

OneBook.

THE EPIC OF
EDEN

VIDEO STUDY GUIDE

Understanding the Old Testament

SANDRA L. RICHTER

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SOWING FOR A GREAT AWAKENING

To all the amazing people with whom I've had the privilege
of exploring the frontiers of the Great Story—
my seminarians at Asbury Theological and Wesley Biblical;
the good people of RCP fighting the good fight throughout the great state of California;
the remarkably dedicated laypeople from Memphis to Marietta, Killearn to Jackson,
Old Bethel to Boston, Lexington to Lubbock, Houston to Haverhill, Asheville to Southborough;
and of course my undergrads at Wheaton—
may this study serve to expand your borders, build the kingdom, and bring the exiles home.

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PUBLISHER'S FOREWORD

Welcome to OneBook, the Bible study resource brought to you by Seedbed Publishing.

In all of the history of the world, one book stands in a category of its own; one book towers over them all. We're referring, of course, to the Bible, the Word of God.

Unparalleled in truth and unmatched in wisdom, the Bible tells us the story of the world—from creation to new creation; it reveals the reality of God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; and it teaches us what it means to be a human being, created in the image of God, broken by sin yet redeemed by grace, and destined for a life of profound purpose and deep meaning.

The Bible is worthy of our highest attention and deepest devotion. To be sure, it is a complex book—sixty-six books, written in three different languages, over the course of fifteen hundred years, across three continents, by more than forty authors. It is in the marvel of such complexity that we discover the miracle of its simplicity: from beginning to end, Genesis to Revelation, the Bible tells a single, unified story.

John Wesley famously said in the preface to his sermons,

I am a spirit come from God, and returning to God: just hovering over the great gulf; till, a few moments hence, I am no more seen; I drop into an unchangeable eternity! I want to know one thing—the way to heaven; how to land safe on that happy shore. God himself has condescended to teach me the way. For this very end He came from heaven. He hath written it down in a book. O give me that book! At any price, give me the book of God! I have it: here is knowledge enough for me. Let me be a man of one book.

We want to invite and inspire you to a lifelong study of the Bible. We want you to become a person of OneBook. We are determined to help you understand it and to read it for all it's worth so that you will be equipped to fulfill God's purposes for your life. This is not so much a book we seek to master as a book we seek to be mastered by.

We have carefully chosen teachers, men and women, who have given their lives to understanding Scripture and in the process have stood under its teaching. We have searched for people who love Jesus, who love the church, and who love others.

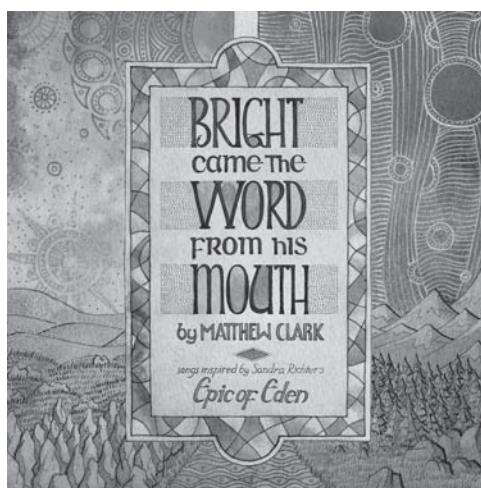
I am pleased to present to you our first release in the OneBook Collection—*The Epic of Eden Video Study Guide: Understanding the Old Testament* by Dr. Sandra L. Richter.

The Epic of Eden Video Study Guide: Understanding the Old Testament

The Old Testament makes up three-fourths of the Bible—a clear majority—and yet it is the least understood part of the Bible. Sandra Richter is one of the finest teachers of the Old Testament in the world. She has a way of teaching the Old Testament that brings it to life. As a result of engaging with her in this study of the *Old* Testament, you will come to a profound understanding of the *New* Testament and all that Scripture means for your life. She comprehends it from a deep place of faith and understanding and she has learned to teach it to ordinary people in extraordinary ways.

Richter is a wife, a mother of two daughters, a Harvard-educated scholar, a teacher, and a passionate, Spirit-filled preacher of the gospel of Jesus Christ. She presently serves on the faculty of the esteemed Wheaton College in Illinois.

You are in for a treat over the course of the next twelve weeks as you study the Word of God together through this workbook and the video teaching sessions. It is our hope that you and your *Epic* study group will be richly blessed by this investment of your time.



