

Salvation History

God's Gift to You

The oldest sections of the Bible were written over 3,200 years ago, the newest, 1,900 years ago. Things were so different then! Some cultures sacrificed children. Some religions had temple prostitution. Slavery was everywhere. Women were considered property. Science and history as we know it did not exist. The world was believed to be flat. Keeping factual records was not as important as telling powerful stories. And references to the people and events of the day were confusing: who were the Amorites, anyway?

But out of those ancient times came our wonderful Bible. In it you will find riveting stories, moving songs of praise, and inspiring messages that will draw you closer to God. The Bible is God's gift to you!

Overview of Salvation History

Primeval History

The Bible starts with some imaginative stories that tell how God made everything, along with the first humans, **Adam and Eve**. God's **Creation** was good, but evil crept into the world. After several generations God decided to flood the world. But God saved **Noah**, his family, and specimens of land animals on an **ark** (boat) in order to give humans a chance to start over.

Patriarchs and Matriarchs (1850–1750 BC)

Abraham and **Sarah** arrived in **Canaan**, the land God had promised them. They were old, but God gave them a son, **Isaac**, who had two sons with his wife **Rebecca**. The younger was **Jacob**, whom God named **Israel**. Israel had twelve sons, but his favorite was **Joseph**. Joseph's jealous brothers sold him as a slave in **Egypt**, but God helped him prosper. When his brothers visited Egypt, Joseph recognized them and told them to come live with him.

Egypt and Exodus (1750–1290 BC)

Israel's descendants (sometimes called **Hebrews**, **Israelites**, the **Tribes of Israel**, or the Children of Israel) became a small nation. But a new dynasty came to power and made the Hebrews slaves. Eventually God told **Moses** to bring them out of Egypt. To convince **Pharaoh** to let his cheap labor go, God sent a series of plagues, including the killing of all firstborn sons. The Hebrews were saved by putting the **blood of a lamb** over their

doors. After the Hebrews left, Pharaoh sent his army to bring them back, trapping them at the Red Sea. God made the waters separate so the Hebrew people could escape; then God made the waters fall back, drowning the pursuing army. The **Passover** meal celebrates this victory.

Settling the Promised Land (1250–1020 BC)

On their way back to Canaan, God made a **covenant** (an agreement) with the Hebrew people at **Mount Sinai**. God gave them laws, including the **Ten Commandments**. God told them to build a **tabernacle** (worship tent) and the **ark of the Covenant** (a box symbolizing God's presence). After a generation, the Hebrew people invaded Canaan under the leadership of **Joshua**. The land was divided into territories, roughly corresponding to the twelve Tribes of Israel. For over two hundred years, the Hebrews fought for the land; there was no central power, so God would occasionally raise up local leaders called **judges**.

The Kingdom United (1020–922 BC)

God allowed **Samuel**, the last of the judges, to make **Saul** the first king. Samuel poured oil on Saul's head, "anointing" him for leadership. The Hebrew word for an "anointed person" is *Messiah* (the Greek word is *Christ*). The next king was **David**, the greatest human king the little nation of **Israel** would ever have. God promised that David's house would be established forever. Next was David's son **Solomon** the Wise, who built a great palace and the first **Temple** in Jerusalem. But during Solomon's son's reign, the kingdom divided in two.

The Kingdom Divided (922–587 BC)

The **northern kingdom** was called **Israel**, and it went through several dynasties. The **southern kingdom** was **Judah**, and the Davidic dynasty stayed in power. Sadly, most of the kings were not faithful to God. So God would send **prophets** like **Elijah** to speak the word of God and call the people to faithfulness. When the northern kingdom fell to **Assyria**, it ceased to exist. **Babylon** in turn defeated Assyria and then later crushed Judah; Jerusalem and the Temple were utterly destroyed. Many **Jews** (inhabitants of Judah) were sent into **exile in Babylon**.

The Exile and the Return (587–5 BC)

While the Jews were in exile, stories about heroes like **Daniel** kept the faith alive. When **Persia** defeated Babylon, the Persians let the Jews return home. By 515 BC the Temple had been rebuilt. Eventually the **Greeks** controlled the region and became brutally disrespectful, so **Judas Maccabeus** led a successful revolt. For a time Israel was free, until **Rome** conquered the region in 63 BC. Weary from dark centuries of domination, the Jews began to hope for a new King, a **Messiah** (Christ), a Son of David, who would restore glory to Israel. In time millions would recognize a baby lying in a manger as the Christ—a light shining in the darkness.

