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Bible Dictionary (Tyndale)

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Baal (Idol), Baal (Person), Baal (Place), Baal-Berith, Baal-Gad, Baal-Hamon, Baal-Hanan, Baal-Hazor, Baal-Hermon, Baal-Meon, Baal-Peor, Baal-Perazim, Baal-Shalishah, Baal-Tamar, Baal-Zebub, Baal-Zephon, Baalah, Baalath, Baalath-Beer, Baale-Judah, Baale of Judah, Baali, Baalis, Baalsamus, Baana, Baanah, Baara, Baaseiah, Baasha, Baba Bathra, Babel, Babylon, Babylonia, Babylonian Captivity, Baca, Valley of, Bacchides, Bacenor, Bachrite, Backsliding, Badger, Baean, Bagoas, Bagpipe, Baharum, Baharumite, Bahurim, Bajith, Bakbakkar, Bakbuk, Bakbukiah, Baker, Balaam, Balac, Baladan, Balah, Balak, Balamon, Balance, Balances, Balbaim, Bald Locust, Baldness, Balm, Balsam, Balthasar, Bamah, Bamoth, Bamoth-Baal, Ban, Bani, Banish, Banishment, Banker, Banking, Banquet, Baptism, Baptism for the Dead, Baptism of Fire, Baptism of Jesus, Baptism of the Spirit, Bar, Bar-Jesus, Bar-Jona, Bar-Kochba, Bar-Kokba, Bar-Koziba, Barabbas, Barachel, Barachiah, Barachias, Barak, Barakel, Barbarian, Barhumite, 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Nehemiah, Book of Noah, Book of Remembrance, Book of Revelation, Book of the Acts of the Apostles, Book of the Cock, Book of the Covenant, Book of the Dead, Book of the Law, Book of the Resurrection of Christ by Bartholomew, Book of the Wars of the Lord, Book of Tobit, Booth, Booz, Bor-Ashan, Born

Again, Borrow, Borrowing, Boscath, Bosor (Person), Bosor (Place), Bottomless Pit, Bow, Bowels, Bowl, Bowman, Box Tree, Boxthorn, Bozez, Bozkath, Bozrah, Bracelet, Bramble, Branch, Brass, Brazen Serpent, Bread, Bread of the Presence, Breakfast, Breaking of Bread, Breastpiece, Breastplate, Briar, Bribe, Bribery, Brick, Brick Kiln, Bride and Bridegroom, Bride of Christ, Bridechamber, Brier, Brimstone, Bronze, Bronze Sea, Bronze Snake, Bronze Serpent, Brood, Brook, Brook of Egypt, Brook of the Arabah, Brook of the Willows, Broom, Brother, Brothers (and Sisters), Brothers of Jesus, Buckler, Buckthorn, Build, Building, Bukki, Bukkiah, Bul, Bull, Bullock, Bulrush, Bunah, Bunni, Burial, Burial Customs, Burning Bush, Burnt Offering, Bush, Bushel, Butler, Buttercup, Buz (Person), Buz (Place), Buzi, Buzite, Buzzard

Baal (Idol)

The name of the most important Canaanite god. As the god of fertility, his influence covered agriculture, animal husbandry (raising animals), and human sexuality. The Old Testament often combines "Baal" with other terms, such as place names (Baal-peor, Hosea 9:10; Baal-hermon, Judges 3:3), or with other descriptions like Baal-berith (Baal of the covenant, Judges 8:33). These combinations may suggest local cults of Baal worship.

Baal worship became widespread in northern Israel during King Ahab's reign in the ninth century BC after he married Jezebel from Tyre, a city in Phoenicia (1 Kings 16:29–33; 18:19–40). It spread to Judah when their daughter Athaliah married King Jehoram of Judah (2 Kings 8:17–18, 24–26). Worship places for Baal, often on hilltops, included an altar and a sacred tree, stone, or pillar (2 Kings 23:5). The Phoenicians, who mainly lived in cities, built temples to Baal. Even Jerusalem had a Baal temple when Athaliah was queen of Judah (2 Chronicles 23:12–17).

In Ugaritic stories, Baal goes to the underworld, the domain of the god Mot. This story likely matches the seasons' cycle. To bring Baal back and start the rainy season, the Canaanites practiced extreme rituals, including human sacrifice and sexual rites (Jeremiah 7:31; 19:4–6). Sacred prostitutes likely joined these autumn rituals. The Old Testament strongly condemns Baal worship (Judges 2:12–14; 3:7–8; Jeremiah 19).

See also Canaanite Deities and Religion.

Baal (Person)

1. A Reubenite, the son of Reaiah and the father of Beerah (1 Chronicles 5:5).
2. A Benjaminite and one of the ten sons born to Jeiel, the father of Gibeon, by Maacah his wife. His brother was Kish, the father of Saul (1 Chronicles 8:30; 9:36).

Baal (Place)

Alternate name for Baalath-beer, a city defining a portion of the boundary of Simeon's territory, in 1 Chronicles 4:33. *See* Baalath-beer.

Baal-Berith

A pagan god worshiped in central Canaan around the city of Shechem (Judges 9:1–4, 44–46). Baal-berith (meaning "lord of the covenant") was probably a local form of Baal, the main Canaanite fertility god. During the period of the judges, the people of Israel turned from the Lord to worship the idols Baal and Baal-berith (Judges 8:33).

See Canaanite Deities and Religion.

Baal-Gad

A site in the valley of Lebanon at the bottom of Mount Hermon in the north of Joshua's conquest of Canaan (Joshua 11:17; 12:7; 13:5).

See Hermon, Mount.

Baal-Hamon

The site of a vineyard owned by Solomon and rented by local farmers (Song of Solomon 8:11). The surrounding text suggests that the vineyard produced excellent grapes.

Baal-Hanan

1. Acbor's son, a king of Edom (Genesis 36:38–39; 1 Chronicles 1:49–50).
2. An official appointed by King David to be in charge of the royal supply of olives and sycamore-figs in the lowlands near Philistine land (1 Chronicles 27:28). He came from Geder, a town in the area.

Baal-Hazor

A mountain where King David's son Absalom had a home.

Two years after Amnon raped Absalom's sister, and his half-sister, Tamar, Absalom invited Amnon and his other brothers to a feast at Baal-hazor when the shearers were cutting the wool from sheep (2 Samuel 13:21–30). During the celebration, Absalom got his revenge: he had Amnon killed.

Baal-hazor is not the Hazor in the tribal land of Benjamin (Nehemiah 11:33). It is also not the Hazor north of the Sea of Galilee in the tribal land of Naphtali (Joshua 11:10–11; 1 Kings 9:15; 2 Kings 15:29). Baal-hazor was located in the tribal land of Ephraim at Jebel el-Asur, northeast of Bethel.

Baal-Hermon

A Hivite territory in Transjordan near Mount Hermon. It was not captured in the Israelite conquest.

God used this region and others to test the younger generation of Israel (Judges 3:1–6). Baal-hermon may refer to a place on the mountain. It seems to be another name for Baal-gad (Joshua 13:5).

See also Hermon, Mount.

Baal-Meon

A city in northern Moab given to the tribe of Reuben (Numbers 32:38; 1 Chronicles 5:8).

It is called Beth-baal-meon in Joshua 13:17, Beth-meon in Jeremiah 48:23, and Beon in Numbers 32:3. In around 830 BC it was owned by Mesha, the king of Moab. By the sixth century BC, it was still owned by the Moabites (Jeremiah 48:23; Ezekiel 25:9). It may have briefly been in Israelite possession during the eighth century BC.

Baal-Peor

A moabite god worshiped on Mount Peor.

This god was probably Chemosh, the national deity of Moab. While camped in Shittim, the Israelites were seduced by Moabite women who persuaded them to worship "Baal of Peor" (Numbers 25:3). For their idolatry, God struck Israel with a plague that killed 24,000 people (Numbers 25:9; Psalm 106:28–31). Baal-peor is also the name of the place where Israel worshiped "the Baal of Peor" (Deuteronomy 4:3).

See also Moab, Moabites.

Baal-Perazim

A location near Jerusalem where a battle was fought between Israel's newly anointed King David and the Philistines (2 Samuel 5:20; 1 Chronicles 14:11). David named the area Baal-perazim to remember the Lord's "breaking through" his enemies, since the phrase means the "lord of breaking through." Isaiah 28:21 references Mount Perazim, where the Lord came "suddenly and in anger." This may recall David's battle with the Philistines.

Baal-Shalishah

The home of a man who brought a sack of fresh grain and 20 barley loaves to Elisha at Gilgal. Elisha's servant fed 100 young prophets with it and had some left over (2 Kings 4:42). Baal-shalishah was probably in a fertile area where early crops were grown.

Baal-Tamar

A place between Gibeah and Bethel in the tribal land of Benjamin, north of Jerusalem. The 11 other Israelite tribes rallied their forces there in a final victorious battle against Benjamin over crimes committed in the city of Gibeah (Judges 20:33).

Baal-Zebub

A god worshipped by the Philistines in the ancient city of Ekron. In 852 BC, when King Ahaziah of Israel got hurt falling from his balcony, he sent people to ask Baal-zebub if he would get better (2 Kings 1:2). The prophet Elijah was very angry about this. He said the king would die because he didn't respect Israel's God.

We're not sure exactly what Baal-zebub was the god of. His name means "lord of the flies." Maybe people thought he could tell the future by watching flies, or that he protected people from lots of flies. Archeologists have found small golden fly statues where the Philistines lived.

Many experts think the name Baal-zebub was actually changed from Baal-zebul, which means "Baal the prince." They think the Israelites changed the name on purpose to make fun of this god.

See also Canaanite Deities and Religion.

Baal-Zephon

An area near the Israelites' camp just before they crossed the Red Sea (Exodus 14:2, 9; Numbers 33:7). The exact location of Baal-zephon is unknown but probably was in northeast Egypt. The name means "lord of the north," and a shrine to a Semitic deity was probably located there. The god Baal-zephon is mentioned in Ugaritic, Egyptian, and Phoenician writings as a sea and storm god.

Baalah

A city in southern Canaan (Joshua 15:29), probably identical with Balah.

See Balah.

Baalath

1. A town in Dan. It may be the same city as #2 below, although some scholars don't agree (Joshua 19:44).
2. A store city built by Solomon, probably west of Gezer in the original tribal land given to Dan (1 Kings 9:18; 2 Chronicles 8:6).

See also Baalath-beer.

Baalath-Beer

A place-name meaning "mistress" or "lady of the well." Like the male version of *Baal,* Baalath often appears as part of place names. The name may suggest that the Canaanite goddess Baalath, patron of Byblos, was connected with the place or well in some way. Baalath-beer was the name of a town in the tribe of Simeon. The name is also given as:

- Baal or Baalath (1 Chronicles 4:33)
- Ramah of the Negev (Joshua 19:8)
- Ramoth of the Negev (1 Samuel 30:27)

It may have been on the southern border of Simeon's tribal land.

Baale-Judah, Baale of Judah

An alternate name for Kiriath-jearim. It was a village on the road from Jerusalem to Tel Aviv (2 Samuel 6:2).

See Kiriath-jearim.

Baali

A Hebrew title meaning "my lord" or "my master" (Hosea 2:16).

The title was rejected by God because it was associated with the Canaanite Baal. God chose to be called *'ishi,* "my husband." The meaning of the two terms were similar but was not associated with pagan practices. In a prophetic play on words, God stressed his covenantal love for his people and rejected any implication that he the same for Israel as Baal was for the Canaanites.

See Baal (Idol); God, Names of.

Baalis

An Ammonite king who arranged for the murder of Gedaliah, the governor of the people left behind after Nebuchadnezzar's capture of Jerusalem and deportation of its inhabitants (Jeremiah 40:14). Gedaliah was warned by a guerrilla leader, Johanan, but he refused to take listen and was killed (Jeremiah 41:1–3).

Baalsamus

The Levite assistant who explained the passages of the law which were read by Ezra to the people (1 Esdras 9:43). In the similar passage in Nehemiah, his name is Maaseiah.

See Maaseiah #11.

Baana

1. Ahilud's son. He was one of 12 officers assigned to retrieve food for King Solomon's household. He served in the district of Taanach and Megiddo (1 Kings 4:12).
2. Hushai's son, and another of King Solomon's supply officers; his district was Asher and Aloth (1 Kings 4:16).
3. Zadok's father. Zadok helped Nehemiah rebuild the Jerusalem wall (Nehemiah 3:4). He might be the same as Baanah (Nehemiah 10:27).

Baanah

1. Baanah and his brother Rechab were captains under Ishbosheth, who became king after the death of his father, King Saul, in battle. Ishbosheth was crowned by Saul's general, Abner, and was David's rival for the throne of Israel. Baanah and Rechab, seeking favor with David, murdered Ishbosheth while he slept and cut off his head (2 Samuel 4:2–7). They brought Ishbosheth's head to David, expecting to be rewarded for killing the son of his enemy. However, David, who had mourned the death of Saul, God's chosen king (2 Samuel 1), was outraged. He ordered the execution of Baanah and Rechab, had their hands and feet cut off, and their bodies hanged (2 Samuel 4:8–12).
2. Baanah's son, Heled, from the town of Netophah near Bethlehem in the tribal land of Judah. He was one of David's 30 "mighty men" (2 Samuel 23:29; 1 Chronicles 11:30).
3. An alternative form of Baana, Hushai's son, in 1 Kings 4:16.
   See Baana #2.
4. A leader who returned to Jerusalem with Zerubbabel after the exile in Babylon (Ezra 2:2; Nehemiah 7:7).
5. A political leader who signed Ezra's promise of faithfulness to God with Nehemiah and others after the exile in Babylon (Nehemiah 10:27). He is possibly the same as Baana (Nehemiah 3:4).

Baara

A woman who was divorced from Shaharaim, a man from the tribe of Benjamin (1 Chronicles 8:8).

Baaseiah

Malchijah's son and an ancestor of the temple musician Asaph (1 Chronicles 6:40). Baaseiah may be a mistake, where a copyist intended to write the common name Maaseiah (1 Chronicles 15:18).

Baasha

Baasha was the third king of the northern kingdom of Israel, ruling from 908 to 886 BC. He was a fierce leader who started the second of Israel's nine dynasties. Baasha was the son of Ahijah from the tribe of Issachar. The Lord chose him from among the common people to lead the army (1 Kings 16:2). While the Israelite army was attacking Gibbethon, where Philistines were living, Baasha killed King Nadab. He also wiped out all the family members of the former king, Nadab's father Jeroboam (1 Kings 15:27–29).

During his 24-year rule, Baasha fought against Asa, the king of Judah (1 Kings 15:16, 32).The conflict was mainly about controlling trade routes between Israel and Judah. To block trade with Jerusalem, Baasha built a stronghold at Ramah, which was

north of Jerusalem (1 Kings 15:17, 21)To counter this, Asa took all the silver and gold from the temple and his own palace and bribed King Ben-hadad of Syria to turn against Baasha (1 Kings 15:18–20). Ben-hadad then attacked several of Israel's northern cities and took land near the Jordan River. This made Baasha lose his resolve, and he withdrew from Judah's borders (1 Kings 15:20–21).

See also Israel, History of; Kings, Books of First and Second.

Baba Bathra

A tractate, or treatise, which is a part of the Talmudic Mishnah. The Talmud is a collection of Jewish traditional teachings about Hebrew law. The Mishnah (a written collection of Jewish oral traditions) is divided into six main sections called orders, each containing seven to twelve tractates (a tractate is a section or part of a larger written work). Each tractate is divided into chapters, and each chapter is divided into sections of legal paragraphs.

Baba Bathra, meaning "last gate," is the third tractate in the fourth order, *Nezikin*, which means "damages." It follows *Baba Kamma* ("first gate") and *Baba Metzia* ("middle gate"). These three tractates, originally one, deal with property issues. Specifically, Baba Bathra covers the ownership of real estate and related problems.

See Mishnah.

Babel

The translation of a Hebrew word in Genesis 10:10 and 11:9. In other parts of the Bible, it is translated "Babylonia" or "Babylon" (see 2 Kings 17:24). The translation of "Babel" in Genesis is meant to connect the name with the early cultural setting of Genesis 11:1–9, particularly the story of the Tower of Babel. This translation also connects the Tower of Babel incident to the popular interpretation that the name Babel comes from a root meaning "to confuse" (Genesis 11:9).

Archaeological excavations have uncovered information about the construction of ziggurats, which were towers built for temples. These ziggurats consisted of multiple platforms, each smaller than the one below, with a small temple on the top platform dedicated to the deity of the builder or the city.

The first ziggurat at Babylon was built by Shar-kali-sharri, king of Akkad, in the latter part of the 23rd century BC. This ziggurat was destroyed and rebuilt multiple times over the centuries. The ziggurat was in ruins from around 2000 BC until about 1830 BC. Then a king who ruled before Hammurabi rebuilt the city, naming it Bab-ilu or Babel. Hammurabi ruled from 1728 to 1636 BC.

The Babylonian Creation Epic describes the construction of a "celestial city" as the abode of the god Marduk. In this context, Babel, meaning "gate of god," was an important term. The terminology associated with Marduk's temple and the ziggurat suggests that Babel was considered the earthly entrance to the heavenly or celestial realm.

Jewish and Arab traditions link the Tower of Babel in Genesis to a large temple ruin dedicated to Nabu in Borsippa, also known as Birs-Nimrod.

See also Babylon, Babylonia.

Babylon, Babylonia

Land of southern Mesopotamia. Politically, Babylonia refers to the ancient kingdoms that flourished in southern Mesopotamia, especially in the seventh and sixth centuries BC, whose capital city was Babylon (or *Bab-ilu,* meaning "gate of god"). The term can also be used geographically to designate a whole region (in present-day southeast Iraq). The adjective "Babylonian" has an even looser meaning; it may refer to the land or its inhabitants, to the kingdom or its subjects, or to a dialect of one of the principal ancient Mesopotamian languages.

The two principal features of Babylonia's geography are the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. Rising in mountainous eastern Turkey, they initially flow in opposite directions but converge near Baghdad and join farther south to flow into the Persian Gulf.

Politically, Babylonia largely corresponded to geographic Babylonia. Its centers, however, were not situated in the fertile alluvial plain between the two rivers, but rather on the banks along the main course and several side branches of the Euphrates. At times the kingdom reached eastward beyond the Tigris, into the flatlands and foothills of the Zagros

***Babylon**, Babylonia*

Mountains, generally along the Tigris's eastern tributaries.

Ancient Babylon

Sumer and Akkad: 3200–2000 BC

Babylonia emerged as a culture as the result of Sumerian influence on the diverse peoples who had migrated into the area. The Sumerian civilization began to flourish in Babylonia sometime between 3200 and 2900 BC. (All dates given are approximate.) The two principal languages of the region were Akkadian, a Semitic language, and Sumerian, whose linguistic affiliation is still unknown. The earliest interpretable inscriptions from Babylonia, dated at 3100 BC, are in Sumerian, which was the written language throughout Mesopotamia for seven centuries. In fact, cuneiform, the wedge-shaped writing invented by the Sumerians, remained in use for almost 3,000 years.

Eventually the Akkadian way of life began to compete with the Sumerian. Political and cultural leadership was effectively wrested away from the south by Sargon I (*Sharru-kin,* meaning "true king"; 2339–2279 BC), who founded the capital Akkad (or Agade).

The Akkadian Empire, which lasted for nearly two centuries under Sargon and his successors (2334–2154 BC), was disrupted by the invasion of the Guti people, mountaineers from the east, who in turn were defeated by the Sumerian king Utuhegal of the city of Uruk. That event marked a period of revival of Sumerian power and culture in Babylonia, led by a dynasty of kings that established itself in the once-prominent Sumerian city of Ur.

First Babylonian Kingdom: 1900–1600 BC

At the same time, Semitic-speaking people from the west—the Amurru (or Martu), nomads from Syria—were exerting migratory and military pressures on Babylonia.

The Amurru—called by modern researchers "Amorites" after their language—were known in the pre-Sargonid period (before 2340 BC) and were looked upon as barbarians by native Babylonians, who scorned their manner of life. During the reign of Shar-kali-sharri (2254–2230 BC), the Amorites began to appear as a menace. A century later, during the early part of the Ur III period, the first major wave of Amorites moved into Babylonia; the second wave came during the reigns of the last two kings of the Ur III dynasty. That second migration coincided with a complex political situation in Babylonia. The undermining of Sumerian political power gave rise to the kingdom of Babylon under Amorite control.

The last Neo-Sumerian king, Ibbi-Sin, was faced with military threats to his kingdom from both east and west. He also had to deal with internal rebellion. Ishbi-Erra, vassal governor of the city of Mari, 500 miles (804.5 kilometers) up the Euphrates, took advantage of the Amorite incursions to revolt against the king and establish a rival kingdom with its capital at Isin, 50 miles (80.5 kilometers) from Ur. At the same time, in Larsa, less than 20 miles (32.2 kilometers) across the Euphrates from Ur, another new dynasty was established by a ruler with an Amorite name.

The founder of the first dynasty of the kingdom of Babylon was Sumuabum (1894–1881 BC). Little is known about him. He and his next four successors, all legitimate descendants—Sumulael (1880–1845 BC), Sabium (1844–1831 BC), Apil-Sin (1830–1813 BC), and Sin-Muballit (1812–1793 BC)—ruled peacefully and uneventfully for a century. They appear to have devoted themselves mainly to religious and defensive construction and to maintenance of an irrigation canal system, though there is some evidence of conquest and territorial acquisition. Still, the territory of the kingdom of Babylon probably extended no more than 50 miles (80.5 kilometers) in any direction from the capital. Hammurabi, the sixth king of that line (1792–1750 BC), enlarged the kingdom toward the dimensions of an empire. At its greatest extent it reached from the Persian Gulf up the Tigris to include some of the cities of Assyria and up the Euphrates to Mari. Babylonia's glory, however, was short-lived; under the reign of Hammurabi's son Samsu-iluna (1749–1712 BC) the realm shriveled. It lasted for another century, but within borders narrower than those established by Sumuabum. Minor dynasties took turns ruling over the area from 1600–900 BC. Then the Assyrians took control.

Assyrian Domination: 900–614 BC

The earliest incursions of Assyria into Babylonia were by Shalmaneser III. In 851 BC the brother of Marduk-zakir-shumi, reigning king of the eighth dynasty of Babylon, made a bid for the throne with the backing of the Arameans. Marduk-zakir-shumi called on the Assyrians for aid. Shalmaneser defeated the rebels and entered Babylon, treating

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the ancient city and its inhabitants with great respect. Thereafter, advancing southward, he came to Sumer, inhabited by the Chaldeans, and pressed them back against the gulf. For whatever reasons, Shalmaneser did not annex Babylonia. Marduk-zakir-shumi remained on the throne, though he swore allegiance to the Assyrian king.

The final years of Shalmaneser III were darkened by revolts all over the Assyrian Empire. Two strong rulers emerged from the political confusion. In Assyria, Tiglath-pileser III (745–727 BC) usurped the throne. In Babylonia three years earlier a Chaldean, Nabonassar (747–734 BC), took the throne of Babylon as a successor king in the eighth dynasty.

At Nabonassar's death, an Aramean chieftain, Nabu-mukin-zeri (731–729 BC), seized the Babylonian throne and established the ninth dynasty of Babylon. Tiglath-pileser defeated the usurper, ravaged the territory of his tribe, and had himself proclaimed king of Babylon—and thus, of Babylonia—under the name of Pulu (729–727 BC) and as the second king of the ninth dynasty. Little is known of his short-lived successor, Shalmaneser V (727–722 BC). He, too, was proclaimed king of Babylon as well as of Assyria. Under Shalmaneser a siege against the kingdom of Israel began, after its king, Hoshea (732–723 BC), rebelled against Assyria (2 Kgs 17:1–6).

Merodach-baladan

Sargon II (722–705 BC) succeeded Shalmaneser. His rise to power is obscure; he was probably a usurper, which is why he chose the name Sargon ("true king") like his Akkadian namesake 1,500 years earlier. Shortly before Sargon II came to the throne, Elam in the east had begun to take an active part in the affairs of Babylonia by instigating rebellions against Assyria.

After the brilliant successes of his other campaigns, Sargon attacked Babylon again in 710 BC, and this time succeeded in taking it. Although he had himself proclaimed king of Babylon, he acknowledged Merodach-baladan as king of the Yakin tribe. Merodach-baladan evidently took up residence in Elam at that time. In the year that Sargon's son Sennacherib (705–681 BC) succeeded to the Assyrian throne, Merodach-baladan, assisted by Elamite officers and troops, reappeared. He raised the whole Aramean and Chaldean population of Babylonia against the Assyrians, took Babylon, and had himself proclaimed king again (705 BC).

During that brief period, Merodach-baladan sent an embassy to King Hezekiah of Judah (715–686 BC) "with letters and a present," ostensibly to show sympathy for Hezekiah because of the king's illness (2 Kgs 20:12). More likely, Merodach-baladan's purpose was to secure another ally against Assyrian hegemony; the account of Hezekiah's cordial reception of the Babylonian envoys shows his willingness to join the alliance. Evidently the king's vanity overruled his political sense, and he treated the Babylonians to an extensive tour of his treasury. The proud gesture was rebuked by the prophet Isaiah, who predicted Babylonia's later conquest of Judah, when the king's storehouse would be sacked and his family carried off captive (2 Kgs 20:13–19; Is 39).

Sennacherib was able to quickly dislodge Merodach-baladan from the Babylonian throne, force him into exile, and replace him with a king of his own choice, Bel-ibni.

War and Peace

Sennacherib's successor and youngest son, Esarhaddon (681–669 BC), came to the throne of Assyria after a bloody war of succession with his brothers. One of his first acts was to rebuild and enlarge the city of Babylon. Esarhaddon thus won the friendship of many of his Babylonian subjects, who enabled him to enjoy a peaceful reign in that part of his empire. Three years before his death, Esarhaddon named his son Ashurbanipal as his successor (669–627 BC), and another son, Shamash-shum-ukin (668–648 BC), as viceroy in Babylonia.

The empire was not divided by having two sons on two thrones. Ashurbanipal had precedence over his brother, bearing responsibility for the whole empire. Shamash-shum-ukin and his Babylonian subjects, on the other hand, enjoyed sovereignty; as viceroy, he was granted full authority within his realm. That arrangement lasted for 17 years until Shamash-shum-ukin, backed by the Elamites and numerous Arab tribes, rebelled against Ashurbanipal. The revolt was brutally suppressed by 648 BC, and a Chaldean noble, Kandalanu, was appointed Babylonian viceroy. Shortly afterward, Ashurbanipal launched a punitive expedition, devastating Babylonia and completely destroying Elam in the process.

Neo-Babylonian Empire: 614–539 BC

Both Ashurbanipal and Kandalanu, his viceroy in Babylon, died in 627 BC. For a year, Babylonia had

no recognized ruler. Then the throne was seized by the Chaldean prince Nabopolassar (625–605 BC), who established the 10th dynasty of Babylon, which has come to be called the Chaldean or Neo-Babylonian dynasty.

Aided by Media, the kingdom of the Iranian Plateau, Nabopolassar put an end to the Assyrian Empire. By 612 BC Assyria's chief cities had fallen: Asshur, then the religious center; Nineveh, the administrative center; and Nimrod, the military headquarters. The last light of Assyria was snuffed out by Nabopolassar in 609 BC. Under his son Nebuchadnezzar II (604–562 BC), Babylonia fell heir to the Assyrian Empire. For a moment in history, Babylonia was master of the whole Near East. Nebuchadnezzar brought about the end of the Hebrew kingdom of Judah and the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC, deporting part of its population to Babylonia in the event referred to as the exile (2 Kgs 24:1–25:21).

Under Nebuchadnezzar, Babylon became the fabled city of luxury and splendor with which its name is commonly associated. Nebuchadnezzar was succeeded by his son, son-in-law, and grandson within the space of six years. Thereafter, one of his high diplomatic officials, Nabonidus, took the throne (555–539 BC). During his reign, the Medes, formerly allies of the Chaldeans, came under a new ruler, Cyrus II of Persia (559 BC), who over the next 10 years conquered an empire nearly 3,000 miles (4,827 kilometers) in extent, from the Aegean Sea to the Pamirs (mountains in central Asia).

During Cyrus's decade of conquest, Nabonidus was strangely absent from Babylon, residing in Arabia. Although the book of Daniel relates events occurring in the court of Babylon during Nabonidus's reign, his name is never mentioned. Instead, Belshazzar, whom Nabonidus appointed regent in Babylon during his absence, is described as king (Dn 5:1). Perhaps because of his extended absence or perhaps because of his attachment to the moon god Sin and Sin's city, Haran, rather than to the Babylonian national god Marduk and Marduk's city, Babylon, Nabonidus lost the support of the Babylonians. When he finally returned to Babylon, it was on the eve of Cyrus's attack on the city (Dn 5:30–31). Instead of offering resistance, however, the Babylonian army defected to Cyrus and the city gave itself up without a battle (October 539 BC). That surrender ended the Chaldean dynasty and the history of an independent Babylonia.

The Babylon of Nebuchadnezzar's time appears frequently at the end of 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles and in the early part of Daniel. Ezra and Nehemiah record the subsequent return of the remnant of Judah from their Babylonian exile.

Among the prophetic books, Isaiah speaks of Babylon during the period of Assyrian dominance. A century later Jeremiah warns of the threat of Nebuchadnezzar, and Ezekiel and Daniel speak of Babylon from the later viewpoint of those exiled. There are as many references to Babylon in the last half of Jeremiah as in all the rest of the Bible.

See also Postexilic Period; Diaspora of the Jews; Chaldea, Chaldeans; Nebuchadnezzar, Nebuchadrezzar; Daniel, Book of.

Babylonian Captivity

The period when many people living in Judah, the southern kingdom of Israel, were taken to Babylonia after Nebuchadnezzar's conquest of Jerusalem in the sixth century BC.

See Babylon, Babylonia; Diaspora of the Jews.

Baca, Valley of

A phrase in Psalm 84:6 often translated as "valley of weeping" comes from the Hebrew word *baca*, which refers to a type of tree mentioned in 2 Samuel 5:23–24 and 1 Chronicles 14:14–15. In these passages, it is translated as mulberry, aspen, or balsam. It is uncertain whether the valley of Baca in Psalm 84 was an actual geographical location or a symbolic expression for times of grief or difficulty in life.

Some scholars believe it was a specific location near Jerusalem, possibly near the valley of Rephaim. It may symbolize a period or place of sorrow and hardship:

1. The balsam trees in the valley might have exuded resinous gum, which looked like tears.
2. The journey through the valley could have been challenging.
3. The valley might have been characterized by rocks from which water seeped, similar to tears.

Bacchides

Bacchides was a Syrian general and governor of the Seleucid territories west of the Euphrates River, which included Judea. This position brought him into contact with five famous men from the period between the Old and New Testaments:

- Demetrius I, the ruler of the Seleucid kingdom around 160–150 BC
- Alcimus (Hellenized name of Jakim or Eliakim), the puppet high priest from 162–158 BC
- Judas, who ruled Judea from 165 to 160 BC
- Jonathan, who ruled Judea from 160 to 143 BC
- Simon, who ruled from 143 to 135 BC

Judas, Jonathan, and Simon were brothers. Their stories are found in the book of 1 Maccabees.

The story begins with Demetrius I. After Antiochus IV Epiphanes died in 163 BC, Demetrius, a hostage in Rome, asked the Roman Senate for permission to claim the throne. When they said no, Demetrius fled from Rome and won the throne through successful campaigns from 161–160 BC. He then aimed to crush the Maccabean rebels in Judea and, after his victory, called himself Demetrius I Soter, meaning "savior."

Alcimus, a descendant of the Old Testament priest Aaron, suggested to Demetrius that if he were appointed high priest in Jerusalem, he could unite the Jews against Judas Maccabeus. Demetrius agreed and sent Bacchides to install Alcimus in this important role.

Bacchides led three campaigns into Judea to accomplish this task. The first campaign (162–161 BC) had partial success. Some pious Jews called the Hasidim, supported a legitimate Aaronic priest until Bacchides and Alcimus broke their promise and killed 60 Hasidim leaders (1 Maccabees 7:18–20). This act united Judea behind Judas Maccabeus. Bacchides, unaware of this, left Alcimus and an army in Judea and returned to Syria.

Two months later, in 161 BC, Bacchides returned with 20,000 infantry soldiers and 2,000 cavalrymen. He met Judas, who had only 800 men left, in a desperate battle near Elasa in 160 BC. Judas was killed in the battle (1 Maccabees 9:18). His brothers Jonathan and Simon fled to the southern mountains. Bacchides chased Jonathan, fought him in an indecisive battle, and then retreated to Jerusalem. He then returned to Syria, leaving an army, the Jewish Hellenists, and Alcimus in charge (1 Maccabees 9:52–57).

This arrangement lasted for two years. In 158 BC, Bacchides undertook one final campaign into Judea, but this time he faced disaster. Alcimus died of a stroke, and Bacchides began to doubt the wisdom of supporting the Jewish Hellenists further. Sensing his hesitation, Jonathan offered a truce and an exchange of prisoners. Bacchides accepted and returned to Syria, leaving Jonathan in control of Judea (1 Maccabees 9:72).

See also Maccabean Period.

Bacenor

One of Judas Maccabeus's officers, according to 2 Maccabees 12:35. The name, might be a corrupt form of "Toubiani." The verse might read, "Dositheus, a Toubian, who was on horseback" (see 2 Maccabees 12:17).

Bachrite

The King James Version form of Becherite. This was any descendant of Becher (Numbers 26:35).

See Becher, Becherite #2.

Backsliding

To lose commitment to religion, become less devoted, or be less moral.

The main Hebrew word for backsliding means "turning back" or "turning away." The Israelites often turned away from God and followed the sinful practices and idols of their neighbors. In the Old Testament:

- Israel is described as craving wicked things and abandoning God and His commands (Ezra 9:10; Isaiah 1:4; Ezekiel 11:21).
- They broke their covenant with God by worshiping idols and acting unfaithfully (Psalm 78:10; Jeremiah 2:11; Hosea 4:10). A covenant is a special promise or agreement between God and his people.
- They forgot about God's great deeds, ignored His advice, and rejected His teachings (Psalms 78:11; 107:11; Isaiah 30:9).
- They became stubborn and enjoyed all kinds of immoral behaviors (Jeremiah 3:21).
- Religious leaders who should have guided the people were leading them astray (Isaiah 9:16).
- The priests were unfaithful (Jeremiah 50:6).

God was deeply saddened by His people's spiritual failure and said that "faithless Israel had committed adultery" (adultery is used as a metaphor for unfaithfulness to God; Jeremiah 3:8). Through Hosea, the Lord lamented the fact that "Israel is as obstinate as a stubborn heifer" (Hosea 4:16). Jeremiah confessed, "Indeed, our rebellions are many; we have sinned against You" (Jeremiah 14:7).

Badger

A small burrowing mammal with a large back. It has thick, short legs and long claws on the front feet.

The King James Version calls them "coney," while modern translations call them "rock badger" (Leviticus 11:5; Deuteronomy 14:7; Psalm 104:18; Proverbs 30:26). The Bible's rock badger is likely the Syrian rock hyrax (*Hyrax syriaca*). It is the only hyrax species found outside Africa.

This small ungulate (hoofed animal) lives among rocks from the Dead Sea valley to Mount Hermon. It is a plant-eating animal about the size of a rabbit. It looks more like a guinea pig than a rabbit. It has small ears and a smaller tail. It has wide nails with four toes on its front legs and three on its back legs. Its toes are connected with skin almost like a web. Pads on its feet act as sucking discs, allowing it to not slip on rocks. Some people call it the bear rat because of Its yellow and brown fur, which makes it look like a tailless rat. It has black whiskers that may be 17.8 centimeters (seven inches) long.

Rock badgers live together in colonies of from six to 50 animals. They often sun themselves on rocks. They are difficult to catch. They have guards, and if they spot danger, the group will hide. They use sharp whistles to warn the colony of danger. Thus, the Bible praises them for hiding in the rocks (Psalm 104:18). The Bible calls them wise for making "their homes in the rocks" (Proverbs 30:24, 26).

The badger does not chew its cud, but the way it eats looks like it chews its cud. That is likely the reason it was included with other cud-chewing animals in the Jewish food laws (Leviticus 11:5; Deuteronomy 14:7). Jews were forbidden to eat it because it did not have split hooves. Meanwhile, some Arabs eat it and even value its meat.

Baean

A tribe that was destroyed by Judas Maccabeus because it regularly ambushed Jewish travelers (1 Maccabees 5:4–5). Nothing else is known about this tribe. It was probably located east of the Jordan River.

Bagoas

A steward in charge of the duties of Nebuchadnezzar's general Holofernes (Judith 12:11). Bagoas found the general's body after Judith beheaded Holofernes in his tent (Judith 14:14–18). "Bagoas" may have been a Persian title rather than his name.

Bagpipe

The instrument used in King Nebuchadnezzar's court (Daniel 3:5, 7, 10, 15). It may actually have been a string instrument, but is sometimes translated as "bagpipe." Bagpipes are wind instruments. Instruments like bagpipes were known in the ancient world.

See Musical Instruments (Psantrin; Sumponia).

Baharum, Baharumite, Bahurim

A village in the tribal land of Benjamin. It was on the old road connecting Jericho and Jerusalem, east of the Mount of Olives. Bahurim is the modern-day Ras et-Temim. Palti lost his wife, Michal, there at Abner's command when Michal was being returned to King David (2 Samuel 3:16). At Bahurim, Shimei cursed David and threw stones at him and his servants (2 Samuel 16:5; 19:16; 1 Kings 2:8). Jonathan and Ahimaaz, spying for David, were hidden from Absalom's soldiers in a well there (2 Samuel 17:18). One of David's mighty men, Azmaveth, came from Bahurim (2 Samuel 23:31; 1 Chronicles 11:33).

Bajith

A town in Moab according to Isaiah 15:2 in the King James Version. In some translations, it is instead translated as "daughter" or "temple."

Bakbakkar

A Levite who returned to Jerusalem from exile in Babylon (1 Chronicles 9:15). His name is missing in another list in Nehemiah 11:17. It might be the same as Bakbukiah.

Bakbuk

An ancestor of a group of temple assistants who returned to Jerusalem with Zerubbabel after the exile in Babylon (Ezra 2:51; Nehemiah 7:53).

Bakbukiah

1. Shammua's son. He was a Levite who helped Mattaniah at the thanksgiving services in the temple (Nehemiah 11:17).
2. A Levite who returned to Jerusalem with Zerubbabel after the exile in Babylon (Nehemiah 12:9).
3. One of the gatekeepers who was in charge of storage rooms at the temple gates (Nehemiah 12:25).

It is not clear whether these references are to one, two, or three persons.

Baker

One who prepares food. In biblical times, the baker worked:

- in the home (Genesis 19:3),
- in the public bakery (Jeremiah 37:21), and
- in the palaces of kings and nobles (Genesis 40:1–22; 41:10, 13; 1 Samuel 8:13)

They made bread and cakes from the basic staples of oil and flour. The Israelites fleeing from Egypt baked unleavened bread for their journey (Exodus 12:39). The bread and cakes were baked in a pan or oven (Leviticus 2:4; 26:26). As Israelite society developed, professional bakers worked and formed guilds. Some have argued that Hosea was a baker because of his knowledge of baking techniques (Hosea 7:4–8).

See also Food and Food Preparation.

Balaam

Beor's son, a prophet or soothsayer from northern Mesopotamia hired by the Moabite king, Balak, to curse the Israelites.

After 40 years of wandering, the Israelites had arrived in the Jordan Valley opposite Jericho. They had defeated the Amorites (Numbers 21:21–25). Balak was terrified of the Israelites (22:3). Curses and blessings were considered permanent (Genesis 27:34–38). So, Balak believed that if he could hire a prophet to curse the Israelites in the name of their God, Yahweh, he could defeat them. He sent messengers to Pethor, where Balaam lived. The town is believed to have been near Haran on the Habur River. He gave Balaam a substantial offer to curse the Israelites.

The Lord initially warned Balaam not to go to Moab. Despite this, Balak persisted and sent more messengers with greater offers of wealth and

honor. Balaam's desire for wealth led him to ask the Lord again if he should go. His words to the messengers, however, were very pious: "If Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not do anything small or great to go beyond the command of the LORD my God" (Numbers 22:18). Though God allowed Balaam to go, He instructed Balaam to say only what He commanded.

Balak had sent "the fees for divination" with his messengers (Numbers 22:7). This shows that he saw Balaam as a pagan diviner (someone who practiced seeking knowledge of the future by supernatural means). This was forbidden for Israelites (Deuteronomy 18:10–11). A true prophet would not have considered Balak's offer. God's permission for Balaam to go was meant to frustrate Balak's plans and protect His people.

As Balaam traveled, God became angry and sent an angel with a drawn sword to block his path (Numbers 22:22). Balaam's donkey saw the angel and refused to move, prompting Balaam to beat the donkey. Miraculously, the donkey spoke to Balaam, complaining about the beatings (Numbers 22:28–30).

On the surface, the story in Numbers 22 presents Balaam as simply following what the Lord allowed him to do. But Deuteronomy 23:5 reveals that the Lord did not listen to Balaam and turned his intended curse into a blessing. When the Lord opened Balaam's eyes to see the angel, he fell on his face (Numbers 22:31). Balaam acknowledged his sin, and agreed to say only what the Lord put in his mouth. Balaam's poems in Numbers 23 and 24 are written in archaic Hebrew. They describe God's past blessings on His people and predict future blessings for Israel.

Balaam spoke only blessings for Israel and never a curse. The Moabite king, Balak, tried to get Balaam to curse Israel from different viewing locations overlooking the Jordan Valley. When Balaam still did not curse them, Balak, infuriated, sent Balaam away without any reward.

Numbers 25 recounts how the Moabite king almost succeeded in leading the Israelites astray. At Peor, Israelite men engaged in immoral behavior with Moabite women, possibly involving temple prostitution, based on Balaam's advice to weaken Israel (Numbers 31:14–16). Balaam was later killed by the Israelites during their campaign against Midian (Numbers 31:8; Joshua 13:22).

See also Balak.

Balac

The King James Version spelling of Balak. Balak was king of Moab during the time of Moses (Revelation 2:14).

See Balak.

Baladan

The king of Babylon and father of Merodach-baladan. Baladan's son sent letters and a gift to King Hezekiah of Judah after Hezekiah's recovery from a serious illness (2 Kings 20:12; Isaiah 39:1).

Balah

A city in southern Canaan (Joshua 19:3), probably identical with Baalah (Joshua 15:29) and Bilhah (1 Chronicles 4:29).

Balak

Zippor's son, and king of Moab. Balak was afraid after the Israelites defeated the Amorites, so he hired a prophet named Balaam to curse Israel (Numbers 22:1–7). Balak escorted Balaam to three different mountains and offered three different sacrifices. But each time Balaam delivered a blessing to the Israelites instead (Numbers 22–24). Enraged, Balak sent Balaam away. That event was given as an example of God's special blessing on the Israelites and the pointlessness of trying to change God's will (Joshua 24:9–10; Judges 11:25; Micah 6:5; Revelation 2:14).

See also Balaam.

Balamon

A city near where Judith's husband, Manasseh, was buried (Judith 8:3).

Balance, Balances

Devices used to weigh objects by opposing them with a known weight. Balances or scales have been used since at least the middle of the second

millennium BC. Early depictions and inscriptions in Egyptian tombs provide insights into the appearance of these ancient scales. A pair of balances found in Ugarit dates back to around 1400 BC.

Balances typically had four main parts:

1. An upright center standard;
2. A crossbar suspended from the standard;
3. Two pans suspended from each end of the crossbar by cords; and
4. A rod or pointer attached at right angles to the center of the crossbar (in more elaborate models). This rod moved in front of the standard, indicating when the two pans held equal weights by their vertical position.

In the ancient world, scales or balances were primarily used to measure precious metals like silver or gold. However, the "Story of the Eloquent Peasant" from the Middle Kingdom of Egypt also mentioned the figurative use of scales to measure a person's heart and tongue.

Balances are frequently mentioned in the Old Testament, usually emphasizing the use of fair weights when buying and selling (Leviticus 19:36; Proverbs 11:1; 16:11; 20:23; Ezekiel 45:10; Hosea 12:7; Amos 8:5; Micah 6:10–12).

Silver is weighed with a balance as described in Isaiah 46:6. Likewise, Jeremiah weighed the money that he paid for his nephew's field (Jeremiah 32:8–10). In an acted-out prophecy, Ezekiel was instructed to cut off all his hair and beard, weigh it in balances, and separate it into three equal parts (Ezekiel 5:1–2). Job asked "weigh me with honest scales," that God might know his integrity (Job 31:6). Daniel declared that Belshazzar had been weighed in the balances (judged) and found wanting (Daniel 5:27).

In the New Testament, Revelation 6:5 speaks of a rider on a black horse holding a balance in his hand. This prophecy foretells a severe famine where food becomes scarce, inflation drives up food prices, and people carefully check the scales to avoid being cheated even when buying the cheapest grains, like barley (Revelation 6:6).

See also Weights and Measures.

Balbaim

A town to the south of Dothan. It is mentioned in the book of Judith (Judith 7:3). It might be the same as Belmain (Judith 4:4).

Bald Locust

A kind of locust that was considered clean and, therefore, edible (Leviticus 11:22).

See Animals (Locust).

Baldness

The condition of having little or no hair on the scalp.

The Bible indirectly refers to natural baldness due to age, contrasting it with baldness caused by leprosy (Leviticus 13:40–42). The Israelites were forbidden from shaving their heads or shaping their beards in ways that mimicked pagan religious practices (Deuteronomy 14:1), with such restrictions particularly applying to Israelite priests (Leviticus 21:5). However, shaving off hair and offering it as a sacrifice to God was a prescribed act for those taking a Nazirite vow (Numbers 6:1–5, 18; Acts 18:18).

In ancient cultures like Egypt, shaving hair and eyebrows was a sign of respect for the dead. The Bible references this custom among non-Israelites as a sign of mourning or anguish (Jeremiah 16:6; 48:37; Ezekiel 27:31; Micah 1:16). This is often in the context of God's judgment against pagan cities or nations. Because baldness was associated with leprosy, venereal disease, idolatry, or death, prophetic warnings sometimes included predictions or threats of baldness (Isaiah 3:16–24).

Balm, Balsam

A fragrant, oily resin that comes from certain trees and shrubs. People use balm as medicine. The word "balm" can refer to both the resin and the plants that produce it.

The balm mentioned in Genesis 37:25, Jeremiah 8:22, 46:11, and 51:8 is probably either the Jericho balsam (*Balanites aegyptiaca*) or the mastic tree

(*Pistacia lentiscus*). The Jericho balsam grows commonly in Egypt, North Africa, the plains of Jericho, and the hot lands near the Dead Sea. It is a small plant that thrives in desert areas. It grows 2.7 to 4.6 meters (9 to 15 feet) tall. It has thin, thorny branches with small green flowers.

The mastic tree naturally grows in Israel and the surrounding areas. Genesis 43:11 probably refers to this plant because it describes a product native to Israel and the surrounding areas that was unknown in Egypt at that time. This tree is bushy and grows 0.9 to 3 meters (3 to 10 feet) tall with leaves that stay green all year. People collect the "balm" by cutting the stems and branches, usually in August. The sap flows out and hardens. The best quality balm appears as yellow-white, see-through drops. People use this high-quality balm in medicine as a drying agent. Lower quality balm serves as varnish. Children in Middle Eastern countries also use it as chewing gum.

The spices mentioned in 1 Kings 10:10, 2 Kings 20:13, Song of Songs 3:6, Isaiah 39:2, and Ezekiel 27:17 are likely the balm of Gilead (*Commiphora opobalsamum*). Despite its name, this plant does not naturally grow in Gilead or the surrounding areas. It comes from Arabia, especially the mountain regions of Yemen. These trees still grew on the plains of Jericho during the Roman conquest. The Roman conquerors took branches back to Rome as symbols of their victory over the Jewish people.

The balm of Gilead tree is a small evergreen with stiff branches. It rarely grows taller than (4.6 meters (15 feet) and has spreading branches. People collect the "balm" by cutting the stem and branches of the tree. The sap quickly hardens into small, uneven pieces that are gathered. People also get gum from both unripe and ripe fruit of this tree.

See Medicine and Medical Practice.

Balthasar

The traditional name of one of the wise men who brought a gift to Jesus in Matthew 2:1–2. *See* Wise Men.

Bamah

The Hebrew word meaning height, ridge, or elevation in the landscape (2 Samuel 1:19, 25; 22:34). It is written in English once (Ezra 20:29). It refers to hills or mountains overlooking the Arnon River (Numbers 21:28). The plural form, Bamoth, is used for the name of towns in Moab (Numbers 21:19–20; 22:41; Joshua 13:17).

Metaphorically, the word signifies:

- A place of security (Deuteronomy 32:13; Hebrews 3:19)
- The high ground a military commander aims to control in battle.

Controlling an enemy's "heights" meant subjugating that enemy (Deuteronomy 33:29; Ezekiel 36:2). The term often combines both literal and figurative meanings when referring to Jerusalem, a "high place" in ruin overgrown with plants (Micah 3:12; see also Jeremiah 26:18; Ezekiel 36:1–2).

In Canaanite religion, a "high place" was a local shrine on a hill near a town or village, unlike the larger temples spread throughout the land.

4o*See also* High Place.

Bamoth, Bamoth-Baal

A town in Moab Joshua gave to the tribe of Reuben (Joshua 13:17, called Bamoth-baal). It was one of Israel's last secure points on the route into Canaan, the Promised Land (Numbers 21:19–20).

Bamoth-baal, a mountain or high place, was probably a shrine to the Canaanite god Baal. King Balak of Moab took the prophet Balaam there to try to get him to curse Balak's enemies, the people of Israel (Numbers 22:41–23:13).

Ban

A religious practice involving dedicating those who are hostile to God to destruction. This practice was used in Israel during wartime. They would completely destroy the Canaanites because of their wickedness and evil practices

See also Conquest and Allotment of the Land; Joshua, Book of; Warfare; War, Holy.

Bani

1. A member of Gad's tribe and warrior among David's mighty men who were known as "the thirty" (2 Samuel 23:36).
2. Shemer's son and ancestor of Ethan. Ethan was the Levite of Merari's line in charge of the music in the tabernacle during King David's reign (1 Chronicles 6:46).
3. A member of the tribe of Judah and an ancestor of Uthai (1 Chronicles 9:4). Uthai was one of the first to move into Jerusalem after the exile in Babylon. Possibly the same as #4 below.
4. An ancestor of a family that returned to Judah with Zerubbabel after the exile in Babylon (Ezra 2:10). It can also be spelled Binnui (Nehemiah 7:15).
5. An ancestor of a family that returned to Judah with Ezra after the exile in Babylon (Ezra 8:10; 1 Esdras 8:36). Possibly the same as #4 above.
6. An ancestor of some Israelites who were found guilty of marrying foreign women (Ezra 10:29).
7. An ancestor of another group of Israelites who were found guilty of marrying foreign women (Ezra 10:34).
8. The son or descendent of Bani (#7 above). He was among those found guilty of marrying foreign women (Ezra 10:38). Because Bani is similarly spelled as "sons of" in Hebrew, most modern translations write verse 38 "of the sons of Binnui."
9. Rehum's father and a Levite. Rehum repaired a section of the Jerusalem wall after the exile in Babylon (Nehemiah 3:17).
10. The levitical assistant of Ezra who explained passages from the law read by Ezra to the people (Nehemiah 8:7). He gave praises to God on the steps of the temple (Nehemiah 9:4–5). He is probably the same as Binnui (Ezra 10:38) and Anniuth (1 Esdras 9:48).
11. Another levitical assistant who explained passages from the law read by Ezra (Nehemiah 9:4b).
12. A levite who signed Ezra's promise of faithfulness to God after the exile in Babylon (Nehemiah 10:13). He was a leader of the people representing the Bani family mentioned under #4 above.
13. Uzzi's father. Uzzi was the head of the levites in Jerusalem after the exile in Babylon (Neh 11:22). Possibly the same as #9 or #10 above.
    The popularity of this name and its similarity to other Jewish names (e.g., Binnui) has caused much confusion in lists of ancestors. The list above is one of several possible arrangements.

Banish, Banishment

The exclusion of a person from a country or group as a form of punishment.

In the Bible, "banishment" or similar words are used several times:

- God's judgment on Adam and Eve (Genesis 3:23–24)
- God's judgment on Cain (4:9–14)
- Absalom's exile from his father David (2 Samuel 13:37–39; 14:13–14)
- Israel's exile from the promised land (Deuteronomy 30:1; Isaiah 11:12; Jeremiah 16:15; Ezekiel 4:13)

Banishment was included in a list of punishments in the exile in Babylon for those who disobeyed God or the Persian king Artaxerxes (Ezra 7:26)

The Mosaic law prescribed that an Israelite could be "cut off" from the community for various offenses:

- failure to circumcise a male child (Genesis 17:12, 14)
- eating leavened bread during Passover (Exodus 12:15)
- making an unholy animal sacrifice (Leviticus 17:1–4)
- eating blood (Leviticus 17:10)
- sinning deliberately (Numbers 15:30–31)
- failing to undergo ceremonial cleansing after contact with a dead body (Numbers 19:11–20)

Being "cut off" likely meant exclusion from both social and religious life (John 9:18–23, 34). After the exile, when the nation of Israel was banished, disinheritance and permanent excommunication from God's people became formal punishments (Ezra 10:7–8).

The Romans, like other conquerors, used deportation as a form of punishment. For example, Jews were banished from Rome under Emperor Claudius due to controversies (Acts 18:2). The author of Revelation was exiled to the island of Patmos during Roman persecution (Revelation 1:9). More severe forms of banishment included permanent exclusion from a region, loss of citizenship, and confiscation of property.

See also Diaspora of the Jews.

Banker, Banking

A banker is someone who works with money. This person lends money, exchanges different types of money, and gives out new money.

As trade between different countries grew, people needed a way to move money easily. This led to the creation of banking. When coins were first made in the seventh century BC, money changers became important. These were people who would exchange one type of coin for another.

In the past, kings and queens controlled all trade (2 Samuel 5:11; 1 Kings 10:14–29). But over time, this changed. A new system developed that was similar to the banking we have today.

In New Testament times, money changers were one part of the banking system. Their job was to change Roman money into special coins for the temple. People needed these special coins to pay the temple tax. This tax was a type of coin called half a shekel. Money changers are mentioned in:

- Matthew 17:24
- Matthew 21:12
- Matthew 25:27
- Mark 11:15
- Luke 19:23
- John 2:14–15

People who lent money (lenders) and those who gave credit (creditors) were protected. The borrowers had to give something valuable as a promise to pay back the loan.

Israelite law said people should not charge interest on loans (Exodus 22:25; Deuteronomy 15:1–18). However, some people did not follow this law and charged very high interest rates. Prophets and leaders spoke against this practice (Nehemiah 5:6–13; Ezekiel 18:8, 13, 17; 22:12).

The people of Israel often feared the creditors (2 Kings 4:1; Psalm 109:11; Isaiah 24:2; 50:1). Creditors could come into people's homes to take back what was owed. They could even take children as slaves to pay the debt (2 Kings 4:1; Isaiah 50:1). In Luke 7:41–42, Jesus tells a story about a kind creditor. This story is called a parable. Other similar stories are in Matthew 25:14–30 and Luke 19:11–27.

See also Money; Money Changer.

Banquet

A grand ceremonial meal held to celebrate an important event or person. It also symbolizes the future feast that Christ will host in the kingdom of God.

In biblical times, banqueting and feasting were central to social and religious life. Alongside the religious feasts set by Mosaic law, people celebrated with banquets on various joyful or significant occasions, such as:

- make formal agreements (Genesis 26:30; 31:54; Exodus 24:11)
- weddings (Genesis 29:22; Judges 14:10)
- harvest (Judges 9:27; Ruth 3:1–3)
- shearing sheep (1 Samuel 25:11; 2 Samuel 13:23–29)
- welcoming guests (Genesis 19:3)
- weaning a child (Genesis 21:8)
- ceremonies to make someone king or queen (1 Kings 1:9, 19–25)
- state events (Esther 1:3–9; 2:18; 5:4–8)
- as well as for many other reasons

Banquet customs from ancient Middle Eastern cultures are depicted in the Bible and other ancient texts. Objects found by people who study ancient cultures often show scenes of banquets. The process of hosting a banquet in biblical texts, such as Proverbs 9:2–5, Matthew 22:1–14, and Luke 14:15–24, is also known from the legend of King Keret in Ugaritic literature:

1. preparation of the foods
2. sending messengers with the invitation and announcement that all is ready
3. presentation of food and wine in order

The prophet Amos portrays grand feasts and shows the main eating customs (Amos 6:4–6). Meals were typically enjoyed while reclining on a couch before a table (Esther 1:6; Ezekiel 23:41; Amos 6:4; Matthew 9:10; Luke 7:49; 14:10, 15).

Banquet imagery is significant in both the Old and New Testaments as a symbol of the kingdom of God. Isaiah predicts a grand banquet following the judgment of nations and the deliverance of Israel, where the Lord reigns over his people (Isaiah 24:23). The beginning of that reign is celebrated by a huge banquet with all people (Isaiah 25:6–8; compare Luke 13:29). The Old Testament's animal sacrifice meals point to this great feast where there will be no more death or sorrow for God's people (Isaiah 25:7; compare Revelation 21:4). The new covenant banquet points to the future when the redeemed will share fine wine (Isaiah 25:6) with Christ in God's kingdom (Luke 22:14–20). Participating in the Lord's Supper (Communion) is a way for Christians to anticipate this future feast.

This final banquet in God's kingdom is also described as a wedding feast. While everything is prepared and many are invited, only a few are chosen (Matthew 22:1–14). The church eagerly awaits the marriage feast of the Lamb (Revelation 19:7–9).

Baptism

A term generally meaning "to dip" or "immerse." It represents a group of words used to indicate a religious ceremony for ceremonial cleansing. In the New Testament, baptism became the ceremony of initiation into the Christian community. It was interpreted theologically as a dying and rising with Christ.

Preview

• The Baptism of John

• The Baptism of Jesus

• Jesus's Resurrection Command to Baptize

• Baptism in the Early Church

• The Theology of Baptism in Paul's and Peter's Epistles

The Baptism of John

John preached a "baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" (Luke 3:3). The origins of his ceremony are difficult to trace. Some have claimed that John's baptism was like the baptism practiced by those at Qumran. Others have claimed that his baptism was like the baptism practiced by Jews when initiating new converts to Judaism. The members of the Qumran community viewed themselves as God's chosen people of the last days and so dwelt in the desert. They lived a life of strict self-discipline and immersed themselves daily in acts of ceremonial cleansing.

At the same time, they taught that internal repentance must accompany the external act (Rule of the Community 2:3). Its sacramental (or sacred) nature is seen in the fact that only a full member of the community could practice it, and then only after two probationary years (Rule of the Community 5:6). Converts to Judaism from other

religions were admitted to the community only after fulfilling certain requirements. These requirements included the following practices:

- the study of the Torah (the first five books of the Bible)
- circumcision (the practice of removing the foreskin of the male reproductive organ)
- a ceremonial bath to cleanse themselves from their previous non-Jewish life

John's baptism was similar to and different from these other forms of baptism. The origins of his baptism may be found in the prophetic acted-out parable (a short story used to explain a moral truth). These acts not only symbolized God's message but also intended to bring it about.

John's practice had several theological ramifications:

1. It was closely connected with radical repentance, not only for non-Jewish people (gentiles) but also for Jewish people (which would have been surprising to John's contemporaries).
2. It was eschatological at the core (focused on the end times). It was preparing for the Messiah (God's anointed one), who would baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire (Matthew 3:11). This looked ahead to the final separation between God's people and the wicked at the end of time (compare Matthew 3:12).
3. It symbolized moral purification and so prepared the people for the coming kingdom of God (Matthew 3:2; Luke 3:7–14).

Despite the clear connection between John's ceremony and the early church, we cannot assume as fact absolute dependence. In fact, the ceremony of baptism disappeared from Jesus's ministry. At first, Jesus allowed his disciples to continue the ceremony (John 3:22). Later he seemed to end the practice (John 4:1–3). This likely happened because of the following reasons:

1. John's message was about what people should do, while Jesus's message was about who he was and his nature.
2. John's baptism was forward-looking, expecting the coming kingdom of God, while Jesus's baptism was backward-looking, celebrating that event.
3. John's baptism was a temporary practice, while Jesus's baptism was sacramental (a permanent, sacred practice).

Jesus's ministry fulfilled John's ministry, so Jesus moved away from John's way of doing things.

The Baptism of Jesus

This event has its origins in a complex mix of divine and human motives within Jesus's awareness of his role as the Messiah (see Mark 1:9–11 and parallels). For John, it was confirmation of his message and ministry from Jesus. Jesus's actions aligned with John's proclamation of the kingdom. For Jesus, it was also an anointing that marked the start of his messianic ministry. As seen in God's "heavenly voice" of Mark 1:11 and parallels, this has two aspects:

1. The voice alludes to Psalm 2:7, establishing Jesus's unique sonship.
2. It alludes to Isaiah 42:1, establishing him as the messianic "servant of Yahweh." (This is discussed at greater length in the article below.)

Jesus's Resurrection Command to Baptize

Here we find the true basis of the church's practice in Matthew 28:19. As already stated, the disciples stopped using the earlier practice, so this moment marks the reestablishment of baptism as an ordinance based on the death and resurrection of Christ. It was no longer a future-oriented practice but had now become a realized activity centering on the gospel message. It was validated by the risen Christ who is exalted to universal lordship. It also is an essential aspect of making disciples, as seen in the use of the participle "baptizing" after the main verb "make disciples." Finally, the practice signifies the entrance of the believer "into" union with the triune God (literally "into the name of" the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit).

Baptism in the Early Church

Acts 2:38 shows that baptism was a sacred institution from the very beginning. This takes it back to the earliest days of the church. In the early church it was an important part of the salvation process (Acts 2:38, "repent and be baptized"). It was accomplished through confession and prayer "in the name of Jesus Christ" (Acts 2:38; 8:16; 10:48; 19:5). There was likely a time for questions and answers during which believers confessed their faith and dedicated themselves to Christ. The result was acceptance into and identification with the community of believers under the new covenant (God's promise of salvation and new life in Christ). This signified both forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38; 5:31; 10:43; 13:38; 26:18) and the reception of the Holy Spirit (Luke 3:16; Acts 2:38, 41; 9:17; 10:47–48; 11:16–17; 19:5–7). *See* Baptism of Fire; Baptism of Jesus; Baptism of the Spirit.

The Theology of Baptism in Paul's and Peter's Letters

Paul's basic statement is found in Galatians 3:27, "baptized into Christ." The ceremony of baptism is centered on Christ, indicating union with Christ. This is clarified further by Romans 6:3–8, which equates baptism with dying and rising (compare Colossians 2:12–13).

At the same time, baptism is related to the Holy Spirit. First Corinthians 12:13 connects "baptism by the one Spirit" with being "given that same Spirit." Many see baptism as the outward confirmation of the inward "seal" by the Holy Spirit (2 Corinthians 1:21–22; Ephesians 1:13; 4:30).

This leads us to the future aspect of baptism related to the end times. In its relation to the present work of Christ and the Holy Spirit, baptism represents the outpouring of salvation in the age of fulfillment. This is because it is the ceremony indicating the believer's entrance into the blessings of the new age (Titus 3:5).

There is also a definite link between baptism and the Old Testament covenants (promises between God and his people). The major connection is with God's covenant with Abraham and its practice of circumcision. Paul in Colossians 2:11–12 combines Jewish circumcision with Christian baptism as pictures of the redemptive work of Christ.

The debate today centers on how alike the two practices are—does baptism perform the same function in the new covenant, that is, forensic (declaring someone legally right with God) and imputative (giving them Christ's righteousness)? Whatever the theological implications, Paul at least cannot be made to say that. Rather, he borrows here the Jewish-Christian imagery of the "circumcision of the heart" (Deuteronomy 10:16; 30:6; Jeremiah 4:4; Romans 2:28–29; Philippians 3:3). Christians experience the fulfillment of that which circumcision merely prefigured—a spiritual reality that is completely effective.

Baptism is also related to the covenant with Noah in 1 Peter 3:19–21. There, Noah's deliverance through the waters is considered a picture of the effects of baptism. The debate centers on the meaning of "baptism that now saves you." The answer is connected with the explanation that follows, which speaks of "the pledge of a clear conscience toward God" (literally "of a good conscience"). While the discussion between the sacramental and baptist views is considered below, we will simply comment here that the interpretation "appeal *by* a good conscience" best fits the emphatic position of this phrase and the picture in this verse of a pledging convert. Baptism is the seal (or confirmation) of the salvation covenant, which itself has been accomplished beforehand by the act of Christ and the faith decision of the individual believer.

Baptism for the Dead

A custom of uncertain meaning, referred to once in the New Testament (1 Corinthians 15:29). Many interpretations have been suggested for this debated verse. The main questions are what the practice of baptism for the dead was and whether Paul approved of it.

Different Ways of Interpreting Baptism for the Dead

Most interpretations of the phrase "baptized for the dead" fall into one of three categories:

1. baptism used as a symbol
2. normal baptism
3. baptism on behalf of someone else

In Mark 10:38 and Luke 12:50, baptism is used as a symbol of suffering or martyrdom (dying for one's beliefs). Some scholars think "baptism for the dead" means martyrdom and would translate it as "being baptized with a view to death."

Many people think it means being baptized for oneself. Martin Luther thought it meant baptizing over the tombs of the dead. John Calvin believed it referred to Christians who wanted baptism because they were close to dying. Others think it meant new believers were baptized because of the testimony of Christian martyrs or dead loved ones.

Did Paul Approve of Baptism for the Dead?

The most straightforward meaning of the words points to a practice of baptism on behalf of someone else. The phrase seems to indicate that some people in Corinth would get baptized on behalf of dead people. The Corinthians might have had a magical view of baptism, which could explain why Paul downplayed his role as a baptizer (1 Corinthians 1:14–17).

Paul compared the Corinthians' experience to that of Israel in the wilderness (1 Corinthians 10:1–13). He described how the Israelites crossed the Red Sea and gathered manna. These events remind us of baptism and the Lord's Supper. Paul reminded his readers that neither of these dramatic experiences kept the Israelites from sinning. Some Corinthians might have thought that participating in Christian ceremonies like baptism would automatically save them. If so, those who practiced baptism on behalf of someone else probably believed the rite helped the dead.

Did Paul approve of the practice of baptism for the dead? Probably not. In the arguments for the resurrection of the dead in 1 Corinthians 15:29–34, Paul did not say he approved of this practice. Instead, he used it to make a point. He said that if there is no resurrection of the dead, then baptizing for the dead does not make sense.

Baptism of Fire

A metaphor used by John the Baptist. John was looking for someone who would "baptize...with the Holy Spirit and with fire" (Matthew 3:11; Luke 3:16). In this context, fire means judgment, which would purify those who repent (compare Isaiah 4:4; Malachi 3:2–3) and destroy those who do not (Malachi 4:1; Matthew 3:10, 12).

The prophets and writers of apocalyptic texts often talked about a time of trouble and suffering needed before the new age could come. They called this time "the messianic woes," "the birth pangs of the Messiah," "a river of fire." Similar ideas to John's can be found in Isaiah 30:27–28 and in the non-biblical text 2 Esdras 13:10–11. John the Baptist likely used these ideas and expressed them through his act of baptism. His phrase "baptize in fire" probably meant the purifying judgment that would bring about the new age and bring people into it.

The Bible does not mention baptism of fire again. The gospels of Mark and John shorten John the Baptist's preaching and leave out any mention of judgment. After Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit came to Jesus's followers, John's water baptism is seen as fulfilled in baptism in the Holy Spirit. However, Jesus seemed to share John's belief in a fiery purification (Mark 9:49). He referred to his own death as a baptism and likely included this fire (Luke 12:49–50). Jesus's death is seen as enduring the fiery baptism for others.

Paul the apostle also speaks of baptism into Christ as a baptism into Christ's death (Romans 6:3). Thus, John's idea of a purifying baptism of fire for those who repent is most closely fulfilled when believers unite with Christ in his death and share in his sufferings. Only then can they fully share in Christ's risen glory (Romans 6:5; 8:17–23; Philippians 3:10–11).

See also Baptism; Baptism of the Spirit.

Baptism of Jesus

Major event in Jesus' life, which marked the beginning of his ministry. The fact that John the Baptist baptized Jesus is disputed by very few scholars today, but the purpose and significance of Jesus' baptism remain controversial.

The Gospel accounts agree that John's baptism was a baptism of repentance (Mt 3:6–10; Mk 1:4–5; Lk 3:3–14). He proclaimed that the kingdom of heaven was at hand and that God's people should prepare for the Lord's coming by a renewal of faith toward God. For John, that meant repentance, confession of sins, and practicing righteousness. That being so, why was Jesus baptized? If Jesus was sinless, as the NT proclaims (2 Cor 5:21; Heb 4:15; 1 Pt 2:22), why did he submit to a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins? The Gospels provide the answers.

The Gospel of Mark

Mark presents the baptism of Jesus as a necessary preparation for his period of temptation and

ministry. At his baptism Jesus received the Father's approval and the bestowal of the Holy Spirit (1:9–11). Mark's focus on Jesus' special relation to the Father, "You are my beloved Son, and I am fully pleased with you" (1:11, nlt), brings together two important OT references. Jesus' messiahship is presented in a radically new way, in which the ruling Messiah (Ps 2:7) is also the Suffering Servant of the Lord (Is 42:1). Popular Jewish belief expected a ruling Messiah who would establish the kingdom of God, not a Messiah who would suffer for the people. Mark intended to show that in Jesus alone had God's appointed time for the fulfillment of his purpose come.

The statement that the heavens opened at the baptism of Jesus (Mk 1:10) may proclaim the arrival of the "end times" (the time of fulfillment and the establishment of God's kingdom). A then-current Jewish interpretation of Isaiah 64:1 held that in the last days God would open the heavens and come down to his people. In Jewish thought the rending of the heavens was also associated with hearing God's voice and the bestowal of God's Spirit.

The Gospel of Matthew

Matthew's account of Jesus' baptism has more detail than Mark's. It begins by noting John's reluctance to baptize Jesus (3:14). John was persuaded only after Jesus explained to him that the act was "fitting for us to fulfil all righteousness" (3:15, rsv). Although the full meaning of those words is uncertain, they at least suggest that Jesus' baptism was necessary to accomplish God's will. In both the Old and New Testaments (Ps 98:2–3; Rom 1:17) God's righteousness is seen in his salvation for his people. That is why the Messiah can be called "The Lord Is Our Righteousness" (Jer 23:6; cf. Is 11:1–5). Jesus told John that his baptism was necessary to do God's will in bringing about salvation for his people. Thus the Father's declaration at Jesus' baptism is presented in the form of a public announcement, emphasizing that Jesus was God's anointed Servant about to begin his ministry as the bringer of the Lord's salvation.

The Gospel of Luke

Luke passes over Jesus' baptism quickly, placing it alongside the baptism of others who came to John (3:21–22). The context in Luke also sheds some light on the purpose of Jesus' baptism. Luke, unlike Matthew, places the genealogy of Jesus after his baptism and just before his ministry begins. The parallel to Moses, whose genealogy occurs just before his primary work begins (Ex 6:14–25), seems more than coincidental. It is probably intended to illustrate Jesus' role in bringing deliverance (salvation) to God's people just as Moses did in the OT. At his baptism, by the descent of the Holy Spirit upon him, Jesus was equipped to do the mission God had called him to do. Following his temptation (Lk 4:1–13), Jesus entered the synagogue and declared to the people that he had been anointed by the Spirit to proclaim good news (4:16–21). That anointing came at Jesus' baptism (cf. Acts 10:37–38).

In his Gospel account, Luke tried to identify Jesus with the common people—for example, in the birth story (with Jesus born in a stable and visited by lowly shepherds, Lk 2:8–20) and through placing the genealogy (stressing Jesus' relation to all of humanity, 3:38) right after the baptism. Thus, Luke saw the baptism as Jesus' first step in identifying himself with those he had come to save.

In the OT the Messiah was always inseparable from the people he represented (see especially Jer 30:21 and Ez 45–46). Although the "servant" in Isaiah is sometimes viewed corporately (Is 44:1) and sometimes individually (53:3), he is always viewed as the representative *of the people* to the Lord (49:5–26), as well as the servant *of the Lord.*

Evidently Luke, along with Mark and Matthew, was trying to show that Jesus, as the divine representative of the people, had identified himself with them in his baptism.

The Gospel of John

The fourth Gospel does not say that Jesus was baptized but does say that John the Baptist saw the Spirit descend upon Jesus (Jn 1:32–34). The account emphasizes that Jesus went to John during John's preaching and baptizing ministry; John recognized that Jesus was the Christ, that God's Spirit was upon him, and that he was the Son of God. John also recognized that Jesus, unlike himself, baptized with the Holy Spirit (1:29–36).

John the Baptist described Jesus as the "Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (1:29, nlt). The closest OT parallel to that statement comes from a "servant of the Lord" passage (Is 53:6–7). It is possible that "Lamb of God" could be an alternate translation of the Aramaic term "servant of God."

The sense of Jesus as the one who bears the sins of the people is obviously in view in the fourth Gospel.

That Jesus was the promised representative and deliverer of the people was understood by John the Baptist and conveyed by the Gospel writer.

Conclusion

In the four Gospels it is clear that the Holy Spirit came upon Jesus at his baptism to enable him to do the work of God. All four Gospel writers saw that Jesus had been anointed by God to accomplish his mission of bringing salvation to the people. Those ideas provide a key to understanding why Jesus was baptized. On that occasion at the beginning of his ministry, God anointed Jesus with the Holy Spirit to do his mediating work between God and the people. At his baptism Jesus was identified as the one who would bear the people's sins; Jesus was baptized to identify himself with sinful people.

See also Jesus Christ.

Baptism of the Spirit

"Baptism of the Spirit" is a phrase that many people use when talking about Christian experiences. But, this exact phrase is not found in the Bible. Instead, the New Testament always uses phrases like "baptize in the Spirit" or "baptized in the Spirit." These phrases describe an action or experience, which gives them a more active meaning than the noun phrase "baptism of the Spirit."

What Does "Baptism of the Spirit" Mean?

The phrase seems to have been coined by John the Baptist. He said, "I baptize you with water for repentance, but after me will come One more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire" (see Matthew 3:11; Luke 3:16; but Mark 1:8 and John 1:33 omit the words "and fire"). The phrase is clearly a metaphor. It stands in contrast to and as the fulfillment of John's water baptism. It is a metaphor for *judgment.* The context in Matthew and Luke makes this clear.

Cleansing and Judgment in Jewish Thought

In Jewish thought, there were several familiar ideas about how God would cleanse or judge people:

1. Cleansing by fire: People imagined being purified or destroyed by a river of fire.
2. Cleansing by spirit: They thought of being cleaned by a spirit.
3. Cleansing by God's breath: They pictured being purified by the fiery breath of God.

It is important to know that in Hebrew, the words for "breath" and "spirit" are the same. We can find these ideas in parts of the Bible like Isaiah 4:4, Isaiah 30:27–28, and Daniel 7:10.

This cleansing is not just about judgment. It is also about God's kindness. The process of cleaning, like separating wheat from unwanted parts, leads to something good. After the cleaning, the good grain (representing God's people) is safely stored (Matthew 3:11–12).

It is also a metaphor for *initiation* or the start of something new. John the Baptist's variation on "the messianic woes." This is a way of describing the expectation that the messianic age when God's chosen leader (the Messiah) would rule. Many Jewish people believed that before the Messiah came, there would be a difficult period of suffering and troubles. This belief about hard times before the Messiah's coming is found in several places in the Bible and other ancient Jewish writings, such as:

- Daniel 7:19–22; 12:1
- Zechariah 14:12–15
- 1 Enoch 100:1–3

Baptism of the Spirit in the New Testament

In the book of Acts, the metaphor continues to mean the start of something new, just as John the Baptist taught. Acts 2:4 fulfills the promise of Acts 1:5. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit was seen as *the* mark of "the last days" (Isaiah 44:3; Ezekiel 39:29; Joel 2:28–29). So, it was by being baptized in Spirit that the disciples *began* to experience the last days for themselves (Acts 2:1–7, 18).

Acts 11:17 speaks of Pentecost as the occasion when they came to believe in Jesus Christ as Lord. Similarly, the apostle Paul sees the gift of the Holy Spirit as the beginning of the Christian experience (2 Corinthians 1:22; Galatians 3:3). So "if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ" (Romans 8:9). By being baptized in the Spirit, Cornelius and his friends received the forgiveness and salvation that Peter promised them (Acts 10:43–45; 11:13–18). "Baptized in

Spirit" is there synonymous with "granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life" (11:18) and "cleansed their hearts by faith" (15:8–9). *See* Baptism; Baptism of Fire; Spiritual Gifts.

Bar

A term used in Aramaic for a close family relationship. For example, Simon Bar-Jona means "Simon, son of John."

See also Ben (Noun).

Bar-Jesus

A Jewish sorcerer and a "false prophet" (someone who falsely claimed to speak for God). He worked with the governor of Paphos on the island of Cyprus (Acts 13:6). When the governor, Sergius Paulus, became interested in the message of Paul and Barnabas, Bar-Jesus tried to turn him away from their teachings. Paul confronted Bar-Jesus, calling him a "son of the devil" and predicting that he would be temporarily blinded as a punishment from God. Immediately, Bar-Jesus was struck with blindness (Acts 13:7–12). The governor seems to have converted to Christianity.

At that time, many people who easily believed in supernatural events were influenced by those who claimed to have special powers like Bar-Jesus (compare Acts 8:9–11). The term "sorcerer" used for him meant more than just magician; it often referred to a wise man whose knowledge was thought to be greater than that of most others in society.

Bar-Jesus was also known by his Greek name, Elymas (Acts 13:8). Jewish people with connections to Greek culture often adopted Greek names. Some believe that Elymas comes from an Aramaic word for "strong" and an Arabic word for "wise," which can also mean "magician."

Bar-Jona

The Aramaic form of Simon Peter's last name, meaning "son of Jonah" (Matthew 16:17). Another verson of the name appears in John 1:42 and 21:15–17, where the best Greek texts have "son of John" rather than "son of Jona[s]."

See Simon Peter.

