

# A God Named

# Josh



Uncovering  
the **Human Life**  
of Jesus Christ

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Jared Brock

“*A God Named Josh* is a rich and compelling book, perfect for those both unfamiliar and overfamiliar with the story of Jesus.”

—Mark Sayers, author of *Reappearing Church*  
and *A Non-Anxious Presence*

“*A God Named Josh* is absolutely fascinating. Modern, engaging, and relevant, even for those with little or no theological background.”

—Jago Silver, illustrator of *The Jesus Storybook Bible*

“Wow! What a refreshing book! The same wonderful story, the same incredible Savior, the same good news . . . but written with such clarity that everything you thought you knew about Jesus will seem new and exciting. Read this book and give it to all your friends.”

—Steve Brown, founder of *Key Life* and author of *Laughter and Lament*

“Too many people set aside the fact that Jesus was not only fully God but fully human. Jared Brock sets nothing aside! You will close this book with a far greater appreciation for who Jesus was and how He still impacts our lives today.”

—Ken Davis, Christian comedian and author of *Fully Alive*

“This book feels fresh and different—it has something for those familiar with the idea of Jesus as well as those starting from zero. It will inform, challenge, and amuse those who read it; it will also invite you to come closer to its subject.”

Clive Orchard, Team Leader at Ffald y Brenin  
Christian Retreat Center

“You know when you have a piece of art on the wall for years and then one day you actually notice it? *A God Named Josh* is like that, but for the life of Jesus. Even if you were raised in the church, you probably didn’t learn 95 percent of what’s in this book.”

—Dave McSporran, producer of THIS IS ME TV

“Jared’s attention-grabbing biography of Jesus is accessible, thoughtful, and fun. *A God Named Josh* will prove greatly engaging for those who know next to nothing about Jesus, and it might surprise lifelong Christians as well.”

—Vicar Christopher Frost, Christian filmmaker and YouTuber

“Having worked for more than two decades in the poorest country on earth, I believe with all my heart that Jesus deeply loves the

poor. In *A God Named Josh*, Jared Brock re-emphasizes this nearly lost theology and brings it vividly to life for the modern church.”

—Simon Guillebaud, author of *Choose Life*

“In an age of abstraction and disillusion, Jared Brock brilliantly reveals something we all desperately need: an extremely real, human, flesh-and-blood God.”

—Nathan Clarkson, actor and author of *Good Man*

“Jared Brock uses more than 1,000 Scripture references and an in-depth knowledge of historical details to deftly build a compelling case for Jesus as a revolutionary who changes our perspective on every aspect of life—political, financial, relational, philosophical, and spiritual. Reading *A God Named Josh* will deepen your desire to know Jesus more intimately.”

—Harold Albrecht, former Canadian member of Parliament

“It’s like meeting Jesus for the first time, all over again! Sometimes the best way to get a fresh new look at Jesus is to go backwards, and Jared Brock invites us on a journey to meet the Jesus with skin on. The one who lived as a Jew, rowed in wooden boats, wore sandals, and slept in the outdoors. The one with real siblings and friends and enemies. The one who cried as a baby, whose voice broke as a teen, and who cried again as his heart broke over the people he loved. Reading this book, I felt like I could smell ancient Israel—and see Jesus in all of his humanity. For those of you who have known Jesus for a long time, or have yet to meet Him, I’d like to invite you to meet a God named Josh.”

—Sheila Wray Gregoire, author and host of the Bare Marriage podcast

“*A God Named Josh* is a wonderful book that shares new perspectives, insights, and practical applications drawing on the ancient Hebrew story. I loved it.”

—Rabbi Evan Moffic, author of *What Every Christian Needs to Know about the Jewishness of Jesus*

“Jared Brock has written a biography on Jesus that is historical yet relevant, funny yet honest, intelligent yet simple, and timely yet timeless. I’ll be using *A God Named Josh* as a reference for years to come.”

—James Kelly, founder of FaithTech

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**Jared Brock**



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For my father, Gordon Alan Brock.  
I want to be just like you because you want to be just like him.

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## Foreword

**T**alk about the Jesus I never knew! Jared Brock tells the old, old story with such zest, flare, and startling freshness that on almost every page I thought, and often said aloud, “I didn’t know that.”

