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A

AARON

(AIR un)

Aharon, Hebrew

About 1523–1400 BC

First mention: Exodus 4:14

Aaron was an eighty-three-year-old man when he first appeared in the Bible. Big brother to Moses, he was on a long trek from Egypt to the Sinai desert, looking for his fugitive brother. God sent him: “Go out into the wilderness to meet Moses” (Exodus 4:27). Forty years earlier, Moses had killed an Egyptian foreman for mistreating a Hebrew slave, then ran for his life.



Aaron leads the Israelites in making a golden calf to worship.

Boldly, the two brothers returned to Egypt and—with Aaron doing most of the talking—demanded that the king free their people, the Hebrews. Ten disastrous plagues later, the king agreed.

Once, on the Exodus out of Egypt, Moses put Aaron in charge—with tragic results. Moses climbed Mount Sinai to receive the Ten Commandments. But he stayed away so long that the people feared he and God had left. They convinced Aaron to build them an idol to lead them—a golden calf like those common in Egypt. When Moses finally returned and saw thousands worshipping the calf, he ordered immediate executions. Three thousand died by the sword. Others died by plague.

Aaron was not only spared; in time God chose him to become Israel’s high priest—the first in a tradition that would span some fifteen hundred years. His sons, too, became priests, though

his two oldest boys were burned to death after disobeying God by improperly preparing an incense fire.

After lingering forty years in the desert, the Hebrews resumed their march to the Promised Land. Aaron, at age 123, could not join them. At God’s



As Israel's first high priest, Aaron launched a priestly dynasty that endured more than a millennium—until Romans destroyed the temple in AD 70.

instruction, he climbed Mount Hor, south of Canaan, where he died.

Moses removed the high priestly robes from his brother and put them on Aaron's oldest surviving son, Eleazar—the high priest for a new generation.

AARON'S FAMILY

Father:	Amram
Mother:	Jochebed
Sister:	Miriam
Younger brother:	Moses
Wife:	Elisheba
Four sons:	Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, Ithamar

ABEDNEGO

(a BED nee go)
Abed Nego, Hebrew
Arad Nabu, Akkadian
 “servant of Nego” (wisdom god)
 About 600 BC
 First mention: Daniel 1:7

Thrown into a furnace for refusing to worship a gold statue of the Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar, Abednego miraculously survived. So did his friends Shadrach and Meshach. His Hebrew name was Azariah. (See *Shadrach*.)

ABEL

(A bull)
Hebel, Hebrew
 “breath”
 Before 4000 BC
 First mention: Genesis 4:2

The world's first murder victim was Adam and Eve's second son. Abel was a shepherd, while his older brother, Cain, farmed the land. Cain jealously killed Abel. It happened shortly after the two brothers brought gifts to God. “Abel brought several choice lambs” (Genesis 4:4). Cain brought farm produce.

God accepted Abel's offering but not Cain's. Perhaps Cain offered sub-standard produce or a bad attitude.

Cain's seething jealousy led to a murderous walk in the field with Abel.

ABIGAIL

(AB uh gay il)

Abigayil, Hebrew

"my father rejoices"

About 1000 BC

First mention: 1 Samuel 25:3

Beautiful, sensible, and smart, Abigail was married to a crook. He was Nabal, a rich herder who lived about twenty miles south of David's hometown of Bethlehem. Nabal insulted David by refusing to give his men any food during sheep-shearing season, a time of celebration and prosperity. When David heard this, he led his army to kill Nabal. But Abigail met them on the road and gave them food.

When Nabal discovered how close he had come to dying, he apparently had a heart attack or a stroke and died ten days later. David was so impressed with Abigail that he married her.

ABIMELECH

(uh BIM uh lek)

Abimelek, Hebrew

"my father is king"

About 2100 BC

First mention: Genesis 20:2

The Philistine king Abimelech, of Gerar in southwest Canaan, is best known for trying to add Abraham's wife, Sarah, to his harem.

