

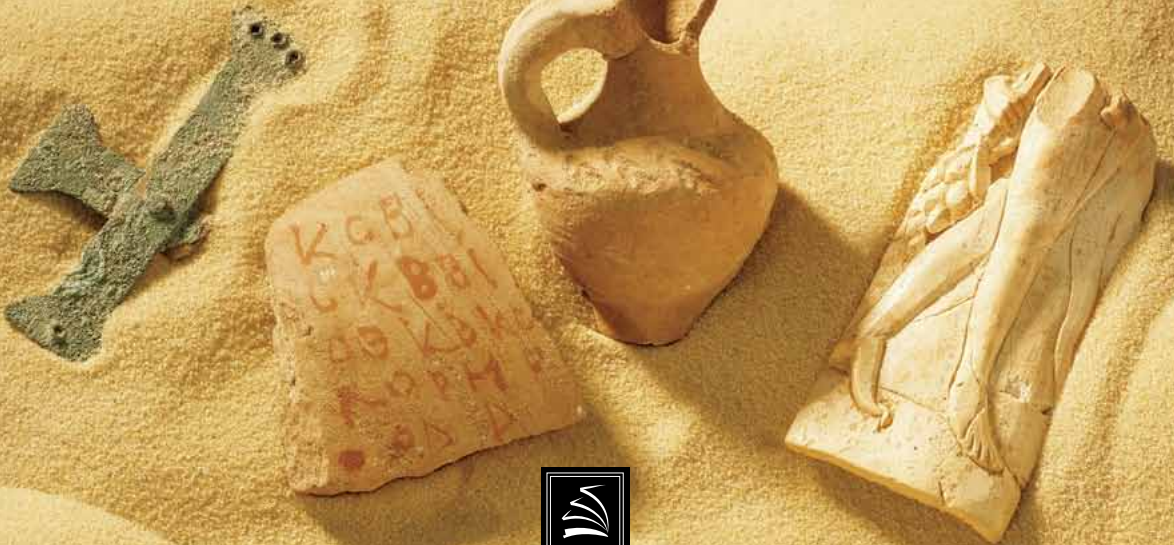
THE COMPLETE

VISUAL
BIBLE

A LAVISHLY ILLUSTRATED TOUR OF THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS

THE COMPLETE

VISUAL BIBLE



BARBOUR

STEPHEN M. MILLER

AUTHOR OF THE COMPLETE GUIDE TO THE BIBLE

For a helpful index
and other details on the *Complete Visual Bible*,
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | | | |
|----------------------------------|------------|----------------------------------|------------|
| INTRODUCTION | 6 | MICAH | 274 |
| OLD TESTAMENT INTRO | 8 | NAHUM | 278 |
| GENESIS | 10 | HABAKKUK | 282 |
| EXODUS | 30 | ZEPHANIAH | 286 |
| LEVITICUS | 46 | HAGGAI | 290 |
| NUMBERS | 56 | ZECHARIAH | 294 |
| DEUTERONOMY | 68 | MALACHI | 300 |
| JOSHUA | 76 | NEW TESTAMENT INTRO | 304 |
| JUDGES | 88 | MATTHEW | 306 |
| RUTH | 98 | MARK | 340 |
| 1, 2 SAMUEL | 104 | LUKE | 358 |
| 1, 2 KINGS | 124 | JOHN | 378 |
| 1, 2 CHRONICLES | 142 | ACTS | 396 |
| EZRA | 152 | ROMANS | 414 |
| NEHEMIAH | 158 | 1, 2 CORINTHIANS | 422 |
| ESTHER | 162 | GALATIANS | 436 |
| JOB | 168 | EPHESIANS | 440 |
| PSALMS | 176 | PHILIPPIANS | 448 |
| PROVERBS | 184 | COLOSSIANS | 454 |
| ECCLESIASTES | 194 | 1, 2 THESSALONIANS | 460 |
| SONG OF SONGS | 200 | 1, 2 TIMOTHY | 466 |
| ISAIAH | 206 | TITUS | 478 |
| JEREMIAH | 218 | PHILEMON | 482 |
| LAMENTATIONS | 228 | HEBREWS | 486 |
| EZEKIEL | 232 | JAMES | 494 |
| DANIEL | 242 | 1, 2 PETER | 502 |
| HOSEA | 254 | 1, 2, 3 JOHN | 512 |
| JOEL | 258 | JUDE | 520 |
| AMOS | 262 | REVELATION | 522 |
| OBADIAH | 266 | ART CREDITS | 542 |
| JONAH | 268 | | |

I N T R O D U C T I O N

AN ATHEIST complimented me today.

Perfect timing. Wonderful compliment.

I was taking a last pass through this book, polishing the writing and making sure I had all the pictures and maps ready to go to the editor. All the while I was wondering what to write in this intro, one of the last things I do before sending a book on its way.

I was in Revelation and nearly done with my polishing when the atheist's e-mail came. He's a photographer in Germany. I had e-mailed him yesterday, asking permission to publish one of his photos.

"After thinking awhile," he wrote, "I have decided that you may use it for the book you are writing on the Bible.

"To tell you frankly," he added, "I am a decided atheist and thus felt kind of strange about the intended context for the use of the photo. So I read samples of your previous books on the Internet.

"Actually, I found them written with care and sensitivity, and your approach will surely be interesting."

I stopped working.

I sat for a while and thought about what he had said.

I looked out the window of my upstairs home office. Past the lavender blooms on our redbud tree and the brownish green buds on the ash. To the homes of my neighbors.

There's one neighbor whose wife works half the nation away, but who comes home when she can.

Next door to them is another couple. The husband was recently diagnosed with lung cancer; he's younger than me.

Across the street there's a couple who brought my family some food several years ago when they heard our high school son was in the hospital, deathly sick with a virus he eventually managed to beat, barely.

On Sunday mornings when it comes time to back the car out of the driveway and go to church, those neighbors of mine stay home. Of the 10 houses I can see from my window, only one household attends worship services.