Jared has mined deeply into the story and the history of Jesus—he seems all at once historian, journalist, investigator, theologian, adventurer-sleuth—and has written it all up as though he’s breaking a story worthy of a Pulitzer Prize. And, well, he is.

Dorothy Sayers many years ago complained that preachers had committed the ultimate sin against Jesus: They had managed to make him boring—nothing more than a “household pet for pale curates and pious old ladies.”

If that’s been your experience, prepare yourself: Jesus is about to become thrillingly, subversively, dangerously, gloriously interesting again.

—Mark Buchanan, author of *God Walk:  
Moving at the Speed of Your Soul*

# Introduction

*“Thou hast made us for thyself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it finds its rest in thee.”*

—Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions*

**T**he other day I was tossing black beans in chili and cumin (with a squeeze of lime and a splash of jalapeño juice) when my wife, Michelle, looked down at the beans in disgust. She wrinkled her nose and asked, “How often do you think Jesus farted?”

We descended into a fit of giggles at the very thought.

But it got me thinking: Jesus farted. And burped. And did other human things. That’s the insane wonder of the incarnation. The God of the universe, the all-powerful, all-knowing, all-present King of Kings and Lord of Lords, creator of heaven and earth, maker of oceans and galaxies and subatomic particles and kombucha—*The Dude*—humbled himself to become a helpless, voiceless, pooping baby, born to a teenager out of wedlock, in a filthy barn, in an overcrowded city, under the rule of corrupt religious officials and a murderous foreign dictator.

And he didn't stop there.

Jesus learns to crawl. And walk. And talk. And feed himself. He learns to read but never owns a single book. He goes through puberty. His voice cracks and croaks and eventually deepens. He gets body odor. He grows chest hair. He makes friends (and enemies). He learns to fish, and build things, and preach like nobody's ever heard.

At twelve, he ditches his parents on their annual family vacation. They freak. *Our preteen has gone off the handle.* They search the capital city and eventually find him in the temple. He's listening and learning, but he's also teaching. Everyone's amazed. He grows in stature, and in favor with God and man.

And then it happens. Around age thirty, he changes careers. He's a rabbi now. He collects a dozen young men—a rowdy and riotous lot, some zealous and others traitorous, all unbelieving to varying degrees—and invites them to follow him.

They're soon joined by others, including loads of epic women, and their merry band of seventy travelers walks at least 21,525 miles. They eat bread, fish, and figs, but not one tomato or potato or ear of corn. They hang out with a diverse cast of characters, including a grandpa named Heli, a desert-dwelling, river-dunking, grasshopper-chomping kinsman who gets beheaded, and a weird prophet-uncle who once lost his voice for nine months. Jesus laughs. He cries. He gets angry. He cracks jokes. He breaks up fights. He engages in economic sabotage. He mourns, he dances, he fasts, he feasts. He works, rests, commands, stresses, prays. He faces every temptation, bears every burden, experiences every emotion that we've experienced. And why shouldn't he? He's human.

And yet . . . there are miracles. Everywhere, miracles. Water turns to wine, blindness turns to sight, death turns to life. He reads minds. He sees hearts. He speaks with authority. He preaches a highly controversial theology with massive socioeconomic and political implications: the kingdom of heaven.

The people start talking. Who is this man, this Galilean with his treasonous political agenda? Could he be the Christos, the Messiah-King chosen not only to overthrow the dictator, but also to be the spiritual savior of his people? Nazareth, you say? Nothing great has ever come from that redneck, backwater part of the world. What's his name? Joshua, son of Joseph? *Yehoshua ben Yehoseph*?

A God . . . named Josh?

For those who don't know the Jesus story, here is a wonderfully brief overview directly from Wikipedia: "Jesus was a Galilean Jew, who was baptized by John the Baptist and began his own ministry. Jesus debated with fellow Jews on how to best follow God, engaged in healings, taught in parables, and gathered followers. He was arrested and tried by the Jewish authorities, turned over to the Roman government, and crucified on the order of Pontius Pilate, the Roman prefect of Jerusalem. After his death, his followers believed he rose from the dead, and the community they formed eventually became the early Church."