Bright Came the Word From His Mouth

Hear the music inspired by *The Epic of Eden*
Twelve original songs written and performed by Matthew Clark.
For more information visit matthewclark.net

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This epic study of the Old Testament could not have been completed without the colossal investment of many people. Our gratitude goes to J. D. Walt, the sower-in-chief of Seedbed Publishing, for having and holding the vision to make this happen. To Andrew Miller, director of publishing at Seedbed, for the nuts-and-bolts leadership necessary to any task of this magnitude. To Ryan Staples for hours of filming and diligent (tedious!) editing of the DVDs. To Nick Perreault of Nikabrik Design for his commitment to detail in creating some amazing maps and charts (and always being willing to nudge Dothan just a little further to the west). To Jason and Mary Aycock for our pedagogical template and the first run at the written guides. To Kathy Noftsinger for her dedicated, fastidious, and creative investment in bringing the written guides and so much more to their current state of *telos*. To Don Swank, who indefatigably tracked down numerous images from ancient files and the far reaches of the Internet. To Holly Jones for her masterful project management. To Maren Kurek and Tammy Spurlock for their expert copy editing and proofreading skills. To Kristin Goble at PerfectType for her artful typesetting. To Matthew Clark, whose vision and heart have set this great story to music—music that he has so generously shared with us. To the studio audiences who courageously endured hours and hours of filming. To Tiffani Walt for her unending encouragement for this project and its team members. And to every pastor and layperson who would not stop asking . . . our team is grateful to say that *The Epic of Eden Video Study Guide: Understanding the Old Testament* is at last available. Let the adventure begin!

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THE EPIC OF
EDEN
VIDEO STUDY GUIDE

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WEEK ONE

The Great Cultural Barrier

A Word from the Author

“The Bible is the saga of Yahweh and Adam, the prodigal son and his ever gracious heavenly father; humanity in their rebellion and God in his grace. This narrative begins with Eden and does not conclude until the New Jerusalem is firmly in place. It is all one story. And if you are a believer, it is all your story. . . . If our goal is to know our own story, then we first have to come to understand the characters who populate the Old Testament: who they were, where they lived, what was important to them” (Sandra L. Richter, *The Epic of Eden: A Christian Entry into the Old Testament* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2008), 15, 17).

Introduction

An eight-year-old girl in the suburbs listens to her grandmother’s tale of growing up on a small midwestern farm; a ten-year-old boy listens while his grandfather tells of the time *his* father, a new immigrant, moved the family from an apartment in Brooklyn to a Craftsman bungalow in San Francisco. In school, both of these children learn about the history of the United States—its founding, growth, and westward expansion; stories of war and peace, trial and triumph, of leaders great and small. Eventually these two become young adults, fall in love, and begin their own new family. And two separate stories become one, which will, in turn, be passed down to *their* children. All of these experiences and memories, individual and shared, become *their* story, shaping who they are and who or what they may one day become.

What is *your* story?

Most of us are like the two children mentioned above. Whether male or female, married or single, we’ve grown up with a common history, a common language, and a

common literature. We share common truths and legends, values and dreams, and we pass them on to the next generation. In short, we share a common culture. Each of us adds our personal narrative, weaving our thread into the fabric of society and thereby helping to create the ever-expanding tapestry of culture. In doing so, the tapestry tells our collective story, one that we all know and share because our own hands had a part in creating it. Our thread gives shape and substance to the whole just as the whole gives shape and substance to us.

What is unique about the Christian community is that part of our story comes from a part of our “family” that we might not yet know: our forefathers in the faith—Abraham (who is known as Abram prior to his covenant with God), Isaac, and Jacob. This story is also part of the fabric of our lives, and gives shape to who we were, who we are, and who we will become.

Real Time and Space

This week, we begin to address the barrier of culture that stands between us and this other “family.” As we learn about the culture of this other family, we will traverse the land of the Bible from Mesopotamia to Canaan/Israel/Palestine to Egypt. We will travel in time from Abraham’s world somewhere around 2000 BC to the Passion of Jesus in approximately AD 30.