I write for the other nine. And for my atheist friends and colleagues.

So I figure you can imagine how I felt when I read today's e-mail.

Books like this take a full year of my life, researching and writing. It sometimes worries me that I'm spending all that time creating something

that works only for religion insiders—as though I’m singing to the choir, when what I want to do is sing to the rest of the world.

So today, on the last day of another year’s long work—a day before the start of a new year on a new book—an atheist writes to tell me he has heard my song, and it’s not so bad.

I wonder. What would an atheist say if I told him that he, an unbeliever, has become the voice of God—heaven-sent to encourage a believer?

Coincidence is not a deity, he might argue.

Not always, I would agree. But sometimes.

Today, perhaps.

A WORD OF THANKS

I write this book alone, like a monk isolated in his cell.

Yet I’m not the only human bringing this book to life and putting it into your hands. There’s a team at work. And I’d like to name names.

Linda Miller, my wife. She has let me work in the risky business of full-time freelance writing for more than 15 years. That makes her a sanctified gambler.

Becca Miller, my daughter. She got her Facebook friends to join the fan page my publisher asked me to start. She has more friends than most pastors have eyeballs staring at them on Sundays.

Brad Miller, my son. His online marketing company has helped market my books: sheppix.net.

Virginia Miller, my mom. I send her copies of each book I write, and she always says she loves the book. Let me tell you, it doesn’t hurt.

Steve Laube, my agent. He’s a bit like the Holy Spirit in a bone bag. He’s my advocate, helper, counselor, and sometimes my comforter.

Paul K. Muckley, Barbour editor. God gave him the perfect quality for a soul trapped between a writer pleading for excellence and a production crew swamped with work: grace under fire.

Donna Maltese, freelance copy editor and fact checker. I requested her because her attention to detail on a previous book I wrote convinced me she’s a cyborg.

Kelly Williams, Annie Tipton, Ashley Schrock, Ashley Casteel, and the rest of the in-house team at Barbour keep these big projects moving along, toward the light at the end of the tunnel.

The team at FaceoutStudio designed the pages for beauty and readability.

Shalyn Hooker, Barbour marketing manager. Without Shalyn and her team, my books would hear the sound of one hand clapping.

God bless each one of these people.

And God bless you as you read this book, and more importantly as you read his Book.

Steve

STEPHEN M. MILLER

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OLD

TESTAMENT

// DON'T EVEN TRY THINKING OF THE BIBLE AS A BOOK. //

IT'S NOT.

It's a library of books written over a stretch
of a thousand years. Maybe more.

THE BIBLE COMES IN TWO MAIN SETS:

// OLD TESTAMENT

This is the Jewish Bible. It traces the story of the Jewish people—from their founding father, Abraham, to their near annihilation by invaders from what is now Iraq. Home to 39 of the Bible's 66 books, the Old Testament makes up the first two-thirds of the Bible.

// NEW TESTAMENT

This is the Christian add-on to the Jewish Bible. It traces the story of the Christian movement—from the birth of Jesus to the spread of Christianity throughout the Roman Empire about a century later.

HOW THE JEWS SETTLED on which books to include in their Bible, the Old Testament, is anyone's guess. Scholars speculate that the oldest stories—like those about Abraham and Moses—were passed along by word of mouth for generations. Then when David became king, as one theory goes, palace officials started writing down the stories to document their nation's history.

Moses had apparently done some writing earlier, since God told him to write down the 10 Commandments and other Jewish laws (Exodus 34:27). Those laws appear in the first five books of the Old Testament. And this was the first section of the Bible that Jews embraced as sacred. Jesus himself described the stories in those books as “the writings of Moses” (Mark 12:26).

Later, Jews added the books of the prophets to their sacred collection. And finally the rest of their Bible—a diverse assortment of writings including sacred lyrics called Psalms, a collection of wise sayings known as Proverbs, and the sad tale of Job.

This is the Bible Jesus read—the Jewish Bible. It's also the Bible the apostle Paul was talking about when he said:

“Everything in the Scriptures is God's Word. All of it is useful for teaching and helping people and for correcting them and showing them how to live.”

2 TIMOTHY 3:16 CEV



GENESIS 1:3

Light bursts from a fledgling solar system in an artist's depiction of photos taken by NASA's Spitzer Space Telescope. On day one of creation, God produces light and separates it from darkness.

BIG SCENE

LET THERE BE LIGHT



BIBLE HISTORY

ALL DATES APPROXIMATE

BEFORE 4000 BC

God creates universe

BEFORE 2500 BC

Noah saves family and animals from flood; ark stops in Ararat mountains

WORLD HISTORY

4.5 BILLION BC

Geologists estimate birth of earth and solar system

4500 BC

Ocean breaks through Bosphorus Strait, flooding freshwater lake that becomes Black Sea 200 miles (322 km) north of Mount Ararat (see page 14 for map).

GENESIS

PARADISE POLLUTED

STORY LINE

GOD CREATES THE UNIVERSE, life on earth, and a garden paradise for the first humans, Adam and Eve.

Sadly, the couple breaks God's one and only rule. They eat fruit from a forbidden tree—which God warned would kill them. Perhaps God intended Adam and Eve to live forever. But now they're sentenced to die, after a lifetime of hard labor.

Their sin not only alienates them from God, it seems to contaminate the world—like a spiritual toxin dumped into the physical universe.

Some Bible experts say the rest of the Bible is the story of God working his plan to undo the damage—to restore his perfect creation and his relationship with humanity.

God starts with one man who trusts him completely: Abraham. From this man, God will grow a nation devoted to him. Abraham's grandson Jacob fathers a dozen sons who become the founding ancestors of Israel's 12 tribes.

By the end of Genesis, Jacob's favorite son, Joseph, has risen to the number-two position in Egypt. And when a drought strikes Canaan, in what is now Israel, Joseph invites his father's entire extended family to move to Egypt to weather out the dry spell by enjoying the lush pastures along the drought-proof Nile River.