That's about as much as we can know for certain about the historical Jesus, give or take one murderous Jewish mafia boss we will meet in chapter 5. Jesus lived, ministered, was crucified, and then people believed he was God. This is the man we'll discover in the pages ahead, including how in the world a Jew named Yehoshua ended up with the English name *Jesus*. From naked infant to naked martyr, from crying in a cradle to crying out on a cross. From a fetus fearfully and wonderfully knit together in his mother's womb to his ascension and that coronation where he's crowned with glory and honor forever. For those of us who call ourselves Christians, he is fully God and fully man.

It's the latter I'd like us to discover in these pages. Is Joan Osborne's song "One of Us" ringing in your ears yet? "What if God was one of us, just a slob like one of us?"

What did Jesus look like? What did he eat? What did he wear? Did he keep a schedule? How did he pay his bills? Who were his

closest friends? Was he married? Why was he murdered? Was he really born on December 25? Who was the fake, Jewish crime family who covertly engineered his assassination and almost got away with not being named in Scripture? How did Jesus muster up so much love for his enemies? Basically, how in the world did God pull it off?

Over the next few hundred pages, we're going to dig into more than a thousand Scripture passages to find out. In the person of Jesus, we'll get a glimpse of how much God must love us. We'll never be able to fully fathom the depth of love it took to incarnate, but we know this for certain: Being a human is hard. Life, even the very best life, is full of pain and misery, heartbreak, loss. Even on the best of days, human life requires effort, struggle, sweat.

Being God is so much better. You don't have the constraints of a body or gravity or time. You don't have to feel pain or experience loss if you don't want to. Disappointment disappears when you know the future. You have total freedom and autonomy and unlimited resources. Why in the world would you set that all aside and come to earth as a helpless human baby—in wretched, Roman-ruled, first-century Palestine, no less?

You'd need to love something—or someone—an awful lot.

## **A Quick Word to Agnostics, Atheists, and Anti-Theists**

Thank you for coming on this journey with me.

Everyone on earth familiar with Josh must place him somewhere on a sliding scale. Perhaps he was a deranged lunatic, a religious crank, or a dynastic warlord who got what he deserved for upsetting the Jewish elite and the Roman Empire. Perhaps he was a kindhearted sage who was innocently murdered. Perhaps he was a Greek-style philosopher who escaped crucifixion and lived out his days on the Med. Maybe he wasn't real at all, but rather a mythical hero.

Or perhaps he was God incarnate, sent down from heaven to reconcile us with his trinitarian self. That's what the gospel writers and the seventy-odd first-century Jews who spent three to five years in close contact with him believed.

Whether he is God or not, Josh is significantly more radical than most pastors and denominations will have you believe. His thoughts on money, politics, philosophy, and religion are downright disturbing. At the very least, he was the most influential man who ever lived—which should make us wonder why most of humanity refuses to seriously consider his message.

And then there is the crazy notion the gospel writers claim: that Josh is the son of God, but also one with God. It was a dangerous belief to hold in the first century. It is still a dangerous belief in our time.

### **What This Book Is Not**

Josh's influence during his lifetime was minimal at best, leaving behind no great buildings like Alexander and Herod did, no great writings like from Cicero and Aristotle, and no great following save for a motley crew of seventy disciples led by a hotheaded fisherman named Rocky.

The greatest documentation of the life of Jesus is the eyewitness testimony of his followers as compiled by the writers of the four gospel accounts. It would be unreasonable to expect it to come to us in any other way. We would not expect Xi Jinping to commission a biography of an obscure Tibetan monk any more than we would expect a superpower like America to document the supposed godhood of a Puerto Rican cult leader with a following smaller than a university class. It is nearly always the fans and followers who leave behind details about their heroes. Proof of the authenticity and accuracy of the four gospels continues to grow as thousands of scholars—Christian and secular alike—pore over the text and unearth new evidence from the era.

Today, nearly every scholar agrees Jesus was a preacher from Galilee who got in some trouble with the temple elites and was executed by the Romans. Whether or not he resurrected and is God is not a historical question but a faith one. I will make little attempt to convince you that Jesus is God—that is what the gospels are for. We will focus on the human Josh, exploring history, archeology, philosophy, genealogy, and many otherologies, to fix in our minds a clearer image of the man many of us call Christ. Jesus is, frankly, brilliant. Even if you see yourself as a progressive secularist, a proper reading of Scripture will give you incredible insight into the human condition and the nature of reality. Yehoshua offers a sound moral code, time-tested wisdom for relationships and business, and counterintuitive perspectives on money, philosophy, politics, and virtue that can transform your way of being and living across any culture at any time. The Bible is the essential work for anyone seeking the good life.