Bar-Kochba, Bar-Kokba

A hero of the second Jewish revolt against Rome. This revolt happend from AD 132 to 135, during the last years of Emperor Hadrian's rule. Jewish sources call him Bar (or Ben) Koziba, meaning "son of a star." The exact reasons for the rebellion are unclear, but include:

- Hadrian's construction of a pagan (non-Jewish) city on the site of Jerusalem (which had been destroyed in AD 70).
- The building of a temple to the Roman god Jupiter on the site of the Jewish temple.
- Hadrian's ban on circumcision (the religious practice of removing the foreskin from male babies).

Even with possible legends surrounding him, it is clear that Simeon Ben Koziba, called president or prince of Israel, fought bravely and led his men fiercely against the Romans. This led to heavy Roman casualties and brutal punishments. Third-century Roman historian Dio Cassius reported that the Romans destroyed 50 fortresses and 985 Jewish settlements during the war. They killed 580,000 in battle and left many to die from sickness and starvation. Judea was almost depopulated (most people were killed or forced to leave). Bar Kokhba himself was killed at the end of a long siege at Bethera (Bethar) near Jerusalem in AD 135.

During the struggle, Jews had to hide in caves and other places. This led to discoveries that confirmed Bar Kokhba's historical existence. The first Bar Kokhba letters were found in 1951 in a cave in Wadi Murabba'at, 17.7 kilometers (11 miles) south of Qumran, on the Jordanian side of the Judean wilderness. In 1960–61, Israelis exploring caves south of En-gedi in Nahal Hever found personal belongings of refugees, letters written by Bar Kokhba, and many documents related to his government. Coins from the Bar Kokhba revolt were also found at the Herodium near Bethlehem and at Masada, showing that Bar Kokhba's forces used these places as forts.

Bar-Koziba

The original name of Simeon Bar-Kochba, the leader of the Jewish revolt against the Romans in Palestine during the reign of Emperor Hadrian.

See Bar-Kochba, Bar-Kokba.

Barabbas

A criminal who was released instead of Jesus. All four gospel writers took note of that event (Matthew 27:15–26; Mark 15:6–15; Luke 23:18–25; John 18:39–40). The apostle Peter also mentioned it in his temple sermon (Acts 3:14).

Barabbas was known as a bandit or revolutionary (John 18:40) and had been imprisoned for murder during a rebellion (Mark 15:7; Luke 23:19). The word translated "robber" in John 18:40 can refer to either a bandit or revolutionary. He was a well-known prisoner (Matthew 27:16). His crime could have been a violent robbery or a political revolt against the Roman authorities in Jerusalem. Many scholars think Barabbas might have been a member of the Zealots, a Jewish group that sought to overthrow Roman rule through violence.

Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor, found Jesus innocent and wanted to release Him. However, Pilate also needed to keep the Jewish leaders happy to protect his own position. To resolve this, he offered to release one prisoner to the crowd during the Passover festival (John 18:39). Pilate assumed the crowd would choose to free Jesus, but he misjudged their mood or the influence of the Jewish leaders, or both. Instead, the crowd demanded Barabbas be released and Jesus be crucified (Matthew 27:21–22). As a result, Jesus was crucified, and Barabbas, after being freed, disappeared from both the Bible and historical records.

Barachel

Barachel was the father of Elihu. He is described as a Buzite (Job 32:2, 6; compare Genesis 22:21; Jeremiah 25:23). Elihu tried to counsel Job after the failed attempts by Job's three older friends.

Barachiah, Barachias

The name given to Zechariah's father in the New Testament (Matthew 23:35). Zechariah was executed in the temple by order of King Joash, but was said to be the son of Jehoiada (2 Chronicles 24:20–22). "Son of Barachiah" might be a copyist's addition, since in a similar passage in Luke's Gospel (Luke 11:51) the name does not appear in the most reliable manuscripts. A copyist may have confused the martyred Zechariah with the prophet Zechariah, whose father was Berechiah (Zechariah 1:1, 7).

Barak

The son of Abinoam of Kedesh in Naphtali (Judges 4:6; 5:1). He was a partner of the prophetess Deborah. Barak led an army of Israel that defeated the forces of Jabin, king of the Canaanites (Judges 4). Barak is one of the heroes of faith listed in the New Testament (Hebrews 11:32).

See Deborah #2; Judges, Book of.

Barakel

Another way of spelling Barachel, the father of Elihu.

See Barachel.

Barbarian

A foreigner, especially someone from a culture not considered advanced or developed. The Greek word "*barbarous*," which we translate as "barbarian," originally came from the repeated nonsense sound "*bar-bar*." This sound imitates the unfamiliar sounds of foreign languages. The Greeks saw themselves as the most cultured people and used the term to describe anyone who was not Greek. The Romans, who adopted Greek culture and saw themselves as equal to the Greeks, also used "barbarian" to refer to people who did not share their languages or customs.

In the New Testament, the word "barbarian" shows its different meanings. The relationship to language is evident in a statement about speaking in tongues the Holy Spirit. In 1 Corinthians 14:11, Paul mentions that if a Christian's spiritual language is not understood, it would make the

speaker a "barbarian" to Paul and vice versa. In Acts 28:2–4, Luke describes the people of Malta as "barbarous," but this was not meant to be insulting. Instead, it highlighted their kindness to Paul after his shipwreck.

Paul also used the term in a broader Greek-Roman sense, stating that he was in debt to both Greeks and barbarians (Romans 1:14). Paul emphasized that the gospel of Jesus Christ is for everyone, saying, "Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, or free, but Christ is all and is in all" (Colossians 3:11).

Barhumite

The King James Version form for a person from the village of Bahurim (2 Samuel 23:31).

See Baharum, Baharumite, Bahurim.

Bariah

Shemaiah's son, a descendant of King David (1 Chronicles 3:22).

Barkos

An ancestor of a group of temple servants who returned to Jerusalem with Zerubbabel after the exile in Babylon (Ezra 2:53; Nehemiah 7:55).

Barley

A grain plant that produces edible seeds. It has spikes of flowers with bristly hairs. Common barley (*Hordeum distichon*), winter barley (*Hordeum hexastichon*), and spring barley (*Hordeum vulgare*) have been grown in mild climate regions since ancient times. Barley was an important food in Bible lands and remains a major grain crop today.

Barley and wheat were the two main cereal crops of Egypt and Israel and the surrounding areas. Because barley was less expensive than wheat, people often used it to feed animals. However, people also ate barley, either by itself or mixed with wheat and other seeds (Ezekiel 4:9–12). The Bible mentions barley more than 30 times as a common food. Since barley cost less than wheat, it became a symbol of poverty (Hosea 3:2).

See Agriculture; Food and Food Preparation.

Barn Owl, White Owl

The barn owl (*Tyto alba*) is a large owl known for its heart-shaped face. Some people call it the "snoring owl" because of the sound it makes when breathing in its nest. Others call it the "screech owl" because of its loud, frightening cry when it flies.

Its big head and wide eyes have made some people think it looks scary or even evil. Because of its face, others call it the "monkey-faced owl."

Even though some people think this owl looks strange, it is a helpful bird. It hunts and eats rodents (like rats and mice) that ruin crops and eat stored food. This makes the barn owl good for farmers.

Like other owls, the barn owl sleeps during the day and hunts at night. It has very good hearing and eyesight, which help it catch prey in the dark.

The barn owl has light brownish-yellow feathers. Its face is white, and there is a white "mask" around its eyes and cheeks. Its legs are fully covered in feathers. These feathers help protect the owl from bites when it catches prey with its sharp claws (called talons).

Barn Owls in the Bible

Some modern Bible translations mention the barn or white owl by name (Leviticus 11:17–18; Deuteronomy 14:16). These owls are listed as unclean birds in Jewish law, meaning they were not allowed to be eaten.

See also Birds; Owl.

Barnabas

Barnabas was an early Christian convert in Jerusalem. He was originally named Joseph. Barnabas earned his new name through his influential preaching and teaching.

Background and Early Life

We learn most about Barnabas from the book of Acts and Paul's letters in the Bible. The "Epistle of Barnabas," written in the mid-second century, is not from him. Likewise, the "Acts of Barnabas," a fifth-century text, does not provide reliable information about him. Tertullian mistakenly

claimed Hebrews was written by Barnabas, but this claim lacks supporting evidence.

Barnabas was a Jew from Cyprus. He came from a family of priests, which likely influenced his interest in Jerusalem. He probably moved to Jerusalem and may have met Jesus, but his conversion to Christianity was likely through the apostles' teaching after Christ's resurrection.

Missionary Journeys with Paul

Barnabas first appears in Acts as Joseph, who sold a field and donated the money to the Christian community (Acts 4:36–37). When persecution hit Jerusalem and people were attacked for their beliefs, Barnabas stayed in the city, unlike others who fled (Acts 8:1–8; 11:19–22). His good reputation may have led the apostles to choose him as a companion for Paul's missionary work (to spread the gospel).

As Christians fled to Antioch in Syria, the Jerusalem church sent Barnabas there to assist with the growing Christian community (Acts 11:19–26). The writer of Acts said that Barnabas "was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith" (Acts 11:24). Barnabas recruited Paul to help in Antioch. They worked together for a year, teaching many Christians (Acts 11:26). During a famine in Jerusalem, Barnabas and Paul took relief funds back to the city, and John Mark joined them on their return to Antioch (Acts 12:25).

Barnabas and Paul were later sent to spread the Christian message beyond Antioch (Acts 13:2–3). At this point, Barnabas's name is listed first, possibly indicating his leading role. They traveled to Cyprus and several key locations in Asia Minor. In Lystra, the people mistook Barnabas for the god Zeus and Paul for Hermes (Acts 14:8–12). This shows how impressive they seemed to the people there.

Barnabas and Paul Separate

At a Jerusalem council, Barnabas and Paul reported on their mission to the gentiles (Acts 15). Following that council, as the two men planned another mission, a serious disagreement arose that led to their separation (Acts 15:36–41). Barnabas wanted to take his cousin John Mark (Colossians 4:10), but Paul refused because Mark had deserted them on the earlier mission (Acts 13:13). Barnabas and John Mark went to Cyprus, while Paul traveled with Silas to Syria and Cilicia. After this split, the focus of the narrative shifts from Barnabas to Paul.

See also Apocrypha (Barnabas, Epistle of).

Barodis

An ancestor of a group of people who returned to Jerusalem with Zerubbabel after the exile in Babylon (1 Esdras 5:34). The name Barodis does not appear in the similar lists of returnees in Ezra 2:55–57 or Nehemiah 7:57–59).

Barrenness

The condition of being barren (unable to have children) or childless.

A closed womb was seen as a personal tragedy. After the flood, God commanded people to "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth" (Genesis 9:1). Later, Jeremiah gave similar advice (Jeremiah 29:6). A barren wife in a polygamous marriage (where a man has multiple wives) could be ridiculed or extreme jealousy (Genesis 16:4; Jeremiah 30:1). The pressure to have children for her husband was so intense that a barren wife might offer her husband a surrogate mother (a woman who would have a baby for the couple; Genesis 16:1–2; 30:3). If a husband died without children, his brother was expected to have children with his wife on his behalf (Genesis 38:8).

Barrenness could be a curse or a divine punishment (Hosea 9:11, 14; Genesis 20:17–18). It could be removed after earnest prayers (Genesis 25:21; 1 Samuel 1:16, 20). It could also be removed by God's prophet or messenger (2 Kings 4:16; Genesis 18:14).

In one story, a wife who had stopped having children traded mandrakes (a plant believed to help with fertility) for the chance to sleep with her husband and had three more children (Genesis 30:14–21). God promised that if Israel obeyed His laws, they would not experience infertility (inability to have children; Deuteronomy 7:14). Unusually, ancient texts also considered that barrenness could result from male infertility. Lastly, despite how bad barrenness was, Jesus told the women of Jerusalem that it would be better than the suffering they were about to face (Luke 23:29). He was teaching that physical problems are not as important as spiritual ones.

Barsabas, Barsabbas

A biblical last name. Barsabas means "son of Saba" in Aramaic. Barsabbas, "son of the Sabbath," is the used as the spelling in modern translations. Two people in the New Testament have this last name: Joseph Barsabbas and Judas Barsabbas (Acts 1:23; 15:22).

See Joseph #12; Judas #6.

Bartholomew, the Apostle

A disciple of Jesus included in all four lists of the 12 apostles (Matthew 10:2–4; Mark 3:16–19; Luke 6:14–16; Acts 1:13). However, he is not mentioned elsewhere in the New Testament, and nothing specific is said about him in these lists. The name "Bartholomew" means "son of Tolmai," which suggests he might have also had another name.

In the lists in Matthew, Mark, and Luke (the synoptic Gospels), Bartholomew is listed right after Philip. This has led some to speculate that he might be the Nathanael mentioned in John's Gospel (John 1:45–50). This Nathanael was brought to Jesus by Philip and appears to be linked with some of the disciples (John 21:2). The Gospel of John may have referred to the apostle Bartholomew by another name. However, we do not know if John meant that Nathanael was one of the twelve apostles when he wrote about him.

An early church historian named Eusebius recorded a tradition that Pantaenus, the first leader of the catechetical school (for teaching Christian beliefs) in Alexandria around AD 180, traveled to India and found Christians there who knew the Gospel of Matthew in Hebrew letters. Eusebius suggested that Bartholomew had preached to them and left them the Gospel of Matthew. Other traditions say that Bartholomew worked alongside Philip and Thomas in spreading Christianity and was martyred in Armenia.

Several writings have been falsely attributed to Bartholomew. Jerome, a writer from the fourth century, mentioned a Gospel of Bartholomew, and a few other sources also refer to it. There are also mentions of the Questions of Bartholomew, the Book of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ by Bartholomew, and other texts like the Acts of Bartholomew and the Apocalypse of Bartholomew. However, none of these writings are considered genuine.

See also Apostle, Apostleship; Apocrypha (several titles attributed to Bartholomew).

Bartimaeus

Timaeus's son, a blind beggar who called out to Jesus as he left Jericho on his final journey to Jerusalem (Mark 10:46–52). Seeing Bartimaeus's faith, Jesus healed his blindness.

Baruch

1. Neriah's son, Baruch. He was the secretary of the prophet Jeremiah. In the fourth year of King Jehoiakim of Judah, Baruch wrote down Jeremiah's prophecy about the evil that God would bring upon Judah if the nation did not repent (Jeremiah 36:4). This happened sometime between 605 and 604 BC. God also gave Baruch a special message through Jeremiah about being humble in service (Jeremiah 45).
Baruch read Jeremiah's prophecy to the people and the leaders (Jeremiah 36:9–19). When King Jehoiakim heard the message, he destroyed the scroll and ordered the arrest of Baruch and Jeremiah (Jeremiah 21–26). While in hiding, Baruch again wrote down Jeremiah's prediction of Judah's destruction (Jeremiah 27–32). Baruch was the brother of Seraiah, a close associate of King Zedekiah. Later, Nebuchadnezzar took Seraiah to Babylon with the king. In 587 BC, Nebuchadnezzar surrounded the city to attack it (this happened a year before the final destruction of Jerusalem). Jeremiah bought a field to symbolize Israel's future restoration. He ordered Baruch to keep the purchase documents safe (Jeremiah 32:12–15).
Two months after Jerusalem's destruction in 586 BC, some rebellious Jews killed Gedaliah. He was the Babylonian-appointed governor of Judah. The Jews had planned to escape to Egypt. Jeremiah advised them to stay in Jerusalem, but the rebels blamed Baruch for influencing Jeremiah and forced both of them to go to Egypt (Jeremiah 43:1–7).
The Bible does not mention the final events in Baruch's life. The Jewish historian Josephus wrote that when Nebuchadnezzar invaded Egypt, Baruch was taken to Babylon. The apocryphal book of Baruch (not

included in some Bibles) starts by saying the author was in Babylon (Baruch 1:1–3). However, both accounts may not be accurate based on historical evidence.

2. Zabbai's son, also named Baruch. He was involved in the rebuilding of Jerusalem's wall around 445 BC under Nehemiah's supervision (Nehemiah 3:20).
3. An individual who signed Ezra's promise of faithfulness to God with Nehemiah and others after the exile in Babylon (Nehemiah 10:6). This person is possibly the same as #2 above.
4. Col-hozeh's son, and father of Maaseiah (Nehemiah 11:5).

Barzillai

1. One of three men who helped David and his supporters at Mahanaim during Absalom's rebellion (2 Samuel 17:27). After Absalom was defeated, Barzillai met David at the Jordan River as David was returning to Jerusalem. Although Barzillai, who was 80 years old, declined David's offer to stay permanently in Jerusalem, he sent his son Chimham instead (2 Samuel 19:31–40; compare 1 Kings 2:7).
2. Adriel's father. Adriel married Saul's daughter Merab (2 Samuel 21:8; compare 1 Samuel 18:19). As a result, Barzillai was the grandfather of five of the seven men hanged in Gibeon to make up for Saul's wrongdoing against the Gibeonites (2 Samuel 21:1–9).
3. A priest who married the daughter or descendant of the #1 and took on his family name. This priest's descendants returned to Jerusalem in 538 BC with Zerubbabel after the exile in Babylon. However, they were not made priests because they could not prove their ancestry (Ezra 2:61; Nehemiah 7:63).

Basemath

1. Daughter of Elon the Hittite. Basemath was a Canaanite woman whom Esau married against his parents' wishes (Gn 26:34). Basemath may be the same as Elon's daughter Adah, or perhaps was her sister (36:2).

2. Ishmael's daughter, who married Esau (Gn 36:3) and bore Reuel to him (vv 4, 10). This Basemath is probably the same as Ishmael's daughter Mahalath (28:9). Since Ishmael was the son of the patriarch Abraham, this marriage would have been more acceptable to Isaac and Rebekah (36:6–8).

See also Mahalath (Person) #1.

Identifications of #1 and #2 above are somewhat confused. Most scholars suspect that Esau married Elon's daughter Adah (Gn 36:2–4), who was also called Basemath (26:34). Later, Esau married Ishmael's daughter Mahalath (28:9), who was likewise called Basemath (36:3–4). That two of Esau's wives should be named Basemath could be because Esau chose to give both the same affectionate name, which means "fragrant."

3. King Solomon's daughter who married Ahimaaz, the king's administrator in Naphtali (1 Kgs 4:15).

Bashan

A region located east and northeast of the Sea of Galilee. Its exact boundaries are unclear, but it extended about 35 to 40 miles (55 to 64 kilometers) from the foot of Mount Hermon in the north to the Yarmuk River in the south. It stretched around 60 to 70 miles (97 to 113 kilometers) eastward from the Sea of Galilee.

The region (also called "Hauran," in Ezekiel 47:16, 18) is mostly a fertile tableland 1,600 to 2,300 feet (488 to 701 meters) above sea level. Its rich volcanic soil is well watered because the low hills

of southern Galilee to the west allow rains to reach farther inland than in most other places along the Palestinian coast. Today, as in ancient times, it is a productive agricultural region. In New Testament times, it was a grain-producing area of the Roman Empire. Bashan was known for its high-quality cattle and sheep (Dt 32:14; Ez 39:18; Am 4:1).

In the patriarch Abraham's day, Bashan's inhabitants were giantlike people called Rephaim (Genesis 14:5). Og, the last of the Rephaim, was an enemy of the Israelites when they were trying to enter Canaan after leaving Egypt and wandering in the wilderness (Deuteronomy 29:7). Og was defeated and killed by the Israelites (Numbers 21:33–35).

Bashan's prosperity at that time is shown by the fact that one of its provinces, Argob, had 60 large walled cities (Deuteronomy 3:4–5). The main cities of Bashan were:

- Edrei
- Ashtaroth
- Golan
- Salecah

After the Israelites conquered the land east of the Jordan River, Bashan was given to the half-tribe of Manasseh (Joshua 13:29–30). Golan and Ashtaroth, two cities in Bashan, were set aside for the Levites (1 Chronicles 6:71). Ben-geber of Ramoth-gilead managed Argob, a region in Bashan, for King Solomon (1 Kings 4:13).

In the days of Jehu (841–814 BC), King Hazael of Syria conquered the area (2 Kings 10:33). Tiglath-pileser III later incorporated Bashan into the Assyrian Empire in the eighth century BC (2 Kings 15:29). The Nabateans held it in the second century BC, and Herod the Great (37–4 BC) ruled over it at the time of Jesus's birth.

Bashan-Havoth-Jair

The King James Version translation in Deuteronomy 3:14 for Havvoth-jair. These were 60 villages in the region of Bashan.

See Havoth-jair, Havvoth-jair.

Bashemath

1. KJV form of Basemath, one of Esau's wives, in Genesis 26:34. *See* Basemath #1.

2. KJV form of Basemath, another of Esau's wives in Genesis 36:3, known also as Mahalath. *See* Mahalath (Person) #1.

Basilisk

A word used in two passages of some translations (Proverbs 23:32; Isaiah 14:29). "Basilisk" refers to a kind of lizard. It is a mistranslation. It has been corrected to read "adder" or "viper" in more recent translations.

Baskama

A site where Trypho, commander of the Seleucid army, killed his captive, Jonathan Maccabeus. Trypho was holding Jonathan hostage, and when Jonathan was no longer useful, Trypho killed him (1 Maccabees 12:42–13:23).

It is unclear where Baskama is located. The most popular suggestion is modern-day Tell el-Jummeizeh ("sycamore tree"), which is near the northeast shore of the Sea of Galilee. El-Jummeizeh might be related to Baskama, which can mean "house of the sycamore." Ancient ruins there might have been a shrine to Jonathan, a great hero. The Jewish historian Josephus calls the spot Basaca.

Basmath

Another spelling of Basemath, King Solomon's daughter, in 1 Kings 4:15.

See Basemath #3.

Bat

A mouselike flying mammal with a furry body and wings.

According to modern definitions, bats are flying mammals. They have hair and make milk for their babies. But the Bible groups them with other flying animals, like birds. The bat is included in the two lists of unclean birds (Leviticus 11:19; Deuteronomy 14:18).

Bats live in caves, crevices, holes in trees, buildings, and even open spots on trees. In colder areas, they sleep for long periods (hibernate) or travel elsewhere. The normal resting position for a bat is hanging head downward. When bats fly, it looks as though they are swimming through the air because they move with their legs as well as with their wings.

The bat's thumb is free and ends in a single hook claw. It is used for climbing and hanging. The hind feet have five toes, all facing the same way. The large chest has space for muscles needed for flying. Their hearing is well-developed. Bats use sound to see, which is called "echo location."

Most bats eat insects, catching them in flight. Some insect-eating bats also consume fruit. Other bats, however, eat only fruit and plants, usually in groups. Fruit bats mainly live in tropical areas where fruit is always ripe. A few, though, are found in the holy land. These bats are typically larger than insect-eating ones, with wingspans reaching up to one and a half meters (five feet).

A third group includes flower-eating bats that feed on pollen and nectar. These small bats have long, pointed heads and long tongues. They are found only in tropical and semitropical regions. Three species of vampire bats, which do not occur in the holy land, eat blood by making a small cut and lapping it up. Meat-eating bats hunt birds, lizards, and frogs. Fish-eating bats catch fish at or near the surface of the water.

Eight kinds of bats live in the holy land. One of them, the little brown bat (genus *Myotis*), lives everywhere in the world, the most locations behind humans. It eats insects. Brown bats mostly live in caves. The females form maternity colonies of up to tens of thousands.

Two species of mouse-tailed bats (genus *Rhinopoma*) live in the holy land. Their tails are nearly as long as the head and body combined. They live in colonies in caves, rock clefts, wells, pyramids, palaces, and houses. Like the brown bat, they eat insects. The slit-faced or hollow-faced bats (genus *Nycteris*) also live in the holy land. They are insects and live in groups of six to 20.

Bats in Israel and Palestine range in size from a mouse to a rat. The largest species has a wingspan of over 51 centimeters (20 inches). Bats were considered ritually unclean to the Jews and were not to be eaten (Leviticus 11:19; Deuteronomy 14:18).

Bath

A unit of liquid measure in the Old Testament (Ezekiel 45:10–11). It is equal to about six gallons or 23 liters.

See Weights and Measures.

Bath-Rabbim, Gate of

A gate in the city of Heshbon that was near several pools of clear water. Song of Solomon 7:4 describes a young woman's eyes as being like those pools.

Bathe, Bathing

To cleanse as with water or to wash oneself. In the Bible the terms "bathing" and "washing" translate, often interchangeably, several different words. One Old Testament passage uses one Hebrew word for cleaning clothes, and another for washing other objects, including the body (Leviticus 15:8–12).

Israel's dry climate and scarcity of water discouraged bathing except where a stream or pool was available (2 Kings 5:10; John 9:7). Yet people still washed babies at birth (Ezekiel 16:4), dead bodies in preparation for burial (Acts 9:37), and sheep for their shearing (Song of Solomon 6:6). Frequent bathing of the whole body was probably reserved for the rich (Exodus 2:5). But the prevalence of dust made frequent washing of the face, hands, and feet necessary (Genesis 18:4; 19:2; 24:32; 43:24; Judges 19:21; Song of Solomon 5:3). Good grooming for the privileged demanded washing of one's body before anointing with oil (Ruth 3:3; 2 Samuel 12:20; Ezekiel 23:41). A good host provided water for a guest's feet (Genesis 18:4; Judges 19:21; Luke 7:44; John 13:4–5). To wash someone's feet was the task of a servant. For anyone else to do so was a sign of humility (1 Samuel 25:41; Luke 7:44–47; John 13:3–16; 1 Timothy 5:10).

Most biblical references to washing or bathing deal with ritual cleansing. Priests and Levites were required to wash their clothes and faces, and sometimes bodies, before approaching the altar and on ceremonial occasions (Exodus 29:4; 30:19–21; 40:7, 12, 30–32; Numbers 8:21). Before a slain animal was sacrificed, its legs and intestines were washed (Leviticus 1:9, 13; 8:21; 9:14). Anyone who

was once unclean had to wash his or her clothes and bathe to be ritually pure (Leviticus 14:8–10; 15:5–11, 21–27). For example, a leper who was healed or someone who had experienced a genital discharge would be considered unclean and need to wash and bathe. Any garment that became polluted had to be ceremonially cleansed (Leviticus 6:27; 13:54).

"Washing" is also used figuratively for a cleansing from sin (Psalm 51:2; Isaiah 1:16; 4:4; Jeremiah 2:22; 4:14; 1 Corinthians 6:11; Hebrews 10:22).

Bathsheba

Uriah's wife. King David committed adultery with Bathsheba, and he later married her. Bathsheba, also spelled Bathshua, was the daughter of Ammiel or Eliam (2 Samuel 11:3). She was and possibly the granddaughter of Ahithophel, the king's adviser (2 Samuel 15:12; 23:34). Her Hittite husband was one of David's top military heroes (2 Samuel 23:39).

While Uriah was fighting under Joab, King David saw Bathsheba taking her evening bath. After learning her name and that her husband was away, David sent for her and slept with her (2 Samuel 11:1–4). When Bathsheba told David she was pregnant, David called Uriah back to Jerusalem. David was hoping Uriah would sleep with his wife and make the pregnancy seem legitimate. But Uriah, feeling still on duty, slept with the palace guard and did not go home (2 Samuel 11:5–13). Frustrated, David sent Uriah back to the front lines and ordered Joab to put Uriah in the fiercest battle, where he was killed (2 Samuel 11:14–25).

After Bathsheba's mourning period, David brought her to the palace as his seventh wife, and she bore him a child. The Lord sent the prophet Nathan to pronounce judgment on David's sin through a parable. Nathan prophesied a series of tragedies in David's household, starting with the death of Bathsheba's baby (2 Samuel 11:26–12:14). David confessed his sin and repented, but the baby became sick and died. Psalm 51 is David's psalm of repentance after Nathan confronted him about his adultery with Bathsheba and the murder of Uriah. David comforted Bathsheba, and they eventually had more children (2 Samuel 12:15–25).

David had 19 sons by his seven wives (1 Chronicles 3:1–9). Bathsheba had four sons:

- Shimea (also spelled Shammua, 2 Samuel 5:14; 1 Chronicles 14:4)
- Shobab
- Nathan
- Solomon

Nathan and Solomon are in the New Testament lists of Jesus's ancestors (Luke 3:31; Matthew 1:6). Bathsheba also appears in Matthew's list of Jesus's ancestors as "she who had been the wife of Uriah." Near the end of David's life, the prophet Nathan told Bathsheba that David's son Adonijah (by his wife Haggith) was planning to take the throne. Bathsheba and Nathan persuaded David to make Solomon king as he had promised (1 Kings 1).

See also David.

Bathshua

1. The Canaanite wife of Judah. She bore him three sons: Er, Onan, and Shelah (Genesis 38:2–5; 1 Chronicles 2:3).
2. An alternate spelling of Bathsheba in 1 Chronicles 3:5.
3. *See* Bathsheba.

Battering Ram

An ancient military machine with a heavy wooden beam used to batter down gates or walls. Some battering rams had a ram head made of iron at the end of the beam.

See Armor and Weapons.

Battle-Ax

A heavy ax with a wide blade used as a weapon of war.

See Armor and Weapons.

Battlement

A defensive wall with openings for shooting, typically found on top of a fortress, can also refer to a parapet or railing around any flat roof.

In the Near East, houses were often built with flat roofs, which were used for various purposes:

- Rahab hid two Israelite spies on her roof (Joshua 2:6)
- Saul slept on Samuel's roof (1 Samuel 9:25)
- King David, from his roof, saw Bathsheba taking a bath (2 Samuel 11:2)
- People celebrated on rooftops (Isaiah 22:1–2)
- Peter prayed on his roof (Acts 10:9)

With so much activity on rooftops, it is easy to understand the need for the law: "If you build a new house, you are to construct a railing around your roof, so that you do not bring bloodguilt on your house if someone falls from it" (Deuteronomy 22:8).

City walls often had battlements at gates and corners to defend against attacks. The Hebrew words for these fortifications are often translated as "towers" (2 Chronicles 26:15; Zephaniah 1:16).

Bavvai

An individual who managed the repair of a section of the Jerusalem wall under Nehemiah's supervision (Nehemiah 3:18). Bavvai was Henadad's son and the leader of half the district of Keilah, a town 17 miles, or 27.4 kilometers southwest of Jerusalem. Binnui (Nehemiah 3:24), who is also mentioned as Henadad's son (compare Ezra 3:9), might be a mistaken spelling of Bavvai, or the two may have been brothers.

See Binnui #4.

Bazlith, Bazluth

An accestor of a group of temple assistants returning to Jerusalem with Zerubbabel after the exile in Babylon (Ezra 2:52, he is called "Bazluth"; Nehemiah 7:54).

Bdellium

Bdellium is an aromatic gum resin that looks similar to myrrh. It comes from various trees of the *Commiphora* genus that grow in Africa and western Asia. Most scholars believe the bdellium mentioned in Genesis 2:12 and Numbers 11:7 comes from the *Commiphora africana*, a shrub that grows naturally in southern Arabia and northeastern Africa. This yellowish, transparent, fragrant resin looks like a pearl.

The Bible describes the manna gathered by the Israelites as having the same color as bdellium (Numbers 11:7). Bdellium is also mentioned along with gold and onyx stone found near the garden of Eden (Genesis 2:12). Because it appeared in this list of valuable items, people once thought bdellium might be pearl or a precious stone.

The *Commiphora* genus includes the plants that produce myrrh and possibly what the Bible calls "balm." Outside the Bible, an English plant expert described bdellium as an aromatic gum from a tree known in Persia and beyond. The Roman writer Pliny, who lived in the first century AD, also described bdellium as a waxy substance that resembled a pearl.

See also Balm; Myrrh.

Be-Eshterah

A city in the half-tribe of Manasseh that was given to the Levitical family of Gershonites in the dividing of the promised land (Joshua 21:27). The name is a shortened form for *Beth-ashtaroth* ("house or place of Ashtaroth"). It is probably the same as the city of Ashtaroth (1 Chronicles 6:71).

See Ashtaroth, Ashterathite; Levitical Cities.

Bealiah

A warrior from the tribe of Benjamin who joined David at Ziklag in his struggle against King Saul. Bealiah was one of David's archers and slingers who could shoot with both right and left hands (1 Chronicles 12:5).

Bealoth

1. A town on the border of Edom in the Negev Desert area (Joshua 15:24).
2. An administrative district in the time of King Solomon governed by Baana, Hushai's son (1 Kings 4:16).

Beam

1. A weaver's beam—a round wooden roller that cloth or carpet was wound around during the weaving process in Bible times. The spears of the giant Goliath (1 Samuel 17:7; 2 Samuel 21:19; 1 Chronicles 20:5) and an Egyptian killed by Benaiah, one of David's mighty men (1 Chronicles 11:23), were compared to a weaver's beam.
2. A tree trunk or log that has been cut and used for building purposes. King Solomon used cedar beams and planks to build the temple (1 Kings 6:9; 2 Chronicles 3:7) and his "House of the Forest of Lebanon" (1 Kings 7:2, 12). Another mention of cedar beams probably refers to their aroma (Song of Solomon 1:17).
3. The crossbeam of a Hebrew balance from which cords hung the scales.
4. A beam (King James Version) or log (Revised Standard Version) that Jesus mentioned (Matthew 7:3–5; Luke 6:41–42). Jesus compared the beam in an accuser's eye with the mote (King James Version) or speck (Revised Standard Version) in his brother's eye.

Bean

A bean is a type of legume (a plant that produces pods with seeds inside). Beans were an important part of the diet for people living in Bible lands. The references to beans in 2 Samuel 17:27–28 and Ezekiel 4:9 are generally thought to refer to the broad bean (*Faba vulgaris*). This species is an annual plant, which means it completes its life cycle in one year. The broad bean is believed to have originally grown in northern Persia, but it was widely grown as a food plant in western Asia from very early times.

Beans have been discovered in Egyptian tombs alongside mummies, showing they were important in ancient Egyptian culture. The Greeks and Romans also grew beans as a crop.

See Agriculture; Food and Food Preparation.

Bear (Animal)

A large, heavy, big-headed mammal with short, strong limbs, a short tail, and small eyes and ears. Bears walk on the whole foot (both the sole and heel), as humans do.

The Palestinian bear is a Syrian version of the brown bear *(Ursus arctos syriacus).* It can grow to a height of 1.8 meters (six feet) and may weigh as much as 227 kilograms (500 pounds). It is still found in Syria and Turkey but no longer in Israel.

Bears have an excellent sense of smell but less keen sight and hearing. They eat any kind of food:

- Vegetation
- Fruits
- Insects
- Fish

Bears usually do not attack people. However, bears will fight fiercely to protect themselves (Lamentations 3:10). They will also fight to protect their children (2 Samuel 17:8; Proverbs 17:12; Hosea 13:8). David bragged about killing a bear (1 Samuel 17:34–37). A single hit from a bear's paw can kill a person. So, David's courage and strength as a young shepherd in running after a bear and saving a sheep from its jaws were impressive

Some biblical passages seem to imply that bears attacked for no reason (for example, Proverbs 28:15; Amos 5:19). At times, they were God's instruments of punishment. This is seen in the story of Elisha and the two she-bears. (2 Kings 2:24). The Bible often mentions the bear and lion together (1 Samuel 17:37). They were the two largest and strongest predators in the holy land. Thus they symbolized both strength and terror (Amos 5:19).

In biblical times, bears seem to have roamed all over Palestine. Today, they only live in the Lebanon and Anti-Lebanon Mountains. Even there they are rare.

Bear (Astronomy)

The constellation of stars also called Ursa Major or the Big Dipper. It is mentioned in Job 9:9 and 38:32.

See Astronomy.

Beard

The hair growing on the lower part of a man's face.

A beard was worn as a sign of maturity among people from the ancient Near East, including the Israelites. In Israel, care of the beard was religiously significant (Leviticus 19:27). The laws in Leviticus commanded priests to not shave their heads or clip their beards (Leviticus 21:5–6). David sent messengers to an Ammonite king, who were humiliated by having one side of their beards shaved off by the Ammonites. That insult, and others, led to war (2 Samuel 10:1–8).

It was sometimes appropriate to shave one's beard. If someone may have had leprosy on the head or face, they had to shave around the spot to verify (Leviticus 13:29–37). A shaven head, wailing, and wearing sackcloth were ways to signal future doom (Isaiah 15:1–3). Ezra acted out Israel's spiritual disaster by pulling hair out of his head and beard (Ezra 9:3).

Beast

An animal in both the Old and New Testaments. Sometimes it is used metaphorically. The word has many meanings in the Old Testament. This is sometimes translated differently because several Hebrew words can mean "living creature" as well as "beast," but are only translated as "beast." In the Old Testament, therefore, beast can refer to the following:

1. In general, any animal (e.g., Genesis 1:24; Psalm 36:6), but not fish, birds, and insects (e.g., Genesis 6:7; Leviticus 11:2; Deuteronomy 4:17; Job 12:7; 35:11; Zephaniah 1:3).
2. A pet or trained animal (e.g., Exodus 19:13; 22:10; Numbers 3:13; 31:47; Judges 20:48; Proverbs 12:10; Jeremiah 21:6; Zechariah 8:10).
3. A wild and sometimes meat-eating animal (e.g., Genesis 37:20; Exodus 23:11; Deuteronomy 28:26; 1 Samuel 17:44; Ezekiel 14:15).
4. Figurately, "beast" is used most in Daniel and Revelation. In Daniel (especially Daniel 7), the beast is a symbol of a world ruler who persecutes and oppresses the people of God. In Revelation, the apostle John applies this concept to speak about the final persecution of God's people at the end of history. John's "beast" is similar to the "antichrist" in his earlier letters (1 John 2:18, 22; 4:3; 2 John 1:7) and Paul's "man of lawlessness" (2 Thessalonians 2:3). Many Bible commentators think the three terms all reference the same person.

See Antichrist; Armageddon; Mark of the Beast; Revelation, Book of.

Beatitudes, the

A beatitude is a statement of blessing. The term "beatitudes" comes from the Latin word *beatitudo.* It is not used in the English Bible. Technically it means "blessedness" as described in the Old Testament and New Testament. "Blessed" is translated from both Hebrew and Greek words to refer to God's kindness given to people.

Blessing in the Old Testament

The phrase "happy is" or "blessed is" is a common declaration in the book of Psalms (used 26 times). Proverbs uses the phrase eight times. It is used 10 times in the other books of the Old Testament and 13 times in the apocryphal books. These writers declare these blessings on people who live rightly and trust in God. These blessings show that a person is living close to God, experiencing forgiveness, and feeling God's love and kindness.

This kind of life covers every part of a person's experience. Blessings show a person's full well-being, peace, and ability to grow. These blessings

involve family life, temple worship, public life, and a person's inner thoughts and feelings. Someone who is blessed is connected to God's power to create and make things grow. This person lives a satisfying life. This is the way God wants people to live in his presence.

Blessing in the New Testament

In the New Testament, references to "blessing" occur:

- seven times in the book of Revelation,
- three times in Paul's Letter to the Romans, and
- once in John's Gospel.

The Beatitudes in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke

The importance of "blessedness" in Matthew and Luke leads to the use of the technical term "Beatitudes." There are interesting contrasts between Luke's "sermon on the plain" in Luke 6:20–23 and Matthew's "sermon on the mount" in Matthew 5:3–12. The pronouncement of the blessings in Luke comes immediately after the selection of the 12 disciples (Luke 6:12–16). The sermon addresses the crowd generally. It speaks of the coming of God's kingdom as the reversal of the social conditions of the human race. Luke balances four blessings with four woes. Luke changes the present tense to the future tense to heighten the contrast of the impending reversal of social conditions.

In Matthew's account, the advent of the kingdom has already commenced. Matthew indicates this by the use of the present tense. It is addressed to the disciples particularly and is not a general proclamation. The sermon is set within two statements of Jesus. Jesus says he has not come to destroy but to fulfill the Mosaic law (Matthew 5:17). He also says it is necessary to have a kind of righteousness that exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees (Matthew 5:20).

The Meaning of the Beatitudes

These Beatitudes are more concerned with the interior life of the disciple. They seek to activate the kind of life Jesus taught in the lives of Jesus's followers. This kind of life involves the here and now. Jesus has already inaugurated the kingdom. These eight Beatitudes reflect on the traits of those who belong to that kingdom and who reflect Christ's own life. The people and situations described may seem pitiable by human standards. Because of God's presence in their lives, they are actually blessed and should be congratulated and imitated.

See Jesus Christ, Life and Teachings of.

Beautiful Gate

A gate in Herod's temple in Jerusalem.

A man who was unable to walk was miraculously healed by Peter and John at the gate (Acts 3:2, 10). We do not know where this gate was, but it was probably the gate leading from the Court of the Gentiles into the Women's Court. This was also called the Corinthian Gate (for its Corinthian bronze) by the Jewish historian Josephus. According to him, it measured 22.9 meters (75 feet) high by 18.3 meters (60 feet) wide. A burial inscription found on Mount Olivet says the gate was built by a Jewish man from Alexandria named Nicanor.

See also Temple.

Beauty

The harmonious combination of qualities that is pleasing to see. Archaeological materials (objects or remains from the past) indicate that the ancient Hebrews were concerned more with usefulness than with beauty. Hebrew pottery, for example, was generally more bulky than Canaanite pottery. Yet such artifacts (objects used in the past) do not mean that the Hebrews did not have an appreciation for beauty.

The Old Testament speaks of God's creation as beautiful (Genesis 2:9; Job 26:13; Psalm 19:1–6; Song of Solomon 6:10). The land of Canaan is a "desirable land" (Jeremiah 3:19). Jerusalem is called "beautiful" (Isaiah 52:1; Lamentations 2:15), as is one of its temple gates (Acts 3:2, 10). The Hebrew people admired the wild beauty of the Lebanon mountain range (Psalm 104:16; Isaiah 60:13). The Canaanite city of Tirzah, King Baasha's capital in the northern kingdom (1 Kings 15:33), was so named for its attractive location. The name "Tirzah" comes from the Hebrew word for "beauty."

Although the Hebrews did not exalt the human form as did the ancient Greeks, the Old Testament does idealize physical attractiveness. A bride's beauty is described expressively by her bridegroom in love lyrics in Song of Songs 4:1–15; 6:4. Such praise of the bride may have been a traditional feature of Israelite weddings. Several women prominent in the Old Testament are described as beautiful (Genesis 29:17; 2 Samuel 11:2; Esther 2:7). But sensual beauty was secondary to hard work, resourcefulness, and traditional piety in a woman (Proverbs 31:10–31). Several men were also known for their physical attractiveness—for example, David (1 Samuel 16:12) and Absalom (2 Samuel 14:25). Cosmetics, jewelry, and other accessories were used to enhance female beauty in Old Testament times. The prophet Isaiah listed such items (Isaiah 3:18–24), and Ezekiel mentioned cosmetic practices current in his day (Ezekiel 16:10–13). Israelite worship was beautiful, too, with the high priest's elaborate ceremonial robes designed for glory and beauty (Exodus 28:2, 40).

The concept of beauty is applied also to God in the Old Testament. The Lord's favor is called his "beauty" (Psalm 90:17). Isaiah recorded God's promise to give his people "beauty for ashes" (Isaiah 61:3). The psalmist expressed a desire to spend time in the temple enjoying the Lord's beauty, his "incomparable perfections" (Psalm 27:4, New Living Translation). Isaiah described God as a "diadem of splendor" to the Israelite remnant (Isaiah 28:5), those who would remain faithful to God. The Messiah (God's anointed one) was spoken of as a beautiful king (33:17). Thus in the Old Testament, the concept of beauty had a deeper meaning than simply physical attractiveness. It became a theological concept affirming God's essential glory.

The New Testament urges Christ's followers to live lives that will "adorn" the teaching of the Savior, making it attractive to nonbelievers (Titus 2:10). Those who preach the gospel of Christ are spoken of as beautiful (Romans 10:15). The apostles Paul and Peter warned women against being satisfied with outward beauty (1 Timothy 2:9–10), reminding them that beautiful character is the true adornment of godliness (1 Peter 3:3–5). The beauty of the believer's final home in heaven is reflected in the description of the "new Jerusalem" as a bride and in the symbolism of treasured precious stones of ancient times (see Revelation 21–22).

Bebai (Person)

1. An ancestor of a family that returned to Jerusalem with Zerubbabel after the exile in Babylon (Ezra 2:11; 8:11; Nehemiah 7:16). Some of the members of that family were guilty of marrying foreign women (Ezra 10:28).
2. A levitical leader of Israel who signed Ezra's promise of faithfulness to God with Nehemiah and others after the exile in Babylon (Nehemiah 10:15). They may have been a member of the family of #1 above.

Bebai (Place)

An unidentified Israelite city mentioned in Judith 15:4.

Becher, Becherite

1. Benjamin's second son, who moved to Egypt with his grandfather Jacob (Genesis 46:21; 1 Chronicles 7:6).
2. Ephraim's second son. The family of "Becherites" came from his lineage (Numbers 26:35). He is also called Bered (1 Chronicles 7:20).

Becorath

Zeror's father, a member of the tribe of Benjamin and an ancestor of King Saul (1 Samuel 9:1).

Bectileth

A plain mentioned only in the Apocrypha (ancient writings that are included in some versions of the Bible but are not considered Scripture by all Christian traditions). Nebuchadnezzar's general, Holofernes, camped there on his western conquest (Judith 2:21–23).

Bed

A piece of furniture used for sleeping or resting.

See Furniture.

Bedad

The father of Hadad, one of the kings of Edom before Israel had kings (Genesis 36:35; 1 Chronicles 1:46).

Bedan

1. One of Israel's saviors, along with Gideon, Jephthah, and Samuel, during the time of the judges (1 Samuel 12:11). The name Bedan may be either a shortened form of Abdon (Judges 12:13) or a scribal error for Barak (Judges 4:6).
2. Ulam's son, a descendant of Manasseh (1 Chronicles 7:17).

Bedeiah

Bani's son, who obeyed Ezra's command to divorce his non-Jewish wife after the exile in Babylon (Ezra 10:35).

Bee

Flying insects that produce honey and wax. Bees are mentioned in the Bible for their productivity and as a source of food.

Bees *(Apis mellifica)* are one of two insects that are kept and bred by humans. The other is the silkworm. Bees collect nectar from flowers while spreading pollen. They might show other bees where to find nectar using a "dance" that communicates distance and direction. Bees can see four colors:

- Blue-green
- Yellow-green
- Blue-violet
- Ultra-violet (not visible to the human eye)

Israel's and Palestines's wild bees are aggressive. Only female "worker" bees sting. Their venom becomes stronger in warm weather. Several biblical passages mention bees' irritable nature and painful stings (Deuteronomy 1:44; Psalm 118:12; Isaiah 7:18).

One reference notes that wild bees can make a colony in a dead animal (Judges 14:5–9). The corpse will be cleaned to be bone by jackals or vultures, and the bones dried in the sun.

The Egyptians considered the bee sacred. In ancient Greece candles were made from beeswax. In Israel and Palestine, beekeeping was likely not practiced until the second century BC. Ezekiel 27:17 suggests it may have been done earlier. If the Hebrews could not find domestic honey, they would seek wild honey. Travelers would look for caches of honey in rocky crevices and other likely spots. The Philistines and the Hittites practiced beekeeping in their cities.

The Bible contains many references to bees and bee products. A bee swarm was valuable, though honey was cheap. Honey was sometimes eaten with the honeycomb (Song of Solomon 5:1). Honey was not just for food. People also used it as medicine and to preserve things. When they wanted to keep a dead body from decaying, they would sometimes cover it with honey (embalming).

The land of Israel was described as a land flowing with milk and honey. Honey was very important to people in biblical times because it was one of the few ways they could make food taste sweet (compare Judges 14:8–9). The Hebrew word for "honey" may mean both bee honey and the sweet syrup from figs, dates, and grapes. So, "a land flowing with milk and honey" does not mean a land of bees (Exodus 3:8). It means a land rich in sweetness.

See also Food and Food Preparation; Honey.

Beeliada

The former name of Eliada, one of King David's sons, in 1 Chronicles 14:7.

See Eliada #1.

Beelzebul

A name meaning "lord of the flies" or "lord of the manure pile," referring to Satan. It was used against Jesus by his enemies (Matthew 10:25; 12:24; Luke 11:15).

See Baal-zebub.

Beer

1. A place where Israel camped while in the wilderness. It was probably just north of the Arnon River on the border of Moab and Amurru (Numbers 21:16). The name means "a well." Water from the well they dug there was sung about (Numbers 21:17–18). It may have been in the same place as the Moabite well called *Beer-elim* (Isaiah 15:8).
   See Wilderness Wanderings.
2. The place that Gideon's son Jotham escaped to after criticizing his half brother Abimelech, who had killed all his half-brothers while trying to become king of Israel (Judges 9:21).

Beer-Elim

One of the cities of Moab that Isaiah predicted would hear crying when the Moabite kingdom fell (Isaiah 15:8). It might be the same as Beer (Numbers 21:16).

Beer-Lahairoi

BEER-LAHAI-ROI

A well between Kadesh and Bered where Hagar was confronted by the angel of the Lord when she was pregnant with Ishmael (Genesis 16:7–14). Beer-lahai-roi means "the well of the Living One who sees me," This refers to God's appearance to Sarai's servant girl. Later, Isaac often used it as a watering place on his travels (Genesis 24:62; 25:11).

Beera

Zophah's son, a warrior in the tribe of Asher (1 Chronicles 7:37).

Beerah

A chief of the tribe of Reuben (1 Chronicles 5:6, 26). He was taken captive by the Assyrian king Tilgath-pilneser (a later spelling of Tiglath-pileser).

Beeri

1. Judith's father who was a Hittite (sometimes spelled Hethite). Judith was one of the wives of Esau (Genesis 26:34).
2. The father of Hosea the prophet (Hosea 1:1).

Beeroth

One of four Hivite cities that Joshua promised to not destroy when the Israelites marched into Canaan (Joshua 9:17). Beeroth was later listed as a city in Benjamin's territory (Joshua 18:25; 2 Samuel 4:2–3). It was the home of Rechab and Baanah, the assassins of King Ishbosheth (2 Samuel 4:2–9), and of Naharai, Joab's armor bearer (2 Samuel 23:37; 1 Chronicles 11:39). People moved into the city after the exile in Babylon (Ezra 2:25; Nehemiah 7:29). Certain cities have been named as possible locations for Beeroth, including:

- El Bireh near Ramallah
- Nebi Samwil north of Jerusalem

Beeroth Bene-Jaakan

The site where the Israelites camped during their wilderness journey from Egypt. It was near

Moserah or Moseroth (Deuteronomy 10:6). It is also called Bene-jaakan in Numbers 33:31–32. Beeroth Bene-jaakan means "well of Jaakan's sons."

See Wilderness Wanderings.

Beerothite

An resident of Beeroth (2 Samuel 4:2–9 in the King James Version and Revised Standard Version).

See Beeroth.

Beersheba

Beersheba is the name used in the Bible for the southernmost part of the Promised Land. It is located 45.1 kilometers (28 miles) southwest of Hebron. It was an important place in the Negev desert early on. Hagar wandered here with Ishmael, and Abraham also spent time here. Later, both Isaac (Genesis 26:23) and Jacob (46:1) had meaningful spiritual experiences in this area. It remained an important location for many other Hebrews in later times.

During the time of the Hebrew monarchy, Beersheba was located at Tell Beersheba, which is 3.2 kilometers (two miles) northeast of the modern city. Recent archaeological digs show that the Hebrews built the city in the 12th or 11th century BC. It was likely where Samuel's sons served as judges for the people (1 Samuel 8:2).

The city itself was small, covering about one hectare (two and a half acres). In its ruins, archaeologists found pieces of a horned altar. When put back together, the altar stood about 1.5 meters (five feet) tall, the same height as the altar discovered at Arad. These are the only two Hebrew altars from the time of the first temple that have been found. The height of these altars matches that of the one described in the tabernacle (Exodus 27:1) and was likely the same as the original altar in Solomon's temple (2 Chronicles 6:13). A large water system was also uncovered in Beersheba, similar to those found in the ancient cities of Megiddo and Hazor.

Beetle

Beetles are insects that have chewing mouthparts and two pairs of wings. Their front wings are hard, while their back wings are soft and can be folded. Beetles have different eating habits. Some beetles eat meat, while others mainly eat plants. Some beetles live in water. Some can cause skin blisters. Others can damage fabrics or crops. Some beetles are helpful because they eat harmful insects.

In ancient Egypt, the beetle, or sacred scarab, was an important symbol. It represented the sun god Ra. The Egyptians made scarab seals and amulets, which were very popular items.

The word "beetle" is used in the King James Version of the Bible as a translation for "cricket" in Leviticus 11:22.

See also Cricket.

Beggar

A person who asks for help, usually money or food. This person often lives by asking others for these things.

The Bible does not use the word "beggar" often. In the Old Testament, Hebrew words meaning "to seek" or "to ask," or words that refer to "the poor and needy." In the New Testament, Greek words describe people who are "poor" or "miserable," and those who "ask for more."

In Moses's time, there were no people who begged as a job. This was because the law made sure to take care of poor people.

The earliest laws required caring for the poor (Deuteronomy 15:11):

- In the Sabbath year (every seven years), the produce of the land was left to the poor, and all debts were canceled (Leviticus 25, Exodus 23:11, Deuteronomy 15:1).
- Lending generously to the poor was encouraged (Deuteronomy 15:7–11).
- Hired workers were protected (Deuteronomy 24:14–15).

The goal was that "there will be no poor among you" (Deuteronomy 15:4). When the Israelites first settled in their land, everyone had about the same amount of wealth.

Digging at Tirsah near Nablus found that the size of houses in the tenth century BC were all equal. However, by the eighth century BC, there was a

large difference. Houses were divided into richer and poorer sections of town. This social change happened when kings began to rule over Israel. Some officials used their jobs to get rich. The prophets spoke against this unfair wealth (for example, Isaiah 5:8; Hosea 12:8; Amos 8:4–7; Micah 2:2). The prophet Amos criticized people who lent money but did not care about the poor (Amos 2:6–8; 8:6). Even so, the Old Testament rarely mentions beggars. However, between the Old and New Testament times, giving to the poor became an important religious duty (this is also known as giving alms).

In the New Testament, begging was more common. In the ministry of Jesus, references are made to:

- a blind beggar (John 9:8–9),
- blind Bartimaeus (Mark 10:46–52), and
- Lazarus, a godly beggar who is compared to a rich man (Luke 16:19–31).

Peter and John met a beggar who could not walk at the Beautiful Gate in Jerusalem (Acts 3:1–11).

Jesus criticized giving to the poor just to be seen by others (Matthew 6:1–4). He stressed the importance of giving to the poor for the right reasons (Matthew 5:42–48). By the time of Jesus, Jerusalem was full of beggars, probably because giving to the poor in Jerusalem was seen as a virtue. Beggars often stayed near holy places. For example, the pool of Bethesda was a place of healing, where the sick and disabled begged and sought healing in the waters (John 5:2–9).

In the early Christian community, leaders were chosen to fairly distribute funds to the poor (Acts 4:32–35; 6:1–6). A part of every Christian's income was to be given to the needy (Acts 11:27–30; Romans 15:25–27; 1 Corinthians 16:1–4). Poverty in Palestine may have been worse because of heavy taxes from Rome. The gospels often mention tax collectors and people asking for help.

Some think the Zealots (a group that fought against Rome) started because of poverty. Josephus, a Jewish historian, says the Zealots included many poor people. In AD 66, the Zealots burned records in Jerusalem, probably to destroy records of what they owed. Josephus also says that before Rome destroyed Jerusalem, groups of people asking for help were causing fear and unrest throughout the whole city.

See Alms; Poor, The.

Beheading

Beheading is a way of killing someone by cutting off their head. This method of execution (putting someone to death as punishment) was used in Bible times.

See Criminal Law and Punishment.

Behemoth

A plural Hebrew word usually translated "beasts" or "wild animals" (as in Deuteronomy 28:26; 32:24; Psalm 50:10; Isaiah 18:6; 2 Esdras 6:49, 51; Habakkuk 2:17). Most English translations only refer to a "behemoth" once, when the context seems to refer to the specific animal. The animal was large and powerful. Many biblical scholars believe that it was a hippopotamus (Job 40:15). In ancient times, the hippopotamus was well known in Egypt and may have lived in the Jordan Valley. Job 40:23 may refer to any river that flooded like the Jordan in flood season.

See Hippopotamus.

Behistun Inscription

A large rock carving from ancient Persia carved into the slope of Mount Behistun. It is written in three languages:

- Old Persian
- Elamite
- Akkadian

It is a record of the accomplishments of Darius I, king of the Persian Empire. It provides the key to understanding the cuneiform script (an ancient writing system using wedge-shaped marks) in which several of these ancient languages were written.

See Inscriptions.

Beka, Bekah

A six-gram weight that was called "half a shekel, according to the sanctuary shekel" (Exodus 38:26).

See Weights and Measures.

Beker, Bekerite

Another spelling for the second son of Ephraim. A Bekerite is one of his descendants (Numbers 26:35).

See Becher, Becherite #2.

Bel

The title of the Babylonian god Marduk. The title was used disrespectfully by Isaiah (Isaiah 46:1). Jeremiah speaks about Bel in Jeremiah 50:2 and 51:44, and Bel is the idol in the non-biblical story Bel and the Dragon.

See Marduk.

Bel and the Dragon

A religious story found in some versions of the Bible, where Daniel proves the Babylonian gods are not real.

See Daniel, Additions to.

Bela (Person)

1. Beor's son, a king of Edom who ruled before Israel had a king (Genesis 36:31–33). Balaam, the pagan prophet from north Syria, also had a father named Beor (Numbers 22:5). So, some scholars have confused the Edomite Bela with Balaam.
2. Benjamin's oldest son (Genesis 46:21; 1 Chronicles 8:1), whose descendants were called Belaites (Numbers 26:38).
3. Azaz's son, a descendant of Reuben. He lived in Gilead in Transjordan. His family had so much land that their cattle lived near the Euphrates River (1 Chronicles 5:8–9). In the reign of Saul, his family defended their land against a Hagrite opposition.

Bela (Place)

Alternate name for Zoar, a city of the plain, in Genesis 14:2. *See* Cities of the Plain; Zoar.

Belah, Belaite

The King James Version spelling of Bela. He was the oldest son of the patriarch Benjamin (1 Chronicles 8:1). His descendants were the Belaites (Numbers 26:38–40).

See Bela (Person) #2.

Belial, Beliar

A common Hebrew noun meaning "baseness," "worthlessness," "wickedness," or "lawlessness." Belial, however, is often translated as a name. Thus, sometimes it is translated as "sons of Belial" (Judges 19:22; 1 Samuel 2:12), "daughter of Belial" (1 Samuel 1:16), or "children of Belial" (Deuteronomy 13:13; Judges 20:13). Newer translations generally translate it as "worthless rabble" or "worthless" (Deuteronomy 13:13; Judges 19:22; 20:13; 1 Samuel 1:16; 2:12; 10:27; Proverbs 6:12). One exception is in Nahum 1:15, which some scholars think should be translated "Belial." This is a personal name of the Assyrian conqueror who threatened to the southern kingdom of Judah.

Texts from between the two Testaments use "Belial" as a name and influenced how it is used in the New Testament. In the New Testament, the term appears once as "Belial" (or Beliar in 2 Corinthians 6:15) and is identified with Satan, the representation of evil. Nonbiblical writings from the New Testament period often used Belial as a name for Satan or the Antichrist.

Belief, Believe

A strong feeling or opinion based on evidence that something is true or that someone is reliable. As used in the Bible, to believe in God involves trust, not merely understanding God exists.

See Faith.

Believers

The people who believe. In the New Testament, it specifically refers to people who believe in Jesus as Lord and follow him (Acts 5:14).

One would expect the term "believers" (sometimes translated as "faithful") to be a title for Christians since the New Testament stresses belief in Jesus. Although New Testament authors emphasized believing, they rarely used the term "believer" as a name for Christians.

There are a few clear examples of "believer" being used as a name for Christians in Acts 4:32, 10:45, 19:18, and 1 Timothy 4:12. But in other places, the term is a description, not a name (Acts 2:44; 15:5; 18:27; 1 Timothy 4:3). As a name, "believer" points to the personal commitment of Christians to Jesus. Christians were called not merely to believe something but to give themselves to someone.

Bell

A small noisemaker. Bells were sometimes attached between decorative pomegranates around the bottom of the high priestly robe (Exodus 28:33–34; 39:25–26).

See Musical Instruments (Pamonim); Music.

Belmain

A Samaritan city that was a camp for Nebuchadnezzar's invading general, Holofernes, against the Jews (Judith 4:1–4). It was probably the same as Balbaim (Judith 7:3), Balamon (8:3), and perhaps Bebai (15:4).

Beloved Disciple

The title of one disciple who was apparently the author of the Gospel of John (John 21:20–24).

The Beloved Disciple in the Gospel of John

Five passages in John's Gospel mention the disciple whom Jesus loved:

1. The beloved disciple lay close to Jesus's chest during the Last Supper and was prompted by Peter to ask Jesus who the betrayer would be (John 13:21–26).
2. The beloved disciple stood near the cross, and Mary, Jesus's mother, was given to his care (John 19:25–27).
3. Mary Magdalene came to Peter and the beloved disciple, reporting that Jesus's body was missing from the tomb (John 20:2).
4. The beloved disciple was in a fishing boat with Peter and the other disciples and recognized Jesus standing on the shore (John 21:7).
5. The beloved disciple was following Jesus by the lakeshore, and the author reminded his readers that this was the same disciple as the one at the Last Supper (John 21:20–23; compare 13:21–26).

Who Was the Beloved Disciple?

The phrase is only used in John's Gospel. Could it be the author's way of referring to himself? Several passages make that seem very likely.

1. A list of names given in John 21:2 indicates that the disciples present at the lakeshore were Peter, Thomas, Nathanael, the sons of Zebedee (James and John), and two others. The beloved disciple was one of the sons of Zebedee or else one of the two unnamed disciples.
2. The beloved disciple was one of the Twelve since he was at the Last Supper, and evidently, only the 12 disciples were there with Jesus (Matthew 26:20; Mark 14:17–20; Luke 22:14, 30). This means it cannot be Lazarus or John Mark, who are sometimes suggested as the beloved disciple.

3. The beloved disciple appeared to be close to Peter (John 13:23–24; 20:2; 21:7; see also Acts 3; 8:14; Galatians 2:9). Matthew, Mark, and Luke record that Jesus often chose Peter, James, and John to be with him. Since Peter was mentioned in connection with the disciple whom Jesus loved, and since James was martyred (killed for his beliefs) early (Acts 12:2), only John is left as a reasonable possibility if John's Gospel was written long after James's death.

See also John, The Apostle.

Belshazzar

Belshazzar was a Babylonian king who ruled alongside his father, Nabonidus, during the final days of the Babylonian Empire. His name means "Bel protect the king."

The book of Daniel calls Belshazzar the son of Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 5:2, 11, 13, 18). However, he was actually the son of Nabonidus. In Hebrew literature, "son" can mean "descendant," and "father" can mean "ancestor." Some believe that Belshazzar's mother might have been Nebuchadnezzar's daughter, making him the grandson of Nebuchadnezzar. Nabonidus, Belshazzar's father, took the throne in 555 BC.

The book of Daniel presents Belshazzar as king when Babylon fell to the Persians, but historical records show that Nabonidus was the last king. Some questioned Daniel's accuracy because of this. However, inscriptions reveal that Nabonidus left Belshazzar in charge while he was away for over 10 years, campaigning in Arabia. When Cyrus the Great invaded, Nabonidus fled but later surrendered after the city fell. Belshazzar was responsible for Babylon's defense when the Persians took over.

During the Persian invasion, Belshazzar hosted a feast for Babylon's leaders. While drunk, he ordered the gold and silver vessels from the Jerusalem temple to be used, disrespecting them. At that moment, mysterious handwriting appeared on the wall, announcing his doom. That same night, on October 12, 539 BC, the Persians entered the city without a fight by diverting the Euphrates River, allowing them to breach the city's defenses.

See Daniel, Book of; Babylon, Babylonia.

Belteshazzar

Daniel's Babylonian name (Daniel 1:7). Daniel was one of the young men taken captive to Babylon to be trained as servants for King Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 1).

See Daniel (Person) #3.

Bema

A Greek word for a judgment seat or court of a Roman official. This word, which literally means "step" or "stride," was commonly used in the first century AD to refer to a raised platform where political speeches or judicial decisions were made. The bema was an important feature in ancient cities, often located in important public areas such as marketplaces.

In the New Testament, the word is used several times:

- Jesus was questioned before the judgment seat of Pilate (Matthew 27:19; John 19:13).
- Herod Agrippa I addressed the people of Tyre and Sidon from a judgment seat (Acts 12:21).
- The apostle Paul was brought before the judgement seat of Gallio in Corinth (Acts 18:12–17).
- The apostle Paul was again brought before Festus's judgement seat in Caesarea (Acts 25:6, 10, 17).
- Paul used the word to refer to God's judgment seat
    - In Romans 14:10, he warned that all will stand before the judgment seat of God.
    - According to 2 Corinthians 5:10, Paul described the judgment seat of Christ, where the value of each person's work will be judged (compare 1 Corinthians 3:13–15).

See also Judgment; Judgment Seat; Last Judgment.

Ben (Noun)

A Hebrew word used at the beginning of names to describe a relationship. It literally means "son," and it is used 4,850 times in the Old Testament. In Aramaic, it is *bar* (see Matthew 16:17).

See also Bar.

Ben (Person)

A Levite musician chosen by King David (1 Chronicles 15:18, King James Version). The Masoretic Text (the Old Testament written in Hebrew, with notes added by Jewish scholars during the Middle Ages) and the King James Version include the name Ben. Still, the Septuagint (the ancient Greek translation of the Old Testament) and modern versions do not include it because it is not used in 1 Chronicles 15:20 and 21. Since the Masoretic Text also does not include it in the later verses, the addition of Ben in 1 Chronicles 15:18 may be a scribal error.

Ben Sirach, Jesus

The son of Sirach and author of Wisdom of Jesus ben Sirach (also known as Ecclesiasticus).

See Wisdom of Jesus ben Sirach.

Ben-Abinadab

One of 12 officers chosen to collect food for King Solomon's household. His administrative district was found in the area around Naphath-dor, a city on the coast south of Mount Carmel (1 Kings 4:11). The name means "son of Abinadab" and probably means that Ben-abinadab was the son of Solomon's uncle Abinadab (1 Samuel 16:8; 1 Chronicles 2:13).

Ben-Ammi

The son of Lot and his younger daughter. A similar incestuous relationship between Lot and his older daughter produced a son named Moab. The two sons are both considered the ancestors of the Ammonite and Moabite peoples (Genesis 19:38).

Although Lot could have shared in the promise made to Abraham (Genesis 11:31; 12:1–4), he chose to go his own way (13:2–12) and failed to trust the Lord (19:15–23). However, because of his relationship with Abraham, the Israelites treated Lot's descendants with respect, despite the Ammonites and Moabites sometimes being strong enemies of Israel (2 Chronicles 20:1–12).

See also Ammon, Ammonites.

Ben-Deker

One of 12 officers chosen to collect food for King Solomon's household (1 Kings 4:9, "son of Dekar" in the King James Version). Ben-deker's area was an area along the southern border of Dan's tribe near Beth-shemesh.

Ben-Geber

Literally, “Geber’s son.” An official in King Solomon’s court who managed the sixth of 12 districts. The area Ben-geber managed began at Ramoth-gilead in northern Transjordan and ended as far north as Argob in Bashan (1 Kings 4:13). His association with Geber, son of Uri (1 Kings 4:19), is not certain.

Ben-Hadad

The title for two or possibly three kings of Syria. The name means "son of Hadad." Hadad was the Syrian storm god. Hadad is likely the same as the god Rimmon (2 Kings 5:18).

1. **Ben-Hadad I**: He was the son of Tabrimmon and the grandson of Hezion. Despite a history of fighting between Syria and Israel, Ben-Hadad I allied with King Baasha of Israel (1 Kings 15:18–20). However, this alliance ended when conflict arose between Israel and Judah. Baasha led a campaign against King Asa of Judah. To prevent people from leaving his kingdom to flee to Judah, Baasha strengthened the city of Ramah, which was located very close to the north of Jerusalem. By doing so, Baasha extended Israel’s control into Judah. In response, Asa sent his remaining wealth to Ben-Hadad I, asking him to break his alliance with Baasha (1 Kings 15:18–19). Ben-Hadad agreed to the offer and attacked Israel, capturing:
    - Ijon
    - Dan
    - Abel-beth-maacah
    - The region of Naphtali (1 Kings 15:20)

This move allowed Syria to control the main trade routes through Galilee. Baasha had to abandon Ramah and retreat to Tirzah. Asa raised the people of Judah to break down Baasha’s fortifications and used the materials to build Geba in the territory of Benjamin. Asa's actions led to criticism from the prophet Hanani, who rebuked him for relying on the king of Syria rather than on God (1 Kings 16:7).

1. **Ben-Hadad II**: The Bible is not clear about the differences between Ben-Hadad I and II, leading some scholars to think they might be the same person. This idea is supported by the "Melqart Stele," which mentions a Ben-Hadad and is dated around 850 BC. However, it is more likely that Ben-Hadad II was the son of Ben-Hadad I. If we do not separate them, then Ben-Hadad would have been the king during the reigns of King Ahab and King Baasha, meaning there would be a gap of about 40 years between the events.
   Ben-Hadad II led an alliance of armies against Samaria during Ahab's reign. During the siege, Ben-Hadad demanded that Ahab surrender his wealth, wives, and children. Ahab agreed at first, but when Ben-Hadad added that his men could take anything they wanted, Ahab took his advisor's advice and refused. This angered Ben-Hadad.
   A prophet, who remains unnamed, predicted that Ahab would defeat Ben-Hadad's armies (1 Kings 20:13). Ahab was victorious when the aides of the governors killed the soldiers sent by Ben-Hadad to capture them. The Syrian forces fled, only to be defeated again the next year when Ben-Hadad tried to fight the Israelites on the plains instead of in the hills. He wrongly believed that Israel's gods were only powerful in the hills (1 Kings 20:23). This second defeat was also predicted by a prophet, who explained that it happened because Ben-Hadad misunderstood the nature of Israel's God (1 Kings 20:28).
   After his defeat, Ben-Hadad begged for his life and promised to return all the cities his father had taken from Israel. Ahab agreed, but this decision was criticized by a prophet (1 Kings 20:35–43). The peace between the two kings only lasted three years. It ended when Ahab, listening to King

Jehoshaphat of Judah, tried to recapture Ramoth-Gilead. Although most prophets predicted victory, Micaiah, a true prophet, predicted defeat (1 Kings 22:5–28). Ahab's forces were defeated, and Ahab himself died in battle (1 Kings 22:29–36).
Ben-Hadad also spoke with the prophet Elisha, whom he tried to capture (2 Kings 6:11–19). His attempt failed when the Syrian army was struck with blindness.

2. **Ben-Hadad III**: He was the son of King Hazael of Syria and not related to Ben-Hadad I or II. He adopted the name "Ben-Hadad." During the reign of King Jehoahaz of Israel, Israel fell under Ben-Hadad III's control because Jehoahaz did not follow the Lord. However, Israel was eventually freed from Ben-Hadad III's oppression by a "savior," likely referring to the Assyrian attacks on Syria (2 Kings 13:5).

See also Syria, Syrians; Israel, History of.

Ben-Hail

One of five officials sent out by King Jehoshaphat of the southern kingdom of Judah to teach the people the law of the Lord (2 Chronicles 17:7).

Ben-Hanan

Shimon's son of the tribe of Judah (1 Chronicles 4:20).

Ben-Hesed

One of the 12 officers appointed to collect food for King Solomon's household (1 Kings 4:10, sometimes called the "son of Hesed"). He managed an area south and west of Arubboth in the western part of the tribe of Manasseh.

Ben-Hur

One of 12 officers appointed to collect food for King Solomon's household (1 Kings 4:8, sometimes called "son of Hur"). He managed an area in the hill country of Ephraim.

Ben-Oni

The name Rachel gave to her last son as she died in childbirth (Genesis 35:18). His father, Jacob, changed his name from Ben-oni ("son of my sorrow") to Benjamin ("son of my right hand").

See Benjamin (Person) #1.

Ben-Zoheth

Ishi's son from the tribe of Judah (1 Chronicles 4:20).

Benaiah

A popular name meaning "the Lord has built," used primarily by Levites.

1. The son of Jehoiada the priest, from the south Judean town of Kabzeel. Benaiah fought in the military, and he became the commander-in-chief of the army during the reign of Solomon (1 Kings 2:35; 4:4).
   Before David became king, Benaiah performed a number of daring military and protective feats to become one of the mighty men (2 Samuel 23:20–22) during David's flight from King Saul. He became the commander of "the thirty" (1 Chronicles 27:6), a group second only to "the three" of highest valor (2 Samuel 23:23). He later had a high place in the armed forces when Joab was commander in chief and led King David's elite troops, the Cherethites and Pelethites (2 Samuel 8:18). He was made third in command by David, with 24,000 men under him. His duties included annual priestly service in the temple (1 Chronicles 27:5–6).
   Benaiah stayed loyal to David during the rebellion of Absalom (2 Samuel 20:23; see 2 Samuel 15:18). He was also loyal during the attempt by Adonijah to take David's throne (1 Kings 1:8). For this, he was rewarded with the opportunity to help in Solomon's coronation at Gihon (1 Kings 1:32–40). As army commander and chief bodyguard to Solomon, he executed Adonijah (1 Kings 2:25), Joab (verse 34), and Shimei (verse 46).
2. A warrior from the town of Pirathon who was one of David's mighty men known as "the thirty" (2 Samuel 23:30; 1 Chronicles 11:31). Benaiah led the 11th division of the army in David's rotation system (1 Chronicles 27:14).
3. A prince in the tribe of Simeon who participated in the conquest of Gedor during Hezekiah's reign (1 Chronicles 4:36).
4. A levitical musician who played the harp when King David brought the ark to Jerusalem (1 Chronicles 15:18, 20; 16:5). Afterward, he was appointed to serve daily before the ark under Asaph's direction (1 Chronicles 16:5).
5. A priestly musician who blew the trumpet before the ark when King David brought it to Jerusalem (1 Chronicles 15:24). Afterward he was appointed to play regularly before the ark (1 Chronicles 16:6).
6. The father of Jehoiada, King David's counselor after the death of Ahithophel (1 Chronicles 27:34; see also 2 Samuel 17:1–14).
7. A Levite, Asaph's descendant, and grandfather of Jahaziel (2 Chronicles 20:14). Jahaziel gave an encouraging prophecy to King Jehoshaphat of Judah before the battle against the Moabites and Ammonites (2 Chronicles 20:1–29).
8. A Levite appointed by King Hezekiah to help manage the tithes and offeringss brought to the temple (2 Chronicles 31:13).
9. Parosh's son (or descendant), who obeyed Ezra's command to divorce his non-Jewish wife after the exile in Babylon (Ezra 10:25).
10. Pahath-moab's son (or descendant), who also obeyed Ezra's command to divorce his non-Jewish wife after the exile in Babylon (Ezra 10:30).
11. Bani's son (or descendant), another who divorced his non-Jewish wife after the exile in Babylon (Ezra 10:35).
12. Nebo's son (or descendant), who also divorced his non-Jewish wife after the exile in Babylon (Ezra 10:43).
13. Pelatiah's father (Ezekiel 11:1, 13). Pelatiah was a prince of the people of Israel during the time of the prophet Ezekiel.

Bene-Berak

One of the cities of Dan (Joshua 19:45). The modern name is Ibn Ibrak, a residential area northwest of Tel Aviv.

Bene-Jaakan

A place where Israel camped near the border of Edom (Numbers 33:31–32).

See Beeroth Bene-jaakan.

Benediction

An announcement of God's favor on a gathered group of people (Genesis 27:27–29; Luke 24:50; 2 Corinthians 13:11, 14).

See Bless, Blessing.

Beninu

A Levite who signed Ezra's promise to be faithful to God with Nehemiah and others after the exile in Babylon (Nehemiah 10:13).

Benjamin (Person)

1. The youngest of Jacob's 12 sons and full brother to Joseph. Jacob named him Benjamin ("son of my right hand") after his dying mother Rachel had called him Ben-oni ("son of my sorrow," Genesis 35:18). After Joseph had been sold into Egypt by his half brothers, their father, Jacob, assumed that Joseph was dead and became very protective of Benjamin. Later, because of a plan created by Joseph, Benjamin was used to help reunite Jacob with his 12 sons in Egypt (Genesis 42–45). In a prophecy about his sons, Jacob spoke of Benjamin's skill as a warrior or predicted the military power of his tribe by saying, "Benjamin is a ravenous wolf; in the morning he devours the prey, in the evening he divides the plunder" (Genesis 49:27).
   See Benjamin, Tribe of.
2. Bilhan's son and Jacob's great-grandson (1 Chronicles 7:10).
3. Member of Harim's clan after the exile in Babylon who married a non-Jewish wife (Ezra 10:32).
4. One who repaired a section of the wall next to his own house (Nehemiah 3:23).
5. One of the company of Jews who participated in the dedication of the wall at Jerusalem (Nehemiah 12:34). He may be the same as #4 above.

Benjamin, Gate of

One of the gates in Jerusalem's old wall. The Gate of Benjamin was probably at the northeast corner, since the prophet Jeremiah went through it on his way to Benjamin, northeast of Jerusalem (Jeremiah 37:12–13). King Zedekiah held court there at least once (Jeremiah 38:7). It was opposite from the Corner Gate on the west wall (Zechariah 14:10). When the walls of Jerusalem were rebuilt at the end of the exile, a new gate called "Sheep Gate"

(Nehemiah 3:1, 32) or "Muster Gate" (Nehemiah 3:31) was built at the same site.

See Jerusalem.

Benjamin, Tribe of

One of the smallest of the 12 tribes of Israel, made up of descendants of Jacob's youngest son (Numbers 1:36). In the Old Testament, the tribe is often referred to as simply "Benjamin." Despite its small size, the tribe played an important role in Israel's history, particularly in their conduct as great warriors (Judges 20:13–16; 1 Chronicles 12:1–2).

The Territory of the Tribe of Benjamin

When the Israelites conquered Canaan, Benjamin was the first tribe to receive its land after Judah and Ephraim. Benjamin's territory was located between the lands of Judah and Ephraim, stretching from the hills of Mount Ephraim to the Judean hills. The southern boundary with Judah was well-defined, running through the valley of Hinnom just south of Jerusalem to a point north of the Dead Sea. The eastern boundary was the Jordan River, and the northern border with Ephraim ran from the Jordan to Bethel to Ataroth-addar, which is south of Lower Beth-horon (Joshua 18:11–20).