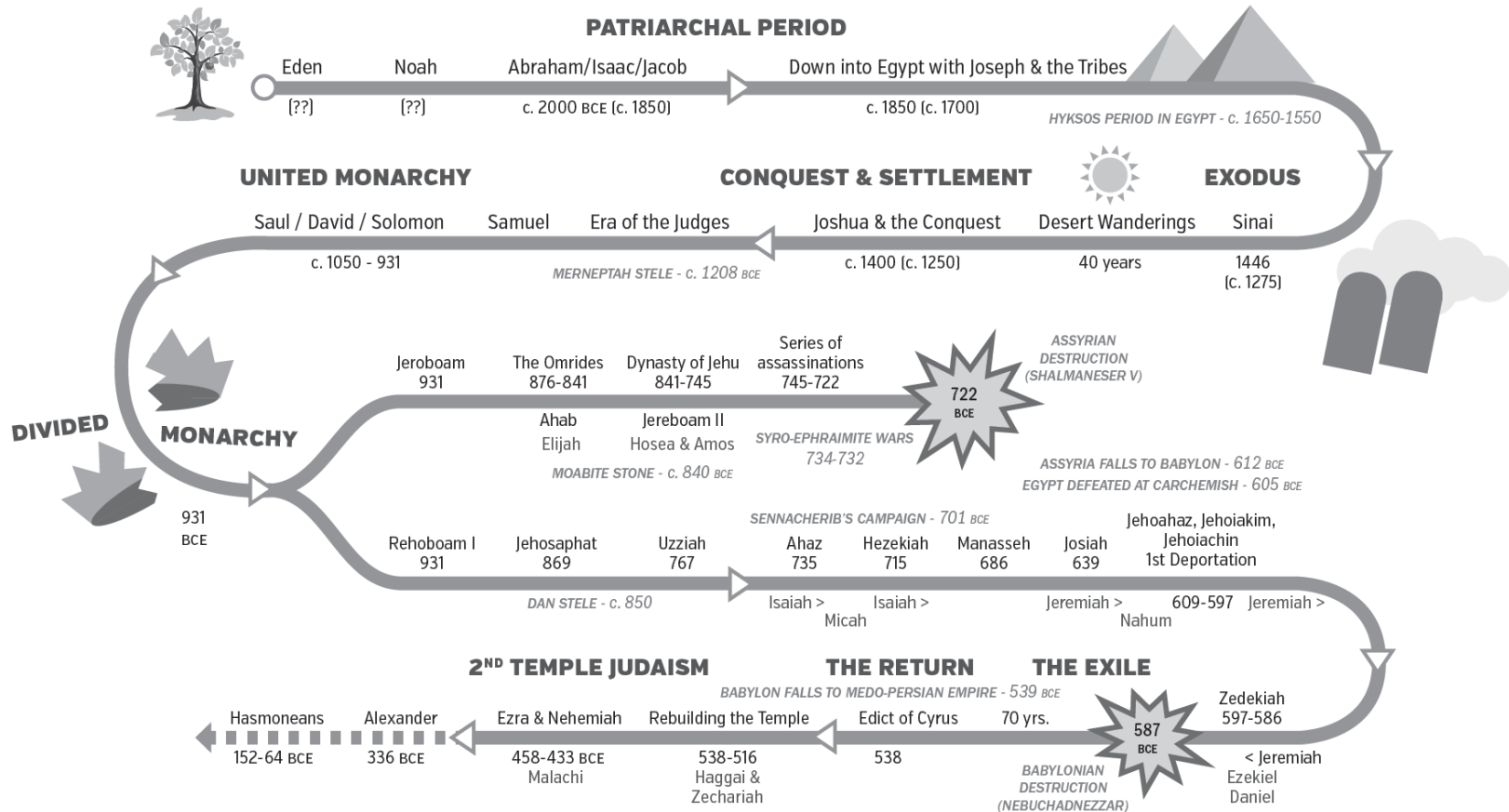
(Note: BC stands for the time period “before Christ” [or “before the Common Era”/BCE] and AD stands for the Latin Anno Domini, meaning “The Year of Our Lord” [also sometimes referred to as the “Common Era”/CE].)

As you journey through these stories, think about what it would be like to live in a culture where the family was the basic unit and regulatory force of society. Think about what it would look like for God to connect with people living and breathing in this sort of tribal culture. With those thoughts in mind, let’s open the door and enter the epic story of the Old Testament!

Humans, rather than recognizing the trappings of their own culture (and that their culture may in fact be very different from someone else’s), tend to assume that other societies are just like their own. This is known as *ethnocentrism* and is a human perspective that is as old as the hills. (Richter, *Epic*, 21.)



The Fertile Crescent



[[DAY ONE]]

First Contact

Before you open your Bible, jot down the names of seven characters from the Old Testament. If that took under a minute, go on to twelve, then twenty. With your Bible still closed, try to arrange these characters in chronological order. Next to each character list some detail you know about them: an aspect of their story, their hometown, their spouse. If someone asked you why this person's story was in the Bible, could you answer? What would you say?

Into the Story

Read Matthew 1.

- From the names in Jesus' genealogy, circle any of the names that are familiar to you.
- Place a check mark next to the names of those whose stories you could explain to a friend or child.
- Draw a question mark next to any of the characters whose stories disturb or confuse you.
- Do you recognize characters here who are significant to Jesus' genealogy?
- Can you guess why the New Testament writers would launch the first book of the New Testament with a genealogy?

Real People, Real Places, Real Faith

Out of the Old Testament characters on your list, identify one with whom you most connect. What parts of their story resonate with you? Now identify one character and/or story that you find really challenging to accept or to understand. List both characters with your reasons. What do you want to know about these characters? What doors or barriers stand between you and a clear understanding of them?

Our People, Our Places, Our Faith

How would you respond if someone asked you today, “Why does the Old Testament (the backstory of the New Testament) matter to your Christian faith?” List some of your responses.

[[DAY TWO]]

First Contact

Imagine that you needed a new job. What are the first steps you would take? Who would you ask for advice or direction? Where would you look and why? What are the five things that would be most important for you to emphasize to a potential employer on your résumé?

Into the Story

Read Genesis 29:1–30.