## **The Truth Will Set Us Free**

Who do you say Jesus is?

He asks his disciples this same question three different times. It's a powerful question, one he's still asking us today. Was he a con man, a spiritual snake-oil salesman, a rabbi gone off the theological rails? Was he a crazed fringe politician who thought he could take down the Jewish mafia and the Roman Empire? Is he the son of the living God, the supernatural made incarnate in human flesh? We don't know. Everything requires faith, and God loves us all so much that he lets us choose our orientation toward his son.

But you don't have to be a Christian or even believe in God to appreciate the life and legacy of Jesus of Nazareth. He is, undoubtedly, the most influential person in history, endowing a belief structure and way of life that led to a proliferation of churches, the invention of universities and hospitals, and the steady expan-

sion of human rights. To be sure, horrible things have been said and done in his name—things he was decidedly against—but as you'll see in these pages, the man who Christians call Lord is a man worth knowing intimately and personally.

Let's meet Josh.





## The Genealogical Josh

*“History is the essence of innumerable biographies.”*

—Thomas Carlyle, *Essays*

**W**hat is the Bible, exactly? It is the story of one family discovering God. If you consider yourself a member of the Christian faith family, then this is your charter story, a library of books packed with various genres including poetry, mythology, wisdom, narrative, and YHWH-centered salvation history. As such, it is important to know your family tree. I am the ancestry nut in our family. I’m not nearly as committed as those in the Mormon Church, who try to trace their ancestry back to Adam and then squirrel away the data with two billion other names beneath seven hundred feet of granite in Utah’s Wasatch Range, but I do my best.

I’ve taken multiple DNA tests and convinced my mother to nick the inside of her mouth and bleed into a test tube for a mitochondrial meandering, which grew our family tree to thousands

of known cousins. Though I regret that several corporations (one of which is now owned by the government of Singapore) have my life sequence on file, the tests rather wonderfully explained why I sneeze in sunlight, prefer dark chocolate to milk, and have curly hair.\*

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It's weird to think that Jesus had ancestors.

It's even crazier to realize we know who they are. Josh's family tree contains a pantheon of wonderfully interesting and supremely sinful humans: warlords, kings, slaves, slave-owners, murderers, moon-worshippers, centenarians, ark-builders, prostituted women, prophets, priests, shepherds, and giant-killers, for example.

The Bible gives us two accounts of Josh's genealogy. Matthew starts with Abraham, while Luke starts with Adam. The lists are identical between Abraham and David but are radically different otherwise. That's because Matthew traces Mary's line through David's son, King Solomon, while Luke traces Joseph's line through one of David's lesser-known sons, Nathan. In the end, however, both lists end up at the same conclusion: Yehoshua ben Yehoseph is a double-bloodline king candidate.

Genealogy was a much bigger deal back in the day, especially if someone like Yehoshua wanted to make a legitimate claim to the Jewish throne. In the same way that I can't waltz up to Buckingham Palace and claim the crown, there were quite a few hoops one had to jump through to claim Israelite imperium. The first step, of course, was actually being Jewish. So before we meet Yehoshua's nuclear and extended family, it's definitely worth our time to dive into the historic family-nation-religion that would have defined Josh's life more than any other influence.

\* Family lore suggests we were Huguenot Protestants named Le Broc, purged from France in the late seventeenth century by the Sun King Louis XIV. Thanks to DNA confirmation, I can boast I'm related to Napoleon Bonaparte (boo!), Marie Antoinette (double boo!), Nicolaus Copernicus, and the apostle Luke—the last of which I imagine looks great on a church elder application form.

The patriarch of Judaism was a super-wealthy, semi-nomadic, Hebrew-Aramean herdsman named Abram ben Terah. Abram was a tenth-generation descendant of Noah, and Noah could trace his lineage back to Adam, so why not just start at the beginning?

The Bible says Adam and Eve had at least five sons and two daughters (Genesis 5:4), while the Roman-Jewish historian Titus Flavius Josephus, in an *The Antiquities of the Jews* footnote, references a traditional claim that they bore as many as thirty-three sons and twenty-three daughters. This number might seem high to us, but in the days before entertainment, the necessity of work, resource scarcity, birth control, and other human beings, I can't think of much else better to do. The first family raised their brood somewhere outside of Eden, which itself could have been situated anywhere from eastern Africa to western Iraq, depending on who and what you believe.