Benjamin's territory extended about 45.1 kilometers (28 miles) from west to east and 19.3 kilometers (12 miles) north to south. It was a hilly region, strategically placed to control key mountain passes but also with fertile valleys. Some of its important towns, mentioned in Joshua 18:21–28, included:

- Jerusalem
- Jericho
- Bethel
- Gibeon
- Gibeah
- Mizpeh

Not all of these towns were taken immediately from the people who used to live in them; for example, Jerusalem remained in the hands of the Jebusites until the time of David. The difficult environment produced a hardy people, described in Jacob's blessing of Benjamin as "a ravenous wolf" (Genesis 49:27).

People from the Tribe of Benjamin

One of the early judges in Canaan, Ehud, was from the tribe of Benjamin. He delivered the Israelites by killing Eglon, the king of Moab (Judges 3:15). Members of the tribe later helped Deborah and Barak defeat Sisera (Judges 5:14). The tribe produced more great people:

- Political leaders (1 Chronicles 27:21)
- Captains in Saul's army (2 Samuel 4:2) and David's army (2 Samuel 23:29)
- Skilled archers (1 Chronicles 8:40)
- Leaders in Solomon's labor force (1 Kings 4:18)

Benjamin's descendants also showed less noble traits:

- Palti, a Benjaminite, made a bad report when the 12 spies returned from exploring the land of Canaan (Numbers 13:1–2, 9, 31–33)
- The tribe was disobedient and was not courageous when they failed to clear their inheritance of Canaanites (Judges 1:21)
- the tribe defended the lewd behavior and murder of a concubine by some of its members, which led to a near-total destruction of the tribe in a war against the other tribe (Judges 19–20). To prevent the tribe from dying out, the other tribes allowed the surviving Benjaminites to take captive several hundred women who became their wives (Judges 21)

Benjamin's tribe proved to be dependable in various ways:

- During the exodus from Egypt, it took its place in the organization (Numbers 1:11) and the army (Numbers 2:22) and made its tribal offerings (Numbers 7:60)
- It was very loyal to the throne, at first to Saul and his family (2 Samuel 2:8–31), but they also supported David and his descendants. Benjamin remained loyal to Solomon's son Rehoboam when Jeroboam split from Judah (1 Kings 12:21–24)

Other men of Benjamin (often called Benjaminites) spoken of in the Old Testament include:

- Cush, of whom David sang (The superscription of Psalm 7)
- Jeremiah the prophet, who lived in Benjamin despite being a Levite (Jeremiah 1:1; 32:8)
- Mordecai, uncle and adviser to Queen Esther (Esther 2:5)

The Tribe of Benjamin in the New Testament

In the New Testament, the apostle Paul was proudly a member of Benjamin, saying he was from Benjamin twice (Romans 11:1; Philippians 3:5). In his sermon at Antioch of Pisidia, Paul also mentioned Benjamin as the tribe of King Saul, in his brief account of Israel's history (Acts 13:21). In one other New Testament reference, Benjamin is named with the other 11 tribes in John's vision in the book of Revelation (Revelation 7:8).

See Benjamin (Person) #1.

Benjaminite, Benjamite

A member of the tribe of Benjamin.

See Benjamin, Tribe of.

Beno

Jaaziah's son who is listed as one of the Levites assigned to temple duty (1 Chronicles 24:26–27). It is possible that the Hebrew word is not a proper name, so, it has sometimes been translated "his son."

Beon

Another name for Baal-meon, a city east of the Jordan River (Numbers 32:3).

See Baal-meon.

Beor

1. Bela's father (Genesis 36:32). Bela was a king of Edom.
2. Balaam's father (Numbers 22:5; 2 Peter 2:15, sometimes called "Bosor"). Balaam was asked by Balak, king of Moab, to curse Israel.

Bera

The ruler of Sodom during the days of Abraham and Lot. Bera was one of five Canaanite city kings who failed to rebel against King Chedorlaomer of Elam and his three allies (Genesis 14:2).

Beracah

A warrior from the tribe of Benjamin who joined David at Ziklag in his struggle against King Saul. Beracah was one of the archers and slingers in David's army who used both his left and right hands (1 Chronicles 12:3).

Beracah, Valley of

The place where King Jehoshaphat brought the people of Judah to praise God (2 Chronicles 20:26). The people were grateful for God's help in defeating the attacking armies of Moab, Ammon, and Mount Seir (2 Chronicles 20:1–25). The valley is probably the area Wadi el 'Arrub, not far from Tekoa, near a ruin called Bereikut.

Berachiah

KJV spelling of Berechiah, Asaph's father, in 1 Chronicles 6:39. *See* Berechiah #2.

Beraiah

One of Shimei's sons from the tribe of Benjamin (1 Chronicles 8:21).

Berea

1. A place north of Jerusalem where the Syrian army camped before attacking and killing Judas Maccabeus in 161 BC (1 Maccabees 9:4).
2. An ancient city in Macedonia, a region now split between Greece, Yugoslavia [now North Macedonia], and Bulgaria. It was likely founded in the fifth century BC. The city was about 40 kilometers (25 miles) inland from the Aegean Sea, located on a scenic and fertile plain 183 meters (600 feet) high in the foothills north of the Olympian range. Rome conquered Berea in 168 BC, and it was one of the most populated Macedonian cities during the time of Christ. Today, the city is called Verria.
   The apostle Paul visited Berea during his second missionary journey (Acts 17:10–15). It was also the hometown of Sopater, one of Paul's companions (Acts 20:4). Paul and Silas traveled to Berea, about 81 kilometers (50 miles) southwest, after facing violent religious and political opposition in Thessalonica. In Berea, both Jews and Greeks eagerly accepted the gospel, but Paul had to leave when hostile Jews from Thessalonica came to cause trouble.

Berechiah

1. Son of Zerubbabel and descendant of King David (1 Chronicles 3:20).
2. A Levite from the family of Gershon. He was the father of Asaph (1 Chronicles 6:39; 15:17). Asaph was a famous musician of Israel.
3. The son of Asa. He was the head of a family of Levites who returned to Judah after the exile in Babylon (1 Chronicles 9:16).
4. A Levite who King David assigned as a gatekeeper for the ark of the covenant (1 Chronicles 15:23).
5. The son of Meshillemoth, a leader of the tribe of Ephraim. He was one of three men in Samaria who supported the prophet Obed in sending prisoners of war back to their homes in Judah (2 Chronicles 28:12).
6. The father of Meshullam. Meshullam told Nehemiah, the governor, to rebuild the wall of Jerusalem (Nehemiah 3:4, 30; 6:18).
7. The son of Iddo and father of Zechariah the prophet (Zechariah 1:1, 7).

See also Barachiah, Barachias.

Bered (Person)

Alternate name for Beker, one of Ephraim's sons, in 1 Chronicles 7:20. *See* Beker, Bekerite #2.

Bered (Place)

A place in the southern part of Israel called the Negev Desert. We do not know exactly where Bered was. God spoke to Sarai's maid, Hagar, at a well between Kadesh and Bered (Genesis 16:14).

Berekiah

Another way of speling Berechiah.

See Berechiah.

Beri

Zophah's son, the head of a subclan. Beri was a skilled warrior listed with Asher's descendants (1 Chronicles 7:36, 40).

Beriah

1. Asher's son, who moved to Egypt with his family, relatives, and grandfather Jacob (Genesis 46:17; 1 Chronicles 7:30). His descendants were called Beriites (Numbers 26:44).
2. Ephraim's youngest son, born after several of his brothers were killed at Gath for stealing cattle (1 Chronicles 7:20–23).
3. Elpaal's son, head of a family in the tribe of Benjamin. This Beriah lived at Aijalon and helped kick out invaders from Gath (1 Chronicles 8:13).
4. Shimei's son, a Levite of the clan of Gershon who served in the temple at Jerusalem. Because neither Beriah nor his brother Jeush had many sons, their families were counted as a single subclan within the Levites (1 Chronicles 23:10–11).

Beriite

A member of a family descended from Beriah, one of Asher's sons (Numbers 26:44).

See Beriah #1.

Berite

The King James Version translation of Bichrite, a person descended from Bichri (2 Samuel 20:14).

See Bichri, Bichrite, Bicri.

Bernice

The eldest daughter of Herod Agrippa I. She was present when the apostle Paul spoke to her brother, King Agrippa II (Acts 25:13, 23; 26:30).

Bernice, also spelled Berenice, was born around AD 28. At the age of 13, she married Marcus, the son of a Jewish official named Alexander. After Marcus died, her father arranged for her to marry his elder brother, Herod of Chalcis. Bernice had two sons, Bernicianus and Hyrcanus, before her second husband died in AD 48. When her relationship with her brother, Agrippa II, became closer, rumors of incest began to spread. To counter these rumors, Bernice convinced Polemo, the king of Cilicia, to marry her, but she left him soon after.

In AD 66, Bernice courageously but unsuccessfully tried to stop the Roman procurator Gessius Florus from plundering the temple in Jerusalem. She stood by her brother's side when he warned the people against going to war. When the war began that same year, Jewish rebels burned down her palace and her brother's.

Berodach-Baladan

KJV spelling of Merodach-baladan, the king of Babylon during the reign of Judah's King Hezekiah, in 2 Kings 20:12. *See* Merodach-baladan.

Beroea

An alternate spelling of Berea, an ancient city in Macedonia where Paul preached during his second missionary journey (Acts 17:10–15).

See Berea #2.

Berothah, Berothai

A city between Damascus and Hamath that the prophet Ezekiel said was on the northern border of the restored Israel (Ezekiel 47:16). Berothah is probably the same as Berothai, a city captured by David (2 Samuel 8:8; called Cun in 1 Chronicles 18:8).

Berothite

KJV form of Beerothite, an inhabitant of Beeroth, in 1 Chronicles 11:39. *See* Beeroth.

Berry

A fleshy fruit, usually with many seeds and having no hard seed covering.

See Plants (Bramble; Caper Plant).

Beryl

A hard, shiny mineral with many colors that the Bible calls a gemstone (Exodus 28:20; Revelation 21:20).

See Minerals and Metals; Stones, Precious.

Besai

An ancestor of a group of temple assistants who returned to Jerusalem with Zerubbabel after the exile in Babylon (Ezra 2:49; Nehemiah 7:52).

Besodeiah

Meshullam's father. Along with Joiada, Meshullam helped rebuild part of the Jerusalem wall after the exile in Babylon (Nehemiah 3:6).

Besom

An old English word meaning "broom" (Isaiah 14:23, King James Version). The Berean Standard Bible and other modern translations use "broom" instead of "besom." The besom, or broom, of destruction, is a metaphor in the Near East, signifying total destruction. It refers to the destruction or "sweeping away" of Babylon by the Lord.

Besor, Brook of

A brook, or stream, that David crossed to follow the Amalekites to the south after they had raided Ziklag, his home base. They were exhausted, so 200 of David's men remained at the brook while the other 400 caught and defeated the enemy (1 Samuel 30:9–21).

Betah

Another name for Tibhath (1 Chronicles 18:8). This was a town in the city-kingdom of Aram-zobah that King David brought under his control (2 Samuel 8:8).

See Tebah (Place).

Beten

A city given to the tribe of Asher as tribal land. It is said to be between Hali and Achshaph (Joshua 19:25).

Beth-Anath

A town given to the tribe of Naphtali (Joshua 19:38). The tribe did not drive out the people who originally lived there (Judges 1:33). The Israelites often made slaves of the remaining Canaanite people. They were then corrupted by the non-Jewish religious practices.

Beth-Anoth

A village in the hill country given to the tribe of Judah after the Israelite conquest of Canaan (Joshua 15:59).

Beth-Arabah

One of six cities in the wilderness southeast of Jericho on the border between the tribal land of Judah and Benjamin (Joshua 15:6, 61; 18:22). The modern Ain Gharbeh in the Wadi el-Quelt may be the site of Beth-arabah.

Beth-Aram

KJV rendering of Beth-haram, a Gadite town, in Joshua 13:27. *See* Beth-haram, Beth-haran.

Beth-Arbel

A town that was violently destroyed by the Assyrians. Hosea compared this destruction to Ephraim's future destruction (Hosea 10:14).

Beth-arbel is likely present-day Irbid in Gilead, which is at an important crossroads in the northern Transjordan.

Beth-Ashbea

The place where some families from Judah lived. These families were known for their production of

linen (1 Chronicles 4:21). The King James Version calls "Ashbea" a family name rather than a place of residence.

Beth-Aven

1. A town in the tribal land of Benjamin, located west of Michmash on the border of the wilderness, near Ai, to the east of Bethel (Joshua 7:2; 18:12; 1 Samuel 13:5; 14:23).
2. Hosea used this word to mock Bethel, which was an ancient center of worship. The "House of God" (Bethel) had become a "house of wickedness" (Beth-aven or just Aven; Hosea 4:15; 5:8; 10:5).
   See Aven #2.

Beth-Azmaveth

Another name for Azmaveth, a town near Jerusalem (Nehemiah 7:28).

See Azmaveth (Place).

Beth-Baal-Meon

Alternate name for Baal-meon, a city in Reuben's territory, in Joshua 13:17. *See* Baal-meon.

Beth-Barah

A place where warriors from the tribe of Ephraim, under Gideon's leadership, tried to block the retreat of the Midianites over the Jordan River (Judges 7:24).

Beth-Biri

Alternate name for Lebaoth, a city in Judah's southern territory (1 Chr 4:31). *See* Lebaoth.

Beth-Car

A place in the tribal land of Benjamin. The Israelites chased a Philistine army there after the second battle of Ebenezer (1 Samuel 7:11).

Beth-Dagon

A shrine to the Philistine and Canaanite god Dagon. It is mentioned in several texts other than the Bible. A fortress called Dagon near Jericho was mentioned by the Jewish historian Josephus, for example. Many Canaanite areas had shrines to Dagon:

1. A town in the lowlands of Judah (Joshua 15:41). This Beth-dagon is said to have been captured by both Ramses III of Egypt and by Sennacherib of Assyria.
2. A town on the border of the territory of Asher, east of Mount Carmel (Joshua 19:27).
3. A temple in Ashdod (1 Samuel 5:1–2; called Azotus in 1 Maccabees 10:83–84).

Beth-Diblathaim

A town in Moab (Jeremiah 48:22). It is probably the same as Almon-diblathaim.

See Almon-diblathaim.

Beth-Eden

A small Aramean (Syrian) state north of Damascus. Assyria conquered Beth-eden and forcibly sent its people to Kir (2 Kings 16:9). This fulfilled the prediction in Amos 1:5 ("house of Eden" in the King James Version). Beth-eden, which means "house of delight," is connected to the Eden that is listed in Ezekiel 27:23. We do not know where it was. Its inhabitants are referred to as the "people of Eden" in 2 Kings 19:12.

Beth-Eked

The place between Jezreel and Samaria where Jehu killed Ahaziah's family at a pit or cistern (2 Kings 10:12, 14, King James Version translates it "shearing house").

Beth-Emek

Town on the territorial boundary between the tribes of Asher and Zebulun (Jos 19:27).

Beth-Ezel

One of several small towns, probably in southwest Judah, whose destruction was mourned by the prophet Micah (Micah 1:11).

Beth-Gader

A town mentioned alongside its founder, Hareph, who was a Calebite (1 Chronicles 2:51).

Beth-Gamul

A city in Moab that Jeremiah prophesied God's judgement against because they treated Israel badly (Jeremiah 48:23). It has been identified as Khirbet Jumeil, located 12.9 kilometers (eight miles) east of Dibon.

Beth-Gilgal

A town from which Levitical singers came to Jerusalem to celebrate the rebuilding of the wall under Nehemiah (Nehemiah 12:29).

See Gilgal #1.

Beth-Haggan

A town where King Ahaziah of Judah fled for his life from Jehu of Israel (2 Kings 9:27). Beth-haggan was probably the same as En-gannim. It has been identified as modern Jenin.

Beth-Hakkerem

A town in the hilly area between Jerusalem and Bethlehem. The prophet Jeremiah spoke about the signal fires set at Beth-hakkerem to warn about an invasion from the north (Jeremiah 6:1). Malchijah is mentioned as a political leader in Beth-hakkerem in Nehemiah's time (Nehemiah 3:14).

Beth-Haram, Beth-Haran

A town given to the tribe of Gad at the division of Canaan (Joshua 13:27). It was defended and used to house sheep herds (Numbers 32:36).

It is probably the same as Beth-aramphtha, a city mentioned by the Jewish historian Josephus.

Beth-Hoglah

A city given to the tribe of Benjamin (Joshua 18:21). It was southeast of Jericho near the mouth of the Jordan River on the border of the territories of Judah and Benjamin (Joshua 15:6; 18:19). It is identified with modern Ain Hajlah.

Beth-Horon

A Canaanite place name, perhaps meaning "the house of Hauron," the god of the underworld. Beth-horon was two towns located 16.1 and 19.3 kilometers (10 and 12 miles) northwest of Jerusalem. These towns were on the border between the territories of Ephraim and Benjamin (Joshua 16:3, 5). The two settlements were important because they controlled the Aijalon Valley, a key ancient route that connected the Mediterranean coast to the interior hill country. The upper town guarded a strategic mountain pass. The town of Beth-Horon in Ephraim, along with its surrounding fields, was given to the Levite family of Kohath (Joshua 21:22; 1 Chronicles 6:68).

Many armies passed through the Aijalon Valley near Beth-Horon. After Joshua defeated the Amorites at Gibeon, they fled past Beth-Horon on "the day the sun stood still" (Joshua 10:1–14). A group of Philistines also passed through here to fight King Saul (1 Samuel 13:18). The Egyptian army under King Shishak also passed by Beth-Horon, as recorded in his Karnak inscription. Syrian forces led by Seron (1 Maccabees 3:13–24)

and Nicanor (7:39–43) were defeated by Judas Maccabeus at Beth-Horon. Later, Roman troops led by Cestius were nearly destroyed by Jewish forces there, according to the Jewish historian Josephus.

Beth-Horon was likely destroyed and rebuilt multiple times. Sheerah, the daughter of Beriah and granddaughter of Ephraim, is credited with building both the lower and upper towns of Beth-Horon (1 Chronicles 7:24). King Solomon later strengthened both towns after nearby raids by an Egyptian pharaoh (1 Kings 9:15–17; 2 Chronicles 8:5). During the period between the two Testaments, the Syrian general Bacchides strengthened the defences of Beth-Horon after battling Jonathan Maccabeus (1 Maccabees 9:50).

Beth-Jeshimoth

A city given to the tribe of Reuben (Joshua 13:20), which is later described as a Moabite town (Ezekiel 25:9). Before Israel's conquest of the promised land, they made camp along the Jordan from Beth-jeshimoth to Abel-shittim (Numbers 33:49). The city is usually identified with Tell el-Azeimeh.

See also Wilderness Wanderings.

Beth-Leaphrah

A town mentioned by the prophet Micah. Since Beth-leaphrah ("house of Aphrah" in the King James Version) means "house of dust," Micah made a sarcastic pun by telling its people to "roll in the dust" (Micah 1:10).

Beth-Lebaoth

Alternate name for Lebaoth, a city of Simeon in the southern extremity of Judah's tribe, in Joshua 19:6. *See* Lebaoth.

Beth-Maacah, Beth-Maachah

Another name for Abel-beth-maacah (2 Samuel 20:14–15).

See Abel (Place).

Beth-Marcaboth

A city in Judah's territory given to the tribe of Simeon (Joshua 19:5; 1 Chronicles 4:31).

It may be the same as Madmannah (Joshua 15:31). The name Beth-marcaboth means "house of chariots," and so some have seen a link to the chariot cities of Solomon (1 Kings 9:19; 10:26). We do not know its location unless it is the same as Madmannah.

Beth-Meon

Another name for Baal-meon, a town that first belonged to the tribe of Reuben (Jeremiah 48:23).

See Baal-meon.

Beth-Millo

A house or fortress connected to the city of Shechem. It was mentioned in connection with the crowning of Abimelech (son of Gideon) as king there (Judges 9:6, 20). Since the word "millo" probably means "mount" or "earthwork," Beth-millo is often identified with the "tower of Shechem" mentioned later in the same chapter (Judges 9:46–49).

Beth-Nimrah

A Moabite city given to and rebuilt by the tribe of Gad at the division of the promised land (Numbers 32:3; Joshua 13:27). Beth-nimrah has been identified with modern Tell el-Bleibil, 12.9 kilometers (eight miles) east of the Jordan River.

Beth-Palet

KJV spelling of Beth-pelet, a city of Judah, in Joshua 15:27. *See* Beth-pelet.

Beth-Pazzez

A city that was given to the tribe of Issachar when the promised land was divided. It was near Mount Tabor (Joshua 19:21).

Beth-pelet

A city given to the tribe of Judah when Joshua divided up the promised land among the tribes of Israel (Joshua 15:27). The people of Judah returned to the city after they returned from exile in Babylon (Nehemiah 11:26). Beth-pelet was possibly the hometown of David's warrior Helez the Paltite (2 Samuel 23:26; 1 Chronicles 11:27, also called "Pelonite").

Beth-Peor

A Moabite city given that was to the tribe of Reuben when the promised land was divided (Joshua 13:20). Before the Israelites entered into the land of Canaan, they made camp in a valley across from Beth-peor. The people gathered to hear Moses' final message after he had seen the land from the top of Mount Pisgah (Deuteronomy 3:29; 4:46). Moses was buried here after he was forbidden to enter the promised land (Deuteronomy 34:6). Baal-peor (or Baal of Peor) was the name of a local deity worshiped in this area (Numbers 25:3–5).

Beth-Phelet

The King James Version spelling of Beth-pelet, a city in the land of Judah (Nehemiah 11:26).

See Beth-pelet.

Beth-Rapha

A place or clan name listed with the descendants of Eshton in the tribe of Judah (1 Chronicles 4:1, 12).

Beth-Rehob

A city or district mentioned in Judges 18:28 and 2 Samuel 10:6. It was probably the northernmost point the 12 Israelite spies reached when they searched the land of Canaan. It is probably the same as Rehob (Numbers 13:21; 2 Samuel 10:8).

See Rehob (Place).

Beth-Shan, Beth-Shean

A strategic Palestinian town in the subtropical Jordan Valley. It is 24.1 kilometers (15 miles) south of the Sea of Galilee and 6.4 kilometers (4 miles) west of the Jordan River.

Beth-Shan (also Beth-Shean) was at the eastern end of the valley of Jezreel, and it guarded an important Jordan River crossing. It was at the meeting point of two trade routes. One led north toward Galilee and Damascus. The other went west through the Jezreel Valley and the hills of Samaria.

When the Philistines defeated Israel and King Saul at the battle on Mount Gilboa, Beth-Shan was a Philistine city. The bodies of Saul and his sons were hung in disgrace on the city wall, and Saul's head was displayed in the temple of Dagon, a Philistine deity (1 Samuel 31:10–13; 2 Samuel 21:12–14; 1 Chronicles 10:8–10). The city later became a part of David's kingdom.

Beth-Shan is identified with modern Tell el-Husn. This is confirmed by two Egyptian texts which mention its name. The tell, or mound, is 64.9 meters 2 (13 feet) high and about 804.5 meters (one-half mile) around at its base. During Israel's conquest of Canaan, the area that included Beth-Shan was a part of Issachar's tribe. At some point, Manasseh's tribe took it over (Joshua 17:11). Under King Solomon, it was a part of the district of Baanah (1 Kings 4:12).

The city was destroyed by Shishak (Sheshonk I), pharaoh of Egypt in the 10th century BC. It was not significant during the rest of the Old Testament period. It was occasionally occupied during the Babylonian exile and the post-exilic Persian period.

In the Hellenistic period, Beth-Shan was named Scythopolis because it was settled by Scythian mercenaries under the Egyptian king Ptolemy II. Temples to the Greek deities Dionysus and Zeus were built. Under the Hasmonean dynasty, Beth-Shan became an important administrative center. It prospered as a member of the league of Greco-Roman commercial cities called Decapolis (Matthew 4:25; Mark 7:31) and was the only member west of the Jordan.

Beth-Shemesh

1. A Canaanite city on the northern border of Judah's territory (Joshua 15:10) and the southern border of Dan's southern portion. Beth-shemesh means "the house of Shamash," the Canaanite sun god. It was included in the list of cities of Dan as *Ir-shemesh* (Joshua 19:41). Beth-shemesh was one of the towns of Judah gave to the Levites (Joshua 21:16; 1 Chronicles 6:59). Its inhabitants were called Beth-shemites (1 Samuel 6:14, 18). When the Philistines decided to getrid of the captured ark of the covenant because of the plagues in their cities, they took it to Beth-shemesh. The area was also the scene of a great victory of King Joash (Jehoash) of Israel over King Amaziah of Judah (2 Chronicles 25:21–23). About a century later, Beth-shemesh was captured from King Ahaz of Judah by the Philistines (2 Chronicles 28:16–20). After that, the settlement fell into decline and was finally destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar in 586 BC.
2. A Canaanite city given to the tribe of Issachar (Joshua 19:22).
3. A strong Canaanite city given to the tribe of Naphtali (Joshua 19:38). The people who lived in this Beth-shemesh were not kicked out by the Israelites (Judges 1:33).
4. The term used in the King James Version to describe the Egyptian city of Heliopolis (or On), where the sun was worshiped (Jeremiah 43:13). *See* Heliopolis.

Beth-Shemite

A resident of Beth-shemesh (1 Samuel 6:14, 18).

See Beth-shemesh #1.

Beth-Shittah

A town between the Jordan River and the valley of Jezreel. The Midianites fled here after being defeated by Gideon (Judges 7:22).

Beth-Tappuah

A town in the hill country of the tribal land of Judah (Joshua 15:53). It was named the "place of fruit trees" because of its high ridge location and many fruitful orchards. Beth-tappuah is the modern Taffuh, which is about 6.4 kilometers (four miles) northwest of Hebron.

Beth-Togarmah

A Hebrew phrase meaning "house of Togarmah." It refers to the nation that was descended from Gomer's son Togarmah. They traded with Tyre (Ezekiel 27:14; 38:6).

See Togarmah.

Beth-Zaith

A city where Bacchides, a Syrian general of the Maccabean period, camped after his massacre of 60 Hasidian Jews in Jerusalem (1 Maccabees 7:19). At Beth-zaith, more Jews were killed and thrown into a pit. Beth-zaith is identified with modern Beit Zeita, near Bethlehem.

Beth-Zatha

A variant name for the pool in Jerusalem. The name is generally believed to mean "house of olives," occurring only in John 5:2. In many translations, this variant is written in the margin for Bethesda.

ee Bethesda.

Beth-Zechariah

A place 16.1 kilometers (10 miles) southwest of Jerusalem where Judas Maccabeus was defeated by a Seleucid ruler, Antiochus V Eupator, son of Antiochus Epiphanes (1 Maccabees 6:32–47).

Beth-Zur

A hill town of Judah in the mountains north of Hebron (Joshua 15:58). Beth-zur was built by Maon, one of Caleb's descendants (1 Chronicles 2:45), and was a natural stronghold of Judah. It was defended by King Rehoboam of the southern kingdom in the 10th century BC, even though it was already less important (2 Chronicles 11:7). It was a political center during the time of Nehemiah (Nehemiah 3:16). In the Maccabean period it was known by the Greek name Bethsura. Judas Maccabeus defeated Syrian general Lysias there (1 Maccabees 4:29, 61) and lost the town a few years later. After recapturing Beth-zur from the Syrians, Simon Maccabeus strengthened it in 140 BC, making it one of the most important fortresses on the border between Judah and Idumea (1 Maccabees 11:65–66; 14:33).

Bethabara

A village where messengers from the Pharisees questioned John the Baptist (John 1:28, King James Version).

Modern translations use "Bethany" instead of Bethabara to follow a better collection of manuscript evidence. John called it Bethany "beyond the Jordan" to distinguish it from the Bethany near Jerusalem.

See Bethany #2.

Bethany

1. A village on the eastern slope of the Mount of Olives. This village is sometimes called "Bethany on the Mount of Olives." It is about a mile and a half (2.4 kilometers) east of Jerusalem. Jesus and his disciples sometimes stayed in Bethany when in Judea. For example, they stayed here when they attended temple observances during Passover (Matthew 21:17; Mark 11:11). Jesus was eating at the home of Simon the leper in Bethany when a woman came and anointed his head with costly perfume (Matthew 26:6–13; Mark 14:3–9).

Bethany was also the home of Mary and Martha and their brother Lazarus. This is where Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead (John 11:1, 18). The village was near Bethphage on an approach to Jerusalem (Mark 11:1; Luke 19:29) that Jesus followed in preparation for his triumphal entry into Jerusalem. In Bethany, Jesus blessed his disciples after the resurrection and parted from them (Luke 24:50). Today the town is called el-Azariyeh (the place of Lazarus).

2. A village on "the other side of the Jordan" (the east side), where John the Baptist baptized (John 1:28). It is often called "Bethany beyond the Jordan."

Bethbasi

A town in the Judean wilderness where Jonathan and Simon Maccabeus hid from General Bacchides. After defending it successfully, they survived an attack from the Syrian forces (1 Maccabes 9:62–68). After that defeat, Bacchides had to make peace with Jonathan (1 Maccabees 9:69–73).

Bethel (God)

A foreign god mentioned in ancient texts. Some think it is mentioned in Jeremiah 48:13, Amos 5:5 and Zechariah 7:2.

See Canaanite Deities and Religion.

Bethel *(Place), Bethelite*

Bethel (Place), Bethelite

Bethel *(Place), Bethelite*

1. An important Old Testament city located about 17.7 kilometers (11 miles) north of Jerusalem on the north-south ridge road along the borders of Benjamin and Ephraim (Joshua 16:1–2; 18:13). Hiel, a resident of the city, is referred to as a Bethelite in 1 Kings 16:34. As a trading center, Bethel collected goods from both the Mediterranean coast and Transjordan through Jericho. Although Bethel was in a dry, hilly region, several springs provided enough water for its inhabitants. The oldest artifact found at the site is a water jar from around 3500 BC.
The name "Bethel," meaning "house of El (god)," might have been used by the Canaanites as early as the fourth millennium BC. Archaeological findings from between the Stone Age and the Bronze Age imply that the Canaanites worshiped the deity El on top of the hill.
The patriarch Jacob named the place Bethel—or gave the old name a new meaning—after God sent him a dream there (Genesis 28:10–22). The site was said to be known as Bethel to the patriarch Abraham (Genesis 12:8). However, this might be a later update of an older local name since Bethel was previously known as Luz (Genesis 28:19). It is possible that the sanctuary was known as Bethel and the nearby town was called Luz.
By the beginning of the Intermediate Bronze Age, around 2200 BC, the name Bethel was well-established and continued throughout its history. A biblical passage mentions both names, stating that a man from Luz founded another city with the same name in Hittite territory (Judges 1:26).
Although Bethel was assigned to the tribe of Benjamin, it was actually captured by the tribe of Ephraim from its Canaanite fortress (Judges 1:22–26; 1 Chronicles 7:28). During the period of the judges, the Ark of the

Bethel *(Place), Bethelite*

Covenant was located at Bethel, where the usual Israelite worship practices took place under the high priest Phinehas, the son of Eleazar (Judges 20:18–28; 21:2–4). There is no archaeological evidence that the Philistines lived in Bethel during the time of the judges.

During King Saul's reign, Bethel was left alone when other Israelite cities were attacked (compare 1 Samuel 12–14). Archaeological evidence shows that Bethel was wealthy in the early parts of Saul's reign, but when he made Gibeah his capital, it began to decline.

When the kingdoms of Israel and Judah split during the time of Jeroboam I, Bethel became important again as the capital of the northern kingdom of Israel. It was the counterpart to Judah's capital, Jerusalem. Bethel was one of two northern cities where golden calves were worshiped (1 Kings 12:28–33). The exact location of the sanctuary for this practice has not been discovered. The city was also home to an elderly prophet (1 Kings 13:11) who might have been part of a prophetic community that existed in Bethel during the time of Elijah and Elisha (2 Kings 2:2–3). During the reign of Judah’s King Abijah, Bethel fell under Judah’s control (2 Chronicles 13:19) but was later returned to Israel. The prophet Amos delivered harsh criticisms of Israel’s social and religious life in Bethel, leading the priest Amaziah to expel him (Amos 7:10–13).

There is no archaeological evidence that Bethel was destroyed during the Assyrian conquest of Israel in 722 BC. In fact, one of the deported priests was returned to Bethel to teach Mesopotamian colonists about the ways of the Lord (2 Kings 17:28). Under Judah's King Josiah, the pagan shrine in Bethel was destroyed (2

Kings 23:15–20) but the city itself was not harmed. However, during the reign of either Nabonidus or Darius I, Bethel was burned, and by the time of Ezra, it had become a small village (Ezra 2:28).

2. An alternate name for Bethuel, a town in Judah's territory (1 Samuel 30:27). *See* Bethuel, Bethul (Place).

Bether

A Hebrew word that appears in the phrase "upon rugged mountains" in Song of Solomon 2:17, where it is translated as "mountains of Bether." However, some suggest that "Bether" might not be a proper name but rather refers to a spice or a place, considering that Song of Solomon 8:14 mentions "mountains of spices" in a similar context. Given the poetic nature of the text, "Bether" could be related to a specific spice, such as cinnamon, rather than being a literal location.

In the Septuagint (Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible), "Bether" appears as the name of a city, possibly Beth-anoth in the hill country of Judah, as listed in Joshua 15:59. Additionally, in 1 Chronicles 6:59, the Septuagint uses "Bether" in place of "Beth-shemesh," leading some scholars to associate Bether with Khirbet el-Jehudiyeh, a site southwest of Bittir, which may preserve the ancient name.

Bether became the site of the last Jewish stronghold during the Second Jewish Revolt against the Romans from AD 132 to 135. There Simon Bar-Kochba, the designated "messiah," and the Jewish forces were massacred.

Bethesda

An Aramaic name transliterated into Greek, referring to a pool in Jerusalem mentioned in John 5:2. In Jesus' time, the pool was surrounded by five porches, called colonnades, creating a walkway around it. Bethesda was located near the Sheep Gate, and it was a place where many sick and unwell people gathered, hoping for miraculous healing by entering the pool at the right moment.

The name "Bethesda" has several variations in different manuscripts, including:

- Bethsaida ("house of fish")
- Belzetha
- Bezatha
- Beth-zatha, which means "house of olives"

However, recent studies, particularly those on the Copper Scroll from Qumran Cave Three, suggest that "Bethesda" is the most accurate form. This name is a dual form, indicating that the site had two pools, which corrects the older interpretation that Bethesda meant "house of mercy."

Archaeological digs led by the Franciscan Fathers of the Church of St. Anne near St. Stephen's Gate in Jerusalem have revealed the location of the pool. These findings have shown that the pool of Bethesda should not be confused with other nearby water sites, such a:s

- Birket Israel
- Large pools under the convent of the Sisters of Zion
- The pool beside the Gihon on the slope of Ophel

Instead, the pool of Bethesda has been found in the ruins of the St. Anne Courtyard. These ruins reveal two large pools surrounded by arched pillars that were originally covered by 7.5 to 9 meters (25 to 30 feet) of debris. When they were dug up, these pillars became evidence of the impressive buildings built at the time.

The architectural style and inscriptions suggest it was built in Herodian times, making the pool of Bethesda one of Herod the Great's many grand building projects. Over the centuries, debris and ruins filled the pool area, eventually leading to the construction of a Byzantine church on top of it in the fifth century AD. Through both literary and archaeological evidence, Bethesda is now understood to mean "a place of two pools," located near the Sheep Market of St. Stephen's Gate.

See Bethsaida; Beth-zatha.

Bethlehem

1. "City of David" and the birthplace of Jesus Christ. It is located eight kilometers (five miles) south of Jerusalem. To distinguish it from another Bethlehem in the region of Zebulun, this city is sometimes called Bethlehem-Judah or Ephrath (Genesis 35:19; Micah 5:2).

Bethlehem was originally a Canaanite settlement connected to the patriarchs. Rachel, the wife of Jacob, died and was buried near Bethlehem (Genesis 35:16, 19; 48:7). The earliest historical mention of Bethlehem comes from the Amarna letters in the 14th century BC, where it is referred to as *bitil u-lahama*, located south of Jerusalem. The name might have meant "house of the goddess Lahama." A branch of Caleb's family settled there, and his son Salma was known as "the father of Bethlehem" (1 Chronicles 2:51). Bethlehem was also the home of a young Levite who served as a priest to Micah (Judges 17:7–8), and of Boaz, Ruth, Obed, and Jesse—the father of David (Ruth 4:11, 17; 1 Samuel 16:18).

Bethlehem was the birthplace of David (1 Samuel 17:12) and the home of one of David's mighty men, Elhanan (2 Samuel 23:24; 1 Chronicles 11:26). It was the site of a brave act by three of David's soldiers, who broke through a group of Philistine raiders occupying Bethlehem to bring David water from the well near the city gate (2 Samuel 23:14–17). Much later, Bethlehem is mentioned as being near the village of Geruth-Kimham, where Jews fleeing from the Babylonians stayed on their way to Egypt (Jeremiah 41:17). People from Bethlehem were among those who returned from the Babylonian exile (Ezra 2:21; Nehemiah 7:26; 1 Esdras 5:17).

When Jesus was born there, Bethlehem was only a village (Matthew 2:1–16; Luke 2:4–6, 15; John

7:42). Because of a census ordered by Caesar Augustus, Joseph had to go to Bethlehem, "since he was from the house and line of David" (Luke 2:4). It is possible that the family still owned property there. The birth of Jesus may have taken place in a cave outside the town, a belief held by early Christian writers like Justin Martyr and Origen. Origen, who lived in the Holy Land, wrote, "In Bethlehem, you are shown the cave where he was born and within the cave the manger where he was wrapped in swaddling clothes." Later, Jerome described the grotto (a small cave), which was a basilica built by Emperor Constantine. Archaeological digs in 1934–35 revealed that a second phase of the building occurred during the reign of Justinian in AD 527 to 565 when Constantine's basilica was enlarged. Steps lead down to the grotto, which has a rectangular shape, suggesting that Constantine's builders altered the original cave. However, there is no description of the grotto before Constantine's basilica was constructed.

2. A town in Zebulun (Joshua 19:15). It was probably the home of the judge Ibzan, an early ruler of Israel (Judges 12:8–10). It is identified today with the village of Beit Lahm, some 11.3 kilometers (seven miles) northwest of Nazareth.

Bethlehemite

A resident of Bethlehem of Judah (1 Samuel 16:1, 18; 17:58; 2 Samuel 21:19).

See Bethlehem #1.

Bethphage

A village on the Mount of Olives near Jerusalem. At Bethphage, two disciples obtained the donkey colt on which Jesus rode into Jerusalem (Matthew 21:1–6; Mark 11:1–6; Luke 19:29–35).

Bethsaida

1. A town northeast of the Sea of Galilee. Bethsaida was the home of three of Jesus' disciples: Andrew, Peter, and Philip (John 1:44; 12:21). Despite the miracles Jesus performed there, the people of Bethsaida did not believe in him. Because of this, Jesus warned that calamity would come upon the town (Matthew 11:21–22; Luke 10:13). A blind man was healed in Bethsaida (Mark 8:22–26), and nearby over 5,000 people were fed by the miracle of the loaves and fish (Mark 6:34–45; Luke 9:10–17).
Bethsaida is mentioned in several ancient sources, especially in the writings of Josephus, a Jewish historian from the first century AD. There was once a theory that there were two Bethsaidas, one on each side of the Sea of Galilee. This theory came from the account in Mark, which suggests that the feeding of the 5,000 happened across the lake from Bethsaida, while Luke places it near Bethsaida. One explanation is that the miracle occurred in the area around Bethsaida, and the quickest way to reach the town itself was by crossing part of the lake. This interpretation questions the traditional site of the miracle (et-Tabgha on the west shore, closer to Capernaum). Still, it is a better solution than the idea of two Bethsaidas so close to each other.
Bethsaida was originally just a fishing village, but it was expanded and made more beautiful by Philip the Tetrarch, the son of Herod the Great, after Caesar Augustus's death. According to Josephus, Philip was later buried in Bethsaida. The town was renamed Julias in honor of Julia, the daughter of Augustus. Josephus also defended Bethsaida when he was a military commander during the first Jewish revolt against Rome from AD 66 to 70. Josephus described Bethsaida as being "at the lake of Gennesareth" (another name for the Sea of Galilee)

but "near to the Jordan River." He also mentioned that it was located in lower Gaulanitis, a district that bordered the northeastern part of the Sea of Galilee. However, no ancient ruins matching the size or description of Bethsaida have been found near either the lake or the river. The small harbor of el-'Araj has been suggested as the site of Bethsaida, but there is little archaeological evidence to support this. The site of et-Tell, located about 3.2 kilometers (two miles) from the lake, shows signs of significant Roman occupation and building activity. Currently, et-Tell is considered the most likely location for ancient Bethsaida.

2. A different name for the pool at Jerusalem, which is also called Bethesda or Beth-zatha.
See Bethesda; Beth-zatha.

Bethuel (Person)

The youngest son of Abraham's brother Nahor and his wife, Milcah. Bethuel was Abraham's nephew and the father of Rebekah (Genesis 22:23; 24:15, 24). He was called an Aramean of Paddan-aram (Genesis 25:20; 28:5).

Bethuel, Bethul (Place)

One of the cities given to Simeon's tribe within Judah's land (1 Chr 4:30). Bethuel is also called Bethul in Joshua 19:4, and is perhaps the same as Chesil or Kesil, a city given to Judah's tribe (Joshua 15:30). It may also be the same as Bethel in the Negev, to which David sent gifts (1 Samuel 30:27).

See Kesil.

Bethulia

A town described in the book of Judith as being near Dothan on a hill over the plain of Esdraelon (Judith 4:6; 6:11). Nebuchadnezzar's general, Holofernes, tried to control Bethulia by controlling its water sources (Judith 7:6–7).

Betomasthaim, Betomesthaim

A place near Dothan, which is mentioned in the Book of Judith. It's location is unknown. The high priest told the people who lived in Betomasthaim and Bethulia to block the advancing Assyrian army led by Holofernes. After Holofernes was killed, Betomasthaim was one of the cities asked by Uzziah, the leader of Bethulia, to destroy the remnant of the Assyrian army (Judith 4:6–7; 15:4).

Betonim

A city in the territory of the tribe of Gad (Joshua 13:26). It has been identified with modern Khirbet Bat-neh, 25.7 kilometers (16 miles) northeast of Jericho.

Betrothal

The first stage of a marriage agreement. Also called engagement.

See Marriage, Marriage Customs.

Beulah

A Hebrew word used once in the King James Version as a proper name for Jerusalem, suggesting a promise of blessing for the people of God (Isaiah 62:4). The word means "married" and was used symbolically by the prophet Isaiah to describe what God's special relationship would be to his restored people. The same theme recurs in New Testament references to the "Bride of Christ."

See also Bride of Christ.

Bezai

1. An ancestor of a group of people who returned to Jerusalem with Zerubbabel after the exile in Babylon (Ezra 2:17; Nehemiah 7:23).
2. A political leader who signed Ezra's promise of faithfulness to God with Nehemiah and others after the exile in Babylon (Nehemiah 10:18).

Bezaleel, Bezalel

1. Uri's son and the master craftsman from the tribe of Judah. God gave him special skills to be in charge of the construction and furnishing of the tabernacle (Exodus 31:2; 35:30–31; 36:1–2; 37:1; 38:22; 1 Chronicles 2:20; 2 Chronicles 1:5) In the King James Version, his name is Bezaleel.
2. Pahath-moab's son, who obeyed Ezra's command to divorce his non-Jewish wife after the exile in Babylon (Ezra 10:30). In the King James Version, his name is Bezaleel.

Bezek

1. A site of a major victory for the tribes of Simeon and Judah over the Perizzites and Canaanites (Judges 1:3–7). Adoni-bezek, which means "lord of Bezek," was king of the city at that time. Bezek was perhaps located at Khirbet Bezqa, a few miles northwest of Jerusalem.
2. A place where Saul gathered an army to attack the Ammonites who were troubling Jabesh-gilead (1 Samuel 11:8–11). This Bezek is usually located at Khirbet Ibziq, a little south of Mount Gilboa.

Bezer (Person)

Zophah's son in the tribe of Asher (1 Chronicles 7:37).

Bezer (Place)

A city of refuge in Reuben's land in the desert, east of the Jordan River (Deuteronomy 4:43; Joshua 20:8). It was later given to the Merari family of Levites (Joshua 21:36; 1 Chronicles 6:78). It is probably a different spelling of Bozrah in Jeremiah 48:24. According to the Moabite Stone, Bezer was among the cities rebuilt by King Mesha of Moab.

See also Bozrah #2; Cities of Refuge.

Bible

Derived from the Greek biblia ("books"), which, though plural, came to be used as a singular noun and to stand for the collection of books known as the Scriptures. The idea of a collection of holy writings developed early in Hebrew-Christian thought. Daniel in the sixth century BC spoke of a prophetic writing as "the books" (Dn 9:2). The writer of 1 Maccabees (second century BC) referred to the OT as "the holy books" (12:9). Jesus referred to the OT books as "the scriptures" (Mt 21:42), and Paul spoke of them as "the holy scriptures" (Rom 1:2).

The Bible is divided into the Old Testament and the New Testament. Of course, there was no OT and NT before the coming of Christ, only one collection of sacred writings. But after the apostles and their associates produced another body of sacred literature, the church began to refer to the OT and the NT. Actually "testament" is the translation of a Greek word that might better be rendered "covenant." It denotes an arrangement made by God for the spiritual guidance and benefit of human beings. The covenant is unalterable: humankind may accept it or reject it but cannot change it. "Covenant" is a common OT word; of several covenants described in the OT, the most prominent was the law given to Moses. While Israel was chafing and failing under the Mosaic covenant, God promised them a "new covenant" (Jer 31:31).

The term "new covenant" appears several times in the NT. Jesus used it when he instituted the Lord's Supper; by it he sought to call attention to the new basis of communion with God he intended to establish by his death (Lk 22:20; 1 Cor 11:25). The apostle Paul also spoke of that new covenant (2 Cor 3:6, 14), as did the writer to the Hebrews (Heb 8:8; 9:11–15). The detailed description of God's new method of dealing with people (on the basis of the finished work of Christ on the cross) is the subject of the 27 books of the NT. God's dealing with people in anticipation of the coming of Messiah (Hebrew equivalent of "Christ," meaning "anointed one") is certainly the major theme of the 39 books of the OT, though they deal with much more than that. Latin church writers used *testamentum* to translate "covenant," and from them the use passed into

English; so old and new covenants became OT and NT.

At least the first half of the OT follows a logical and easily understood arrangement. In Genesis through Esther the history of Israel from Abraham to the restoration under Persian auspices appears largely in chronological order. Then follows a group of poetic books and the Major and Minor Prophets ("Major" meaning the books that are relatively long; "Minor" meaning the books that are relatively short).

The NT also follows a generally logical arrangement. It begins with the four Gospels, which describe the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Christ and his training of disciples to carry on his work after his ascension. The book of Acts continues the narrative where the Gospels end and details the founding of the church and its spread through Mediterranean lands. In the latter part of the book the spotlight focuses on the apostle Paul and his church planting activities. Next come letters Paul addressed to churches he founded or to young ministers he tried to encourage. Following the Pauline Epistles come a group commonly called the General Epistles. The last book, Revelation, is an apocalyptic work.

The OT was written almost entirely in Hebrew with a few isolated passages in Aramaic in the latter books. If one accepts the view that Moses wrote the first five books of the OT (the position the Scripture itself takes), the earliest books of the OT were written by about 1400 BC (provided one accepts the early date proposed for the exodus). If the last book written was Malachi (before 400 BC), composition took place during 1,000 years of time. All the writers (some 30 in number) were Jews: prophets, judges, kings, and other leaders in Israel.

The NT was probably written entirely in Greek. If James was the first to write a NT book before the middle of the first century, and if John was the last (composing Revelation about AD 90), the NT was written during a 50-year period in the latter half of the first century. All the writers (probably nine) were Jews, with the exception of Luke (writer of Luke and Acts), and they came from a variety of walks of life: fishermen, doctor, tax collector, and religious leaders.

In spite of great diversity of authorship in the OT and NT, and composition spanning over 1,500 years, there is remarkable unity in the total thrust. Christians believe that God must have been superintending the production of a divine-human book that would properly present his message to humankind.

The OT and NT are component parts of one divine revelation. The OT describes man and woman in the first paradise on the old earth; the NT concludes with a vision of the new heaven and new earth. The OT sees humankind as fallen from a sinless condition and separated from God; the NT views believers as restored to favor through the sacrifice of Christ. The OT predicts a coming Redeemer who will rescue men and women from eternal condemnation; the NT reveals the Christ who brought salvation. In most of the OT the spotlight focuses on a sacrificial system in which the blood of animals provided a temporary handling of the sin problem; in the New, Christ appeared as the one who came to put an end to all sacrifice—to be himself the supreme sacrifice. In the OT, numerous predictions foretold a coming Messiah who would save his people; in the New, scores of passages detail how those prophecies were minutely fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ: the "son of Abraham" and the "son of David" (Mt 1:1). As Augustine said more than 1,500 years ago, "The New is in the Old contained; the Old is in the New explained."

The Authority of the Bible

Judge of men and nations, the self-revealed God wields unlimited authority and power. All creaturely authority and power is derived from that of God. As the sovereign Creator of all, the God of the Bible wills and has the right to be obeyed. The power God bestows is a divine trust, a stewardship. God's creatures are morally accountable for their use or misuse of it. In fallen human society God wills civil government for the promotion of justice and order. He approves an ordering of authoritative and creative relationships in the home by stipulating certain responsibilities of husbands, wives, and children. He wills a pattern of priorities for the church as well: Jesus Christ the head, prophets and apostles through whom redemptive revelation came, and so on. The inspired Scriptures, revealing God's transcendent will in objective written form, are the rule of faith and conduct through which Christ exercises his divine authority in the lives of Christians.

Revolt against particular authorities has in our time widened into a revolt against all transcendent and external authority. The widespread questioning of authority is condoned and

promoted in many academic circles. Philosophers with a radically secular outlook have affirmed that God and the supernatural are mythical conceptions, that natural processes and events comprise the only ultimate reality. All existence is said to be temporal and changing, all beliefs and ideals are declared to be relative to the age and culture in which they appear. Biblical religion, therefore, like all other, is asserted to be merely a cultural phenomenon. The Bible's claim to divine authority is dismissed by such thinkers; transcendent revelation, fixed truths, and unchanging commandments are set aside as pious fictions.

In the name of man's supposed "coming of age," radical secularism champions human autonomy and creative individuality. Man is his own lord and the inventor of his own ideals and values, it is said. He lives in a supposedly purposeless universe that has itself presumably been engendered by a cosmic accident. Therefore, human beings are declared to be wholly free to impose upon nature and history whatever moral criteria they prefer. In such a view, to insist on divinely given truths and values, on transcendent principles, would be to repress self-fulfillment and retard creative personal development. Hence, the radically secular view goes beyond opposing particular external authorities whose claims are considered arbitrary or immoral; radical secularism is aggressively hostile to all external and objective authority, viewing it as intrinsically restrictive of the autonomous human spirit.

Any reader of the Bible recognizes rejection of divine authority and of a definitive revelation of what is right and good as an age-old phenomenon. It is not at all peculiar to contemporary man to "come of age"; it was found already in Eden. Adam and Eve revolted against the will of God in pursuit of individual preference and self-interest. But their revolt was recognized to be sin, not rationalized as philosophical gnosis at the frontiers of evolutionary advance.

If one takes a strictly developmental view, which considers all reality contingent and changing, what basis remains for humanity's decisively creative role in the universe? How could a purposeless cosmos cater to individual self-fulfillment? Only the biblical alternative of the Creator-Redeemer God, who fashioned human beings for moral obedience and a high spiritual destiny, truly preserves the permanent, universal dignity of the human species. The Bible does so, however, by a demanding call for personal spiritual decision. The Bible sets forth man's superiority to the animals, his high dignity ("a little lower than God," Ps 8:5, nasb) because of the divine rational and moral image that he bears by creation. In the context of universal human involvement in Adamic sin, the Bible utters a merciful divine call to redemptive renewal through the mediatorial person and work of Christ. Fallen humanity is invited to experience the Holy Spirit's renewing work, to be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ, and to anticipate a final destiny in the eternal presence of the God of justice and justification.

Contemporary rejection of biblical tenets does not rest on any logical demonstration that the case for biblical theism is false; it turns rather on a subjective preference for alternative views of "the good life."

The Bible is not the only significant reminder that human beings stand daily in responsible relationship to the sovereign God. The Creator reveals his authority in the cosmos, in history, and in inner conscience, a disclosure of the living God that penetrates into the mind of every human being (Rom 1:18–20; 2:12–15). Rebellious suppression of that "general divine revelation" does not succeed in wholly suspending a fearsome sense of final divine accountability (1:32). Yet it is the Bible as "special revelation" that most clearly confronts our spiritually rebellious race with the reality and authority of God. In the Scriptures, the character and will of God, the meaning of human existence, the nature of the spiritual realm, and the purposes of God for human beings in all ages are stated in propositionally intelligible form that all can understand. The Bible publishes in objective form the criteria by which God judges individuals and nations, and the means of moral recovery and restoration to personal fellowship with him.

Regard for the Bible is therefore decisive for the course of Western culture and in the long run for human civilization generally. Intelligible divine revelation, the basis for belief in the sovereign authority of the Creator-Redeemer God over all human life, rests on the reliability of what Scripture says about God and his purposes. Modern naturalism impugns the authority of the Bible and assails the claim that the Bible is the Word of God written, that is, a transcendently given revelation of the mind and will of God in objective literary form. Scriptural authority is the storm center both in the controversy over revealed religion and in the modern conflict over civilizational values.

The Bible's View of Itself

The intelligible nature of divine revelation—the presupposition that God's will is made known in the form of valid truths—is the central presupposition of the authority of the Bible. Much recent neo-Protestant theology demeaned the traditional evangelical emphasis as doctrinaire and static. It insisted instead that the authority of Scripture is to be experienced internally as a witness to divine grace engendering faith and obedience, thus disowning its objective character as universally valid truth. Somewhat inconsistently, almost all neo-Protestant theologians have appealed to the record to support cognitively whatever fragments of the whole seem to coincide with their divergent views, even though they disavow the Bible as a specially revealed corpus of authoritative divine teaching. If God's revelational disclosure to chosen prophets and apostles is to be considered meaningful and true, it must be given not merely in isolated concepts capable of diverse meanings but in sentences or propositions. A proposition—that is, a subject, predicate, and connecting verb (or "copula")—constitutes the minimal logical unit of intelligible communication. The OT prophetic formula "Thus saith the Lord" characteristically introduced propositionally disclosed truth. Jesus Christ employed the distinctive formula "But I say unto you" to introduce logically formed sentences that he represented as the veritable word or doctrine of God.

The Bible is authoritative because it is divinely authorized; in its own terms, "all Scripture is God-breathed" (2 Tm 3:16, niv). According to this passage, the whole OT (or any element of it) is divinely inspired. Extension of the same claim to the NT is not expressly stated, but it is not merely implied. The New Testament contains indications that its content was to be viewed, and was in fact viewed, as no less authoritative than the Old. The apostle Paul's writings are catalogued with "other Scriptures" (2 Pt 3:15–16). Under the heading of "Scripture," 1 Timothy 5:18 cites Luke 10:7 alongside Deuteronomy 25:4 (cf. 1 Cor 9:9). The book of Revelation, moreover, claims divine origin (1:1–3) and employs the term "prophecy" in the OT sense (22:9–10, 18). The apostles did not distinguish their spoken and written teaching but expressly declared their inspired proclamation to be the word of God (1 Cor 4:1; 2 Cor 5:20; 1 Thes 2:13).

The Bible remains the most extensively printed, most widely translated, and most frequently read book in the world. Its words have been treasured in the hearts of multitudes like none other's. All who have received its gifts of wisdom and promises of new life and power were at first strangers to its redemptive message, and many were hostile to its teaching and spiritual demands. In all generations its power to challenge persons of all races and lands has been demonstrated. Those who cherish the Book because it sustains future hope, brings meaning and power to the present, and correlates a misused past with the forgiving grace of God would not long experience such inner rewards if Scripture were not known to them as the authoritative, divinely revealed truth. To the Christian, Scripture is the Word of God given in the objective form of propositional truths through divinely inspired prophets and apostles, and the Holy Spirit is the giver of faith through that word.

Preview

Several other major articles on the Bible follow:

- Bible, Canon of the
- Bible, Inspiration of the
- Bible, Manuscripts and Text of the (Old Testament)
- Bible, Manuscripts and Text of the (New Testament)
- Bible, Quotations of the Old Testament in the New Testament
- Bible, Versions of the (Ancient)
- Bible, Versions of the (English)

Bible, Canon of the

Those books in the Jewish and Christian Bible considered to be Scripture and therefore authoritative in matters of faith and doctrine. The term translates both a Greek and a Hebrew word that mean "a rule," or "measuring rod." It is a list to which other books are compared and by which they are measured. After the fourth century AD, the Christian church found itself with only 66 books that constituted its Scripture; 27 of these were the NT and 39 were the OT. Just as Plato, Aristotle, and Homer form a canon of Greek literature, so the NT books became the canon of Christian literature. The criteria for selecting the books in the Jewish canon (the OT) are not known but clearly had to do with

their worth in the ongoing life and religion of the worshiping nation. The criteria of the selection of NT books revolved around their "apostolicity," according to early church writers. Like those of the OT, these books were collected and preserved by local churches in the continuing process of their worship and need for authoritative guidance for Christian living. The formation of the canon was a process, rather than an event, that took several hundred years to reach finality in all parts of the Roman Empire. Local canons were the basis for comparison, and out of them eventually emerged the general canon that exists in Christendom today, although some of the Eastern churches have a NT that is slightly smaller than that accepted in the West. Judaism, as well as Christianity as a whole, believes that the Spirit of God was operative in some providential way in the production and preservation of his Word.

Canon of the Old Testament

The Old Testament is a name that does not appear in Jewish literature. Jews prefer to call their collection of Scriptures the TANAK—an acronym formed from the first letters of *Torah* (Law), *Nevi'im* (Prophets), and *Kethubim* (Writings). In Luke 24:44 (niv), these are called the "Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms" (the first book of the Writings in the Hebrew Bible). Christians called their collection of writings the New Testament, or covenant, the latter term being a designation earlier used of the agreement God made with Abraham and the patriarchs, which was repeated by Christ to his apostles (Mt 26:28). Christians in the first century considered their new covenant from Christ (1 Cor 11:25) to be a continuation of the one made earlier with the patriarchs (Eph 2:12), spoken of by the prophets (Jer 31:31–34), and which was therefore called a former covenant (Heb 8:7–13; 9:1, 15–22) or in later centuries the OT. The terms "Old" and "New" do not appear in the apostolic fathers of the first and second century or in the apologists of the early- to mid-second century, but they do appear in the latter half of the second century in Justin Martyr (*Dialogues* 11:2), Irenaeus (*Against Heresies* 4.9.1), and Clement of Alexandria (*Stromata* 1:5). In these authors the expression referred more to the covenant itself than to the books containing it, though the transfer was eventually made. The term "canon" was not used in the OT or NT to refer to the Jewish Scriptures. The idea of limitation inherent in the word was not appropriate to the nature of religious authority in Jewish religion during the thousand years when the OT books were being written. Only the Torah was conceived as incapable of being added to or taken from (Dt 4:2). Jewish religion existed for a millennium, from Moses to Malachi, without a closed canon, i.e., an exclusive list of authoritative books. Never in their history did the people of the OT have the entire 39 books of the OT. When their canon was closed is not known. Although some questions were being asked about religious authority by rabbis at Jamnia 20 years after the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70, we have our first list of 39 books produced by Melito of Sardis around AD 170. That list included no books written after the time of Malachi, unless one is disposed to date Daniel to the second century. The Prophets and the Writings were always considered secondary to the Law. Their composition and collection was a process rather than an event in the life of the people of Israel and functioned largely as a record of the nation's response to the Law, which was so sacred that it was kept (according to rabbinical tradition: Babylonian Talmud, *Baba Bathra* 14a; cf. also *Cairo Damascus Document* 5.2) in the ark of the covenant that stood in the Holy of Holies in the tabernacle. In Deuteronomy 31:26, however, the Levites were commanded by Moses merely to put the Book of the Law beside the ark. Nevertheless, its very presence in the Holy of Holies establishes its uniqueness in relation to other OT books.

The 39 books of the modern OT were originally divided into only 24, according to the uniform testimony of early Hebrew tradition. The Talmud, rabbinic literature, and probably 4 Esdras testify to this arrangement that included five books of the Law, eight Prophets, and eleven Writings (Greek—Hagiographa). Modern Hebrew Bibles reflect this tripartite arrangement that was used in the first three printed editions (Soncino, 1488; Naples, 1491–1493; Brescia, 1492–1494). The Law contained the Pentateuch in our familiar order, Genesis to Deuteronomy. The eight Prophets were Joshua, Judges, Samuel (1 and 2), Kings (1 and 2), Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Minor Prophets (all 12), which were considered as one book and arranged in the same order as our English Bibles. The eleven books of Writings contained three of poetry (Ps, Prv, Jb), the Five Scrolls (Sg, Ru, Lam, Eccl, Est), which were read at the important feasts and arranged in the chronological order of their observance, and three of narrative or historical (Dn, Ezr-Neh, 1 and 2 Chr).

Apart from authentic Jewish tradition, efforts were made to divide the books into 21, combining Ruth

with Judges, and Lamentations with Jeremiah. Josephus was the first to do so, in the first century AD, but he was influenced by the Greek OT, the Septuagint. Origen observed in the early third century that this arrangement also corresponded to the number of letters in the Hebrew alphabet, as did Athanasius in the fourth, and others, including Jerome. It was dubiously concluded that the number of books in the Hebrew Bible had been divinely ordained to agree with the number of letters of the Hebrew alphabet! Church fathers added their support to this coincidence, which became providence to them. All such efforts, however, are of Greek origin and have no support in Hebrew tradition.

The oldest extant manuscripts of the complete OT in Hebrew are the Masoretic Texts, which are no earlier than the eighth century AD. Only manuscripts of individual books have been found in the Dead Sea Scrolls. The Masoretic scribes apparently laid down no rules about arrangement of books because there is no uniform order of the Latter Prophets or the Writings in early Hebrew manuscripts. Nor is the situation any different in ancient Greek translations of the Hebrew. Great diversity exists in the order of books in all three of our oldest manuscripts—Codex Alexandrinus, Vaticanus, and Sinaiticus. All the early Christian authors who profess to give the order and contents of the Hebrew Bible but who do not reflect the Hebrew tripartite division are clearly dependent on the Alexandrian order reflected in these Greek editions, rather than on the Hebrew Bible. Modern Protestant Bibles follow the order of the Latin Vulgate and the content of the Hebrew. Both the Vulgate and the Septuagint (Greek translation) contained the Apocrypha, which was never accepted by the Jews. The Roman Catholic Church includes the Apocrypha in its English translations because of the influence of the Vulgate on Catholic tradition. It is considered deuterocanonical.

Even though no uniformity of order was maintained, the Alexandrian order, reflected in the Greek manuscripts, generally arranged books according to their subject matter—narrative, history, poetry, and prophecy, with the apocryphal books appropriately interspersed into these categories. The Hebrew division was totally ignored.

Early Hebrew Bibles divided the text into small paragraphs and larger sections somewhat akin to our paragraphs. These were indicated by spaces left between them—three letters between the small sections and nine letters between the larger ones. The number of sections is not the same in all manuscripts. Jesus probably referred to such sections in his comment concerning the "passage about the bush" (Mk 12:26). Later, liturgical needs led to further divisions of the text for the complete reading of the Law in Babylonian synagogues in one year (54 sections) and in Palestinian synagogues in three years (154 sections). These are reflected in the lectionary cycles marked in some early Hebrew Bibles.

The division of the text into modern chapters, done in the 13th century (c. 1228) for the Latin Vulgate by Stephen Langton, was applied to the Hebrew Bible in 1518 (Bomberg Edition), but the numbers were not given to the chapters until 1571 in the text of Montanus, a Hebrew Bible with Latin interlinear translation. The verses were introduced in Bomberg's Great Bible of 1547–48 in which every fifth verse was designated by a Hebrew numeral 1, 5, 10, and so on. Verses were inserted into the Latin Vulgate in 1555 in the small octavo edition of Stephanus.

Canon of the New Testament

The NT was written within the period of half a century, several hundred years after the completion of the OT. Both halves of that statement would be questioned by modern critics, who would extend the time span for completion of both Testaments. The writer of this survey is confident of its truthfulness to historic fact, however, and the approach taken to canonization of both OT and NT is based solidly upon that twofold premise.

In a sense, we possess far higher certification of the OT canon than of the NT canon. We refer to the fact of our Lord's own imprimatur by way of his use of the Hebrew Scriptures as the authoritative Word of God. Yet there is a sense in which Jesus Christ did establish the NT content or canon as well, by way of anticipation. It was he who promised, "The Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you" and "he will guide you into all truth" (Jn 14:26; 16:13, niv).

From this we can derive, in turn, the basic principle of canonicity for the NT. It is identical to that of the OT, since it narrows down to a matter of divine inspiration. Whether we think of the prophets of OT times or the apostles and their God-given associates of the New, the recognition at the very time of their writing that they were authentic

spokesmen for God is what determines the intrinsic canonicity of their writing. It is altogether God's Word only if it is God-breathed. We can be assured that the books under question were received by the church of the apostolic age precisely when they had been certified by an apostle as being thus inspired. The apparent variation, relative to geographic area, in acknowledgment of some of the NT epistles may well reflect the simple fact that this attestation was by its very nature localized at first. Conversely, that all 27 books of the now universally received NT were ultimately agreed upon is evidence that proper attestation was indeed confirmed after rigorous investigation.

Tertullian, an outstanding Christian writer in the first two decades of the third century, was one of the first to call the Christian Scriptures the "New Testament." That title had appeared earlier (c. 190) in a composition against Montanism, the author of which is unknown. This is significant. Its use placed the NT Scripture on a level of inspiration and authority with the OT.

From available information, the gradual process that led to full and formal public recognition of a fixed canon of the 27 books comprising the NT takes us down into the fourth century of our era. This does not necessarily mean that these Scriptures were lacking recognition in their entirety before that time, but that a need for officially defining the canon was not pressing until then.

Though a much shorter period of time was involved in the writing of the NT than the OT, the geographic range of its origin is far wider. This circumstance alone is sufficient to account for a lack of spontaneous or simultaneous recognition of the precise extent of the NT canon. Because of the geographic isolation of the various recipients of portions of the NT, there was bound to be some lag and uncertainty from one region to another in the acknowledgment of some of the books.

In order to appreciate just what did transpire in the process of canonization of the NT books, we must review the facts available to us. This will enable us to analyze *how* and *why* our early Christian forebears settled upon the 27 books in our NT.

The historic process was a gradual and continuous one, but it will help us understand it if we subdivide the nearly three and a half centuries involved into shorter periods of time. Some speak of three major stages toward canonization. This implies, without justification, that there are readily discernible steps along the way. Others simply present a long list of the names of persons and documents involved. Such a list makes it difficult to sense any motion at all. A somewhat arbitrary breakdown into five periods will be made here, with the reminder that the spreading of the knowledge of sacred literature and the deepening consensus as to its authenticity as inspired Scripture continued uninterruptedly. The periods are:

1. First Century
2. First Half of Second Century
3. Second Half of Second Century
4. Third Century
5. Fourth Century

Again, without meaning to imply that these are clear-cut stages, it will be helpful to notice the major trends observable in each of the periods just identified. In the first period, of course, the various books were written, but they also began to be copied and disseminated among the churches. In the second, as they became more widely known and cherished for their contents, they began to be cited as authoritative. By the end of the third period, they held a recognized place alongside the OT as "Scripture," and they began to be both translated into regional languages and made the subject of commentaries. During the third century AD, our fourth period, the collecting of books into a whole "New Testament" was underway, together with a sifting process that was separating them from other Christian literature. The final, or fifth, period finds the church fathers of the fourth century stating that conclusions regarding the canon have been reached that indicate acceptance by the whole church. Thus, in the most strict and formal sense of the word, the canon had become fixed. It remains to list in greater detail the forces and individuals that produced the written sources witnessing to this remarkable process through which, by God's providence, we have inherited our NT.

Period One: First Century

The principle determining recognition of the authority of the canonical NT writings was established within the content of those writings themselves. There are repeated exhortations for public reading of the apostolic communications. At the close of his First Letter to the Thessalonians, possibly the first book of the NT to be written, Paul

says, "I command you in the name of the Lord to read this letter to all the brothers and sisters" (1 Thes 5:27, nlt). Earlier in the same letter Paul commends their ready acceptance of his spoken word as "the word of God" (2:13), and in 1 Corinthians 14:37 he speaks similarly of his "writings," insisting that his message be recognized as a commandment from the Lord himself. (See also Col 4:16; Rv 1:3.) In 2 Peter 3:15–16 Paul's letters are included with "the other Scriptures." Since Peter's is a general letter, widespread knowledge of Paul's letters is thereby implied. Highly indicative also is Paul's usage in 1 Timothy 5:18. He follows up the formula "the Scriptures say" by a combined quotation about not muzzling an ox (Dt 25:4) and "the worker deserves his wages" (cf. Lk 10:7). Thus, an equivalence is implied between OT Scripture and a NT Gospel.

In AD 95, Clement of Rome wrote to the Christians in Corinth using a free rendering of material from Matthew and Luke. He seems to be strongly influenced by Hebrews and is obviously familiar with Romans and Corinthians. There are also reflections of Ephesians, 1 Timothy, Titus, and 1 Peter.

Period Two: First Half of Second Century

One of the earliest NT manuscripts yet discovered, a fragment of John from Egypt known as the John Rylands papyrus, demonstrates how the writings of the apostle John were revered and copied by about AD 125, within 30 to 35 years of his death. There is evidence that within 30 years of the apostle's death all the Gospels and Pauline letters were known and used in all those centers from which any evidence has come down to us. It is true that some of the smaller letters were being questioned as to their authority in some quarters for perhaps another 50 years, but this was due only to uncertainty about their authorship in those particular locales. This demonstrates that acceptance was not being imposed by the actions of councils but was rather happening spontaneously through a normal response on the part of those who had learned the facts about authorship. In those places where the churches were uncertain about the authorship or apostolic approval of certain books, acceptance was slower.

The first three outstanding church fathers, Clement, Polycarp, and Ignatius, used the bulk of the material of the NT in a revealingly casual manner—authenticated Scriptures were being accepted as authoritative without argument. In the writings of these men only Mark (which closely parallels the material of Matthew), 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, and Jude are not clearly attested.

The Epistles of Ignatius (c. AD 115) have correspondences in several places with the Gospels and seem to incorporate language from a number of the Pauline letters. The Didache (or Teaching of the Twelve), perhaps even earlier, makes references to a written Gospel. Most important is the fact that Clement, Barnabas, and Ignatius all draw a clear distinction between their own and the inspired, authoritative apostolic writings.

It is in the Epistle of Barnabas (c. AD 130) that we first find the formula "it is written" (4:14) used in reference to a NT book (Mt 22:14). But even before this, Polycarp, who had personal acquaintance with eyewitnesses of our Lord's ministry, used a combined OT and NT quotation. Citing Paul's admonition in Ephesians 4:26, where the apostle quotes Psalm 4:4 and makes an addition, Polycarp in his Epistle to the Philippians introduces the reference by "as it is said in these Scriptures" (12:4). Then Papias, bishop of Hierapolis (c. 130–140), in a work preserved for us by Eusebius, mentions by name the Gospels of Matthew and Mark, and his use of them as the basis of exposition indicates his acceptance of them as canonical. Also around AD 140, the recently discovered Gospel of Truth (a Gnostic-oriented work probably authored by Valentinius) makes an important contribution. Its use of canonical NT sources, treating them as authoritative, is comprehensive enough to warrant the conclusion that in Rome at this period there was a NT compilation in existence corresponding very closely to our own. Citations are made from the Gospels, Acts, letters of Paul, Hebrews, and the book of Revelation.

The heretic Marcion, by defining a limited canon of his own (c. 140), in effect hastened the day when the orthodox believers needed to declare themselves on this issue. Rejecting the entire OT, Marcion settled for Luke's Gospel (eliminating chapters 1 and 2 as too Jewish) and Paul's letters (except for the pastoral ones). Interestingly, especially in the light of Colossians 4:16, he substitutes the name "Laodiceans" for Ephesians.

Near the end of this period, Justin Martyr, in describing the worship services of the early church, puts the apostolic writings on a par with those of the OT prophets. He states that the voice which spoke through the apostles of Christ in the NT was the same as that which spoke through the prophets—the voice of God—and the same voice

that Abraham heard, responding in faith and obedience. Justin was also free in his use of "it is written" with quotations from NT Scriptures.

Period Three: Second Half of Second Century

Irenaeus had been privileged to begin his Christian training under Polycarp, a disciple of apostles. Then, as a presbyter in Lyons, he had association with Bishop Pothinus, whose own background also included contact with firstgeneration Christians. Irenaeus quotes from almost all the NT on the basis of its authority and asserts that the apostles were endowed with power from on high. They were, he says, "fully informed concerning all things, and had a perfect knowledge . . . having indeed all in equal measure and each one singly the Gospel of God" (*Against Heresies* 3.3). Irenaeus gives reasons why there should be four Gospels. "The word," he says, "gave us the Gospel in a fourfold shape, but held together by one Spirit." In addition to the Gospels, he makes reference also to Acts, all the letters of Paul except Philemon, 1 Peter, 1 John, and the book of Revelation.

Tatian, pupil of Justin Martyr, made a harmony of the four Gospels, the *Diatessaron,* attesting to the equal status they had in the church by AD 170. Other "gospels" had come into existence by then, but he recognized only the four. Also dating from about 170 was the *Muratorian Canon.* An eighth-century copy of this document was discovered and published in 1740 by librarian L. A. Muratori. The manuscript is mutilated at both ends, but the remaining text makes it evident that Matthew and Mark were included in the now missing part. The fragment begins with Luke and John, cites Acts, 13 Pauline letters, 1 and 2 John, Jude, and Revelation. There follows a statement, "We accept only the Apocalypse of John and Peter, although some of us do not want it [Apocalypse of Peter is 2 Peter?] to be read in the Church." The list goes on to reject by name various heretical leaders and their writings.

Translated versions existed by this period. In the form of Syriac and Old Latin translations we secure, by AD 170, adequate witness from the extreme eastern and western branches of the church, as we might well expect from the other evidence in hand. The NT canon is represented with no additions and the omission of only one book, 2 Peter.

Period Four: Third Century

The outstanding Christian name of the third century is that of Origen (AD 185– 254). A prodigious scholar and interpreter, he made critical studies of the NT text (alongside his work on the *Hexapla*) and wrote commentaries and homilies on most of the books of the NT, emphasizing their inspiration by God.

Dionysius of Alexandria, pupil of Origen, indicates that while the Western church accepted the book of Revelation from the first, its position in the East was variable. In the case of the Letter to the Hebrews, the situation was reversed. It proved to be more insecure in the West than in the East. When it comes to other contested books (note, incidently, that all in that category have the hindmost position in our present Bibles—Hebrews to Revelation), among the so-called "Catholic Epistles" Dionysius supports James and 2 and 3 John but not 2 Peter or Jude. In other words, even at the end of the third century there was the same lack of finality about certain books as at its beginning.

Period Five: Fourth Century

Early in this period, the picture begins to clarify. Eusebius (AD 270–340, bishop of Caesarea before 315), the great church historian, sets forth his estimate of the canon in his *Ecclesiastical History* (3.3–25). Herein he makes a straightforward statement on the status of the canon in the early part of the fourth century: (1) Universally agreed upon as canonical were the four Gospels, Acts, letters of Paul (including Hebrews, with question about his authorship), 1 Peter, 1 John, and Revelation. (2) Admitted by a majority, including Eusebius himself, but disputed by some were James, 2 Peter (the most strongly contested), 2 and 3 John, and Jude. (3) The Acts of Paul, the Didache, and Shepherd of Hermas were classified "spurious," and still other writings were listed as "heretical and absurd."

It is in the latter half of the fourth century, however, that the NT canon finds full and final declaration. In his *Festal Letter* for Easter, 367, Bishop Athanasius of Alexandria included information designed to eliminate once and for all the use of certain apocryphal books. This letter, with its admonition, "Let no one add to these; let nothing be taken away," gives us the earliest extant document that specifies our 27 books without qualification. At the close of the century, the Council of Carthage (AD 397) decreed that "aside from the canonical Scriptures nothing is to be read in church under the Name of Divine Scriptures." This, too, lists the 27 books of the NT.

The sudden advance of Christianity under Emperor Constantine (Edict of Milan, 313) had a great deal to do with the reception of all the NT books in the East. When he assigned Eusebius the task of preparing "fifty copies of the Divine Scriptures," the historian, fully aware of which were the sacred books for which many believers had been willing to lay down their very lives, in effect established the standard that gave recognition to all of the once-doubtful books. In the West, of course, Jerome and Augustine were the leaders who exercised a determinitive influence. Publication of the 27 books in the Vulgate version virtually settled the matter.

Principles and Factors Determining the Canon

By its very nature, Holy Scripture, whether OT or NT, is a production given of God, not the work of human creation. The key to canonicity is divine inspiration. Therefore, the method of determination is not one of selection from a number of possible candidates (there are no other candidates, in actuality) but one of reception of authentic material and its consequent recognition by an ever-widening circle as the facts of its origin become known.

In a sense, the movement of Montanus, which was declared heretical by the church of his day (mid-second century), was an impetus toward the recognition of a closed canon of the written Word of God. He taught that the prophetic gift was permanently granted to the church and that he himself was a prophet. The pressure to deal with Montanism, therefore, intensified the search for a basic authority, and apostolic authorship or approval became recognized as the only sure standard for identifying God's revelation. Even within the Scripture record, first-century prophets were subordinate and subject to apostolic authority (see, for example, 1 Cor 14:29–30; Eph 4:11).

When all things were being reexamined in the Protestant Reformation, some of the Reformers sought means of reassuring themselves and their followers about the canon of Scripture. This was in some ways an unfortunate aspect of Reformation thinking, because once God in his providence had determined for his people the fixed content of Scripture, that became a fact of history and was not a repeatable process. Nevertheless, Luther established a theological test for the books of the Bible (and questioned some of them)—"Do they teach Christ?" Equally subjective, it would seem, was Calvin's insistence that the Spirit of God bears witness to each individual Christian in any age of church history as to what is his Word and what is not.