They will overstay their welcome. Generations later the Egyptians will enslave them.

// **LOCATION:** The stories take place throughout the Middle East, mainly in what are now Israel and Egypt (see page 14 for map).

// **TIME:** Genesis starts with Creation, which some Christians say took place about 6,000 years ago. Others agree with most scientists who theorize it began countless eons ago. Genesis ends in the time of Abraham's great-grandson Joseph in about 1800 BC.

// **AUTHOR:** Unknown. Ancient Jewish tradition says Moses wrote this book and the four that follow.



2000 BC :
Abraham almost
sacrifices his son

1900s BC :
Jacob fathers 12 sons,
ancestors of Israel's 12 tribes

1800s BC :
Jacob's family moves to
Egypt during drought

2500 BC King Naram-
Sin in what is now Iran
declares himself a god



1800 BC Egypt expands crop
cultivation to desert oasis town of
Faiyum, south of Cairo

Creation countdown

BEFORE THE BEGINNING, a great nothing exists.

Genesis describes it: formless, empty, dark. There is no universe.

There are just “deep waters,” (Genesis 1:2). Many interpret this as a symbol of pre-creation matter, chaotically scattered. Presumably, God supplies these creation building blocks and then forms them into the universe.

He does all this in six days, which some Bible students take literally as 24-hour days. Others read it figuratively.

Under God’s spoken direction, creation unfolds like a cosmic drama in six acts.

Act seven: God rests. Not that God’s tired. Rest, many scholars say, is a symbolic model for humans to follow: Take a day off. Moses later cites God’s day of rest as the reason for the Sabbath, the law that God’s people should rest every seventh day.

Creation story, version two

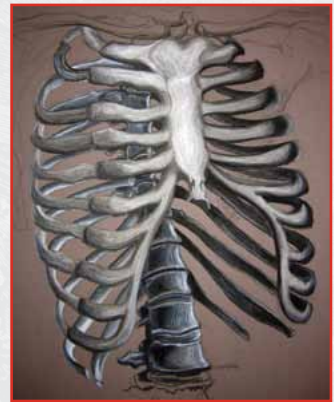
GENESIS CHAPTER 2 tells a different creation story. So say many Bible experts. Others argue it’s not different. It’s just more detail on the earlier story.

God creates the earth. Then from the dust of the ground he forms a man and breathes into him the breath of life—the original CPR.

God plants a riverside garden in Eden. Then he plants the man there—home alone in paradise.

GOD’S SPIRIT HOVERS OVER THE WATER.

“Water” in other ancient creation stories refers to pre-creation chaos—as in one story from Babylon (now Iraq) written at least 200 years before Moses. At the start of that story, called *Enuma Elish*, heaven and earth are unformed. Their raw material mingles together in the “waters of chaos,” personified as the goddess Tiamat. Babylon’s chief god, Marduk, kills Tiamat and divides her body. With half he creates the heavens, and half the earth. Genesis says it was God, not Marduk, who turned chaos into creation.



▲ RIB COUNT.

Genesis says God made Eve from Adam’s rib. That sparked an urban legend: Men have fewer ribs than women. Both have 12 on each side. Some folks who defend the story as literal ask: Who’s to say Adam didn’t have 13 pairs to begin with?

ADAM.

The name of humanity’s first man reads like a play on words. He’s Adam (Hebrew for “man”), made from dirt (*adama* in Hebrew).

EVE.

This is the Hebrew word for “life-giver.” Adam “named his wife Eve, because she would be the mother of all who live” (Genesis 3:20).

COLORFUL CREATION CHAOS

/ A thousand light-years from earth, a nebula in the constellation Perseus puts on a light show that NASA astrophysicists describe as “the beautiful chaos of a dense group of stars being born.”

“It is not good for the man to be alone,” God says. “I will make a helper who is just right for him” (Genesis 2:18).

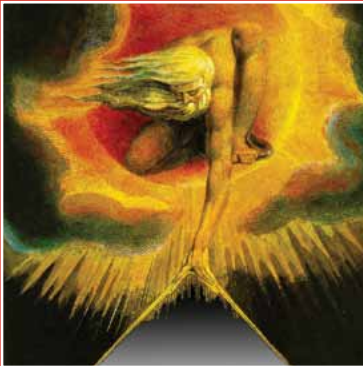
The next few sentences sound a little like a chauvinistic joke. Or perhaps a report of beta testing on potential helpers. Anticipating a “helper” for the man, the reader might expect God to create a woman. Instead, he creates wild animals. Then birds. Then livestock.

Sadly for women—it might seem—they come after livestock.

God, a bit like an anesthesiologist, puts Adam into a deep sleep. Then, like a surgeon, he removes a rib. But in the end, like someone out of this world, he sculpts a living, breathing woman. She’s wearing nothing but a smile.

The first words out of Adam’s mouth when he sees her: “At last!” (Genesis 2:23). Or, as a churchgoing gent might put it today: “Hallelujah!”

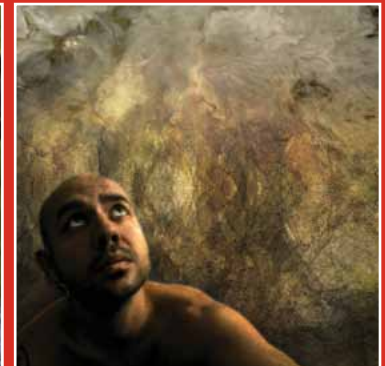
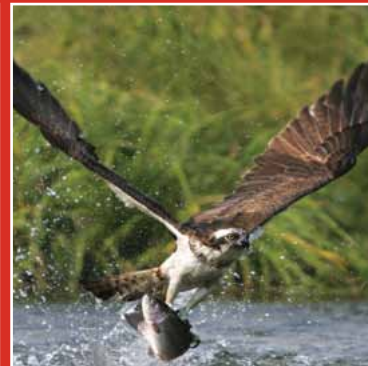
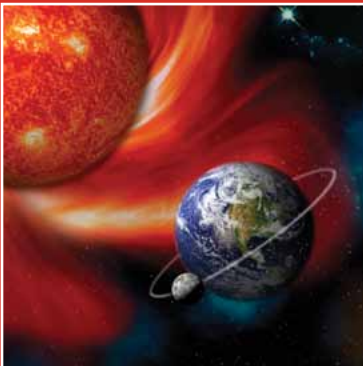
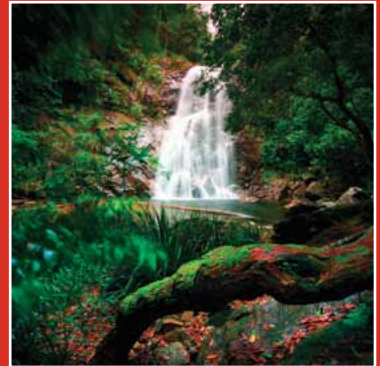
**ACT ONE:
GOD CREATES LIGHT.**