We know the names of only two of Adam and Eve's sons, who lived long enough to expand the family tree. Cain and Seth and their wives start having kids and grandkids for several generations, most of whom are so incredibly corrupt and violent that the Genesis authors envision God being so disappointed with humanity that he decides to destroy the whole world—which is almost exactly what happens. Cain's descendants get wiped out by a massive flood, and if you do the math, so does oldest-man-ever Methuselah, who evidently grew so weary of life that he refuses to board his grandson Noah's 510-foot polymer-sealed boat (Genesis 6:14). For those interested, Methuselah's foreboding name means either "When he is dead, it shall be sent" (*Exhaustive Dictionary of Bible Names*) or "When he dies, judgment" (attributed to Dr. Henry Morris).

Forty days of flooding and nearly a year of drainage later, Noah's boat runs aground on a 17,000-foot dormant volcano just east of the current Turkey-Armenia border, where Noah exits onto dry ground with his three sons and their wives.

God commands Noah's sons to be fruitful and multiply, and they do so prodigiously: Their kids have kids who have kids, spawning families that turn into clans that turn into tribes that turn into nations. Japheth's kids head for the Aegean and eventually spread throughout Europe. Ham has a son named Egypt who heads for north Africa, while another son named Canaan seeds the Jebusite, Amorite, Hivite, Arkite, and Sinite tribes that fill the Middle East and Africa. Shem's family tree has so many branches that the Bible includes two lists of his descendants, many of whom scatter to the Far East and eventually into North and South America.

One piece of Shem's family, however, stays in the Middle East, and it's from that people group we derive the word *Semitic* today. One of Shem's great-great-great-great-great-great-grandsons was named Abram, and he plays a pivotal role in the future life of Yehoshua of Nazareth. It's this man who we call the founder of Judaism.

## **Uncle Abe**

The Bible doesn't say where Abram was born, but it does mention that his brother Haran was born while their father, Terah, lived in a city called Ur, which was a few miles from the banks of the Euphrates in Sumer, now southern Iraq, and best known for its massive, pyramidesque Ziggurat. That's one proposed location, anyway. The Ur in question may have been 680 miles away in the modern-day town of Urfa, Turkey, but there are at least four other potential sites of Abram's birth. It's just as likely he was born in a drover's tent somewhere in the Mesopotamian section of the Fertile Crescent of modern-day Iraq, eastern Syria, or southern Turkey.

At some point before reaching middle age, Abram has an encounter that will not only change his life but will transform the world in ways that affect us to this very moment. You see, Abram

grew up in a polytheistic family. He worshiped many gods. Joshua 24:2 states that Terah was an idol worshiper. Jewish records say Terah was an idol craftsman, and according to ancient Jewish authorities, Abram worked in Terah's idol shop as a teenager. In Genesis 31:19, we'll read about how Terah's great-great-granddaughter, Rachel, steals her father's collection of household idols called *Teraphim*.

For some reason, polytheism doesn't sit well with Abram. He believes in *one* god, not dozens or hundreds. He is, classically speaking, the world's most famous early monotheist.

Abram's god of choice calls himself *Ehyeh* (meaning "I will be") and later, through Moses, says we can call him *Yahweh* ("he will be"). The God of Abram is *Being itself*. We don't know the exact name origins of Yahweh, but he appears in the written record around three thousand years ago, in the late Bronze Age. In Abram's day, Yahweh was known (or misconceived) as a weather god and warrior deity, and he was just one of many gods and goddesses worshiped throughout Canaan. In time, however, Abram's all-knowing, all-powerful, all-present being will displace all the rest, proving himself to be God Almighty, King of Kings, Lord of Lords, ruler of heaven and earth, and the world's first widespread creator of the cosmos.

Within five hundred years, religionist scribes so idolized the name *Yahweh* they couldn't bring themselves to say it out loud, and went with *Adonai* ("lord") instead. Eventually, Jewish scribes got so religious about not saying God's name that they created a visual device to remind readers to say Adonai and not Yahweh. They snatched the four consonant letters from Yahweh (YHWH) and blended them with the three vowels in Adonay (AOA) and came up with the word YAHOVAH, to trigger people into saying Adonai. Centuries later, Christian scribes (who didn't know Yahovah was a made-up word) accidentally translated the name of God as *Jehovah*. In the meantime, the temple in Jerusalem is destroyed in 70 AD and the actual pronunciation of God's name

is lost. Thankfully, God sent his son, Yehoshua ben Ehyeh—Josh, son of Being itself—through the human line of Abram, to redeem all of Adamkind to himself.