Actually, even for the initial acceptance of the written Word, it is neither safe nor sound (as far as Scripture or history teaches us) to say that recognition and reception was an intuitive matter. It was rather a matter of simple obedience to the known commands of Christ and his apostles. As we saw at the outset, our Lord promised (Jn 14:26; 16:13) to communicate all things necessary through his agents. The apostles were conscious of this responsibility and agency as they wrote. Paul's explanation in 1 Corinthians 2:13 is apropos: "In telling you about these gifts we have even used the very words given to us by the Holy Spirit, not words that we as men might choose. So we use the Holy Spirit's words to explain the Holy Spirit's facts" (tlb).

Hence, the early church, with closer ties and greater information than is available to us today, examined the testimony of the ancients. They were able to discern which were the authentic and authoritative books by their apostolic origin. Mark's association with Peter, and Luke's with Paul, gave them such apostolic approval, and epistles like Hebrews and Jude were also tied in with the apostolic message and ministry. Incontrovertible consistency of doctrine in all the books, including the sometime contested ones, was perhaps a subordinate test. But historically the procedure was essentially one of acceptance and approval of those books that were vouched for by knowledgeable church leaders. Full acceptance by the original recipients followed by a continued acknowledgment and use is an essential factor in the development of the canon.

The church's concept of canon, derived first of all from the reverence given the OT Scriptures, rested in the conviction that the apostles were uniquely authorized to speak in the name of the one who possessed all authority—the Lord Jesus Christ. The development from there is logical and straightforward. Those who heard Jesus in person were immediately subject to his authority. He personally authenticated his words to the believers. These same believers knew that Jesus authorized his apostles to speak in his name, both during and (more significantly) after his earthly ministry. Apostolic speaking on behalf of Christ was recognized in the church, whether in personal utterance or in written form. Both the spoken word

Bible, *Inspiration of the*

of an apostle and the letter of an apostle constituted the word of Christ.

The generation that followed that of the apostles themselves received the witness of those who knew that the apostles had the right to speak and write in the name of Christ. Consequently, the second and third generation of Christians looked back to apostolic words (writings) as the very words of Christ. This is what is really meant by canonization—recognition of the divinely authenticated Word. Hence, the believers (the church) did not establish the canon but simply bore witness to its extent by recognizing the authority of the word of Christ.

Bible, Inspiration of the

The theological term for how God influenced the writers of Scripture to reveal his messages.

How Did God Communicate with the Writers of Scripture?

The Bible itself tells us that it is an inspired text. It says, "All Scripture is God-breathed" (2 Timothy 3:16). This means every word of the Bible comes from God. The words of the Bible came from God but were written by men. Peter confirmed this when he said that "no prophecy of Scripture comes from one's own interpretation. For no such prophecy was ever brought forth by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:20–21).

"Men spoke from God." This is the key to understanding how the Bible was written. Thousands of years ago, God chose certain people—such as Moses, David, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel—to receive his words and write them down. These writings became the Old Testament. Nearly 2,000 years ago, God chose others—such as Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and Paul—to share his message of salvation through Jesus Christ. These writings became the New Testament.

God gave his words in many different ways. Some writers of the Old Testament got direct messages from God. Moses received the Ten Commandments carved in stone on Mount Sinai. When David wrote his psalms to God, he predicted events that would occur in Jesus's life. Prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah were told exactly what to say. So, when they prophesied, it was God's word, not their own. This is why many Old Testament prophets often said, "Thus says the Lord." (This statement appears over 2,000 times in the Old Testament). Other prophets, like Ezekiel and Daniel, received visions and dreams. They wrote down exactly what they saw, even if they did not understand it. Writers like Samuel and Ezra were directed by God to record events in Israel's history.

What Did Jesus Teach about the Old Testament?

Four hundred years after the last book of the Old Testament (Malachi) was written, God's Son, Jesus Christ, came to earth. He taught that the Old Testament writings were authored by God (see Matthew 5:17–19; Luke 16:17; John 10:35). He also pointed to certain passages in the Old Testament as predictions of certain events in his life (see Luke 24:27, 44). The New Testament writers also affirmed that the Old Testament was divinely inspired. It was the apostle Paul who wrote, "All Scripture is God-breathed." Quite specifically, he said this about the Old Testament. Peter said that the Old Testament prophets were motivated by the Holy Spirit to speak from God.

How Were the New Testament Writers Inspired by God?

The New Testament is also God-breathed. Before Jesus returned to God, he told the disciples that he would send the Holy Spirit to remind them of everything Jesus said and guide them to truth (see John 14:26; 15:26; 16:13–15). The Holy Spirit helped the authors of the Gospels remember Jesus' exact words, and the Holy Spirit guided the other authors of the New Testament.

However, inspiration for writing the Gospels didn't only begin when the authors began writing. Inspiration began with the disciples' encounters with Jesus Christ. Their experiences with Jesus changed them and helped them remember everything about him.

John spoke about this at the beginning of his gospel when he declared, "The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. We have seen His glory" (John 1:14). This refers to the apostles who lived with Jesus for over three years and saw his glory. In his first letter, John speaks of this experience, saying, "We have seen it and testified to it" (1 John 1:1–2).

The verbs in both the gospel and the letter are in the perfect tense, which refers to a past action with

an ongoing effect. John never forgot the encounters he had with Jesus. They lived with him, stayed with him, and he inspired their writing. Matthew, John, and Peter (through Mark) wrote their gospels based on their own experiences. Luke was not an eyewitness but based his gospel on the accounts of eyewitnesses (see Luke 1:1–4).

The inspiration of the rest of the New Testament also came from encounters with the living Christ. Paul claims that his inspiration and call came from his encounter with the risen Christ (see, for example, 1 Corinthians 15:8–10). Peter says the same thing (see 1 Peter 5:1; 2 Peter 1:16–18), as does John (1 John 1:1–4). James and Jude, Jesus' brothers, became believers after they saw the risen Christ (for James—see 1 Corinthians 15:7; for Jude—see Acts 1:14).

So, they also were inspired by their encounters with the living Christ. So, all the writers of the New Testament (with the possible exception of the author of Hebrews, who is unknown) knew the living Christ. This is what made it possible for them to write Scripture. No other authors, no matter how good their writings were, could write Scripture.

The writers of the New Testament letters were inspired by the Holy Spirit. Paul indicated that the New Testament apostles were not writing "in words taught us by human wisdom" but "in words taught by the Spirit" (see 1 Corinthians 2:10–13). What they wrote was Spirit-taught. For example, when John wrote about Jesus giving eternal life, the Holy Spirit helped him express this truth in many different ways:

- "in Him was life" (John 1:4)
- "a fount of water springing up to eternal life" (John 4:14)
- "the bread of life" (John 6:48)
- "the light of life" (John 8:12)
- "the resurrection and the life" (John 11:25)
- and more (John 14:6)

When Paul wrote about Christ's divine nature, he was inspired by the Holy Spirit to use such phrasing as:

- "in whom [Christ] are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Colossians 2:3)
- "for in Christ all the fullness of the Deity dwells in bodily form" (Colossians 2:9)
- "the unsearchable riches of Christ" (Ephesians 3:8)

How Did God and People Work Together to Write Scripture?

The writers used their own words and styles to express the meaning given by the Holy Spirit. So, the Scriptures are a result of divine and human cooperation. The Scriptures were not mechanically inspired—God did not exclude the human experience to perfectly communicate the divine word. Rather, the Scriptures were inspired by God and then written by humans. The Bible, therefore, is both fully divine and fully human.

Bible, Manuscripts and Text of the (New Testament)

Copies of the NT books produced by scribes and editions made from these copies. In the centuries prior to the simultaneous-multiple production of copies via dictation (wherein many scribes in a scriptorium transcribed a text dictated to them by one reader), all manuscript copies were made singly—each scribe producing a copy from an exemplar.

Prior to the 15th century, when Johannes Gutenberg invented movable type for the printing press, all copies of any work of literature were made by hand (hence, the name "manuscript"). According to a current tabulation, there are 99 papyrus manuscripts, 257 uncial manuscripts, and 2,795 minuscule manuscripts. We can add 2,209 Greek lectionaries to this list. Therefore, we have over 5,350 manuscript copies of the Greek NT or portions thereof. No other work of Greek literature can boast of such numbers.

Preview

• Important Papyrus Manuscripts

• Important Uncial Manuscripts

• The Text of the New Testament

Important Papyrus Manuscripts

Papyrus is a tall, aquatic reed, the pith of which is cut into strips, laid in a crosswork pattern and glued together to make a page for writing. The papyrus rolls of Egypt have been used as a writing surface since the early third millennium BC. The Greeks adopted papyrus around 900 BC, and later the Romans adopted its use. However, the oldest extant Greek rolls of papyrus date from the fourth century BC. Unfortunately, papyrus is perishable, requiring a dry climate for its preservation. That is why so many papyri have been discovered in the desert sands of Egypt.

The NT papyrus manuscripts (abbreviated as "P") are generally the earliest manuscripts of the NT. Broadly speaking, the most important ones can be categorized in three groups: the Oxyrhynchus Papyri (from Oxyrhynchus, Egypt), (2) the Beatty Papyri (named after the owner); and (3) the Bodmer Papyri (named after the owner).

The Oxyrhynchus Papyri

Beginning in 1898 B. P. Grenfell and A. S. Hunt discovered thousands of papyrus fragments in the ancient rubbish heaps of Oxyrhynchus, Egypt. This site yielded volumes of papyrus fragments containing all sorts of written material (literature, business and legal contracts, letters, etc.) as well as over 40 manuscripts containing portions of the NT. Some of the more noteworthy papyrus manuscripts from Oxyrhynchus are as follows:

P1 (P. Oxy. 2)

This late second-century manuscript contains Matthew 1:1–9, 12, 14–20. Grenfell and Hunt in the winter of 1896–97 went to Oxyrhynchus (now called El Bahnasa) in search of ancient Christian documents. P1 was discovered on the second day of the dig. At the time of this discovery, this was the earliest extant copy of any NT portion—at least 100 years earlier than Codex Vaticanus. The copyist of P1 seems to have faithfully followed a very reliable exemplar. Where there are major variants, P1 agrees with the best Alexandrian witnesses, especially B (Codex Vaticanus), from which it rarely varies.

P5 (P. Oxy. 208 and 1781)

Two separate portions of this third-century manuscript were unearthed from Oxyrhynchus by Grenfell and Hunt, both from the same papyrus manuscript. The first portion contains John 1:23–31, 33–40 on one fragment and John 20:11–17 on another—probably on the first and last quires of a manuscript containing only the Gospel of John. This portion was published in volume II of *Oxyrhynchus Papyri* in 1899; the second portion—containing John 16:14–30—was not published until 1922 in volume XV of *Oxyrhynchus Papyri.*

After examining the first portion, Grenfell and Hunt said, "The text is a good one, and appears to have affinities with that of Codex Sinaiticus, with which the papyrus agrees in several readings not found elsewhere." The papyrus, written in a documentary hand, is marked for its brevity.

P13 (P. Oxy. 657 and PSI 1292)

This manuscript, dated between 175 and 225, contains 12 columns from a roll preserving the text of Hebrews 2:14–5:5; 10:8–22; 10:29–11:13; 11:28–12:7. The text of Hebrews was written in a reformed documentary hand on the back of the papyrus containing the new epitome of Livy. For this reason, some scholars think the manuscript was possibly brought to Egpyt by a Roman official and left behind when he left his post. P13 very often agrees with B, and it supplements B where it is lacking—namely, from Hebrews 9:14 to the end of Hebrews. P13 and P46 display nearly the same text. Out of a total of 88 variation-units, there are 71 agreements and only 17 disagreements.

P77 (P. Oxy. 2683 + 4405)

Dated c. 150–75, this is the earliest manuscript of Matthew (23:30–39). The manuscript is clearly a literary production. It was written in an elegant hand and has what was or became a standard system of chapter division, as well as punctuation and breathing marks. P77 has close textual affinities with Codex Sinaiticus.

P90 (P. Oxy. 3523)

This second-century manuscript (c. 150–75) contains John 18:36–19:7. The handwriting (an upright, rounded, elegant script) is much like that found in P66. Furthermore, P90 has more affinity with P66 than with any other single manuscript, though it does not concur with P66 in its entirety.

P. Oxy. 4404

Containing Matthew 21:34–37, 43, 45, this manuscript could be the earliest extant manuscript of the NT in that the script is early Roman and therefore could be dated to the early second century.

The Chester Beatty Papyri

These manuscripts were purchased from a dealer in Egypt during the 1930s by Chester Beatty and by the University of Michigan. The three manuscripts in this collection are very early and contain a large portion of the NT text. P45 (c. 200) contains portions of all four Gospels and Acts; P46 (c. 125) has almost all of Paul's epistles and Hebrews; and P47 (third century) contains Revelation 9–17.

P45 (Chester Beatty Papyrus I)

This codex has the four Gospels and Acts (Mt 20:24–32; 21:13–19; 25:41–26:39; Mk 4:36–9:31; 11:27–12:28; Lk 6:31–7:7; 9:26–14:33; Jn 4:51–5:2, 21–25; 10:7–25; 10:30–11:10, 18–36, 42–57; Acts 4:27–17:17). The order of books in the original intact manuscript was probably as follows: Matthew, John, Luke, Mark, Acts (the so-called Western order). This manuscript was dated by Kenyon to the early third century, a date that was confirmed by the papyrologists W. Schubart and H. I. Bell. This continues to be the date assigned to this manuscript in modern handbooks on textual criticism and critical editions of the Greek NT, but the consistent formation of certain letters suggests an earlier date—maybe sometime in the late second century.

The scribe of P45 worked without any intention of exactly reproducing his source. He wrote with a great amount of freedom—harmonizing, smoothing out, substituting at will. In short, the scribe did not actually copy words. He saw through the language to its idea-content, and copied that in words of his own choosing, or in rearranged order. Thus, in the scribe of P45 we see an exegete and a paraphraser.

P46 (Chester Beatty Papyrus II)

This codex has most of Paul's epistles (excluding the Pastorals) in this order: Romans 5:17–6:14; 8:15–15:9; 15:11–16:27; Hebrews 1:1–13:25; 1 Corinthians 1:1–16:22; 2 Corinthians 1:1–13:13; Ephesians 1:1–6:24; Galatians 1:1–6:18; Philippians 1:1–4:23; Colossians 1:1–4:18; 1 Thessalonians 1:1; 1:9–2:3; 5:5–9, 23–28 (with minor lacunae in each of the books).

The manuscript was originally dated to the early third century. But others, since, have dated the manuscript earlier in the second century. The scribe who produced this manuscript used an early, excellent exemplar. He was a professional scribe because there are stichoi notations at the end of several books (see the conclusion of Romans, 2 Corinthians, Ephesians, Philippians). The stichoi were used by professionals to note how many lines had been copied for commensurate pay. Most likely, the ex officio of the scriptorium (perhaps connected with a church library) paginated the codex and indicated the stichoi. The scribe himself made a few corrections as he went, and then several other readers made corrections here and there.

The text of P46 shows a strong affinity with B (especially in Ephesians, Colossians, and Hebrews) and next with א (Codex Sinaiticus). P46 agrees much less with the later representatives of the Alexandrian text. In short, P46 is proto-Alexandrian. In Hebrews, P46 and P13 display nearly the same text. Out of a total of 88 variation-units, there are 71 agreements and only 17 disagreements.

P47 (Chester Beatty Papyrus III)

This third-century codex contains Revelation 9:10–17:2. The text of P47 agrees more often with that of Codex Sinaiticus than with any other manuscript (including Codex Alexandrinus and Codex Ephraemi Rescriptus), though it often shows independence.

The Bodmer Papyri

These manuscripts were purchased by M. Martin Bodmer from a dealer in Egypt during the 1950s and 1960s. The three important papyri in this collection are P66 (c. 175, containing almost all of John), P72 (third century, having all of 1 and 2 Peter and Jude), and P75 (c. 200, containing large parts of Luke 3—John 15).

P66 (Papyrus Bodmer II)

This manuscript contains most of John's Gospel (1:1–6:11; 6:35–14:26, 29–30; 15:2–26; 16:2–4, 6–7; 16:10–20:20, 22–23; 20:25–21:9). The manuscript does not include the pericope of the adulteress (7:53–8:11), making it the earliest witness to not include this spurious passage. The manuscript is usually dated as c. 200, but the renowned paleographer Herbert Hunger has argued that P66 should be dated to the first half, if not the first quarter, of the second century.

According to recent studies, it seems evident that P66 has preserved the work of three individuals: the original scribe, a thoroughgoing corrector, and a minor corrector. With a practiced calligraphic hand, the original scribe of P66 wrote in larger print as he went along in order to fill out the codex.

The large print throughout indicates that it was written to be read aloud to a Christian congregation. The text exhibits the scribe's knowledge of other portions of Scripture (inasmuch as he harmonized John 6:69 to Matthew 16:16 and John 21:6 to Luke 5:5), his use of standard *nomina sacra* (a way of writing divine names), and his special use of *nomina sacra* for the words "cross" and "crucify."

The original scribe was quite free in his interaction with the text; he produced several singular readings that reveal his independent interpretation of the text. While the numerous scribal mistakes would seem to indicate that the scribe was inattentive, many of the singular readings—prior to correction—reveal that he was not detached from the narrative of the text. Rather, he became so absorbed in his reading that he often forgot the exact words he was copying. His task as a copyist was to duplicate the exemplar word for word, but this was frustrated by the fact that he was reading the text in logical semantic chunks and often became a coproducer of a new text. As a result, he continually had to stop his reading and make many in-process corrections. But he left several places uncorrected, which were later fixed by the *diorthotes* (official corrector). The finished product is quite good, presenting a text that is very close to the Alexandrian witnesses.

P72 (Papyrus Bodmer VII–VIII)

This manuscript, dated late third century, has an interesting collection of writings in one codex: 1 Peter 1:1–5:14; 2 Peter 1:1–3:18; Jude 1:1–25; the Nativity of Mary, the apocryphal correspondence of Paul to the Corinthians, the eleventh ode of Solomon, Melito's Homily on the Passover, a fragment of a hymn, the Apology of Phileas, and Psalms 33 and 34.

Scholars think that four scribes took part in producing the entire manuscript. First Peter has clear Alexandrian affinities—especially with B. Second Peter and (especially) Jude display more of an uncontrolled type text (usually associated with the "Western" text), with several independent readings.

P75 (Papyrus Bodmer XIV–XV)

This codex contains most of Luke and John (Lk 3:18–4:2; 4:34–5:10; 5:37–18:18; 22:4–24:53; Jn 1:1–11:45, 48–57; 12:3–13:1, 8–9; 14:8–30; 15:7–8.) The manuscript does not include the pericope of the adulteress (7:53–8:11). The manuscript can be dated to the late second or early third century.

The copyist of P75 was a literate scribe trained in making books. His craftsmanship shows through in his tight calligraphy and controlled copying. The handwriting displayed in this manuscript is typically called by paleographers the common angular type of the late second to early third century. The scribe's Christianity shows in his abbreviations of the *nomina sacra,* as well as in his abbreviation of the word "cross." These are telltale signs of a scribe who belonged to the Christian community. Furthermore, the large typeface indicates that the manuscript was composed to be read aloud to a Christian congregation. The scribe even added a system of sectional divisions to aid any would-be lector. Thus, we have a manuscript written by a Christian for other Christians.

There are several indications of the scribe's Alexandrian orientation. First and foremost is his scriptoral acumen. He is the best of all the early Christian scribes, and his manuscript is an extremely accurate copy. P75 is the work of an extremely disciplined scribe who copied with the intention of being careful and accurate. Scholars generally agree that P75 displays the kind of text that was used in making Codex Vaticanus (there is 87 percent agreement between P75 and B). As such, textual scholars have a high regard for P75's textual fidelity.

Other Papyrus Manuscripts

P4 + P64 + P67

These three papyrus manuscripts are part of one codex dated AD 150–175. The manuscript was the work of a professional scribe, and the text is extremely accurate.

P32 (Rylands Papyrus 5)

This manuscript, preserving Titus 1:11–15; 2:3–8, is dated c. 175, making it the earliest extant copy of any of the Pastoral Epistles. P32 shows agreement with ℵ and with F and G. Since F and G (nearly identical manuscripts) go back to the same archetype, it is possible that P32 could be linked to the same source.

P52 (Rylands Papyrus 457)

This fragment, containing John 18:31–34, 37–38, is noteworthy because of its date: c. 110–125. Many scholars (F. Kenyon, H. I. Bell, A. Deissmann, and W. H. P. Hatch) have confirmed this dating. The manuscript came from the Fayum or Oxyrhynchus site. It was acquired in 1920 by Grenfell, but it remained unnoticed among hundreds of papyri

until 1934, when C. H. Roberts recognized that this fragment preserves a few verses from John's Gospel.

Important Uncial Manuscripts

The manuscripts typically classified as "uncial" are so designated to differentiate them from papyrus manuscripts. In a sense, this is a misnomer because the real difference has to do with the material they are written on—vellum (treated animal hide) as compared to papyrus—not the kind of letters used. Indeed, the papyri are also written in uncials (capital letters), but the term "uncial" typically describes the majuscule lettering that was prominent in fourth-century biblical texts, such as in א, A, B, C.

Codex Sinaiticus (or א)

This codex contains the entire OT and the NT in this order: the four Gospels, the Pauline Epistles (including Hebrews), Acts, the General Epistles, Revelation. It also includes the Epistle of Barnabas and the Shepherd of Hermas. The codex cannot be earlier than 340 (the year Eusebius died) because the Eusebian sections of the text are indicated in the margins of the Gospels by a contemporary hand. Most scholars date it 350–375.

This codex was discovered by Constantin von Tischendorf in St Catherine's Monastery (situated at the foot of Mt Sinai). On a visit to the monastery in 1844 he noticed in a wastebasket some parchment leaves that were being used to light the lamps. He was allowed to take this waste paper, which proved to be 43 leaves from various parts of the Greek translation of the OT.

In 1853 he made a second trip to the monastery and found nothing. In 1859, however, on his third trip, he found not only other parts of the OT but also the complete NT. He was finally able to persuade the monastery authorities to present the manuscript to the czar, the great patron of the Greek Catholic Church, who placed it in the Imperial Library in St Petersburg. The czar gave great honors to the monastery and its authorities, and everybody seemed well pleased. Later Tischendorf was charged with having stolen the manuscript from its lawful owners, but the better textual scholars do not accept that story.

The manuscript remained in the Imperial Library until 1933, when it was purchased by the British Museum for the huge sum of £100,000 (about $500,000). Textual criticism made the headlines because one manuscript was bought for this much money, raised largely by public subscription during the Great Depression. The manuscript is now on display in the manuscript room of the museum, where it is considered one of its most prized possessions.

The text of Sinaiticus is very closely related to that of Codex Vaticanus. They agree in presenting the purest type of text, usually called the Alexandrian text type. Tischendorf greatly used the textual evidence of Codex Sinaiticus in preparing his critical editions of the Greek NT. Tischendorf thought four scribes had originally produced the codex, whom he named scribes A, B, C, D. After reinvestigation, H. J. Milne and T. C. Skeat identified only three scribes: A (who wrote the historical and poetical books of the OT, as well as most of the NT), B (who wrote the Prophets and the Shepherd of Hermas), and D (who wrote some Psalms, Tobit, Judith, and 4 Maccabees, and redid small sections of the NT). Milne and Skeat demonstrated that scribe A of Codex Vaticanus was likely the same scribe as scribe D of Codex Sinaiticus. If this true, then א is contemporary with B—perhaps produced in the same scriptorium in Alexandria. Codex Sinaiticus provides a fairly reliable witness to the NT; however, the scribe was not as careful as the scribe of B.

Codex Alexandrinus (A)

This is one of the three most important codices containing early copies of the whole Bible in Greek (the other two being the Vaticanus and Sinaiticus codexes). The name Alexandrinus comes from ancient records suggesting that it was copied in Egypt during the early part of the fifth century AD. The early history of this manuscript and its Egyptian provenance is partially revealed by its flyleaves. A note by Cyril of Lucar (patriarch of Alexandria and then of Constantinople in the 1620s) states that, according to tradition, it was written by Thecla, a noble lady of Egypt shortly after the Council of Nicaea (325) and that her name was originally inscribed at the end of the volume but the last page was lost due to mutilation. An Arabic note of the 13th or 14th century also says that the manuscript was written by "Thecla the martyr." Another Arabic note says that is was presented to the patriarchal cell of Alexandria (c. 1098). Cyril of Lucar took the manuscript from Alexandria to Constantinople in 1621 and then gave it to Charles I of England in 1627, where it became part of the Royal Library, then later the British Museum.

Only 773 of the original 820 or so pages still exist. The rest were lost as the book was passed down through the centuries. The surviving parts of Alexandrinus contain a Greek translation of the whole OT, the Apocrypha (including four books of Maccabees and Psalm 151), most of the NT, and some early Christian writings (of which the First and Second Epistles of Clement to the Corinthians are the most important).

Frederick Kenyon thought the codex was the work of five scribes, to each of whom he designated a Roman numeral. According to Kenyon, scribes I and II copied the OT; scribe III did Matthew, Mark, 1 Corinthians 10:8—Philemon 1:25; scribe IV did Luke—Acts, General Epistles, Romans 1:1—1 Corinthians 10:8; and scribe V did Revelation. Milne and Skeat, however, argued that the whole codex was the work of two copyists (I and II). W. H. P. Hatch noted that many corrections have been made in the manuscript, most of them at an early date. Some of these corrections were introduced by the scribe himself, and others came from later hands.

Evidently, the scribes of this codex used exemplars of varying quality for various sections of the NT. The exemplar used for the Gospels was of poor quality, reflecting a Byzantine text type. Its testimony in the Epistles is much better, and in Revelation it provides the best witness to the original text.

Codex Vaticanus (B)

Codex Vaticanus is the Vatican Manuscript, so named because it is the most famous manuscript in the Vatican Library in Rome. This manuscript has been in the Vatican's library since at least 1475, but it was not made available to scholars, such as Constantin von Tischendorf and Samuel Tregelles, until the middle of the 19th century.

At one time, the codex contained the whole Greek Bible, including most of the books of the Apocrypha, but it has lost many of its leaves. Originally it must have had about 820 leaves (1,640 pp), but now it has 759—617 in the OT and 142 in the NT. The major gaps of the manuscript are Genesis 1:1–46:28; 2 Samuel 2:5–7, 10–13; Psalms 106:27–138:6; Hebrews 9:14–13:25; the Pastoral Epistles; and Revelation. Each leaf measures ten and a half by ten inches (26.7 by 25.4 centimeters). Each page has three columns (two for the poetical books) with 40 to 44 lines to the column. The manuscript was written by two different scribes. It is dated in the early to middle part of the fourth century. It is not known where the manuscript originated, but it has been in the Vatican Library from the time of its earliest catalog in 1475.

When Napoleon conquered Rome, he brought its treasures to Paris, including this manuscript. The scholar Hug identified it and called the attention of other scholars to it. After the downfall of Napoleon, the manuscript was returned to the Vatican Library. Competent textual scholars were not allowed to do careful work on it until a photographic edition was published in 1890. It is now on exhibit in the Vatican Library.

The text of the Vatican Manuscript is much like that of Codex Sinaiticus. These are generally recognized as the two finest examples of the Alexandrian type of Greek text of the NT. The Greek text of the OT is very fine too, but it is not quite so important, as the original language of the OT was Hebrew. Virtually all the textual scholars since the days of Brooke Westcott and Fenton Hort (who brought out their Greek Testament, including their theory of textual criticism, in 1881), recognize this neutral type of text as a very early text and a very pure text, an extremely accurate reproduction of what the original text must have been. Westcott and Hort called it a second-century text accurate in 999 out of 1,000 words so far as any matter of translatable difference was concerned. א and B are the finest examples of this type of text, but it is also found in a few other Greek uncial manuscripts, a few of the early translations, and in the writings of a few of the early church fathers. Since the days of Westcott and Hort, their theory has been confirmed by the discovery of some papyrus manuscripts, notably the Bodmer Papyri, discovered in the 1950s.

Codex Ephraemi Rescriptus (C)

This codex is a palimpsest (the original writing was erased and different words written on the same material). It originally contained the entire Bible but now has only parts of six OT books and portions of all NT books except 2 Thessalonians and 2 John. The single-column Bible text, written in the 5th century AD, was erased in the 12th century and replaced by a two-column text of a Greek translation of sermons or treatises by a certain Ephraem, a 4th-century Syrian church leader. Such a practice was common in periods of economic depression or when parchment was scarce. The original writing was scraped from the writing surface and the surface smoothed. Then new compositions could be written on the prepared

surface. Using chemicals Tischendorf was able to read much of the erased document.

The manuscript may have been brought from the east to Florence by a learned Greek named Andrew John Lascar in the time of Lorenzo de'Medici. Since Lascar was known as Rhyndacenus (from the river Rhyndacus), he probably came from the region of Phrygia (site of ancient Laodicea). Where the manuscript was prior to this is not known. The Ephraemi manuscript was brought to Italy in the early sixth century, where it became the property of the Medici family. Catherine de'Medici took it to France, where it remains today.

The text of this manuscript is mixed—it is compounded from all the major text types, agreeing frequently with the later koine of Byzantine type, which most scholars regard as the least valuable type of NT text.

Codex Bezae (D)

This is a Greek-Latin diglot containing Matthew—Acts, 3 John, with lacunae. Most scholars date it late fourth or early fifth century (c. 400). Some scholars think the codex was produced in either Egypt or North Africa by a scribe whose mother tongue was Latin. Another scholar (D. C. Parker) has argued that it was copied in Beirut, a center of Latin legal studies during the fifth century, where both Latin and Greek were used. Evidently, it was produced by a scribe who knew Latin better than Greek, and then was corrected by several scribes. In any event, the codex somehow came into the hands of Theodore Beza, French scholar and successor to Calvin. Beza gave it to the Cambridge University Library in 1581.

This codex is probably the most controversial of the NT uncials because of its marked independence. Its many additions, omissions, and alterations (especially in Luke and Acts) are the work of a significant theologian. A few earlier manuscripts (P29, P38, P48, and 0171) appear to be precursors to the type of text found in D, which is considered the principal witness of the Western text-type. Thus, Codex Bezae could be a copy of an earlier revised edition. This reviser must have been a scholar who had a propensity for adding historical, biographical, and geographical details. More than anything, he was intent on filling in gaps in the narrative by adding circumstantial details.

Codex Washingtonianus, or The Freer Gospels (W)

This codex, dated around 400, has the four Gospels and Acts. It is often referred to as the Freer Gospels—named after its owner, Charles Freer. The codex likely came from the ruins of a monastery near Giza. The handwriting is quite similar to that found in a fifth-century fragment of the book of Enoch found at Akhmim in 1886.

Codex W was copied from a parent manuscript (exemplar) that had been pieced together from several different manuscripts. This is obvious because the textual presentation of W is noticeably variegated and even the stratification of the text is matched by similar variations in paragraphing. The scribe who collated the parent manuscript drew upon various sources to put together his Gospel codex. It is likely that the scribe of the parent manuscript used a text that came from North Africa (the "Western" text) for the first part of Mark, and the scribe of W used manuscripts from Antioch for Matthew and the second part of Luke to fill the gaps in the more ancient manuscript he was copying. Detailed textual analysis reveals the variegated textual stratifications of W, as follows: in Matthew the text is Byzantine; in Mark the text is first Western (1:1–5:30), then Caesarean in Mark 5:31–16:20 (akin to P45); in Luke the text is first Alexandrian (1:1–8:12), then Byzantine. John is more complicated because the first part of John (1:1–5:11), which fills a quire, was the work of a seventh-century scribe who must have replaced a damaged quire. (Ws designates the work of this scribe.) This first section has a mixture of Alexandrian and Western readings, as does the rest of John.

Codex 1739

This tenth-century codex has Acts and the Epistles. The manuscript was discovered at Mt Athos in 1879 by E. von der Goltz. The manuscript has strong textual affinities with P46, B, 1739, Coptic Sahidic, Coptic Boharic, Clement, and Origen. The relationship between P46, B, and 1739 is remarkable because 1739 is a tenth-century manuscript that was copied from a fourth-century manuscript of excellent quality. According to a colophon, the scribe of 1739 for the Pauline Epistles followed a manuscript that came from Caesarea in the library of Pamphilus and that contained an Origenian text. The three manuscripts, P46, B, and 1739, form a clear textual line: from P46 (early second century) to B (early

fourth century) to 1739 (tenth century based on fourth century).

The Text of the New Testament

The original text of the NT is the "published" text—that is, the text as it was in its final edited form and released for circulation in the Christian community. For some books of the NT, there is little difference between the original composition and the published text. After the author wrote or dictated his work, he (or an associate) made the final editorial corrections and then released it for distribution. As is the case for books published in modern times, so in ancient times, the original writing of the author is not always the same as what is published—due to the editorial process. Nonetheless, the author is credited with the final edited text, and the published book is attributed to the author and considered the autograph. This autograph is the original published text. Of course, in this case the autographs do not exist, so scholars have to rely on copies to recover or reconstruct the original wording.

Some scholars think it is impossible to recover the original text of the Greek NT because they have not been able to reconstruct the early history of textual transmission. Other modern scholars are less pessimistic but still quite guarded in affirming the possiblity. And yet others are optimistic because we possess many early manuscripts of excellent quality and because our view of the early period of textual transmission has been getting clearer and clearer.

When we speak of recovering the text of the NT, we are referring to individual books of the NT, not to the entire volume per se, because each book (or group of books—such as the Pauline Epistles) had its own unique history of textual transmission. The earliest extant copy of an entire NT text is the one preserved in Codex Sinaiticus (written about AD 375). (Codex Vaticanus lacks the Pastoral Epistles and Revelation.) Prior to the fourth century, the NT was circulated in its various parts: as a single book or a group of books (such as the four Gospels or the Pauline Epistles). Manuscripts from the late first century to the third century have been found with individual books such as Matthew (P1, P77), Mark (P88), Luke (P69), John (P5, 22, 52, 66), Acts (P91), Revelation (P18, 47), or containing groups of books, such as the four Gospels with Acts (P45), the Pauline Epistles (P30, P46, P92), the Petrine Epistles and Jude (P72). Each of the books of the NT has had its own textual history and has been preserved with varying degrees of accuracy. Nonetheless, all of the books were altered from the original state due to the process of manual copying decade after decade and century after century. And the text of each of the books needs to be recovered.

The NT text was affected with many variations in its early history. In the late first and early second century, the oral traditions and the written word existed side by side with equal status—especially with respect to the material of the Gospels. Often, the text was changed by scribes attempting to conform the written message to the oral tradition or attempting to conform one Gospel account to another. By the end of the second century and into the third century, many of the significant variant readings entered into the textual stream.

The early period of textual transmission, however, was not completely marred by textual infidelity and scribal liberty. There were those scribes who copied the text faithfully and reverently—that is, they recognized that they were copying a sacred text written by an apostle. The formalization of canonization did not ascribe this sacredness to the text. Canonization came about as the result of common, historical recognition of the sacredness of various NT books. Certain NT books, such as the four Gospels, Acts, and Paul's epistles were considered inspired literature from the onset. As such, certain scribes copied them with reverential fidelity.

Other scribes, however, felt free to make "improvements" in the text—either in the interest of doctrine and harmonization or due to the influence of a competitive oral tradition. The manuscripts produced in such a manner created a kind of "popular text"—i.e., an uncontrolled text. (This text type used to be called the "Western text," but scholars now recognize this as a misnomer.)

During the second century, there were a few men who produced recensions of the NT text. According to Eusebius, Theodotus (and his followers) altered the text for their own purposes. In the middle of the second century, Marcion expunged his copies of the Gospel according to Luke of all references to the Jewish background of Jesus, and Tatian's harmony of the Gospels contains several textual alterations that gave support to ascetic views. And yet another recendor created the D-type text for the Gospels and Acts. This theologically minded redactor, living in the late second or third century, created a text that had short-lived popularity. Three third-century papyri, P29, P38, P48, each containing a portion from the book of Acts, may be precursors

to the D-type text in Acts. But there are other papyri containing portions of Acts that provide even earlier testimony to a purer form of Acts—namely, P45 (c. 150) and P91 (c. 200), thereby showing that the D-type text of Acts did not necessarily antedate the purer form.

Besides these endeavors—which are all noted for creating textual impurities—there was no recension of the NT text in the second century. Rather, it was a period in which there were scribes who exercised freedom in copying and those who demonstrated acumen. The manuscripts produced by the latter are those that come closest to preserving the original text. A prime example of an accurate late-second-century manuscript is P75.

It is a well-known fact that the text produced by the scribe of P75 is a very accurate manuscript. It is also well-known that P75 was the kind of manuscript used in formulating Codex Vaticanus—the readings of P75 and B are remarkably similar. Prior to the discovery of P75, certain scholars thought Codex Vaticanus was the work of a fourth-century recension; others (chiefly Hort) thought it must trace back to a very early and accurate copy. Hort said that Codex Vaticanus preserves "not only a very ancient text, but a very pure line of a very ancient text" (Westcott and Hort, *The Introduction to the New Testament in the Original Greek,* pp 250–51). P75 appears to have shown that Hort was right.

Prior to the discovery of P75, many textual scholars were convinced that the second- and third-century papyri displayed a text in flux, a text characterized only by individual independence. The Chester Beatty Papyrus, P45, and the Bodmer Papyri, P66 and P72 (in 2 Peter and Jude), show this kind of independence. Scholars thought that scribes at Alexandria must have used several such texts to produce a good recension—as is exhibited in Codex Vaticanus. But we now know that Codex Vaticanus was not the result of a scholarly recension, resulting from editorial selection across the various textual histories. Rather, it is now quite clear that Codex Vaticanus was simply a copy (with some modifications) of a manuscript much like P75, not a fourth-century recension.

Some scholars may point out that this does not automatically mean that P75 and B represent the original text. What it does mean, they say, is that we have a second-century manuscript showing great affinity with a fourth-century manuscript whose quality has been highly esteemed. But various scholars have demonstrated that there was no Alexandrian recension before the time of P75 (late second century) and B (early fourth) and that both these manuscripts represent a relatively pure form of preservation of a relatively pure line of descent from the original text.

The current view about the early text is that certain scribes in Alexandria and/or scribes familiar with Alexandrian scriptoral practices (perhaps those in Oxyrhynchus) were probably responsible for maintaining a relatively pure text throughout the second, third, and fourth centuries. The Alexandrian scribes, associated with or actually employed by the scriptorium of the great Alexandrian library and/or members of the scriptorium associated with the catechetical school at Alexandria (called the *Didaskelion*), were trained philologists, grammarians, and textual critics. Their work on the NT was not recensional—that is, it was not an organized emendation of the text. Rather, the work of purification and preservation was probably done here and there by various individuals trained in text criticism. This is apparent in the production of P66, which contains the Gospel of John. This manuscript was probably produced in an Egyptian scriptorium by a novice scribe who made many blunders, which were subsequently corrected by another scribe working in the same scriptorium. The first text produced by the novice could be classified as being very "free," but the corrected text is far more accurate. (See the discussion on this manuscript above.)

What appears to have happened with the copying of the NT text in the early period in Egypt has been poignantly characterized by Zuntz. He said that when a book was immensely popular (such as Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey,* or Plato's writings), it was copied with wild enthusiasm by novice and scholar alike. But when grammarians and scribes got ahold of it, they tried to rid it of textual corruption. In the process, however, they may have obliterated some authentic readings, but not many. Thus, the popular text (also known as the "Western text") could have preserved the original wording in some cases. The popular or free kind of text is displayed in several third-century manuscripts: P9, P37, P40, P45, P72, and P78.

In brief, this popular text is usually displayed in any kind of manuscript that was not produced by Alexandrian influences. This text, given to independence, is not as trustworthy as the Alexandrian text type. But because the Alexandrian text is known as a polished text, the popular text sometimes preserved the original wording. When a

variant reading has the support of "Western" and Alexandrian texts, it is very likely original; but when the two are divided, the Alexandrian witnesses more often preserve the original wording.

One dilemma still remains for some textual critics. They cannot explain how a P75/B-type text coexisted with a Western-type text in the second century. All that can be said is that the Western text generally appears to be inferior to the P75/B-type text. Of course, this kind of judgment troubles certain scholars, who point out that the esteem given to B and P75 is based on a subjective appreciation of the kind of text they contain (as over against the Western text) rather than on any kind of theoretical reconstruction of the early transmission of the text. This same subjective estimation was at work when Westcott and Hort decided that B was intrinsically superior to D (see their *Introduction,* pp 32–42). Yet the praxis of textual criticism time and again demonstrates that the P75/B-type text is intrinsically superior to the Western text.

In the final analysis, the manuscripts that represent a pure preservation of the original text are usually those called "Alexandrian." Some scholars, such as Bruce Metzger, have called the earlier manuscripts "protoAlexandrian," for they (or manuscripts like them) are thought of as being used to compose an Alexandrian-type text. However, this is looking at things from the perspective of the fourth century. We should look at things from the second century onward and then compare fourth-century manuscripts to those of the second. The second-century manuscripts could still be called "Alexandrian" in the sense that they were produced under Alexandrian influences. Perhaps a distinguishing terminology could be "early Alexandrian" (pre-Constantine) and "later Alexandrian" (post-Constantine). Manuscripts designated as "early Alexandrian" would generally be purer, less editorialized. Manuscripts designated "later Alexandrian" would display editorialization, as well as the influence of other textual traditions.

The "early Alexandrian" text is reflected in many second- and third-century manuscripts. On the top of the list is P75 (c. 175), the work of a competent and careful scribe. Not far behind in quality is P4+P64+P67 (c. 150), the work of an excellent copyist. Other extremely good copies are P1 (c. 200), P20 (early third century), P23 (c. 200), P27 (third century), P28 (third century), P32 (c. 150), P39 (third century), P46 (c. 125), P65 (third century), P66 (in its corrected form—P66c; c. 150), P70 (third century), P77 (c. 150), P87 (c. 125), P90 (c. 175), and P91 (c. 200). Several of these manuscripts have been placed in the "strict" category by textual critics Kurt and Barbara Aland—that is, they exhibit "strict" scribal control and therefore are accurate copies of an exemplar, if not the original. These manuscripts are P1, P23, P35, P37, P39, P64/67, P65, P70, and P75.

The "later Alexandrian" text, which displays editorial polishing, is exhibited in a few manuscripts, such as א (fourth century), T (fifth century), ע (seventh century), L (eighth century), 33 (ninth century), 1739 (a tenth-century manuscript copied from a fourth-century Alexandrian manuscript much like P46), and 579 (13th century). Beginning in the fifth century, Byzantine-type manuscripts began to make their influence in Egypt. Some manuscripts dated around 400 that came from Egypt clearly reflect this influence; Codex Alexandrinus (A) is probably the best example. Other Egyptian manuscripts of this era, such as Codex Sinaiticus (א) and Codex Washingtonianus (W) display large-scale harmonization, which cannot be directly linked to any kind of recension.

At the end of the third century, another kind of Greek text came into being and then grew in popularity until it became the dominant text-type throughout Christendom. This is the text-type first instigated by Lucian of Antioch, according to Jerome (in his introduction to his Latin translation of the Gospels). Lucian's text was a definite recension (i.e., a purposely created edition)—as opposed to the Alexandrian text-type that came about as the result of a process wherein the Alexandrian scribes, upon comparing many manuscripts, attempted to preserve the best text—thereby serving more as textual critics than editors. Of course, the Alexandrians did do some editing—such as we would call copy-editing. The Lucianic text is the outgrowth and culmination of the popular text; it is characterized by smoothness of language, which is achieved by the removal of obscurities and awkward grammatical constructions and by the conflation of variant readings. Lucian (and/or his associates) must have used many different kinds of manuscripts of varying qualities to produce a harmonized, edited NT text. The kind of editorial work that went into the Lucianic text is what we would call substantive editing.

Lucian's text was produced prior to the Diocletian persecution (c. 303), during which time many copies of the NT were confiscated and destroyed. Not long after this period of devastation, Constantine came to power and then recognized Christianity as the state religion. There was, of course, a great need for copies of the NT to be made and distributed to churches throughout the Mediterranean world. It was at this time that Lucian's text began to be propagated by bishops going out from the Antiochan school to churches throughout the East, taking the text with them. Lucian's text soon became the standard text of the Eastern church and formed the basis for the Byzantine text—and is thus the ultimate authority for the Textus Receptus.

While Lucian was forming his recension of the NT text, the Alexandrian text was taking on its final shape. As was mentioned earlier, the formation of the Alexandrian text-type was the result of a process (as opposed to a single editorial recension). The formation of the Alexandrian text involved minor textual criticism (i.e., selecting variant readings among various manuscripts) and copyediting (i.e., producing a readable text). There was far less tampering with the text in the Alexandrian text-type than in the Lucian, and the underlying manuscripts for the Alexandrian text-type were superior to those used by Lucian. Perhaps Hesychius was responsible for giving the Alexandrian text its final shape, and Athanasius of Alexandria may have been the one who made this text the archetypal text for Egypt.

As the years went by, there were fewer and fewer Alexandrian manuscripts produced, and more and more Byzantine manuscripts manufactured. Very few Egyptians continued to read Greek (with the exception of those in St Catherine's Monastery, the site of the discovery of Codex Sinaiticus), and the rest of the Mediterranean world turned to Latin. It was only those in the Greek-speaking churches in Greece and Byzantium that continued to make copies of the Greek text. For century after century—from the 6th to the 14th—the great majority of NT manuscripts were produced in Byzantium, all bearing the same kind of text. When the first Greek NT was printed (c. 1525), it was based on a Greek text that Erasmus had compiled, using a few late Byzantine manuscripts. This printed text, with minor revisions, became the Textus Receptus.

Beginning in the 17th century, earlier manuscripts began to be discovered—manuscripts with a text that differed from that found in the Textus Receptus. Around 1630, Codex Alexandrinus was brought to England. An early fifth-century manuscript, containing the entire NT, it provided a good, early witness to the NT text (it is an especially good witness to the original text of Revelation). Two hundred years later, a German scholar named Constantin von Tischendorf discovered Codex Sinaiticus in St Catherine's Monastery (located near Mt Sinai). The manuscript, dated around AD 360, is one of the two oldest vellum (treated animal hide) manuscripts of the Greek NT. The earliest vellum manuscript, Codex Vaticanus, had been in the Vatican's library since at least 1481, but it had not been made available to scholars until the middle of the 19th century. This manuscript, dated slightly earlier (AD 350) than Codex Sinaiticus, had both the OT and NT in Greek, excluding the last part of the NT (Hebrews 9:15 to Revelation 22:21 and the Pastoral Epistles). A hundred years of textual criticism has determined that this manuscript is one of the most accurate and reliable witnesses to the original text.

Other early and important manuscripts were discovered in the 19th century. Through the tireless labors of men like Constantin von Tischendorf, Samuel Tregelles, and F. H. A. Scrivener, manuscripts such as Codex Ephraemi Rescriptus, Codex Zacynthius, and Codex Augiensis were deciphered, collated, and published.

As the various manuscripts were discovered and made public, certain scholars labored to compile a Greek text that would more closely represent the original text than did the Textus Receptus. Around 1700 John Mill produced an improved Textus Receptus, and in the 1730s Johannes Albert Bengel (known as the father of modern textual and philological studies in the NT) published a text that deviated from the Textus Receptus according to the evidence of earlier manuscripts.

In the 1800s certain scholars began to abandon the Textus Receptus. Karl Lachman, a classical philologist, produced a fresh text (in 1831) that represented the fourth-century manuscripts. Samuel Tregelles (self-taught in Latin, Hebrew, and Greek), laboring throughout his entire lifetime, concentrated all of his efforts in publishing one Greek text (which came out in six parts, from 1857 to 1872). As is stated in the introduction to this work, Tregelles's goal was "to exhibit the text of the NT in the very words in which it has been transmitted on the evidence of ancient authority." Henry Alford also compiled a Greek text based

upon the best and earliest manuscripts. In his preface to *The Greek New Testament* (a multivolume commentary on the Greek NT, published in 1849), Alford said he labored for the "demolition of the unworthy and pedantic reverence for the received text, which stood in the way of all chance of discovering the genuine word of God."

During this same era, Tischendorf was devoting a lifetime of labor to discovering manuscripts and producing accurate editions of the Greek NT. In a letter to his fiancé he wrote, "I am confronted with a sacred task, the struggle to regain the original form of the NT." In fulfillment of his desire, he discovered Codex Sinaiticus, deciphered the palimpsest Codex Ephraemi Rescriptus, collated countless manuscripts, and produced several editions of the Greek NT (the eighth edition is considered the best).

Aided by the work of the previous scholars, two British men, Brooke Westcott and Fenton Hort, worked together for 28 years to produce a volume entitled *The New Testament in the Original Greek* (1881). Along with this publication, they made known their theory (which was chiefly Hort's) that Codex Vaticanus and Codex Sinaiticus (along with a few other early manuscripts) represented a text that most closely replicated the original writing. They called this text the Neutral Text. (According to their studies, the Neutral Text described certain manuscripts that had the least amount of textual corruption.) This is the text that Westcott and Hort relied upon for compiling their volume.

The 19th century was a fruitful era for the recovery of the Greek NT; the 20th century, no less so. Those living in the 20th century have witnessed the discovery of the Oxyrhynchus Papyri, the Chester Beatty Papyri, and the Bodmer Papyri. To date, there are nearly 100 papyri containing portions of the NT—several of which date from the late first century to the early fourth century. These significant discoveries, providing scholars with many ancient manuscripts, have greatly enhanced the effort to recover the original wording of the NT.

At the beginning of the 20th century, Eberhard Nestle used the best editions of the Greek NT produced in the 19th century to compile a text that represented the majority consensus. The work of making new editions was carried on by his son for several years, and then came under the care of Kurt Aland. The latest edition (the 27th) of Nestle-Aland's *Novum Testamentum Graece* appeared in 1993. The same Greek text appears in another popular volume published by the United Bible Societies, called the *Greek New Testament* (fourth edition). Aland has argued that the Nestle-Aland text, 27th edition (NA27), comes closer to the original text of the NT than did Tischendorf or Westcott and Hort. And in several writings he intimates that NA27 may very well be the original text. Though few, if any, scholars would agree with this, the 27th edition of the Nestle-Aland text is regarded by many as representing the latest and best in textual scholarship.

New Testament Textual Criticism

Textual critics working with ancient literature universally acknowledge the supremacy of earlier manuscripts over later ones. Textual critics not working with the NT would love to have the same kind of early witnesses that biblical scholars possess. In fact, many of them work with manuscripts written 1,000 years after the autographs were composed! We all marvel that the Dead Sea Scrolls have provided a text that is nearly 800 years closer to the originals than the Masoretic manuscripts, and yet many of the Dead Sea manuscripts are still over 600 to 800 years removed from the time of original composition. NT textual critics have a great advantage!

The 19th-century NT textual scholars—such as Lachmann, Tregelles, Tischendorf, Westcott and Hort—worked on the basis that the earliest witnesses are the best witnesses. Some textual scholars have continued this line of recovery using the testimony of the earlier witnesses. But many textual scholars since the time of Westcott and Hort have been less inclined to produce editions based on the theory that the earliest reading is the best. Most present-day textual critics are more inclined to endorse the maxim: the reading that is most likely original is the one that best explains the variants.

This maxim (or "canon" as it is sometimes called), as good as it is, produces conflicting results. For example, two scholars, using this same principle to examine the same variant unit, will not agree. One will argue that one variant was produced by a copyist attempting to emulate the author's style; the other will claim the same variant has to be original because it accords with the author's style. One will argue that one variant was produced by an orthodox scribe attempting to rid the text of a reading that could be used to promote heterodoxy or heresy; another will claim that the same variant has to be original because it is orthodox and

accords with Christian doctrine (thus a heterodox or heretical scribe must have changed it). Furthermore, this principle allows for the possibility that the reading selected for the text can be taken from any manuscript of any date. This can lead to subjective eclecticism.

Modern textual scholars have attempted to temper the subjectivism by employing a method called "reasoned eclecticism." This kind of eclecticism applies a combination of internal and external considerations, whereby the character of the variants is evaluated in light of the manuscripts' evidence and vice versa. This is supposed to produce a balanced view and serve as a check against purely subjective tendencies.

The Alands favor the same kind of approach, calling it the local-genealogical method, which is defined as follows:

It is impossible to proceed from the assumption of a manuscript stemma, and on the basis of a full review and analysis of the relationships obtaining among the variety of interrelated branches in the manuscript tradition, to undertake a recension of the data as one would do with other Greek texts. Decisions must be made one by one, instance by instance. This method has been characterized as eclecticism, but wrongly so. After carefully establishing the variety of readings offered in a passage and the possibilities of their interpretation, it must always then be determined afresh on the basis of external and internal criteria which of these readings (and frequently they are quite numerous) is the original, from which the others may be regarded as derivative. From the perspective of our present knowledge, this "local-genealogical" method (if it must be given a name) is the only one which meets the requirements of the NT textual tradition. (Introduction to *Novum Testamentum Graece,* 26th edition)

The "local-genealogical" method assumes that for any given variation unit any manuscript (or manuscripts) may have preserved the original text. Applying this method produces an extremely uneven documentary presentation of the text. Anyone studying the critical apparatus of NA27 will detect that there is not an even documentary presentation. The eclecticism is dispersed throughout the text.

"Reasoned eclecticism" and/or the "local-genealogical" method tend to give priority to internal evidence over external evidence. But it has to be the other way around if we are going to recover the original text. This was Westcott and Hort's opinion. With respect to their compilation of *The New Testament in the Original Greek,* Hort wrote, "Documentary evidence has been in most cases allowed to confer the place of honour against internal evidence" (*The Introduction to the New Testament in the Original Greek,* p 17).

In this respect, Westcott and Hort need to be revived. Earnest Colwell was of the same mind when he wrote "Hort Redivivus: A Plea and a Program." Colwell decried the growing tendency to rely entirely on the internal evidence of readings, without serious consideration of documentary evidence. He called upon scholars to make an attempt to reconstruct a history of the manuscript tradition. The abundance of manuscripts—several of which are very early—will aid scholars in this ongoing task.

Bible, Manuscripts and Text of the (Old Testament)

Copies of the OT books produced by scribes and editions made from these copies. The ancient manuscripts of the OT are the basic working material used to seek out the original text of the Bible with as great a degree of accuracy as possible. This process is called textual criticism, sometimes designated "lower criticism" to distinguish it from "higher criticism," which is analysis of the date, unity, and authorship of the biblical writings.

Preview

- Important Old Testament Manuscripts
- Significant Old Testament Versions
- The Text of the Old Testament

Important Old Testament Manuscripts

Most medieval manuscripts of the OT exhibit a fairly standardized form of the Hebrew text. This standardization reflects the work of the medieval scribes known as Masoretes (AD 500–900); the text that resulted from their work is called the Masoretic Text. Most of the important manuscripts dated from the 11th century AD or later all reflect this same basic textual tradition. But since the Masoretic Text did not stabilize until well after AD 500, many questions about its development in the preceding centuries could not be answered. So the primary task for OT textual critics has been to compare earlier witnesses in order to discover how

the Masoretic Text came to be, and how it and earlier witnesses of the Hebrew Bible are related. This leads us to the initial task of textual criticism: the collection of all possible records of the biblical writings.

All the primary sources of the Hebrew Scriptures are handwritten manuscripts, usually written on animal skins, papyrus, or sometimes metal. The fact that they are handwritten is the source of many difficulties for the textual critic. Human error and editorial tampering are often to blame for the many variant readings in OT and NT manuscripts. The fact that the ancient manuscripts are written on skins or papyrus is another source of difficulty. Due to natural decay, most of the surviving ancient manuscripts are fragmentary and difficult to read.

There are many secondary witnesses to the ancient OT text, including translations into other languages, quotations used by both friends and enemies of biblical religion, and evidence from early printed texts. Most of the secondary witnesses have suffered in ways similar to the primary ones. They, too, contain numerous variants due to both intentional and accidental scribal errors and are fragmentary as a result of natural decay. Since variant readings do exist in the surviving ancient manuscripts, these must be collected and compared. The task of comparing and listing the variant readings is known as collation.

Manuscripts with the Masoretic Text

The textual history of the Masoretic Text is a significant story in its own right. This text of the Hebrew Bible is the most complete in existence. It forms the basis for our modern Hebrew Bibles and is the prototype against which all comparisons are made in OT textual studies. It is called Masoretic because in its present form it is based on the *Masora,* the textual tradition of the Jewish scholars known as the Masoretes of Tiberias. (Tiberias was the location of their community on the Sea of Galilee.) The Masoretes, whose school flourished between AD 500 and 1000, standardized the traditional consonantal text by adding vowel pointing and marginal notes. (The ancient Hebrew alphabet had no vowels.)

The Masoretic Text, as it exists today, owes much to the Ben Asher family. For five or six generations, from the second half of the eighth century to the middle of the tenth century AD, this family played a leading role in the Masoretic work at Tiberias. A faithful record of their work can be found in the oldest existing Masoretic manuscripts, which go back to the final two members of that family. The oldest dated Masoretic manuscript is Codex Cairensis (AD 895), which is attributed to Moses ben Asher. This manuscript contained both the Former Prophets (Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings) and the Latter Prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the 12 Minor Prophets). The rest of the OT is missing from this manuscript.

The other major surviving manuscript attributed to the Ben Asher family is the Aleppo Codex. According to the manuscript's concluding note, Aaron ben Moses ben Asher was responsible for writing the Masoretic notes and pointing the text. This manuscript contained the entire OT and dates from the first half of the 10th century AD. It was reportedly destroyed in anti-Jewish riots in 1947, but this proved to be only partly true. A majority of the manuscript survived and will be used as the base for a new critical edition of the Hebrew Bible to be published by the Hebrew University in Jerusalem.

The manuscript known as Codex Leningradensis, presently stored in the Leningrad Public Library, is of special importance as a witness to the Ben Asher text. According to a note on the manuscript, it was copied in AD 1008 from texts written by Aaron ben Moses ben Asher. Since the oldest complete Hebrew text of the OT (the Aleppo Codex) was not available to scholars earlier in this century, Codex Leningradensis was used as the textual base for the popular Hebrew texts of today: *Biblia Hebraica,* edited by R. Kittel, and its revision, *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia,* edited by K. Elliger and W. Rudolf.

There are quite a number of less important manuscript codices that reflect the Masoretic tradition: the Petersburg Codex of the Prophets and the Erfurt Codices. There are also a number of manuscripts that no longer exist but which were used by scholars in the Masoretic period. One of the most prominent is Codex Hillel, traditionally attributed to Rabbi Hillel ben Moses ben Hillel about AD 600. This codex was said to be very accurate and was used for the revision of other manuscripts. Readings of this codex are cited repeatedly by the early medieval Masoretes. Codex Muga, Codex Jericho, and Codex Jerushalmi, also no longer extant, were also cited by the Masoretes. These manuscripts were likely prominent examples of unpointed texts that had become part of a standardizing consensus in the first centuries AD. These laid the groundwork for the work of the Masoretes of Tiberias.

Despite the completeness of the Masoretic manuscripts of the Hebrew Bible, a major problem still remains for OT textual critics. The Masoretic manuscripts, as old as they are, were written between 1,000 and 2,000 years after the original autographs. Earlier witnesses to the ancient Hebrew text were needed to testify to the accuracy of the Masoretic Text.

The Dead Sea Scrolls

The most important ancient witnesses to the Hebrew Bible are the texts discovered at Wadi Qumran in the 1940s and 1950s. (*Wadi* is an Arabic word for a riverbed that is dry except in the rainy season.) Before the Qumran discoveries, the oldest existing Hebrew manuscripts of the OT dated from about AD 900. The greatest importance of the Dead Sea Scrolls, therefore, lies in the discovery of biblical manuscripts dating back to only about 300 years after the close of the OT canon. That makes them 1,000 years earlier than the oldest manuscripts previously known to biblical scholars. The texts found at Wadi Qumran were all completed before the Roman conquest of Palestine in AD 70, and many predate this event by quite some time. Among the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Isaiah Scroll has received the most publicity, although the collection contains fragments of all the books in the Hebrew Bible with the exception of Esther.

Because the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls is so important for OT textual criticism, a short history and description of these recent discoveries is appropriate. The manuscripts now known as the Dead Sea Scrolls are a collection of biblical and extrabiblical manuscripts from Qumran, an ancient Jewish religious community near the Dead Sea.

Before the Qumran find, few manuscripts had been discovered in the Holy Land. The early church father Origen (third century AD) mentioned using Hebrew and Greek manuscripts that had been stored in jars in caves near Jericho. In the ninth century AD a patriarch of the eastern church, Timothy I, wrote a letter to Sergius, metropolitan (archbishop) of Elam, in which he, too, referred to a large number of Hebrew manuscripts found in a cave near Jericho. For more than 1,000 years since then, however, no other significant manuscript discoveries were forthcoming from caves in that region near the Dead Sea.

Scroll Discoveries at Wadi Qumran

The history of the Dead Sea manuscripts, both of their hiding and of their finding, reads like a mystery adventure story. It began with a telephone call on Wednesday afternoon, February 18, 1948, in the troubled city of Jerusalem. Butrus Sowmy, librarian and monk of St Mark's Monastery in the Armenian quarter of the Old City of Jerusalem, was calling John C. Trever, acting director of the American Schools of Oriental Research (ASOR). Sowmy had been preparing a catalog of the monastery's collection of rare books. Among them he found some scrolls in ancient Hebrew that, he said, had been in the monastery for about 40 years. Could ASOR supply him with some information for the catalog?

The following day Sowmy and his brother brought a suitcase containing five scrolls or parts of scrolls wrapped in an Arabic newspaper. Pulling back the end of one of the scrolls Trever discovered that it was written in a clear, square Hebrew script. He copied several lines from that scroll, carefully examined three others, but was unable to unroll the fifth because it was too brittle. After the Syrians left, Trever told the story of the scrolls to William H. Brownlee, an ASOR fellow. Trever further noted in the lines he had copied from the first scroll the double occurrence of an unusual negative construction in Hebrew. In addition, the Hebrew script of the scrolls was more archaic than anything he had ever seen.

Trever then visited St Mark's Monastery. There he was introduced to the Syrian archbishop Athanasius Samuel, who gave him permission to photograph the scrolls. Trever and Brownlee compared the style of handwriting on the scrolls with a photograph of the Nash Papyrus, a scroll inscribed with the Ten Commandments and Deuteronomy 6:4 and dated by scholars in the first or second century BC. The two ASOR scholars concluded that the script on the newly found manuscripts belonged to the same period. When ASOR director Millar Burrows returned to Jerusalem from Baghdad a few days later, he was shown the scrolls, and the three men continued their investigation. Only then did the Syrians reveal that the scrolls had been purchased the year before, in 1947, and had not been in the monastery for 40 years as was first reported.

How had the Syrians come to possess the scrolls? Before that question could be answered, many fragmentary accounts had to be pieced together. Sometime during the winter of 1946–47 three Bedouin were tending their sheep and goats near a spring in the vicinity of Wadi Qumran. One of the herdsmen, throwing a rock through a small

opening in the cliff, heard the sound of the rock evidently shattering an earthenware jar inside. Another Bedouin later lowered himself into the cave and found ten tall jars lining the walls. Three manuscripts (one of them in four pieces) stored in two of the jars were removed from the cave and offered to an antiquities dealer in Bethlehem.

Several months later the Bedouin secured four more scrolls (one of them in two pieces) from the cave and sold them to another dealer in Bethlehem. During Holy Week in 1947, St Mark's Syrian Orthodox Monastery in Jerusalem was informed of the four scrolls, and Metropolitan Athanasius Samuel offered to buy them. The sale was not completed, however, until July 1947, when the four scrolls were bought by the monastery. They included a complete Isaiah scroll, a commentary on Habakkuk, a scroll containing a Manual of Discipline of the religious community at Qumran, and the Genesis Apocryphon (originally thought to be the aprocryphal book of Lamech but actually an Aramaic paraphrase of Genesis).

In November and December of 1947 an Armenian antiquities dealer in Jerusalem informed the late E. L. Sukenik, professor of archaeology at Hebrew University in Jerusalem, of the first three scrolls found in the cave by the Bedouin. Sukenik then secured the three scrolls and two jars from the antiquities dealer in Bethlehem. They included an incomplete scroll of Isaiah, the Hymns of Thanksgiving (containing 12 columns of original psalms), and the War Scroll. (That scroll describes a war, actual or spiritual, of the tribes of Levi, Judah, and Benjamin against the Moabites and Edomites. *See* War of the Sons of Light against the Sons of Darkness.)

On April 1, 1948, the first news release appeared in newspapers around the world, followed by another news release on April 26 by Sukenik about the manuscripts he had already acquired at Hebrew University. In 1949 Athanasius Samuel brought the four scrolls from St Mark's Monastery to the United States. They were exhibited in various places and finally were purchased on July 1, 1954, in New York for $250,000 by Sukenik's son for the nation of Israel and sent to Hebrew University in Jerusalem. Today they are on display in the Shrine of the Book museum in West Jerusalem.

Because of the importance of the initial discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, both archaeologists and Bedouin continued their search for more manuscripts. Early in 1949, G. Lankester Harding, director of antiquities for the kingdom of Jordan, and Roland G. de Vaux, of the Dominic Ecole Biblique in Jerusalem, excavated the cave (designated Cave One, or 1Q) where the initial discovery was made. Several hundred caves were explored the same year. So far, 11 caves in the Wadi Qumran have yielded treasures. Almost 600 manuscripts have been recovered, about 200 of which are biblical material. The fragments number between 50,000 and 60,000 pieces. About 85 percent of the fragments are leather; the other 15 percent are papyrus. The fact that most of the manuscripts are leather contributed to the problem of their preservation.

Probably the cave next most important to Cave One is Cave Four (4Q), which has yielded about 40,000 fragments of 400 different manuscripts, 100 of which are biblical. Every book of the OT except Esther is represented.

In addition to the biblical manuscripts the discoveries have included apocryphal works such as Hebrew and Aramaic fragments of Tobit, Ecclesiasticus, and the Letter of Jeremiah. Fragments were also found of pseudepigraphal books such as 1 Enoch, the book of Jubilees, and the Testament of Levi.

Many sectarian scrolls peculiar to the religious community that lived at Qumran were also found. They furnish historical background on the nature of pre-Christian Judaism and help fill in the gaps of intertestamental history. One of the scrolls, the Damascus Document, had originally turned up in Cairo, but manuscripts of it have now been found at Qumran. The Manual of Discipline was one of the seven scrolls from Cave One. Fragmentary manuscripts of it have been found in other caves. The document gives the group's entrance requirements, plus regulations governing life in the Qumran community. The Thanksgiving Hymns include some 30 hymns, probably composed by one individual.

There were also many commentaries on different books of the OT. The Habakkuk Commentary was a copy of the first two chapters of Habakkuk in Hebrew accompanied by a verse-by-verse commentary. The commentary gives many details about an apocalyptic figure called the "Teacher of Righteousness" who is persecuted by a wicked priest.

A unique discovery was made in Cave Three (3Q) in 1952. It was a scroll of copper, measuring about eight feet (2.4 meters) long and a foot (30.5 centimeters) wide. Because it was brittle, it was not

opened until 1966, and then only by cutting it into strips. It contained an inventory of some 60 locations where treasures of gold, silver, and incense were hidden. Archaeologists have not been able to find any of it. That list of treasures, perhaps from the Jerusalem temple, may have been stored in the cave by Zealots (a revolutionary Jewish political party) during their struggle with the Romans in AD 66–70.

During the Six-Day War in June 1967, Sukenik's son, Yigael Yadin of the Hebrew University, acquired a Qumran document called the Temple Scroll. That tightly rolled scroll measures 28 feet (8.5 meters) and is the longest scroll found so far in the Qumran area. A major portion of it is devoted to statutes of the kings and matters of defense. It also describes sacrificial feasts and rules of cleanliness. Almost half of the scroll gives detailed instructions for building a future temple, supposedly revealed by God to the scroll's author.

Important Dead Sea Scroll Manuscripts

Among the hundreds of biblical manuscripts discovered in the 11 caves around the Dead Sea, there are some very significant ones—especially for textual studies. These are listed below. (The first number signifies the cave, Q indicates Qumran, the abbreviation for the biblical book follows, often followed by a superscipt letter for successive manuscripts containing the same book.)

1QIsaa

This is the first Dead Sea Scroll to receive widespread attention. It is dated to c. 100 BC. The text, which includes most of Isaiah, is proto-Masoretic with some significant variants.

1QIsab

The text, which includes most of Isaiah, is proto-Masoretic. It is dated to a period from 25 BC to AD 50.

2QJer

This manuscript is dated to a period from 25 BC to AD 50 and has portions of Jeremiah chapters 42–49. It has some readings that follow the Septuagint (LXX), while it follows the order of chapters found in proto-Masoretic texts. For the book of Jeremiah, the Septuagint and Masoretic Text are quite different: the Septuagint is one-eighth shorter and has a different arrangement of chapters.

4QPaleoExodm

This manuscript, containing most of Exodus, is dated quite early: 200–175 BC. As such, it has provided scholars with some interesting insights into the early history of textual transmission of Exodus and the Pentateuch. The manuscript shows many similarities with the Samaritan Pentateuch.

4QNumb

This manuscript, dated 30 BC–AD 20, contains most of Numbers. The book of Numbers existed in three distinguishable textual traditions: the Masoretic Text, the Samaritan Pentateuch, and the Septuagint. This manuscript, 4QNumb, shows similarities with the Samaritan Pentateuch and the Septuagint, while having its own unique readings.

4QSama

This manuscript, containing about one tenth of 1 and 2 Samuel, is dated c. 50–25 BC. This manuscript, showing some similarities with the Septuagint, is believed to have several readings that are superior to the Masoretic Text.

4QJera

This manuscript, containing portions of Jeremiah 7–22, dates c. 200 BC. It generally concurs with the Masoretic Text.

4QJerb

This manuscript, dated c. 150–125 BC, follows the arrangement of the Septuagint, as well as its brevity. The significance of this is that two different texts of Jeremiah were used in the pre-Christian era—one that was proto-Masoretic (as with 4QJera) and one that was like the Septuagint.

11QPsa

This manuscript, dated c. AD 25–50, preserves many psalms. However, these are not in the traditional sequence found in the Hebrew Bible. Furthermore, the manuscript has several other psalms, some of which were known from other ancient versions and others that were unknown until they surfaced in this manuscript.

Scroll Discoveries at Wadi Murabba'at

In 1951 Bedouin discovered more manuscripts in caves in the Wadi Murabba'at, which extends southeast from Bethlehem toward the Dead Sea, about 11 miles (17.7 kilometers) south of Qumran. Four caves were excavated there in 1952 under Harding and de Vaux. They yielded biblical documents and important materials, such as letters and coins, from the time of the second Jewish revolt

under Bar-Kochba in AD 132–135. Among the biblical manuscripts was a scroll containing a Hebrew text of the Minor Prophets, dating from the second century AD. This manuscript corresponds almost perfectly to the Masoretic Text, hinting that by the second century a standard consonantal text was already taking shape. Also found in Wadi Murabba'at were fragments of the Pentateuch (the five books of Moses) and Isaiah.

Apart from the Dead Sea Scrolls, ancient witnesses to the Hebrew OT that are actually written in the Hebrew language are almost nonexistent. Because of this, the Dead Sea Scrolls may easily be one of the greatest archaeological finds of all time. They take us 1,000 years deeper into the history of the Hebrew OT, giving us the ability to assess all the other ancient witnesses with greater understanding.

The most frequently represented OT books among the Dead Sea Scrolls are Genesis, Exodus, Deuteronomy, Psalms, and Isaiah. The oldest text is a fragment of Exodus dating from about 250 BC. The Isaiah Scroll dates from about 100 BC. These ancient witnesses only confirm the accuracy of the Masoretic Text and the care with which the Jewish scribes handled the Scriptures. Except for a few instances where spelling and grammar differ between the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Masoretic Text, the two are amazingly similar. The differences do not warrant any major changes in the substance of the OT. Yet these discoveries are helping biblical scholars gain a clearer understanding of the text at an earlier time in its history and development.

Early conclusions about the antiquity of the first Dead Sea Scrolls were not accepted by everyone. Some scholars were convinced that the scrolls were of medieval origin. A series of questions relate to the dating problem. When were the texts at Qumran composed? When were they deposited in the caves? Most scholars believe the manuscripts were placed in the caves by members of the Qumran community when Roman legions were besieging Jewish strongholds. That was shortly before the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70.

Careful study of the contents of a document sometimes reveals its authorship and the date when it was written. An example of using such internal evidence for dating a nonbiblical work is found in the Habakkuk Commentary. It gives hints about the people and events in the days of the commentary's author, not in the days of the prophet Habakkuk. The commentator described the enemies of God's people as the Kittim. Originally that word denoted Cyprus but later came to be more generally the Greek islands and the coasts of the eastern Mediterranean. In Daniel 11:30 the term is used prophetically, and most scholars identify the Kittim with the Romans. Thus, the Habakkuk Commentary was probably written about the time of the Roman capture of Palestine under Pompey in 63 BC.

Another important item to consider when dating a manuscript is its copy date. Although the vast majority of manuscripts are undated, it is often possible to determine when a manuscript was written by paleography, the study of ancient handwriting. That was the method initially employed by Trever when he compared the script of the Isaiah Scroll with the Nash Papyrus, thus dating it to the pre-Christian era. His conclusions were confirmed by the late William F. Albright, then the foremost American archaeologist. During the time of the Babylonian captivity, the square script became the normal style of writing in Hebrew (as well as in Aramaic, a cousin of Hebrew). The evidence of paleography clearly dates the majority of the Qumran scrolls in the period between 200 BC and AD 200.

Archaeology provides another kind of external evidence. The pottery discovered at Qumran dates from the late Hellenistic and early Roman periods (200 BC–AD 100). Earthenware articles and ornaments point to the same period. Several hundred coins were found in jars dating from the Graeco-Roman period. A crack in one of the buildings is attributed to an earthquake that, according to Josephus (a Jewish historian who wrote during the first century AD), occurred in 31 BC. The excavations at Khirbet Qumran indicate that the general period of their occupation was from about 135 BC to AD 68, the year the Zealot revolt was crushed by Rome.

Finally, radiocarbon analysis has contributed to dating the finds. Radiocarbon analysis is a method of dating material from the amount of radioactive carbon remaining in it. The process is also known as carbon-14 dating. Applied to the linen cloth in which the scrolls were wrapped, the analysis gave a date of AD 33 plus or minus 200 years. A later test bracketed the date between 250 BC and AD 50. Although there may be questions concerning the relation of the linen wrappings to the date of the scrolls themselves, the carbon-14 test agrees with the conclusions of both paleography and archaeology. The general period, then, in which the

Dead Sea Scrolls can be safely dated is between about 150 BC and AD 68.

The Nash Papyrus

Prior to the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, the oldest Hebrew witness to the OT was the Nash Papyrus. This manuscript was acquired in Egypt by W. L. Nash in 1902 and was donated to the Cambridge University Library. This manuscript contains a damaged copy of the Ten Commandments (Ex 20:2–17), part of Deuteronomy 5:6–21, and also the Shema (Dt 6:4ff.). This is clearly a collection of devotional and liturgical passages, and has been dated to the same period as the Dead Sea Scrolls, between 150 BC and AD 68.

The Cairo Geniza Fragments

Near the end of the 19th century, many fragments from the 6th to the 8th centuries were found in an old synagogue in Cairo, Egypt, which had been St Michael's Church until AD 882. They were found there in a geniza, a storage room where worn or faulty manuscripts were hidden until they could be disposed of properly. This geniza had apparently been walled off and forgotten until its recent discovery. In this small room, as many as 200,000 fragments were preserved, including biblical texts in Hebrew and Aramaic. The fact that the biblical fragments date from the 5th century AD makes them invaluable for shedding light on the development of the Masoretic work prior to the standardization instituted by the great Masoretes of Tiberias.

Significant Old Testament Versions

The Samaritan Pentateuch

Exactly when the Samaritan community separated from the larger Jewish community is a matter of dispute. But at some point during the postexilic period (c. 540–100 BC), a clear division between Samaritans and Jews was marked off. At this point, the Samaritans, who accepted only the Pentateuch as canonical, apparently canonized their own particular version of the Scriptures.

A copy of the Samaritan Pentateuch came to the attention of scholars in 1616. Initially, it caused a great deal of excitement, but most of the early assessments of its value to textual criticism were negative. It differed from the Masoretic Text in some 6,000 instances, and many judged this to be the result of sectarian differences between Samaritans and Jews. By some, it was simply viewed as a sectarian revision of the Masoretic Text.

After further assessment, however, it became clear that the Samaritan Pentateuch represented a text of much earlier origin than the Masoretic Text. And although a few of the distinctions of the Samaritan Pentateuch were clearly the result of sectarian concerns, most of the differences were neutral in this respect. Many of them had more to do with popularizing the text, rather than altering its meaning in any way. The fact that the Samaritan Pentateuch had much in common with the Septuagint, some of the Dead Sea Scrolls, and the NT, revealed that most of its differences with the Masoretic Text were not due to sectarian differences. More likely, they were due to the use of a different textual base, which was probably in wide use in the ancient Near East until well after the time of Christ. This realization, though not solving any real problems, did much to illustrate the complexity of the OT textual tradition that existed before the Masoretic standard was completed.

The Septuagint (LXX)

The Septuagint is the oldest Greek translation of the OT, its witness being significantly older than that of the Masoretic Text. According to tradition, the Septuagint Pentateuch was translated by a team of 70 scholars in Alexandria, Egypt. (Hence its common designation LXX, the Roman numerals for 70.) The Jewish community in Egypt spoke Greek, not Hebrew, so a Greek translation of the OT was sincerely needed by that community of Jews. The exact date of translation is not known, but evidence indicates that the Septuagint Pentateuch was completed in the third century BC. The rest of the OT was probably translated over a long period of time, as it clearly represents the work of many different scholars.

The value of the Septuagint to textual criticism varies widely from book to book. It might be said that the Septuagint is not a single version but a collection of versions made by various authors, who differed greatly in their methods and their knowledge of Hebrew. The translations of the individual books are in no way uniform. Many books are translated almost literally, while others like Job and Daniel are quite dynamic. So the value of each book for textual criticism must be assessed on a book-by-book basis. The books translated literally are clearly more helpful in making

comparisons with the Masoretic Text than the more dynamic ones.