- Find aspects of this story that are culturally different from yours. Underline or list them with their verse references.
- Are there differences here between their culture and yours that illicit a stronger reaction from you?

Israelite society was enormously different from contemporary life in the urban West. Whereas modern Western culture may be classified as urban and “bureaucratic,” Israel’s society was “traditional.” More specifically, it was “tribal.” (Richter, *Epic*, 25.)

Real People, Real Places, Real Faith

If you were Jacob, how would you react to Laban's deception? Put yourself in Rachel's sandals. How would you react to having the man promised to you given to someone else? Especially your older sister! Do you think Rachel was in love at this point? Consider Leah. How do you think she felt about being given in marriage to a man who wanted someone else? How in the world would these two women handle the wedding night? How in the world would they handle their future relationship? What is your opinion of Laban at this point?

My goal as regards the great barrier is to bring the heroes of the Old Testament into focus, such that you can see them as real people who lived in real places and struggled with real faith, just as you do. We are "Abraham's offspring" (Gal. 3:29 [NASB]), and his story is our story. (Richter, *Epic*, 17.)

Our People, Our Places, Our Faith

Compare the story of Jacob, Rachel, and Leah to your own story. Have you had any experiences similar to these characters? What significance do you see in the differences between your story and this one? Are there other stories in the Bible where your inner child screams "That's not fair!?" Perhaps the warfare techniques of the conquest in the book of Joshua or the social position of women in the Old Testament? How could understanding the biblical culture help you to better understand the Old Testament? Over the course of this study, your understanding of the time, space, and culture of the Old Testament story is going to grow tremendously. The goal? Helping you understand your Old Testament better will help you understand your God and your other family better!

DAY THREE

First Contact

Think about who and what comprises your household. Who are the members? How many are there? What is the pecking order in your household? Who (if anyone) is in charge and of what? Who leads and how? How does your household structure compare to your parents', siblings', friends'?

Into the Story

Read Genesis 38.

- In Genesis 38:6, Judah marries Tamar to his firstborn, Er. According to Israel's patrilocal culture, in whose household does Tamar reside?
- In Genesis 38:11, Tamar now lives in her biological father's house. Why has she moved?
- Do you find anything in this passage indicating that this departure was not the cultural norm? If so, what?
- What does Tamar do when she finds out where her father-in-law is? What action does she take?
- What does Judah declare to be done when he learns that Tamar is pregnant?

As we open the Bible, however, we find that the God of history has chosen to reveal himself through a specific human culture. To be more accurate, he chose to reveal himself in several incarnations of the same culture. (Richter, *Epic*, 23.)

Real People, Real Places, Real Faith

Do you find that you are able to separate yourself from your own cultural norms as you read through Tamar's story? Do you see Tamar as a real person in a real place in a real time? In your mind, which characters/actions are good and which are bad? Why? List each of the main characters and offer one word to describe each of those main characters.

Our People, Our Places, Our Faith

Do you ever find yourself avoiding certain Bible stories because they make you uncomfortable, disapproving of the things the characters are doing, or perhaps finding the scenarios are too violent? Have you ever noticed that a lot of children's Bibles avoid these stories as well? Throughout this study, we challenge you to stop dodging. Rather, thoughtfully consider the characters as real people who are quite human and fallen, in real places that are probably geographically and culturally very different from your own, struggling with real faith in real circumstances. The objective? To come out with a better understanding of the character of our God and a better understanding of his people past and present across the globe.

DAY FOUR

First Contact

If you were to write your last will and testament tonight, for whom would you make provision in the document? Who would be responsible for the care of your dependents? Why would you make provisions for these persons and how would you go about choosing your guardians?

Into the Story

Read Deuteronomy 25:5–10 (known as the Levirate law).

- According to this Israelite law, “when brothers live together” (i.e. in extended families living under one roof), what responsibilities does a surviving brother have to his widowed sister-in-law? List each command.
- What do you think the intended outcome of this law might be?
- In the case of an injustice, what is the surviving wife instructed to do?
- What responsibilities belong to the community leaders?

The people of Israel considered it a serious offense for a man to fail to fulfill this responsibility to his dead brother. . . . Although this system seems very odd to most Westerners, it worked. The inheritance of the deceased brother was properly conferred upon his legal offspring, and the young widow was secured within the household. Thus her current need for food and shelter was met, and her future need for a child to care for her in her old age was addressed as well. (Richter, *Epic*, 31–32.)

Real People, Real Places, Real Faith

In the setting of the shaming described in Deuteronomy 25, what were the consequences for the brother who refused his responsibilities? What were the consequences for the widow? How do you think these consequences affected the extended family?

Our People, Our Places, Our Faith

In today's world, would a widow in similar circumstances need help? Recast this woman into a modern-day equivalent. To whom would such a woman turn for help? Who, if anyone, would be responsible for helping her? What would the community's reaction be if she did not receive help? Would it be different if it were a widower instead of a widow? Why?