Abraham moved to the area and told people that the beautiful Sarah was his sister so no one would kill him

to marry her. That was half true, since she was his half sister. But in a dream, God warned Abimelech that Sarah was married and her husband was a prophet. Abimelech made a peace treaty with Abraham and showered him with gifts.

ABNER

(AB nur)

Abner, Hebrew

"father is a lamp"

About 1050 BC

First mention: 1 Samuel 14:50

Abner's father and King Saul's father were brothers. In hope of setting up a family dynasty, Abner served Saul as commander and bodyguard. Ironically, Abner's first reported act was presenting to Saul the man who would end that dynasty—David.

After the Philistines killed Saul, Abner backed one of Saul's sons, Ishbo-sheth, as the new king. Later, in a battle with David's forces, the young brother of David's commander, Joab, chased down Abner. But Abner, a veteran warrior, quickly killed the young man.

Months later, Saul's son accused Abner of sleeping with one of the royal wives. Furious, Abner stormed off to David and vowed to give the nation to him. Joab derailed these negotiations by murdering Abner to avenge his brother's death.

ABRAHAM*(A bruh ham)**Abraham, Hebrew**“father of many”*

2100s BC

First mention: Genesis 17:5 (Genesis 11:26 for Abram)

Born and raised in what amounted to the New York City of his day—the world’s shoreline hub of culture, power, and wealth—Abraham left his homeland and took everything he owned to a land as rustic and sparsely populated as the Kansas prairies.

Common sense says that a move like that would only doom him to obscurity. Yet, four thousand years later, he is revered as the spiritual father of three major religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

Before God changed Abraham’s name, he was called Abram—meaning “honored father.” He grew up in Ur, a city on the west bank of the Euphrates River in southern Iraq. Its ruins today lie just across the river from the modern town of Nasiriya, a hard-fought Iraqi holdout during the 2003 war in which American and British troops ousted dictator Saddam Hussein. In Abram’s day, Ur was the control center for the world’s first known empire: Sumer.

BOUND FOR CANAAN LAND

Actually, it wasn’t Abram who decided to leave home. It was his father, Terah. Why Terah decided to move remains a mystery. The Bible says only that he and his family left “to go to the land of Canaan” (Genesis 11:31). Some

scholars guess that Terah, apparently a wealthy man with huge flocks, saw signs of the coming invasion that destroyed Ur in about 2000 BC.

Bound for Canaan, the shortest route was straight west for six hundred miles—almost all of that desert. Not an option for a family with flocks in tow. Terah decided to follow the water supply along one thousand miles of caravan routes. First, he’d walk north-west along the banks of the Euphrates River. Then when he got near the Mediterranean Sea, he would turn south to Canaan.

But he didn’t turn south. Instead, he settled in the prosperous town of Haran, about halfway to Canaan. By the time Terah died, Abram was seventy-five years old. God told Abram, “Leave your country, your relatives, and your father’s house, and go to the land that I will show you. I will cause you to become the father of a great nation” (Genesis 12:1–2).

Abram did as he was told. He took his wife, Sarai, who was his half sister—Terah’s daughter with a second wife. He took his nephew Lot, son of Abram’s brother Haran, who had died before the family left Ur. And he took all his livestock and entourage of servants.

PROMISE FOR A CHILDLESS COUPLE

When Abram set up camp at Shechem, in the center of Canaan, God made him a stunning promise: “I am going to give this land to your offspring” (Genesis 12:7).

Abram had no offspring.

And it seemed unlikely he ever would since he was seventy-five and Sarai was sixty-six. Still, Abram built an altar of piled-up stones in honor of God's promise.

Abram's first impression of the land may have left him wondering if God's promise was a blessing or a curse. Famine was squeezing the life out of the land. The drought was so severe that Abram decided to wait it out in Egypt, where the Nile River valley provided water even under the driest conditions.

Abram got in trouble there with the king—serious enough that he was escorted out of the country under armed guard.