The content of some books is significantly different when comparing the Septuagint and the Masoretic Text. For example, the Septuagint's Jeremiah is missing significant portions found in the Masoretic Text, and the order of the text is significantly different as well. What these differences actually mean is difficult to know with certainty. It has been conjectured that the Septuagint is simply a poor translation and is therefore missing portions of the original Hebrew. But these same differences could also indicate that editorial additions and changes worked their way into the Masoretic Text during its long history of development. It is also possible that there were a number of valid textual traditions at that time, one followed by the Septuagint, and another followed by the Masoretic Text. This illustrates some of the difficulties that arise while doing OT textual criticism.

The Septuagint was the standard OT text used by the early Christian church. The expanding Gentile church needed a translation in the common language of the time—Greek. By the time of Christ, even among the Jews, a majority of the people spoke Aramaic and Greek, not Hebrew. The NT writers evidence their inclination to the Septuagint by using it when quoting the OT.

Other Greek Versions

Because of the broad acceptance and use of the Septuagint among Christians, the Jews renounced it in favor of a number of other Greek versions. Aquila, a proselyte and disciple of Rabbi Akiba, produced a new translation around AD 130. In the spirit of his teacher, Aquila wrote an extremely literal translation, often to the point of communicating poorly in Greek. This literal approach, however, gained this version wide acceptance among Jews. Only fragments of this version have survived, but its literal nature reveals much about its Hebrew textual base.

Symmachus produced a new version around AD 170 designed not only for accuracy but also to communicate well in the Greek language. His version has survived only in a few *Hexapla* fragments. A third Greek version came from Theodotion, a Jewish proselyte from the end of the second century AD. His version was apparently a revision of an earlier Greek version, possibly the Septuagint. This version has survived only in a few early Christian quotations, though it was once widely used.

The Christian theologian Origen (c. AD 185–255) arranged the OT with six parallel versions for comparison in his *Hexapla.* In his effort to find the best text of the Septuagint, Origen wrote out six parallel columns containing first the Hebrew, second the Hebrew transliterated into Greek characters, third the text of Aquila, fourth the text of Symmachus, fifth his own corrected Septuagint text, sixth the text of Theodotion. Jerome used this great Bible at Caesarea in his work on the Vulgate (after 382—see below). Almost four centuries after Origen's death, a Mesopotamian bishop, Paul of Tella, also used the *Hexapla* in the library at Caesarea (616–17) to make a translation into Syriac of Origen's fifth column, the corrected Septuagint. Then in 638 the Islamic hordes swept through Caesarea and the *Hexapla* disappeared. Other than a few fragments, only Bishop Paul's Syriac translation of Origen's fifth column remains.

An eighth-century copy of Bishop Paul's Syriac *Hexapla* Septuagint is extant in a Milan museum. Other famous uncial manuscripts of the Septuagint are the codices: Vaticanus, early fourth century, now in the Vatican Library; Sinaiticus, mid-fourth century; and Alexandrinus, probably from the fifth century—both of the latter are in London's British Museum. These copies are intensely studied because they bear a Greek witness to Hebrew texts far earlier than the Masoretic or "received text."

The Aramaic Targums

The Aramaic Targums were Aramaic translations of the Hebrew OT. Since the common language of the Jews during the postexilic period was Aramaic and not Hebrew, a need for Aramaic translations of the Hebrew Bible arose. Hebrew remained the language of scholarly religious circles, and translations for the common people were often spurned by the religious leadership. But over time, the reading of the Scriptures and commentaries in Aramaic became an accepted practice in the synagogues.

The purpose of these translations was to get the message across and to edify the people. Thus, the translations were extremely interpretive. The translators paraphrased, added explanatory glosses, and often boldly reinterpreted the text according to the theological biases of their time. They sought to relate the Bible text to contemporary life and political circumstances. Because of the dynamic approach evident in these translations, their use in textual criticism is limited, but they do add to the welter of evidence to be

collected and collated in order to reconstruct the text of the OT.

The Syriac Version

Another version worthy of note is the Syriac version. This version was in common use in the Syriac (eastern Aramaic) church, which designated it the *Peshitta,* meaning "the simple or plain." What they intended by this designation is difficult to discern. It may indicate that it was intended for popular consumption, or that it avoided adding explanatory glosses and other additions, or perhaps that it was not an annotated text, as was the annotated *Syro-Hexapla* then in use by the same community.

The literary history of the Syriac version is not known, though it is clearly complex. Some have identified it as the recasting of an Aramaic Targum in Syriac, while others claim it has a more independent origin. Some connect it to the conversion of the leaders of Adiabene (east of the Tigris River) to the Jewish faith during the first century AD. Their need for an OT could have brought about the development of a version in their common tongue—Syriac. Still others connect it to Christian origins. Obvious later revisions to the *Peshitta* complicate matters even more. More study needs to be done to assess the nature of this version before it can lend much insight into the history of the Hebrew text.

The Latin Versions

Latin was a dominant language in western regions of the Roman Empire from well before the time of Christ. It was in the western regions of southern Gaul and North Africa that the first Latin translations of the Bible appeared. Around AD 160 Tertullian apparently used a Latin version of the Scriptures. Not long after this, the Old Latin text seems to have been in circulation, evidenced by Cyprian's use of it before his death in AD 258. The Old Latin version was translated from the Septuagint. Due to its early date, it is valuable as a witness to the early Septuagint text, before later editors obscured the nature of the original. It also indirectly gives clues to the nature of the Hebrew text at the time of the Septuagint's translation. Complete manuscripts of the Old Latin text have not survived. After the completion of Jerome's Latin version, the Vulgate, the older text fell into disuse. Enough fragmentary manuscripts of this version do exist, however, to lend significant information to the early OT text.

Around the third century AD, Latin began to replace Greek as the language of learning in the larger Roman world. A uniform, reliable text was badly needed for theological and liturgical uses. To fill this need, Pope Damasus I (AD 336–84) commissioned Jerome, an eminent scholar in Latin, Greek, and Hebrew, to undertake the translation. Jerome began this work as a translation from the Greek Septuagint, considered inspired by many church authorities, including Augustine. But later, and at the risk of great criticism, he turned to the Hebrew text being used in Palestine at that time as the base text for his translation. During the years between AD 390 and 405 Jerome wrote his Latin translation of the Hebrew OT. Yet, despite Jerome's return to the original Hebrew, he was heavily dependent on the various Greek versions as aids in translation. As a result the Vulgate reflects the other Greek and Latin translations as much as the underlying Hebrew text. The value of the Vulgate for textual criticism is its pre-Masoretic witness to the Hebrew Bible, though this was compromised to a great extent by the influence of already existing Greek translations.

The Text of the Old Testament

The task of the textual critic can be divided into a number of general stages: (1) the collection and collation of existing manuscripts, translations, and quotations; (2) the development of theory and methodology that will enable the critic to use the gathered information to reconstruct the most accurate text of the biblical materials; (3) the reconstruction of the history of the transmission of the text in order to identify the various influences affecting the text; (4) the evaluation of specific variant readings in light of textual evidence, theology, and history.

Both OT and NT textual critics undertake a similar task and face similar obstacles. They both seek to unearth a hypothetical "original" text with limited resources that are at varying degrees of deterioration. But the OT textual critic faces a more complex textual history than does his NT counterpart. The NT was written primarily in the first century AD, and complete NT manuscripts exist that were written only a few hundred years later. The OT, however, is made up of literature written over a 1,000-year period, the oldest parts dating to the 12th century BC, or possibly even earlier. To make matters even more difficult, until recently, the earliest known Hebrew manuscripts of the OT were medieval. This left scholars with little witness as to the OT's textual development

from ancient times to the Middle Ages, a period of over 2,000 years.

Until the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in the 1940s and 1950s, secondary Aramaic, Greek, and Latin translations served as the earliest significant witnesses to the early Hebrew Scriptures. Since these are translations, and subject to sectarian and contextual alterations and interpolations, their value to the textual critic, though significant, is limited. The recent discoveries of the Dead Sea Scrolls and other early manuscripts, however, have provided primary witnesses to the Hebrew OT in earlier times. The scholarly assessment of these discoveries is, at present, far from complete, and the discipline of OT textual criticism anxiously awaits a more complete assessment of their significance. In a general sense, however, the Dead Sea Scrolls have affirmed the accuracy of the Masoretic Text that we use today.

Reconstruction of the history of the transmission of the text is an important element in evaluating variant readings. Material from a wide variety of sources must be combined in order to arrive at even a tentative reconstruction of the text. A brief sketch of scholarly opinion follows.

The early history of the OT text as reflected in the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Samaritan Pentateuch, the Septuagint, and the ancient Hebrew text shows a remarkable fluidity and diversity. Evidently the standardizing process did not begin at the earliest stages. For example, the materials from the Qumran community, where the Dead Sea Scrolls were found, do not reflect any frustration with varying texts within that community.

Some scholars have attempted to account for such diversity by theories of local texts. They theorize that various localities in the Near East (e.g., Babylon, Palestine, Egypt) had differing text types that are reflected in the various surviving Hebrew texts and versions. Other scholars account for the diversity by recognizing a precanonical fluidity. They feel that until the process of canonization was complete, accurate reproduction of the manuscripts was not viewed as very important. It should be noted, however, that the basic text that modern scholarship has identified as closest to the original was among the Dead Sea texts (for example, the large Isaiah Scroll).

Destruction of the temple in AD 70 provided an impetus for standardization of the consonantal text. The texts found at Wadi Murabba'at, copied during the first centuries AD, reflect the new stage. The scholars initially reporting on the discovery were disappointed to find in these texts so few variations from the standard Masoretic Text. To scholars, the very early texts from the Dead Sea Scroll discoveries had become the standard consonantal text to the exclusion of other variants. Scholars have now gone so far as to identify the only slightly later Wadi Murabba'at texts as a "proto-Masoretic" standard. This seems to indicate that the Hebrew consonantal text was already approaching a standard in Palestine by the first centuries AD.

Standardization as practiced by the Masoretes meant identifying one text as normative and copying carefully from that text. It also meant correcting existing texts by the normative text. The Hebrew text, of course, was written with consonants alone, not with consonants *and* vowels, as we write English.

The next stage in the transmission of the OT text was standardization of punctuation and vowel patterns. That process, which began fairly early in the NT period, extended over a period of 1,000 years. A long series of Masoretes provided annotations known as *Masora,* which, in Hebrew, means "tradition." Two different motivations are evident in their work. One was their concern for accurate reproduction of the consonantal text. For that purpose a collection of annotations (on irregular forms, abnormal patterns, the number of times a form or word was used, and other matters) was gathered and inserted in the margins or at the end of the text.

A second concern of the Masoretes was to record and standardize the vocalization of the consonantal text for reading purposes. Up until this point, scribes had been prohibited against inserting vowels to make the vocalization of the text clear. Because of this, a proper reading of the text depended on the oral tradition passed down from generation to generation. The origins of vocalization reflect differences between Babylon and Palestine. The Tiberian Masoretes (scholars working in Tiberias in Palestine) provided the most complete and exact system of vocalization. The earliest dated manuscript from that tradition is a codex of the Prophets from the Karaite synagogue of Cairo dated AD 896. Today the standard Hebrew text of the OT, *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia,* an updated version of Kittel's *Biblia Hebraica,* is constructed on the basis of the Tiberian Masoretic tradition.

Standardization of both the consonantal text and vocalization succeeded so well that the manuscripts that have survived display a remarkable agreement. Most of the variants, being minor and attributable to scribal error, do not affect interpretation.

Methodology of Old Testament Textual Criticism

The search for an adequate methodology to handle the many variant readings found in manuscripts is inseparably intertwined with our understanding of the history of transmission. The basic issue in textual criticism is the method used to decide the relative value of those variant readings. Many factors must be evaluated in order to arrive at a valid decision.

Modern science has provided a number of aids for deciphering a manuscript. Scientific dating procedures help to determine the age of the writing material. Chemical techniques help clarify writing that has deteriorated. Ultraviolet light enables a scholar to see traces of ink (carbon) in a manuscript even after the surface writing has been effaced.

Each manuscript must be studied as a whole, for each has a "personality." It is important to identify the characteristic errors, characteristic carelessness or carefulness, and other peculiarities of the scribe(s) who copied the material. Then the manuscript must be compared with other manuscripts to identify the "family" tradition with which it agrees. Preservation of common errors or insertions in the text is a clue to relationships. All possible details of date, place of origin, and authorship must be ascertained.

Scribal errors fall into several distinct categories. The first large category is that of *unintentional errors:* (1) Confusion of similar consonants and the transposition of two consonants are frequent errors. (2) Corruptions also resulted from an incorrect division of words (many early manuscripts omitted spaces between words in order to save space). (3) Confusion of sounds occurred particularly when one scribe read to a group of scribes making multiple copies. (4) In the OT, the method of vocalization (addition of vowels to the consonantal text) created some errors. (5) Omissions of a letter, word, or phrase created new readings. (6) Repetition of a letter, word, or even a whole phrase was also common. (7) Omission (called haplography) or repetition (called dittography) could be caused by the eye of a scribe slipping from one word to a similar word or ending. (8) Omissions by *homoioteleuton* (Greek meaning "similar endings") were also quite common. This occurred when two words that were identical, similar, or had identical endings were found close to each other, and the eye of the copyist moved from the first to the second, omitting the words between them. (9) In the OT, errors were at times caused by the use of consonants as vowel letters in some ancient texts. Copyists unaware of this usage of vowel letters would copy them in as aberrant consonants. Normally unintentional errors are fairly easy to identify because they create nonsense readings.

Intentional errors are much more difficult to identify and evaluate. Harmonizations from similar materials occurred with regularity. Difficult readings were subject to "improvement" by a thinking scribe. Objectionable expressions were sometimes eliminated or smoothed out. Occasionally synonyms were employed. Conflation (resolving a discrepancy between two variant readings by including both of them) often appears.

Awareness of these common problems is the first step in detecting and eliminating the more obvious errors and identifying and eliminating the peculiarities of a particular scribe. Then more subtle criteria for identifying the reading most likely to be the original must be employed. Procedures for applying such criteria are similar in both OT and NT work.

General Methodological Principles

Through the work of textual critics in the last several centuries, certain basic principles have evolved. The primary principles for the OT can be briefly summarized.

1. The basic text for primary consideration is the Masoretic Text because of the careful standardization it represents. That text is compared with the testimony of the ancient versions. The Septuagint, by reason of age and basic faithfulness to the Hebrew text, carries significant weight in all decisions. The Targums (Aramaic translations) also reflect the Hebrew base but exhibit a tendency to expansion and paraphrase. The Syriac (*Peshitta*), Vulgate (Latin), Old Latin, and Coptic versions add indirect evidence, although translations are not always clear witnesses in technical details. Use of such versions does enable scholars to use comparative philology in textual decisions and thus expose early

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errors for which the original reading probably has not survived.

2. The reading that best explains the origin of other variants is preferable. Information from reconstruction of the history of transmission often provides additional insight. Knowledge of typical scribal errors enables the critic to make an educated decision on the sequence of variants.

3. The shorter reading is preferable. The scribes frequently added material in order to solve style or syntax problems and seldom abridged or condensed material.

4. The more difficult reading is more likely to be the original one. This principle is closely related to the third. Scribes did not intentionally create more complex readings. Unintentional errors are usually easy to identify. Thus the easier reading is normally suspect as a scribal alteration.

5. Readings that are not harmonized or assimilated to similar passages are preferable. Copyists had a tendency to correct material on the basis of similar material elsewhere (sometimes even unconsciously).

6. When all else fails, the textual critic must resort to conjectural emendation. To make an "educated guess" requires intimate acquaintance with the Hebrew language, familiarity with the author's style, and an understanding of culture, customs, and theology that might color the passage. Use of conjecture must be limited to those passages in which the original reading has definitely not been transmitted to us.

Conclusion

It should be remembered that textual criticism operates only when two or more readings are possible for a specific word or phrase. For most of the biblical text, a single reading has been transmitted. Elimination of scribal errors and intentional changes leaves only a small percentage of the text about which any questions occur.

The field of textual criticism is complex, requiring the gathering and skillful use of a wide variety of information. Because it deals with the authoritative source of revelation for all Christians, textual argumentation has often been accompanied by emotion. Yet in spite of controversy, great progress has been made, particularly in the last century. Refinement of methodology has greatly aided our understanding of the accumulated materials. Additional aid has come from accumulations of information in related fields of study such as church history, biblical theology, and the history of Christian thought.

Collection and organization of all variant readings have enabled modern textual critics to give strong assurance that the Word of God has been transmitted in accurate and dependable form. Although variant readings have become obvious through the publication of so many manuscripts, inadequate, inferior, and secondary readings have been largely eliminated. In relatively few places is conjectural emendation necessary. In matters pertaining to the Christian's salvation, clear and unmistakable transmission provides authoritative answers. Christians are thus in debt to the textual critics who have worked, and are working, to provide a dependable biblical text.

Bible, Quotations of the Old Testament in the New Testament

OT passages cited or alluded to in the NT writings.

One of the most complex problems in interpreting the Bible is in understanding how NT writers quoted the OT. Obviously nothing is so formative and authoritative for the NT writers as Scripture. However, the way that they used OT passages often seems strange to modern readers.

The OT has provided the words and ideas for much of the NT. Unless one has a Bible that prints OT quotations in distinctive print, this may not be easily seen, for the NT writers often weave the OT words into their own without indicating they are borrowing from the OT. There are over 400 passages of the OT that are explicitly cited in the NT. Almost half of these are introduced by a statement like "Scripture says" to draw attention to the fact that the authority and thought of the OT is being implemented. For the others, however, the OT words are woven into the fabric of the author's own statement.

In addition to the over 400 passages cited explicitly, there are well over 1,000 places where there is an allusion to an OT text, event, or person. The difference between a quotation and an allusion is sometimes debated for particular texts, but usually the distinction is that in a quotation the author consciously uses the words of an OT passage, whereas with an allusion he has the texts in mind but is not consciously trying to use the words.

Bible, *Quotations of the Old Testament in the New Testament*

Quotations are easy to identify if there is an introductory formula such as "the Scripture says" (as in Rom 10:11; cf. Is 28:16). Where there is no introductory formula, it is easy to overlook explicit quotations (Rom 10:13; cf. Jl 2:32). The allusions are, of course, harder still to recognize, but they often provide the key to interpretation. For example, John 1:14–18—with its mention of glory, grace and truth, Moses, and the fact that no one has seen God—is much more easily and profoundly understood when read in connection with Exodus 33:17–34:8. In the Exodus passage the glory of God and his grace and truth are revealed to Moses. The author was showing that a much more complete revelation of God was given in Jesus than was given Moses in the account recorded in Exodus.

In addition, significant light is shed on many NT passages from OT passages with similar ideas and words even where the NT author may not have been consciously alluding to those texts (e.g. Mt 16:19; Is 22:22). What was behind the author's thinking is not certain, but in such cases the NT reflects the thinking, the culture, and language of the OT period.

Distribution of Old Testament Quotations

The books of the NT that show the most dependence on the OT are Matthew, John, Romans, Hebrews, 1 Peter, and Revelation. Such a statement can be misleading, however, because the writers have different methods.

Matthew quotes or consciously reflects the wording of OT passages about 62 times, almost half of which have an introductory formula. The book of Revelation, on the other hand, never quotes the OT and never has an introductory formula but is probably more dependent on the OT than any other NT book. The book of Hebrews quotes or consciously reflects the OT about 59 times, again half of which have an introductory formula, but the Gospel of John does so only 18 times, nearly always with an introductory formula. However, the allusions to the OT are present on virtually every page of John's Gospel, so much so that some scholars have argued that he has modeled his account on the exodus narrative, the Jewish feasts, or OT persons and images. Paul's Letter to the Romans uses the OT 54 times (about three-fourths of which have introductory formulas), but nowhere else so frequently (e.g., 1 Cor 16 times, Gal 11 times, Phil one time, 1 Thes one time).

In addition to the indication that Philippians and 1 Thessalonians use the OT only once each, some other books make explicit use of the OT rarely or never. Colossians, Titus, Philemon, and the Johannine letters do not use the OT at all; 2 Timothy and Jude use the OT only once; while 2 Peter and 1 Timothy make use of it twice.

The important point is to realize that the OT is used most frequently in circumstances where the audience is familiar with the OT or where the OT is essential for describing the events relating to Christ and the church. The books using the OT most frequently (Mt, Jn, Rom, Heb, 1 Pt, Rv) either stem from or are addressed to a Jewish context or, as in the case of Romans and John, deal specifically with the relation of Jews and Christians. The Gospels make rather extensive use of the OT because the language of the OT is necessary to convey the identity and importance of Jesus in the purposes of God. Similarly 1 Peter uses the OT frequently because the author is trying to convey to his persecuted audience that they are the people of God and the inheritors of the promises of God.

Difficulties in Interpretation

Often when people think of quotations of the OT in the NT they think only in terms of prophecy. Some have been guilty of counting up the OT statements that the NT applies to Christ and the church and then claiming these OT texts as predictions that prove Jesus is the Messiah. Such a procedure is filled with problems because it is too simplistic and does not do justice to either the OT or to the way the NT uses it. Of course, the early church used the OT to show that Jesus fulfilled the promises of God and did God's work, but the use the church made of the OT was quite varied and much of it cannot be classified as predictive prophecy. Prophecy itself is too complex to be limited to predictive thinking.

Some of the most obvious examples of the difficulties appear in Matthew's Gospel, although they are by no means confined there. Matthew 2:15—"Out of Egypt I called my son"—is a quotation of Hosea 11:1, but in Hosea these words do not refer to the Messiah. They refer to the nation of Israel. Similarly Matthew 2:18 quotes Jeremiah 31:15 ("A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more," niv) as fulfilled in the slaughter of the innocent babies in Bethlehem, but in Jeremiah the weeping is over the destruction of Jerusalem. John 12:40 views Isaiah 6:10 as fulfilled in Jesus' ministry, but this verse deals with the call of Isaiah and is not a prediction concerning the ministry of

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the Messiah. The examples could be multiplied but these should be sufficient to illustrate the problem. For this reason the NT writers have often been accused of twisting the Scriptures, but this charge is as simplistic as the thought that all prophecy is predictive and in fact springs from the same error. Therefore, any attempt to understand the use of the OT in the NT will have to deal with the variety of ways in which the OT is used and with the methods employed by the NT writers.

There are other difficulties that are encountered as well. Sometimes the NT writer will indicate that some fact related to Christ is a fulfillment of the OT but the explicit text that he had in mind cannot be identified. For example, John 7:38 introduces the words "Out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water" with the statement "as Scripture has said." No OT text reads this way. Possibly the allusion is to the rock that provided water in the wilderness (Ex 17:1), or to the waters that flowed from the new temple (Zec 14:8) or, more generally, it may be a reference to Isaiah 58:11. Similarly, the difficulty in determining the OT text behind the prophecy that Christ will be called a Nazarene (Mt 2:23) is notorious. Probably the reference is to Isaiah 11:1 and the Hebrew word there translated as "branch," but the connection is not easily made and is not certain. A third example of this kind of difficulty is in 1 Corinthians 14:34, where Paul indicates that women should be in submission just as the Law says, but there is no OT text expressing this idea. His statement in probably to be understood as a summary rather than a quotation or allusion. Similarly on a few occasions an OT text is seemingly attributed to the wrong OT book. In Mark 1:2–3 an OT quotation is attributed to Isaiah but the quotation is really a conflation (or mixing) of Exodus 23:20, Malachi 3:1, and Isaiah 40:3. Matthew 27:9–10 quotes a passage that is said to be from Jeremiah, when really it is dependent on Zechariah 11:13 and might best be described as a summary of Zechariah 11:12–13, with certain words included from Jeremiah 32:6–9. These two examples do not create a major problem, however, for the determination of the origin of the words may be due to their use in collections of quotations from various prophets, in which case the more prominent prophets would be used to designate origin.

The wording of the quotations of the OT text does not always conform to the modern form of the OT. Just as today there are numerous translations of the Bible, when the NT was being written there were various forms of the OT text. With regard to the Hebrew text (for the OT was written mostly in Hebrew), there were different traditions. Such differences in the Hebrew traditions would have been relatively small. Because of the increasing importance of Aramaic after the Babylonian captivity and of Greek after the conquests of Alexander the Great, the OT was also known and used in both these languages when the NT was being written. In fact, the Jews found it necessary in their synagogue services after reading the Hebrew OT to paraphrase the reading in Aramaic so that all could understand. These paraphrases were later written down and are known as Targums. The Greek translation of the OT that stems from the third century BC is known as the Septuagint, but there were also other Greek translations in use. This being the case, the wording of a NT quotation is not identical in every detail to the text of the Hebrew OT.

Added to the fact that there were various forms of the text known in first-century AD Palestine is the complicating factor that NT writers often did not intend to quote the OT exactly. The use of formal quotation marks is a modern device, and ancient writers were not so taken by technical precision. They were more concerned with the intention of a text and consequently might copy or quote it verbatim, quote it from memory, use or adapt part of a verse, or even change certain words as they borrowed the verse to express their points. (The NT writers often use the OT words describing God's actions in the past to explain what he has done in their time.) The importance of any differences between the NT quotation and the OT depends on the use to which the quotation is put and the degree to which the use is dependent on textual differences.

Some examples should illustrate the nature of these difficulties. Ephesians 4:8 quotes Psalm 68:18. Whereas the Hebrew and Septuagint read, "You ascended to the heights, you lead captivity captive, you received gifts among mankind," Ephesians records the verse as "After he ascended into the heights, *he* led captivity captive; he *gave* gifts to men." Paul is stressing that Christ has given grace to people for ministry. He has either adapted the wording of the OT to make his point or he quoted a variant reading, *"he gave* gifts." Some versions do have this reading. In fact, the Targum understands this verse as Moses giving the words of the law to the children of men, and Paul may well be adapting this understanding to the new revelation that has come in Christ.

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Matthew 1:23 quotes Isaiah 7:14, but there are distinct differences between the Hebrew text and the wording in Matthew. The Hebrew reads, "Behold the young woman will become pregnant and will bear a son and you will call his name Immanuel," whereas Matthew's text records "Behold, the *virgin* will become pregnant and will bear a son, and *they* will call his name Immanuel." The Septuagint does have the specific word "virgin," like Matthew, but is not the source of Matthew's quotation since other differences exist. Some have argued that the change from "you will call" to "they will call" was made by Matthew when he applied the words to Jesus. However, there are several traditions known for this part of the quotation and partial support for the reading in Matthew is provided by the text of Isaiah found among the Dead Sea Scrolls.

Romans 11:26–27 is a conflation of Isaiah 59:20–21 and part of Isaiah 27:9, but there are important differences. One of these is that the OT has "the redeemer will come to Zion," whereas Romans has "the deliverer will come *from* Zion." The change to "from Zion" could indicate that Paul had a different textual tradition, could be the result of an intentional change by Paul, or more probably, could reflect the wording of Psalm 14:7.

An awareness of the difficulties involved in the quotations of the OT by the NT writers will prohibit a simplistic approach and will prevent hasty conclusions. Care to ask not only which text was used but also which form of the text was used and how is obviously essential in any serious study. In addition it is necessary to allow for the possibility that the NT writers knew forms of a text that are now lost.

The Methods of the New Testament Writers

The methods used by the NT writers were not unique to them. Many of these methods were also employed in first-century Judaism. In fact, both the technique used in quoting and the understanding of the OT text itself in many cases are paralleled in Judaism. For example, from the standpoint of technique used in quoting, the same kinds of formula introductions are used in the Dead Sea Scrolls, the rabbinic writings, and elsewhere. The rabbinic technique of "pearl stringing," that is, of applying verses from various parts of the OT (the Law, the Prophets, the Writings) to a subject, can be seen especially in Paul's writings (note Rom 9:12–19 or 11:8–10). Somewhat related is the practice of using quotations that all contain a key word or key words (note 1 Pt 2:6–8, which draws together quotations using the word "stone," or Rom 15:9–12, which joins OT verses referring to the "nations").

The methods used in the NT to interpret an OT text are also displayed in Judaism. Some passages interpret the OT "literally," such as Jesus' replies during temptation (see the quotations of Dt 8:3; 6:16; 6:13; in Mt 4:3–10), his teachings on marriage based on Genesis 2:24 (Mt 19:5), or Paul's use of Habakkuk 2:4 (Rom 1:17) or Genesis 15:6 (Rom 4:3–9). Many such examples could be given. With regard to prophecy, some of these statements are fulfilled in a "literal" or "direct" way in keeping with the intention of the OT (e.g., Mi 5:2, Bethlehem as the birthplace of the Messiah; Mt 2:4–6). Jeremiah 31:31–34, the promise of the new covenant, is viewed as directly fulfilled in Christ (Heb 8:7–13). The prophecy of Joel 2:28–32 concerning the pouring out of the Spirit of the Lord is directly fulfilled in the Pentecost event (Acts 2:17–21), but the changing of the sun to darkness and the moon to blood are certainly not understood literally in connection with this event.

A different method of interpretation is based on the concept of *corporate solidarity.* This technical expression is an attempt to convey the idea that the individuals among God's people are not merely individuals; they are part of a larger whole. Consequently, what is said about the individual can apply to the whole and vice versa. This is the reason the Servant of the Lord in Isaiah is seen both as the nation (44:1) and as an individual (52:13–53:12). Also the king is sometimes viewed as representative of the nation. The easiest places to see the concept of corporate solidarity are in the effect of the sin of Achan on all the people (Jos 7) or the sin of David in numbering the people (1 Chr 21:3–8).

Correspondence in history is not so much a method of interpretation as it is a way of thinking about God. It assumes that the things that happen to God's people are the things that have happened to previous generations and that God is faithful and operates in the present as he has in the past. Consequently, the trials and deliverance of God's people are often expressed with words borrowed from the previous accounts of God's people. Isaiah describes the anticipated deliverance in terms of a second exodus (11:15–16). Ezekiel describes the king set up over the people in terms of a second David (Ez 37:25). In the NT, Revelation 22 describes the new heavens and the new earth in

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terms of the Garden of Eden (Gn 2–3). Sometimes this technique is described as "typology," but this term has been used for so many questionable interpretations that it is misleading. The most important thing about this concept is that it is a view of God and his working among his people.

With these two concepts, the way that the OT is quoted in the NT can be understood. The conviction that Jesus was the promised deliverer and that the last days had dawned in his ministry are evident everywhere. The quotation of Hosea 11:1 can be used in Matthew 2:15 because of corporate solidarity and correspondence in history. What was said of the nation is true of the one who is its representative, and there is correspondence in their respective histories. Jeremiah 31:15 can be used in Matthew 2:18 because of correspondence in history and especially because Jeremiah looked forward to God's intention for Israel and prophesied a new covenant (31:17, 31–34). Matthew saw not only the correspondence in history but believed that in Jesus this promised salvation had been granted. John 12:40 can quote Isaiah 6:10 of Jesus' ministry, not because he twists the meaning of the OT text, but because he saw that what had happened with God's messenger before happened again and even *ultimately* in Jesus' ministry. The instances of such correspondences in history are numerous.

There are other texts where there seems to be an *actualization* of the OT text. Some quotations seem to be "lived out" in the ministry of Jesus. Because of their conviction about Jesus and his kingdom, the NT writers often saw certain OT texts as appropriated and made alive by Jesus. Psalm 118:22 was not intended as a prophecy of the Messiah, but Jesus saw it as descriptive of his ministry (Mt 21:42), and the early church saw this verse as actualized in his death and resurrection (Acts 4:11). Isaiah 53 is another text that the NT views as actualized in Jesus' ministry (see Acts 8:32–35 and 1 Pt 2:22–25). Some Christians would view Psalm 22 as a prophecy of the crucifixion of Jesus, but it seems instead to be the lament of a righteous OT sufferer. Through correspondence in history, and because Christians saw so much of the psalmist's plight actualized in Jesus' crucifixion, the psalm became the easiest way to describe what once again had happened to God's righteous sufferer. The words of Isaiah 40:3 describe the ministry of John the Baptist (Mt 3:3). Jews had come to see this verse as a prophecy of God's end-time salvation, and the early church saw John the Baptist fulfilling this forerunner's task. Luke made this identification (Lk 3:4–6), but he applied the same role to Jesus' disciples (9:52; 10:1). This seems to be a further example of actualization and correspondence in history. In other places the church has applied to Christians ideas that were previously understood of Christ (e.g., the stone in 1 Pt 2:4–5; the ministry of the Suffering Servant in Acts 13:46–47).

The most convenient term to describe the way the OT is "fulfilled" in Christ is to say that the OT finds its climax in Jesus. Even where actual quotations are not involved, the OT ideas such as prophet, priest, or king are climaxed in him as the ideal and embodiment of all the OT models. He could tell religious authorities that "one greater than Solomon is here" (Mt 12:42) or "one greater than the temple is here" (Mt 12:6). Those passages involving correspondence in history or actualization also lead to the conviction that he is the climax of the OT Scriptures.

The Purposes of the Use of the Old Testament

The variety of methods of interpretation and application of the OT parallels the fact that the OT was used for a variety of purposes. People tend to think only in terms of the use of the OT to show that Jesus was the Messiah, but there are a number of other uses with a variety of goals. Many OT texts are used to show Jesus is the Messiah, the fulfillment of the OT promises (Lk 4:16–21). Without lessening the fulfillment emphasis, however, other verses are applied to Jesus for other purposes: to evangelize (Acts 8:32–35); to demonstrate or convince (Acts 13:33–35); to rebuke (Mk 7:6–7; Rom 11:7–10); and to describe (Rv 1:12–15). On the other hand, many quotations of the OT in the NT are not directly related to the Messiah. OT passages are adapted to provide a word from God on some aspect of life or ethics. For example, Jesus used Genesis 2:24 to substantiate his teaching on divorce as he attempted to deal with the issues raised by the civil regulation of divorce (Dt 24:1; Mt 19:1–12). The stress on the OT commandments shows their importance for Christians (Mt 19:16–22; Rom 13:8–10). Often OT statements deal with specific problems. The problem of pride at Corinth is solved by the quotation of Jeremiah 9:24 ("Let the one boasting, boast in the Lord," 1 Cor 1:31). First Peter 3:10–12 incorporates Psalm 34:12–16 as ethical instructions, and 3:14–15 borrows from Isaiah 8:12–13 to address the fear of suffering. The spiritual armor in Ephesians 6:14–17 is derived largely from OT passages. Such examples are so

numerous that there can be no doubt that the OT is used to describe Christian existence. In fact, nearly every subject discussed in the NT is presented somewhere via OT terms and quotations. Frequently OT passages are used to describe the church as God's end-time community. Hosea 2:23 is used to show that those who formerly were not God's people now are (Rom 9:25–26; 1 Pt 2:10). Several OT texts contribute to the description of the church in 1 Peter 2:9. OT texts that speak of the word of God describe the apostles' preaching (Rom 10:8; 1 Pt 1:24–25). OT quotations describe the sinful condition of humanity (Rom 3:10–20). Salvation is explained through OT concepts and symbols and is based on OT statements (Jn 6:31–33; Gal 3:6–13). The words of Daniel describe the Second Coming (7:13–14; cf. Mt 24:30). Even the worship of early Christians was expressed through use of the OT (see Acts 4:24; Rom 11:34–35).

Biblical Concept of Law

God uses different ways to set apart his people for himself. The nature and content of "law" may change, but the goal stays the same: to grow and become more like God.

Preview

- Historical Context
- Law in the Old Testament
- Israelite Law and the Ancient Near East
- Old Testament Laws
- Purposes of the Law

Historical Context

When God created humans in his image, God gave them glory, authority, and daily needs (Genesis 1:27–30). However, as a ruler of God's creation on earth, humans had to show loyalty to God. God set a simple test for this: the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Humans were forbidden to eat its fruit (Genesis 2:17). Their disobedience showed they were unfit for fellowship with God. They were rebellious and naturally deceitful, as seen in the stories of:

- Cain (Genesis 4:1–16)
- The generation of the great flood (Genesis 6:1–13)
- Ham and Canaan (Genesis 9:18–26; Genesis 10:6–20)
- The tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1–9)

In the middle of all this, the Lord graciously called Abraham. He promised to bless Abraham, his descendants, and the families of the earth who shared their faith (Genesis 12:2–3; 17:4–7). Abraham responded to God with faith (Genesis 15:6). He willingly observed circumcision as a sign of God's covenant with Abraham (Genesis 17:10; see also 21:4). He lived with integrity before God (17:1).

Abraham learned that God had chosen him so his family could stand out by doing what is right and just (Genesis 18:19). The Lord was pleased with Abraham, who, even without detailed laws, was a man of integrity. His heart was right with God, and he willingly followed God's commands.

Abraham, known as the father of faith, was also the father of the faithful. The Lord said that Abraham obeyed him and followed his requirements, commands, decrees, and laws (Genesis 26:5). His faith led to righteous actions (James 2:21–24).

However, Israel, blessed by the Lord with many descendants, the exodus, the crossing of the Red Sea, and his presence, did not respond with faith. They complained at Mount Sinai, Kadesh-barnea, and in the plains of Moab. They showed themselves to be rebellious and stubborn people (Exodus 32:9; 33:3, 5; 34:9; Deuteronomy 9:6, 13).

Despite their behavior, the Lord remained faithful to Abraham by making a covenant with them. Israel became his people, his royal priesthood, and his holy nation (Exodus 19:5–6; Deuteronomy 26:18–19). He gave Israel the Ten Commandments, the law, and the covenant, symbolized by the two tablets of the Testimony (Exodus 32:15–16). Even after Moses broke them in anger because of the people's idol worship of the golden calf, the Lord renewed his covenant by rewriting the words of the covenant (Exodus 34:28).

The context in which the law was given shows God's grace and patience with Israel's sins and his plan to use Israel in his redemption plan for the world (Exodus 34:6–7). It also shows Israel's immaturity and stubbornness. Therefore, the law

in the Old Testament has both positive and negative purposes.

Law in the Old Testament

The Old Testament uses many words for God's law. The most general word is Torah, which means instruction of any kind, whether religious or secular, written or oral, divine or human. In Israel, the law was God's law, given through Moses (Exodus 20:19; Deuteronomy 5:23–27). Because Israel rejected God's direct messages, Moses, God's servant, delivered the law (John 1:17).

English Bible translations use different words for law, including:

- Word (see Exodus 24:3; 34:27)
- Ordinance (see Exodus 24:3; Deuteronomy 4:1
- Decree (see Deuteronomy 6:20; 1 Kings 2:3)
- Statute (see Leviticus 3:17; 10:11; Numbers 9:12, 14; 30:16; Deuteronomy 6:2)
- Command or commandment (see Deuteronomy 6:1, 25)
- Precepts (a Hebrew word used only in Psalms; see Psalm 119:4, 15, 27, 40, 45, 56, 63, 69, 78, 87, 93, 94, 100, 104, 110, 128, 134, 141, 159, 168, 173)
- Testimonies (see Deuteronomy 4:45)
- The "way" or "ways" (see 1 Kings 2:3; Psalms 18:21; 25:9; 37:34)

Other translations also use words like stipulation, requirements, and judgment.

These words belong to a group of words with related meanings. It is not easy to tell apart the different types of laws. Generally, "the words" refer to human duties toward God, especially the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1; 34:27). The "judgments" or "ordinances" include civil rules and duties to others and society (Exodus 21:1–23:9). These passages often use an "if... then..." format.

In Leviticus and religious texts, "ordinances" specifically mean ceremonial laws. However, in other contexts, especially when listed with other law terms, it means any rule or expectation. The "commandments" are rules given by a higher authority. Although the Old Testament has many words for law, the meaning of one word often overlaps with others, especially in phrases like:

- "The statutes and ordinances" (Deuteronomy 4:1, 5; 5:1)
- "The commandments and statutes and ordinances" (6:1)
- "Walk in His ways and to keep His statutes, commandments, ordinances, and decrees" (1 Kings 2:3)

The reason for following God's law is found in the actions and presence of the Lord. The introduction to the Ten Commandments reminds us of God's powerful deeds: “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery” (Exodus 20:2).

Through Israel's redemption, the revelation at Mount Sinai, and making Israel his people, God acted as a "father." He adopted Israel as his children and declared them holy (Exodus 19:6; 31:13; Leviticus 20:8; 22:32; see also Romans 9:4). Redemption and being made holy are often linked, and they cannot be separated: “I am the LORD who sanctifies you” (Leviticus 22:32b).

Obedience is simply based on God's name: “I am the LORD” (see Leviticus 18:6, 21, 30; 19:10, 14, 16, 18, 28, 30–31, 34, 36–37). The need for practical holiness is also based on experiencing God's presence. The Lord commanded Israel to be holy because he is holy (Leviticus 11:44–45; 19:2). The “holy one of Israel” lived among his people (Exodus 25:8; 29:45; Numbers 5:3; 35:34).

How could rebellious Israel understand what God wanted without clear moral, social, civil, and religious rules? God saw they lacked the desire to serve him as a loyal people (Deuteronomy 5:29). By nature, Israel could not create a moral and religious system to please God. Due to their stubbornness, God had to clearly reveal his will.

Israelite Law and the Ancient Near East

Israel's law reflected the practices of its ancient Near Eastern context. Ancient Babylonian law codes, like those of Eshnunna and Hammurabi, show similarities with the biblical codes. These similarities include both cases and legal formulations, known as casuistic law.

Israelite law is unique because it is God's law. Moses acted as the mediator, not the creator, of the

law. This differs from a king, like Hammurabi, who enforced a legal code. The Lord himself gave Israel its laws (see Deuteronomy 4:5–8).

Laws in the ancient Near East focused on organizing society. However, Israel's laws regulated every aspect of life: personal, family, social, and religious. These laws taught Israel to distinguish between holy and unholy, clean and unclean, and just and unjust.

Old Testament Laws

The legal texts of the Old Testament are not in a single book or section. The laws show a shift from the desert setting in Exodus to the land setting in Deuteronomy. The Old Testament legal material is complex, with many variations and repetitions. It appears in:

- Exodus (chapters 20–24; 25–31)
- Leviticus
- Numbers (chapters 3–6; 8–10; 15; 18; 19; 28–30)
- Deuteronomy (chapters 5–26)

The Ten Commandments

The commandments are called the "words" that God spoke (Exodus 20:1). They are found in Exodus 20:1–17 and Deuteronomy 5:6–21, with small differences and individual commandments appearing elsewhere (for example, Exodus 34:14, 17, 21; Leviticus 19:1–8; Deuteronomy 27:15–16).

Initially given to Israel as part of the covenant, these commandments now form the moral foundation of Christianity. The New Testament shows the ongoing importance of this moral law. Jesus established his authority as the interpreter of all commandments (Matthew 5:17–48; 12:1–14; 23:23–24). He summarized the law as love for God and others (see Matthew 22:37–40; Mark 12:28–34; Luke 10:27; Romans 13:8–9; Galatians 5:14). As the Lord of the Sabbath, Jesus linked the Sabbath to the other commandments (Matthew 12:8).

The apostle Paul also supported the law, with his "ethics of the Spirit" showing how believers internalize God's law in their hearts (see Romans 8:1–17; 12:1–15:13; 1 Corinthians 2:6–16; 5:1–8; 10:23–11:1; Galatians 5:13–6:10; Ephesians 4:17–6:9; Philippians 2:1–18; Colossians 3:1–4:6; 1 Thessalonians 4:1–12; 5:12–24; 2 Thessalonians 3:6–15; 1 Timothy 6:3–10; Titus 3:1–11).

The Lord wrote the commandments on both sides of the two tablets (Exodus 32:15–16). It is unclear if the tablets were duplicates, how the commandments were divided, or how they were numbered. They were kept in the ark of the covenant as a testimony to the covenant (Exodus 40:20).

The Book of the Covenant (Exodus 20:23–23:19)

The covenant code aimed to show and start the legal system for Israel to reflect God's focus on justice, love, peace, and life's value. The laws in the Book of the Covenant are mostly case-based. They manage life in a farming society with servants, donkeys, bulls, oxen, sheep, and grain fields. The rules address:

- Relationships with women (including widows), foreigners, and orphans
- Legal issues (liability, damages, ownership)
- Religious duties (altar, Sabbath)

Often, the law requires repayment, but not when human life is involved (Exodus 21:12–29; 22:2–3), especially concerning family (Exodus 21:15–17, 22–25). The rules about punishments that went with these laws emphasize the importance of human life, protected by the *lex talionis* ("law of retaliation").

The *lex talionis* does not show a lack of forgiveness in the Old Testament. Instead, it was a legal principle to ensure fairness and justice in society. The Book of the Covenant explains through principles and examples how Israel should live as a nation, following God's law and applying it *justly* (without bias or unfairness), *lovingly* (with care for all involved), and *peaceably*.

The Priestly Law

God's focus on holiness and purity is shown in the priestly laws (Exodus 25–31; 35–40; Leviticus 1–27; Numbers 4–10). These rules address:

Biblical *Concept of Law*

- Building the tabernacle
- Setting apart and appointing priests for service to God
- Offerings and sacrifices
- Purity rules
- Holy days
- Vows

The tabernacle was at the center of Israel's camp in the wilderness. It represented God's presence with his people. The priests and Levites camped around the tabernacle to serve and protect God's holiness. All the tribes were arranged around the tabernacle.

Although tribe members could not access all parts of the tabernacle, they needed to be ceremonially clean to live in the camp. Anyone who was ceremonially unclean (Leviticus 13:46; Numbers 5:1–3) or had committed a serious sin was sent outside the camp (Leviticus 24:10–23; Numbers 15:32–36). This rule also applied to objects that became unclean (Leviticus 8:17; 9:11).

Through specific offerings and sacrifices (Leviticus 1–7; 16; Numbers 15:1–31; 28), God assured Israel, both individually and as a group, of forgiveness for unintentional sins. The offerings and sacrifices represented the purpose of the person offering them, whether for forgiveness, dedication, or fellowship.

The priests and Levites taught God's law, applied its rules, and served in courts (Deuteronomy 17:8–13; 31:9–13).

The Holiness Code (Leviticus 17–26)

The holiness code is an important part of the book of Leviticus. Here Moses spoke to all of Israel (see Leviticus 17:2; 18:2; 19:2; 20:2; 21:24; 23:2; 24:2; 25:2; 26:46; 27:2).

The laws tell people what they must do and must not do. These laws include:

- Rules about where to make offerings to God and not eating meat that still has blood in it (chapter 17)
- Rules against marrying or having sexual relationships with close relatives (chapter 18)
- Regulations for godliness, holiness, justice, and love in society (chapter 19)

The penal code assigns penalties for breaking these rules (chapter 20; 24:10–23). Chapters 21–24 apply religious rules to priests and all Israelites. The sabbatical year and the Year of Jubilee manage debt forgiveness, freeing people, and returning land (chapter 25).

The holiness code describes the qualities needed for a holy people: devotion to God through offerings, sacrifices, and priests, and love for others as shown in concern for justice, peace, freedom, the value of human life, and family care. Many laws reflect the spirit of the Ten Commandments (chapter 19).

The holiness code in chapter 26 includes both promises and curses. The curses warn of exile if people break the laws. However, the laws and penalties always reflect the Lord's grace. He promises to forgive the people's sins and renew the broken covenant (Leviticus 26:44–45).

Laws of Deuteronomy

The Deuteronomic laws explain and apply the Book of the Covenant for Israel's new situation. Israel was about to enter the Promised Land when Moses shared God's law with them (Deuteronomy 1:5). The Book of the Covenant's impersonal nature becomes personal through Moses' strong appeal. He urges Israel to stay loyal to the Lord, the covenant, and its rules. The Deuteronomic laws imagine the people in the Promised Land with:

- A central place of worship (Deuteronomy 12:5, 11–18; 14:23; 15:20; 16:5–7, 16, 21; 17:8; 18:6; 26:2; 31:11)
- A king (Deuteronomy 17:14–20)

Blessings and curses encourage loyalty to the covenant (chapter 28). Even if Israel breaks God's law, the Lord remains gracious and forgiving.

Bichri, Bichrite, Bicri

Purposes of the Law

The law given at Mount Sinai aimed to bring Israel closer to God. Despite their rebellion, God used the law to clearly show what sin is (see Romans 5:20; 7:7–8) and how to live a life free from sin and dedicated to the Lord. The law served as Israel's teacher and guardian (Galatians 3:24).

The detailed explanations of the laws in all aspects of life (work, society, family, worship, and nation) played an essential role in God's relationship with Israel. Israel was a nation in a special land with a theocratic government (with God as the highest authority) and needed a set of laws.

At Mount Sinai, Israel could not receive direct revelation, so it had to come through Moses. The laws were detailed because Israel did not naturally understand what God's holiness, justice, righteousness, love, and patience required. They had adopted Egyptian customs and needed to learn God's will through revelation.

However, Moses and the prophets stressed that the law's purpose was not strict adherence for its own sake, also called legalism, or for rewards, called Pharisaism. Following the law was an act of devotion to God. Our Lord confirmed the law's purpose: to create a way of life where one continually seeks God's kingdom and righteousness (Matthew 6:33).

The law of God helps people become holy. God made Israel holy through grace and wanted them to stay holy. Jesus showed how the law reveals sin and leads people to Him. On the cross, Jesus took the law's penalties, fulfilled God's presence, met the Father's atonement expectations, and showed the Father's love.

Jesus, greater than Moses, summarized God's law as loving God and loving others (Matthew 23:23–24; Luke 11:42–44). Jesus taught that obedience is not mainly for rewards but to be like salt (Matthew 5:13) and light (Matthew 5:14–16; see also Ephesians 4:17–5:20), and to produce good deeds (John 15:1–17). God's law aims to:

- Gradually change God's children to reflect Jesus (Romans 8:29; 2 Corinthians 3:18; Colossians 3:10)
- Imitate the Father (Ephesians 5:1–2)
- Be filled with God's Spirit (Galatians 5:18, 22–24)

Jesus gave us the Beatitudes and the Sermon on the Mount to summarize Moses' and the prophets' teachings (Matthew 5–7).

The law aims to help believers grow into maturity. Spiritual maturity was not only for believers after Christ; Old Testament saints also walked with God:

- Enoch (Genesis 5:22–24)
- Noah (Genesis 6:9)
- Abraham (Genesis 17:1)

These were mature men who lived with integrity before God (see Genesis 17:1; Deuteronomy 18:13; Psalms 15:1–2; 18:26; 101:2, 6; 119:80; Proverbs 11:5).

Maturity, or integrity, is when a believer responds to God without needing specific rules or fearing mistakes. Instead, they find joy in following the Lord's will (Psalms 1:2; 112:1). Since Jesus's arrival and Pentecost, the Holy Spirit has been given to every believer. The Holy Spirit helps internalize God's law (Jeremiah 31:33). The Holy Spirit helps in developing Christian maturity by providing the fruits of godliness more fully (Galatians 5:22–24).

While some Old Testament saints experienced maturity and freedom, it is now God's gift to all his children in Christ (Acts 2:39; 1 Corinthians 12:13). The goal remains the same: "so that the man [person] of God may be complete, fully equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:17). However, the way to achieve this and the status of God's children have greatly improved since Pentecost.

See also Civil Law and Justice; Cleanness and Uncleanness, Regulations Concerning; Criminal Law and Punishment; Galatians, Letter to the; Hammurabi, Law Code of; Justification; Romans, Letter to the; Commandments, The Ten; Torah; Tradition.

Bichri, Bichrite, Bicri

The father of Sheba from the tribe of Benjamin. Sheba led a revolt against King David (2 Samuel

20:1–22). The descendants of Bichri were the Bicrites (2 Samuel 20:14).

Bidkar

Aide of King Jehu of the northern kingdom of Israel. Bidkar fulfilled a prophecy about the fate of Ahab's family by throwing the body of Joram, Ahab's son, into Naboth's field after Jehu had killed Joram (2 Kgs 9:24–26).

Bigamy

Bigamy means marrying a second wife while still legally married to the first wife.

See Marriage, Marriage Customs.

Bigtha

A eunuch who served King Ahasuerus of Persia. He and six others were in charge of the royal household (Esther 1:10). He may be Bigthana from Esther 2:21; 6:2.

See also Bigthan, Bigthana.

Bigthan, Bigthana

A eunuch who served King Ahasuerus of Persia as a palace guard. He and a fellow guard named Teresh planned an assassination attempt on the king's life. When their plot was overheard by Queen Esther's uncle Mordecai, Bigthan and Teresh were executed (Esther 2:21–23). Bigthan is called "Bigthana" in Esther 6:2.

See also Bigtha.

Bigvai

1. Ancestor of a group of people who returned to Jerusalem with Zerubbabel after the Babylonian exile (Ezr 2:2, 14; Neh 7:7, 19). Since his name is Persian, Bigvai may have been born or renamed during the exile.

2. Political leader who signed Ezra's covenant of faithfulness to God with Nehemiah and others after the exile (Neh 10:16); possibly a representative for the family descended from #1 above.

Bildad

One of three friends who came to comfort Job in his anguish, identified as a Shuhite (Jb 2:11). That term suggests that he was a descendant of Shuah, son of Abraham and his second wife Keturah (Gn 25:1–2). Bildad spoke to Job on three occasions. In his first speech he asserted that God upholds the just and punishes the wicked (Jb 8). Job must therefore be a hypocrite to say that he is right with God. In his second speech Bildad emphasized the immediate punishment of the wicked in this life (ch 18). Job must therefore be wicked because of his intense suffering. In his third speech Bildad proclaimed the majesty of God and called man a worm by comparison (ch 25). He implied that Job was foolish to claim to be righteous before such a holy God.

See also Job, Book of.

Bileam

Alternate name for Ibleam, a Levitical city in Manasseh's territory, in 1 Chronicles 6:70. *See* Ibleam.

Bilgah

1. Head of the 15th of 24 divisions of priests whom King David assigned to official duties in the temple (1 Chr 24:14).

2. Priest who returned to Jerusalem under Zerubbabel's leadership after the exile (Neh 12:18). He is perhaps identifiable with Bilgai in Nehemiah 10:8. *See* Bilgai.

Bilgai

A priest who signed the covenant of Ezra to be faithful to God with Nehemiah and others after the exile in Babylon (Nehemiah 10:8). It is possible that this is the same person as Bilgah in Nehemiah 12:18.

See Bilgah #2.

Bilhah (Person)

Servant given by Laban to his daughter Rachel when she married Jacob (Gn 29:29). Realizing her own childlessness, Rachel gave Bilhah to her husband as a concubine and accepted their two sons as her own, naming them Dan and Naphtali (30:3–8; 35:25; 46:25). Archaeological investigation has confirmed the custom of a barren wife's providing a concubine to guarantee children to her husband. Such an arrangement is mentioned in marriage contract documents dug up at Nuzi and dated from about the same time as the Genesis 29 events. Jacob's son Reuben was later guilty of incest with Bilhah (35:22).

Bilhah (Place)

Town in the territory allotted to Simeon's tribe (1 Chr 4:29), probably identical with Baalah (Jos 15:29) and Balah (19:3).

Bilhan

1. Ezer's firstborn son and a descendant of Seir (Gn 36:27; 1 Chr 1:42).

2. Jediael's son from Benjamin's tribe (1 Chr 7:10).

Bilshan

One, who with Nehemiah and Zerubbabel, led a group of Jews to Jerusalem following the exile (Ezr 2:2; Neh 7:7).

Bimhal

Japhlet's son, a great warrior and head of a clan in Asher's tribe (1 Chr 7:33, 40).

Binding and Loosing

A term that Jesus used to describe special authority he gave to his followers. Jesus talked about binding and loosing on two different occasions.

Jesus Gives Authority to Peter

After Peter's confession that Jesus was the Messiah, Jesus said to him: "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven" (Matthew 16:19). Later, Jesus gave the same authority to bind and loose to all of the disciples (18:18).

Only Matthew's Gospel includes these specific words about binding and loosing. According to the Gospel of John, Jesus said something similar to the disciples after the resurrection: "If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you withhold forgiveness from anyone, it is withheld" (John 20:23). It is difficult to understand exactly what kind of authority Jesus gave and how far it reached.

What Does "Binding and Loosing" Mean?

"Bind" and "loose" translate two Greek words. The Greek words come from Aramaic, the language Jesus spoke. In Jesus's time, Jewish teachers used these words in two ways:

1. **Teaching Authority**: Teachers of God's law would say an action was "bound" when they forbid it, or "loosed" when they allowed it. Jesus mentioned this teaching role when he said: "The scribes and Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. So practice and observe everything they tell you." Matthew 23:2–3. Among the greatest Jewish rabbis, Shammai "bound" many actions that the more liberal teacher Hillel "loosed."
2. **Legal Decisions:** People also used these words when making decisions about punishment or freedom. To "bind" meant to judge someone guilty, while to "loose" meant to declare them innocent.

Both sets of meanings have been used to interpret the two texts in Matthew.

The precise meaning of the words in Matthew must be understood based on their use in specific situations and based on the general New Testament understanding of the authority of the apostles. In Matthew 16:19, Peter's authority to bind and loose is connected with his receiving "the keys of the kingdom of heaven." In the Gospels, the "kingdom of heaven" or "kingdom of God" is where God rules. It is the "community" of people whom he rules as Lord. As a symbol, Peter was given the keys to that kingdom, that "building." The people of God

are described as his building (1 Corinthians 3:9, 16–17; Ephesians 2:20–22; 1 Peter 2:4–5). The keys symbolize the authority given to Peter as the one who confessed Jesus as Lord (Matthew 16:16). Peter represents all those disciples who speak the same confession.

According to Matthew 23:13, the scribes were understood as guardians of the kingdom because the knowledge of God had been given to them (Luke 11:52). But they failed in this duty and kept people from entering God's kingdom. Therefore, their task was given to Peter, who spoke for the 12 disciples. These disciples represented God's new people (see Matthew 21:43).

See also Keys of the Kingdom.

Binea

Moza's son from Benjamin's tribe and a descendant of King Saul through Jonathan's line (1 Chr 8:37; 9:43).

Binnui

1. Noadiah's father. Noadiah was a Levite in charge of weighing temple valuables after the exile (Ezr 8:33). Possibly the same as #4 below.

2. Pahath-moab's son or descendant. He obeyed Ezra's exhortation to divorce his pagan wife after the exile (Ezr 10:30).

3. According to the Apocrypha and the kjv, one of Bani's sons (descendants) who also obeyed Ezra's exhortation to divorce his pagan wife (Ezr 10:38; 1 Esd 9:34). Because the list of Bani's descendants is proportionally very long and because verse 38 in Hebrew can easily be construed "of the sons of Binnui," most modern translations make Binnui an ancestor of a new group rather than a descendant of Bani.

4. Henadad's son who repaired part of Jerusalem's wall after the exile (Neh 3:24). He was among the Levites who signed Ezra's covenant of faithfulness to God (Neh 10:9).

5. Alternate spelling for Bani in Nehemiah 7:15. *See* Bani #4.

6. Levite who returned to Judah with Zerubbabel after the exile. He was one of several in charge of songs of thanksgiving (Neh 12:8).

The popularity of this name and its similarity to other Jewish names (e.g., Bani and Bavvai) has caused much confusion in the genealogical lists. The above is one of several possible arrangements.

Birds

Birds are feathered vertebrates (animals with skeletons) in the class *Aves.* Scientists have identified over 8,000 species of birds. About 400 species live in the Holy Land, and about 40 kinds are mentioned in the Bible.

Today, scientists classify living things by their inner and outer body structure. In the Bible, writers often grouped animals by where they live. For example, the Bible lists bats with birds as creatures of the air (Leviticus 11:19; Deuteronomy 14:18).

It is often hard or even impossible to know exactly which bird is meant in a Bible passage. The languages of the Bible were not scientific. People in Bible times could tell the difference between similar animals we now call separate species. But for birds, they often used poetic or descriptive names.

Bible scholars try to identify these birds by:

- comparing the Hebrew words to words in related languages, and
- looking at the bird's home, behavior, and features described in Scripture.

Even with these methods, scholars sometimes disagree about the exact kind of bird.

Birds in the Bible

The Bible speaks about birds in both real and symbolic ways. The writers of the Bible paid close attention to nature. Many passages show their knowledge of birds and bird life. They said that God knows every bird (Psalm 50:11) and cares for them (Matthew 10:29). They also saw God's promise to Noah after the flood as including the birds and animals (Genesis 9:10).

The law of Moses said that some birds were "unclean." These were mostly birds that ate dead animals, hunted other animals, or lived in empty, wild places. Later, early Christians came to see all birds as clean. This was shown in a vision given to the apostle Peter (Acts 10:12).

The Israelites ate other birds, like quail during their journey in the desert (Exodus 16:13). The law required birds to be used as sacrifices:

- for a firstborn child (Luke 2:24);
- for a Nazirite vow (Numbers 6:10);
- for cleansing a leper (Leviticus 14:22); and
- as a burnt offering and sin offering (Leviticus 12:8).

Birds can become extinct, especially because of human activity. God told the Israelites to protect birds so they would always live in the land and provide food. The law allowed people to take eggs or young from a nest, but they could not kill the mother bird and her young on the same day (Deuteronomy 22:6).

Those who wrote the Bible often used nature to show truths about God or to describe human behavior. Sometimes this showed human weakness or low position. King Nebuchadnezzar's madness is described as having claws like a bird (Daniel 4:33). Job said that birds do not know the source of wisdom (Job 28:21). In Jesus's parable of the sower, birds that ate seed beside the road stand for people who do not understand God's word (Matthew 13:4).

Other passages show sympathy for birds. A lonely person in prayer was compared to a bird alone on a roof (Psalm 102:7). Someone hunted by enemies could understand the fear of a hunted bird (Lamentations 3:52). Birds fled from Jerusalem and from the earth when God's curse came on those who did evil (Jeremiah 9:10; Zephaniah 1:3).

Even though birds face dangers, the Bible says God cares for them (Psalm 50:11; Matthew 6:26; 10:29). Some rulers, like Pharaoh and Nebuchadnezzar, were compared to trees that gave shelter to birds (Ezekiel 31:6; Daniel 4:12; compare 2:38). But human power does not last. When Nebuchadnezzar's "tree" was cut down, the birds fled (Daniel 4:14).

God's protection is different because it lasts forever. Jesus compared the kingdom of God to a mustard seed that grows into a plant where birds can rest (Matthew 13:32). God provides a home for birds (Psalm 104:12), but Jesus, the Son of Man, had no home of his own (Matthew 8:20).

Birds show God's work in creation (Job 12:7). Bird behavior is used as a picture of learning from mistakes (Proverbs 1:17; 6:5). It also teaches about bad choices that lead to sin (Proverbs 7:23). Birds can be tamed, but the human tongue cannot (James 3:7). Birds flying without stopping are compared to a curse without cause (Proverbs 26:2). Without trusting God, people may feel forced to flee like a bird to the mountains (Psalm 11:1). Birdsongs bring joy (Song of Solomon 2:12). The return of God's people to their land would be like birds returning home (Hosea 11:11). Jesus said he wanted to gather the people of Jerusalem like a hen gathers her chicks under her wings (Matthew 23:37).

Sometimes birds were a sign of danger. In a dream, Pharaoh's baker saw birds eating food from a basket on his head. This showed he would soon die (Genesis 40:17). Solomon warned not to curse the king, even in private, because "a winged creature" might tell what was said (Ecclesiastes 10:20).

A powerful image in the Bible is that of birds eating the bodies of the wicked after battle. For the Israelites, this kind of treatment of a human body was the worst form of disgrace (Deuteronomy 28:26; 1 Samuel 17:44; Isaiah 46:11; Jeremiah 7:33; 12:9; Ezekiel 29:5; 39:4; Revelation 19:17, 21).

Types of Birds

Specific types of birds are listed below. Click on a bird listed below to access the full-length article.

- Bittern: A water bird with long legs, similar to a heron but with shorter legs and a smaller body.
- Buzzard: A large bird of prey similar to a hawk that soars high up in the air.
- Cormorant: A large, black water bird that looks similar to a goose.
- Crane: A tall, long-necked wading bird known for its loud calls and graceful flight in large flocks.
- Cuckoo: A bird known for its call and for laying its eggs in the nests of other birds.
- Eagle: A powerful bird of prey with good eyesight and strong wings.
    - Gier Eagle: An older English name for the Egyptian vulture (see Vulture).
- Fowl (Domestic): Birds raised by people for food or other uses, such as chickens, ducks, and turkeys.
- Goose: Large water birds with long necks and loud honking calls.
- Hawk: A sharp-eyed bird of prey that hunts small animals and birds.
- Heron: A long-legged wading bird that feeds on fish in shallow waters.
- Hoopoe: A colorful bird with a crest of feathers and a curved bill.
- Ibis: A long-legged wading bird with a curved bill, known from ancient Egypt.
- Kestrel or Falcon: Small, fast-flying birds of prey that hunt insects and small animals.
- Kite: A medium-sized bird of prey with a forked tail that glides in the air.
- Night Hawk: A bird that is active at bight and that catches insects in flight. A night hawk is actually a type of bird related to the whippoorwill, not the hawk.

- Ostrich: The largest living bird. It cannot fly but is able to run very fast.
- Owl: A bird of prey that is active at night. It has large eyes and a silent flight.
    - Barn Owl, White Owl: A pale, heart-faced owl that hunts rodents at night.
    - Great Owl: A large species of owl that has two tufts on its head that look like ears.
    - Little Owl: The smallest owl that hunts at night and the most common owl in the Holy Land.
    - Scops Owl: A small owl with ear tufts and a soft, repeated call.
- Partridge: A plump bird that lives on the ground. People hunt partiridge for food and sport.
- Peacock: A large bird with the male displaying a long, colorful tail.
- Pelican: A large water bird with a pouch under its bill for catching fish.
- Pigeon: Gentle, short-necked birds often used as symbols of peace or sacrifice.
    - Dove: Any small pigeon, whether wild or domesticated.
    - Turtledove: A small wild pigeon that migrates and makes a soft cooing sound.
- Quail: A small bird that lives in fields and grasslands. People hunt quail for food and sport.
- Raven: A large black bird known for its intelligence and harsh call.
- Seagull: A bird that lives on the coast with long wings and a loud cry.
- Sparrow: A small, brownish songbird common in towns and fields.

- Stork: A tall wading bird with long legs and a long beak. Storks often build large nests on rooftops or tall trees.
- Swallow: A small bird with long, pointed wings that catches insects in flight.
- Swan: A large, graceful water bird with a long neck.
- Swift: A small bird with long wings that spends most of its life flying.
- Vulture: A large scavenging bird that feeds on dead animals.
- Water Hen: A dark, ducklike bird that lives in wetlands and has a red bill.

Birsha

Ruler of Gomorrah in the days of Abraham and Lot. Birsha was one of five Canaanite city-kings who unsuccessfully rebelled against King Chedorlaomer of Elam and his three allies (Gn 14:2).

Birth of Mary

This was an early Gnostic writing that no longer exists. A fourth-century bishop named Epiphanius described it by saying, "The Gnostics have a book which they call the Birth (or Descent) of Mary, in which are horrible and deadly things."

According to Epiphanius, the book claimed to reveal what Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, saw in the temple. It said that Zechariah saw the Jewish god in the form of a donkey. At that time, people who criticized Jews and Christians often mocked them by saying they worshiped a donkey god.

This work is disrespectful toward God and is different from the Gospel of the Birth of Mary. The Gospel of the Birth of Mary is a story about Mary's birth, early life, and marriage to Joseph. It is a legendary tale, but not considered harmful.

See also Apocrypha; Gospel of the Birth of Mary; Mary.

Birthright

In ancient Hebrew families, a birthright was a special set of rights and privileges that belonged to the oldest son. The oldest son was second in importance only to his father. When the father was away, the oldest son had the authority to make decisions for the family.

We can see how this worked in the story of Reuben and his younger brothers in Genesis. Reuben was the oldest son and had the birthright (Genesis 37:19–22, 28–30). But he later did something very wrong. He slept with one of his father's wives. Because of this sin, he lost his birthright (Genesis 49:1–4).

After Reuben lost his birthright, his younger brothers Simeon, Levi, and Judah were next in line (Genesis 29:31–35). However, their father Jacob decided not to give the birthright to Simeon or Levi because they had shown bad character (Genesis 49:5–7). Jacob spoke well of Judah (Genesis 49:8–10). But he chose to give the birthright to his favorite son Joseph instead (Genesis 49:22–26; 1 Chronicles 5:1–2; compare Genesis 37:2–4).

How Birthrights Worked in Ancient Times

Archaeologists have found ancient clay tablets in a place called Nuzi in Mesopotamia. These tablets tell us that family members could trade or exchange their birthrights with each other. We see an example of this in the Bible when Esau trades his birthright to his brother Jacob (compare Genesis 25:19–34).

The person who had the birthright also kept special objects called "teraphim," or household idols (Genesis 31:19, 32, 34). These were small figures made of clay that represented the gods people worshiped in their area. Having these idols helped show that the oldest son had authority in the family.

Having a birthright meant two important things. First, the person would become the family leader. Second, they would receive twice as much inheritance as their brothers.

In ancient Israel, men could have more than one wife. The law said that the birthright must go to the first son born to the father, even if the father loved another wife more. The father could not change this without a just cause (Deuteronomy 21:15–17).

However, there were some exceptions. If a son's mother was a servant or a secondary wife (a

woman who lived with the father but had fewer rights than his wife), that son could not receive the birthright (Genesis 21:9–13; Judges 11:1–2).

The birthright was especially important in royal families. The oldest son of a king had the right to become the next king (2 Chronicles 21:1–3). We see an example of what could go wrong when this rule was broken. King Rehoboam of Judah chose his favorite son, Abijah, to be the next king, even though Abijah was not the oldest. To prevent his other sons from causing problems, Rehoboam had to give them special gifts and positions (11:18–23; 12:16).

Esau's Birthright and What It Means for Christians

The New Testament tells a story from the Old Testament about a man named Esau. Esau was the oldest son of Isaac, an important leader in Israel's early history. One day, Esau was very hungry and traded his birthright to his younger brother Jacob for a bowl of lentil stew. He made this decision without thinking about how important his birthright was (Hebrews 12:16–17; compare Genesis 25:19–34).

This story teaches an important lesson. Just as Esau lost his birthright and his father's blessing by making a foolish choice, Christians are warned not to carelessly give up the spiritual blessings God has for them. (Genesis 27).

See also Inheritance; Heir; Firstborn.

Birzaith, Birzavith

Malchiel's son of Asher's tribe (1 Chr 7:31). Since parallel lists fail to mention him (Gn 46:17; Nm 26:44–47), it is possible that Birzaith (kjv "Birzavith") was the name of a city Malchiel founded. If so, the city may have been northwest of Bethel, near Tyre, and is now called Birzeit.

Bishlam

Resident of the vicinity of Jerusalem who opposed the rebuilding of the city after the exile. He and his associates wrote a letter complaining about the rebuilding to the Persian king Artaxerxes (Ezr 4:7).

Bishop

Official in the church whose qualifications are listed in 1 Timothy 3:2–7 and Titus 1:6–9. The Greek word from which the English title "bishop" and the adjective "episcopal" are derived is often translated in modern versions as "elder," "overseer" (as in the Berean Standard Bible), "shepherd," or "guardian." It corresponds closely to the current term "pastor." Jesus is called "the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls" (1 Peter 2:25, King James Version).

In the New Testament, "bishop," and "elder" refer to the same office, as shown by the apostle Paul's telling Titus to appoint "elders in every town" and then referring to those same individuals as "bishops" (Titus 1:5, 7). While at Miletus, Paul summoned the elders from the church at Ephesus and then addressed them as "overseers" or "guardians" (Acts 20:17, 28). In his letter to Philippi, Paul greeted the "bishops and deacons" (Philippians 1:1). The fact that there were numerous bishops at Philippi, as well as in Ephesus, shows that the office of bishop had not yet developed into what it later became: a single bishop governing one or more churches.

Bishops obviously had positions of authority, but the duties of the office are not clearly defined in the New Testament. One task was to "refute those who contradict [sound teaching]" (Titus 1:9) and to teach and expound the Scriptures (1 Timothy 3:2). In addition, there is some evidence that one of their primary concerns was economic matters and caring for the poor, as well as generally overseeing the congregation. The lists of qualifications in Paul's letters to Timothy and Titus indicate that a bishop was considered a leader in the congregation and a representative to the non-Christian world.

See Elder; Pastor; Presbyter.

Bithiah

Mered's wife. Bithiah may have been a princess, or the phrase "daughter of Pharaoh" (kjv) may merely indicate that she was Egyptian (1 Chr 4:17–18). Her name (meaning "daughter of Yah") seems to indicate that she was a Jewish convert.

Bithron

A term in 2 Samuel 2:29 (King James Version; New Living Translation margin) whose meaning is uncertain. Abner was the commander of the army of Ishbosheth. He fled through Bithron after losing a battle to the army of David. The Hebrew root word means "to cut into pieces." There are three explanations:

1. It refers to a valley (possibly the Jabbok).
2. It is the area "cut off" by a great curve in the Jabbok River.
3. It refers to the first part of the day, "all morning" (Berean Standard Bible).

Bithynia

Roman province located in the northwest corner of Asia Minor. The apostle Paul and Silas wanted to preach the gospel in Bithynia on Paul's second missionary journey but were prevented by the Holy Spirit from doing so (Acts 16:7). The apostle Peter may have ministered in Bithynia and other provinces of Asia Minor, since he addressed his first letter to believers there (1 Pt 1:1). Christianity entered Bithynia somehow, possibly through Peter.

Bithynia was occupied by a Thracian tribe that established a prosperous kingdom there in the third century BC. In 75 BC, when Bithynia's last king, Nicomedes III, willed his kingdom to the Roman people, it became part of the Roman Empire. For administrative purposes, it was generally linked with the province of Pontus to the east.

After NT times, Bithynia figured significantly in church history. Early in the second century, its Roman governor, Pliny the Younger, elicited from the emperor Trajan the earliest stated imperial policy on persecution of Christians. Later, the church councils of Nicaea (AD 325) and Chalcedon (451) were held in two of Bithynia's western cities. The Council of Nicaea declared the full deity of Christ; the Council of Chalcedon made pronouncements on the nature of the person of Christ and the canonicity of the 27 NT books.

The Roman province of Bithynia was bordered on the north by the Black Sea, on the west by the Propontis (modern Sea of Marmara), on the south by the province of Asia, and on the east by Galatia and Pontus. Bithynia was mountainous, with Mt Olympus in the south rising to 7,600 feet (2,315.5 meters), but had districts of great fertility near the seacoast and in its interior valleys. Besides producing fruit and grain, the province had fine marble quarries, good timber, and excellent pasturage. The principal river was the Sangarius (modern Sakarya), which flowed from south to north into the Black Sea. Transportation was largely along the river valleys.

Bitter Herbs

Bitter herbs are some kind of bitter-tasting vegetables, perhaps a certain variety of lettuce. The people of Israel were commanded to eat bitter herbs along with roasted lamb and unleavened bread on the night when God caused the plague of death on all the Egyptian firstborn (Exodus 12:8–11).

The "bitter herbs" mentioned in Exodus 12:8 and Numbers 9:11 likely refer to plants such as endive (*Cichorium endivia*), the common chicory (*Cichorium intybus*), lettuce (*Lactuca sativa*), or the common dandelion (*Taraxacum officinale*). All of these are weedy plants commonly found in modern Egypt and western Asia. People living in these regions still eat these plants today.

The leaves of ordinary garden lettuce become very bitter when bleached (when they turn white after being covered to prevent sunlight from reaching them). This is also true of the common dandelion. Some scholars suggest that the bitter herbs might have come from thorns and thistles.

Bittern

A bittern is a long-legged water bird (*Botaurus stellaris*). It is similar to a heron but has shorter legs and a smaller body.

Bitterns live in marshes, where they can hide easily. Their brown-and-black feathers look like the plants around them. This camouflage makes them hard to see. Their long neck has soft feathers that make it look thick and heavy.

Bitterns are shy and usually live alone. In the mating season, they make a deep, strange-sounding call. They also twist their bodies in a special way while calling. Bitterns build their nests alone in grassy marshes.

Because of their secretive nature, people often think of bitterns as symbols of lonely or empty places.

There is some question about whether the bittern is actually mentioned in the Bible. The King James Version uses "bittern" in three verses (Isaiah 14:23; 34:11; Zephaniah 2:14). The Hebrew word's meaning is uncertain, so translators sometimes choose very different animals.

Isaiah 14:23 and Zephaniah 2:14, the Revised Standard Version translates it "hedgehog." In Isaiah 34:11, the Revised Standard Version has "porcupine." The Hebrew word is similar to an Arabic word for "porcupine."

Other scholars think the verses describe a bird, not a mammal. Zephaniah 2:14 says the creature will "roost atop her pillars" (that is, above Nineveh's doorposts). This would better fit a bird.

Bitterns live in the swamps of the Tigris River, near the site of Nineveh. Their habits may fit these Bible references better than those of the hedgehog.

See also Birds; Hawk; Hedgehog; Pelican; Porcupine.

Bitumen

A naturally occurring substance similar to asphalt, pitch, or tar. It is a thick, sticky substance found naturally in the ground. People in ancient times used it like a type of glue or sealant.

Bitumen (or tar) was used for mortar when building the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11:3). It was also used to seal the reed basket in which baby Moses was hidden (Exodus 2:3). In Israel, the valley of Siddim had many bitumen pits. Some soldiers fell into them during Chedorlaomer's war against Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 14:10).

Bitumen is translated as "slime" in the King James Version.

See also Asphalt; Minerals and Metals.

Biziothiah, Bizjothjah

Listed in Joshua 15:28 (kjv "Bizjothjah") as a city in the Negev Desert area of Judah. The Greek OT, called the Septuagint, has "and her daughters," which would mean that this was not a specific place but rather the cluster of villages surrounding Hazar-shual and Beersheba. Such a translation is possible with a slight adjustment to the Hebrew text. It is difficult to say how the Hebrew text originally read.

Biztha

One of the seven eunuchs King Ahasuerus commanded to bring Queen Vashti to his drunken party (Esther 1:10).

Black

A dark color often mentioned in the Bible to describe hair, skin, or objects, sometimes symbolizing mourning or judgment.

See Color.

Black Cumin, Black Caraway, Nutmeg Flower

The "caraway" mentioned in Isaiah 28:25–27 ("fitches" in the King James Version) likely refer to *Nigella sativa*. This plant is sometimes called black cumin, black caraway, or nutmeg flower. This annual plant belongs to the buttercup family (*Ranunculaceae*). It grows wild in southern Europe, Syria, Egypt, North Africa, and other Mediterranean regions, and is cultivated for its flavorful seeds.

The black seeds have a spicy, pepper-like taste and aroma. People in Eastern countries sprinkle them over breads and cakes, and use them to flavor curries and other dishes, both historically and today.

Farmers in Israel and the surrounding areas still harvest cumin and Nigella using the gentle methods that Isaiah described, showing how traditional agricultural practices have remained largely unchanged.

Black Obelisk

A shaft of black limestone that describes the military successes of Shalmaneser III of Assyria during the first 31 years of his reign. Shalmaneser III ruled from 858 to 824 BC.