The Life of Jesus, the Christ (5 BC–AD 30)

The angel **Gabriel** appeared to **Mary**, a young virgin, and told her she was going to have a baby—**Jesus**. The child would be conceived by the Holy Spirit and called the **Son of God**. Jesus was born in **Bethlehem** with only a manger for a bed; we celebrate his birth on **Christmas**. **Wise Men** guided by a star brought gifts to Jesus; we celebrate this on **Epiphany**. Jesus grew up in **Nazareth** in **Galilee**.

Meanwhile, **John the Baptist** was baptizing people in the **Jordan River** when he recognized Jesus as "the **Lamb of God**." Jesus began teaching, often using stories called **parables**; he soon had a large following of **disciples**. Jesus preached the **Gospel—Good News**—with words that were both challenging and promising: we are to love God and our neighbor; this is God's **greatest commandment**. Even though we

sin, God loves us—unconditionally—and offers us **forgiveness**; this is God's promise. Jesus performed many miracles, which were signs of the coming of the **Reign of God**. Some believed, and their faith was strengthened; others rejected Jesus.

The Death and Resurrection of Jesus, (AD 30)

Many of the Jewish leaders were upset because Jesus talked like he was above Jewish law, claimed to be the Christ, and even claimed to be God. So the authorities planned to kill him. Shortly before he was arrested, Jesus rode into Jerusalem like a king, while crowds honored him with palm branches (**Palm Sunday**). Later that week (**Holy Thursday**) Jesus ate a Passover meal with his disciples; this would be their **Last Supper** (and the first **Eucharist**). The next day (**Good Friday**) Jesus was **crucified** (brutal execution on a **cross**) under the authority of the Roman governor **Pontius Pilate**. Early Sunday morning (**Easter**) some women came to visit his tomb and were told that Jesus had come back to life; several times after his **Resurrection**, Jesus appeared to his disciples. Forty days later (**Ascension Day**), Jesus was lifted up into heaven.

The Early Christian Church (AD 30–70)

Fifty days after Jesus's Resurrection on **Pentecost** (the name of a Jewish feast day), the Holy Spirit came to the disciples and they started preaching in many languages. Thousands believed! Some refer to it as the birth of the **Church**. **Stephen** was the first **martyr**. **Paul** saw a vision of Jesus and became the first Christian missionary. **Peter** also had a startling vision—God told him salvation was for the Jews and the **Gentiles** (non-Jews). Days of persecution were ahead; Rome became increasingly intolerant and destroyed the Temple in **AD 70**. But Christianity kept spreading and growing. Jesus's mission of spreading the Good News of salvation continues through the Church today.

Photo (top facing page): This is the Sinai Mountain Range, the legendary location in Exodus where Moses received the Law from God. Photo (right): A northern source spring of the Jordan River near the ancient city of Dan.

Timeline of Salvation History (dates are approximate)

Biblical Prehistory	1850–1750 BC	1750–1290 BC	1250–1020 BC	1020–922 BC	922–587 BC	576–5 BC	5 BC–AD 30	AD 30–70	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adam and Eve Noah and the Flood 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1850 BC Abraham and Sarah arrive in Canaan. 1750 BC Joseph invites his brothers and his father, Jacob, to settle in Egypt. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1290 BC Moses leads the Exodus from Egypt. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1250 BC Joshua leads the invasion of Canaan. 1200 BC Judges lead individual tribes in Canaan. 1020 BC Samuel anoints Saul as first king of Israel. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1000 BC David unites and rules over Israel. 961 BC King Solomon builds the Temple. 922 BC Kingdom is divided into Israel (N) and Judah (S). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 721 BC Assyrians destroy Israel. 587 BC Babylonians destroy Jerusalem and the Temple. The Exile of Judah in Babylon begins. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 538 BC Persians defeat the Babylonians and allow the Jews in exile to return home. 515 BC People of Judah rebuild the Temple. 332 BC Greeks conquer the Holy Land. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 160 BC Judas Maccabeus leads successful revolt against the Greeks. 63 BC Romans conquer the Holy Land. 19 BC Herod the Great begins construction on the third Temple. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 5 BC Jesus is born. AD 27 Jesus's public ministry begins. AD 30 Jesus is crucified, Jesus rises from the dead, and the Spirit comes to the disciples at Pentecost. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> AD 31 Saul is converted. AD 64–68 Nero persecutes Christians. Peter and Paul are martyred. AD 70 Romans destroy the Temple.