We will know God's name again.

At some point, YHWH had said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Genesis 12:1-3).

That's it. No fireworks or earthquakes or trumpet blasts. *Let me lead you and the world will be blessed through you.* The Holy Spirit stirs something deep within Abram, and he converts from polytheism to monotheism, from a cultural-familial religion to a radical, unprecedented, world-changing personal faith.

Abram's life story invites us to do the same. Everyone believes in gods—ideas, spirits, ideologies, essences—in which we place our hope, trust, and faith. Even atheism is just a spread bet on a thousand little gods like self, capitalism, consumerism, progress, the rule of law, and a heavy dose of happiness-hunting individualism. When we place our ultimate faith in anyone or anything less than *Being himself*, we fall short of the glory of God. We exchange the truth for a lie, foolishly believing our patchwork pantheon of faiths and trusts can reward us with life to the full. In our blind pursuit of blessing, we miss the Blesser himself. The great truth Abram discovers is that nothing can save us except the One who made us.

Abram bets on YHWH. After the death of his father, Abram, age seventy-five, sets out from Haran. He takes his sister-wife Sarai and nephew Lot with him, along with all his possessions and herds and—unfortunately, like many of the elites in his time and ours—slaves. They make the five-hundred-plus-mile journey through Canaan and stop around modern-day Nablus in the

West Bank, about thirty miles north of Jerusalem. When Abram is ninety-nine, YHWH appears to him and says,

“Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations. No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations. . . . I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you. . . . As for you, you shall keep my covenant, you and your offspring after you throughout their generations. This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your offspring after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised.”

Genesis 17:4–5, 7, 9–10

#### *Circum-what?*

The removal of the foreskin from the human penis by means of a flint was likely unheard of by most of their Canaanite neighbors, but Egyptian tomb artwork from Abraham’s time suggests the practice was used for the sake of cleanliness and to mark the passage from childhood to manhood. Did he pick up the idea on his southern sojourn? In any case, it was a small sacrifice that sealed a massive promise, a stark reminder on the very organ used to create life, that YHWH’s covenant was everlasting.

Later that same day, Abraham takes his thirteen-year-old son, Ishmael, and the hundreds of men in his household and does the deed without modern anesthesia. Talk about a bonding father-son experience. Has the old man lost his mind?

Within a few months, ninety-year-old Sarai, who YHWH renames Sarah, becomes pregnant for the first time. Abraham moves back to the Negev Desert and eventually lodges south of Gaza in the water-rich Philistine wadi of Gerar. When Abraham is one hundred, he and Sarah become the parents of a little boy named Isaac. The Jewish nation has begun.

## Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses

Abraham lives peaceably in the territory of the Philistines for years and years, until YHWH decides to test Abraham's commitment to the one true God. *Prove your love for me by sacrificing your only begotten son.* This probably doesn't come as a huge surprise to Abraham—all the gods require human sacrifice.

Imagine Abraham's surprise when, right at the last moment before he's about to kill Isaac, YHWH stops him and provides a substitute offering in the form of a thicket-trapped ram—a lamb of God, if you will. A God who doesn't require child sacrifice? This is a *big deal*. This whole mountain trek wasn't just to test Abraham's faithfulness to God—it was to prove YHWH's faithfulness to humanity.

So where did this first substitutionary atonement take place? Genesis says Abraham and Isaac were on a mountain called Moriah. Today, Jews and Christians revere the supposed spot in question as the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. The Temple Mount is pretty important to Judaism for a host of other reasons too: At the center of the mountain is the Foundation Stone of the world (not mentioned in the Bible), where it is said Adam came into being (geographically dubious), where the Ark of the Covenant rested (likely), where the two temples were built (by Solomon and Herod), and where the altar rested inside the Holy of Holies. Muslims believe it's also the spot to which Muhammad miraculously traveled over 750 miles from Mecca in one night, where he stood on a rock, was lifted to heaven, and received his teachings. *On the same rock where Abraham almost sacrificed Isaac.* The rock is now covered by a dome that is called, rather uncreatively, the Dome of the Rock. What are the chances that of all 1.59629 quadrillion square feet of physical land on earth, three major world religions—containing billions of ancient cousins—are all warring over one single stone? No wonder Yehoshua will later seem unconcerned if the whole thing gets torn down.



