Hebrew people as they were called were back on the bottom of the social heap, *(take Joseph's gown & gold chain off him!)*

which meant lots of brick making for pyramids & the like, and it was not a good life, not at all. And God decided to do something about it, because for his own strange reasons he had a special place in his heart for these people. So he rescued a little boy called **Moses**, brought him up in the palace of all places

and when he was grown, spoke to him one day in the middle of nowhere from a burning bush and said,

**God:** *I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, of Isaac and Jacob. I have heard the cry of my people. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of the Egypt!*

So, you know the rest, plagues, disasters, last minute packing, a mad dash away from the Egyptian army, crossing the Red Sea. Great stuff!

Then there's Moses up Mt Sinai getting the 10 commandments and there's fire & glory all around. Great stuff! *(Get Moses to stand on a chair)*

And then... and then ... 40 long years in the desert. wandering in circles hungry and thirsty. not so great. *(the people wander around the aisles of the church. GRUMBLING!)*

But eventually they make it to the River Jordan and the promised land. Israel.

**Joshua** takes the leadership

*(Moses exits, and through the rest of the story each other person comes & goes, just leaving the 12 tribes in the action)*

and after him a succession of tribal leaders

until one day the people ask God for a king

so God reluctantly appoints **Saul** for the job

*(God puts the crown on Saul. Sit him on a 'throne'. Everyone cheers)*

and he does OK but not that great and along comes young **David**

kills the giant, sings & plays harp like an angel. Everyone loves him except Saul

and after many skirmishes and shenanigans David becomes King,

*(David takes the crown off Saul, pushes him off the throne. Everyone cheers even louder!)*

the great King David, the shining years of Israel, united at last under God and King

The year is almost but not quite exactly 1000 BC, 3000 years ago.

And David sings his heart out, and thankfully people wrote them down, many of them recorded as our Psalms.

David's son **Solomon** was next to be King ... he loved gold and jewels and finery and his palace was magnificent.

*(Give him the gold chain as well as the crown)*

He also built a Temple in Jerusalem, for God.

*(build a tower with blocks)*

And he compiled the book of Proverbs, and the passionate Song of Songs

But cracks appeared and the northern tribes split away,

*(Judah pushes past Solomon, with a couple of his brothers, and set up another chair to the North)*

appointing their own king ... so now we have 2 kingdoms, Israel and Judah.  
and various Kings came & went over the next few hundred years, some better than others

Until... Judah is invaded and smashed

*(those people have to go & sit back in their seats. Gone!)*

and then, 600 years before Jesus was born, Israel falls to the Babylonians.  
Jerusalem is destroyed, the Temple ransacked, everything that could be nicked was nicked.

*(Get some Babylonians to knock over the temple, push a couple of brothers back to their seats – dead – and drag the rest to Iraq)*

Those people not slit through with the sword were rounded up and dragged back to Babylon ... which is in Iraq, so sorry folks, back to Iraq again, just a bit further up the Euphrates river than we started from.

60 long years they were in Babylon

and in that terrible century God spoke often, to men with hearts stirred up with compassion and judgement

Men like **Isaiah** who could see the disaster chystal clear in his minds eye before it happened but was helpless to prevent it. Here's how Isaiah begins:

**Isaiah:** Hear me, you heavens! Listen, earth! For the Lord has spoken: "I reared children and brought them up, but they have rebelled against me.

Your country is desolate, your cities burned with fire; your fields are being stripped by foreigners right before you, laid waste as when overthrown by strangers.

But Isaiah also says:

**Isaiah:** But now, this is what the Lord says— he who created you, Jacob, he who formed you, Israel:

**God:** "Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine.

Sure enough, God does save his people, restores them to their home, through the defeat of the Babylonians to the Syrians in the year 638BC, led by **Cyrus** (*Cyrus takes the crown*) who lets them return home, even lets them take their stolen treasures back with them.

*(The Israelites carry back the gold chain triumphantly to Israel)*

Then two men, **Ezra** and **Nehemiah** stepped up to lead the rebuild, and they rebuilt the Temple and Jerusalem.

And God called prophets too to encourage his people, men like **Micah**. God said through him

**God:** *And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.*

The year is roughly 500 BC, 2,500 years ago. God's people have been dragged to hell and back. Over a couple of centuries God sent more than 16 prophets, recorded for us. And then, silence. waiting.

as the Israelite people attempted to get along as best they could despite being under foreign control, from Syria and then from Rome.

and we wait for a baby to be born

who will fulfill the dreams, the hopes, the waiting for a people

a people chosen by God for no particular reason

other than he loved them

and kept cajoling them and keeping his promises alive for them.

that promise made right back at the beginning, that through Israel all the peoples of the world would be blessed.

including us, here in Palmerston North, so so many years later.

Sing: 'Tell out my soul'

or say the Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55)

the sign that the waiting is over, that God's Spirit comes, to a young girl,

who sings this amazing song which is really a summary of the entire story of the Old Testament.

Israel

Egypt

# Iraq

Abraham  
and Sarah

Judah

Isaac

Issachar

Jacob

Zebulun

Reuben

Joseph

Simeon

Benjamin

Levi

Dan



Naphtali

Solomon

Gad

Isaiah

Asher

Micah

Moses

Ezra

Saul

Nehemiah

David

Joshua