His trouble started with a lie that seems strikingly out of character for him. This man who had so much faith in God that he uprooted his family was afraid that some Egyptian would kill him to marry his beautiful senior adult wife. So he and Sarai spread the half-truth that they were brother and sister. True, but the more important half of the truth was that they were husband and wife.

Egypt's king took Sarai into his harem and showered Abram with gifts: livestock and servants, perhaps including Hagar, who is later identified as Egyptian and becomes a surrogate mother for the couple.

A plague struck the king's family. Plagues were often considered punishment from the gods. And the timing apparently led the king to suspect that his marriage provoked the gods.

SURROGATE MOTHER, ANCIENT STYLE

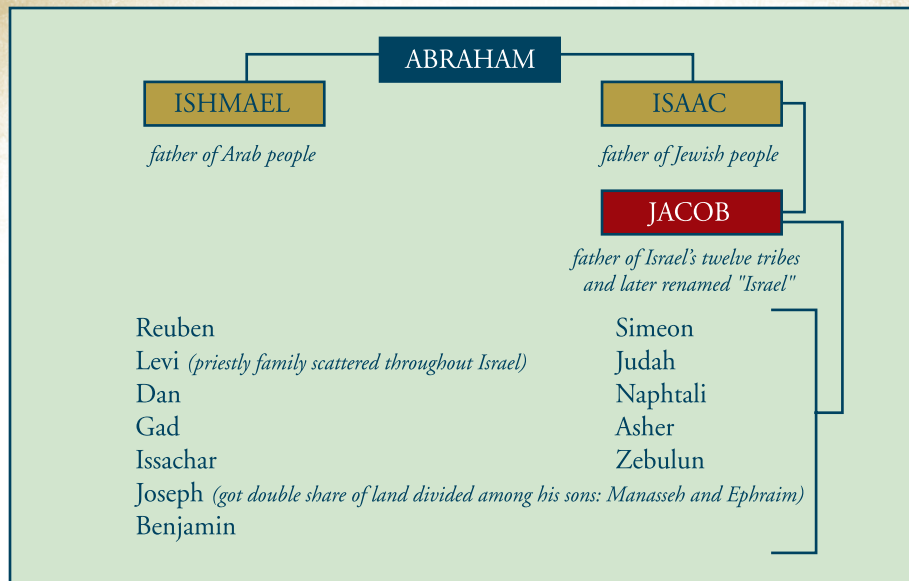
By the time Sarah was seventy-six years old, she felt certain she would never give Abraham a child. "Go and sleep with my servant," she told him. "Perhaps I can have children through her" (Genesis 16:2). Abraham slept with Hagar, and Ishmael was born.

This was a perfectly respectable practice for infertile couples in the ancient Middle East. Similar laws and references show up in many ancient documents from the region where Abraham was born and raised in what is now Iraq: an early Assyrian marriage contract (1800s BC), the Code of Hammurabi, king of Babylon in what is now Iraq (1700s BC), and Nuzi stone tablets from northern Iraq (about 1500 BC).

This is an excerpt of a marriage contract from Nuzi tablets: "If Giliminu [bride's name] will not bear children, Giliminu will take a woman of Lullu-land [apparently famed for excellent slaves] for Shennima [groom's name]."

Law 146 from Hammurabi states: "If a man marries, and his wife gives him her servant to bear children, and then this servant starts acting like she's equal to the wife because of this, the wife isn't allowed to sell her. But she can put a slave mark on her and treat her as a slave."

Abraham



The family tree of the biblical patriarchs.

Abram admitted that Sarai was not only his sister but his wife, as well. That's when the king had Abram and his family escorted to the border, apparently with the king's gifts.

Back in Canaan, years later, the couple used the same ploy with King Abimelech of Gerar, who ruled somewhere along Canaan's southern border. The results were even better this second time around, perhaps because God told the king in a dream that Abram was a prophet. Abram got to keep the bridal gifts from the king, he got extra money as a settlement, he was allowed to stay, and the two men made a peace treaty.