Abraham returns to what is now Be'er Sheva in the Negev Desert. He sends his chief of staff back up the Fertile Crescent to Nahor's town near Haran to find his son Isaac a wife from among his kin. The woman of choice is his brother Nahor's granddaughter Rebekah, who is straight-up lovely. When Abraham dies, he leaves everything he owns to Isaac. Isaac and his half-brother Ishmael bury their father in the cave with Sarah. Ishmael, unlike his father, has no problem siring sons, and produces twelve. They settle east of Egypt and eventually spread into all of Arabia, living in violent hostility toward all the tribes related to them. Those twelve tribes of Ishmael become the nation of Islam, a religion of works over faith.

After nineteen years of struggling with infertility—evidently something that runs in Yehoshua's family tree for generations—Rebekah gives birth to twin sons. Esau is daddy's wild child who loves to hunt, while Jacob is a mama's boy who prefers to cook.

Eventually Jacob heads back to Haran to find a wife and ends up marrying two of his first cousins, Rachel and Leah. For the next fourteen years, he's forced to work for his devious, grasping, polytheistic uncle. After twenty years of being financially exploited, Jacob decides to head back down the Fertile Crescent to the land promised by YHWH to his grandfather. (It's here that Rachel steals her father's Teraphim idols, suggesting she hasn't been won over to the monotheistic worldview.)

All told—and not without a long struggle with infertility on Rachel's part—Jacob has twelve sons by four women. These dozen will become the heads of the twelve tribes of Jacob, who himself receives a new name: Israel, meaning "one who struggles with God."

Rachel's eldest, Joseph, like his great-grandfather, is a seminomadic shepherd and stargazer with a penchant for getting himself in trouble. The seventeen-year-old is also a bit of a tattletale against his brothers and is his father's favorite son, adorned in multicolor haute couture. While Joseph delivers supplies to his

brothers about twenty miles south of modern-day Nazareth, they seize him and sell him to their Ishmaelite cousins, who in turn sell him to the captain of the guard for the Egyptian Pharaoh.

This, as it turns out, is a boon for all involved. When a third famine rocks Canaan, the brothers head to Egypt to find food, just like their ancestors. They're shocked beyond words to see that their kid brother has ascended to VP of Egypt. Jacob decides to move his entire household—at least sixty-six people—back to Egypt.

This, as it turns out, is a horrible decision for all involved. Abraham's nightmare in which his descendants will be enslaved in a foreign land for four hundred years is about to come to pass. But first, Jacob, on his deathbed, blesses and/or curses his twelve sons, depending on their deeds and misdeeds, and says of Judah, "Your brothers shall praise you; . . . your father's sons shall bow down before you. . . . The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him, and to him shall be the obedience of the people" (Genesis 49:8, 10). With this remark, Jacob-Israel seals his family's destiny: Their future king will arise from the tribe of Judah.

Hundreds of years pass. The twelve sons of Israel die, Joseph included, but their offspring multiply into the millions. This, naturally, terrifies the Egyptians.

After an ill-fated attempt to get Hebrew midwives to murder all Jewish baby boys, the Pharaoh commands all his people to drown all Hebrew boys in the Nile. One descendant of Levi decides to hide her son in a bitumen-sealed basket along the bullrush banks of the great river. Pharaoh's daughter comes for a bath and rescues the crying baby. The baby's older sister, a girl approximately seven years old named Miriam, dupes the princess into hiring the baby's mother to breastfeed her own child.

Once weaned, the princess gives the boy a name that sounds like the Hebrew word for "to draw out" of the water: *Mosheh*. Moses, as we call him in English, will rescue his people from

their four-hundred-year nightmare and finally get them on track to take possession of the Promised Land and become the holy nation they were ordained to become.