The obelisk is six and a half feet (2 meters) high and smoothed on all four sides. It has five rows of shallow reliefs with inscriptions between them written in cuneiform. The pictures show tribute being paid from five parts of Shalmaneser's Empire.

Of special interest to Bible students is the second row of reliefs, which shows King Jehu of the northern kingdom of Israel (2 Kings 9–10) bowing before Shalmaneser. Thirteen Israelites are with him, bearing tribute. The inscription identifies Jehu and lists the tribute as including silver and gold bowls and vases, tin, and a royal staff. This relief is the only contemporary image of an Israelite king. Jehu is shown wearing a long fringed cloak, a pointed soft cap, and a short rounded beard. His payment of tribute dates to 841 BC, but there is no mention of it in the Bible.

Blasphemy

Blasphemy is speaking or writing in a way that shows disrespect or insults God. It can also include actions that show contempt toward God. More generally, "blasphemy" can refer to insulting or damaging someone's reputation. This includes any words or actions that degrade or devalue another person. In ancient Greek writings, people used the word "blasphemy" to describe insults or mockery toward both living and dead people. Later, it came to also mean doubting or mocking the power and nature of the gods.

Blasphemy in the Old Testament

In the Old Testament, "blasphemy" always means to insult God, either by attacking him directly or mocking him indirectly. Either way, the glory and honor of God are lessened. So, blasphemy is the opposite of praise. An Israelite might directly insult the "Name" (the personal name of God, Yahweh) by cursing God (Leviticus 24:10–16) or deliberately disobeying God's law (Numbers 15:30). Either of those blasphemies was punishable by death, as was idolatry, the ultimate blasphemy (Isaiah 66:3).

It was thought that Gentiles, who had never experienced the power and majesty of the Lord, were the most likely blasphemers. Thus the king of Assyria blasphemed in equating the Lord with the gods of the nations he had already conquered (2 Kings 19:4–6, 22). For his arrogance, the king was doomed by the word of the prophet Isaiah. God was also mocked when:

- Israel was exiled (Isaiah 52:5);
- Edom derided the desolate "mountains of Israel" (Ezekiel 35:12, King James Version); and
- The enemy scoffed that God had not protected Jerusalem (Psalm 74:18; 1 Maccabees 2:6).

Blasphemy in the New Testament

In the New Testament, blasphemy takes on the wider Greek meaning. It includes slandering a human being, as well as God (Matthew 15:19; see also Romans 3:8; 1 Corinthians 10:30; Ephesians 4:31; Titus 3:2). It even includes mocking angelic or demonic powers, which is just as wrong as mocking any other being (2 Peter 2:10–12, Jude 1:8–10). In other words, slander, ridicule, and mocking of any kind are totally condemned in the New Testament.

The most common form of blasphemy in the New Testament is blasphemy against God. One might insult God directly (Revelation 13:6; 16:9), mock his word (Titus 2:5), or reject his revelation and its bearer (Acts 6:11). Jesus was accused of blasphemy when he claimed to have a prerogative belonging to God—the power to forgive sins (Mark 2:7). John 10:33–36 reports an attempt to stone Jesus. His accusers said to him, "You, who are a man, declare Yourself to be God" (verse 33). The highest Jewish court (the Sanhedrin) condemned Jesus on the charge of blasphemy because he claimed to be the Son of Man (the Messiah). In their view, Jesus had given no evidence that he was such an exalted personage. Jesus appeared to be mocking the Messiah and, by extension, to mock God himself (Mark 14:64).

The Bible makes clear that blasphemy is forgivable (Matthew 12:32; Mark 3:28–29). But, if a person will not repent, the only remedy is to turn him or her "over to Satan to be taught not to blaspheme" (1 Timothy 1:20).

Blastus

A royal secretary to King Herod Agrippa I (Acts 12:20). The people from the cities of Tyre and Sidon needed food from Herod's country, but Herod was angry with them. They first made friends with Blastus so he would help them get a meeting with the king. After Blastus arranged this meeting, Herod gave a speech to the delegates.

During this speech, Herod accepted worship from the people instead of giving glory to God. Because of this, an angel of the Lord struck Herod with a deadly illness (verses 21–23).

Bless, Blessing

An announcement of the favor of God to a group of people gathered together.

Worship services, like Holy Communion in Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and most Protestant churches, usually end with a blessing from a member of the clergy. This pronouncement (called a "blessing" in the Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and Anglican churches and "benediction" in most Protestant churches) is based on a biblical example (Genesis 27:27–29; Numbers 6:22–27; Luke 24:50; 2 Corinthians 13:11, 14; Philemon 4:7; 2 Thessalonians 2:16–17; Hebrews 13:20–21).

The benediction or blessing is seen as a ritual to end the service, but it is an important pronouncement of God's favor. It is given to faithful believers by ministers who have biblical authority. In this way, Christians are assured that the grace of God the Father, the love of the Son, and the communion of the Holy Spirit are with them.

The term "blessing" is also applied to the act of giving thanks for food and drink (Matthew 14:19; Mark 8:7; Luke 24:30).

See also Beatitudes, The.

Blindness

The condition of being unable to see. Blindness was common in the ancient Near East. It is still common among many poor and tribal communities that do not have access to modern medicine.

What Causes Blindness?

The Bible does not discuss the medical cause of blindness, but poor personal hygiene and unsanitary (unclean or dirty) living conditions likely contributed. Newborn babies were the most at risk. Most blindness from birth (John 9:1–3) was likely caused by germs passed by the mother to the baby's eyes, such as gonorrhea. Inflammation, pus, and swelling would develop within three days. The basic medical treatment could not prevent eye damage.

Modern medicine can treat babies with eyedrops, but these are not always available to those who are poor. It is also rejected in parts of the Middle East today. Babies and young children also faced threats by other diseases of the eyes that were spread by pests. These diseases would cause heavy crusting, droopy eyelids, loss of eyelashes, and eventually total blindness. In parts of the world, folk superstition still allows flies to fly around on babies.

Blindness among adults might be caused by:

- Malaria
- Long exposure to sandstorms
- Sun glare in the desert
- Accidents
- Punishment (as with Samson, Judges 16:21)
- Old age (Genesis 27:1; 1 Samuel 4:15; 1 Kings 14:4)

Blindness in the Old Testament

The Old Testament required special care for the blind (Leviticus 19:14). Those who misled people who were blind were punished (Deuteronomy 27:18). Blind men were not allowed to be priests (Leviticus 21:18).

Blindness in the New Testament

Jesus's healing ministry fulfilled prophecy by bringing sight to the blind (Luke 4:18). His ability to restore sight proved to John the Baptist that Jesus was the Messiah (Matthew 11:5). Jesus healed:

- Two blind men in Galilee (Matthew 9:27–30)
- One blind man in Bethsaida (Mark 8:22–26)
- A man blind from birth in Jerusalem (John 9)
- A blind beggar named Bartimaeus and his friend at Jericho (Mark 10:46–52; compare Matthew 20:30–34; Luke 18:35–43)

At times, Jesus immediately healed the blind (Mark 10:52). Other times, he healed them through acts,

like using clay and water (John 9:6–11) or spit (Mark 8:23).

The apostle Paul was blinded when he converted and was healed in the presence of Ananias (Acts 9:1–9, 18). Later, Paul blinded a sorcerer, Elymas, with temporary blindness for opposing his ministry in Cyprus (Acts 13:11).

See also Medicine and Medical Practice; Disease.

Blood

Blood is the red fluid that flows through the bodies of people and animals.

In the Bible, the word "blood" has several meanings beyond its physical definition. Sometimes, it describes the color red: “The sun will be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood” (Acts 2:20). It can also mean wine, as in Deuteronomy 32:14 ("wine" here is literally "the blood of grapes" in the original Hebrew).

When the Bible uses the phrase "flesh and blood," it means ordinary human beings. For example, when Jesus told Peter that "this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by My Father in heaven” he meant that no ordinary person told Peter (Matthew 16:17; see also 1 Corinthians 15:50; Galatians 1:16; Ephesians 6:12). It came from God. After betraying Jesus, Judas recognized that he had “sinned by betraying innocent blood” (Matthew 27:4). In these passages, “blood” means a natural life rather than a spiritual or divine life.

The Connection Between Blood and Life

“Blood” is also used in the sense of shedding blood, as in murder. Psalm 9:12 speaks of an “Avenger of bloodshed.” Genesis 37:26 refers to the brothers who cover up Joseph’s blood, meaning to murder him. To be “burdened by bloodguilt” means to be guilty of murder (Proverbs 28:17). Before Jesus was crucified, Pilate said, “I am innocent of this man’s blood" (Matthew 27:24–25). So, the idea of violent death is regularly connected with blood.

This logic makes sense because blood and life are connected. Three passages in the Old Testament show a connection between blood and life:

- “But you must not eat meat with its lifeblood still in it” (Genesis 9:4)
- “For the life of the flesh is in the blood" (Leviticus 17:11)
- “Only be sure not to eat the blood, because the blood is the life” (Deuteronomy 12:23).

God creates all life, so shedding blood is serious. Blood is sacred, which is why it is forbidden to eat (see Acts 15:20). Blood symbolizes the life that God gives us.

Blood in Sacrifices

Blood was very important in religious sacrifices because it represented life. On the Day of Atonement, priests would sprinkle bull and goat blood on the altar (Leviticus 16). Blood (life) was poured out at death. The animal's life was given up for the life of the people. The people's sin was transferred to the animal through sacrifice, and full judgment and amends could now be made. This idea of transfer is also shown by the scapegoat in the same ceremony (Leviticus 16:20–22). In the first Passover, the blood had the same meaning (Exodus 12:1–13). Animal blood on the door meant a death had already taken place, so the angel of death could pass over.

Blood also becomes the best offering to God. In Exodus 24, after the people agreed to the covenant (or agreement), Moses poured half of the sacrificial blood on the altar and the rest on them. He did this while saying, “This is the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words” (Exodus 24:8). When blood was sprinkled on both the altar and the people, it showed that God and the Israelites made an agreement together (this is called a "covenant relationship").

In Israel's religious ceremonies, blood had several meanings. It could represent:

- Death (the end of natural life)
- Judgment (when God decides if someone has done right or wrong)
- Sacrifice (giving a gift to God)
- Substitution (one life given to save another)
- Redemption (being set free from sin)

Life with God was made possible by blood.

The Blood of Christ

In the New Testament, other than references to medical issues (for example, Matthew 9:20) and murder (for example, Acts 22:20), the focus is on the blood of Christ. This is a reference to Old Testament ideas. The synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) say that at the Last Supper, Jesus spoke about his blood as a new covenant (Matthew 26:28; Mark 14:24; Luke 22:20). This shows that his death was a sacrifice. Jesus shows that his death had a redemptive meaning. The Gospel of John shares this idea but describes it in different terms: "Unless you eat the flesh and drink the blood of the Son of Man, you have no life in you" (John 6:53). Believers participate in Jesus's death and resurrection through faith (see also 1 Corinthians 10:16).

Paul's letters also connect blood with Christ's death. When he used the words "blood" or "cross," he was talking about Jesus's death and how it saves people. For example, he wrote that Jesus's "blood on the cross" brought peace (Colossians 1:20). He also wrote that people who were once far from God "have been brought near through the blood of Jesus Christ" (Ephesians 2:13). This meant that both Jewish and non-Jewish people could now have a relationship with God through Jesus's death.

Paul was thinking about the sacrifice of the Day of Atonement when he said that God made Christ an atoning sacrifice (making things right between people and God) by his blood (Romans 3:25). He uses the language of Leviticus 16, which describes the most important Jewish sacrifice.

Peter also speaks about the "blood of the covenant" (a reference to Exodus 24) when he wrote about Christians being sprinkled with Christ's blood (1 Peter 1:2). He promises that Christians are redeemed by Jesus's blood (1 Peter 1:9). He calls Christ "a lamb without blemish or spot," probably thinking about the servant in Isaiah 53 or the Passover lamb. Both of these texts have redemptive meaning. The writer of Hebrews says Christ fulfilled the Old Testament system of sacrifices because his death was the greatest sacrifice (Hebrews 9:7–28; 13:11–12).

The New Testament references to Christ's blood show the complete redemption God achieved in the death of his Son (Hebrews 10:20). Justice and justification (being made right with God) were both accomplished (Romans 3:26). The blood of Christ is the "once for all" means of redemption (Hebrews 9:26).

See Atonement; Offerings and Sacrifices.

Blood Avenger

A person (also called an avenger of blood) who tried to bring justice by killing a murderer. This person was usually the closest family member of the one who had been killed.

The law of Moses gave rules for this kind of revenge killing. These rules helped prevent unfair deaths and protected those who killed by accident.

See Avenger of Blood.

Blood, Field of

The name given to the field that was purchased with the "blood money" Judas accepted to betray Jesus (Matthew 27:8; Acts 1:19). The chief priests purchased the field as a burial ground for strangers (formerly, it was named the potter's field). Judas hanged himself, and his intestines spilled out there. This account uses the Aramaic expression *Akeldama* (in the King James Version it is "Aceldama"), translated "field of blood." The Akeldama is on the southern slope of the valley of Hinnom near the Kidron Valley.

Blood, Flow of

1. Vaginal discharge, like during menstruation. Leviticus 15 discusses laws that God gave to Moses about genital discharges. A woman with vaginal bleeding was ceremonially unclean during bleeding and seven days afterwards. While unclean, she could not either worship in the tabernacle or temple or go into the street or market. Anyone who touched her or her belongings was also unclean (Leviticus 15:19–28). Intercourse was not allowed while the woman was unclean. Seven days after her bleeding stopped, a woman could give two turtledoves or pigeons to the priest as offerings to atone for the time that she was unclean (Leviticus 15:29–30).
   Jesus's healing of a woman who had been bleeding for 12 years is recorded in three gospels (Matthew 9:20–22; Mark 5:25–34; Luke 8:43–48). If she was bleeding vaginally, her long period of uncleanness (and her separation from others) must have been very difficult. Besides her anxiety and discomfort, she would have been unable to become pregnant. She had "borne much agony under the care of many physicians and had spent all she had, but to no avail" (Mark 5:26). Finally, she ignored the rules about uncleanness and went through a crowd to touch Jesus. When she touched him, her bleeding totally stopped.
2. Bloody stools. Publius's father suffered from some form of dysentery (Acts 28:8).

See also Medicine and Medical Practice; Hemorrhage.

Bloodguilt

Bloodguilt refers to being responsible for someone's death. In the Bible, this term comes from a Hebrew word that means "blood" or "bloods" (Exodus 22:2–3; Leviticus 17:4; 1 Samuel 25:26, 33; Hosea 12:14). When someone killed another person, they were said to have "shed blood" and became guilty of that person's death.

The translation "bloodguiltiness" is only used in Psalm 51:14. When the Hebrew word is used in its plural form, it usually means someone has killed another person. In its singular form, the word can mean three things:

- Blood itself
- The act of killing someone
- Being guilty of killing someone

Throughout the Bible, we see that killing someone was punished by death. In biblical times, killing often happened by shedding another's blood.

Types of Bloodguilt

The first type of bloodguilt was when someone deliberately killed another person on purpose. The Old Testament calls this killing "innocent blood" (Jonah 1:14). The Bible explains what happens when someone kills an innocent person and how they should be punished (Genesis 9:6; Deuteronomy 19:11–13; 2 Kings 24:4; Ezekiel 33:6). According to the Bible, if someone commits murder, they cannot pay money to avoid punishment (Numbers 35:31).

Another type of bloodguilt was when someone killed another person by accident (Numbers 35:9–28, Deuteronomy 19:4–10). In these cases, the person who caused the death could go to special cities called "cities of refuge" to be safe. If they left these cities, they could be killed by a family member of the dead person who was given the right to seek justice. This family member was called an "avenger of blood."

Sometimes, a dead person would be found, and no one knew who killed them. When this happened, the closest town was held responsible for the death. Deuteronomy 21:1–9 explains a special ceremony these towns could perform to remove this responsibility.

In ancient Israel, people could become guilty of wrongful killing even when dealing with animals (Leviticus 17:3–4, 10–11). If an animal killed someone, the animal would be put to death by stoning (Exodus 21:28–29).

There were some situations where killing did not lead to guilt:

- Protecting yourself (Exodus 22:2)
- Carrying out legal executions (Leviticus 20:9–16)
- Killing during war (1 Kings 2:5–6)

The prophets often used the word for "blood" to talk about the guilt of the entire nation of Israel (Isaiah 1:15; 4:4; Ezekiel 7:23; 9:9; Hosea 1:4; 4:2, in the King James Version; Micah 3:10; Habakkuk 2:8, 12, 17).

Some crimes were considered so serious that they were punished by death, even though they did not involve killing (Leviticus 20:9–16; Ezekiel 18:10–13). These crimes included:

- Worshiping false gods
- Worshiping objects as gods (idols)
- Being unfaithful in marriage (adultery)
- Stealing (robbery)
- Being cruel to poor people
- Breaking important promises
- Charging unfair interest on loans

Throughout the Bible, from Genesis (4:10–12) to the Prophets (Isaiah 26:21; Ezekiel 24:6–9) and into the New Testament (Revelation 6:10), we learn that God will bring justice and punish those who kill others.

See also Cities of Refuge; Criminal Law and Punishment.

Bloody Sweat

A rare condition, also called hemohydrosis, that may be caused by small blood vessels bleeding into the sweat glands. It occurs only in extreme emotional stress. Notably, the Bible says that when Jesus was in the Garden of Gethsemane, before his betrayal, he had bloody sweat: "In His anguish, He prayed more earnestly, and His sweat became like drops of blood falling to the ground" (Luke 22:44). Some translations suggest Jesus actually sweated blood. But, the Greek text is only making a comparison. That is, sweat poured off of Jesus "as though he were bleeding." This is an appropriate analogy for Luke, a physician, to have mad e.

Blue

A color mentioned in the Bible, often associated with the sky, sea, and special cloth used in the tabernacle and priestly garments.

See Color.

Boanerges

A name meaning "sons of thunder." Jesus gave this name to James and John, Zebedee's sons (Mark 3:17). The reason for the name is unclear. The name may have referred to

- the unpredictable personalities of the two brothers (Luke 9:54),
- to their possible revolutionary past as Zealots (a violent group in Judea who opposed being ruled by the Roman Empire), or even
- to a style of speaking that was like thunder.

See also James (Person); John, The Apostle.

Boar

A wild or tame animal of the swine family. Boars were known for being strong and destructive.

In Psalm 80:13, a wild boar is pictured as ruining a vineyard. This image shows how enemies were destroying Israel, which was often compared to a vineyard in the Bible.

Pigs and boars were considered unclean animals in Israelite law. People did not eat them or offer them as sacrifices.

See Pig.

Boast

Boasting means talking proudly about what you can do, what you have done, or what makes you special. In the Bible, boasting sometimes has a more positive meaning. "To glory in" means

someone celebrates or gives honor to something good.

Boasting in the Old Testament

In the Old Testament, "boasting" describes the ungodly. They rely on their resources, not on God (Psalms 52:1; 94:3–4). Enemies of Israel boasted of their victories and claimed the glory for themselves (Deuteronomy 32:27; Psalms 10:3; 35:26; 73:9; Isaiah 3:9). They boasted of their riches and wisdom (Psalm 49:6; Isaiah 19:11). The Lord says the rich and wise should "boast in this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the LORD, who exercises loving devotion, justice and righteousness on the earth" (Jeremiah 9:24).

Boasting in the New Testament

Jesus told a story about a proud Pharisee boasting to God in prayer (Luke 18:10–14). Most of the New Testament usages of the word occur in the apostle Paul's letters. Boasting about your own achievements is wrong. Instead, the Bible teaches that it is good to praise what God has done. (Romans 3:27–28; 2 Corinthians 10:17; Galatians 6:14). Avoid self-righteousness and bragging (Romans 1:30; 2:17, 23; Ephesians 2:9; 2 Timothy 3:2). Paul linked boasting to the self-confident attitude of some Jews who had kept the law. For Paul, the only legitimate boasting was to boast (rejoice) in the Lord (Romans 5:11). Romans 5:3, contrasts the rabbinic view of glorying in sufferings with Paul's. Paul believed his sufferings pointed to God's power and his hope for the future.

Unlike his opponents, Paul did not boast by comparing himself to others. Because Christ worked through him and God commended him, he could give glory to God (2 Corinthians 3:2–6; 10:18). Paul preferred to boast of his weakness and the Lord's power and strength (2 Corinthians 12:5, 9).

The apostle did boast about a group of Christians (2 Corinthians 7:4, 14; 8:24; 9:2–3). But he meant to show confidence in them, not to brag. Paul did not like to boast but did so to defend against critics in the Corinthian church. He said that those who should have praised him had instead forced him to engage in "foolish" boasting (2 Corinthians 12:11).

See also Pride.

Boat

A boat is a small vehicle used to travel on water.

In the Bible, people used boats for fishing, travel, or as small rescue boats on larger ships. Boats were moved with oars (long sticks used to row) or sails (cloth that catches the wind).

Many of Jesus's followers were fishermen, so boats are mentioned often in the Gospels.

See Travel.

Boaz (Person)

Salmon's son from the tribe of Judah (Ruth 4:18–22). Boaz lived in Bethlehem in the days of the judges and married Ruth, a Moabite woman. Boaz was an ancestor of Christ (Matthew 1:5; Luke 3:32) and a wealthy relative by marriage of Ruth's mother-in-law, Naomi. Boaz noticed Ruth when she was picking up food from one of his fields (Ruth 2). Boaz's kindness to Ruth made Naomi think he might agree to buy her late husband's land and marry Ruth as part of the deal.

See also Ruth, Book of; Marriage, Marriage Customs; Genealogy of Jesus Christ.

Boaz (Pillar)

Name (meaning "strength") given to one of the two pillars erected in front of King Solomon's temple (1 Kgs 7:21; 2 Chr 3:17). *See* Temple; Jachin and Boaz.

Bocheru

Bocheru was the son of Azel and a descendant of King Saul (1 Chronicles 8:38; 9:44).

Bochim

Bochim was a place near Gilgal mentioned in Judges 2:1–5. There, the angel of the Lord spoke to the people of Israel. He said they had disobeyed God by not driving out the Canaanites. Because of this, God said the Canaanites would become "thorns" in their sides and their gods would be a "snare" to them.

The people were very sad and wept. That is why the place was called "Bochim," which means "weepers."

Many Bible scholars think Bochim was another name for Bethel. The Greek version of the Old Testament (called the Septuagint) says "Bethel" in this passage.

Bodily Presence

This phrase is used to talk about Christ's body and how it relates to the bread and cup in the Lord's Supper (also called the Eucharist).

See Lord's Supper, The.

Bodily Resurrection of Christ

The belief that Jesus physically rose from the dead after his death on the cross, not just spiritually.

See Resurrection.

Body

A term used in the Bible in several different ways. Sometimes it refers to physical bodies, while other times it represents deeper religious ideas. These uses help us understand how the ancient Israelites thought about human life.

Body In the Old Testament

In the Old Testament, many Hebrew words are translated as "body." These usually refer to physical life. The Bible talks about bodies that can suffer, get sick, or be injured. The body becomes a corpse after death. The Bible also mentions the bodies of spiritual beings, like angels in Daniel 10:6, or heavenly creatures called "cherubim" in Ezekiel 1:11. Jeremiah wrote about idol bodies when describing false gods (Jeremiah 10:1–16). This shows that ancient Israelites believed all beings had some kind of body, whether they were in heaven or on earth.

The word "body" is similar to the word "flesh," and the same Hebrew word is used for both. "Body" refers to a human in their physical form. "Flesh" is used to refer to humanity's sinfulness or mortality.

Human beings have a body and a spirit. In the Bible, the two are not separate from each other. The body is not an obstacle to the soul (like the Greeks believed). Only between the Old and New Testaments does Jewish writing speak about the body as evil or as something that works against the soul.

Body In the New Testament

"Body" is used in the New Testament in the same ways as in the Old Testament. However, the idea is given new importance. Jesus's body was taken down from the cross (Mark 15:43). A body could get sick and be healed (Mark 5:29). Bodies needed to be clothed (James 2:16). But Jesus teaches that life is more than clothing (Matthew 6:25). He said only to fear those who can destroy both soul and body in hell (Matthew 10:28).

At the Lord's Supper, Jesus said about the bread, "This is my body," and then added about the wine, "This is my blood" (Mark 14:22, 24). Jesus took these words from the ancient Jewish system of offerings to God. His death was like the sacrifices made in both the old and new covenants (agreements) between God and his people. In both cases, someone gave their actual life for others.

Paul wrote most of what the New Testament says about the body. He used this idea often to help explain what it means to follow Jesus.

The Body of Sin

In Romans 6:6, Paul wrote about destroying the "body of sin." Paul did not mean our physical bodies are evil. He also did not mean that sin is a thing living inside us. Instead, he was talking about how sin controls our lives on earth.

When someone becomes a Christian, Paul saw this control of sin being broken. When he connected sin to the body, he simply meant that humans, while living on earth, often do wrong things. After explaining this difficult struggle, Paul asked, "Who will rescue me from this body of death?" (Romans 7:24). Human life is ruined by sin and needs Christ's redemption (Romans 7:25–8:4).

The Body of the Believer

Paul taught that believers experience both a "saving of the soul" and a change in their current life. They have died to sin and are freed from it. Paul called for holiness of life "in the flesh." "Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its desires." (Romans 6:12). Righteousness is the new ruler in a Christian's life. The social and personal lives of believers are to be defined by

holiness. Believers are in the world (John 17:11) and are to live for God in the world, so they are supposed to care about the world.

Physical life now has a new meaning. Paul told Christians to present their bodies as a living sacrifice (Romans 12:1). Each person's life is a "living sacrifice" to God. Rather than minimizing our earthly life, Paul saw that Christ gave it a new potential. The Holy Spirit is found in the believer. "Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have received from God" (1 Corinthians 6:19). The Holy Spirit lives in a person's entire physical existence.

Paul looked forward to a transformation of life in the body through Christ. He spoke of the "redemption of our bodies" (Romans 8:23) and of the transformation of "our lowly bodies to be like His glorious body" (Philippians 3:21). The Bible is aware of the effects of human sin and physical deterioration, is not pessimistic like the worldviews that want to escape from the world.

The Resurrection Body

The Israelites did not understand the body and soul to be separate. Life after death is not in spirit but involves a "new body." In 1 Corinthians 15:35–57, Paul sees that the earthly body and the resurrection body are the same. "It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body." (1 Corinthians 15:44). This idea comes from Jesus' experience, whose dead body was brought to life and transformed. Paul believed that in the resurrection, life would return to the body without its limitations. Paul says, "Death has been swallowed up in victory" (1 Corinthians 15:54).

See also Resurrection; Body of Christ; Church; Man.

Body of Christ

The phrase "body of Christ" in the Bible refers to three things:

1. Jesus Christ's physical body.
2. The bread and wine used in the Lord's Supper to remember Jesus. His broken body is compared to the bread and his blood shed compared to the wine.
3. The church, both local and worldwide.

The Physical Body of Jesus Christ

The New Testament says that God the Father prepared a human body for Jesus, the Son (Hebrews 10:5). The body was made when the Holy Spirit caused Mary, who was a virgin, to become pregnant (Matthew 1:20). Jesus was born as a descendant of David (Romans 1:3). But, Jesus was also called the Son of God (Luke 1:35).

The apostle John stressed that Jesus's body was really human, not just a spirit (1 John 4:2–3). Some people in John's day were already beginning to argue Jesus was only spirit. God "became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14; compare Isaiah 53:1–4). Jesus's earthly body possessed ordinary human characteristics and limitations. As a real human being:

- Jesus experienced sadness (John 11:35; Hebrews 5:7–8).
- Jesus got tired (John 4:6).
- Jesus got thirsty (19:28).
- Jesus felt pain (19:1–3).

When Jesus died on the cross, his physical body died (John 19:30, 33). The New Testament says he took the sins of the world on himself when he died (1 Peter 2:24; 1 John 2:2; compare Isaiah 53:5–6). His death is described as a perfect sacrifice (Hebrews 9:12–14, 26–28) that makes believers holy and right with God (2 Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 10:10).

Jesus's body was buried in a normal way (Matthew 27:59; Mark 15:46; Luke 23:53, 56; 24:1; John 19:39–40). It was placed in Joseph of Arimathea's rock tomb (Matthew 27:57–60; John 19:41). On the third day, his body came back to life, as he had said it would (John 2:19–22).

He was seen in his physical resurrection body (Matthew 28:9; Luke 24:31, 36; John 20:10–19, 26). People saw, heard, and touched him after he came back to life. (Matthew 28:9; Luke 24:39; John 20:17; 1 John 1:1). He let people touch his scars (Luke 24:39; John 20:17). He could eat food, showing he had a real body (Luke 24:42–43). But his body was also special. He could enter and leave rooms in unusual ways (Luke 24:31, 36; John 20:19, 26). The Bible says that because Jesus's body came back to life, believers will also return to life one day(1 Corinthians 15:20–23, 50–57; Philippians 3:20–21).

The Body of Christ in the Lord's Supper

At the last supper (Matthew 26:26–29; Mark 14:22–25; Luke 22:15–20; 1 Corinthians 11:23–26), Jesus held the bread and said "This is my body." He held the cup of wine and said, "This is my blood of the covenant" (Matthew 26:26, 28). Jesus meant that the bread represented his body. His body was broken when he was beaten at his trial and pierced at his crucifixion (Luke 23:33; John 19:1–2). Paul said that Jesus our Passover lamb was sacrificed for us (1 Corinthians 5:7). This means that the Passover lamb in the Old Testament was an object lesson. It points to "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29).

For Christians, the body of Christ is viewed (Matthew 8:17; 1 Peter 2:24; compare. Isaiah 53:4–5) as the broken bread at the Lord's Supper. The cup of wine represents Jesus's blood poured out. The blood is the main factor in God's covenant of grace with his people.

Jesus called it "the new covenant in My blood" (Luke 22:20). The whole event of the Lord's Supper was also to be a time to remember (1 Corinthians 11:25–26). In the event, believers are reminded that Christ died for sinners. They remember his forgiveness of their sins (Matthew 26:28). They are also reminded that they are united with him as part of the body of Christ (Romans 6:1–11; 1 Corinthians 10:16; Galatians 2:20; Philippians 3:10).

The Body of Christ, the People of God

The "body of Christ" also used to mean the whole church. All the believers joined together with Jesus are considered God's people. God's people are said to be members of Christ's "mystical body" (1 Corinthians 12:27). This means they are close to Jesus, and he takes care of them (Ephesians 5:25, 29). The Bible uses a number of other comparisons for the whole people of God, such as the vine (Psalms 80:8), the temple of God (1 Corinthians 3:16–17), building (1 Peter 2:5), chosen people (2:9), and family of God (Ephesians 3:15). These comparisons show how connected and dependent the "body of Christ" is upon the living God.

Paul often used "body of Christ" to remind a local church that it was part of something bigger. Paul taught that all believers are part of one body, with Jesus as the head. "Just as each of us has one body with many members, and not all members have the same function, so in Christ, we who are many are one body, and each member belongs to one another" (Romans 12:4–5). Paul taught the Corinthian Christians that they were part of the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:27). They and Paul were all baptized by one Spirit into that one body (Ephesians 5:30).

In many passages written by Paul, the church is called the "body" and Christ the "head" (Colossians 1:18). Christ has been made "head over everything for the church," which "is His body" (Ephesians 1:22–23). The body grows through "connection to the head," (Colossians 2:19). As head of the body, Christ is its Savior (Ephesians 5:23).

The head/body comparison leads to a natural dependence of the church on Christ and his rule over the church. The church understands itself in terms of its Head. The relationship is natural in that the life flows from and is sustained by the Head. The relationship is quick, direct, and complete. Without Christ, both in his saving sacrifice and in his present position at the right hand of God, the church would not exist

In the New Testament, the phrase "body of Christ" means the worldwide church and each local group of believers. It includes both Jewish and non-Jewish believers united in Jesus Christ (Ephesians 2:14–16; 3:6; 4:4).

- Jesus saved the "body of Christ" (Ephesians 5:23).
- Jesus leads the "body of Christ" (Colossians 1:18).
- Jesus rules the "body of Christ" (Ephesians 1:22–23).
- Jesus gives the "body of Christ" strength and unity (Ephesians 4:15–16; Colossians 2:19).

The Gifts of the Body of Christ

Each member of the body of Christ has been given special abilities (called spiritual gifts) to serve Jesus (Romans 12:6; 1 Corinthians 12:11). These abilities are discussed many times in the bible. They include things like teaching, encouraging others, and showing kindness (Romans 12:7–8; Ephesians 4:11). The ministry of serving is to be shared by all Christians. Christians can do this through giving to the physical needs of others (Acts 11:29–30; 1 Corinthians 16:1–4; 2 Corinthians 8:1–5). They can also do this by praying for one another (Ephesians 1:15–23; 3:14–19; 6:18–20).

No one should look down on others or their gifts. God has chosen each person to have a special job in the body (1 Corinthians 12:14–26). The gifts are given to support "the saints for works of ministry and to build up the body of Christ, until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God, as we mature to the full measure of the stature of Christ" (Ephesians 4:12–13). Everyone should become more like Jesus (4:15–16).

See Body; Church; Lord's Supper, The; Resurrection.

Bohan, Stone of

Stone marking the northeast boundary between the tribes of Judah and Benjamin. Bohan, a descendant of Reuben, is not mentioned elsewhere in the OT (Jos 15:6; 18:17).

Boil

An inflamed area of swelling on the skin. In modern medicine, a "boil" is a pus-filled swelling. It is caused by infectious germs, usually *staphylococci*. The pus is a mixture of germs and white blood cells, the body's defense against germs. Although painful, boils usually heal naturally after rupturing or being cut open. A more severe boil with several openings is called a *carbuncle*. If the infection goes deeper and injures internal organs or tissues, it is called an *abscess* and can even be fatal.

In the Bible, the word translated as "boil" probably referred to a variety of skin diseases. The sixth plague that God inflicted on Egypt through Moses and Aaron was a plague of boils (Exodus 9:9–11; Deuteronomy 28:27, 35) or blisters. Boils or skin eruptions of a certain type were described in the Mosaic laws about health and cleanliness as one sign of leprosy (Leviticus 13:1–8, 18–23). Job's "terrible boils from the soles of his feet to the crown of his head" (Job 2:7–8, 12) were probably too widespread to be called boils in the modern sense. He may have had:

- Smallpox
- Psoriasis
- Tubercular leprosy
- Some other disease that caused severe itching

King Hezekiah's boil was probably a group of boils (2 Kings 20:1–7; Isaiah 38:21).

See Medicine and Medical Practice; Disease; Plagues upon Egypt.

Bokeru

Another way of spelling Bocheru. He was the son of Azel.

See Bocheru.

Bokim

Another way of spelling Bochim, a place near Gilgal.

See Bochim.

Bond, Bondage

A bond or bondage means to be held back or controlled by someone or something. When someone is in bondage, they lose their freedom and often become like a slave. Hebrew and Greek words translated as "a bond" or "bondage" mean "a loss of freedom." This idea is related to serving or being a slave to another person.

Bondage in the Old Testament

The Old Testament uses several words for bondage to describe periods when the Israelites were slaves. This includes the period in Egypt as well as Babylon and Persia. Some English versions of the Bible use the word "bond" to describe a condition of individual slavery. One example is the laws Moses gave that permit a person to choose to become a slave (Leviticus 25:39–44, King James Version). The old term "bondmaid" is used to describe a mistress or secondary wife. The idea of bondage is also used to describe the control that God has over the nations of the world (Psalm 2:3).

Bondage in the New Testament

In the New Testament, the term bondage is used as a metaphor with positive and negative aspects. Negatively, it indicates spiritual subjection to:

- sin or Satan (Hebrews 2:14–15; 2 Peter 2:19),
- the flesh (Romans 8:12–14), or
- the Law (Galatians 2:4; 5:1).

Human beings become slaves when hostile forces control their actions. The apostle Paul also illustrates the idea of bondage in how creation is subjected to physical decay (Romans 8:21). This is the result of human sin.

Positive Ideas About Bondage

Positively, the use of the term bondage in the Bible indicates being a servant. This is especially true when describing service to God as an obligation or vow (Numbers 30:2–15; Ezekiel 20:37). Bondage can also represent the necessity and value of suffering (Hebrews 10:34; 13:3). The apostle Paul uses this term in two ways when calling himself a "prisoner of Christ." He says this to demonstrate the connection of his physical bonds with his spiritual bondage to Christ (Ephesians 3:1; Phil 1:7–14; 2 Timothy 1:8; 2:9; Philemon 1:9–10, 13).

See also Slave, Slavery.

Bondage, House of

A phrase used in the Old Testament to describe Egypt during the time when the Israelite people were forced to work as slaves there. This period lasted about 400 years until God helped the Israelites escape from Egypt (Exodus 13:3; Joshua 24:17).

See Exodus, Book of.

Bondmaid, Bondman, Bondservant

Terms that refer to people who worked as servants or slaves in biblical times, often to pay off debts or as part of social structures.

See Servant.

Bone

Bones are the hard parts that make up the skeleton in humans and animals. They stay in their original shape for a long time after a person or animal dies, even after the soft parts of the body have decayed. Because of this, people often connect bones with death.

The ancient Israelites believed it was very important to treat dead bodies with respect (Genesis 50:25; 1 Samuel 31:11–13; 2 Kings 23:14–18; Ezekiel 39:14–16; Amos 2:1.

In the book of Ezekiel, God showed the prophet a valley filled with old, dry bones. These bones represented the people of Israel who had lost all hope. But God promised to bring his Spirit and give new life to his people, just like bringing life back to dead bones (Ezekiel 37:1–14). Bones are actually living tissue in a living body. Ezekiel wrote about how broken bones could heal (Ezekiel 30:21).

When the Israelites celebrated Passover, they had to sacrifice a perfect lamb. One of the requirements was that none of the lamb's bones could be broken (Exodus 12:46; Numbers 9:11–12). This becomes important in the New Testament. The Roman soldiers usually broke the legs of people who were crucified to make them die faster. But when Jesus died on the cross, they did not break his legs. This fulfilled what the Old Testament had written about Jesus, who is called "the Lamb of God" (Psalm 34:20; John 1:36; John 19:30–37).

In some parts of the Bible, people talk about bones to describe strong feelings (Job 2:5; 19:20; 30:30). The Bible also uses the phrase "flesh and bone" to show that people are closely related to each other. When we say someone is our "flesh and bone," it means they are part of our family, just like when we say "flesh and blood" today (compare Genesis 2:23; 29:14; Judges 9:2).

Book

A set of written sheets or a scroll that holds records or a story. These are typically made from wood, parchment, or papyrus. Bound books with pages were developed later, after the biblical period.

The Bible contains multiple texts that are called "books" because that is what each document was before it was added to the Bible. The Bible has 66 books (for example, Genesis, Isaiah, Matthew, and Revelation).

The Book of the Law

The most important book to the ancient Israelites was the Book of the Law (2 Kings 22:8). This book was important because it came from God to Moses (Joshua 23:6; Mark 12:26). It contained the record of the covenant that God made with Israel through Moses (for example, Exodus 20). God told Joshua to meditate on it day and night (Joshua 1:8). The prophets referred to it constantly, especially to the book of Deuteronomy. The Book of the Law was found during the renovation of the temple in Josiah's reign. This led to important religious reforms (2 Kings 22:8–13).

Books Mentioned in the Bible

Some books specifically named as sources in the Bible are:

- The Book of the Wars of the Lord (Numbers 21:14)
- The Book of Jashar (Joshua 10:13; 2 Samuel 1:18)
- The Book of the Acts of Solomon (1 Kings 11:41)
- The Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah (1 Kings 14:29)

Many prophetic texts are named in the books of Chronicles as sources for the book:

- The Chronicles of Samuel the Seer
- The Chronicles of Nathan the Prophet
- The Chronicles of Gad the Seer (1 Chronicles 29:29)
- The Prophecy of Ahijah the Shilonite (2 Chronicles 9:29)

The fact that prophetic sources were used in Chronicles shows that the Israelites viewed their history as being a record of God's activity.

See Writing.

Book of Ahikar

The Book of Ahikar is an ancient Near Eastern story from around the sixth or seventh century BC. It teaches a lesson about the dangers of ingratitude (not being thankful). The story is about a wise man named Ahikar who served as secretary to Sennacherib, the king of Assyria.

Ahikar was famous for his great wisdom, but although he had sixty wives, he had no children. He decided to adopt his sister's son, Nadan, and train him to take his place in the royal court. Ahikar carefully taught Nadan everything he knew, but Nadan turned out to be dishonest. He forged documents to make it appear that Ahikar had committed a crime, hoping to have him put to death.

Ahikar was saved because the executioner was his friend. His friend hid him until the king's anger had passed. Later, when Sennacherib needed Ahikar's wisdom again, Ahikar was brought before the king. His hair had grown long, and his nails were like eagle's claws because he had been in hiding for so long. The king forgave him and restored him to honor. Ahikar then rebuked his ungrateful nephew. After this, Nadan's body swelled up, and his stomach burst open.

Ahikar's story has interesting similarities with Old Testament wisdom books and some of the parables of Jesus. There are references to Ahikar in the apocryphal book of Tobit, the works of the Greek philosopher Democritus, the apocalyptic Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, and the Qur'an. The original story was written in Aramaic but later appeared in many other languages, including Syriac, Arabic, Armenian, Ethiopic, and Greek. These versions differ from one another in various ways.

See also Apocrypha.

Book of Baruch

A book named after Baruch, who worked as a secretary for the prophet Jeremiah. Some church traditions include it in their canon (the official list of books in the Bible), but others do not.

In ancient times, people wrote several books but said Baruch wrote them. People knew Baruch worked with Jeremiah, so these books were popular.

The Book of Baruch talks about how God is right and wise in all that God does. It also says God will listen when people are sorry for their sins. The book says the Jewish people deserve to be punished by God because they have sinned. But it also says God is kind. At the end, the book tells the

people of Israel not to be sad. It says God will care for them and make them great again.

Introduction

The book of Baruch tells the story of the Jewish exiles in Babylon. They fast, weep, and pray over their difficult position, and remember their disobedience to God. They plan to raise money to send to the high priest in Jerusalem so offerings can be made for the exiles. They also send the book of Baruch. The book has been read to the Jews in Babylon. The exiles ask that the book be read on feast days, on "appointed seasons", and be added to the liturgy (the formal arrangement of prayers, hymns, and other practices used in worship). They ask that the high priest prays for the wellbeing of the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar his son so "the Lord will give us strength, and he will give light to our eyes, and we shall live under the protection of… Belshazzar his son, and we shall serve them many days and find favor in their sight" (Baruch 1:12, Revised Standard Version).

Confession and Prayer for Mercy

A confession and prayer for mercy follow the introduction. The Jewish people agree that their misfortune is a result of their own sin. They admit that God is just, and they ask for his mercy and forgiveness. "Righteousness belongs to the Lord our God, but confusion of face to us and our fathers, as at this day" (Baruch 2:6, Revised Standard Version). The Jewish people ask God not to punish them for their disobedience. In particular, they ask that they aren't punished for not having served the king of Babylon. "Hear, O Lord, our prayer and our supplication, and for thy own sake deliver us, and grant us favor in the sight of those who have carried us into exile" (Baruch 2:14, Revised Standard Version).

Wisdom

The Jews are then told to follow God's law and rediscover the wisdom that comes from the Torah. They are instructed to follow God and not trust in wealth. This wisdom is not abstract but practical, as they might find in the Old Testament. The purpose of this section was to establish that the exiles were still special to God and had a future ministry.

Lamentation and Hope

The final section is a lamentation (an expression of deep sorrow) followed by hope for the glory God has planned for Israel: "Take off the garment of your sorrow and affliction, O Jerusalem, and put on forever the beauty of the glory from God. Put on the robe of righteousness from God; put on your head the diadem of the glory of the Everlasting" (Baruch 5:1–2, Revised Standard Version).

The Letter of Jeremiah

Traditionally, "The Letter of Jeremiah" is included after the fifth chapter. This document is actually a religious document condemning idolatry. It was supposedly sent to the Judeans being taken into exile in Babylon.

Who Wrote the Book of Baruch? When Was It Written?

The book of Baruch was probably written by several authors. It might have been edited by the writer of the introduction. The "confession" borrows from Daniel 9. The following prayers for forgiveness are similar to the prophetic texts in the Old Testament. The section of wisdom poetry is very different as it is similar to Job 28–29. The final call for hope probably used Isaiah 40–45 as inspiration.

The date of the book has been widely discussed. The book was probably written in Hebrew and translated into Greek. The translator was probably the same person who translated the book of Jeremiah for the Septuagint (an ancient Greek version of the Old Testament). The date of 582 BC has been suggested based on internal evidence from the first section. However, later dates are more likely, possibly even as late as the second century BC.

How Did the Book of Baruch Influence the Church?

Although the book was popular with Jewish people who did not live in the land of Israel, its influence was greater in the early Christian church. Early theologians quoted the book often. The Roman Catholic Church accepted the book of Baruch into their canon at the Council of Trent (1545–1563).

Book of Daniel

The fourth book of the Major Prophets in the Old Testament features vivid symbolism and highlights heroic events during the Babylonian exile of the Jewish people. Daniel is a complex book, so

understanding it requires careful study and reflection. Daniel himself wrote about one of his visions, saying, “I was confounded by the vision; it was beyond understanding” (Daniel 8:27).

In the old Jewish division of the Old Testament, Daniel is part of the third section, called the Writings. This section also includes books like Psalms, Proverbs, and Job. Daniel is not included in the second section of the Old Testament, called the Prophets. Although some parts of his book can be seen as prophetic, Daniel is not clearly identified as a prophet. The book has two main parts:

1. Stories about Daniel’s life (Daniel 1–6)
2. Daniel’s visions (Daniel 7–12)

Preview

- Author
- Date
- Language
- Background
- Purpose and Theological Teaching
- Content: Stories about Daniel (1–6)
- Content: Daniel’s Visions (7–12)

Author

The book of Daniel does not have a known author, like many ancient texts. The title, "Daniel," refers to the main subject of the book: the man Daniel.

The first six chapters of the book describe Daniel in the third person. Starting in Daniel 7:2, the book claims to include Daniel's words in the first person. Traditionally, Judaism, later followed by Christianity, believed Daniel wrote the entire book. However, there is little evidence to confirm this. Jesus’s reference to things “spoken of by the prophet Daniel” (Matthew 24:15) does not clarify the authorship of the entire book. These words appear in the second half of the book, clearly marked as Daniel's. Therefore, the question of who wrote the first part remains unresolved.

Daniel is the most important character in the book, whether or not he wrote it. The book itself is the only source of information about him. Daniel was a Hebrew from Judah, likely of royal descent, born in the late seventh century BC. As a young boy, he was taken from his homeland to Babylon (now southern Iraq) around 605 BC. After three years of formal education in language and literature (Daniel 1:4–5), he became an official in the royal household. The first six chapters describe specific events in Daniel's life but do not give a complete biography.

Daniel's name means "God is my judge." In Babylon, where he lived as a foreigner, he received another name, Belteshazzar. This name might have meant "may Bel (a god) protect his life" in the Babylonian language.

Date

Uncertainty about who wrote the book of Daniel also creates uncertainty about when it was written. If Daniel wrote the entire book, it was likely written in the second half of the sixth century BC. If he did not write it, it could have been written later. The conservative view is that the book was written in the sixth century BC. Another view is that it was written around 165 BC.

There is evidence for both early and late dates of the Book of Daniel. People who support a late date and a different author usually use historical and language-based arguments. However, those who support an earlier date have counterarguments, which are discussed below.

Historical Argument

The historical argument suggests the writer knew a lot about Near Eastern empires from the sixth to the second centuries. However, the writer misunderstood some historical details from the second half of the sixth century, which is Daniel's time. This uneven knowledge suggests the writing happened later.

People with a conservative view must agree on the first part of the historical argument. The book of Daniel shows a deep understanding of Near Eastern history. The main question is whether this knowledge was gained after the events or revealed to Daniel beforehand. Different people answer this question in various ways, depending on their beliefs about prophecy and other factors.

The second part of the historical argument is more complex. Was the writer's knowledge of history in the late sixth century BC really wrong? The main issue is the identity of Darius the Mede (Daniel 5:30–31). The book of Daniel claims that Darius the Mede conquered Babylon and was later succeeded by Cyrus. However, external historical sources do not mention a Darius at that time. They clearly show that Cyrus conquered Babylon. Those who

support a late date see this as strong evidence. Those who support an early date have no simple solution.

One proposed solution is that Darius and Cyrus are two names for the same person. This idea is based on the translation of Daniel 6:28: "So Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius and the reign of Cyrus the Persian." A similar case is the use of the names Pul and Tiglath-pileser in 1 Chronicles 5:26. In summary, dating Daniel based on the writer's historical knowledge is challenging, whether suggesting an early or late date.

Linguistic Argument

The arguments about when the Book of Daniel was written are complex, especially for those unfamiliar with Hebrew and Aramaic. Supporters of a later date use three main points:

1. The Aramaic in the book resembles late Aramaic from the second century BC and later
2. The book contains Persian loan words, suggesting a later date for its Aramaic
3. The presence of Greek loan words indicates the language dates after Alexander the Great's conquest of the East around 330 BC.

For those who support a later date, the third point is the strongest. They argue it would be impossible to find Greek loan words in Aramaic two centuries before Alexander's time.

At first, the arguments seem convincing, but they are less persuasive to conservatives upon closer examination. Each part of the argument has been addressed.

1. People commonly used Aramaic in the Near East from the ninth century BC. It became an official language in Assyria in the eighth century BC. Ninety percent of the Aramaic words in the Book of Daniel were from the older language, including both Old and Imperial Aramaic dialects. The remaining ten percent, known only from later texts based on current evidence, might suggest a late date. However, they could also be early uses of those words.
2. The presence of Persian loan words in Aramaic can be surprising. Later Aramaic includes many Persian loan words, with about 19 appearing in the book of Daniel. However, there is another explanation for these words in Daniel from an earlier time. The story of Daniel partly takes place in a Persian-controlled court. The Persians used Aramaic for managing their empire, so their language naturally influenced Aramaic. If we assume an early date for the book of Daniel, it was written when Persian had the most impact on Aramaic.
3. The evidence of Greek words in Daniel's Aramaic is not very strong. Greek traders traveled in the Near East from the eighth century BC. Greek soldiers fought for Near Eastern states from the seventh century BC. During Daniel's time, King Nebuchadnezzar hired Greek artisans in Babylon. Therefore, Greek influence on the Aramaic language could have happened before Alexander the Great. He was not the first Greek in the East.

Conclusion

The arguments about when the Book of Daniel was written are not clear for either an early or late date. Dating the book depends on factors like who wrote it, the purpose, and whether you see parts as prophetic. Saying Daniel wrote it fits with the current evidence. Some material from the Dead Sea Scrolls at Qumran does not support a late date. All Daniel manuscripts and fragments are copies from the second century BC, suggesting the original is older. One manuscript, similar to the large Isaiah Scroll, likely comes from the same time, several centuries before the Qumran copy of Isaiah. Other Qumran manuscripts show that no Old Testament material was written after the Persian period. Therefore, no manuscript evidence supports a second-century BC date for Daniel.

Language

The book of Daniel has an interesting feature that is not obvious in the English Bible. It is bilingual.

Daniel 1:1–2:4a and Daniel 8–12 are in Hebrew, like other Old Testament books. The middle part (Daniel 2:4b–7:28) is in Aramaic, a related language. People have different ideas about why this is. Some think a Hebrew writer added to an original Aramaic book, adding parts at the start and end. Others believe a part of the original Hebrew book was lost, so they replaced it with an Aramaic translation. There are more complex theories, but none are widely accepted.

Another suggestion is possible. The book of Daniel, regardless of the date, may reflect the bilingual nature of its cultural setting. (For example, many written materials in Canada appear in both English and French.) Finally, one can see the bilingual nature as another mysterious aspect of the book that makes its interpretation difficult.

Background

We can look at the background of the book of Daniel in two ways. First, we can see it from the Babylonian exile, which Daniel experienced in the early sixth century BC. Second, we can view it in light of future events in the second century BC, which the visions in the book's second half seem to predict.

The Babylonian Exile

Daniel was exiled around 605 BC, but the main phase of the Babylonian exile started in 586 BC. This followed the defeat of Judah and the destruction of Jerusalem. The story covers the reigns of Nebuchadnezzar (also known as Nebuchadrezzar) and Belshazzar. It ends in the early years of the Persian king Cyrus, who captured Babylon in 539 BC. For the Jews, the exile was a time of hardship and renewed religious understanding. Both aspects are shown in the book of Daniel.

The Seleucid Period in Palestine

Daniel's visions in the second half of the book seem to refer to the Seleucid period in Palestine. This was when Antiochus Epiphanes, a member of the Seleucid dynasty, ruled the Jews from 175 to 163 BC. Whether these visions predicted future events or reflected the culture of the time, the Seleucid period is crucial for fully understanding the book.

Under Antiochus, Palestinian Jews faced significant hardship. Their ancient faith was greatly weakened, the high priesthood in Jerusalem was sold to the highest bidder, and the temple was desecrated in many ways. Jews were pressured to change their lives and faith to fit Hellenistic (Greek-influenced) culture.

Some gave in, but others held firmly to their old faith. A rebellion against Antiochus's oppressive measures began in 168 BC. By 164 BC, the rebels largely removed the objectionable practices. However, the Seleucid period was generally difficult for faithful Jews, as historical forces seemed to oppose their true faith. Part of the book of Daniel's greatness is its theological understanding of history, which helped people continue living in faith during a time of severe crisis.

Purpose and Theological Teaching

The section of the Old Testament called the Writings had many purposes. The psalms were mainly used in Israel's worship. The proverbs might have been part of Israel's school lessons. The book of Job dealt with a specific human and religious problem.

The purpose of the book of Daniel is not easy to determine. It is mainly a story and a partial biography of Daniel. It is not strictly a prophetic book or history in the modern sense. Much of it focuses on dreams and their interpretations.

The word "history" hints at its purpose. Daniel aims to explain history through theology. The first six chapters focus on Daniel and his friends. This is not just to satisfy curiosity but to teach readers. Old Testament theology emphasized that the God of Israel was involved in human life and history. Reading biblical history reveals God's role in human events and teaches how God and people interact. The opening chapters of Daniel describe events in the life of a man with strong faith. This type of history offers lessons on how to live.

The last six chapters focus on Daniel's dreams. Although the dreams and their interpretations are complex, a theme of history emerges. Daniel 7–12 emphasize the meaning of history and the world's future, not just past events. From a biblical view, the movements of human societies now and in the future are as important as past history. Daniel's visions focus on nations and superpowers but highlight a key theme: God's power over humans and nations.

History often seems chaotic and full of conflict, but God ultimately controls it and guides it toward a goal. Despite unclear details at the book's end, Daniel offers hope to those in crisis. Even if the "the

time of the end" is not understood now (Daniel 12:9), the end of history is hopeful for those with faith in God (12:13). The book of Daniel explores the meaning of history, teaching lessons from the past and offering hope for the present and future.

The book includes specific religious ideas about:

- Human faith
- Divine salvation
- The nature of revelation

One important topic in Daniel is the belief in resurrection.

The New Testament clearly teaches resurrection followed by judgment, but this is not a main theme in the Old Testament. The Hebrews mainly focused on earthly life. Many texts suggest hope for life after death, but it is not clear. Only in the later Old Testament writings, especially Ezekiel and Daniel, does a clearer doctrine of resurrection appear.

The main idea of this doctrine in the book of Daniel is found in Daniel 12:2: "many who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake, some to everlasting life, but others to shame and everlasting contempt." The belief in personal resurrection gives individuals hope for the future. Nations may fight each other, creating chaos. People believe God controls everything, but what happens to those who die during these events? According to Daniel, the dead will rise again and be judged based on their actions. Some will receive everlasting life, while others will face shame.

For readers of the book of Daniel, the idea of resurrection gave hope in a bleak world. It reminded them that actions in life matter and shape future judgment. Life extends beyond physical death. Justice will eventually prevail, even if it is rare now. Evildoers might escape punishment now, but after death, God's justice will bring final judgment.

The book of Daniel is about history and hope. We must live life now, and the first six chapters offer insights from Daniel's experience. Life happens amid war and international chaos, and Daniel 7–12 show God's control and his plans in history. Individual life leads to death, and the writer discusses resurrection and judgment.

Content: Stories about Daniel (1–6)

Daniel and His Companions (1:1–21)

Daniel and his companions—Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah—were exiled to Babylon about 19 years before the main exile after Jerusalem's destruction. The king selected these four healthy young men from many Jewish exiles. King Nebuchadnezzar assigned them to a special three-year training program to become court aides.

When the four Jewish youths joined Babylon's high society, they encountered a dietary issue. The king offered them the finest food and wine from the royal kitchens. However, Jewish dietary laws, as outlined in Deuteronomy 14, restricted their diet. The four requested a diet of vegetables and water. They did this not to be picky or ungrateful, but to stay faithful to their God. The story explains how they resolved the dietary issue and follows their education and Daniel's appointment as a royal counselor.

The first episode focuses on a key issue for all Jewish exiles: How can one live in a foreign land with different food and customs, yet stay faithful to God and his laws? Daniel serves as a model. He was brave enough not to compromise and wise enough to find a solution acceptable to everyone. God rewarded his faithfulness. By the end of the episode, people see Daniel as someone with special wisdom and gifts from God. He used these gifts throughout his life.

Nebuchadnezzar's Dream (2:1–49)

The king had a dream that troubled him, but he could not remember it. When his interpreters failed to help, he ordered their execution. This order included Daniel and his friends, who were also interpreters. Daniel asked for more time and offered to interpret the dream. After praying, Daniel received the dream and its meaning from God and shared it with the king. Grateful, Nebuchadnezzar promoted Daniel and his friends to important positions in Babylon.

The writer documented both the king's dream and Daniel's interpretation. The challenge for modern readers is understanding the interpretation. In the dream, the king saw a statue with a gold head, silver chest and arms, brass belly and thighs, iron legs, and feet made of part iron and part clay. The interpretation identified Nebuchadnezzar as the gold head. His kingdom would be followed by three other kingdoms, each symbolized by different parts

and materials of the statue. Modern interpretations vary from this point.

A common view of the four kingdoms is:

- Chaldean Empire (gold)
- Medo-Persian Empire (silver)
- Greece (brass)
- Rome (iron and clay)

Others suggest:

- Chaldean Empire (gold)
- Media (silver)
- Persia (brass)
- Greece (iron and clay)

Focusing too much on identifying these kingdoms can distract from the chapter's main point. Among these human kingdoms, "In the days of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will shatter all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, but will itself stand forever" (Daniel 2:44). The Babylonian king's dream predicted the arrival of a greater kingdom, that of Jesus Christ.

The Fiery Furnace (3:1–30)

The story continues with Daniel's three friends, using their Babylonian names—Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. King Nebuchadnezzar built a huge gold statue, 27.4 meters (90 feet) tall. At its dedication ceremony, everyone had to bow down and worship when the band played. The three young Hebrews refused to worship and were called before the king. Their firm refusal led to a death sentence, and they were thrown into a fiercely burning furnace. Remarkably, they did not burn, and a fourth being appeared with them in the furnace. As they emerged unharmed, the king recognized God's power to save and rewarded them.

The story shows another problem faced by the Jews in exile. Staying true to God's first commandment, "You shall have no other gods before Me" (Deuteronomy 5:7), could mean risking death. The three young men stayed faithful, not because they were sure God would save them, but regardless of whether he chose to save them or not (Daniel 3:17–18). God did save them; they were thrown into the furnace tied up, but they came out as free men. The message was clear: Jews should believe in a God who can save them from persecution, but they should remain faithful even if they cannot see a way out of their troubles.

Nebuchadnezzar's Second Dream and Madness (4:1–37)

Nebuchadnezzar admitted belief in the living God twice:

1. When Daniel explained his dream about the statue (Daniel 2:47)
2. When Daniel's three friends were freed from the furnace (Daniel 3:28)

However, the king's belief was weak. Daniel 4 tells of a faith lapse that led to severe consequences. After eight years, when these consequences ended, the king again recognized God (Daniel 4:37).

The story is a proclamation by Nebuchadnezzar, shared widely after the events occurred. The king dreamed of a tall tree growing higher in a field. A divine messenger ordered the tree to be cut down, leaving only a stump and roots. The stump and roots then turned into a man, but his mind became like an animal's. For seven years, this semihuman creature acted like a beast.

Daniel explained to the king that the dream was about him. Nebuchadnezzar was the great tree that would be cut down. He would act like a beast in the field for seven years. One year after hearing this interpretation, the judgment happened. For seven years, he acted like an animal until his sanity returned.

The moral of the king's story is that his madness was not an accident but divine judgment. His arrogant belief in having God's power led to severe punishment (Daniel 4:30). The king likely suffered from a rare mental illness now called "boanthropy." The deeper meaning of the story is that believing oneself to be God, with total power and control over one's life, is madness. This madness can only be cured by realizing that only God has absolute power and authority.

Belshazzar's Feast (5:1–31)

The scene shifts to the reign of a later king in Babylon, Belshazzar. He was the son of Nabonidus and likely co-ruled with him from around 555 to 539 BC. He had special authority in Babylon. His story is similar to Daniel 4. During a large feast, Belshazzar used sacred vessels taken from the Jerusalem temple. The Babylonians used these

vessels to toast their gods, a disrespectful act that invited divine judgment. This judgment appeared as words written on the wall by a hand, which Daniel interpreted as a warning (Daniel 5:26–28).

Although Belshazzar praised Daniel for his interpretation, he failed to understand the true meaning and the lesson taught to Nebuchadnezzar, his predecessor (Daniel 5:18–22). Belshazzar was killed that night when Darius the Mede entered and captured the city. The theme continues relentlessly: human pride and arrogance do not go unnoticed by the God of history, who guides human events to fulfill his purpose.

The Den of Lions (6:1–28)

The theme of Daniel 6 is similar to Daniel 3, but Daniel is the main character. He refuses to compromise and obeys Darius as long as it aligns with God's law. Daniel knowingly breaks a royal decree that bans prayer to anyone but the king. Despite knowing the risks, Daniel stays loyal to God. When his enemies report him, he faces execution and is thrown to the lions. However, he survives, and the king, relieved from a difficult situation, punishes the plotters.

The story conveys two messages. First, God's servant should remain faithful in prayer and worship, no matter the result. God saved Daniel from disaster. Second, Daniel's faithfulness taught the king, who wanted his subjects to worship him, about true worship (Daniel 6:25–27). Faithfulness, like ripples from a pebble in water, impacts more than just the faithful person.

Content: Daniel's Visions (7–12)

At the start of Daniel 7, the timeline in the book of Daniel shifts. Daniel's first vision goes back to Belshazzar's first year (Daniel 7:1), but later visions occur during the reign of Cyrus, the Persian king (Daniel 10:1). Daniel 7–12 focus on the meaning of history and God's control over it, shown through the mysterious symbols in dreams. This section divides into:

1. The vision of four beasts (Daniel 7:1–28)
2. The vision of the ram and the goat (Daniel 8:1–27)
3. Daniel's prayer (Daniel 9:1–27)
4. The vision of the end times (Daniel 10:1–12:13)

The first vision revisits the theme of four kingdoms, as seen in Nebuchadnezzar's dream (Daniel 2). The second vision narrows the focus to two kingdoms, Persia and Greece. Much of the final vision about the end times covers events during the reign of Antiochus Epiphanes in the second century BC. All the visions share the same theme. Although human kingdoms may show their power in a chaotic world, the sovereign God works through history's apparent chaos toward a final goal of salvation.

The primary interpretation of the visions can relate to past historical events. However, a further messianic aspect appears in the New Testament. This aspect is most evident in Daniel 7. In the context of the four kingdoms, a divine court of judgment is established, led by the "Ancient of Days"—the almighty God (Daniel 7:9). Then Daniel sees the arrival of "One like the Son of Man" (Daniel 7:13). Although the phrase "Son of Man" was later seen as a messianic title, it did not technically have that meaning in the book of Daniel. Daniel 7:13 is a main source for the title "Son of Man," which Jesus often used to refer to himself. His most significant use of that term was at his trial, where he directly linked his title with Daniel 7 (Matthew 26:63–64).

See also Daniel (Person) #3; Diaspora of the Jews; Israel, History of; Prophecy; Prophet, Prophetess.

Book of Ecclesiastes

The Old Testament book of Wisdom Literature, Ecclesiastes, is philosophical. It asks deep questions about the meaning and nature of human life.

The Greek title "Ecclesiastes" comes from the Septuagint, which is the Greek translation of the Old Testament. Early Jewish tradition named books after their first few words. So, the Hebrew title of Ecclesiastes is "The Words of Qoheleth, the Son of David, King in Jerusalem." It is also called "Qoheleth."

The term "Qoheleth" is the author's title for himself throughout the book (Ecclesiastes 1:1–2, 12; 7:27; 12:8–10). It is the Hebrew participial form of a verb meaning "to assemble," and it likely refers to someone who speaks in a gathering. The word is often translated as "the Preacher" in English. Due to the book's philosophical nature, the title might also indicate the author's role as a leader among wise men.

Preview

- Who Wrote Ecclesiastes?
- When Was Ecclesiastes Written?
- What Is the Purpose of Ecclesiastes? What Does It Teach Us About God?
- What Is the Message of Ecclesiastes?

Who Wrote Ecclesiastes?

The authorship of Ecclesiastes raises complex questions, and biblical scholars do not agree. Early Jewish tradition was also divided. Some attributed the book to King Hezekiah and his followers, while others credited King Solomon.

People often use internal evidence to support the idea that Solomon wrote Ecclesiastes. The first verse credits the book to "the son of David." Other passages (such as Ecclesiastes 1:16–17 and 2:6–7) also seem to refer to Solomon, who became king after David in the united kingdom of Israel. Those who disagree with Solomon's authorship see these references as literary tools. They believe a later unknown author used Solomon's wisdom to express his own thoughts on life's purpose and meaning.

Some passages in the book suggest that Solomon did not write it. Some scholars argue that if Solomon had written it, he would not have used the past tense about his reign "over Israel in Jerusalem" (Ecclesiastes 1:12). Supporters of Solomonic authorship note that the Hebrew verb "was" can also mean "became," indicating that Solomon had become king in Jerusalem.

Some people claim that Ecclesiastes 1:16 suggests the text was written by someone who lived much later than Solomon. They argue that Solomon could not have claimed to be wiser than “all those before me who were over Jerusalem,” as this implies a long line of kings before him. However, the author might have referred to prominent wise men rather than kings (see 1 Kings 4:31).

A main challenge with attributing Ecclesiastes to Solomon is that Old Testament history does not mention a spiritual revival during his life. However, this is not a decisive argument because the book's thoughts are very personal. The historical books of the Old Testament focus on historical events and only mention personal details when they relate to God's plans in national history. It would actually be surprising if the historical writers included the deeply personal struggles found in Ecclesiastes.

Determining the author is challenging, but there is no strong evidence against Solomon writing Ecclesiastes.

When Was Ecclesiastes Written?

Most scholars who believe Solomon wrote Ecclesiastes think he did so in his last years as king, around 940 BC. This would place the book in the golden age of Israelite wisdom, authored by a leading teacher of wisdom.

Those who deny that Solomon wrote the book disagree on its date, but most think it was written after the exile. A Maccabean date (around 165 BC) is hard to support because fragments from the second century BC were found at Qumran. Also, the apocryphal book of Ecclesiasticus, likely written in the early second century BC, was heavily influenced by Ecclesiastes. These factors leave little time for the book to be written and spread during the Maccabean period.

Some conservative scholars, like Franz Delitzsch and E. J. Young, believe the book dates to the fifth century BC. Many others think it is from the third century BC.

Internal Evidence

People have tried to date the book of Ecclesiastes using supposed historical references. However, the gloomy observations in passages like Ecclesiastes 1:2–11 and 3:1–15 might just reflect the author's views on life's emptiness. These do not necessarily mean the book was written during a period of national decline or social decay in Israel, which would not match Solomon's reign.

People claim the book refers to Greek philosophical ideas. This suggests it was written after Alexander the Great's conquests spread Greek culture to the Syro-Palestinian region, from 356 to 323 BC.

One important philosophical idea is the "golden mean" introduced by Aristotle. The golden mean suggests avoiding extremes to find satisfaction in life. It appears in Ecclesiastes 7:14–18. This idea is also present in Egyptian wisdom literature (*Instruction of Amen-em-opet* 9.14) and Aramaic wisdom literature. In a notable example of Aramaic wisdom, *The Words of Ahiqar,* the golden mean is expressed as “Do not be too sweet, or they will swallow you; do not be too bitter, or they will spit you out.” The golden mean does not belong to one

specific time or culture; it represents a basic wisdom shared by people across different eras and backgrounds.

Linguistic Considerations

The main challenge in dating Ecclesiastes is its language. The Hebrew used in Ecclesiastes is unique. It is different in style and language from fifth-century Old Testament books like Ezra, Nehemiah, and Zechariah.

Some scholars believe that Aramaic heavily influenced the language of Ecclesiastes. They suggest the book was written when Aramaic was influential among Hebrew speakers. Others argue that the unique Hebrew features show similarities with Canaanite-Phoenician dialects.

People often say the Hebrew in the book is like later Mishnaic Hebrew, especially in its use of the relative pronoun. However, the language of Ecclesiastes differs from the Mishnah in other aspects.

The language used might suggest the book was written later. However, Solomon might have used a literary style influenced by Phoenician literature. This style could have become standard for the genre of Ecclesiastes. During Solomon's reign, interactions between Palestine and Phoenicia were common.

What Is the Purpose of Ecclesiastes? What Does It Teach Us About God?

The book of Ecclesiastes shows that life feels meaningless without including God in our worldview. It explains that we can find true satisfaction in a world that seems like endless, tiring cycles. People feel trapped in this world with no way out. According to Qoheleth, we can find freedom by fearing God and trusting that God will judge everything fairly. Therefore, life has a goal and purpose, even if it does not always seem that way in history and nature.

The book's main religious idea is that God cares about human events and their injustices. He will judge every action. Therefore, life has a purpose, and human actions matter.

People often say Qoheleth has a negative view of life. When reading passages like Ecclesiastes 1:12–14, 18 and 2:1–9, 18–23, one feels his sense of helplessness about what seemed like an empty existence. However, Qoheleth's negative outlook was about life without God. To him, such a life had no meaning.

The book reveals a positive message, though it is often overlooked. Qoheleth speaks in absolutes as he presents his argument. There is an absolute good for people living in a seemingly meaningless world. This good is enjoying God's gifts. Thus, Qoheleth is not completely pessimistic. When he considers God's influence in the world, he becomes optimistic. However, when he views life without God, he feels pessimistic, as this perspective only leads to despair.

Qoheleth's "theology of contentment" is clear in passages like Ecclesiastes 2:24–25, 3:10–13, and 3:22. The first passage seems to show a view of life focused on pleasure, making eating and drinking the main purpose. The phrase "eat and drink" is a Semitic idiom that represents daily life routines (see Jeremiah 22:15; Luke 17:27–28). Qoheleth uses this phrase to mean that one should enjoy God's gifts. Life is meant to be enjoyed, not just endured.

In Ecclesiastes 3:10–13, Qoheleth presents a major mystery of humanity: God has placed the idea of eternity in the human mind. This means the mind can think beyond physical limits. However, this ability does not reveal all of God's plans. Therefore, it is wise for a person to accept human limits and appreciate the knowledge God provides.

Ecclesiastes 3:16–4:3 is a challenging part of the book. Qoheleth notices life's unfairness and believes God allows it to test people, showing they are like animals. The same idea appears in Ecclesiastes 8:11, where Qoheleth notes that when evil is not punished, it encourages more wrongdoing. In Ecclesiastes 3:18, he claims injustice exists to separate the good from the wicked. The Hebrew phrase should be translated as “in and of themselves,” meaning that without God, humans are no better than animals. Without a belief in God, one cannot know what happens after death (Ecclesiastes 3:21). Qoheleth believes these injustices will be fixed on the Day of Judgment. Therefore, it is wise to be content with God's plan and not worry about the future (Ecclesiastes 3:22).

The key to understanding the book of Ecclesiastes is the phrase “under the sun.” This phrase shows Qoheleth's perspective. He is not saying all human experiences are pointless. Instead, he observes life “under the sun,” or without God, as pointless. The apostle Paul gave a similar view of the world in Romans 8:20–23. However, he added that God uses

everything in the world for good outcomes for his people (Romans 8:28). Qoheleth's viewpoint is also helpful.

People often interpret Qoheleth as expressing an Epicurean view of life, suggesting that eating and drinking are humanity's highest good. However, in Ecclesiastes 2:1–8, he tests pleasure and finds it futile. He concludes that pleasure is not an absolute good. The passages about eating and drinking refer only to enjoying the good and necessary things that come from God's hand.

What Is the Message of Ecclesiastes?

The Vanity of the Cycle of History and Nature (1:1–11)

Qoheleth starts by noting life's emptiness and nature's lack of purpose. Human work achieves nothing (Ecclesiastes 1:3), and life's endless cycle seems pointless (1:4–11).

The Vanity of Qoheleth's Own Experience (1:12–2:26)

In this dramatic section, Qoheleth reflects on the futility of parts of his life that others might value. He remembers his quest for wisdom but finds human philosophy pointless (Ecclesiastes 1:12–18). His pursuit of pleasure (Ecclesiastes 2:1–11) also ends in futility. Given this, Qoheleth does not see pleasure as life's greatest goal. The search for true philosophical truths is tiring and pointless (Ecclesiastes 2:12–17). Human work is also in vain (Ecclesiastes 2:18–23) because one cannot know who will benefit from their efforts (Ecclesiastes 2:21). Qoheleth concludes that the greatest good is to joyfully accept God's guidance (Ecclesiastes 2:24–26), adding an optimistic note to his message.

The Plight of Humanity apart from God (3:1–22)

Qoheleth's well-known statement that everything in life has its time (Ecclesiastes 3:1–9) is often seen as fatalistic. However, these verses likely describe how life's circumstances cannot change. Humans are stuck in a continuous cycle with no escape, yet they can think beyond the physical world (Ecclesiastes 3:11). This is the mystery of humanity. Without considering God, people are no better than animals (Ecclesiastes 3:19–20).

Conclusions Resulting from Qoheleth's Observations (4:1–16)

The author starts with a bleak view of life (Ecclesiastes 4:1–3) but then shares lasting insights. For example, he notes that facing life's challenges is easier with a partner than alone (Ecclesiastes 4:9–12).

The Vanity of Living Only for Oneself (5:1–6:12)

Qoheleth strongly criticizes a selfish life by focusing on God (Ecclesiastes 5:1–2, 4–6). He condemns the misuse of wealth and shows concern for the poor (Ecclesiastes 5:8–6:9), themes later highlighted in the New Testament.

Wisdom for Living (7:1–8:17)

This example of Old Testament Wisdom Literature uses a proverbial pattern (Ecclesiastes 7:1–13) and personal references (Ecclesiastes 7:23–29) to show how to find true satisfaction. The passage highlights the value of godly wisdom. Qoheleth teaches that God is the source of both adversity and prosperity (Ecclesiastes 7:14). He advises accepting both as coming from God. When applying wisdom to government authority (Ecclesiastes 8:2:2–9), Qoheleth advises obeying the authorities. The apostle Paul gave similar advice in Romans 13. Qoheleth is optimistic (Ecclesiastes 8:13), emphasizing the importance of fearing God. The author is not entirely pessimistic, as he shows that fearing God leads to true satisfaction.

Observations on Life's Seeming Injustices (9:1–18)

"Under the sun," meaning apart from God, there seem to be no differences among people (Ecclesiastes 9:1–6, 11–12). People often overlook and do not thank great deeds (Ecclesiastes 9:13–16). However, a person should still be content because life offers some benefits (Ecclesiastes 9:7–10).

Wisdom and Folly (10:1–20)

In the Old Testament, wisdom means knowing God, while folly means rejecting God. Qoheleth shows that wisdom leads to honor and satisfaction, and folly leads to ruin.

Qoheleth's Conclusion—Fear God (11:1–12:14)

The book of Ecclesiastes starts by declaring that everything is meaningless, but it ends with Qoheleth seeing God beyond his bleak views. Ecclesiastes 11 begins by saying humans cannot understand God's ways. People should enjoy life, but they must remember that God will judge them in the future (Ecclesiastes 11:9–10). After beautifully describing old age (Ecclesiastes 12:1–8) and urging the reader to respect God while young, Qoheleth shares his conclusion. A person's main duty is to respect God (Ecclesiastes 12:13–14). Youthful pleasures will fade like bubbles, and without God, one will end up with nothing. True satisfaction comes only from respecting God. Life without God is the greatest emptiness.

See also Solomon (Person); Wisdom; Wisdom Literature.

Book of Eldad and Medad

This is an ancient work that existed before the Roman Empire became Christian. It claims to include the prophecies of Eldad and Medad. These were two elders whom Moses appointed while the Israelites were in the wilderness (Numbers 11:26). The Bible says they prophesied, but it does not tell what they said.

Because of this gap, someone wrote a separate work about them. That book has not survived. The only known quotation from it appears in the Shepherd of Hermas: "The Lord is near to those who return to Him, as written in Eldad and Medad, who prophesied to the people in the wilderness" (Vision II, chapter 3). This is the only surviving sentence that tells us anything about the content of the book.

See also Apocrypha; Eldad; Medad; Shepherd of Hermas.

Book of Esther

An Old Testament book telling the story of a Jewish woman's protection of her people after her marriage to a non-Jewish king.

Preview

- Who Wrote the Book of Esther?
- When and Where Was the Book of Esther Written? Why Was It Written?
- Is the Book of Esther Considered Part of the Bible?
- What Is the Background of the Book of Esther?
- What Is the Message of the Book of Esther?

Who Wrote the Book of Esther?

We do not know who wrote the book of Esther. The reference in 9:20 that Mordecai "recorded these things" implies that part, if not all, of the book was written by him. The absence of God's name in the book of Esther may be due to the fact that the author intended the book to become part of the official Persian court record. The use of God's name might have prevented that from happening.

The author of the book knew a lot about life and customs in the Persian court (the place where the king lived and ruled). Because of this, some people think Mordecai might be the same person as a man named Morduka. Morduka was a Persian court official (someone who worked for the king) during the time of two kings:

1. Darius I, who ruled from 521 to 486 BC
2. Xerxes, who ruled from 486 to 464 BC

When and Where Was the Book of Esther Written? Why Was It Written?