**ACT TWO:
SEA AND SKY.**



**ACT THREE:
LAND TEEMING WITH PLANTS.**



**ACT FOUR:
SUN AND MOON.**

**ACT FIVE:
SEA LIFE AND BIRDS.**

**ACT SIX:
LAND ANIMALS AND
CREATION'S CLIMAX:
HUMANITY.**

Forbidden fruit

IN THE GARDEN OF EDEN, Adam and Eve have just one rule: “You must not eat the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden. Do not even touch it. If you do, you will die” (Genesis 3:3 NIV).

But a snake throws Eve a line. And she bites. The Bible later identifies this snake as “the ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan” (Revelation 12:9).

The snake says God is lying and that if Eve eats the forbidden fruit, she’ll become like God, “knowing both good and evil” (Genesis 3:5).

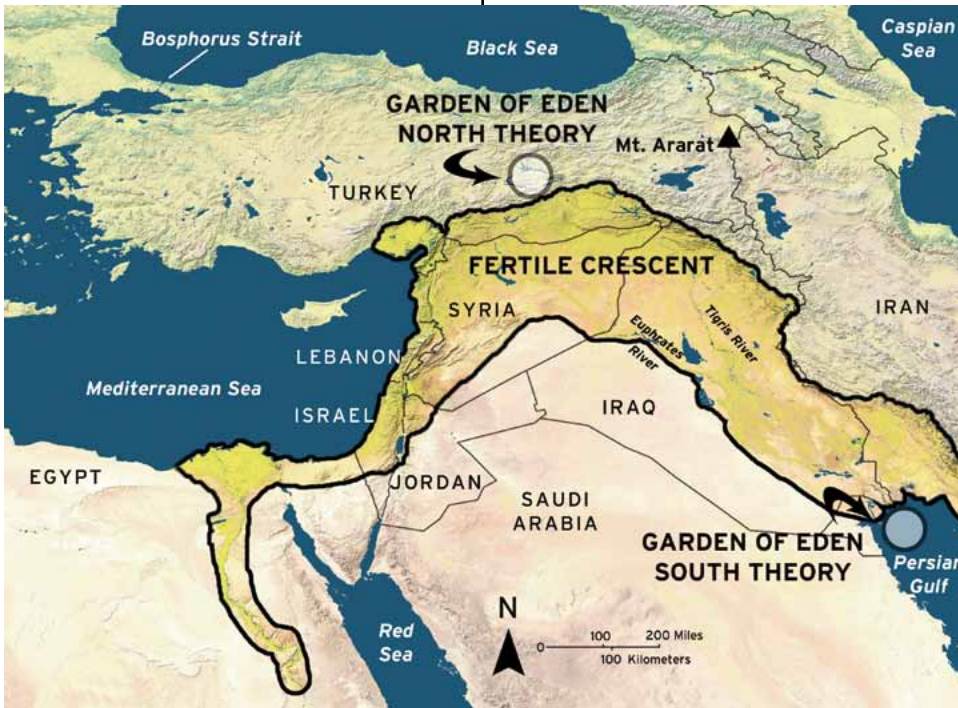
Eve makes a choice fit for a blond joke. Adam makes a choice fit for a jock joke. They both bite.

Suddenly, they realize they’re as naked as a jay-bird, plucked.

God apparently has been joining them for evening walks. This particular evening, Adam and Eve feel underdressed for the occasion. So they hide.

Something about this sin seems to change creation for the worse. It’s just a guess, but some scholars speculate that God may have intended for Adam and Eve to live forever in a paradise on earth. But now, because of disobedience, death enters the world—and Adam and Eve suffer paradise lost.

God exiles them from the Garden. He condemns Eve to suffer the pain of delivering children. And he condemns Adam to struggle in his effort to grow food. In time, God warns, both will die. “You were made from dust, and to dust you will return” (Genesis 3:19).



QUEST FOR EDEN / The Bible’s clue of a river flowing out of Eden and branching off into four rivers has led to many theories about where Eden was. One theory puts it in the mountains of Turkey. Another puts it in the Persian Gulf, a former river valley until the ocean flooded it.

World's first murder

BIG BROTHER CAIN—humanity’s first big brother—kills his little brother, Abel.

Motive: jealousy, apparently with only four people on the planet.

It isn’t that Cain, son of Adam and Eve, figures his parents love Abel best.

Worse, Cain seems to think God loves Abel best—with good reason, as far as Cain’s concerned.

Each brother brings God a gift from their year of hard work. Cain, a farmer, brings “some of his crops” (Genesis 4:3). Abel, a shepherd, brings “the best of the firstborn lambs from his flock” (Genesis 4:4).

God accepts Abel’s gift. But not Cain’s.

Why the rejection?

Some Christians guess it’s because God prefers blood offerings. Yet Jewish law later allows for grain offerings, too.

Some guess it’s because Abel brought the “best”

of his flocks, while Cain scraped the bottom of the barrel for “some” crops.