In time, the flocks of Abram and Lot grew so large that it was impossible to graze them in the same fields. So the men separated. Abram gave his nephew first choice of the land, and Lot chose

the best pastures in Canaan: the fertile Jordan River valley. Unfortunately for Lot, neighboring kings were eyeing the land, too. An alliance of four powerful kings from the north raided cities of the Jordan valley and plains, carrying off Lot and his family as plunder.

Fortunately for Lot, his uncle was wealthy and well connected. Abram assembled an army of 318 men from his servants alone. Then, with the help of some allies, Abram overtook the raiders, freed the captives, and recovered the plunder. He kept nothing for himself. Instead, he gave a tenth of it to Melchizedek, identified as God's priest living in Salem, an early name for Jerusalem. When Lot's hometown king asked for only the people back, inviting Abram to keep the goods, Abram refused: "I will not take so much as a single thread or sandal thong from you. Otherwise you

might say, 'I am the one who made Abram rich!' ” (Genesis 14:23). Abram asked only that his allies receive some payment.

ABRAM'S TWO SONS

By the time Sarai reached age seventy-six, she decided that if Abram—then eighty-five—would ever have a son to inherit Canaan, it would be with another woman. So she instructed him to conceive a child with her servant Hagar, an accepted practice for infertile couples in this culture.

Ishmael was born. Though he was not the son destined to inherit Canaan, God made this promise to the boy's

father: “I will make a nation of the descendants of Hagar’s son because he also is your son” (Genesis 21:13). Many consider Ishmael father of the Arab people.

It was a decade and a half later—when Sarai was ninety and Abram was ninety-nine—that God finally made it clear who would inherit Canaan. It would be the son of Sarai and Abram.

God sealed his promise by changing the couple’s names. In ancient times people in authority, such as kings, would often change people’s names to mark a turning point in their lives. Abram became Abraham “for you will be the father of many nations. I will give you millions of descen-

dants who will represent many nations” (Genesis 17:5–6). Sarai became Sarah.

This wasn't just a promise. It was an agreement, or covenant, between God and Abraham. For his part, Abraham had to circumcise every male in his family, servants included. And every newborn had to be circumcised on the eighth day after his birth. “Your bodies will thus bear the mark of my everlasting covenant” (Genesis 17:13). Observant Jews today still practice this ritual, called *Berit Mila*, Hebrew for



As God instructed, Abraham's son Isaac is circumcised on the eighth day after his birth—a tradition observant Jews still practice.

“covenant of circumcision.”

Not long afterward, the Lord and two others stopped at Abraham’s camp on their way to Sodom. Again the Lord promised that Sarah would have a son, but this time he said it would happen within the year. This was apparently the first time Sarah had heard anyone but Abraham say such a thing. Listening from inside the tent, she laughed—as Abraham had done silently when God first made this promise.

So the name God chose for the child was appropriate—Isaac. That’s Hebrew for “laughter.”

With a son of her own, Sarah no longer had need for the surrogate mother and her son, who was thirteen years old when Isaac was born. In fact, Sarah realized that keeping Ishmael in the family would mean less inheritance for Isaac. (The oldest son generally got a double share of the father’s possessions.) So by the time Isaac was weaned, she insisted that Abraham send Hagar and Ishmael away. Abraham certainly loved his oldest son and was heartbroken by the request. But God told him to do as Sarah asked, promising to give Ishmael many descendants, too.

ABRAHAM’S BIGGEST TEST

Isaac was thirty-seven years old when God ordered Abraham to sacrifice him. So says one Jewish legend. It’s based in part on the biblical report that Isaac was thirty-seven when Sarah died. The legend says it was the pro-

posed sacrifice that killed her, shocking her to death at age 127.

The Bible never says how old Isaac was. Father and son traveled to a hill of Moriah, three days from their home in Beersheba. That may be the same Mount Moriah where Solomon built the Jewish temple in Jerusalem and where the Islamic Dome of the Rock now dominates the city skyline.