The exact time and place the Book of Esther was written are not certain. Some people think it was written shortly after 465 BC. This idea comes from the book's mention of King Ahasuerus, who might be the same as King Xerxes. Xerxes died in 465 BC.

However, many scholars believe it was written later. A book called Ecclesiasticus, written around 180 BC, mentions events from that later time. It also mentions Jewish heroes but does not talk about Esther or Mordecai. This suggests the book of Esther may not have been written yet.

Some scholars think the book of Esther was written during the time of the Maccabees, around 167 to 160 BC. Others think the story of Esther might come from an old religious tale (cultic story) from ancient Babylon. In this view, Esther might be based on Ishtar, a goddess in Babylonian belief. Mordecai might be based on Marduk, a god in Babylonian belief. The earliest reference outside the Bible to the Feast of Purim (an event described

in the book of Esther) is 2 Maccabees 15:36. This book was probably written about 75 BC.

The book of Esther claims to record events that happened in Persia sometime during the fifth century BC. These events tell the story of how Esther became queen. If the book was written later than the events it describes, it might have had a special purpose. It could have been written to give hope to Jewish people during a time when they were being treated badly (persecuted).

One clear purpose of the Book of Esther is to explain where the Jewish holiday called Purim came from. This is described in Esther 9:16–28. The term "purim" is probably related to the Assyrian word *puru,* meaning a small stone used for casting lots.

Is the Book of Esther Considered Part of the Bible?

The main problem some people see with the book of Esther is that it does not mention God directly. It also does not clearly talk about God's guidance (providence) in the events of the story. This is unusual for a book in the Bible. So, some Jewish and Christian scholars question whether it should be included in the Bible's canon (the official list of books considered to be Scripture).

But when we look closer, we can see God's guidance in the story:

- Esther 4:16 mentions fasting (not eating food for a time), which often means people are praying too.
- Esther being in the right place at the right time seems to be more than just luck.
- The fall of Haman (the story's villain) also seems to be guided by God.

The book shows how God protects his people even when they are being treated badly. This has made it a favorite book for many Jewish people throughout history. However, some parts of the book are hard to understand today. For example, the harsh treatment of Haman's sons (9:13–14) is not something we would accept now.

Even though the book of Esther has practical teachings, some people still question whether it truly belongs in the Bible. In the Jewish Bible, Esther is part of a group of five books called the Megilloth. The other books in this group are Ruth, Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes, and Lamentations. The Septuagint (Greek version of the Old Testament) contains 107 extra verses in the book of Esther. These additions form part of the Apocrypha in English versions of the Bible. E

People have been debating whether Esther should be in the Bible for a long time. Even during the Reformation (about 500 years ago), people were still discussing this. Today, some evangelical Christians still have doubts about the book's value. However, most people accept Esther as part of the Bible for two main reasons:

1. Both Jewish and Christian people have accepted it as part of their holy books for a long time.
2. It shows how God takes care of the Jewish people, which is an important idea in the Bible. (You can read more about this idea in Romans 9–11; Revelation 7, 14).

What Is the Background of the Book of Esther?

Some people have noticed a few problems with the history in the book of Esther:

1. The historian Herodotus says that King Xerxes' wife was named Amestris. But the book of Esther talks about a wife named Esther. It is possible that King Xerxes had more than one wife.
2. The book seems to say that Mordecai was sent away from his home (exiled) in 597 BC. If this is true, Mordecai would have been about 120 years old during King Xerxes' rule. But the text of 2:5–6 might mean that Mordecai's great-grandfather was the one who was sent away rather than Mordecai.
3. Some parts of the story (see 1:4; 2:7, 12; 7:9; 9:16) seem hard to believe for modern readers:

- a banquet lasting 180 days
- Esther's 12-month beauty treatment
- a gallows 25.3 meters (83 feet) tall
- the Jews killing 75,000 of Xerxes' subjects

Some people think these details sound more like made-up stories (mythological) than real history. But it is important to remember that sometimes things that seem unbelievable turn out to be true when we learn more about history.

Several things in the book of Esther show that it is set in a real time in history. Ahasuerus, the king in the story, is usually thought to be the same person as King Xerxes. His father was King Darius. We have found inscriptions and relief sculptures from Darius's time. One relief sculpture shows Darius sitting on his throne with Xerxes standing behind him.

People think Xerxes was easy to influence in his personal life. People who wanted to please him (flattering courtiers) could easily change his mind. But in war, Xerxes was a strong leader. He fought hard to get what he wanted. Xerxes stopped a rebellion in Egypt. Then he gathered a navy to attack Athens, a city in Greece. The Greeks won a big sea battle at a place called Salamis in 480 BC. This saved Greece from being completely taken over by Persia. Xerxes eventually lost the war. He went back to live in his beautiful palaces in cities called Persepolis and Susa. After this, Xerxes stopped worshiping the gods of Egypt and Babylon. Instead, he started following Ahuramazda, a Persian god known as the spirit of good.

What Is the Message of the Book of Esther?

The Book of Esther tells a story that happened long ago in Persia, which is now called Iran. The story is about King Ahasuerus, who ruled a big empire from India to Ethiopia (1:1–9). The main city of his empire was called Susa (Shushan), in Persia.

The story begins when Queen Vashti disobeys the king. Because of this, she is no longer queen. The king then looks for a new queen (1:10–22). He chooses a young Jewish woman named Hadassah, who is also called Esther (2:1–18). Esther lives with her relative Mordecai because she has no parents.

Soon after Esther becomes queen, she and Mordecai help save the king's life (verses 19–23). This is important later in the story. A man named Haman becomes very powerful in the king's court. Haman does not like Mordecai, so he makes a plan to kill all the Jewish people in the empire (chapter 3). Mordecai asks Queen Esther to help save the Jewish people. Esther asks the Jews in Susa to stop eating for a time (fast) and pray for help. Then she goes to talk to the king (chapter 4).

One night, the king cannot sleep because of what Esther told him (5:1–6:1). He reads about how Mordecai saved his life, and he decides to honor Mordecai. This happens just when Haman is planning to hurt Mordecai (chapter 6). The king finds out about Haman's evil plan. Haman is punished by being hanged (chapter 7). The king then makes a new law to protect the Jewish people. He also honors Mordecai and gives him an important job (chapter 8). The Jews, by the king's permission, killed the soldiers who would earlier have killed them in Haman's plot (9:1–16). After this, they have a big celebration (9:17–10:3). This celebration became a holiday called Purim. During Purim, people feast, give gifts, and help poor people.

See also Esther (Person); Persia, Persians.

Book of Exodus

The second book of the Bible. The book of Exodus tells the story of when God freed the people of Israel from slavery in Egypt. Few books of the Old Testament are as important for the history and religion of the Israelites as the book of Exodus.

When God freed the Israelites from Egypt, they became a nation for the first time. At Mount Sinai, God made these tribes, who were all descended from Abraham, into one nation that he would rule. The book of Exodus explains how the Israelites returned to settle in the land God had promised Abraham. It also shows how their religious, political, and social life began.

The book of Exodus has a special pattern (called an "exodus motif") that appears throughout the Bible in both the Old and New Testaments. In Psalm 68, David found comfort in remembering that his God was the same God who had rescued Israel from Egypt. The prophet Jeremiah said that God would bring Israel back to their land again. He said this would be even more amazing than when God

brought them out of Egypt (Jeremiah 16:14–15). When Jesus and his parents returned from Egypt, Matthew connected this to the earlier rescue from Egypt (Matthew 2:13–15).

The story of the Jewish people being freed from Egypt is seen as a symbol of God's salvation of all his people, both Israel and the church. Thus, the message of the book of Exodus is key to understanding God's plan of salvation throughout the Bible.

The English title "Exodus" comes from an ancient Greek translation of the Old Testament called the Septuagint. The word "exodus" means "a way out" or "departure." It refers to Israel leaving Egypt. In Hebrew, the book is called *Shemoth*, meaning "these are the names." This Hebrew title comes from the first words of the book, which lists the names of Jacob's sons who went to Egypt with Joseph.

Preview

- Who Wrote the Book of Exodus?
- When Was the Book of Exodus Written?
- What Is the Background of the Book of Exodus?
- Why Was the Book of Exodus Written? What Does It Teach About God?
- What Is the Message of the Book of Exodus?

Who Wrote the Book of Exodus?

According to tradition, Moses wrote Exodus and the other first five books of the Bible (the Pentateuch). This could suggest that Exodus was written at Mount Sinai or shortly after the events there. Evidence supporting this view includes:

1. The book itself says that Moses wrote down God's words (Exodus 17:14; 24:2, 7; 34:27–28). According to the book of Deuteronomy (31:9, 24), Moses wrote the law in a book that was placed beside the ark of the covenant.
2. Many Old Testament writers refer to portions of Exodus as the "law of Moses" (Joshua 8:31; Malachi 4:4).
3. The New Testament, including Jesus, calls Moses the author (Mark 7:10; 12:26; John 1:45; 7:19).

Scholars have different ideas about who wrote Exodus. Some believe Moses wrote almost all of it. One writer claims Moses was just a desert leader who never met the Israelites. Other scholars think different people wrote parts of the book at different times in Israel's history, and someone combined these parts long after Moses died. Some focus on special sections, like the "Song of Moses" (Exodus 15), and study how these developed over time. Another view is that people told the exodus story by word of mouth for many generations before anyone wrote it down.

While some scholars have these different theories, the book itself clearly states that Moses wrote it. There are details in Exodus that suggest the writer saw these events firsthand. For example, the writer remembered exactly 12 springs and 70 palm trees at Elim (Exodus 15:27).

The writer also knew a lot about Egyptian life, customs, and language. The materials described for building the sacred tent (called the tabernacle) provide more evidence. These materials included acacia wood for furniture (Exodus 25:10) and fine leather (possibly the hides from large sea animals) for the outer covering (verse 5). These materials were found in Egypt and the Sinai desert but not in the land of Israel. This suggests the book was written in the desert.

Moses was not only chosen by God to write Exodus, but he was also well-qualified. He was "educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful in speech and action" (Acts 7:22). He also spent 40 years in the Midian and Sinai wilderness, where he learned about the land and its animals. This knowledge helped him write about the places where the Israelites traveled.

The exodus events were very important to Israel's history. These included God freeing them from Egypt and giving them his law. Moses carefully recorded these events so future generations would remember them.

When Was the Book of Exodus Written?

If Moses wrote Exodus, as the book itself says, then he wrote it during his lifetime. Scholars suggest two different times when the Israelites may have left Egypt

The "Late Date" View

This view suggests that the pharaoh who oppressed the Israelites was Seti I. He ruled Egypt from 1304 to 1290 BC. The pharaoh of the exodus

would then be Ramses II. He rules Egypt from 1290 to 1224 BC. The exodus would have occurred in 1290 BC, and the conquest of Canaan would have begun in 1250 BC.

This view is based on two main points:

1. According to Exodus 1:11, the Israelites built the store city of Rameses, so Ramses II must have been ruling at the time. The city of Rameses could have existed earlier under a different name and been renamed later by Ramses II when he rebuilt it. Or, an earlier pharaoh named Ramses may have built it.
2. Archaeologists have found evidence that many cities in Canaan were destroyed around 1250 BC. Some think Joshua and the Israelites caused this destruction. This would mean the exodus happened around 1290 BC. This destruction could also have happened during other times of conflict in the time of the judges, or when other nations attacked the area.

The "Early Date" View

This view says that the pharaoh of the oppression was Thutmose III. He ruled Egypt from 1504 to 1450 BC. The pharaoh of the exodus would then be Amenhotep II. He ruled Egypt from 1450 to 1424 BC. This means the exodus would have happened around 1440 BC, and the conquest would have begun around 1400 BC. Three arguments support this view:

1. If the fourth year of King Solomon was 966 BC, then the 480 years before would place the exodus at 1446 BC (1 Kings 6:1).
2. If the time of Jephthah was 1100 BC, then the 300 years before would place the conquest at 1400 (Judges 11:26).
3. The late date does not leave enough time for the period of the judges, which lasted between 300 and 400 years. Based on these biblical references, the early date seems more likely.

What Is the Background of the Book of Exodus?

Things that happened in Egypt during the time of the exodus help us understand the events in the book of Exodus better. Exodus 12:40 tells us the Israelites lived in Egypt for 430 years. This means Jacob's family settled in Goshen (Genesis 47:4, 11) around 1870 BC, when Egypt was ruled by powerful kings of the 12th royal family.

Later, Egypt became weaker under two new royal families. Around 1730 BC, foreign rulers called the Hyksos took control of northern Egypt. These new rulers were the "new king" who "did not know Joseph" (Exodus 1:8). The Hyksos were worried about the Israelites because they too were foreigners in Egypt. They saw that the Israelites were becoming too numerous and powerful (Exodus 1:9). Their solution was to make the Israelites slaves. The Hyksos used these slaves to build up the city of Rameses, which was then their capital in northern Egypt.

Around 1580 BC, an Egyptian leader named Ahmose drove out the Hyksos and made Egypt Egyptian-ruled again. The Israelites kept growing in number despite their hard work as slaves. So the new Egyptian kings (called the 18th dynasty) kept them as slaves and ordered all Israelite baby boys to be killed. Moses was born around 1560 BC when this order was still in place. The ruler at this time was Pharaoh Thutmose I (1539–1514 BC), who had built a large empire.

Thutmose I's only surviving legal heir was a daughter named Hatshepsut. Her husband became Pharaoh Thutmose II and ruled from 1514 to 1504 BC. When he died, a young relative named Thutmose III was chosen as the next ruler. He was only ten years old. Thutmose III ruled Egypt from 1504 to 1450 BC.

Hatshepsut took control of the kingdom from Thutmose III and ruled for 22 years, from 1503 to 1482 BC. Such a strong-willed woman could have the courage to disobey her father's command by saving the life of a Hebrew baby and raising him in the palace at Thebes.

Hatshepsut kept ruling even after Thutmose III became pharaoh. She may have wanted Moses to become ruler or to have an important position in Egypt. After Hatshepsut died, Thutmose III gained full power and likely wanted to get rid of Moses. This might explain why Moses had to quickly flee to the desert after he killed an Egyptian slave master.

When Thutmose III died in 1450 BC, Moses could return to Egypt. He then confronted the new ruler, Pharaoh Amenhotep II, with God's command: "Let my people go."

Why Was the Book of Exodus Written? What Does It Teach About God?

The purpose of the book of Exodus is to show how God's promise to Abraham in Genesis 15:12–16 was fulfilled when the Lord rescued the Israelites from Egyptian slavery. It also explains:

- The origin of the Passover festival
- The beginning of the nation by establishing a covenant between God and Israel
- The giving of the law on Mount Sinai

The book of Exodus tells the powerful story of a mighty God, creator of the universe, who exists beyond time and space. God intervenes in history to save a group of slaves. God defeats the ruler of the greatest empire on earth and then leads his people to freedom.

Exodus is the story of a family that grows into a multitude. Through God's special agreement (called a "covenant"), a nation is formed. Through God's law, the nation is made stable and set apart from all others.

The book of Exodus tells the story of Moses, an unusual leader. He spent his first 40 years in an Egyptian palace, and his next 40 years taking care of sheep for a priest who lived in the desert. Though Moses did not want to be a leader at first, he opposed Pharaoh, talked with God face-to-face, and wrote almost one-fourth of the Old Testament.

The God of the Exodus story keeps his promises. In Genesis 15:13–16, God made an amazing promise to Abram:

"Then the LORD said to Abram, 'Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated for four hundred years. But I will judge the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward, they will depart with many possessions. You, however, will go to your fathers in peace and be buried at a ripe old age. In the fourth generation your descendants will return here, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.'"

Because of this promise, Joseph, near the end of his life, spoke about how God would bring the Israelites out of Egypt. He even gave instructions about what to do with his body when this happened (Hebrews 11:22).

This promise sets up the main theme of Exodus: how God saves his people. To save (or redeem) means to free people from those who control them and give them freedom. The book of Exodus uses many words to describe how God saves his people:

- It tells of the God who "remembers" his promise to the Hebrew patriarchs (Exodus 2:24; 6:5).
- God "comes down to rescue" the Israelites (3:8).
- God "saves" them (14:30; 15:2) so he can "bring" them out of the land of Egypt (3:10–12).

Redemption involves these aspects:

1. God is the redeemer. In Exodus 6:1–8, God answers Moses's prayer to save his people. He uses the pronoun "I" 18 times to show that he is the one acting. Before that, the Israelites knew God as "*El*," the ancient Near Eastern name for the most powerful god.

   But in Exodus, Israel learned that God's name is "*Yahweh*." That is his personal name, a reminder that he is the God of the covenant who cares for his people. In Exodus 3:14, God tells Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." Some people think this is proof that the name *Yahweh* comes from the Hebrew verb "to be." In Israelite culture, the concept of "name" was the same as "character." Knowing God's name meant knowing his character. Israel knew God as the one who is always present to help them wherever they went (Exodus 3:12; 33:14–16).

2. The reason God saved Israel was his promise to the patriarchs. When God heard the cries of Israel, he remembered his promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Exodus 2:24; compare 6:5). In response to their need, he selected the unwilling Moses to help save them. Moses gave every excuse, but God would not accept them. Moses is an example of how God prepares and helps his chosen servants to achieve his plans.
3. The reason God wanted to save Israel was his grace and love (Exodus 15:13; 20:6; 34:6–7). He saved Israel so they, and the Egyptians, might know him (Exodus 6:7; 7:5; 8:10; 14:18). The Lord worked to show everyone (Moses, the Israelites, Pharaoh, and the Egyptians) that he is the only God. For the ancient Israelites, knowing something meant experiencing it, not just understanding it with their minds. When God acts, he wants people not only to believe but also to trust him and do what he says.
4. God saved Israel through miracles (Exodus 4:21). MIracles are natural events controlled supernaturally by God. They are described as:
    - signs and wonders (Exodus 7:3), great acts of judgment (6:6; 7:4), and "the finger of God" (8:19).

These miracles were not random displays of power but God's chosen acts. Some miracles proved that God sent Moses. The plagues proved that God is the most powerful god. The plagues directly challenged the Egyptian gods and goddesses:

- Osiris, the river god
- Heqet, the frog goddess
- Ra (or Re), the sun god
- Hathor, the cattle goddess

The miracles in the wilderness showed that God would fulfill all his people's needs.

1. The pharaoh was the villain. He represented humanity's rebelliousness when confronted by God's command (Exodus 4:21–23). The pharaoh hardened his heart ten times, which means the pharaoh's heart became stubborn and unresponsive to God. But God was also responsible for hardening the pharaoh's heart, leading to the king's decision to defy him.
2. The Passover showed how God saved his people. God said he would spare those who put lamb's blood around their doorways (Exodus 12:23–27; 15:16). The Passover showed how God saved people through an exchange. The lamb died instead of the firstborn child in each family.
3. Israel received God's redemption. God took them as his special people (Exodus 6:7). They were no longer free to do as they wanted. Even before the exodus, God had claimed the Israelites, telling Pharaoh, "'Israel is My firstborn son, and I told you to let My son go so that he may worship Me'" (Exodus 4:22–23).

4. The price of redemption was obedience. Because he freed Israel from slavery, God gave them the Ten Commandments (listed in Exodus 20:1–17) and the rest of the law for them to obey. The people quickly pledged their obedience (Exodus 19:8; 24:3). But, they disobeyed even quicker (32:8).

   The Lord is holy and wants his people to be holy and completely devoted (Exodus 34:14). So, he must punish disobedience. But God is compassionate, so he also forgives. Throughout Israel's history, God asked for his people to remember the exodus and repent (Micah 6:3–4). Those who were faithful gave thanks to God with Moses's "song of redemption" (Exodus 15; compare Revelation 15:3–4).

What Is the Message of the Book of Exodus?

The book of Exodus can be divided into four parts. Each part describes one aspect of how God was involved in the lives of the Israelites during the 15th century BC.

God Reveals Himself (Exodus 1–6)

The book of Exodus begins with the 70 descendants of Jacob who joined Joseph in Egypt while there was a famine in their land (compare Genesis 46–50). They were prosperous for over a hundred years in the land of Goshen until a new family of Egyptian pharaohs took power in Egypt. These new rulers treated Israel harshly. The Israelites were growing quickly in number, so the Egyptians made them slaves. They forced them to do hard work, like building cities where the pharaoh could store supplies.

The pharaoh then ordered that all baby boys born to Israelite mothers should be killed at birth. The women who helped with births (called midwives) did not follow this order. They chose to obey God instead of the pharaoh, even though they had to lie. God blessed them because they respected him more than the pharaoh.

The pharaoh then made a new order: all Israelite baby boys must be thrown into the Nile River. But one baby, Moses, was saved. The pharaoh's daughter found him in a basket floating on the Nile. She then paid Moses's own mother to take care of him, not knowing it was his real mother. Later, Moses grew up in the pharaoh's palace as the princess's adopted son.

As an adult, Moses chose to identify with his Hebrew relatives, showing the lasting impact of his early teaching from his godly parents (see Hebrews 11:24–26). He tried to free the Israelites from the Egyptians by helping one person at a time. But he had to run away to Midian, a region at the eastern edge of the Sinai Peninsula or in Arabia beyond the northern top of the Gulf of Aqaba. Moses married into the family of Jethro, who was also called Reuel. Reuel (meaning "friend of God") was probably the man's personal name, and Jethro (meaning "excellence") was his title.

Jethro is called a "priest of Midian" (Exodus 2:16). Some scholars suggest that Moses learned about Yahweh (the name of God) from Jethro and later taught this religion to the Israelites. This theory is known as the "Kenite hypothesis." However, the Bible presents a different view: Moses and the Israelites already knew about God before leaving Egypt (Exodus 1:21; Acts 7:24–25). God personally revealed his name, YHWH, to Moses at the burning bush (Exodus 3:14–15). It seems Jethro believed in God only after he saw that God has rescued Israel from the Egyptians(Exodus 18:10–11).

When Moses was in Midian, the Israelites suffered and cried out to God in their pain (Exodus 2:23–25). God responded by coming down to rescue Israel (Exodus 3:8). He appeared to Moses in a burning bush and introduced himself as the same God who promised the patriarchs "a land flowing with milk and honey" (Exodus 2:17). Moses will lead the Israelites there with the help of Aaron, his brother.

Confident in God's presence and miracles, Moses took his wife, Zipporah, and their two sons to Egypt. On the way, the Lord confronts Moses and tries to kill him (Exodus 4:24). That is probably the Hebrew way of saying that Moses became sick with a mortal illness. Moses was going to lead God's people, but he had not followed God's command to circumcise his son (a special ceremony God required for all Israelite boys, Genesis 17:14).

Moses recovered after his son was circumcised and continued on to Egypt, meeting Aaron at Mount Sinai. The Israelites welcomed them more kindly than Pharaoh did. The pharaoh refused to honor

God who sent Moses. Instead of allowing the Israelites to sacrifice to their God in the wilderness, the pharaoh added to their workload. The people complained to Moses, and Moses complained to God. God appeared again to Moses and reassured him that he would deliver Israel with his power (Exodus 6). God was just beginning his plan.

God Delivers Israel (Exodus 7–19)

In Chapters 7–12, God sent ten disasters (called plagues) on the Egyptians. Even before the first plague, Pharaoh had refused to obey God (Exodus 7:13). The first nine plagues follow a recognizable pattern: three cycles of three.

While the first three plagues might have affected both the Egyptians and the Israelites, the final six only affected the Egyptians. The Egyptian magicians were able to duplicate the first two plagues, but they admitted the third was "the finger of God" (Exodus 8:19).

Some scholars identify four attempts by Pharaoh to negotiate terms with Moses, beginning with the plague of flies. But each time, either Moses refuses the limited offer, or Pharaoh ends the negotiation without doing what Moses asks (Exodus 8:25–29; 10:8–11, 24–29). The first plagues were unpleasant, but the final ones brought a lot of suffering. Since many of the plagues were common to that area, they themselves are not miraculous. The miracle was how natural occurrences were multiplied and limited to the land of Egypt.

The nine plagues hardened the pharaoh's heart even more. So, God prepared one final plague: the death of every firstborn male. God warned the Israelites to be prepared to leave. To avoid the plague, they had to paint blood from a pure male sheep or goat on their doorways. While they were eating the Passover meal, the angel of death began moving through the land of Egypt. In his grief, the pharaoh allowed the Israelites to leave the land. They had been freed. Just as God promised, God led the Israelites in a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night.

But, once again, the pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he pursued the Israelites. God parted the waters of the sea with a great wind. The literal meaning of the body of water is "sea of reeds." This term can refer to any shoreline where the water is shallow enough for reeds to grow (see 1 Kings 9:26, where the same term refers to the Gulf of Aqaba near Eloth). Whatever the location, God defeated the Egyptians there. The rescue was complete.

Moses and the Israelites responded with faith in God and with a song of victory and praise (Exodus 14:31–15:21). But soon their praise turned into complaining because of:

- bitter water (Exodus 15:22–26),
- a lack of meat and bread (16:1–15), and
- a lack of water (17:1–7).

In each situation, God provided for their need. He also gave them victory over the Amalekites (Exodus 17:8–16). When the Israelites arrived at Mount Sinai, Jethro and Moses's family rejoined him. Jethro confessed his faith in the Israelite's God and shared a meal with the leaders. He also helped Moses reorganize their legal system. He the returned to Midian (Exodus 18).

Next, the Israelites arrived at Mount Sinai (also called Horeb, Exodus 3:1). They prepared to meet the Lord who had rescued them (Exodus 3:12). The Lord established a covenant with Israel, making them his people, "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." They quickly responded, "We will do everything that the LORD has spoken" (Exodus 19:5–8).

God Instructs Israel (Exodus 20–24)

God freed the Israelites from slavery, so he had the right to tell them how to live. The commands God gave them at Mount Sinai were not hard rules to make life difficult. Instead, they were instructions to help them live well as God's people (Exodus 20:2–3).

The Law (or Torah, meaning "instruction") given at Sinai has three parts:

1. **The Ten Commandments** (Exodus 20) concern a person's relationship to God and other people. The Ten Commandments are based on God's permanent nature. These laws are unique in the history of the nations.
2. **The Judgments** (Exodus 21–23) are social rules for governing the people while living under God's command. They are similar to the laws of the neighboring nations.
3. **Ordinances** (Exodus 24–31) are rules for religious ceremonies.

Moses received the laws during his time with God on the mountain.

The Ten Commandments form the basis of all other laws in Israel (Exodus 20:1–17). The first five are about honoring the Lord. The second five are about respecting others. The last commandment is about a person's thoughts and intentions. This guards against all sins not covered by the first nine commandments.

The judgments in Exodus 21–23 discuss:

- How masters and slaves should treat each other (21:1–11)
- What crimes are punishable by death (21:12–17)
- How to pay for hurting people or damaging property (21:18–22:15)
- How people should treat each other (22:16–23:9)
- Special days of rest (Sabbaths), feasts, and offerings (23:10–19)

Many judgments would only apply once Israel was living in the land God promised them. God warned them not to rebel or follow the religious practices of other peoples. God also promised that if the people obeyed his commands, he would:

- Drive out their enemies
- Protect them from sickness
- Give them success (Exodus 23:22, 25–27).

Exodus 24 records a reaffirmation of the covenant between God and Israel. Moses sealed (or made it official) with the blood from a sacrifice. After this, God showed himself to Israel's leaders, letting them see some of his glory. After this, Moses climbed the mountain again to receive:

- Stone tablets with God's commands
- Instructions for building the meeting tent (tabernacle)
- Rules about priests and how to worship God

God's Presence with his People (Exodus 25–40)

Before rescuing Israel, God told Moses, "I will take you as My own people, and I will be your God. Then you will know that I am the LORD your God, who brought you out from under the yoke of the Egyptian" (Exodus 6:7). Moses had seen God keep this wonderful promise. But there was one more step: "They are to make a sanctuary for Me, so that I may dwell among them" (Exodus 25:8).

God could live among his people because he had come down to save them and because they promised to obey him. God asked people to give materials for this sacred place if they wanted to give. He showed Moses exactly how to build the tabernacle and what furniture to put in it.

God chose Aaron and his sons to serve as priests in the tabernacle. He gave rules about different offerings, including a special yearly ceremony called the Day of Atonement. God chose two men, Bezalel and Oholiab, to build the tabernacle and make its furniture. God filled them with his Spirit to do this special work.

The Israelites had just promised to obey God completely. But when Moses stayed on the mountain for 40 days, they became impatient. They told Aaron to make them an idol (a statue to worship). Aaron gave in to their demands and made a golden calf to worship, like the false gods of other nations (Exodus 32:4).

God told Moses about the people's worship of idols, wild celebrations, and bad behavior. God said that he was angry enough to destroy them all and start again with Moses's descendants. Moses begged God to spare Israel until God decided not to destroy them. Then Moses went down from the mountain to punish the people. Moses asked again for God to forgive Israel, and God in his mercy pardons their terrible sin (34:8–10).

God offered to make another covenant with the people (Exodus 34:10). Moses spent 40 more days with God and wrote the commands on new stone tablets. These replaced the ones he had broken when he saw the people worshiping the golden calf.

When Moses came back to the people, his face was glowing because he had been with God. He had to cover his face with a cloth because of this bright light.

Now that God had forgiven Israel, the people could start building the sacred tent. The people brought so many gifts for building it that Moses had to tell them to stop giving.

Finally, everything was ready. Moses checked all the work, and they set up the tabernacle on the first day of the first month. This was almost a year after the first Passover. Then, the priests were given their special duties. They lit the lamps. They offered the first sacrifice.

A cloud came down and filled the tabernacle, showing that God's presence was there. God was now living among his people, just as he had promised. This is how the book of Exodus ends.

See also Timeline of the Bible (Old Testament); Egypt, Egyptian; Exodus, The; Feasts and Festivals of Israel; Israel, History of; Moses; Plagues upon Egypt; Tabernacle; Temple; Commandments, The Ten.

Book of Ezra

The book of Ezra is one of the historical books in the Old Testament, describing Israel's history. It continues the story from the end of 2 Chronicles and shares events closely connected to the book of Nehemiah.

Preview

• What Is the Book of Ezra?

• What Is the Background of the Book of Ezra?

• Where Does the Information in the Book of Ezra Come From?

• When Was the Book of Ezra Written?

• In What Languages Was the Book of Ezra Written? What Are Its Different Versions?

• Why Was the Book of Ezra Written? What Is It About?

What Is the Book of Ezra?

Throughout history, many religious scholars have considered the books of Ezra and Nehemiah to be two parts of the same book. In the Talmud tractate Baba Bathra 15a, the rabbis and scribes considered Ezra and Nehemiah to be a single book. The Jewish historian Josephus also considered the two books to be one when he listed 22 Old Testament books (Apion 1.8). Some church fathers, such as Melito of Sardis and Jerome, thought of them as one book. The Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament) also combined them into one book called 2 Ezra to set it apart from another book called 1 Ezra. Later, the Latin Bible (Vulgate) split them into two books: Ezra became 1 Ezra and Nehemiah became 2 Ezra.

What Is the Background of the Book of Ezra?

In 539 BC, King Cyrus of Persia took control of Babylon, and the Jewish people came under Persian rule. Here are the Persian kings who ruled during this important time:

- Cyrus ruled from 539 to 530 BC. He allowed the Jewish people and other captives to return to their homeland (Ezra 1).
- Cambyses rule from 529 to 522 BC.
- Gaumata rule in 522 BC. He took control of the kingdom by force.
- Darius I ruled from 521 to 486 BC (see Ezra 5:6).
- Xerxes I rule from 486 to 465 BC. He is called Ahasuerus in the Old Testament (see Ezra 4:6).
- Artaxerxes I ruled from 465 to 424 BC (see Ezra 4:7–23; 7:1–10:44).

Ezra and Nehemiah did their work during the time between King Cyrus and King Artaxerxes I. However, some experts think Ezra lived later, during the time of King Artaxerxes II. He ruled from 404 to 359 BC.

Where Does the Information in the Book of Ezra Come From?

Many people believe that Ezra himself collected and wrote the material in this book. In chapters 7–10, Ezra writes using words like "I" and "me" to tell his own story. He probably used these personal accounts as the main part of the book and added other information from different sources.

Some parts of the book are written in Aramaic, an ancient language different from Hebrew. Some people thought this meant the book was written

after Ezra's time. However, the Aramaic used in Ezra's book is very similar to fifth-century BC Aramaic papyri from the Jewish community in Elephantine, Egypt. This suggests the book could have been written during Ezra's time.

The book of Ezra combines different types of writings. It includes Ezra's personal stories, official government documents, royal commands, and other historical records. The book uses four main types of sources to tell its story.

Ezra's Personal Stories

In some parts of the book, Ezra writes in first person singular (using words like "I" and "me") to tell his own story (Ezra 7:27–9:15). These sections are surrounded by parts written in third-person narrative where someone else tells the story about Ezra (Ezra 7:1–26; 10). These personal accounts were likely taken from reports that Ezra wrote about his work.

Aramaic Documents

Aramaic was the official language used by the Persian Empire for government business. Several documents in the book of Ezra are written in Aramaic. For example, a letter of complaint was sent to Artaxerxes I about rebuilding the city walls, and Ezra included the official reply (Ezra 4:8–23). There is also a letter from Darius I and the king's reply (Ezra 5:1–6:18). An official order from Artaxerxes allowed Ezra to return home, including a list of items given to him (Ezra 7:12–26). These documents are in Aramaic because they were official letters between government officials.

Hebrew Lists

Ezra included several lists of names written in Hebrew. These lists had different purposes:

- An official order from the Persian government allowing Jewish people to return to their homeland (Ezra 1:2–4). This was a Jewish version of King Cyrus's general command showing he cared about all the people under his rule. The same command appears again in Aramaic in 6:3–5, probably copied from the original royal document.
- Lists of people who returned to rebuild their homeland (Ezra 2; also Nehemiah 7)
- A list of people who came back with Ezra when King Artaxerxes I gave permission (Ezra 8:1–14)
- Lists of men who had married women who did not follow the Jewish faith (Ezra 10:18–43)

Narrative

Ezra wrote the remaining parts of the book himself. When writing about events that happened before his time, like the first group's return from Babylon, he probably used stories that were either written down or passed down by word of mouth. For events that happened during his own time, he wrote about what he saw and did himself.

When Was the Book of Ezra Written?

Historians usually identify the Artaxerxes mentioned in Ezra 7:1 as Artaxerxes I Longimanus. This means Ezra arrived in Jerusalem in 458 BC (Ezra 7:8). He began his work there about 13 years before Nehemiah, who came to Jerusalem in 445 BC.

However, not everyone agrees with these dates. Some historians think Nehemiah worked during the time of King Artaxerxes I, who ruled from 464 to 424 BC. But Ezra came later, during the time of King Artaxerxes II Mnemon, who ruled from 404 to 359 BC. This idea creates a problem because Nehemiah 8:2 says Ezra worked with Nehemiah.

More evidence comes from some ancient Jewish documents found in Egypt (called the Elephantine papyri) from around 407–400 BC. These documents mention two important people:

- Johanan, who was the high priest in Jerusalem
- Sanballat, who was the governor of Samaria

Johanan was the grandson of Eliashib, and we know that Nehemiah worked with Eliashib (Nehemiah 3:1, 20). The Bible mentions that Nehemiah went to Jerusalem twice:

- in the 20th year of Artaxerxes (or 445 BC, Nehemiah 2:1)
- again in the 32nd year (or 433 BC, Nehemiah 13:6)

During this time, Eliashib served as the high priest and worked with Ezra.

This timeline supports the traditional dates for when the book of Ezra was written. If Ezra had come during the time of King Artaxerxes II (around 397 BC), he would have been too late to work with Johanan as high priest.

In What Languages Was the Book of Ezra Written? What Are Its Different Versions?

Most of the book of Ezra is written in Hebrew, except for three sections 4:7, 6:18, and 7:12–26, which are written in Aramaic.

The style of Hebrew used in Ezra is similar to other books written around the same time, like Daniel, Haggai, and 2 Chronicles. It is different from the Hebrew used in later books like Ecclesiasticus.

The Aramaic parts of Ezra are written in a style similar to the Elephantine papyri from around 407–400 BC. The book also uses several Persian names and words, such as Bigvai, Mithredath, and Elam. All these language clues suggest the book was written in the fifth century BC.

The traditional Hebrew version of Ezra (called the Masoretic Text) has been carefully copied over time and appears to be complete. The Septuagint version is slightly shorter. Among the ancient Jewish scrolls found near the Dead Sea, only small parts of Ezra 4 and 5 have been discovered..

Why Was the Book of Ezra Written? What Is It About?

The book of Ezra tells the story of one of the most important events in Jewish history: when the Jewish people returned to their homeland after being forced to live in Babylon. The story focuses on two main events:

- First, in 538 BC, a group of Jewish people returned home under the leadership of Zerubbabel(chapters 1–6)
- Second, about 80 years later in 458 BC, another group returned led by Ezra himself (chapters 7–10)

Ezra writes about these events from the viewpoint of a priest. He shows how important it was that the people came back to their land and rebuilt their community. These events would shape the future of the Jewish people in many important ways.

We do not know much about Ezra's work in the Persian government, but he seems to have been an important leader. He was like a high government official who helped manage Jewish affairs. Most of his work took place in the area west of the Euphrates River, which the Persians called the province “Beyond the River.”

King Artaxerxes trusted Ezra and gave him full power to make decisions that would help both the Jewish people and the Persian Empire (Ezra 7:21–26). The book lists Ezra's family history in Ezra 7:1–5. It describes him as a teacher who knew the law of Moses very well. Because he was a descendant of Zadok the priest, he had the authority to teach others about God's laws (called the Torah, which contains the rules and teachings God gave to Moses).

Chapter 4 tells about people who tried to stop the Jews from rebuilding the temple and the city walls. Ezra organized this chapter by similar events rather than in the order they happened. While describing how people opposed rebuilding the temple in the past (Ezra 5:1–5), he also wrote about similar problems happening in his own time. People tried to stop the Jews from rebuilding Jerusalem's walls (Ezra 5:7–23).

There was a long gap in time between when King Xerxes (also called Ahasuerus) ruled and the early years of King Artaxerxes's rule. During this time, some people complained to the Persian rulers that the Jewish people were rebuilding Jerusalem's wall. Because of these complaints, the building work had to stop for a while.

This helps us understand that Ezra was writing about how enemies kept trying to harm the Jewish people. We know that Rehum and Shimshai (two of

these enemies) lived in the 460s BC, during the early rule of King Artaxerxes I. They could not have opposed the temple building in the 520s BC because they were not alive then.

The first part of this chapter tells about the difficulties the Jewish people faced when trying to rebuild their destroyed temple. It starts with their return home during King Cyrus's rule (Ezra 4:1–5) and continues until the time of King Darius (Ezra 4:24). In 520 BC, the prophet Haggai encouraged the people to start building the new temple.

In chapter 5, Ezra continues telling the story about the temple. He describes how the Jewish people faced many problems and delays while trying to build it. The Persian officials had to search through their old records before they found the original document that gave permission to build the temple (Ezra 5:7–6:5).

See also Ezra (Person) #1; Postexilic Period.

Book of Habakkuk

The eighth book of the Minor Prophets in the Old Testament.

Preview

- Who Wrote the Book of Habakkuk?
- When Was the Book of Habakkuk Written?
- What Is the Background of the Book of Habakkuk?
- Why Was the Book of Habakkuk Written? What Does It Teach About God?
- What Is the Message of the Book of Habakkuk?

Who Wrote the Book of Habakkuk?

We know very little about Habakkuk except what we learn from the book of Habakkuk itself. The book calls him a prophet (Habakkuk 1:1; 3:1). A prophet was someone who spoke God's messages to the people of Israel.

The prayer of chapter 3 includes several notes about music (Habakkuk 3:1, 3, 9, 13, 19). These musical notes suggest that Habakkuk may have helped with music in the temple. If this is true, he might have been from one of the Levite families (priests who served in the temple). An apocryphal book called Bel and the Dragon mentions Habakkuk as “the son of Jesus of the tribe of Levi,” which might support this idea.

The book shows us that Habakkuk cared deeply about right and wrong. He was troubled by the unfair things happening in his society.

When Was the Book of Habakkuk Written?

We cannot be exactly sure when Habakkuk wrote his book, but the text gives us some clues. In Habakkuk 1:5–6, Habakkuk talks about God "raising up" the Chaldeans. The Chaldeans were groups of tribes who lived in part of the Assyrian Empire. They often caused problems for their Assyrian rulers.

In 625 BC, the Chaldeans successfully rebelled against Assyrian control. Their leader Nabopolassar became king and ruled from 625 to 605 BC. The Chaldeans then took control of all Babylonia and began to expand their territory.

Many scholars think Habakkuk wrote his prophecy shortly before 625, during the time of King Josiah (who ruled from 640–609 BC). However, Habakkuk 1:6 might be talking about a later time when the Chaldeans were already known for being fierce warriors. Habakkuk describes the Chaldeans as marching across the world to conquer it (1:6–8). Their reputation for military strength fits better with the time after the Battle of Carchemish in 605 BC. In this battle, King Nebuchadnezzar II defeated Egypt and made Babylon an important world power. Their reputation might also come from when they captured the city of Nineveh in 612 BC.

The social problems Habakkuk describes seem to match the end of King Josiah's rule. Even though Josiah made many religious reforms after finding the book of the law in the temple (2 Kings 22:8), Habakkuk says society was full of "destruction and violence" (Habakkuk 1:3). The courts were unfair, and good people were being treated badly (verse 4).

Since Habakkuk might have been talking about problems in the whole world, not just in Judah, his ministry probably started between 612 and 605 BC. He likely continued preaching during the time of King Jehoiakim, who ruled from 609 to 598 BC.

What Is the Background of the Book of Habakkuk?

The time after King Josiah's death was one of the most difficult periods in Judah's history. In 612 BC, the Babylonians destroyed the Assyrian city of Nineveh. Within two years, they had removed all remaining Assyrian rule in the region of Mesopotamia.

Egypt, which had been friendly with Assyria, tried to take control of the western parts of the former Assyrian Empire. The Egyptians marched to Carchemish, an important city on the Euphrates River. King Josiah tried to stop them but died in the battle.

The Egyptians then made Jehoiakim king instead of Jehoahaz, who should have been the next king after Josiah. Jehoiakim had to do what Egypt wanted, and the people of Judah were forced to pay heavy taxes. During this time, many people's faith began to weaken. The religious reforms under Josiah had not brought blessings to the nation. Instead, they had lost their freedom. Society changed from being fairly stable to being full of oppression and violence (see Jeremiah 22:17).

In 604 BC, the Babylonians moved into the Syro-Palestinian area, meeting little resistance. King Jehoiakim switched his loyalty to King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, who kept moving south. When Pharaoh Neco's army fought against the Babylonians, both sides lost many soldiers and Nebuchadnezzar went back to Babylon. Jehoiakim then changed sides again and supported Egypt. In 598 BC, the Babylonians returned to Syro-Palestine, starting a campaign that would end with Jerusalem's fall in 586 BC.

Why Was the Book of Habakkuk Written? What Does It Teach About God?

The Book of Habakkuk helps us understand two main things:

- how God's people should think about evil in the world, and
- how God brings justice when people do wrong.

Habakkuk asks important questions about how God works in history. These might be his own questions or questions that other people were asking. For example, he asks why God seems to do nothing while evil continues. God answers that he punishes evil in his own time and way.

The book shows that evil does not win forever. Throughout history, evil rulers and nations have fallen. People who trust God should look at history with faith, believing that God rules in a right way.

While the book does not explain why God allows evil to exist, it teaches that faithful people will see God's work in history through the perspective of faith. In Chapter 3, Habakkuk looks back at history and describes how God has helped his people.

One of the most important ideas in the book is that God controls everything that happens. Even nations that do not follow God are under God's control. Nations rise and fall not by chance, but because God allows it to happen.

What Is the Message of the Book of Habakkuk?

Habakkuk's First Question and God's Answer (1:1–11)

The book begins with Habakkuk asking God some hard questions. He sees many wrong things happening in his society and asks God how long he will let this continue. Many people ask this same question when they see evil in a world governed by God, who is in control.

God's answer surprised Habakkuk. God said he was already doing something about the evil in the world. God was sending the Chaldeans to punish the people of Judah. The Bible describes the Chaldeans as a powerful army that destroys everything in its path (Habakkuk 1:6–11). This answer troubled Habakkuk. He wondered why God would use such cruel people to accomplish his purposes.

Habakkuk's first question leads to several other questions. Why does God seem to ignore the problem of evil? Why does God allow it to continue? It often seems that God does not respond when people expect him to.

When God does respond, he reveals that he will use the Babylonians to punish the evil in Judah. Habakkuk's prayer was answered, but it was not what he expected. Instead of using a righteous nation, God would use a hated and evil nation to address the wrongs of his own people. Though this was confusing for Habakkuk, he was comforted by the fact that God was still in control of history (Habakkuk 1:5–6). God governs the rise and fall of nations, using even evil nations to accomplish his will.

Habakkuk's Second Question and God's Answer (1:12–2:5)

Habakkuk's first question was not fully answered by God's first response. He accepted that God was using the Babylonians to punish Judah's sins (Habakkuk 1:12). But he asks God another

question: “You cannot tolerate wrongdoing. So why do You tolerate the faithless? Why are You silent while the wicked swallow up those more righteous than themselves?” (Habakkuk 1:13). Habakkuk suggests that God sees what the evil Chaldeans do but does not punish them for their wrongs. Habakkuk still cannot understand how God can use an evil nation to punish his own people.

But Habakkuk did learn something important from God's first answer. He began by saying that God is eternal, unlike the Babylonians who only trusted in their military strength: “O LORD, my God, my Holy One? We will not die. O LORD” (Habakkuk 1:12). The prophet was probably thinking about the previous verse, which contrasts the Chaldeans’ reliance on their own military strength with Judah’s God, who is eternal and steadfast.

Habakkuk's problem was still not resolved. Next, he described the Chaldeans as aggressive, comparing them to fishermen who capture people in their nets and then worship their nets (Habakkuk 1:15–16). He asked God if the Chaldeans would continue to destroy other nations (Habakkuk 1:17).

After asking these questions, Habakkuk waited for God's answer (Habakkuk 2:1). God told him to write down the answer clearly because it was important, though it would not happen right away (Habakkuk 2:2, 3).

Then God gave one of the most important verses in the Old Testament about faith: "but the righteous will live by faith" (Habakkuk 2:4). This verse became central to Paul’s teachings and the Protestant Reformation. Paul cited Habakkuk 2:4 when discussing justification by faith (Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11). This passage was also important in the New Testament book of Hebrews (Hebrews 10:38–39).

In the Old Testament, "faith" means "firmness” or "strength." The word is used to describe things that give strong support, like door posts (2 Kings 18:16; Isaiah 22:23). When referring to God, it means faithfulness or unwavering commitment to his promises. For people, it means completely trusting in God and his promises. In the Old Testament, faith means actively trusting and following God. It is not just an idea. Faith means truly committing to God with your whole heart. This kind of faith shows itself through trust in God rather than through following religious rules.

In Habakkuk 2:4, God says that righteous people will live by keeping their trust in God strong, even during difficult times. Jesus shared this teaching in his story (the parable of the sower) about seeds growing in different kinds of soil (Matthew 13:21). James also wrote about staying faithful during difficult times (James 1:12).

God's answer to Habakkuk was clear: God does punish evil but in his own time and way. People who truly trust God will keep believing even when evil is not quickly punished. True faith means trusting that God rules the world in the right way.

A Taunt-Song Celebrating the Defeat of the Chaldeans (2:6–20)

After suggesting the Chaldeans would decline and be defeated, Habakkuk writes a taunt-song (meant to humiliate the Chaldeans) about what will happen to them. His words came true when the Medes and Persians later defeated the Babylonian Empire.

In his taunt-song, Habakkuk says that Babylon’s "creditors" will rise against her (Habakkuk 2:7). This suggests that other nations will suddenly appear to destroy Babylon. Babylon will be defeated because of how they treated other nations. Habakkuk 2:8 says: "Because you have plundered many nations, the remnant of the people will plunder you." The Old Testament principle of retributive justice teaches that God's justice applies to everyone, not just his followers.

King Nebuchadnezzar built many buildings in Babylon, but Habakkuk says even these buildings cry out against the cruel way they were built (Habakkuk 2:9–12).

Habakkuk speaks against the Chaldeans because of their extreme cruelty but also because of their shameful treatment of captive peoples. He uses a vivid metaphor to illustrate this, comparing it to making people drunk to expose their shame (Habakkuk 2:15).

At the end of his song, Habakkuk criticizes the Chaldeans for worshipping idols made of wood and stone (Habakkuk 2:18–19). The Chaldeans, like other pagan peoples, believed their success came from these idols. But, since idols are powerless to help them, Babylon will fall.

Habakkuk ends with a powerful contrast: while people worship lifeless idols, the true God is alive in his temple. He tells everyone to be quiet and wait for God's judgment to come. “But the LORD is in His holy temple; let all the earth be silent before Him” (Habakkuk 2:20). God is real and God is in control.

Habakkuk tells everyone to be quiet and wait for God's judgment to come.

The Prayer of Habakkuk (3:1–19)

The prophecy of Habakkuk ends with a prayer that is like some Old Testament psalms. This prayer includes a title (Habakkuk 3:1) and several musical notations.

Some scholars argue that this chapter might not originally belong to Habakkuk. They think it could have been added in the postexilic period (after the Jews returned from living in Babylon) because it seems different from the rest of the book. However, it is also possible that the prophet himself, or a scribe working for him, added the psalm to his collection of prophecies. The musical notations in this chapter do not mean the prayer had to be written in a later period because many early psalms have similar musical notations.

The prayer matches Habakkuk's earlier messages. It talks about how God will judge his enemies (Habakkuk 3:16), and praises God who is in control (Habakkuk 3:3). These are the main ideas of the earlier chapters.

This prayer shows how much Habakkuk's faith has grown. Earlier, he questioned how God was working in the world. Now, after seeing how God works in history, his faith has become strong and certain.

See also Habakkuk (Person); Israel, History of; Prophecy; Prophet, Prophetess.

Book of Jashar

The Book of Jashar was an ancient Hebrew book of songs that no longer exists today. It was most likely a collection of songs that celebrated the great deeds of Hebrew heroes.

References to the Book of Jashar in the Old Testament

The Old Testament mentions this book in a few places. First, it appears when Joshua commands the sun and moon to stop moving during his battle with five kings (Joshua 10:13). Second, it is mentioned when David writes a sad song about the deaths of Saul and Jonathan (2 Samuel 1:17–27)

There might be a third mention of the book in the Old Testament. When Solomon dedicated the temple, he spoke special words (1 Kings 8:12–13). These words may have been written in the Book of Jashar. According to the Septuagint (Greek translation of the Old Testament), the writer of 1 Kings 8:12–13 uses the same language as Joshua 10:12–13. The writer then asks if Solomon's words were written in the "Book of Song."

Some scholars believe two things about this third mention.

1. They think the question about the Book of Song might have been lost from the Hebrew text over time. They believe this because the complete quote appears in the Greek translation after Solomon's prayer in 1 Kings 8:14–53.
2. They think some Hebrew letters might have been switched around. This would explain why the Greek translation says "Song" instead of "Jashar."

If these ideas are correct, then Solomon's words in 1 Kings 8:12–13 would have been part of the Book of Jashar.

The Book of Song

Some scholars think "Book of Song" might actually be the correct name for this book, rather than "Book of Jashar." They have several reasons for thinking this:

1. All the parts we know from this book are poems or songs.
2. Scholars have had trouble explaining exactly what the word "Jashar" means in Hebrew.
3. The word "Jashar" looks similar to several Hebrew words that mean "to sing."

Because of these connections, some scholars believe that "Book of Song" describes the book's contents better than "Book of Jashar."

What Was in the Book of Jashar?

We cannot know for certain exactly what kind of book the Book of Jashar was. However, by looking at the three passages that mention it, we can see that it probably contained many different types of songs:

- The first passage shows Joshua asking God to make the daylight last longer. He needed more daylight so the people of Israel could win an important battle.
- The second passage contains David's beautiful song about Saul and Jonathan after they died.
- The third passage is Solomon's words at the temple. In these words, Solomon praises God as being more powerful than both religious ceremonies and the natural world.

When Was the Book of Jashar Created?

We know even less about when and how the Book of Jashar was created than we know about what it contained. Some scholars believe that it was a collection of songs from before the time before kings ruled Israel. Some scholars think that it was an oral tradition from the time of King Solomon. Others suggest that it was a tool to preserve important events in Israel's history during the time kings ruled Israel. This has led to the suggestion that the Song of Miriam in Exodus 15:21 and the Song of Deborah in Judges 5 may have been part of the collection.

Many people are interested in the book. This has led some people to create fake copies of the book or wrongly claim other writings as being part of it.

Book of Jeremiah

The second prophetic book in the Old Testament's order of the Prophets.

Preview

- Author
- Authenticity
- The Book of Jeremiah and the Septuagint
- Background
- Date
- Origin and Destination
- Purpose
- Teaching
- Outline and Content

Author

Most scholars agree that the prophet from Anathoth wrote the book of Jeremiah, but some questions remain about certain parts, especially Jeremiah 52. The use of the third person does not disprove Jeremiah's authorship. Jeremiah used the first, second, and third person in the same context. For example, Jeremiah 32:6–7 states: "Jeremiah replied [third person], "The word of the LORD came to me [first person]...the son of your uncle Shallum, is coming to you [second person]."

The passage of time strongly argues against Jeremiah writing Jeremiah 52. Jeremiah was born around 657 BC. Evil-merodach freed Jehoiachin (Jeremiah 52:31) about 95 years later. Jeremiah 52:33 describes events continuing beyond this period. The location issue also suggests Jeremiah did not write it, as Jeremiah lived in Egypt (Jeremiah 43:6–7) while Jehoiachin was in Babylon. Additionally, Jeremiah ends his writing with Jeremiah 51, making Jeremiah 52 an editorial addition. Since Jeremiah 52 is similar to 2 Kings 24:18–25:30, other parts of Jeremiah that resemble sections of 2 Kings might have been written by someone else.

The table below displays these sections and includes harmonic passages in 2 Chronicles. The first column shows the historical sequence in chronological order. The last column gives a brief summary of the content.

Baruch worked as Jeremiah's secretary. Their relationship lasted many years. The prophet encouraged and blessed his helper (Jeremiah 45:5). According to local customs, the scribe could write

some of the prophet's messages in his own words. This would not deny divine inspiration.

Authenticity

Many references in biblical and nonbiblical sources confirm that Jeremiah lived and wrote most of the book with his name. Examples include Daniel 9, Ecclesiasticus 49, Josephus's *Antiquities* 10, and the Talmud: *Baba Bathra*. Contemporary biblical books and secular histories from Babylon, Egypt, and Persia confirm the truth of Jeremiah's historical sections.

Some scholars tried to discredit the parts of Jeremiah that were not included in the Septuagint. They attributed some sections to later writers due to style differences, like Jeremiah 30–33, or spelling differences, as seen in Jeremiah 27–29. They also pointed to linguistic issues, such as Jeremiah 10:11, which is in Aramaic, possibly as an added note.

Critics also doubted Jeremiah's authorship because they believed some prophecies were written later than the context suggests. They thought predictive writing should only occur after events happen. However, these reasons are not enough to doubt its authenticity. The Hebrew text should be prioritized over the Septuagint. During this time, Jews commonly interacted with Aramaic (see Ezra 4–7; Daniel 2–7), explaining the Aramaic presence. A writer may use different styles due to various situations and purposes. Baruch might have written or edited parts of this book. For believers, predictions before events are not problematic.

The Book of Jeremiah and the Septuagint

The translation of Jeremiah in the Septuagint has unique issues that need attention. The translators of the Septuagint made mistakes. They left out about 2,300 Hebrew words. After Jeremiah 23, errors, omissions, and mixed order show confusion. However, the Dead Sea Scrolls have texts with both Hebrew and Septuagint orders, showing both are ancient. Both versions have suffered from scribes' errors and time. The Septuagint strays more from the original but offers valuable clues to solve some text issues. A major change in the Septuagint is the removal of Jeremiah 46–51 from the Hebrew order. These chapters are placed where 25:13b–14 was removed. They are renumbered 26–31 and are mixed and changed from the Hebrew Masoretic Text order.

Background

This is fully discussed in the previous entry.

See Jeremiah (Person) #1.

Date

The order of Jeremiah's messages is a major problem that cannot be fully solved. However, the book was written during Jeremiah's ministry, around 627 to 586 BC.

Origin and Destination

Jeremiah started his ministry in Anathoth and then moved to Jerusalem. He stayed there until he had to join the disobedient refugees in Egypt around 584 BC. Before King Jehoiachin's deportation in 597 BC, Jeremiah spoke to the king and the people in Judah. Later, he also addressed the captives in Babylon, as seen in Jeremiah 29. After moving to Egypt, he spoke to the Jews there.

Purpose

God's mission for Jeremiah outlined his role: "See, I have appointed you today over nations and kingdoms to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and plant" (Jeremiah 1:10). Jeremiah, as a "chief governor" over nations, was to challenge existing religious and social systems by preaching against moral and spiritual sins. The physical destruction by the Egyptians, Assyrians, and Babylonians supported the truth spoken by Jeremiah. He consistently condemned moral and religious wrongdoing, urged submission to God's punishment through Babylon, and promised blessings for those who obeyed. When Zedekiah sought advice (Jeremiah 38:14), Jeremiah's response was predictable. When the refugee leaders asked if they should go to Egypt, the answer was already clear (Jeremiah 42:3). The people often rejected God's message, pretending to seek His will but not intending to follow it.

Part of Jeremiah's purpose is to look to the distant future when the new covenant will replace the old (Jeremiah 31:31–37). At that time, a changed people focused on obedience, not sin, will receive God's promised kingdom.

Teaching

When a nation sins, it faces punishment. This truth is very clear. Both non-Jews and Jews face the same judgment because God is not only the God of Israel.

Individuals are not ignored in divine judgments on nations. God shows each person the path of life and death (Jeremiah 21:8) and urges each to choose life (27:13).

Jeremiah shows human sinfulness by asking if people can change their skin color or leopards their spots (Jeremiah 13:23). Human sinfulness is too deep to measure (Jeremiah 17:9–10). People even love lies (Jeremiah 5:30–31). Yet God promises to change those who call on him (Jeremiah 33:3) by giving them a "heart" (24:7; 32:38–41) as part of the new covenant (Jeremiah 31:33–35). The Messiah, who completes the saving work, is called The LORD Our Righteousness, the King, a righteous Branch, David a righteous Branch (Jeremiah 23:5–6; 33:15–16).

A future nation will consist of people who accept this salvation. After enduring a difficult period, the Jews will recognize their Messiah's true identity. They will believe, accept him with sincere regret, be cleansed, and be gathered from all countries by the all-powerful God.

Outline and Content

Many people do not see a clear order, but a careful reading of Jeremiah shows a grouping by content. The following outline suggests this:

1. Introduction (1)
2. Prophecies against the Jews (2–25)
3. History—Events and Hardships of Jeremiah before the Siege (26–29)
4. The Book of Hope, written during the Siege (30–33)
5. History—Events and Hardships of Jeremiah after the Siege (34–45)
6. Prophecies Against the Nations (46–51)
7. Conclusion (52)

The prophet begins his ministry by speaking against the sins of Jerusalem (Jeremiah 2:1–3:5). He continues with similar messages (through Jeremiah 4) and ends with words of judgment (Jeremiah 5–6). The message at the temple gate (Jeremiah 7–10) leads to a proclamation against those who break the covenant (Jeremiah 11–13). The lament over the drought (Jeremiah 14) and the following hardships (Jeremiah 15) are similar to many other expressions of grief. Jeremiah, like other prophets, uses object lessons. Some examples include:

1. The rotted linen waistband (Jeremiah 13)
2. The broken jug (Jeremiah 19)
3. Figs (Jeremiah 24)
4. An ox yoke (Jeremiah 27–28)
5. Human object lessons (Jeremiah 35)
6. The prophet himself

Jeremiah's celibacy (Jeremiah 16:124), refusal of sympathy (16:5–7), and avoidance of feasts (16:8–9) all illustrate and support his message.

Jeremiah chose specific places to deliver his messages to make his point clear. He stood at the public gate, where kings entered and exited, to announce that judgment, symbolized by fire, would come through the gate (Jeremiah 17:19, 27; 39:3). He then visited the potter's house (Jeremiah 18) and later went to Hinnom or Topath, which would later be called the Valley of Slaughter (Jeremiah 19).

Jeremiah faced persecution, first mentioned in Jeremiah 1:8 and predicted in 1:19. It began in his home village (Jeremiah 11:19–23). His relatives joined the opposition (Jeremiah 12:6). Public opposition led to beatings and imprisonment in stocks (Jeremiah 20:2–3). Jeremiah wanted to stay silent to avoid suffering (Jeremiah 20:9), but he felt compelled to speak. As a result, those he knew insulted, mocked, terrorized, and accused him, even seeking his death (Jeremiah 20:7–18). He escaped death from priests, prophets, and people because of a few loyal friends (Jeremiah 26:8–24).

When his prophecies began to come true, hatred increased. He was beaten and jailed for many days on false charges (Jeremiah 37:14–17). A brief respite at the guardhouse (Jeremiah 37:21) lasted only a few days. Officials demanded his death again (Jeremiah 38:4) and put him in a cistern, where he sank into the mud (38:6). His rescue (Jeremiah 38:10) saved his life, but he remained imprisoned at the guardhouse (Jeremiah 38:28). His writings were destroyed (Jeremiah 36:23), and his words were denied and rejected (Jeremiah 43:1–7; 44:16).

The "Book of Hope" (Jeremiah 30–33) includes some words of judgment (32:28–35). Other parts of the prophecy have a few positive moments (Jeremiah 3:11–18; 16:14–16; 23:2–8; 29:10–14).

In an otherwise dark volume, these four chapters offer welcome relief. The peak of hope, also highlighted in the longest New Testament quote from Jeremiah (see Hebrews 8:8–12), predicts a new covenant (Jeremiah 31:31–40). Other prophecies also describe the end of the Mosaic law and rituals (for example, Jeremiah 3:16) and the new covenant (Jeremiah 32:40; 33:19–26).

We know little about Jeremiah's actions or messages from around 594 to 589 BC. Zedekiah's advisors secretly planned to break free from Babylon by forming alliances with neighboring nations. A traitor, possibly from Edom, might have informed Babylon about the conspiracy. After Babylon attacked, Zedekiah asked Jeremiah for a hopeful message but did not receive one.

The Recabites' faithfulness to the Nazarite vow (Jeremiah 35) began during Jehoiakim's time, but it serves as a lesson during the siege. The Recabites obeyed a human command, while the Jews rejected a divine command. The Recabites will be blessed (Jeremiah 35:18–19), but Judah will be judged (Jeremiah 35:15–17). Jehoiakim's reading of the scroll and his scornful rejection of it (Jeremiah 36) shows the prophetic claim (35:15) that destruction comes after rejecting God's message through the prophets.

Jeremiah 37 highlights the siege with another question from Zedekiah. Jeremiah 35–36 are out of order and serve as an example. Jeremiah 37:11 describes the time when the siege lifted in 589 BC, as Nebuchadnezzar forced Pharaoh Hophra's army back to Egypt. During this break, Jeremiah tried to attend a family meeting near Anathoth to resolve family issues. This trip might have been to start a land purchase made two years later (Jeremiah 32:6–15). However, as he left the city, authorities arrested him for allegedly deserting to the Babylonians and jailed him in a dungeon until Zedekiah gave him special prisoner status.

The king's officers had a strong reason to accuse Jeremiah of rebellion. Jeremiah had encouraged soldiers to leave the army (Jeremiah 21:9; 38:2). They believed traitors deserved death, so they believed Jeremiah deserved death as well (Jeremiah 38:4–5). The violence of that time led the officers to choose a cruel execution method: letting Jeremiah starve and sink in the mud at the bottom of an old cistern. A kind Ethiopian named Ebed-melech rescued him. Soon after, Jeremiah spoke his prophecies of judgment again, including a message to the king that mirrored his own recent ordeal: "They misled you and overcame you—those trusted friends of yours. Your feet sank into the mire, and they deserted you" (Jeremiah 38:22).

Jeremiah 39:1–43:7 describes events from the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC to the escape to Egypt. It includes:

- The release of Jeremiah (Jeremiah 39)
- The appointment and murder of Gedaliah (Jeremiah 40–41)
- A warning from God not to go to Egypt (Jeremiah 42)
- The stubborn disobedience of the people (Jeremiah 43:1–7)

The latest writings of Jeremiah are in Jeremiah 44. The audience included idolatrous Jews (Jeremiah 44:4–6) from various parts of Egypt, reaching as far as Aswan (Pathros). Jeremiah repeated the appeal of earlier prophets to reject false gods and choose Jehovah, but the people did not listen (Jeremiah 44:15–16).

The message to Baruch (Jeremiah 45), written around 605 BC, is included here to complete the main part of the book. This section starts with the task to "tear down" and "uproot" (Jeremiah 1:10) and ends with the same Hebrew words (45:4). If Baruch wanted to gain status in the Judean court like his brother Seraiah (Jeremiah 51:59), he was advised it would be pointless because disaster was coming, as the earlier chapters show.

The oracles against the nations (Jeremiah 46–51), introduced by a title superscription (46:1), form a unique style similar to Isaiah 13–23, Ezekiel 25–32, and Amos 1:3–2:16.

Some prophecies against foreign nations in Jeremiah have dates. These dates show they were written at different times during his ministry but were later collected for the book.

The prophecy against Egypt begins with a vivid description of Egypt's expulsion from Carchemish in 605 BC after a brief occupation (Jeremiah 46:1–12). The second message (Jeremiah 46:13–26) might describe

1. The attack on Egypt in 601 BC when Neco stopped Nebuchadnezzar at the border
2. The attack in 589 BC when Hophra failed to help Zedekiah

Or, most likely:

1. The invasion of Egypt by Nebuchadnezzar in 568 BC, when Babylon exploited Egypt's weakness to take control

At that time, Nebuchadnezzar established his judgment throne as predicted (Jeremiah 43:10) and issued death sentences to all rebels, including Jews involved in anti-Babylonian plots. The conclusion of the Egypt oracle echoes part of the Book of Hope (Jeremiah 46:27–28, see also 30:10–11).

The messages against Edom, Arabia, the Phoenician cities, and Ammon generally condemn pride, cruelty, and idolatry. The oracle against Elam is unique. No other prophet speaks of judgment against these people, who lived east of Babylon and had rare contact with Judah. Jeremiah predicted that Elam would face doom but then be restored. Ezekiel includes Elamites among the inhabitants of Sheol (the place the dead go) (Ezekiel 32:24).

The final judgment shows the prophet's fair attitude. His messages earned him respect and kindness from the Babylonians, unlike their cruelty to other Jews. However, when God spoke against Babylon, Jeremiah delivered God's words despite his own comfort, just as he had spoken against Egypt when staying silent would have been safer.

Jeremiah 51 ends "the words of Jeremiah."

Jeremiah 52 repeats historical facts that Jeremiah had previously stated as prophecy. These facts are also partially recorded as history in Jeremiah 39 (see also 2 Kings 25 and 2 Chronicles 36). The editor of Jeremiah wanted to end the book with a historical confirmation of Jeremiah's prophecy. However, he included additional facts not found elsewhere.

See also Israel, History of; Jeremiah (Person) #1; Prophecy; Prophet, Prophetess.

Book of Job

An Old Testament book that is part of the scriptural category known as the Writings.

Preview

- Author
- Date
- Background
- Purpose and Theological Teaching
- Content

Author

The authorship of the book of Job is a challenging question. This is because no one is credited as the author, and some scholars believe the book is a mix of several literary works.

Some scholars believe the book is a composite work due to inconsistencies among its sections. They see the prologue (Job 1–2) and the epilogue (42:7–17) as separate from the main text. These parts show Job as a man of perfect moral character. However, the dialogues portray a more human Job, whose statements about God can be bold and surprising.

Job is shown as a man of perfect moral character in the beginning. He refuses his wife's advice to curse God, as noted in the prologue (Job 2:9–10). He also does not curse God in the dialogues. The book's main point seems to be that even someone with high moral character struggles with understanding God's ways. After the misfortunes in Job 1 and 2, and a period of inner struggle during the seven days and nights before he spoke (2:11–13), Job faces deep questions. Job's strong moral character is clear in the dialogues. Even though he does not understand God, he speaks truthfully before him.

Some people believe that certain parts of the book were added later. These include:

- Elihu's speeches (Job 32–37)
- God's discourse (Job 38–41)
- The wisdom discourse in Job 28

Some scholars think the final author used these existing works to create a structure for his own writing.

The book's main structure, with a prologue, dialogues, and an epilogue, may not result from complex editing. The Code of Hammurabi has a similar structure, as does an ancient Egyptian work called *A Dispute over Suicide.*

Regarding the authorship issue, it is best to say the author is unknown. His theology is clearly focused on Yahweh, so he was likely a Hebrew. His writing skills were impressive, as he created one of the finest works in history.

Date

The authorship of the book is uncertain, which also makes the date unclear. Most modern scholars believe the book was written in the postexilic period, around the fifth century BC. Some think it was written near the end of the exile. Others suggest it was from the time of Solomon, while some place it in the era of the patriarchs.

The internal evidence suggests the book is set in ancient times. There are no references to Levitical institutions. Job offers sacrifices for his family, similar to the time before the priesthood (Job 1:5). Job's wealth, described in livestock, reflects the patriarchal era (Job 1:3).

The language of the book suggests an early date. Some linguistic elements show older forms of Hebrew, similar to those in Ugaritic epic material. Job may have lived in the second millennium BC. If the book, or part of it, was written then, it might be the first written material in the biblical canon. The book may have reached its final form during the Solomonic era, when much of the Hebrew Wisdom Literature was created.

Background

The book of Job is part of the Old Testament materials called Wisdom Literature. This literature addresses basic human life issues. The Israelites were not the only ancient people to create Wisdom Literature. Pagan cultures also produced this type of material, often trying to explain human events within their religious beliefs.

Several ancient works similar to the Old Testament book of Job are known from ancient cultures. A Sumerian book exists that does not match the biblical book in literary scope or emotional depth. It tells the story of a young man whose sorrow turns to joy after he pleads with his personal deity. In Sumerian belief, the gods caused both good and evil. Only appeasing them could prevent the evil they might cause. The book does not try to explain or explore the problem of evil in the world.

A Babylonian book, often called *I Will Praise the Lord of Wisdom,* is similar to the Sumerian *Job* in philosophy. The writer vividly describes his suffering. No one can help him. He questions if his religious rituals truly please a god. An emissary of the god Marduk appears in a dream and eases his suffering. The work ends with praise to Marduk, affirming that his offerings made the gods happy.

Another work, “A Dialogue about Human Misery,” is similar to the biblical book of Job. It explores how worshiping deities seems to have no impact on one's life quality. A character in this work tells the sufferer that the ways of the gods are hard to understand, and humans are naturally flawed. The sufferer appeals to the gods, but the dialogue ends there without solving the problem.

These literary works do not compare to the Old Testament book of Job in theology or philosophy. They only offer a fatalistic view of life, seeing it as controlled by the unpredictable will of the gods. However, these documents, dating from the second to first millennia BC, might be the literary foundation for the book of Job. The book of Job could provide an inspired answer to the deep questions of that historical period. Therefore, this type of literature might suggest an early date for the book of Job.

Purpose and Theological Teaching

The main purpose of the book of Job has puzzled biblical scholars for a long time. It is hard to say the book solves the problem of evil. When an answer is expected, God asks questions instead of providing answers.

Some suggest the main purpose is to answer, "Why do the righteous suffer?" The book does address this question, but it also presents other issues. By the end, we only have the comforters' words and Elihu's statements on the topic, which is not much. This might make one question the purpose of the long dialogues and Job's internal struggles. When God speaks from the whirlwind, there is no explanation for why the righteous suffer. Instead, Job learns to accept his place in the universe.

It is best to try a different approach to the book. To find the main theme of a literary work, look at the prologue and the epilogue. The prologue shows what the author plans to do, and the epilogue reveals what the author believes they have achieved.

In the beginning of Job, the author skillfully creates suspense. We learn about Job's perfect moral character. Then Satan challenges, “strike all that he has, and he will surely curse You to Your face" (Job 1:11). We wonder if Job will curse God and lose his faith, but then we hear his strong declaration of

trust: "The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away. Blessed be the name of the LORD" (Job 1:21).

The writer creates more suspense when Satan plans to harm Job. Job's wife adds to the trial by saying, "Curse God and die!" We wonder if this trial will break Job's faith. The suspense ends when we learn that "In all this, Job did not sin in what he said" (Job 2:10).

The writer introduces Job's friends into the story. They stay silent for seven days. We wonder what Job is thinking. Is he still a man of strong faith, or is his trust fading as the disease harms his body? When Job speaks and curses the day he was born, the suspense grows. The writer makes us question: Will Job's faith stay strong?

Sometimes we believe it will happen. Job makes several strong statements of faith. He says that God will prove him right. One of the most powerful statements in the book is in Job 19:25–27: "But I know that my Redeemer lives, and in the end He will stand upon the earth. Even after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God. I will see Him for myself; my eyes will behold Him, and not as a stranger. How my heart yearns within me!" At other times, Job shows deep doubts about God's control of the universe. The suspense continues. Throughout the dialogues, we follow the pattern of Job's struggle. It is an emotional struggle where Job speaks from deep despair and high faith.

In the epilogue, the suspense is resolved. Job's trials have not weakened his faith. He emerges victorious, with a humble belief. He can finally say to God, "I know that You can do all things and that no plan of Yours can be thwarted. You asked, 'Who is this who conceals My counsel without knowledge?' Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know" (Job 42:2–3).

The writer's purpose is clear. At the beginning, he asks, "Will Job's faith endure despite trials?" The dialogues increase suspense, and the ending resolves it. Job stays faithful to God during his suffering. We learn that Job's faith is genuine.

The book of Job is a study on faith and how suffering affects it. It teaches that a truly righteous person stays faithful to God, even when God's justice seems delayed. This person may not understand everything God does, but their faith in God's good plan and wisdom stays strong. This kind of faith is one part of the overall concept of faith in the Bible. It does not rely on actions but depends entirely on God.

The New Testament also shows a link between faith and suffering. In James 1:12, trials and faithfulness are connected: "Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love Him" (see also 1 Peter 1:3–7). These passages suggest that trials test faith, revealing if it is true or false. Faith that is not true will not withstand suffering (Matthew 13:20–21). The book of Job also links faith and trials, showing the nature of genuine faith, which remains strong despite suffering.

This book contains important principles:

- It teaches that sin leads to punishment. The comforters' words hold some truth, supported by Scripture, but they only partly explain suffering's role in life.
- The book also shows that suffering teaches us, as it is discipline from God.
- When God speaks from the whirlwind, we learn that suffering is part of life, and we must trust the Creator's wisdom. In this part, God reveals himself personally. Job says, "My ears had heard of You, but now my eyes have seen You" (Job 42:5). During trials, we need a close God more than a philosophical explanation of evil.
- The book also highlights how suffering creates true righteousness. Job starts as a righteous man, but his righteousness grows through suffering. By the end, Job is more humble, understands his place in the universe, and accepts God's wisdom.

Content

The Prologue (1:1–2:13)

This part of the book explains what caused Job's suffering. At first, he is shown as a wealthy man who deeply cared for his family.

In a dramatic scene set in heaven, Satan appears and the Lord asks, "Have you considered My servant Job? For there is no one on earth like him, a man who is blameless and upright, who fears God and shuns evil" (Job 1:8). Satan replies, "But stretch out Your hand and strike all that he has, and he will

surely curse You to Your face." (Job 1:11). This leads to the first of Job's great calamities, the loss of his family and possessions.

Another meeting between the Lord and Satan results in Job's physical suffering. This terrible disease sets the stage for the upcoming dialogues. Throughout this, the writer makes it clear that Job does not sin. He resists his wife's plea to curse God and the temptation to abandon God after losing his children. However, the calm scene changes with dialogues as we hear Job's complaints. We wonder if Job has lost his faith in God.

Three of Job's friends come to comfort him. They sit silently with him for seven days, hesitant to speak. After this silence, they start talking with Job.

The Dialogues (3:1–31:40)

The First Cycle (3:1–14:22)

In Job 3, Job questions why God allowed him to be born. He wonders why someone destined to suffer was given life.

Eliphaz is the first of Job's friends to speak. He seems polite, but he is actually heartless. He believes Job must have sinned; otherwise, why would he suffer so much (Job 4:7–11)? Eliphaz thinks Job's questions show a negative attitude toward God. He urges Job to trust in the Lord (Job 4:8) and stop being angry with God, as anger will only lead to ruin (Job 5:2). Eliphaz sees a positive side to suffering, claiming it is discipline from the Almighty (Job 5:17).

Job responds by saying his anger is justified because of the terrible suffering he is facing (Job 6:1–7). He also complains that Eliphaz is wrong for not showing kindness. He compares Eliphaz to a dry riverbed in the desert that offers no water in the hot, dry season (Job 6:14–23).

The next comforter, Bildad, is even more heartless than Eliphaz. He also accuses Job of sinning. His lack of compassion shows when he mentions Job's children, blaming their deaths on possible sins in their lives (Job 8:4).

Bildad, like Eliphaz, urges Job to seek God (Job 8:5), assuring him that God will respond (8:6). He describes Job's troubles as consequences of turning away from God (Job 8:11–19) but assures him that God will not reject an innocent person (Job 8:20).

Job responds to Bildad with a powerful question: "how can a mortal be righteous before God?" (Job 9:2). He then describes God's immense power, visible in the universe (Job 9:3–12). Job feels helpless before this mighty God. He believes he cannot argue with God or prove his innocence because God is too powerful to challenge.

Job also complains that he cannot get a fair hearing from God because God thinks he is guilty. The fact that God has punished him with his affliction shows that God does not see him as innocent (Job 9:14–24). Job continues his response and again questions God's wisdom in creating him (Job 10:18–22).

Zophar speaks next. He accuses Job of sin (Job 11:4–6). Insultingly, he says God "knows the deceit of men. If He sees iniquity, does He not take note? But a witless man can no more become wise than the colt of a wild donkey can be born a man!" (Job 11:11–12).

Job becomes angry because of Zophar's insulting accusations (Job 12:2–3). He asks God to stop afflicting him and demands that God speak (Job 13:20–28).

The Second Cycle (15:1–21:34)

The second cycle of discussions follows the same pattern as the first. Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar keep accusing Job, blaming his misfortune on sin. As the story progresses, the speakers focus more on their own claims. They do not respond to each other's arguments as directly as they did in the first set of dialogues.