It has been said that Moses is a picture of the Christ to come, and readers of the Mosheh story and the Yehoshua story will quickly pick out the similarities: Newborn boys are killed by Pharaoh; newborn boys are killed by Herod. Who saves Moses in Egypt? A girl named Miriam. Who saves Yehoshua by fleeing to Egypt? his mother, Miriam. From whom does Moses descend? Joseph. Who is Yehoshua's earthly father? Joseph. Both Mosheh and Yehoshua fast for forty days and forty nights in the wilderness at the beginning of their public ministries. Moses turns water into blood. Yehoshua turns water into wine and later says wine represents his blood. Moses frees his people from slavery but can't bring them into the Promised Land. Yehoshua saves his people from the slavery of sin and eternal death and takes them all the way to heaven.

Four hundred and thirty years after the arrival of Jacob's twelve sons, several million Israelites—the text says 600,000 men plus women and children and the bones of Joseph—exit Egypt in a massive *exodus*, escaping through a warren of salt lagoons now known as the Bitter Lakes and home to the Suez Canal.

Promised Land, here they come!

Alas, it's not to be, not that day, anyway. After centuries of slavery, the twelve tribes of Israel don't yet know how to live as free people.

The northeast journey back to Canaan is less than 250 miles, but Moses feels called to lead his people south to the Sinai Peninsula for a time of purification and training, a hard reset that will see his generation die in the wilderness over the next forty years. This might seem like a brutal move on Moses's part, but the long-term effect is that it strengthens the Israelite nation, trains its army, develops an economy, coalesces a common culture, purges them of their polytheism, elevates their faith in YHWH,

and ensures they won't be completely annihilated in the many battles to come.

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To be sure, Israel has its ups and downs. But even amidst their setbacks and failures and misstarts at becoming a holy nation, God is patient and gracious. For several centuries, YHWH sends a series of warrior-judges to protect the nation from external threats while arbitrating internal ones. He then reluctantly allows them to be self-ruled by dictatorial kings, though it rarely ends well for the people or the monarch. Through his priests, YHWH gives Israel a tent and later a huge temple, both physical symbols of the bigger reality that God wants to dwell with his people. Through his prophets, he warns the nation when they've fallen off the path and are about to land themselves in pits of destruction.

Israel is supposed to be a theocracy, ruled not by dictators, tyrant-kings, and corporate-sponsored politicians, but by a holy body of law and a supreme court that upholds justice. In the end, neither courts nor laws will be necessary when every heart is flooded with the presence of God. From the beginning, the Israelites know that this body of ceremonial law is supposed to be temporary and that God will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and Judah (Jeremiah 31:31). Clearly, YHWH will need to send someone in the flesh to embody what it means to have a self-sacrificial heart.

Grace is already fully present in the Old Testament. The grand theme of Scripture is God's will to bless . . . and man's will to be God. Abraham does almost nothing right in his life, with one major exception: He trusts in God's promise, and that is enough. The Old Testament is filled with people whose lives yield cautionary tales; they're not heroes to emulate. The Bible could just as well be called *Horrible People and the God Who Loves Them Anyway*. Did YHWH save Israel from the Egyptians because they were obedient to his law? Absolutely not. Their salvation

was an unmerited gift. The Law of Moses—a better translation is *instruction*—is simply the standards by which this faith family chooses to live. Once they learn to live in obedience to the rule and reign of YHWH, he will send a Messiah to free his people (and the rest of the human race) from sin and death for all time.

*Messiah* means “anointed one,” and this Messiah will need to thread four consecutive needles: He needs to come as a human (a descendant of Adam); he must be an Israelite (a descendant of Abraham via Jacob); he needs to be a card-carrying member of Judaism (from the tribe of Judah); and he needs to be a scion of the Davidic line (the kingly family of David). YHWH sends scores of prophets who foretell other characteristics of the coming Christos. Whoever this person proves to be, his coming will cause the end of Judaism as they’ve known it but open the entire world for inclusion in a universal faith family with one Father, one Son, and one Spirit.

The people can’t wait. Day after day, week after week, year after year, lifetime after lifetime, they plead and pray for God to come and dwell among them.

After more than fourteen hundred years of Israelite on-again-off-again faithfulness to the Law of Moses, YHWH decides it’s time to send his Son to dwell among men as a living temple. It’s time to introduce the Christos-King-Savior-Messiah who will fulfill the law and usher in a new covenant of love and grace and truth and spirit instead of the religiously lettered law.

In a Roman-ruled world with a global population of less than 300 million, it’s time for Mary and Joseph to add a very special baby boy to the family tree.