

1.5 BABEL AND ABRAHAM

Noah's sons become the ancestors of many different nations. And these nations multiply upon the earth, growing ever more powerful and ever more ambitious.

At one point they try to build a towering temple, so tall it will reach to God. So God reaches down and confuses their language, turns them into instant foreigners, so they can no longer understand one another.

So building ceases and, at Babel, men babble in different languages.

Many generations pass, then God chooses a man called Abram for the next part of the Big Story. He tells Abram to move to Canaan.

God: I will give you the land. I will make your descendants into a mighty people. The whole world will be blessed because of them.

So Abram, his wife Sarai and their nephew Lot travel to Canaan. Eventually, Abram splits the territory with Lot. Lot selects the rich, green Jordan valley. Abram travels west, up the hills and into Canaan.

Gen 10

Gen 11.1–9

Gen 12.1–9

Gen 13.1–12

It's bad news, I'm afraid.
Our language is Welsh.



These two stories show different aspects of God's attitude to nationalities.

First there is the Babel episode, where men are coming together, but not for good. They are working together to try to beat God at his own game. Stupid. As the Big Story shows us, whenever men try to outsmart God it ends in tears.¹

After men trying to be God, we see one man agreeing to follow God. When God disperses the nations, we see him starting one of his own. God chooses Abraham (or Abram as he was originally called) to start a special nation. This nation is to be the Israelites and Abraham is their headwater, their source.

Abraham is the Big Story's man of faith. God calls him and he responds, without knowing where he is going or what is going to happen. There are times in his life when he questions, there are times when his wife seems to be more in charge than he is. But when God calls him directly, there is always a positive response. In those times, Abraham is seen so clearly as the man of faith. Sometimes, when he has to decide for himself, he dithers. But when God tells him to move, he moves.

¹ And quite frequently moans, whimpers and shouts of 'Oh boy, that hurts' as well.

ACT 3 THE KINGS

In which we see the establishment of a monarchy in Israel; watch a civil war split the country into two kingdoms of Israel and Judah; witness the destruction of Israel; and see the exile and eventual return of Judah.

I don't know about you,
but I have a bad feeling
about this.



ACT 3: THE KINGS

- 3.1 King Saul
- 3.2 David and Goliath
- 3.3 David becomes King
- 3.4 David and Bathsheba
- 3.5 Absalom Rebels
- 3.6 Solomon the Wise
- 3.7 The Divided Kingdom
- 3.8 Elijah
- 3.9 Elijah on the Mountain
- 3.10 Elisha and Beyond
- 3.11 The End of Israel
- 3.12 The End of Judah
- 3.13 Exile
- 3.14 Return

CAST

Samuel	A judge and prophet
Saul	First king of Israel
Jonathan	His son
David	Second king of Israel
Absalom	His rebellious son
Solomon	Third king of Israel. Wise man.
Rehoboam	First king of Judah
Jeroboam	First king of Israel (Northern Kingdom)
Elijah	Great prophet
Elisha	Another great prophet
Isaiah	} Later prophets
Jeremiah	
Daniel	
Ezekiel	
Nebuchadnezzar	A Babylonian emperor
Cyrus	Emperor of the Persians
Esther	A Jewish girl and Persian queen
Ezra	} Leaders who take exiles home
Nehemiah	

Also, various good and bad kings (mostly bad), invading armies, minor prophets, etc.

3.6 SOLOMON THE WISE

Solomon is given great wisdom from God – indeed, his wisdom is legendary. People visit him from throughout the world to hear his thoughts and listen to his learning.

He writes poetry, collects his wise sayings, he writes about biology and zoology. He builds a magnificent new palace in Jerusalem and consolidates all his father's territorial gains.

But it is the temple that really makes his name. His father planned it, but Solomon builds it. Magnificently decorated, it houses the Ark of the Covenant. At the inauguration ceremony a cloud fills the temple; the glory of the Lord.

And yet, and yet...

For all his wisdom, Solomon's reign ends badly. In building of the temple he conscripts labourers from all Israel; but those from the ten northern tribes are treated more harshly than those from the south.

He has seven hundred wives (and three hundred concubines) and many of these wives worship other gods. And they draw Solomon into worshipping those gods as well.

So the 'wise' Solomon ends his life in stupidity – worshipping detestable gods like Chemosh and Molech. He turns away from the God who has given him wisdom and in doing so plunges his kingdom into darkness.

1 Kgs 3.1–15, 10.1–13

1 Kgs 4.29–34

1 Kgs 4.20–27

1 Kgs 8

1 Kgs 12.1–4

Ecc1 1.1–11

1 Kgs 11.3–13

Solomon has a reputation: the proverb-writer who is proverbial for his wisdom. But it's not as simple as that.

Yes he's wise. People come from miles to learn from him. Queens sit at his feet. And he builds the temple. Based on the design of Moses's tabernacle, this magnificent building contains the Holy of Holies – the room where the Ark of the Covenant is stored and where only the High Priest is allowed to enter.

But his treatment of the northern tribes is to have catastrophic consequences. Ironically, it's the building of the temple – the building which was supposed to unify Israel – that leads to civil war.¹

Then there's the end of Solomon's life. He's a compulsive bridegroom, married to women who lure him away to worship Ashtoreth, Milcom, Chemosh and Molech; foreign, useless, evil gods.

Traditionally, Solomon is seen as the writer of Ecclesiastes, that corruscatingly cynical look at the futility of life. Maybe it was his work. Maybe at the end, he could only sum up his wisdom with a weary sigh; 'Meaningless – everything is meaningless!'

¹ It's not as if God was that keen on the temple in the first place. When David first broaches the subject of the temple, God says 'Did I ever say to any of their rulers whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, Why have you not built me a house of cedar?' (2 Sam 7.7) Not what you'd call a ringing endorsement of the idea.



I'm not worshipping, I've lost a contact lens.