Others say they see unidentified sin in Cain, based on God’s cryptic explanation for the rejection:

“If you had done the right thing, you would be smiling. But you did the wrong thing, and now sin is waiting to attack you like a lion. Sin wants to destroy you, but don’t let it!”

GENESIS 4:7 CEV

Cain lets it.

He murders Abel.

God forbids Cain to farm again. “You will be a homeless wanderer,” God says (Genesis 4:12).

.....

MARK OF CAIN / The mysterious mark God put on Cain wasn’t a curse. It was a blessing. Condemned to homeless wandering, Cain feared someone would kill him. So, “The LORD put a mark on Cain to warn anyone who might try to kill him” (Genesis 4:15). Some speculate the mark was black skin, but most scholars would call that a shot in the dark.



HOMELESS CAIN / Forbidden to farm anymore after polluting the ground with the blood of his brother, whom he murdered, Cain moves east of Eden. There, he raises a family and lives as a nomadic herder.

Flood zone: Earth

GOD PUTS UP WITH HUMANITY'S SIN for 1,656 years. Assuming, as many do, that the Bible's genealogy of Adam's descendants is literal (see Genesis 5).

By that time the human race has tanked. There's only one blameless man left standing: 600-year-old Noah.

In a creation do-over, God decides to give humanity a fresh start. Noah will become humanity's new founding father. God tells him, "I am about to cover the earth with a flood that will destroy every living thing that breathes" (Genesis 6:17).

Using God's design specifications, Noah builds a survival barge—a floating warehouse. It will protect him and his family. He'll also take along male-female pairs of land animals to help reboot

the planet's critter life.

For 40 days water attacks the land from above and below: pummeling rain and erupting groundwater. In the end, all breathers outside the boat lie dead. Even those who scrambled to the highest mountaintops lost their footing. Earth looks like Waterworld.

Five months after the first raindrop, Noah's salvation barge grinds to a halt somewhere in the Ararat mountain range. But all on board have to wait inside for another seven months. In all, Noah and passengers stay in the boat a little more than a year. That's how long it takes the land to dry.

Afterward, God makes a promise to Noah—a contract he signs with a rainbow:

"I will never again destroy all living things. As long as the earth remains, there will be planting and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night."

GENESIS 8:21-22

ONE-YEAR CRUISE. To survive a coming flood, Noah builds a barge big enough to hold his family, a zoo-load of animals, and enough supplies to sustain them all for the 12 months they'll stay aboard. The barge is longer than a football field and half as wide—and about half the size of cruise ships today. Length: 150 yards (137 meters). Width: 25 yards (23 meters). Height: 15 yards (14 meters).



SUPER-HUMAN LIFESPANS



DID PEOPLE LIVE HUNDREDS OF YEARS?

Before the flood they did. So says a literal read of the Bible—as well as a 4,000-year-old clay prism from Sumeria (right), the world’s first known civilization. The prism says the reign of eight kings spanned nearly a quarter of a million years. The average reign of a king was 30,000 years, which makes the Bible’s oldest character, 969-year-old Methuselah, look like he died in the crib.



Timeline dates are in Noah years: 2.17.600 is month two and day 17 of Noah's 600th year of life.

WAS ALL THE EARTH FLOODED? Many Christians say yes, and that today’s lay of the land was shaped by this flood. Others side with most scientists who insist there’s no evidence of such a flood. But there is evidence that floods wiped out cities in the Tigris and Euphrates river valleys, where civilization began with the Sumerian Empire. As far as the ancients were concerned, many scholars say, this area in the Fertile Crescent was their entire world.

Tower of Babel

ONCE UPON A TIME humans spoke just one language, according to the Bible.

Not hard to believe if we figure Genesis got it right—that the human race started with one couple, and then rebooted after the flood with only Noah’s family.

From the Ararat mountains, many of Noah’s descendants—if not all—migrate “to the east” and settle in “a plain in the land of Babylonia” (Genesis 11:2).

There, they get cocky.

They say, “Come, let’s build a great city for ourselves with a tower that reaches into the sky. This will make us famous and keep us from being scattered all over the world” (Genesis 11:4).

They’re proposing a monument to themselves. Not a lofty idea, God apparently concludes.

What God does about this, some scholars say, spins a play on words in the original language. The people plan to mix up mud for bricks. Instead, God mixes them up like the dust of the earth they are.

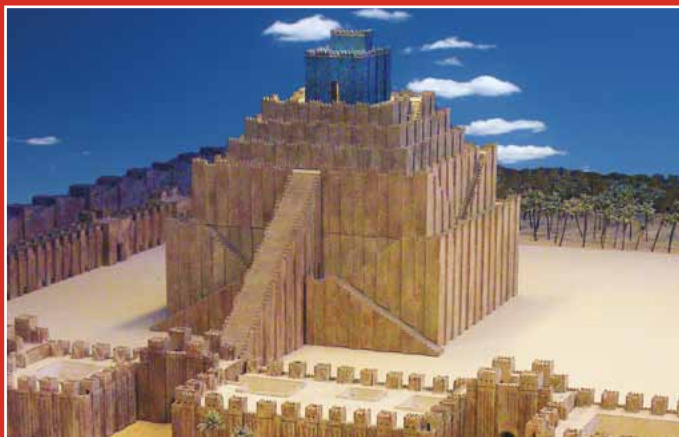
God confuses them by making them talk in different languages. It’s the United Nations working on a construction crew without translators. Project “Stairway to Heaven” falls on its face. In time, the people scatter abroad, apparently by language groups.

That’s how the Bible says the would-be tower town “came to be called Babel, because there GOD turned their language into ‘babble’ ” (Genesis 11:9 MSG).

When Jews in Bible times spoke of Babylon, they used *babel*—as in, “Babble on.”



BUILDING BLOCKS. A worker presses mud and straw into wooden molds. Straw binds the mud together, like steel reinforces concrete today. Dried only in the sun, the bricks could last a few decades exposed to weather. Fired in a kiln afterward, they can endure for centuries.