Glossary of Salvation History

apostle "One who is sent out." Usually refers to the twelve disciples and Saint Paul.

atonement Reconciliation—restoring the relationship—between God and people.

conscience The "interior voice" of a person, a God-given internal sense of what is morally wrong or right.

conversion A profound change of heart, turning away from sin and toward God.

covenant A solemn agreement between human beings or between God and a human being in which mutual commitments are recognized; also called a testament. In the Bible, two covenants are central: (1) the Covenant between God and the ancient people of Israel established in God's Sinai Covenant with Moses; also called the Old Testament or Old Covenant; and (2) the New Covenant established by Jesus through his sacrificial death and Resurrection; also called the New Testament.

Emmanuel (Immanuel) A Hebrew name for God, meaning "God with us."

evangelist Based on a word for "good news," in general, anyone who actively works to spread the Gospel of Jesus; more commonly and specifically, one of the persons traditionally recognized as an author of one of the four Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

evangelization The proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus through word and witness.

faith (1) The gift of believing in Jesus as God. (2) The gift of loving God and others because God first loved us.

Fall, the Also called the Fall from grace, the biblical revelation about the origins of sin and evil in the world, expressed figuratively in the story of Adam and Eve in Genesis. (See also *original sin*.)

final judgment The judgment of the human race by Jesus Christ at his Second Coming, as noted in the Nicene Creed. It is also called the last judgment.

free will The gift from God that allows human beings to choose from among various actions, for which we are held accountable. It is the basis for moral responsibility.

Gospel From an old English term, *god spel*, which means "good news." (1) The one-word name for the message of Jesus's life and ministry. (2) The first four books of the New Testament that focus on the person of Jesus.

grace The free and undeserved gift of God's loving and active presence in the universe and in our life.

hope The theological virtue by which we trust in the promises of God and expect from God both eternal life and the grace we need to attain it; the conviction that God's grace is at work in the world and that the Kingdom of God, established by and through Jesus Christ, is becoming realized through the workings of the Holy Spirit among us (see Rm 8:24–25).

idolatry Worship of other beings, creatures, or material goods in a way that is fitting for God alone. In the Old Testament, the Israelites were constantly breaking their Covenant with God by worshiping idols.

Incarnation The Son of God assumed human nature and "became flesh" in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. It means that Jesus, the Son of God and second person of the Trinity, is both fully God and fully human.

justification God's act of bringing a sinful human being into right relationship with God. It involves removal of sin and the gift of God's sanctifying grace to renew holiness.

Kingdom of God The reign or rule of God over the hearts of people and, as a consequence of that, the development of a new social order based on unconditional love. Also called the Reign of God.

Law, the Another name for the Ten Commandments, it is also called the Law of Moses or the Old Law.

original sin The sin by which the first humans disobeyed God, resulting in separation from God; also, the state of human nature that affects every person now born into the world. (See also *Fall, the*.)

Parousia, Christ's The Second Coming of Christ, when his Reign will be fully established and his triumph over evil will be complete.

Paschal lamb A name for Jesus, whose death and Resurrection redeemed humanity. The name is associated with Passover, a commemoration of the deliverance of the Jewish people from Egypt. To avoid the slaughter of firstborn sons by the Egyptian army, the Jews sprinkled the blood of a lamb on their doorposts.

Paschal mystery The term given the entire process of God's plan of salvation by which God redeemed humanity from sin in and through Jesus's life, death, Resurrection, and Ascension into glory.

Passion, the The suffering and death of Jesus.

People of God The biblical image for the Church. Those who share in Christ's mission as priest, prophet, and king.

redemption, Redeemer The process by which we are "bought back" (the meaning of *redeem*) from slavery to sin into a right relationship with God. We are redeemed by the grace of God and through the life, death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. As the agent of redemption, Jesus is called the Redeemer.