[[DAY FIVE]]

First Contact

Have you ever gone through the loss of a mentor or leader? Perhaps a boss who had made a big impact on your professional growth or a pastor who felt called to another ministry? Perhaps the premature death of a parent? What fears came with that transition? What losses did you face? What words or actions did you find comforting?

Into the Story

Read John 13:31–14:24.

- What is the setting of the narrative?
- What happened just before Jesus' Passover meal with his disciples? What happened immediately following (John 18:1–5)?
- Focusing on 14:1–18, notice where familial or household language is used. Underline this language in your Bible.

... the scene is a private one—Jesus' closest friends have gathered for one last meal together. Just after the meal, Jesus begins telling his disciples about his impending departure and the troubles that will follow. Of course, the disciples are confused and upset. Peter asks the question on everyone's heart: "Where are You going? . . . and can we go with you?" (John 13:36–37). (Richter, *Epic*, 39.)

- Note verse 2 (NASB) in which Jesus says: “In My Father’s house are many dwelling places.” How does your Bible translate the phrase “dwelling places”? Check several translations.
- Why do you think that Jesus speaks of his father’s house here?

Real People, Real Places, Real Faith

Think about being one of the disciples at the Last Supper. Jesus is telling you he is leaving, right at what should be the apex of the story. If you were Peter or James or John or Thomas, what would you be feeling right now? What would *you* ask Jesus?

Our People, Our Places, Our Faith

If we want to know our God better, we’re going to need to understand his story better. Indeed, if the Bible is going to become our story, we’re going to have to put ourselves back into the biblical characters’ time and space. As you wind down your study guide for the week, ask yourself what steps you are willing to take over the course of this study to accomplish that goal.

WEEK TWO

Redemption

A Word from the Author

“Our objective as Christians is to understand the story of redemption, the Bible. More than anything else, we want to hear the words of the biblical writers as they were intended and to claim their epic saga as our own. To accomplish this, we need to get past the great barrier—that chasm of history, language, and culture that separates us from our heroes in the faith” (Richter, *Epic*, 21).

Real Time and Space

Last week, we began to examine and inventory what we know about the characters and stories of the Old Testament—and more important, why it matters. We learned that the Old Testament is more than just an unfortunate preface to the New Testament, that it is an integral part of The Story, and that it is our story. We began to cross the great barrier by investigating Israel’s patriarchal, patrilineal, and patrilocal culture.

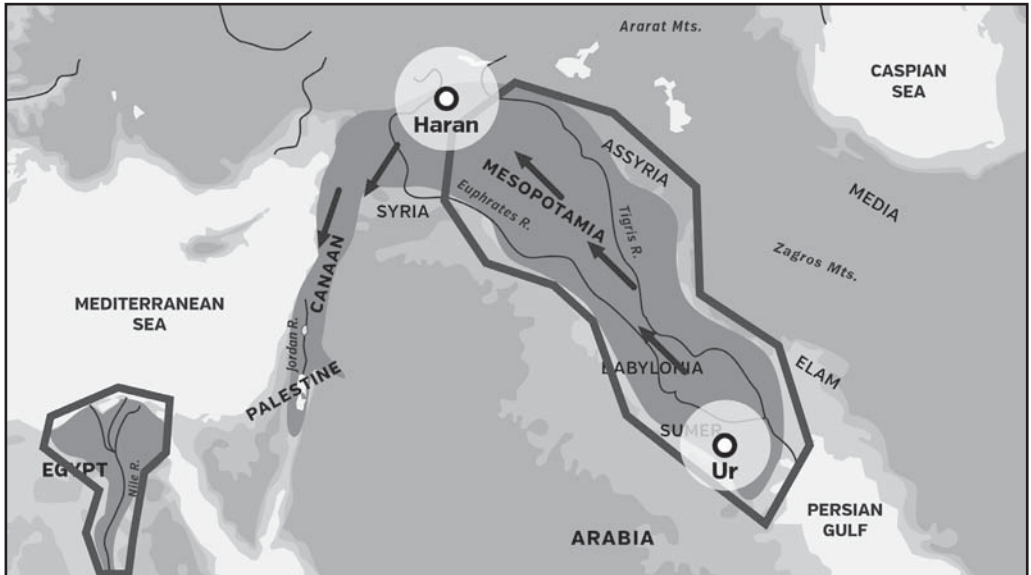
This week, we will continue to cross the cultural barrier by understanding what redemption meant to the real people of the Old Testament. This week we’re going to be all over our map, beginning in Mesopotamia in the city of Ur, and traveling to the land of Canaan/Israel/Palestine with Abraham and

patriarchal: *Having to do with the authority and centrality of the oldest living male member of a family in tribal society.*