CLIMBING TO THE GODS. A temple for Babylon’s chief god, Marduk, crowns the top of a ziggurat in this model on display at the Louvre in Paris. The tower dominated Babylon’s cityscape. Some wonder if this kind of stair-step tower, popular throughout the ancient Middle East, is what builders of the Tower of Babel had in mind.

Abraham leaves home at 75

IT ISN'T GOD'S IDEA for Abraham to leave his hometown of Ur and move to what is now Israel. Not as the Bible tells it.

Abraham's father, Terah, comes up with the idea. But he settles his family in Haran instead, a city two-thirds of the way to Canaan.

It's only after Terah dies that God tells Abraham to pick up where Terah left off.

"Leave your native country, your relatives, and your father's family, and go to the land that I will show you. I will make you into a great nation."

GENESIS 12:1-2

Quite a promise to a 75-year-old man with no kids—and little hope of producing any. Not with his 66-year-old infertile wife.

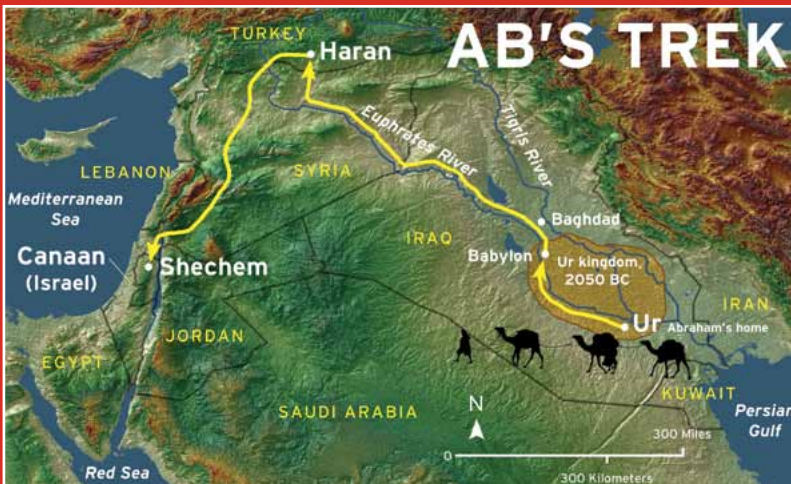
Abraham packs it all up and moves anyhow. He takes his flocks, servants, and the family of his orphaned nephew, Lot.

Perhaps a couple of months later they reach Shechem, a highland village in the heart of what is now Israel.

There, God adds zip to his earlier promise: "I will give this land to your descendants" (Genesis 12:7).

As if Abraham had any.

Yet in response, Abraham builds a stone altar and worships God.



UR. New York City of its day—rich, cultured, and the center of activity. This Euphrates River town commanded about 200 miles of riverfront property.

▲ **WHY DID ABRAHAM'S FATHER LEAVE UR?** Ancient documents found in the region report that foreign pioneers were moving in, threatening the kingdom's stability. Perhaps it was a bit like American settlers driving out the Native Americans. Terah couldn't retreat south: Persian Gulf. Or west: Syrian Desert. Or east: Elamites from what is now Iran; they were among the settlers encroaching on Ur's territory. So Terah moved north, following caravan routes along the Euphrates River.

Contract signed in blood

ABRAHAM IS CIRCUMCISED when he is 99 years old. This procedure is a stipulation in a contract he makes with God—a *covenant*, many call it.

This contract formalizes the promise God first made to Abraham almost 25 years earlier, and repeated about a decade later in a vision:

“Look up into the sky and count the stars if you can. That’s how many descendants you will have! . . . I am the LORD who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land as your possession.”

GENESIS 15:5, 7

Abraham and his wife, Sarah, apparently misunderstand this promise. Sarah, at about age 75

at the time of the vision, figures she can’t have a child. So she offers Abraham her servant Hagar as a surrogate mother to produce a child for the family. A son is born, Ishmael.

But this isn’t the son God has in mind. So God appears to Abraham again. By this time, Abraham is 99 years old. Young Ishmael is about age 13. God says that by this time next year, Sarah will have a son. It’s to the descendants of this son that God “will give the entire land of Canaan. . . . It will be their possession forever, and I will be their God” (Genesis 17:8).

God formalizes this promise, turning it into a contract. Abraham’s responsibility is to obey God and to circumcise the foreskin of his penis. His descendants are to do the same, circumcising every boy on the eighth day after his birth.

A year later, Sarah gives birth to a son, Isaac. His name means “laughter.” Sarah had laughed at the idea she’d get pregnant at age 89. And now she’s laughing for joy.

ISHMAEL. A nomadic woman poses with her child in the camp. Sarah convinces Abraham to send Hagar and son, Ishmael, away from their camp, perhaps to ensure that Isaac would inherit all of Abraham’s property rather than just a third. It was custom for the oldest son to get a double share. God okays the plan and promises to make Ishmael into a great nation, too. Many consider him the father of the Arab people. He fathered 12 sons who founded tribes scattered throughout what is now the Middle East.



Torching Sodom and Gomorrah

ABRAHAM'S FLOCKS grow so huge that Abraham has to part company with his nephew Lot. The land can't support both flocks.

Lot moves to the city of Sodom, where he can graze his flocks in the fertile Jordan River Valley. But Sodom and its twin city of Gomorrah, along with satellite villages in the valley, earn themselves a bad reputation. Think pre-Flood bad. God seems to. And he decides to purge the valley, this time with fire instead of water.

God sends two angels disguised as humans to warn Lot to get his family out of town. Pronto. As if Sodom needed to confirm its bad rep, a gang of men surrounds the house and order Lot to send out the guests, "so we can have sex with them!" (Genesis 19:5).

The angels blind the men and tell Lot to round up his relatives. He rushes out to tell the fiancés of his two daughters that God is about to destroy the city, but they think he's joking. Or perhaps enjoying some late-night wine.

By dawn, only Lot, his wife, and their daughters hit the ground running.