With faithful obedience that seems incomprehensible, Abraham built an altar and raised the knife to kill his son. Suddenly an angel appeared and stopped him, saying, “Now I know that you truly fear God. You have not withheld even your beloved son from me” (Genesis 22:12).

New Testament writers saw in this story the foreshadowing of another Father-Son story. What Abraham was willing to do—sacrifice his son—God did.

Abraham lived almost forty years after Sarah died. Then he was buried with her in the cave of Machpelah near Hebron, which he had bought as a family burial site. Isaac and his wife, Rebekah, were buried there, too. The site today is marked by a huge mosque over what is called the Tomb of the Patriarchs. Built by Herod the Great some two thousand years ago, the building was declared a mosque by Muslims seven hundred years ago. Today, Palestinians control the site, but they permit Jews to worship there under restrictions.

ABSALOM

(AB sah lome)

Absalom, Hebrew

“father is peace”

About 1000 BC

First mention: 2 Samuel 3:3

Though his name bears the Hebrew word for *peace*, Absalom was anything but peaceful. He murdered his half brother and led a coup against his father, King David.

Absalom was David’s third son, born to one of his many wives: Maacah, daughter of the king of Geshur, a region along the Sea of Galilee’s eastern bank. As David’s wives competed for his attention, so did their children. Rivalries churned into hatred, especially among sons who wanted to become the next king.

Absalom, originally third in succession, worked up to first. Kileab, second in succession, apparently died young. Amnon, the oldest, made a fatal decision. He raped Absalom’s full sister, Tamar. Amnon lured Tamar into his bedroom by saying he was sick and needed to be fed. By law, Amnon should have married Tamar. Instead, he ordered her out.

REVENGE FOR RAPE

David got angry about the rape but did nothing. Absalom, however, waited for a chance to get revenge. Two years later, during a sheep-shearing celebration, Absalom had his men get Amnon drunk, then kill him. Absalom fled to his grandfather’s home in Geshur.

After three years, David missed Absalom. So David’s commander, Joab, talked the king into inviting Absalom home. David agreed but refused to see Absalom for another two years. Twice, Absalom asked Joab to intercede. But Joab refused to come. In desperation, Absalom had his servants set fire to one of Joab’s barley fields. That brought Joab, who arranged for the son and father to meet.

Reconciliation, however, had no chance against Absalom’s bitterness. The crown prince, now first in succession to the throne, decided not to wait for his father to declare him king. Absalom, with his good looks and winning personality, began courting the citizens. Each morning he went to the city gate, where cases were tried, and told the litigants they had a good case and he wished he had the power to give them justice. When people tried to bow before him, he hugged them instead. “In this way, Absalom stole the hearts of all the people of Israel” (2 Samuel 15:6).

COUP AGAINST A FATHER

Absalom crowned himself king in Hebron, his birthplace and David’s first capital, about twenty miles south of Jerusalem. This coup was so well planned that David felt compelled to flee Jerusalem. But he left behind a loyal advisor who won the confidence of Absalom and convinced him to mobilize his entire army against David. This bought time for David to

muster his own seasoned warriors.

The battle took place in a forest east of the Jordan River. When the battle turned against Absalom, he fled on his mule. But his long, thick hair got caught in an oak tree and left him dangling like an acorn. Despite David's order to spare Absalom, Joab said the order was nonsense, and he plunged three daggers into the rebel's heart.

When David heard his son was dead, he burst into tears: "O my son Absalom! My son, my son Absalom! If only I could have died instead of you! O Absalom, my son, my son" (2 Samuel 18:33).

ACCO

(AK oh)

Akko, Hebrew

First mention: Judges 1:31

MAP 4
B2

Paul, on his third missionary trip, visited this thriving city on the Mediterranean coast. Its ancient ruins lie north of Haifa, Israel, just across the bay. In Paul's day it was called Ptolemais, after the Egyptian king Ptolemy, who rebuilt it. A thousand years later the Crusaders captured it and called it Acre.