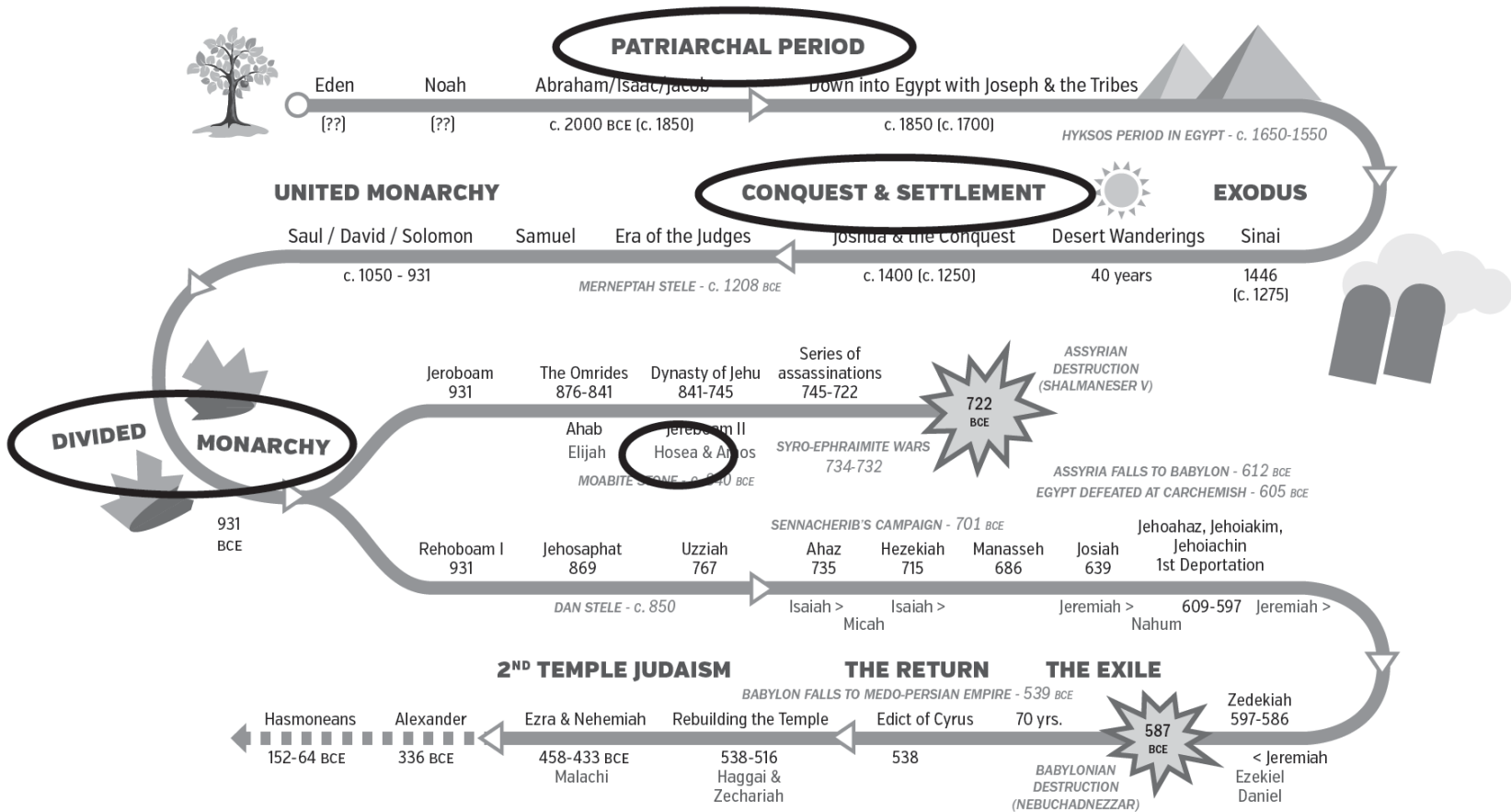
patrilineal: *Having to do with tracing ancestral descent through the male line in a tribal society.*

patrilocal: *Having to do with the living space of the family unit being built around the oldest male in a tribal society.*

his descendants in the Patriarchal Period. We will continue on through the period of Ruth during the Settlement, to the time of Hosea during the Divided Monarchy, and finally to the New Testament with Jesus and his disciples in Jerusalem. Take a moment to locate the places on the map as well as the time periods on the timeline on the following page.



Abraham's Migration into Canaan



[[DAY ONE]]

First Contact

If you are married, how did you and your spouse meet? If you are not married, how did your parents meet? After you got married, where did you/they live? Perhaps you/they come from a culture in which marriages are arranged. Have you ever witnessed a clash of cultures in your marriage or that of your parents? What has been your experience?

Into the Story

We begin this week with some review about ancient Israel's patrilocal and patrilineal culture. Read Genesis 24:1–27, 50–67.

- What did Abraham ask his servant to swear he would and would not do?
- Why was the servant not to take Isaac back to Abraham's homeland?
- What was the relationship between Nahor (Rebekah's grandfather) and Abraham?
- After Abraham's servant recounts his mission and his story, how do Laban (Rebekah's brother) and Bethuel (Rebekah's father) respond?
- What was Rebekah's response? Does her response surprise you?
- What aspects of ancient Israelite culture (as opposed to your native culture) do you observe in this story?