"Don't look back or stop anywhere in the valley," the angels warn, "or you will be swept away!" (Genesis 19:17).

Lot's wife pauses to look back, as Sodom bursts into flames. She turns into a pillar of salt.

The devastation is so widespread that Lot's daughters conclude that they and their father are the last three people on the planet. The daughters get Lot drunk enough to impregnate them, to reseed the planet. Their sons, Moab and Ben-ammi, become the founding fathers of the Moabites and the Ammonites—Arab tribes in what is now Jordan.



▲ **LOT'S WIFE SALTED.** Some wonder if Lot's wife got caught in the explosive shower of chemical spray.

THEORY OF NATURAL DISASTER. God may have destroyed the cities with an earthquake that tore open pockets of natural gas, some speculate. Lightning or early-morning lamp fires may have ignited the gas, propelling sulfur, salt, and other minerals high into the air. The earthquake-prone land around the southern Dead Sea—where some say the cities may have rested in a previously fertile valley—is rich in these resources.

▶ **LOOKING FOR SODOM.**

Some speculate that Sodom is buried in the southern shallows of the Dead Sea—the result of sudden flooding after an earthquake dropped the land mass, allowing the water above to sweep over the plain. Or maybe all that's left are ruins along the southeast shoreline, such as Bab edh-Dhra.



Abraham almost sacrifices his son

“TAKE YOUR SON. . .AND SACRIFICE HIM,”
(Genesis 22:2).

That’s God talking. He’s telling Abraham to kill Isaac—Abraham’s only son with Sarah. The son through whom God promised to build Abraham a nation of descendants.

The news shocks Sarah to death, a Jewish legend says. She dies at age 127 (see Genesis 23:1). If the legend is true, that puts Isaac at about age 37. The Bible doesn’t report his age.

Abraham and Isaac leave their home in Beer-sheba, in southern Israel. They travel three days north. At about 20 miles (32 km) a day—an average day’s walk—that would put them in range of Jerusalem, about 50 miles (80 km) north. Jewish tradition says that’s where they went.

They take firewood, fire, and a knife. When Isaac asks why they don’t have a sheep to sacrifice, Abraham says God will provide one. Some scholars say that’s a clue that Abraham doesn’t expect God to make him go through with this.

Abraham piles up some stones, making an altar. On top, he arranges the wood. Then he ties up his son, lays him on the altar, and picks up the knife.

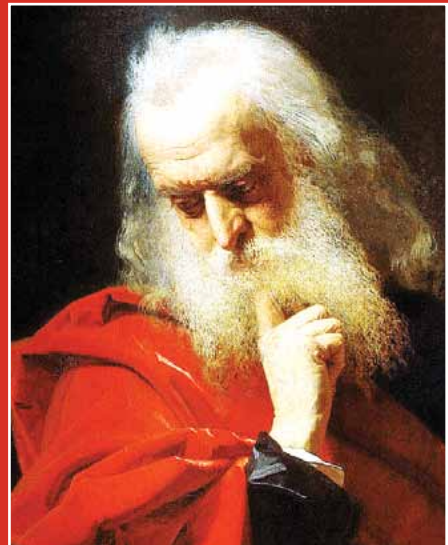
“Don’t hurt the boy,” an angel calls out. “Now I know that you truly obey God, because you were willing to offer him your only son” (Genesis 22:12 CEV).

The angel promises to bless Abraham with a large family of descendants who will:

- // defeat their enemies
- // take over the cities of their enemies—presumably a reference to the conquest of Canaan during Joshua’s days
- // and become a delight to all the nations on earth.

| ABRAHAM'S AGE | KEY EVENT | GENESIS SOURCE |
|---------------|--------------------------------------|----------------|
| 10 | Future wife, Sarah, is born | 17:17 |
| 75 | Leaves home in Haran | 12:4 |
| 85 | Marries Hagar as secondary wife | 16:3 |
| 86 | Ishmael born to Hagar | 16:16 |
| 99 | Abram renamed “Abraham”; circumcised | 17:5, 24 |
| 100 | Isaac born to Sarah | 21:5 |
| 137 | Sarah dies | 23:1 |
| 140 | Finds wife for Isaac | 25:20 |
| 160 | Grandsons born, Esau and Jacob | 25:26 |
| 175 | Dies | 25:7 |

WHY TEST ABRAHAM? The test isn’t for the all-knowing God, most Bible experts agree. Some see it as a foreshadowing of the painful sacrifice God will make 2,000 years later. What Abraham was willing to do—sacrifice his only son—God actually did.



Jacob cheats his twin

ESAU AND JACOB are twins born moments apart, sons of Isaac and Rebekah. Esau arrives first. Jacob next, clutching Esau’s heel.

That’s not all he’d grab of Esau’s.

As the first to exit the uterus, Esau earned a big perk. By custom, he’d get a double share of Isaac’s inheritance—two-thirds for him, one-third for Jacob.

As a bonus for being a daddy’s boy, Esau was fairly certain to get a favorable blessing from his father. It was a custom for fathers to pass on words of hope and blessing to their children.

Jacob cheats Esau out of both.

INHERITANCE. A manly man, Esau comes home famished from a day’s hunt. Jacob, a stay-at-home momma’s boy, is waiting with red lentil stew he cooked. He sells the stew to his brother. Menu price: “Your rights as the firstborn son” (Genesis 25:31). More hungry than smart, Esau agrees.

BLESSING. Old and growing blind, Isaac decides to bless Esau. He asks Esau to prepare him a meal of wild game, so Esau goes hunting. Rebekah convinces Jacob to steal the blessing by pretending to be Esau. Jacob brings Isaac a meat dish. And so he’ll smell like Esau, Jacob wears his brother’s clothes. Jacob even straps goat hide to his arms and neck, to mimic Esau’s hairy body. Fooled by the fraud, Isaac blesses Jacob:

“May many nations become your servants. . . . May you be the master over your brothers.”