ACHAIA

(uh KAY yah)

Achaia, Greek

First mention: Acts 18:12

MAP 5
A2

Paul, during his second missionary trip, became the first Christian on record to introduce Europeans to the Good News about Jesus. He spent a year and a half

starting the church in Corinth, bustling capital of the Roman province of Achaia in what is now the southern half of Greece. Two other famous cities in the region were Athens and Sparta.

Upset with Paul's teachings, a group of Jews took him to the new governor, Gallio, and accused him of heresy. Gallio dismissed the case as nothing more than a religious squabble.

ACHAN

(A kin)

Akan, Hebrew

About 1400 BC

First mention: Joshua 7:1

Achan was the first Hebrew in the Promised Land executed for disobeying God. In fact, he got his entire family executed because of his greed.

After the walls of Jericho tumbled down, the Hebrews were supposed to leave without taking anything. The spoils of this battle belonged to God. But Achan stole "a beautiful robe imported from Babylon, two hundred silver coins, and a bar of gold weighing more than a pound" (Joshua 7:21).

Joshua, the leader, didn't suspect a thing until they lost their next battle. Then, using a mysterious system known as lots, perhaps like dice, Joshua narrowed the problem down to the tribe of Judah and eventually to Achan, who admitted his sin.

For disobeying God—an act that cost thirty-six Hebrew warriors their lives—Achan and his family were stoned to death and burned with all his possessions.

ACHOR

(AY core)

Akor, Hebrew
“trouble”

First mention: Joshua 7:24

MAP 1
C5

“Trouble” is Achor’s name, with good reason. After the walls of Jericho came tumbling down, one man disobeyed God—Achan. The Hebrews were to take nothing, but Achan couldn’t resist a robe imported from Babylon, two hundred silver coins, and a bar of gold. For this, the Hebrews lost their next battle.

When Achan confessed, Joshua replied, “Why have you brought trouble on us? The LORD will now bring trouble on you” (Joshua 7:25). The Hebrews stoned Achan and his family in a valley they named Achor.

Most scholars say Achor is now El Buqeah, “little valley,” the only area near Jericho that fits the Bible description of a fertile plain bordered by hills. The plain is about five miles long and two miles wide.

Prophets later used Achor as a symbolic way of promising that God

would reverse Israel’s hard times. “For my people who have searched for me. . . the valley of Achor will be a place to pasture herds” (Isaiah 65:10).

ADAM

(ADD um)

Adam, Hebrew
“human”

Before 4000 BC

First mention: Genesis 2:19

On the sixth and final workday of Creation, God made Adam and Eve—the world’s first human beings. Their assignment: “Be masters over all life—the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, and all the livestock, wild animals, and small animals” (Genesis 1:26). They were caretakers of the Creation.

In this idyllic world, all seemed perfect. Adam and Eve were like God, “created. . . in his own image; God patterned them after himself” (Genesis 1:27). There was just one rule: “You may freely eat any fruit in the garden except fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If you eat of its fruit, you will surely die” (Genesis 2:16–17).



God creates Adam from dust of the earth. Michelangelo painted this masterpiece on the Sistine Chapel’s ceiling.

They ate the fruit, and in this disobedience they somehow damaged the Creation. The world was no longer perfect, survival became hard work, and death awaited humanity. Expelled from the Garden of Eden, Adam died at age 930.

New Testament writers portrayed Adam as the opposite of Jesus: “Everyone dies because all of us are related to Adam, the first man. But all who are related to Christ, the other man, will be given new life” (1 Corinthians 15:22).

OTHER HUMANS MADE FROM SOIL

God scooped soil from the earth, Genesis 2 says, and created the world’s first human. Many other creation stories from the Middle East also tell of humans created from soil.