Resurrection, the The passage of Jesus from death to life "on the third day" after his Crucifixion; the heart of the Paschal mystery, and the basis of our hope in the resurrection of the dead.

resurrection of the dead The Christian dogma that all those deemed righteous by God will be raised and will live forever with God in heaven; the conviction that not only our souls but also our transformed bodies will live on after death.

righteous To be right with God; to be virtuous and holy. Our righteousness doesn't come from our ability to be perfect but from our relationship with God, who declares us to be righteous.

sacrifice An offering made to God. The Israelites offered animals or grain to God to restore and celebrate their relationship with God. Often an animal, like a lamb, would be killed. Jesus was called the "Lamb of God."

salvation Liberation from sin and eternal union with God in heaven. Salvation is accomplished by God alone through the Paschal mystery—the dying and rising of Jesus Christ.

salvation history The pattern of events in human history that exemplify God's presence and saving actions. In Catholic thought *all* of history is salvation history, even though God's presence may not be recognized.

Savior In the Old Testament, a benefactor who forgave debts, provided benefits, and protected one from the enemy (see Neh 9:27). In the New Testament, Jesus is called the Savior of the world and his ministry is to offer salvation (see Jn 4:42, Lk 1:68–69).

sin Any deliberate offense, in thought, word, or deed, against the will of God.

soul The spiritual life principle of human beings that survives after death.

Trinity Often referred to as the Blessed Trinity, the central Christian mystery and dogma that there is one God in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The concept of Trinity was first expressed in Matthew 28:19.

Yahweh The Old Testament name for God, frequently translated as "I am who I am."

Zion The site of the Old City of Jerusalem built by David and the promised New Jerusalem foretold by the prophets (see Zech 2:14–17, Rev 14:1).

(Portions of this glossary are adapted and taken from *The Catholic Faith Handbook for Youth* and *Saint Mary's Press® Essential Bible Dictionary*.)

Where in the Bible Can I Find . . . ?

Key Events in Old Testament Salvation History

- ✦ **The Creation** (Genesis, chapters 1–2)
- ✦ **The Flood** (Genesis, chapters 6–9)
- ✦ **The Call of Abraham** (Genesis, chapter 12)
- ✦ **The Patriarchs Isaac and Jacob** (Genesis, chapters 25–36)
- ✦ **The Life of Joseph** (Genesis, chapters 37–50)
- ✦ **The Crossing of the Red Sea** (Exodus, chapter 14)
- ✦ **The Ten Commandments** (Exodus, chapter 20)
- ✦ **The History of the Two Kingdoms** (1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings)
- ✦ **The Revolt Led by Judas Maccabeus** (1 and 2 Maccabees)

Key Events in New Testament Salvation History

- ✦ **The Birth of Jesus** (Matthew, chapter 1; Luke, chapter 2)
- ✦ **Jesus Is Baptized** (Mt 3:13–17, Mk 1:9–11, Lk 3:21–22, Jn 1:31–34)
- ✦ **Jesus Begins His Ministry** (Mt 4:12–25, Mk 1:14–20, Lk 4:14–15)
- ✦ **The Confession of Peter** (Mt 16:13–20, Mk 8:27–30, Lk 9:18–20)
- ✦ **The Transfiguration** (Mt 17:1–8, Mk 9:2–8, Lk 9:28–36)
- ✦ **The Last Supper** (Mt 26:26–30, Mk 14:22–25, Lk 22:19–20)
- ✦ **The Death of Jesus** (Mt 27:1–56, Mk 15:1–41, Lk 23:1–49, Jn 19:17–30)
- ✦ **The Resurrection** (Mt 28:1–15, Mk 16:1–13, Lk 24:1–12, Jn 20:1–29)
- ✦ **The Commissioning of the Disciples** (Mt 28:16–20, Mk 16:14–16, Lk 24:36–49)
- ✦ **The Ascension** (Mk 16:19–20, Lk 24:50–53, Jn 20:19–23)
- ✦ **The Descent of the Holy Spirit** (Acts of the Apostles, chapter 2)
- ✦ **The Promise of Everlasting Life** (1 Corinthians, chapter 15)

Additional Resources

The Catholic Youth Bible®, Revised. Winona, MN: Saint Mary's Press, 2005. Available in NAB and NRSV translations, it contains helpful background information and study aids.

Jenkins, Simon. *The Bible from Scratch, Catholic Edition*. Winona, MN: Saint Mary's Press, 2007.

Saint Mary's Press® Essential Quick Charts: Bible Basics. Winona, MN: Saint Mary's Press, 2007.

Singer-Towns, Brian, et al. *The Catholic Faith Handbook for Youth*. Winona, MN: Saint Mary's Press, 2004.