GENESIS 27:29

When Esau gets home and finds out that the only blessing left is one that sounds more like a curse, he vows to kill Jacob. But Rebekah warns her favorite son, who flees to her relatives living in what is now Turkey. That’s the last time Momma’s Boy sees his momma.



OVERPRICED SOUP.

Famished from a hunt, Esau agrees to trade his inheritance rights as the oldest son for a bowl of his younger brother’s soup. The oldest son gets a double share of inheritance.

RED LENTIL STEW.

Esau sells his birthright privileges for “some of that red stuff” (Genesis 25:30 HCSB), later identified as lentil stew (verse 34). Lentils, from the pea family, come in many colors including red, green, and brown.

BLESSING.

It’s more than a prayer, but less than a guarantee. It’s a statement of hope, with the expectation that God will bring the words to life. Once spoken, the ancients seemed to believe, the words of blessing couldn’t be taken back.

FIRST-SON PRIVILEGES.

In addition to getting a double share of the family inheritance, the oldest son usually becomes leader of the clan—the extended family. It’s unclear if Esau exchanged his double share for Jacob’s single share, or if Jacob got everything.

Jacob's payback

RUNNING FOR HIS LIFE from the brother he cheated, Jacob flees about 700 miles (1,100 km) north, from Beersheba to Haran.

That's where his mother, Rebekah, grew up, in what is now Turkey. It's also where her brother, Laban, lives with his family—including two daughters: Leah, the oldest, and Rachel.

Jacob falls in love with Rachel, who has “a beautiful figure and a lovely face” (Genesis 29:17).

Trouble is, he needs to pay Laban a bride fee—and he left home with nothing much more than his survival instinct. So he works for Laban for seven years, as payment.

After a nighttime marriage—apparently to a heavily veiled bride—Jacob wakes up in the morning next to Leah.



FERTILITY TREATMENT / Some believed that the root of the mandrake plant, shaped a bit like a human, works as a fertility drug. Leah had some. Rachel traded for it, offering Leah an extra night with Jacob in exchange. The trade worked, but it was Leah who got pregnant. Sperm 1. Mandrake 0.

Not a pleasant surprise. The Bible's vague description of Leah implies she's not easy on the eyes.

Jacob confronts Laban about the switcheroo. Laban simply says it's the custom to marry off the oldest daughter first. But he says Jacob can have Rachel in seven days if he agrees to work seven more years.

Done deal.

The women enter into what looks like a competition for who can give Jacob the most sons. Each woman even gives him her maid as an add-on surrogate mother. Together, the four women give Jacob 12 sons—forefathers of the 12 tribes of Israel.



JACOB'S LADDER / On his escape from Esau's revenge, Jacob has a dream. He sees angels going up and down on a stairway to heaven. God apparently sees something good in Jacob, which readers don't yet see. For God vows that the promise he made to Abraham will be carried out through Jacob, not Esau. Jacob will become one of Israel's forefathers.

Jacob's nervous reunion with Esau

AFTER 20 YEARS OF HARD LABOR working for his father-in-law—14 years paying for his brides and another 6 building his own flocks and herds—Jacob makes a bold decision.

He's going home.

He hopes his brother, Esau, has cooled off by now. But clearly, Jacob is terrified.

As Jacob gets ready to cross the Jordan River into Canaan, he sends messengers to Esau to announce his return and to ask for a happy reunion.

The messengers come back with frightening news: Esau is coming to meet Jacob—and he's bringing an army of 400 men.

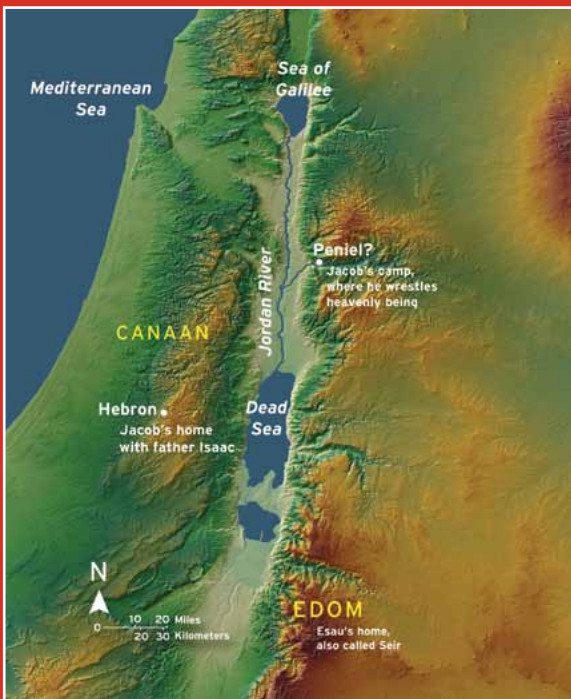
Jacob nervously responds by dividing his cara-

van in half, hoping that if Esau attacks one group, the other might escape. Then Jacob sends more messengers. Wave after wave of them, each wave bearing gifts for Esau—hundreds of prime livestock: cattle, donkeys, camels, goats, and sheep.

The night before the crossing, Jacob can't sleep. He wakes his family and sends them across the Jordan River at a shallow ford. He follows later, but only after wrestling a blessing out of a mysterious man who shows up in the camp.

The next morning Esau arrives, with hugs and kisses.

Their mother has since died, but their father, Isaac, is still alive. Jacob returns to his father at what is now Hebron, a city south of Bethlehem. Esau goes home to Edom, a territory a few days away in what is now Jordan. When Isaac dies, the brothers reunite to bury him.



JACOB WRESTLES GOD? Some wonder if the wrestling match is a poetic way of saying Jacob wrestled with himself over his decision to go home. But a brief reference earlier to Jacob coming upon angels in “God’s camp” (Genesis 32:2) lead many to conclude he wrestled an angel, if not God in human form. Jacob refuses to let go until the man blesses him. Jacob gets his wish—and a new name: Israel. Then Jacob names the place Peniel, meaning “face of God” (Genesis 32:30). Apparently, Jacob thought the man who blessed him was God himself.