Some of the oldest come from Sumer, birthplace of the world’s first known civilization, in what is now Iraq. One story tells of Enki, Sumerian god of water, ordering the creation of humans: “Mix the heart of the clay that is over the abyss.” In another story the goddess Aruru creates the hero Enkidu: She “pinched off a piece of clay, cast it out into the open country. She created a primitive man, Enkidu the warrior.”

ADAM

(ADD uhm)

Adam, Hebrew
“human”

First mention: Joshua 3:16

MAP 2
D4

When Joshua led the Hebrews across the Jordan River into the Promised Land, they didn’t get wet. In a miracle strikingly similar to the crossing of the Red Sea, God blocked the river. “The water began piling up at a town upstream called Adam” (Joshua 3:16).

Adam was probably an ancient city about eighteen miles north of Jericho, on what is now Jordan’s side of the river. The modern city near the ancient ruins is known by its Arabic name, Damiyeh, which sounds similar to the Hebrew word *adamah*, “earth,” from which Adam was made.

The Jordan River stopped again in 1927. An earthquake jarred the 150-foot soft soil cliffs near Damiyeh/Adam, producing a landslide that blocked the Jordan River for twenty-one hours.

ADULLAM

(uh DOO luhm)

Adullam, Hebrew

First mention: Genesis 38:1

MAP 2
C5

Insane with jealousy over how the nation loved his son-in-law, David, King Saul sent a detachment of soldiers to assassinate him. But Saul’s daughter, David’s wife, helped him escape. David fled to one of the many caves near Adullam, a village in the Judean hills about five miles west of his hometown, Bethlehem.

“Soon his brothers and other relatives joined him there. Then others began coming—men who were in trouble or in debt or who were just discontented—until David was the leader of about four hundred men” (1 Samuel 22:1–2).

AHAB

(A hab)

Ahab, Hebrew

Possibly “father’s brother”

Reigned about 875–854 BC

First mention: 1 Kings 16:28

Perhaps the most surprising thing about King Ahab—best known for marrying evil and murderous Jezebel—is that he worshiped God. In fact, the names of all his children signified praise of God. But this seventh king of Israel’s northern nation also worshiped his wife’s god, Baal.

Ahab not only built a temple and shrines for Baal; he stood passively by while Queen Jezebel ordered God’s prophets executed. The prophet Elijah stepped in and on Mount Carmel called fire from the sky to prove God’s power. In response, the crowd killed Baal’s prophets, infuriating Jezebel.

Though Ahab’s marriage to Jezebel produced spiritual chaos, it provided at least temporary peace and prosperity. Jezebel was princess of Phoenicia, in what is now Lebanon. This guaranteed peace with seafaring Phoenicia, which included sea trade.

Ahab was a skilled military leader, twice defeating Syrian invaders and once taking part in a coalition that

stopped Assyria’s push toward Israel. Ahab died in a later battle, however, trying to recapture land east of the Jordan River. A stray Syrian arrow penetrated his armor’s seam.

This is his legacy: “Ahab did what was evil in the LORD’s sight, even more than any of the kings before him” (1 Kings 16:30).

AHAZ

(A haz)

Ahaz, Hebrew

“God holds”

Reigned about 742–727 BC

First mention: 2 Kings 15:38

Ahaz wasn’t just a bad king. He was one of the worst, worshiping idols and “even sacrificing his own son in the fire” (2 Kings 16:3).

The eleventh king of the southern Jewish kingdom of Judah, Ahaz refused to join forces with Israel’s northern kingdom and Syria to stop Assyria’s advance. When the coalition turned on him, Ahaz asked Assyria for help—not trusting Isaiah’s promise that all Judah needed for survival was to worship God.

Assyria defeated the coalition. But they took from Ahaz many temple treasures as payment for protecting Judah. Ahaz ruled for sixteen years, but his nation refused to bury him with other kings. Surprisingly, his son Hezekiah became one of Judah’s most godly kings.