Real People, Real Places, Real Faith

In the biblical account, it appears that Rebekah did not hesitate to say “yes” to Abraham’s servant and thereby agree to be Isaac’s wife. Put yourself in Rebekah’s world for a moment. How old do you imagine Rebekah was? What does she agree to leave? What does she gain? If you were Rebekah’s mother or her little sister, what emotions would you be feeling right now? Write down some of your thoughts.

Our People, Our Places, Our Faith

In our own cultures, the story of Rebekah may seem strange. Arranged marriages and family compounds with fifteen to thirty family members are certainly not the norm in the West! It is sometimes easy for us to be critical of cultures that are different from our own. In an attempt to understand the ancient Israelites, and therefore better understand what the biblical writers are communicating, jot down three things that you see as positive aspects of Israelite culture involving marriage.

[[DAY TWO]]

First Contact

What is your position in your family's birth order? Are you the oldest, youngest, middle, or perhaps fifth out of eight? If you are a firstborn, what types of privileges and responsibilities were unique to you in your family? If you are not a firstborn, what sorts of unique privileges did you see your oldest sibling receiving from your parents? How did you feel about that at the time? How do you feel about it now?

Into the Story

Read Deuteronomy 21:15–17 and Genesis 25:19–34.

- According to the law found in Deuteronomy, what does the firstborn son receive as his inheritance?
- Why do you think that is?
- To whom did Rebekah give birth?
- Who was the firstborn, and therefore the one to whom the birthright was due?
- For what did he exchange his birthright and why?
- In Jacob and Esau's patrilineal culture, what implications did the switching of the birthright have?
- Where is Rebekah in this mix? Where is Isaac?

Real People, Real Places, Real Faith

The biblical author tells us that Esau was famished, so much so that he chose food over his double-portioned inheritance. Thinking about Israel's tribal culture and the privileged position of the firstborn male, how do you think Esau felt after he realized the implications of his choice? How do you think his father felt about his choice?

Our People, Our Places, Our Faith

If you know the rest of the story of Esau and Jacob, you know that Jacob becomes the father of twelve sons who become known as the twelve tribes of Israel. One of those tribes is Judah, from whose line Jesus comes. In a tribal culture in which the norm was that the eldest son was the one to lead the family, God, in opposition to that cultural norm, has chosen the younger son to lead. What does this tell you about God's character and his ways? Do you think God felt constrained to operate according to Jacob's deceit? Or do you think God was free to do and choose as he wished?

DAY THREE

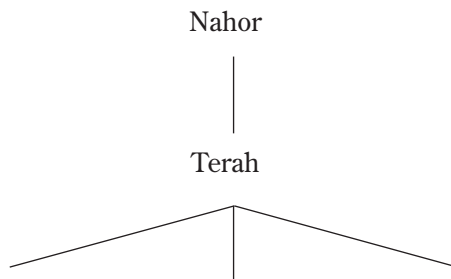
First Contact

When did you leave home (i.e., your “father’s house”)? What was the catalyst for the move? Was it school, military service, marriage, a family breakdown of some sort? When did you establish your new household? What were the economics of that move? Does your current household continue to interact with your extended family (parents, grandparents, siblings, aunts, uncles, and cousins)? If so, when and how? How does your household story compare to that of other people you know?

Into the Story

Read Genesis 11:27–12:5; 13:1–14:16.

- Who belonged to Abram’s *bêt ’āb* (“father’s house[hold]”) in Genesis 11?
- Who is the patriarch?
- Where does Lot fit into that mix?
- Complete the family tree below to show the relationships.



- How does the household change in Genesis 12:5? What is the catalyst for this change?
- How does this household change again in chapter 13? What is the catalyst for the change this time?
- Who are the heads of the households now?
- What crisis occurs in Genesis 14:9–16?
- In the crisis of chapter 14, who is the enemy and what has he taken?
- In this crisis, what did Abram bring to the fight?
- How does your understanding of *bêt 'āb* and the tribal structure of the society affect your understanding of this narrative?
- Did you glean anything that you may not have noticed in previous readings?

When the patriarch died, or when the *bêt 'āb* became too large to sustain itself, the household would split into new households, each headed by the now-oldest living male family member. (Richter, *Epic*, 27.)

Real People, Real Places, Real Faith

In the story of Abram and Lot, ponder the risks Abram took on Lot's behalf. As Lot was a grown nephew with his own inheritance, did Abram *have* to take those risks? What would his community have thought of Abram if he had turned a blind eye to Lot's crisis?

Our People, Our Places, Our Faith

As you ponder Abram's rescue of Lot, think about what he risked to stand up for his kinsman. Would you have been willing to take the same risks for a relative, or would it have been easier to just say, "Alas, that one is out of my control."? Do you currently know someone who has been captured by a "strong enemy" such as substance addiction, domestic abuse, or pornography and sexual addiction? What do you think we as Christians and as a church should be willing to risk to rescue them?

[[DAY FOUR]]

First Contact

Remember a time when you felt you were in need. Perhaps you were blindsided by a financial crisis and needed money, fast. Perhaps you were moving to a new community and couldn't find a permanent place to live or work. Perhaps you had been abandoned or falsely accused. Perhaps your sink was overflowing with dirty dishes, your laundry piles were taller than your toddler, and your infant had not yet slept through the night. What were your fears? How did you resolve the situation? To whom did you turn for help?

Into the Story

Read the book of Ruth.

- In Ruth 1, who is the patriarch of Naomi's household?
- Who are the members of the household?
- How does Ruth come into the household?
- What crisis threatens to destroy this household?
- Why does Naomi try to send Ruth and Orpah away?
- Depending on your translation, Boaz is described as a "close relative," "close kinsmen," and/or "redeemer." Considering the narrative development in chapter 4, what might you infer about the roles and responsibilities of kinsmen, relatives, and/or redeemers in Israel's tribal culture?

Real People, Real Places, Real Faith

Which character in this story most interests you? Do you most relate to Naomi, an older woman who finds herself in a strange land without husband or children, economic or legal stability? Do you relate to Ruth, who in loyalty makes the very risky decision to leave her home to care for another with no economic or legal resources on her side? Do you relate to Boaz, a man with influence and resources who wants to do the right thing, but does not necessarily know how? Put yourself in the shoes of your chosen character and write down what is foremost on your mind. What are you feeling? What are you worried about?

tribal culture: *A society in which the family is the axis of the community and an individual's link to the economic structures of society is through the family.*

Our People, Our Places, Our Faith

Think again about how seriously the Israelites took their responsibility for the well-being of the kinsmen within their households. Think again about our New Covenant in which we are instructed to consider other believers as brothers and sisters, members together of the household of faith. How might we consider emulating Boaz in stepping up to the plate as a church member and saying: "Yes, I will redeem."?

[[DAY FIVE]]

First Contact

Have you ever been forced by life circumstances into a situation that you knew might cause great pain or vulnerability? Perhaps a relationship, central to the core understanding of yourself, ended through death, divorce, or misunderstanding. Perhaps a business venture into which you had invested deeply simply failed, and you were responsible for picking up the pieces. Perhaps you felt God calling you to make a drastic change in career or location. Did you want to escape? Could you have? What were your concerns? Your fears?

Into the Story

Read Hosea chapters 1–3.

- What does the story tell us about Hosea in chapter 1?
- Given what you now know about Israelite culture, what might you infer about Gomer's place in her community prior to marrying Hosea?
- By the end of chapter 1, who are the members of Hosea's household?
- Write down a few details that we know about each character.
- At the opening of chapter 3, where is Gomer?
- Would you consider her a part of Hosea's household? Why or why not?
- By the end of this reading, who are the members of Hosea's household?
- How is the family crisis resolved?

Hosea was a prophet to the northern kingdom of Israel and had the unenviable privilege of being commissioned by Yahweh to live his life as an ongoing visual aid to Yahweh's relationship with Israel. Thus we are introduced to Hosea when he is instructed to "take to yourself a wife of harlotry and have children of harlotry; for the land commits flagrant harlotry, forsaking the LORD" (Hos. 1:2 [NASB]). (Richter, *Epic*, 43.)

Real People, Real Places, Real Faith

In biblical narratives, the authors have limited space and time and do not always give us all the details we want. Are there questions you would like to ask God about why he called Hosea to marry Gomer? What questions might you have for Hosea? Gomer? Write down at least one question for each character. Then choose the most significant one and try to answer it from that character's point of view.

Our People, Our Places, Our Faith

Read the following lyrics or listen to Matthew Clark's "Redemption" from his CD *Bright Came the Word from His Mouth* (matthewclark.net). Write about what redemption means to you.

How can understanding what our God has done for us change the way that we worship him?

REDEMPTION

Matthew Clark

Lot was in a dungeon bound, no chance he could escape
From enemies too strong for him, all hope for life was gone
But the Father of the house called his family to arms
Till the battle sword was sheathed and he was saved

Ruth by bitter chance enslaved, at the margin of the town
Griefs her grave had overfilled, a life left best unfound
But a man stood upright, made a homeless girl his wife
till the barren hopes she bore they birthed a king: redemption

Prophet take a prostitute and love her as your wife
She will make her vows to you, each a vow she'll break
Thirst for lovers drank her dry, drowned in debt she would have died
When Hosea paid the dowry for his bride: redemption, redemption

The Father sends his only son, to ransom all the lost
From enemies too strong for them, from the poverty of loss
In the squalor of the pit, where the willing faithless sit,
To the depths the love of God has sent his Word: redemption