Ai

(A eye)

Haay, Hebrew
“ruin”

First mention: Genesis 12:8

MAP 1
C4

It’s ironic that Abraham camped in the hills near Ai while scouting the Canaanite land God promised him. Ai is best known for handing Joshua his first defeat.

After Jericho fell, Joshua sent scouts to nearby Ai. The village was small, so Joshua sent only three thousand soldiers to take it. God allowed Ai to chase off the attackers because one Hebrew had disobeyed him: Achan took spoils of war from Jericho. Joshua ordered Achan stoned to death, then he led thirty thousand soldiers against Ai. Most hid in ambush, while Joshua led five thousand in a fake attack followed by retreat. Ai pursued, as before, leaving the village unguarded. The Hebrews in hiding rushed into Ai and set it on fire. Smoke was Joshua’s signal to stop running, turn, and fight. The rest of his army joined by attacking Ai’s army from the rear, killing them all.

It’s unclear where Ai was located. Some scholars in the early 1900s suggested a nearly three-acre mound of

dirt covering ruins known by the Arabic name et Tell (“ruin” or “mound”), about ten miles west of Jericho. But excavations show no one lived there at the time.

AIJALON

(AY jah lon)

Ayyalon, Hebrew
“deer field”

First mention: Joshua 10:12

MAP 1
B5

It was in the sprawling valley of Aijalon, about fifteen miles northwest of Jerusalem, that Joshua offered a mysterious battle prayer that still perplexes Bible students: “Let the sun stand still over Gibeon, and the moon over the valley of Aijalon” (Joshua 10:12).



Joshua prepares to execute Canaanite kings after defeating their coalition forces at Aijalon, where “the sun stopped in the middle of the sky.”

Joshua’s invading army had already taken the cities of Jericho and Ai and was tricked into making a peace treaty

with Gibeon. In response, the worried king of Jerusalem assembled a coalition army from several Canaanite cities and led them north to punish their sister city of Gibeon for the betrayal. Gibeonite messengers rushed this news to Joshua, who was camped almost twenty miles east, near the Jordan River.

After an all-night march, Joshua's army took the coalition forces by surprise, routing them, then chasing them west toward the valley of Aijalon. Joshua's prayer may have been a request for God to prolong the day, allowing the Israelites to finish the job of killing their enemies.

"The sun stopped in the middle of the sky. . . . Never before or since has there been a day like that one" (Joshua 10:13–14).

AKKAD

(ACK add)
Akkad, Hebrew
 Agade, Akkadian
 "fortress"

First mention: Genesis 10:10



Nimrod—one of Noah's descendants—started the first-known Persian Gulf empire by building Akkad, Babel, and other cities. Akkad's location is unknown, though some scholars guess it was near Baghdad.

By 2350 BC—about two centuries before Abraham—Akkad became capital of a powerful dynasty ruled by Sargon I. The region, which took the city's name, covered a hundred-mile stretch of fertile land

along the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. In time, this city and region gave its name to the Akkadian language, used by the Babylonians and Assyrians.

ALEXANDRIA

(al ex AN dree uh)
Alexandria, Greek
 "defender of humanity"
 First mention: Acts 6:9



One of the Seven Wonders of the World towered nearly 450 feet above Alexandria, Egypt's shoreline. It was a lighthouse that sailors could see for miles. Paul, on his way to trial in Rome, sailed on a grain ship from this commercial center located where the Nile River drains into the Mediterranean.

Named after Alexander the Great, who conquered Egypt in 323 BC, this city became Egypt's capital during Greek and Roman times. A famed center of learning, Alexandria had the finest library of its time, with more than five hundred thousand volumes. Home to about a million people in New Testament times, these included hundreds of thousands of Jewish immigrants. Here is where Paul's associate Apollos studied and where the first known Bible translation—the Septuagint, a Greek version of Jewish Scriptures—was crafted. Jewish scholars from Alexandria were also among those who debated religion with Stephen, the first Christian martyr.

Alexandria's ancient library was lost in a fire in AD 47, but the city remains a busy port town of more than

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