The Third Cycle (22:1–31:40)

In the third series of dialogues, only Eliphaz and Bildad speak. They accuse Job of sin more harshly. Eliphaz claims, "Is not your wickedness great? Are not your iniquities endless?" (Job 22:5). This third dialogue is unusual because Job speaks more than in the others. While Bildad's argument lasts only six verses, Job's reply spans six chapters (Job 26–31).

Job 31 is important. In it, Job claims he is innocent. Job's sincerity is clear. He states he has been morally pure (Job 31:1–4), has not lied (31:5–8), and has not committed adultery (31:9–12). He shows concern for others (Job 31:13–23) and has not relied on wealth (Job 31:24–28). He ends with a strong statement of his innocence (Job 31:29–40).

A pattern starts to form. Job slowly distances himself from his friends during the discussion. They insist more on sin causing his troubles, while Job strongly claims his innocence. The writer skillfully crafts the story so the reader finds little unusual in the friends' statements. Although we

might agree with their words, we cannot support their attitudes. Sin does bring punishment, but the friends focus only on that. The next friend, Elihu, will highlight another purpose of suffering.

We sense honesty in Job's claims of innocence. However, if we trust both Job and his comforters, we face Job's same problem. We do not know the truth. We do not understand why Job suffers.

The Speech of Elihu (32:1–37:24)

Elihu is a young man who listens to Job and his friends with growing impatience (Job 32:3). He is very aware of his youth (Job 32:6–22), but when he speaks, he shows a deeper understanding of suffering than his companions.

Elihu highlights that God communicates in various ways and that suffering serves as discipline (Job 33:19), showing God's goodness (Job 33:29–33). Although Eliphaz mentioned this idea in his first speech (Job 5:17), Elihu gives it more importance, focusing on how suffering reveals God's love. However, it seems that this is not the complete answer. Another aspect comes in God's words.

The Voice from the Whirlwind and Job's Response (38:1–42:6)

In this section, God speaks. He asks Job many questions about Creation. God asks, "Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?" Then, with sarcasm, he adds, "Tell Me, if you have understanding" (Job 38:4).

God talks about the seas and asks Job who made the ocean basins (Job 38:8–11). He describes the rising dawn and asks Job, "have you commanded the morning or assigned the dawn its place" (Job 38:12). Further questions relate to:

- Light (Job 38:19–21)
- Snow (Job 38:22–24)
- Rain (Job 38:25–30)
- The constellations (Job 38:31–33)
- Storms (Job 38:34–38)
- Animals (Job 38:39–39:30)

Job realizes the vastness of God's power shown in Creation. Job likely felt small and insignificant as he thought about God's might.

The questions aim to do more than make Job feel insignificant. They also intend to make him feel ashamed of his assumptions. The sarcasm in this part is sharp, and one can imagine Job sinking deeper into the ashes with each question. In the section about light (Job 38:19–21), the questions "Where is the way to the home of light? Do you know where darkness resides, so you can lead it back to its border? Do you know the paths to its home?" are followed by "Surely you know, for you were already born! And the number of your days is great!" In the section about the constellations, God asks Job, "Can you bind the chains of the Pleiades or loosen the belt of Orion?" (Job 38:31).

Job has been bold in his statements to God during the dialogues. He has demanded that God speak to him (Job 13:22) and accused God of being unjust (Job 19:6–7; 24:1; 27:2). Now, as he remembers the power of the Almighty, Job starts to understand his true place in the universe.

The important questions in this series are in Job 40:15–41:34. Here, in an unusual order, God directs Job's attention to Behemoth (Job 40:15) and Leviathan (41:1). Some scholars view these as mythical figures, but it is likely they are literary depictions of real animals known for their size and strength. Many scholars suggest behemoth is a hippopotamus and leviathan is a crocodile. The descriptions of these animals support this idea. These references to two powerful animals conclude the section where God's voice speaks from the whirlwind. This section is full of suspense. At the end, the reader sees that Job has learned his lesson (Job 42:1–3).

These questions came to Job with great urgency for an important reason. Job realized he does not control the universe—God does. Job had to face God's power and learn he is just a part of this vast creation that shows God's might. By demanding God speak to him, Job tried to control God.

By suggesting God was unjust, he judged God, making himself equal or superior to God. God required Job to face the universe's power and reconsider his complaints. Job wanted a God he could control; God required submission. Job wanted a world run his way; God created a world to run his way. Job imagined a false God who would follow his desires. By recognizing God's control, Job saw that suffering has a purpose. Job might not understand that purpose, but it is part of God's creation. It is no surprise that Job began to find peace and acknowledge God's authority (Job 42:5–6).

This section of questions is followed by a powerful response from Job. He acknowledges God's power (Job 42:2). He admits he did not fully understand things too amazing for him (Job 42:3), and he repents in dust and ashes (42:6).

The Epilogue (42:7–17)

The final part of the book starts by criticizing Job's comforters. They are condemned because they did not speak correctly (Job 42:7). This seems unusual since their words appeared orthodox. However, they did not provide the right answer to the problem of suffering. Their answer was incomplete and therefore dangerous. They portrayed God as a strict being who used suffering only to punish sin. Unlike Elihu's answer, they did not consider the possibility of God's loving presence in suffering.

Although Job said some harsh things about God, he was not criticized. The text states that Job spoke rightly about God (Job 42:8). This likely refers to Job's final words in Job 42:1–6, where, purified by suffering, he humbly submitted to God's sovereign will.

See also Job (Person) #2; Wisdom; Wisdom Literature.

Book of Joel

A book from the Old Testament and the second of the Minor Prophets.

Preview

- Author
- Date
- Content
- Message

Author

In the first verse, the book of Joel is described as the "message" of the Lord that "came to Joel, the son of Pethuel." Scripture does not provide more information about Joel or Pethuel. The name Joel was common; there are 13 different Joels in the Old Testament. Based on the book, it seems Joel was not a priest but was closely connected with the temple priests, and he was likely a man from Jerusalem. We cannot say more than that.

Date

Scholars have many views on the date of Joel, making it hard to be certain. The book might date to after the Jewish exiles returned to Jerusalem from Babylon, specifically after Nehemiah rebuilt Jerusalem's walls around 400 BC. The reasons supporting this include:

1. Joel 3:2 says that the people of Judah and Jerusalem were scattered among the nations and their land was divided. However, they have returned, and their city now has walls again (Joel 2:9).
2. When a call is made for prayer and fasting, the priests and elders should lead (Joel 1:13; 2:16–17). The book does not mention a king. There were kings until the exile, but not for 400 years after.
3. The prophets before the exile—Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Micah, and Jeremiah—often criticized the people for offering sacrifices while ignoring God's ways in their daily lives. After the exile, prophets like Haggai and Malachi encouraged and showed deep concern for offering sacrifices. The preexilic prophets frequently rebuked the people for idol worship, which was not an issue after the exile. Joel seems to align more with the prophets after the exile rather than the prophets before the exile.
4. This book does not mention the northern kingdom of Israel. It discusses Judah and Jerusalem a lot. When it mentions "Israel," it seems to refer to the same people as Judah and Jerusalem (Joel 2:27; 3:16). Before the northern kingdom fell to the Assyrians in 722 BC, we would expect a different way of speaking.

5. The other kingdoms mentioned are Edom, Tyre and Sidon, the Philistines, and the Greeks. The text does not mention Syria, Assyria, and Babylonia, which were long-standing enemies that caused much suffering before the exile. The mentioned kingdoms were important to the people after the exile, and only then did the Greeks become significant in Palestine.

Some scholars believe these arguments are weak and that the book could fit an earlier date. It is sometimes suggested that the book is placed with the eighth-century BC prophets Hosea and Amos in the Hebrew Scriptures. However, the order of books in the prophetic canon does not determine their date. Obadiah, a prophet from after the exile, is between the eighth-century BC prophets Amos and Micah. In the Greek Old Testament, Joel is in a different position than in the Hebrew Bible. Joel and Amos likely stand together because Amos 1:2 shares words with the end of Joel (Joel 3:16). Some who support a date from before the exile for the book place it in the ninth century, during the early reign of Joash when he was too young to rule. Others suggest it was shortly before Josiah's death in 609 BC due to references to an enemy from the north, similar to Jeremiah, and calls for the people to return to the Lord with all their hearts (Joel 2:12).

Content

1:1–12

A locust plague, worse than any before, struck the land (Joel 1:2–4). Drinkers were urged to see the ruined grapevines and stripped fig trees (Joel 1:5–7). People were asked to mourn over the destroyed fields, especially priests, who could no longer offer cereal and drink offerings to the Lord (Joel 1:8–10). Farmers had to grieve over their ruined harvest, feeling deep sorrow for the lost fruits of the land (Joel 1:11–12).

1:13–20

Due to the events, the people were called to pray and fast. The priests were to appear before the Lord in sackcloth, mourning because they could not bring offerings (Joel 1:13). Elders and people alike had to come to the temple to pray (Joel 1:14). This crisis, with lost crops and no pasture for sheep and cattle, was a sign of the coming Day of the Lord, for which everyone should prepare (Joel 1:15–18). The prophet could only cry out to God when he saw the land's devastation (Joel 1:19–20).

2:1–11

In this section, the prophet describes a time when God's judgment threatens the entire land. It is a time to sound the alarm, as a great and powerful group approaches, more threatening than any before. It also warns of the coming "Day of the LORD," a day of darkness and gloom (Joel 2:1–2). The land is devastated by fire; what was once like the Garden of Eden becomes a wilderness (Joel 2:3). This invasion resembles a cavalry charge, and the insurgents sound like rumbling chariots. Everyone feels anguish as they advance. They march like warriors, break through defenses, scale city walls, and enter houses like thieves (Joel 2:4–9).

Some interpret this description as a picture of armies from nations opposing Israel, used by the Lord to judge his people. However, since they are described as horses in battle, with" a sound like that of chariots," and advancing "like a mighty army deployed for battle," it seems the locust plague is still the focus. The dark cloud of locusts in the sky and their devastating effect on the land foreshadow the great day when the Lord will judge all people. On that day, heaven and earth will tremble; the sun, moon, and stars will darken (Joel 2:10–11).

2:12–17

The prophet urges the people to humbly return to the Lord and repent, so they may receive his mercy and grace. Then they can again offer grain and drink offerings to the Lord their God as they did before (Joel 2:14). They should declare a fast and gather everyone, young and old, for a solemn assembly. Even newlyweds should attend. The priests must lead the people in prayer, asking God to spare them (Joel 2:14–17).

2:18–27

The people turned to God as the prophet asked. In response, the Lord showed compassion and promised to renew their grain, wine, and oil, and to remove their disgrace (Joel 2:18–19). The "northern army" will retreat, and God would restore the land's pastures, fruit trees, and vines (Joel 2:20–22). The people would rejoice, and with the blessing of early and late rains, the land would become very productive again. The losses from the locust plague would be restored (Joel 2:23–25).

People would have plenty of food and praise God. They would know that the one true living God was among them, and they would no longer feel shame (Joel 2:26–27).

2:28–32

The prophet saw that the blessings after the locust plague hinted at even greater future blessings. The judgment served as a warning for the great and terrible Day of the Lord. God would do more for his people in the future. He would pour out his Spirit on everyone, regardless of age or status (Joel 2:28–29). There would be amazing signs in the sky and on earth (Joel 2:30–31). Everyone who called on the name of the Lord would experience his salvation (Joel 2:32).

3:1–15

The Day of the Lord holds deep meaning for Israel and all nations. God's people will find restoration by turning to him. Those who scattered them, took their land, and sold them as slaves will face his judgment (Joel 3:1–3). Tyre, Sidon, and the Philistines must answer for their actions. They took the Lord's silver and gold, removed his people from their land, and sold them as slaves to the Greeks. The children of these slave traders will also be sold as slaves (Joel 3:4–8). Nations must prepare for war, transforming plowshares into swords and pruning hooks into spears. However, this is not a battle between human armies. Those who fought against the living God must face him as a mighty warrior (Joel 3:9–11). This mighty warrior will come to execute judgment. The scene shifts from a battleground to a court of justice. Great crowds will stand before the Lord "in the valley of decision" on the Day of the Lord. It will be a day of deep darkness for those who have made themselves enemies of the Almighty (Joel 3:12–15).

3:16–21

After people have spoken and done their worst, God will speak and act. He will show himself as his people's "refuge" and "stronghold" (Joel 3:16). Their city will then be safe from invasion by foreigners (Joel 3:17). Their land will be very productive (Joel 3:18). Because of the violence Egypt and Edom have done to Judah, they will become desolate (Joel 3:19). Israel will be avenged and restored, and everyone will see that the Lord's home is in Jerusalem with his people (Joel 3:20–21).

This summary of the book suggests that Joel faced a locust plague and saw it as a warning of a greater judgment from God. He also spoke of a greater restoration and blessing if the people returned to God with prayer and fasting. Some interpret the enemies in the book, especially in Joel 2, as human foes. Others view the entire book as a prophecy of future battles, particularly a final battle between the Lord and his enemies. Some believe there are two prophets or that the book has two parts written at different times. However, the interpretation mentioned above seems to have the fewest issues and provides a clear understanding of the book.

Message

What is the lasting importance of Joel's message? Like most Old Testament prophets, Joel spoke of mercy and judgment. A locust plague was a warning of God's judgment on all people and nations, both in history and on the great Day of the Lord, when everyone will stand before him. Joel's message urged repentance based on the events of his time. This is similar to Jesus's response when asked if those who suffered in disasters were worse sinners. Jesus said they were not, but warned, "But unless you repent, you too will all perish" (Luke 13:5). Through Joel, God called people to return to him for mercy. Along with mercy, there was hope for greater blessings from God. He promised to pour out his Spirit on everyone. This promise (Joel 2:28) gained importance when quoted in the New Testament during Peter's sermon at Pentecost (Acts 2:16–21). These words have been true for the Christian church since then. Joel assures us that God lives among his people and those who turn to him will never be ashamed.

See also Israel, History of; Prophecy; Prophet, Prophetess.

Book of John the Evangelist

This work was especially used by the Albigenses, a medieval Christian group. Many people believed it came from the Bogomils, who lived before them. The book is written as a conversation in which the apostle John asks Jesus questions and receives answers while sitting close to him during the Last Supper. This question-and-answer style also appears in other early Gnostic writings, such as the Gospel of Bartholomew.

The book includes Gnostic beliefs. It says that Satan, not God, created the world. It teaches that Christ was not born of Mary in a human way. Instead, Christ was an angel sent from heaven. He "entered by the ear and came forth by the ear" of Mary. The book also claims that Satan sent John the Baptist and that his followers (identified with the Roman Catholic Church) are not the disciples of Christ. It further teaches that baptism and the Lord's Supper have no real value.

This writing survives only in Latin. The version we have today dates from the twelfth century or later. An English translation can be found in *The Apocryphal New Testament* (1924) by M. R. James.

See also Apocrypha; John, the Apostle.

Book of Jubilees

The Book of Jubilees is a Jewish writing from the time of the Maccabees in the second century BC. It belongs to a group of ancient writings called *pseudepigrapha* (books written under someone else's name). Jubilees is an important source for understanding Jewish life and beliefs just before the beginning of the Christian era. Along with the Book of Enoch and the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, it is one of the most valuable Hebrew or Aramaic works from that time. Like the two other works, Jubilees was also translated into Greek and used by the church fathers.

Jubilees was probably first written in Hebrew. It claims that Moses wrote it, and it reflects strong Jewish nationalism during the Maccabean period. Ten Hebrew fragments of the book found at Qumran support the idea that Hebrew was its original language.

Titles and Translations

Later Greek writers followed Hebrew sources and called it "Jubilees" and "the little (lesser) Genesis." It is also known by other names, such as The Apocalypse of Moses and The Testament of Moses. In revised forms, it is known as The Book of Adam's Daughters and The Life of Adam.

Complete, fifty-chapter manuscripts have survived in six Ethiopic texts. The best of these are the manuscripts from the fifth and sixth centuries. The Latin text is valuable but incomplete, and only a few fragments of the Greek version remain. The Hebrew fragments found at Qumran are especially important because they date from the period of the original writing. The Bibliothèque Nationale in France holds "Éthiopien 51" and "Éthiopien 160." The British Museum has *Kufale,* or *Liber Jubilaeorum,* and *Enoch.*

What Does the Book of Jubilees Teach?

Jubilees claims to record teachings that God gave Moses when he was on Mount Sinai receiving the Law. God communicated to Moses through the "Angel of the Presence," telling him: "Write for Moses from the beginning of creation until my sanctuary is built among them forever" (1:27). The book presents this as a supplement to the "first law" (6:22).

After a brief introduction, Jubilees follows the same sequence of events and stories as the biblical accounts from Genesis 1:1 to Exodus 14:31. However, it makes many changes to reinterpret the Pentateuch. It uses a style called *midrash* (Jewish commentary or interpretation) to show that the patriarchs (such as Adam, Noah, and Abraham) already lived according to the Law before Moses received it. The author intends to strengthen traditional Jewish faith to combat the strong influence of Hellenistic culture among the Jewish people of his time. To do this, he removed stories that showed the weaknesses of the patriarchs and added legends that made them appear more faithful. The book even credits them as founders of human culture: Enoch discovered writing, Noah discovered medicine, and Abraham invented plowing.

Based on Leviticus 25:8–12, Jubilees emphasizes the importance of the number seven. It divides history from Adam to Moses into cycles of seven, called "jubilees." According to the book, God revealed this pattern to Moses at Mount Sinai and commanded him to record it. This way of organizing history shows how God rules with complete authority, especially over Israel. The author teaches that God's relationship with Israel is unique. Other nations are ruled by angels, but Israel belongs directly to God and is under his personal care (Jubilees 15:31 and following).

The Book of Jubilees opposes the Jewish use of the lunar calendar (6:36–38) and supports religious use of the solar calendar instead. This is part of a larger effort to reform and cleanse Israel. Israel must become dedicated to God in every way. This includes not marrying or sitting at a table with gentiles. The book is surprisingly demanding with regard to Sabbath observance (50:1–13). It prescribes that Jews who travel, buy or sell, draw

water, carry burdens, trap animals, or have marital relations on the Sabbath must be put to death. These rules go far beyond the biblical requirements. They are similar to the kind of rules the Qumran community and the Essenes used.

Hope for the Future

The Angel of Presence's message includes a vision of the end times, but it reveals only a small amount about what will happen. The Book of Jubilees expects that the messianic age (the time when God's chosen one will rule) will begin soon. However, the main focus of the book is not on predicting the future. Instead, it emphasizes how people should live. It emphasizes moral behavior and faithfulness to Jewish traditions.

See also Apocrypha.

Book of Judith

The Book of Judith is a religious story named after its main character, Judith. It is considered deuterocanonical (a book accepted as part of the Bible by some Christian groups but not by all).

Most scholars agree that the book was first written in Hebrew. However, it was never included in the Hebrew Bible (the holy book of the Jewish people).

Some Christian groups later accepted the book of Judith as part of their Bible. For example:

- The third Council of Carthage in AD 397 (a meeting of Christian leaders) accepted it as part of the Bible.
- The Council of Trent in AD 1545 (another important meeting of Christian leaders) also accepted it as part of the Bible.

These decisions mean that some Christian groups consider the book of Judith to be an official part of their Bible, while others do not.

Historical Context

The book of Judith was likely written during a difficult time for the Jewish people. Many scholars think it was written during the Maccabean period (a time of Jewish history from about 167 to 63 BC). More specifically, they believe it may have been written during the rule of Antiochus Epiphanes from 175 to 164 BC. Antiochus Epiphanes was a foreign ruler who treated the Jewish people very badly. He tried to stop them from following their religious laws and traditions.

A Jewish person living in Palestine (the ancient name for the land of Israel) probably wrote this book. The writer wanted to encourage other Jewish people to stand strong against their enemies and keep following God's laws.

The main character of the book is Judith. She is shown as a hero who follows God's laws very carefully and is brave and clever when facing great danger.

Summary

Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Assyria, sought help from several nations to help with a war against the Medes, including Palestine. But they all refused to help (Judith 1:7–11). As a result, he vowed revenge on the whole territory (Judith 1:12). After he defeated the Medes and conquered their land, he returned to his capital for four months to strengthen his army (Judith 1:12–16).

Nebuchadnezzar sent a great army against the disobedient nations (Judith 2). The cities along the coast surrendered immediately and the Assyrians destroyed local shrines. They forced people to worship Nebuchadnezzar (Judith 3). The people in Judea heard of this destruction, they determined to stop his advance through clever tactics, and by seeking divine favor (Judith 4:1–15).

Nebuchadnezzar's general, Holofernes, was angered. As he prepared to fight against them, he was told that Israel could not be beaten if God was on their side (Judith 5:5–21). Holofernes continued, cutting off the water supply to Judea and waiting for their surrender (Judith 7:1–18). Israel's leaders begged their king, Uzziah, to surrender to the Assyrians, but he convinced them to wait five more days (Judith 7:19–32).

Judith was a pious widow, who was wealthy and beautiful. She criticized the leaders for doubting God and convinced them that God would deliver them through her (Judith 8:2–36). Judith prayed, dressed in her best clothing, and went into the valley toward the enemy's camp.

She told the Assyrians that she was fleeing from the city and that she wanted to show Holofernes how to defeat the Israelites (Judith 10:11–13). Holofernes welcomed Judith and began listening to her (Judith 10:14–11:4). Cleverly, she implied that the siege was about to make the Israelites sin. She

promised to tell Holofernes when the people sinned so he could defeat them (Judith 11:11–19).

When Holofernes ordered her food, she refused. On the fourth night, Holofernes became drunk and Judith cut his head off (Judith 12:5–13:2). She put his head in her bag and brought it to the people (Judith 13:3–11).

When the people heard of what she did, they were filled with joy. The king and the people gave thanks to God and praised Judith for what she did (Judith 13:12–20). Israel planned an attack for the next day (Judith 14:1–4). The Assyrians fled in terror and confusion, and Israel chased them to Damascus (Judith 14:11–15:7).

The priests came from Jerusalem to honor Judith for her bravery, and everyone praised her (Judith 15:8–13). Judith sang a hymn of praise to God for protecting them (Judith 16:1–17). After, everyone went to Jerusalem to worship the Lord for three months (Judith 16:18–20).

The book ends with Judith's return to Bethulia, where she died at 105 and was buried with her husband, and was mourned for seven days (Judith 16:21–25).

Book of Life

A term used to refer to a record kept in heaven.

The phrase appears seven times in the New Testament (Philippians 4:3; Revelation 3:5; Revelation 13:8; Revelation 17:8; Revelation 20:12; Revelation 20:15; Revelation 21:27).

The idea comes from the Old Testament, where several passages descrtibe God keeping a record of his people. Examples include Exodus 32:32; Psalm 87:6; Daniel 7:10; 12:1; and Malachi 3:16. These passages show that God records both the faithful actions and disobedience of his people. Some passages suggest God might also keep records of other nations (for example, Psalm 87:6). In Psalm 69:28, we find the phrase "Book of Life," and the surrounding poetic lines refer to physical life.

Daniel 7:10, 12:1, and Malachi 3:16 connect divine records with final judgment and end-time events. These passages describe names and deeds as evidence before a judge. Luke 10:20 and Hebrews 12:23 share this idea but do not mention a "book." However, a heavenly record is assumed. In Philippians 4:3, Paul uses the term "Book of Life" to give them hope about their future with God.

In the book of Revelation, the "Book of Life" is a heavenly record that contains the names of people who stay faithful to God. It first appears in Revelation in the letter to the church in Sardis (Revelation 3:5). Jesus, who is called "the Lamb," keeps this book (Revelation 13:8; 21:7). If a person's name is found in the book, they are allowed to enter the new Jerusalem (Revelation 20:15; 21:27). If one's name is not written there, their judgment is final destruction. Revelation tells us these names were "written from the foundation of the world" (Revelation 13:8; 17:8). This shows that God has always known and cared for his people.

See also Book of Remembrance.

Book of Nehemiah

One of the last of the Jewish historical books.

Preview

- What Is the Background of the Book of Nehemiah?
- Who Wrote the Book of Nehemiah?
- How Accurate Is the History in the Book of Nehemiah?
- What Is the Timeline of Events in the Book of Nehemiah?
- Why Is the Book of Nehemiah Important?
- What Is the Message of the Book of Nehemiah?

What Is the Background of the Book of Nehemiah?

In 597 BC, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon took the first group of people from Jerusalem into exile, forcing them to leave their homeland. In 586 BC, the Babylonians returned to Jerusalem. This time they destroyed the city and burned the temple. They then took about 60,000–80,000 more people to Babylon. The people who were forced to leave Jerusalem (called exiles) settled in different areas of Babylon. They had some freedom there. They could farm and run businesses. Some of them became wealthy. The Jewish leaders continued to guide their people. Religious teachers called prophets, like Ezekiel, helped the people stay faithful to God.

A new leader named Cyrus the Great became king of Persia from 559 to 530 BC. This brought new hope to the Jewish people living in Babylon. Cyrus

was a wise and educated ruler. Soon after he conquered Babylon, he made an official announcement (Ezra 1:2–4). This announcement gave the Jewish people permission to return to their homeland.

Two separate groups of exiles returned to Judah. They built a new sanctuary in Jerusalem on the site of King Solomon's temple in 516 BC. Later, King Artaxerxes I ruled Persia from 464 to 424 BC. During his rule, two more groups returned from Babylon to Jerusalem. The first group came with their leader Ezra in 458 BC. The second group came with Nehemiah in 445 BC.

From this new beginning, Judah became what people called a theocracy—a place where God was considered the highest ruler and his laws guided all parts of life. The Jewish people committed themselves to following God's laws completely. They chose to live separately from other peoples and made Jerusalem the center of their community life.

Who Wrote the Book of Nehemiah?

The personal narrative of Nehemiah forms a large part of the book named for him. This narrative reveals a man of nobility and deep religious devotion. He was compassionate, smart, and patriotic. He was generous and faithful, had good political sense, religious zeal, and a total dedication to God. He had outstanding organizational ability and was a dynamic leader.

At the same time, Nehemiah was capable of ruthlessness. He was very strict when confronting the sin and moral errors of his fellow Israelites (Nehemiah 5:1–13). He also had no patience for the plots of powerful non-Jewish enemies (13:8, 28). So it is not surprising that Nehemiah inspired a discouraged people. He was able to motivate them to take action. They had a positive response to the strict approach of Nehemiah to their situation (2:4; 13:14, 22, 31).

How Accurate Is the History in the Book of Nehemiah?

The Jewish historian Josephus and other early writers comment on the history of this time period. They say that the books of Ezra and Nehemiah formed one book in the early Hebrew Bible, entitled "the book of Ezra." The earliest Hebrew manuscript that divides the two books dates 1448. Modern Hebrew Bibles refer to them as the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. In manuscripts of the Greek Old Testament (the Septuagint) they also formed one book. The early church writer Origen, in the beginning of the third century, is the first to attest to a division. Scholars generally acknowledge that the personal narrative of Nehemiah is genuine. This forms a major part of the book.

Ancient papyri confirm the historical framework of the book. Archaeologists discovered these papyri between 1898 and 1908 in Elephantine, an island in the upper Nile. Here Psammetichus II (593–588 BC) established a Jewish colony. The Elephantine papyri are well-preserved and written in Aramaic. They are the fifth-century BC literary remains of this Jewish colony of the Persian period.

The most important item among the papyri is a copy of a letter sent to the Persian governor of Judah in 407 BC. Three years earlier the Egyptians destroyed Jewish temple in Elephantine. This disaster was the occasion of a letter to Jehohanan, the high priest in Jerusalem (see Nehemiah 12:12–13). In their letter to the governor in Judah, they asked permission to rebuild their temple. They said that they had sent a similar request to Delaiah and Shelamiah, the sons of Sanballat (enemy of Nehemiah, 2:10, 19; 4:1).

The Elephantine papyri reveal that Sanballat was governor of the province of Samaria. Tobiah was governor of the province of Ammon in Trans-jordan (region across the Jordan River) (Nehemiah 2:10, 19). So this is evidence that there was in Judah a two-fold authority, civil and religious. The high priest of 408–407 BC was Jehohanan (12:13).

What Is the Timeline of Events in the Book of Nehemiah?

There is the question about whether Ezra or Nehemiah came to Jerusalem first. Scholars have strongly debated this. Nehemiah's arrival in 445 BC is widely accepted by scholars, while the date of Ezra's arrival is debated by scholars. Some scholars think Ezra came 13 years before Nehemiah, in 458 BC, but others disagree. The historical and textual evidence for the exact dates is complex. So, a detailed discussion of them here is not practical. Yet, a person can achieve an understanding of the spiritual values of the book. We can understand the book's message whether or not we know the exact order of events. While scholars continue to discuss and debate when things happened, this does not change the main lessons we can learn from the book.

Why Is the Book of Nehemiah Important?

When the exiles returned to Jerusalem, Judah was neither nation nor political body. Only one thing remained to them: their religion. They were the "remnant" (the surviving group) of the chosen people of Yahweh. From them would rise the new and glorious Israel. It was this vision that explains the strictness of Nehemiah.

Nehmiah was insistent that the Jewish people maintain the purity and exclusiveness of their religious faith and practice. This was in order to revive their national life and rebuild the city walls (6:15). Rebuilding the city walls was a symbol of both their religious and cultural purity. Nehemiah also insisted on separation from paganism (people who did not worship the God of Israel). He prohibited marriage with non-Jews (Nehemiah 13:23–28), and enforced careful observance of the laws of the Sabbath (verses 15–22).

So it is difficult to exaggerate the importance of the book of Nehemiah. Along with the book of Ezra, it gives the only consecutive Hebrew story of that period in Jewish history. This was the time when they founded Judaism. The Jews were inflexible in their segregation from other cultures. They had a passionate honor for the law God gave through Moses.

Of course, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi also contribute to knowledge of the period. But Nehemiah and Ezra provide a continuous story of this time. The return of the exiles from Babylon to Jerusalem continues the history of redemption. The saving purposes of God for his ancient people continue, leading to the coming of Jesus Christ.

The story of the return from Babylon to Jerusalem under Nehemiah emphasizes the religion of the community. But secondary factors are important to note. Nehemiah focused on the political security of Judah. He believed the political and legal structure of Israel was important. It would ensure Israel's independence from Samaria. He rebuilt the city walls and resettled the population (Nehemiah 7:4; 11:1–2). They appointed him as governor of the new province.

The books of Nehemiah and Ezra do not mention anything about bringing back the kingdom through one of King David's descendants. They also do not talk about the Messiah (God's promised chosen leader) or God's kingdom that would include all people. Instead, Nehemiah remains completely loyal to the Persian king. This king is very willing to help when Nehemiah asks for permission to rebuild Jerusalem (Nehemiah 2:4–9). However, the king still makes the Jewish people pay taxes (5:4, 15).

Those who returned from exile retreated behind the new walls of the city. They congregated around the second temple, completed in 516 BC. The Persian ruler recognized "the Book of the Law of Moses" (Nehemiah 8:1), as the law of the land of Judah. It became central to Jewish devotion and worship. The restoration of the nation produced Judaism. This protected and separated them from the Gentiles.

They started religious institutions during the Babylonian exile. When they brought them to Jerusalem they became firmly established. They read the Law and the Prophets in the synagogue and offered the prayers. The scribes who taught and copied the Jewish law worked with focused devotion. The Sanhedrin (the Jewish ruling council) continued to serve the new theocracy.

The Jewish remnant of the fifth century BC is similar to the modern Christian church. Both share the challenge of spiritual rebuilding and renewal essential to the purposes of God.

What Is the Message of the Book of Nehemiah?

In the winter of 445 BC, Nehemiah was living in Susa, the ancient capital of Elam where the Persian king held his court (1:1). There Nehemiah had a position of honor and influence (Nehemiah 2:1). From Jerusalem, a group of Judeans arrived. Nehemiah's brother was among them. He described the conditions in Jerusalem. This news made Nehemiah very sad and upset (1:2–4). Four months later, and after much prayer, he traveled to Jerusalem with soldiers to protect him (1:5–2:11). After a three-day inspection of the city, Nehemiah realized that rebuilding the walls must be his main job (2:12–3:32).

The people became excited about rebuilding their city. But this led to problems with some enemies who had been hiding their hatred. Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem were powerful, resourceful, and clever opponents. Through ridicule and rumors, they implied that work on the walls was a form of rebellion against the king (Nehemiah 2:19; 4:1–3, 7–14; 6:1–9). But Nehemiah dealt with all attempts to stop the work with prayer. He refused to turn from his goal. There was also opposition from traitors from the people (6:10–19). Despite all opposition, they reconstructed the walls of

Jerusalem (verse 15). The people celebrated this achievement with great joy (12:27–43).

Ezra, who was both a priest and scribe (a teacher of God's law), read from the law of Moses and the Levites explained it (Nehemiah 8:1–8). The people responded in several ways. hey felt sad about their sins but also felt joy because of God's goodness (verses 9–18). They went without food for a time so they could focus on prayer (9:1–37). They made a new promise to follow their special agreement (the covenant) with God (9:38–10:29). They promised to obey God's commandments, rules, and laws (10:30–39).

Nehemiah 11 and 12 refer to different civil and religious offices and duties. These chapters list the names of the people appointed to these tasks. Then follows the decision to exclude all foreigners from Judaism (13:1–3).

Nehemiah traveled back to Susa to tell the Persian king about his work in Jerusalem. The king allowed him to stay away from his duties longer. When Nehemiah came back to Jerusalem, he found that many new problems had developed.

There was conflict between his enemy Tobiah and the priest Eliashib (Nehemiah 13:4–9). The people failed to provide the Levites with enough money to maintain the temple (verses 10–14). The people were disobeying the laws of the Sabbath (verses 15–22). Jews were marrying non-Jews (verses 23–32). Because of these marriages to people from other nations, the children were not learning to speak Hebrew, their people's language (verses 23–25). Nehemiah knew these problems were dangerous. If the Jewish people became too much like the nations around them, they might stop following God's ways. So he made strict rules about staying separate from other groups.

The book of Nehemiah ends suddenly. It shows how he dealt strictly and forcefully with people who broke the new rules. He made these changes based on the new rules and practices of Judaism.

See also Timeline of the Bible (Old Testament); Ezra, Book of; Ezra (Person) #1; Israel, History of; Judaism; Nehemiah (Person) #3; Postexilic Period.

Book of Noah

The Book of Jubilees mentions a book Noah supposedly wrote: "Noah wrote down all things in a book as we instructed him concerning every kind of medicine. Thus the evil spirits were precluded from (hurting) the sons of Noah" (*Jubilees* 10:13; see also 21:10). Some scholars believe parts of 1 Enoch are based on the Book of Noah (*1 Enoch* 6–11, 54–55, 60, 65–69, 106–110). These parts tell about the great flood and other subjects that Noah would have known about.

Unfortunately, no separate copy of the Book of Noah exists today.

See also Apocrypha; Book of Jubilees; Noah.

Book of Remembrance

A book of remembrance is a record God keeps. It lists the names of people who honor and obey him.

The book is mentioned one time in the Old Testament (Malachi 3:16). The prophet Malachi was speaking during a time when many people were turning away from God. Evil people were growing rich and proud. It looked like God was not doing anything about it.

Malachi said that God was still watching. God would remember those who stayed faithful. He would one day show the difference between the righteous and the wicked.

See Book of Life.

Book of Revelation

The Book of Revelation is the last book of the Bible. It contains visions that reveal events that will take place in the last days. It is also known by its Greek name, *the Apocalypse* (meaning "revelation" or "uncovering").

Preview

- Who Wrote the Book of Revelation?
- When and Where Was the Book of Revelation Written? Who Was It Written for?
- What Is the Story of the Book of Revelation?
- How Might the Book of Revelation Be Interpreted?
- What Is the Purpose of the Book of Revelation? What Does It Teach?
- What Is the Message of the Book of Revelation?

Who Wrote the Book of Revelation?

The earliest sources say that John the apostle, the son of Zebedee, wrote Revelation. In the early third century, a bishop named Dionysius of Alexandria, who studied under Origen, was the first to question whether John was the author. He thought the writing style was very different from the Gospel of John and the three letters of John, which are also attributed to the apostle.

After Dionysius, people in the church in the East continued to debate the book's authorship until around AD 350. At that time, Athanasius of Alexandria helped many accept it as part of the Bible. The church in the West had already accepted Revelation earlier and included it in major lists of biblical books by the mid-second century.

Based on the evidence, we can confidently say a few things about the author:

1. He calls himself "John" (Revelation 1:4, 9; 22:8). This is probably not a pen name but the name of someone already known to the churches in Asia Minor.
2. This John identifies himself as a prophet (1:3; 22:6–10, 18–19). He was in exile "because of the word of God and my testimony about Jesus" (1:9).
3. He speaks to the churches with great authority. His deep knowledge of the Old Testament and Jewish traditions suggests he was a Palestinian Jew familiar with temple and synagogue practices. John the apostle fits this description.

The difference in writing style between Revelation and the Gospel of John may come from the type of writing. The Gospel is a carefully structured story, while Revelation records visions and messages received from God. The author of Revelation wrote quickly to record what he saw and heard. For this reason, it is reasonable to believe that the apostle John could have written both works. No strong argument has proven otherwise.

When and Where Was the Book of Revelation Written? Who Was It Written for?

Scholars usually suggest two possible dates for when Revelation was written. The first dating is shortly after Emperor Nero's rule (AD 54–68). Support for this date comes from several references in the book:

- The persecution of Christians.
- The *Nero redivivus* myth (a belief that Emperor Nero would return from the dead and become a new form of the evil spirit or "genius" of the Roman Empire).
- The practice of emperor worship (chapter 13).
- The mention of the temple (chapter 11), which the Romans destroyed in AD 70.

The second dating is near the end of Emperor Domitian's rule (AD 81–96). This view is based mainly on the testimony of Irenaeus, bishop of Lyons, who said that the apostle John "saw the revelation … at the close of Domitian's reign."

Revelation was written on the island of Patmos, one of the Sporades Islands in the Aegean Sea. Patmos is about 59.5 kilometers (37 miles) southwest of Miletus (1:9). John was likely exiled there because of persecution related to his faith, "because of the word of God and my testimony about Jesus"(1:9).

Likewise, the recipients were seven churches in the Roman province of Asia, located in what is now western Turkey: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea (1:4, 11; 2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14).

What Is the Story of the Book of Revelation?

The book of Revelation is different from other writings in the New Testament. It differs not in its message, but in its style and themes. Revelation is a book of prophecy that includes both warnings and encouragement (1:3; 22:7, 18–19). It announces future judgment and blessings through symbols and visions.

The language and images in Revelation were familiar to people in the first century but may seem unusual today. Knowing the prophetic books of the Old Testament, especially Daniel and Ezekiel, helps make the message of Revelation clearer.

The symbolic and visionary style of Revelation may feel confusing to some, but it gives powerful expression to unseen realities. It communicates truth in ways that ordinary writing cannot. This kind of language can inspire thought, emotion, and spiritual awareness in ways that simple storytelling cannot achieve.

The letters to the seven churches show that five of them faced serious problems. The main problem was disloyalty to Christ. This shows that the central purpose of Revelation is to strengthen faith in God and correct false beliefs about him, rather than to focus on political or social issues. John was confronting false teachings (called heresies) that were spreading among the churches near the end of the first century. One of these false teachings may have been an early form of Gnosticism (a belief system that claimed to offer secret knowledge about God and salvation).

Revelation belongs to a type of writing called "apocalyptic literature." The word *apocalypse* comes from the Greek *apokalupsis*, which means "revelation" or "unveiling." Other apocalyptic writings, not included in the Jewish or Christian Scriptures, appeared between about 200 BC and AD 200. While Revelation shares some features with these works, it is different in important ways.

Even more than apocalyptic writings, the teachings of Jesus (especially his message on the Mount of Olives; see Matthew 24–25; Mark 13; Luke 21) shaped the message of Revelation. John also drew heavily from the Old Testament. Of the 404 verses in Revelation, about 278 contain references to the Hebrew Scriptures. He often echoes the words of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel, as well as Exodus, Deuteronomy, and the Psalms. John rarely quotes them directly but uses their ideas and images to express his message.

How Might the Book of Revelation Be Interpreted?

Throughout history, four traditional ways to interpret or understand Revelation 4–22 have developed.

Futurist

This view teaches that, except for chapters 1–3, all the visions in Revelation refer to the future. These events will happen just before and after Christ's second coming at the end of the age. Chapters 13 and 17 regard the beasts as the future antichrist. This antichrist will appear near the end of history. Christ will defeat him when he returns to judge the world and establish His thousand-year reign on earth.

Some of the earliest Christian teachers, such as Justin Martyr (died AD 164), Irenaeus (died around AD 195), Hippolytus (died AD 236), and Victorinus (died around AD 303), held similar views about a future antichrist and Christ's final victory, though their interpretations also included symbolic and historical elements. The modern form of this futurist view became popular in the 19th century and is common among many evangelicals today.

Historicist

This view understands Revelation as a prophecy that outlines the course of human history. Joachim of Floris, a monk who died in AD 1202, promoted this interpretation after claiming to receive a vision that revealed God's plan for the ages. He understood the 1,260 days in Revelation as symbolic of 1,260 years. According to this approach, the book describes major events in Western history from the time of the apostles until the interpreter's own day.

As this method spread, many linked the antichrist and Babylon with Rome and the papacy (the office of the pope). Later, Protestant Reformers such as Martin Luther and John Calvin adopted this view.

Preterist

This interpretation focuses on events from John's own time. It views Revelation as a message to first-

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century believers about the challenges they faced under Roman rule. The beasts in chapter 13 represent imperial Rome and its pagan priesthood. Many scholars today favor this view.

Idealist

This approach views Revelation as a symbolic and spiritual message rather than a prediction of specific historical events. It presents timeless truths about the continuing struggle between good and evil throughout the history of the church. This way of interpreting Revelation developed more recently than the other three.

What Is the Purpose of the Book of Revelation? What Does It Teach?

NT scholar H. B. Swete wrote of Revelation: "In form it is an epistle, containing an apocalyptic prophecy; in spirit and inner purpose, it is a pastoral." John wrote as a prophet to teach what is true and to warn against what is false. He called the Christian communities in Asia Minor to recognize their failures and to return to faithfulness. He also wanted to encourage those who remained faithful to continue trusting God.

John explained that Christian suffering and martyrdom share in the victory of Jesus over evil through his death and resurrection. He reminded believers that God will honor those who suffer for their faith, such as Antipas (2:13). Revelation shows that evil and those who follow the beast will come to an end (19:20–21; 20:10, 15). It describes the final victory of "the Lamb," Jesus Christ, and of those who follow him.

What Is the Message of the Book of Revelation?

John organized the main parts of Revelation around several groups of seven. Some of these groups are clear, while others are implied. There are seven churches (chapters 2–3), seven seals (chapters 6–7), seven trumpets (chapters 8–11), seven bowls (chapters 16–18), and seven final events (chapters 19–22).

The content can also be divided into four major visions:

1. The vision of the Son of Man among the seven churches (chapters 1–3).
2. The vision of the scroll with seven seals, the seven trumpets, and the seven bowls (4:1–19:10).
3. The vision of Christ's return and the end of this age (19:11–20:15).
4. The vision of the new heaven and new earth (chapters 21–22).

Introduction (1:1–8)

The first three chapters of Revelation form a single section. They are more straightforward to follow and are familiar to many people. These chapters include:

- an introduction to the whole book (1:1–8),
- the first vision of the Son of Man among the seven lampstands (1:9–20), and
- messages to the seven churches in Asia (2:1–3:22).

The first eight verses introduce the entire book. They contain important statements about God and his work. After a short introduction (1:1–3), John writes to the seven churches of Asia in an expanded form of an ancient letter (verses 4–8).

The Son of Man Among the Lampstands (1:9–20)

He briefly explains the historical situation that led to the writing of the book (1:9–11). Then John describes his vision of "One like the Son of Man" walking among seven golden lampstands (verses 12–16). The person reveals himself as the glorified Lord, Jesus Christ (verses 17–18). Jesus then explains the meaning of the symbolic vision (verses 19–20). Finally, the Lord gives a detailed and specific message to each of his seven churches in Asia (2:1–3:22).

The Letters to the Seven Churches (Revelation 2:1–3:22)

These seven churches showed typical qualities of both obedience and disobedience. They are a reminder to all churches throughout history (see 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22; especially 2:23). Their order follows the ancient travel route, starting at Ephesus and ending at Laodicea (1:11; 2:1–3:22).

Each message usually follows a typical structure with seven parts:

1. The addressee is given first. This follows a common pattern in all seven letters: "To the angel of the church in Ephesus write …"
2. Next, the speaker introduces himself. Each time, he repeats part of the vision of Christ and he identifies himself (1:12–20). For example, "These are the words of Him who holds the seven stars in His right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands" (2:1; see also 1:13, 16).
3. Next, the speaker shares his knowledge. He knows the churches' actions and their true loyalty to him, despite appearances. In two cases, Sardis and Laodicea, the assessment is completely negative. The enemy of Christ's churches is the deceiver, Satan, who tries to weaken the churches' loyalty to Christ (2:10, 24).
4. After Christ evaluates the churches' achievements, he gives his judgment on their condition with phrases like, "You have abandoned your first love" or "you are dead" (2:4; 3:1). Two letters contain no negative judgment (Smyrna, Philadelphia). Two have no praise (Sardis, Laodicea). The letters see all failures as betrayals of a previous relationship with Christ.
5. Jesus gives a plain command to correct or warn each church. These commands reveal the true nature of how they have tricked themselves.
6. Each letter includes this advice: "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." The Spirit's words are Christ's words (see 19:10).
7. Each letter ends with a promise of reward to those who overcome. Each promise looks forward to the end times and connects with the final two chapters of Revelation. They also repeat themes of Genesis 2–3. What Adam gave up in Eden, Christ gains back even more. The seven promises likely represent different parts of one great promise to Christians. Wherever Christ is, "the one who overcomes" will be there too.

The Scroll with Seven Seals (4:1–8:1)

Because Revelation 4:1 through the end of the book uses complex images and visions, interpreters often disagree about how these chapters connect to chapters 1–3. Their differences reflect how each person understands the book's symbolism and structure.

The Throne, the Scroll, and the Lamb (4:1–5:14)

Chapters 4–5 form one vision with two parts: the throne (chapter 4), and the Lamb with the scroll (chapter 5). The throne vision (chapters 4–5) and the breaking of all seven seals (chapters 6–8) form a single, continuous vision and should not be separated. The throne vision is central to the entire vision of the scroll with seven seals and the rest of the book (see 22:3).

A new vision of God's majesty and power is revealed to John so that he can understand what happens on earth in relation to the seven seals (4:1–11; compare 1 Kings 22:19). For the first time in Revelation, the vision shows the constant connection between heaven and earth that continues through the rest of the book. What takes place on earth also has a matching event in heaven.

Chapter 5 continues the vision that began in chapter 4 and leads into the opening of the seven seals (Revelation 6:1–8:1; see the introduction to chapter 4). The scene centers on the Lamb who was slain. He takes the scroll from the hand of the one who sits on the throne. The vision ends by declaring the Lamb worthy to receive worship, for through his death, he brought salvation to all people.

Opening of the First Six Seals (6:1–17)

The opening of the seals continues the vision from chapters 4 and 5. Now, the scene shifts to events on earth. The scroll involves the rest of Revelation and

relates to the completion of the mystery of all things. This is the goal or end of history for both those who overcome and those who worship the beast.

The writer suggests that the seals represent events that prepare for the final completion of all things. It is a more complex question whether these events happen right before the end or represent general conditions throughout the time leading up to the end.

The seals closely match the signs of the approaching end times described by Jesus in his message on the Mount of Olives (Matthew 24:1–35; Mark 13:1–37; Luke 21:5–33). This connection is clear and important. The seals correspond to the "beginning of birth pains" in the teachings of Jesus. Their events resemble those described under the trumpets and the bowls (Revelation 8:2–11:19; 15:1–16:21), but they should not be confused with those later and more severe judgments.

First Interlude: 144,000 Sealed (7:1–17)

There is a change in tone from the subject of the sixth seal and the delay until 8:1 to open the seventh seal. This shows that chapter 7 is a true interlude. The word *interlude* refers to a pause between two main series of events in Revelation. In each interlude, the focus moves from scenes of judgment on the earth to scenes that show God's people and their mission.

John first sees angels, who will bring destruction to the earth, held back until God marks his 144,000 servants from every tribe of Israel (verses 1–8). Then John sees a "multitude too large to count" wearing white and standing before God's throne. John identifies the people as "the ones who have come out of the great tribulation" (verses 9–17).

Some scholars divide the two groups into Jews and non-Jews (gentiles). Others see them as one group viewed from different perspectives.

The Seventh Seal Opens (8:1)

After the break in chapter 7, the final seal opens. There is silence in heaven for half an hour to prepare for judgment on earth or to listen to the martyrs' cries on earth (see 6:10).

The First Six Trumpets (8:2–11:14)

There is a scene in heaven to prepare (8:2–5). Then six trumpets sound one after another (8:6–9:19). An interlude follows (10:1–11:14).

The First Six Trumpets (8:6–9:21)

Scholars hold different opinions about how the seals, trumpets, and bowls relate to one another. It may be best to view the first five seals as happening before the events of the trumpets and bowls.

The sixth seal introduces the time when God's wrath is poured out through the trumpet and bowl judgments (6:12–17). The trumpet judgments occur during the seventh seal. The judgments of the bowl happen during the seventh trumpet (16:1–21). This shows that there is both overlap and progression between the seals, the trumpets, and the bowls.

As with the seals, there is a clear pattern in how the trumpet judgments unfold. The first four trumpets are separate from the last three, which are called "woes" (8:13; 9:12; 11:14). These judgments are similar to the plagues described in the book of Exodus.

The last three trumpets receive special attention and are called "woes" (8:13) because they are so severe.

The first trumpet involves a strange plague of locusts (9:1–11). The second involves a plague of creatures like scorpions (verses 13–19). Both of these plagues are best understood as demonic forces unleashed from the abyss (see verses 1, 11).

The Second Interlude: The Angel and the Small Scroll (10:1–11:14)

The main idea of chapter 10 is to confirm John's mission as a prophet. Verse 11 states, "You must prophesy again about many peoples and nations and tongues and kings." The small scroll's contents might include chapters 11, 12, and 13.

Chapter 11 is very challenging to understand. It mentions measuring the temple, the altar, and the worshipers. It speaks of the trampling of the holy city for 42 months (11:1–2). It also describes two prophets who witness and die. Then they resurrect (verses 3–13).

Interpretations differ greatly. Some believe this vision shows the restored Jewish nation, with Moses and Elijah coming back to life. Others think the temple represents the true church protected by God during difficult times. The two witnesses would then represent the entire faithful church encountering persecution.

The Seventh Trumpet (11:15–14:20)

The seventh trumpet sounds, and loud voices in heaven announce the final victory over the world

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by God and Christ. The theme is the kingdom of God and Christ, an eternal double kingdom. This image shows the world kingdom, once controlled by an false power, now in the power of its true owner and king. Here announces God's rule. But the final defeat of the world's enemies happens at Christ's return (19:11–21).

The Woman and the Dragon (12:1–17)

This chapter features three main figures: the woman, the child, and the dragon.

It also includes three main scenes:

1. the birth of the child (verses 1–6),
2. the dragon being thrown out of heaven (verses 7–12), and
3. and the dragon attacking the woman and her children (verses 13–17).

Many interpreters understand the woman under attack as the community of God's people. The imagery may first recall Israel, who gave birth to the Messiah, and then extend to the Christian community that suffers persecution.

The woman is described as experiencing childbirth. Her pain points to the struggles of God's people before the arrival of the Messiah and the new age (Isaiah 26:17; 66:7–8; Micah 4:10; 5:3).

The Two Beasts (13:1–18)

Chapter 13 moves from the internal characteristics of the struggle in chapter 12 to focus on the earthly tools used in the attack against God's people. These tools are the two beasts powered by the dragon. The actions of these two beasts represent the dragon's final efforts to battle the woman's offspring (12:17).

The dragon and the first beast plot to make the world worship the beast. They call a third figure to help, the beast from the earth. This beast resembles the Lamb just enough to attract even the followers of Jesus. As the battle goes on, the dragon's tricks become more clever. Readers must learn to tell the difference between the beast that seems to be a lamb and the true Lamb (see 13:11 and 14:1).

The Harvest of the Earth (14:1–20)

The previous chapters prepared Christians for the final reality as the end approaches. They will encounter abuse and become sacrificed like sheep. This section shows that their sacrifice has meaning.

In chapter 7 shows only the 144,000 sealed. Here, they are already rescued. After the floods pass, Mount Zion stands high above the waters. The Lamb sits on the throne of glory, surrounded by the victory songs of his followers. The gracious presence of God fills the universe.

Chapter 14 briefly answers two important questions:

1. What happens to those who refuse the mark of the beast and die (verses 1–5)?
2. What happens to the beast and his followers (verses 6–20)?

The Seven Bowls (15:1–19:10)

The series of "bowl judgments" is "the third woe," mentioned in 11:14 as "coming shortly" (see comments on 11:14). These final plagues occur "Immediately after the tribulation of those days," as Jesus mentioned in the sermon on Mount Olivet. They may fulfill his apocalyptic words: "The sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken" (Matthew 24:29).

Preparation: The Seven Angels with the Seven Final Plagues (15:1–8)

Chapter 15 connects to the Old Testament story of the Exodus and suggests the worship traditions of ancient synagogues.

The chapter has two main visions:

- The first vision shows the victors who have triumphed over a great challenge (verses 2–4).
- The second vision describes the seven angels in white and gold coming from the heavenly temple, holding the seven bowls of the final plagues (verses 5–8).

The Pouring Out of the Bowl of Judgments (16:1–21)

These events happen quickly, with only a short pause for a dialogue between the third angel and the altar. This emphasizes the justice of God's punishments (verses 5–7). This short sequence likely reflects John's wish to provide a brief overview of the first six bowls and move quickly to the seventh. The seventh bowl involves a more interesting judgment on Babylon, which the author

will describe in detail. The last three plagues affect society and spiritual condition, shifting focus from nature to humanity.

The Prostitute and the Beast (17:1–18)

Many modern interpreters see Babylon as representing the city of Rome. The beast represents the Roman Empire, including its provinces and people. Yet, Babylon is not just Rome. We should probably not limit Babylon to one historical event, past or future. It could have many equivalents (see 11:8).

Babylon then would exist wherever there are satanic lies. It is probably best understood as the main example of all strong worldly resistance to God. Babylon is then a reality that spans history. This includes kingdoms like Sodom, Egypt, Babylon, Tyre, Nineveh, and Rome that worship false gods.

Babylon is a symbol of satanic lies and power. It is a divine mystery that we cannot fully explain by earthly institutions. Babylon represents the entire culture of the world apart from God, while the new Jerusalem represents the divine system. Rome is just one example of this larger system.

The Destruction of Babylon the Great (18:1–24)

Chapter 18 describes the judgment on the prostitute mentioned earlier (17:1). Using the image of a great city's destruction, John explains the final defeat of Babylon, "the great prostitute."

Thanksgiving for the Destruction of Babylon (19:1–5)

Unlike the sadness of Babylon's companions, the heavenly choirs sing joyfully in a grand celebration to God.

The Marriage of the Lamb (19:6–10)

Finally, the cycle of praise ends with the loud voices of another great multitude (verse 6). This is the multitude of redeemed people (see 7:9). They sing the final *Hallel* ("Praise God!") using words like those found in the royal psalms (Psalms 93:1; 97:1; 99:1).

The Vision of the Return of Christ and the End of the Age (19:11–20:15)

The First and Second Last Things: The Rider on the White Horse and the Defeat of the Beast (19:11–21)

This vision shows Christ's return and the beast's defeat. One could consider it as the most important part of the earlier section (verses 1–10). Or it could be the start of a final series of seven events. These events are: Christ's return, the beast's defeat, Satan's binding, the thousand-year rule, Satan's release and end, the last judgment, and the creation of a new heaven, earth, and Jerusalem.

Christ defeated Satan by the crucifixion (see John 12:31; 16:11). But Satan still works evil and lies today (see Ephesians 2:2; 1 Thessalonians 3:5; 1 Peter 5:8–9; Revelation 2:10). Yet, he is a ruler who has limited power and is now under Christ's control. God allows Satan to continue his evil for a short time until God's plans are complete.

John shows us the scene of the defeat of the beast along with its kings and armies. It is a quick and complete destruction of these evil forces by the King of kings and Lord of lords. They encounter their true master in this final and very real battle (see Revelation 19:17–21).

The Third and Fourth Last Things: The Binding of Satan and the Millennium (20:1–6)

The “Millennium” has long been one of the most controversial questions of Christian eschatology. Revelation 20 speaks of a thousand-year reign of Christ, but interpreters differ on how to understand it.

Some see the passage as describing a future earthly reign of Christ and his saints at the close of this present age—this is the premillennial view, in which Christ’s second coming precedes the Millennium.

Others, following the amillennial view, interpret the thousand years symbolically as the present reign of Christ and his saints in heaven, with the Millennium spanning the time between Christ’s resurrection and his return.

A third position, postmillennialism, holds that the spread of the gospel will usher in a long era of peace and righteousness on earth before Christ’s second coming, which concludes the Millennium.

In the vision, Satan is bound to limit his power to deceive the nations (verses 1–3), and the saints are said to share in Christ’s reign (verses 4–6). Premillennialists usually see this as a literal future binding of Satan and bodily resurrection of believers to reign with Christ on earth, while amillennialists view it as Satan’s present restraint through Christ’s victory and the spiritual reign of believers with Christ in heaven. Postmillennialists generally share the amillennial interpretation of

Satan's binding but emphasize its outworking in history as the gospel advances.

The Fifth Last Thing: The Release and Final End of Satan (Revelation 20:7–10)

In Ezekiel 38–39, *Gog* is the leader of a group of nations from the north, likely the Scythian peoples from the land of *Magog*. These nations represent enemies who rise against God's people.

In Revelation, however, the names *Gog* and *Magog* are used symbolically for the final enemies of Christ. They are deceived by Satan and led to attack the community of the saints.

The Sixth Last Thing: The Great White Throne Judgment (20:11–15)

The poetic imagery shows that everything in "the world is passing away" (1 John 2:15–17). Now, the only true reality is God on the judgment throne, in front of which everyone must appear (Hebrews 9:27). His decision is holy and right, symbolized by the white throne.

This vision declares that, even when history seemed to move against God's will, no moment in the world's story has ever escaped his rule. God's reign is complete and unending.

The Seventh Last Thing: The New Heaven, the New Earth, and the New Jerusalem (21:1–22:5)

John reveals a vision filled with beauty and meaning. It is made of stone, shining gold as clear as glass, and vibrant color. Symbolic images appear throughout.

The church is "a bride" (21:2). God gives drink to the spiritually thirsty "from the spring of the water of life" (verse 6). The number 12 and its multiples suggest completeness (verses 12–14, 16–17, 21). The cube shape of the city suggests fullness (verse 16). There are many colorful jewels and references to light and God's glory (21:11, 18–21, 23–25; 22:5). The "river of the water of life" and "a tree of life" are present (22:1, 2). "The sea was no more" (21:1).

There are plenty of references to the Old Testament. Most of John's imagery in this chapter reflects Isaiah 60 and 65 and Ezekiel 40–48. John combines Isaiah's vision of the new Jerusalem with Ezekiel's vision of the new temple. The many Old Testament promises coming together in John's mind suggest he saw the new Jerusalem as the fulfillment of these prophecies.

There are also references to Genesis 1–3. There is no death and suffering. God is present with his people as he was in Eden. The tree of life is there, and the removal of the curse. Creation returns to its original, perfect state.

This vision connects with the promises to those "who overcome" in the letters to the seven churches (Revelation 2–3). For example:

- those who overcome in Ephesus receive the right to the tree of life (2:7; see also 22:2);
- those in Thyatira gain the right to rule the nations (2:26; see also 22:5); and
- those in Philadelphia receive the name of the city of God, the new Jerusalem (3:12; see also 21:2, 9–27).

In a sense, a theme from every major part of Revelation reaches its fulfillment in chapters 21–22.

John's Conclusion (22:6–21)

The words of the introduction repeat in the conclusion (1:1–8). The book ends with voices from the angel, Jesus, the Spirit, the bride, and finally John: "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!" (22:20).

See also Apocalyptic; Book of Daniel; Eschatology; John the Apostle.

Book of the Acts of the Apostles

The book of Acts is part of the New Testament. It tells the story of the early church. It continues the story that began in the Gospel of Luke. In the New Testament, Acts comes after the four Gospels and before the Letters.

Preview

• Who Wrote the Book of Acts?

• When and Where Was the Book of Acts Written? Who Was It Written For?

• What Is the Story and Message of the Book of Acts?

• What Is the Purpose of the Book of Acts?

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Who Wrote the Book of Acts?

The book of Acts does not state clearly who its writer is. Most scholars believe Luke wrote the book of Acts. Early church tradition from the second century says that a traveling companion and fellow worker of the apostle Paul wrote Acts (as well as the Gospel of Luke). Colossians 4:14 calls him "Luke, the beloved physician." He is mentioned among Paul's coworkers (Colossians 4:10–17; see also 2 Timothy 4:11; Philemon 1:24).

Strong evidence for Luke being the author of Acts comes from sections where he writes about Paul's travels using "we" and "us." This shows the writer was there with Paul during these events. Here are examples from Acts:

1. "During the night, Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and pleading with him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." As soon as Paul had seen the vision, we got ready to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them." (Acts 16:9–10).
2. "These men went on ahead and waited for us in Troas...we sailed from Philippi, and five days later we rejoined them in Troas, where we stayed seven days." (Acts 20:5–6).
3. "When it was decided that we would sail for Italy" (Acts 27:1).

These "we" sections found in Acts 16:9–18; 20:5–21:18; and 27:1–28:16 sound like a travel narrative or diary written by an eyewitness who joined Paul on his travels:

- from Troas to Philippi during Paul's second missionary journey
- from Philippi to Miletus during Paul's third missionary journey
- from Miletus to Jerusalem
- from Caesarea to Rome

The writing style and vocabulary of these sections are similar to the rest of the book. So, it is likely that the author of the travel sections was also the author of the rest of the book.

Two things strongly suggest that Luke was a non-Jewish convert to Christianity:

1. The skilled writing style and careful use of Greek in the book.
2. The fact that it is addressed to someone called Theophilus (who might have been an important Roman official).

His regular and frequent use of the Greek Old Testament could mean that he was a gentile (non-Jewish person) who respected Jewish beliefs before he converted to Christianity. People like this were called "God-fearers."

When and Where Was the Book of Acts Written? Who Was It Written For?

Scholars continue to debate when and where the book of Acts was written. The book itself does not give clear information about this. However, Luke makes it clear who he wrote the book for. In the first verse, he addresses someone named Theophilus. Luke had already written an earlier book to Theophilus about Jesus's life. This earlier book is what we now call the Gospel of Luke.

In the introduction to that Gospel, Luke clearly states why he wrote and addressed his account to the "most honorable Theophilus" (Luke 1:1–4). It is unclear who Theophilus was. Theophilus means "dear to God" or "lover of God."

Some people think that Theophilus might represent Christians in general rather than a specific person. However, calling him "most honorable" suggests otherwise. This title was commonly used to show respect. It usually referred to someone with an official position in Roman society (similar to how it was used for Felix in Acts 23:26; 24:2; and for Festus in 26:25). Luke likely wrote his two-volume work for an official in Roman society.

When was Acts written? Some scholars believe it was written in the last quarter of the first century. Luke's Gospel was written first, and Luke based his story of Jesus on eyewitness accounts and other sources (possibly including the Gospel of Mark, which was probably written in the 60s). So, Acts is generally thought to have been written around AD 85.

Those who support this later date argue that the theology in Acts reflects a Christian church that is settling into history and adjusting to the idea that Jesus's return might be a long way off. This idea makes sense considering the excitement about

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Jesus's return that followed the Jewish revolt and the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70. It would have taken time for that excitement to fade.

Other scholars suggest that Acts was written around AD 70 or soon after. From AD 66 to 70, there was a Jewish revolt that ended with the Romans destroying Jerusalem. This revolt hurt the reputation of Judaism, which until then had been legally recognized by the Roman Empire. As a result, Christianity, which had been seen as a Jewish sect, started to be viewed with suspicion.

A close look at Acts shows that Luke may have been trying to defend Christians against accusations of being enemies of Rome. He showed how Roman officials said many times that Christians, and especially Paul, had done nothing wrong and were innocent of any crimes (Acts 16:39; 18:14–17; 19:37; 23:29; 25:25; 26:32). Luke also makes it clear that Paul was allowed to continue his mission. Paul had the full approval of Roman officials in the very center of the capital of the Roman Empire (Acts 28:16–31).

Some scholars suggest an even earlier date for Acts, closer to Paul's Roman imprisonment in the early 60s. They have two main reasons:

1. Acts ends abruptly, with Paul still preaching in Rome before his trial had started. This could mean that Luke was writing during this time. If Luke had already written about Paul's defense before Caesar, he probably would have included it. The sudden ending suggests that Luke might have finished his account before Paul's trial concluded.
2. The period that best fits Luke's defense of Christianity against various accusations is before the start of widespread persecutions under Emperor Nero in AD 64. During this time, Christianity was becoming suspicious but was not yet illegal. An early date fits with the idea that Luke was with Paul during his imprisonment in Rome and wrote his history while waiting for Paul's trial. It is possible Luke wanted to influence the trial's outcome by presenting a positive view of Christianity and Paul. He wanted to help Paul continue his mission among the gentiles.

What Is the Story and Message of the Book of Acts?

Luke sets his account of how Christianity grew quickly within the history of the Roman Empire and Palestine from AD 30 to 60. Understanding some basic facts about this time period and region will help readers better understand Luke's account.

Early Christianity in Roman Syria

Acts 1–12 describe the early Christian movement in the Roman province of Syria, which included Judea and Samaria. In the first century AD, these regions were typically governed by Roman governors (called procurators) or puppet kings (kings who ruled under Roman control).

Around AD 30, when Jesus died and rose from the dead. At this time, Pontius Pilate was the procurator of Judea and Samaria. He ruled from AD 26 to 36. Herod Antipas was king of Galilee. He ruled from 4 BC to AD 39. Tiberius was the emperor of the Roman Empire. He ruled from AD 14 to 37. The events described in Acts 1–12 happened between AD 30 and 44.

Paul's Conversion and Early Ministry

Saul likely became a follower of Jesus around AD 33 (Acts 9). After Saul's conversion her returned to his hometown of Tarsus. During this time, the church had peace and grew stronger as more people became believers (Acts 9:31–11:26). We learn from Galatians 1:18–21 that Saul was busy during the next ten years. We also know this because Paul and Silas later visited Christian communities during

their second missionary journey (Acts 15:40–41). (After Acts 13:9, the name "Saul" is no longer used.)

In AD 41, Claudius became the emperor of Rome. He made Herod Agrippa I the king of the Jewish people. (Before this, Pontius Pilate had been the governor of the region, but he was removed because he did not lead the area well.) Agrippa I was the grandson of Herod the Great and his Jewish wife, Mariamne. Because his grandmother was Jewish, the Jewish people liked him more than they had liked other rulers from the Herod family.

Agrippa I wanted to become even more popular with the Jewish people and their religious leaders. This desire led him to attack the Christian church in Jerusalem. Acts 12 tells us that he killed James (who was the brother of the apostle John) and put Peter in prison. The account of Agrippa I's death in Acts 12:20–23 is also recorded by the Jewish historian Josephus, who dates the event to AD 44.

The book of Acts tells us about another important event in the early church. The Christians in Antioch collected food and supplies to help Christians in Judea who were suffering from a severe famine (Acts 11:27–29). This event helps us understand when these things happened.

Luke mentions that a severe famine occurred during the reign of Emperor Claudius from AD 41 to 54 (Acts 11:28). Josephus wrote about this time period in his book *Antiquities* at the end of the first century. He reported that there was a terrible famine in Palestine between AD 44 and 48. Acts 12:25 indicates that Barnabas and Paul completed their work helping Christians in Judea who were impacted by the famine after Agrippa I died. This suggests that their mission took place around AD 45.

Paul's First Missionary Journey

At this point in Acts, Paul officially begins his mission of sharing the good news about Jesus with the gentiles (Acts 13:1–3). The Roman Empire, which ruled most of the known world at that time, provided three important things that helped Paul travel and teach in many places:

- The Romans allowed people to practice their own religions freely.
- People throughout the empire spoke the Greek language, which meant Paul could talk with people in many different places.
- The Romans had built good roads and established safe sea routes, which made it easier for Paul to travel to many cities.

Paul's first missionary journey took place from AD 46 to 47. Paul and Barnabas traveled through Cyprus, an island province in the northeastern Mediterranean. Then they went into Galatia in Asia Minor. They established churches in several southern Galatian cities: Antioch of Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe. The Black Sea, the Aegean Sea, and the Mediterranean Sea bordered Galatia. These cities were key Roman outposts with diverse populations, including large Jewish communities. Paul began his missionary work in their synagogues, often facing significant opposition (Acts 13–14).

The Jerusalem Council and Paul's Second Missionary Journey

In AD 48, church leaders met in Jerusalem to discuss how Jewish and non-Jewish Christians should live together. This meeting is called the Jerusalem Council (chapter 15). After this, Paul went on his second journey to share the good news about Jesus. He traveled through places he had visited before, including his homeland Cilicia, Galatia, and through Troas on the Aegean coast to Macedonia and down into Achaia, the Greek Peninsula (15:40–18:22). Paul started new churches in the important Macedonian cities of Philippi, Thessalonica, and Beroea.

Paul's stayed in Corinth for about a year and a half. This was likely around AD 51–52. (Acts 18:11). archaeologists found an ancient stone inscription in the ruins of Delphi (a city in central Greece). This inscription tells us that a man named Gallio became the Roman governor of Achaia (the region where Corinth was located) in AD 51.

Acts 18:12–17 tells us that some Jewish people who were against Paul brought him to Gallio for judgment. They probably thought that since Gallio was new to his job as governor, they could convince

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him to punish Paul. This helps us know that Paul was in Corinth when Gallio first became governor.

Paul's Third Missionary Journey

Luke's account of Paul's return to Palestine and the start of his third missionary journey raises an interesting historical question about the followers of John the Baptist (Acts 13:13–19:7). When Paul arrived in the city of Ephesus, he found Apollos there (Acts 18:24–28). Apollos was a Jewish teacher who knew a lot about the Scriptures. He was teaching people about Jesus in the synagogue.

However, Apollos had only received John the Baptist's baptism (the baptism of repentance). After Apollos went to Corinth to help the church Paul had established there, Paul traveled to Ephesus. There, he met several disciples of Jesus who had received John's baptism of repentance but had not been baptized as Christians.

Luke's mention of Apollos and those disciples, along with several passages in the Gospels, shows that John the Baptist's movement did not end when Jesus began his ministry. John continued to baptize until he died (John 3:22–24). Many of his followers continued his work afterward.

Both Apollos and the disciples Paul met in Ephesus likely learned about God through these followers of John.

Later, these people learned more about Jesus and his teachings (what Luke calls "the way of the Lord" in Acts 18:25). However, they did not know about Christian baptism or the Holy Spirit (Acts 19:2–4). This suggests that in the early days of Christianity, different groups of believers had different understandings and practices of the faith.

Paul's Arrest and Trials

At the beginning of Paul's third missionary journey, he spent three years teaching in Ephesus (Acts 19:1–20:1). He then visited churches he had established on his previous journey (Acts 20:2–12). His third missionary journey ended with his arrest in Jerusalem (Acts 21).

This journey took place in the mid-50s AD, from 53 to 57. Paul's arrest in Jerusalem and his trial before the provincial governor Felix in Caesarea likely occurred around 57 AD (Acts 23:23–24:23). Felix kept Paul under house arrest for two years, hoping to please the Jewish leaders. After this, Felix was replaced by Porcius Festus, who was governor from AD 59 to 60. Josephus wrote that Felix was removed from his position because he badly handled fights between Jewish and non-Jewish people in Caesarea.

When Festus became the new governor, he was unsure what to do with Paul. The Jewish leaders saw this as a chance to influence him since new governors often wanted to make their people happy (Acts 25:1–9). To protect himself, Paul appealed his case to the highest court in the empire, which was overseen by Caesar himself (Acts 25:10–12).

Festus had a difficult task ahead of him. As governor, he needed to send a detailed report to the emperor explaining the charges against Paul. However, Festus did not fully understand the religious issues in the case (Acts 25:25–27). He decided to ask for help from King Herod Agrippa II, who had come to Caesarea with his sister to welcome Festus as the new governor of Palestine (Acts 25:13).

Herod Agrippa II was an important leader in Palestine from AD 50 to 100. He was the son of Herod Agrippa I and, although he ruled over parts of Palestine, he was also considered Jewish. The emperor had given him the authority to choose the Jewish high priests. Because Agrippa II knew Jewish laws and religious customs, he could better understand why the leaders in Jerusalem were against Paul.

When Paul spoke before Festus and Agrippa, they agreed that Paul was innocent (Acts 26:1–29; 26:31). However, because Paul had already asked to have his case heard by the emperor in Rome, they had to follow the law and send him there (Acts 26:32).

For two years, Paul had a surprising amount of freedom in Rome while waiting for his trial (Acts 28:30). This kind of freedom was common for Roman citizens who had asked to have their case heard by the emperor. The story in Acts ends around AD 61–62, but this was probably not when Paul died.

A few years later, in AD 64, a great fire burned much of Rome. After this fire, the Roman emperor Nero began to hurt and kill many Christians. Paul was likely freed after his case was dismissed since both Festus and King Agrippa had found no fault with him. Later, Paul probably continued his work of sharing the good news about Jesus for a few more years. According to Eusebius (who wrote about church history in the fourth century AD),

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Paul was eventually killed during Nero's attacks against Christians.

What Is the Purpose of the Book of Acts?

In the beginning (or preface) of his Gospel, Luke told Theophilus (and the audience he represented) that he wanted to provide a clear and accurate account of the beginnings of the Christian movement through the ministry of Jesus of Nazareth (Luke 1:1–4). In Acts, Luke tells how the message about Jesus spread from the land of Palestine all the way to Rome, the capital city of the Roman Empire (Acts 1:1–8).

Defending Christianity

In Acts, Luke tries to defend Christians against false ideas people had about them. There were several wrong beliefs about Christianity when it first began and grew.

One wrong idea was about how Christianity related to Judaism. Many people, including some in the church and Roman officials, thought Christianity was just a small group within Judaism. But Luke showed in his two books that Christianity was meant for all people. His Gospel shows that Jesus came as the Savior for everyone in the world (Luke 2:29–32). In the book of Acts, Luke gives three important examples that show Christianity was not just for Jewish people:

- Stephen's speech to the Jewish leaders (Acts 7)
- Peter's meeting with Cornelius in the city of Joppa (Acts 10)
- Paul's speech in Athens (Acts 17)

Another problem was that people thought Christianity was just like the many other religious groups in the Roman Empire. These groups had their own special gods and secret ways of worship. People wrongly thought Christians were the same as these other groups. He gives two examples to show this

- The early church opposed Simon, who practiced magic (Acts 8).
- Paul and Barnabas refused when people tried to worship them as gods in the city of Lystra (Acts 14).

Luke also wanted to show that Christianity was not like the secret religious groups of that time. These groups had special ceremonies that only members could see. Instead, Luke explained that Christianity was based on real events that many people saw. Jesus lived in Palestine, where he did things openly in front of everyone. Both Peter and Paul talked about this in their speeches to people (Acts 2; 10; 13).

Luke wrote his account to show that Christianity was not a threat to the Roman Empire. Some Roman officials thought Christianity caused problems for their government. They had reasons to be suspicious. Jesus, who started the movement, had been killed on a cross by a Roman governor named Pilate. The governor said Jesus was trying to cause trouble against Rome. Also, whenever Christianity spread to new places, there seemed to be arguments and public disturbances.

Luke explained these events carefully in his writings. In his Gospel, he showed that Jesus's trial was unfair. Both Pilate and King Herod Antipas found no real evidence that Jesus had done anything wrong (Luke 23:13–16; Acts 13:28). Throughout the book of Acts, Luke shows Roman officials treating Christians positively:

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- Sergius Paulus, the Roman governor of Cyprus, welcomed Paul and Barnabas and accepted their message (Acts 13:7–12).
- In the city of Philippi, the leading official said he was sorry for wrongly putting Paul and Silas in prison (Acts 16:37–39).
- Gallio, the governor of Achaia, declared that Paul had not broken any Roman laws (Acts 18:12–16).
- In Ephesus, a city official protected Paul and his friends from an angry crowd (Acts 19:35–39).
- A Roman military commander in Jerusalem helped Paul escape from people who wanted to hurt him. The commander wrote to Governor Felix that Paul was innocent (Acts 23:26–29).
- Later, when Paul appeared before Governor Felix, Governor Festus, and King Herod Agrippa II, they all agreed: "This man has done nothing worthy of death or imprisonment" (Acts 26:3).
- Luke ended his account by describing how Paul was able to teach about Jesus in Rome itself, the capital city of the empire. Paul did this while under guard but with permission from the Roman authorities (Acts 8:30–31).

These instances demonstrate that the unrest surrounding Christianity was more due to Jewish opposition than any threat posed by the movement itself.

The Holy Spirit in the Book of Acts

Luke also focuses on key theological themes. He presents the story of God's plan to save people in three main parts. The first part is about Israel (Luke 1–2). The second part is about Jesus's life. The third part is about the early church, when the good news about Jesus spread from Israel to all nations.

Throughout both books, Luke shows how God works through the Holy Spirit. In his Gospel, Luke presents Jesus as someone filled with the Holy Spirit. The Spirit gave Jesus power for his work (Luke 3:22; 4:1, 14, 18). In the book of Acts, Luke shows how Jesus's followers became a community guided by the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8; 2:1–8). The work that Jesus started with the Spirit's power continued through the church, also with the Spirit's power.

In Luke's writings, the presence of God's Spirit is shown as essential for the church's power, integrity, and perseverance. God's presence was essential for several key aspects of the church's life and mission:

- The Holy Spirit helped believers tell others about Jesus with confidence (Acts 1:8).
- The Holy Spirit also created true community among believers, who shared everything they had (Acts 2:44–47; 4:32–37).
- The Holy Spirit gave Peter and others courage to defend their faith (Acts 2–5).
- The Holy Spirit gave power to believers to serve others (Acts 6).
- The Holy Spirit helped believers overcome their prejudices, as shown when they shared the message about Jesus in Samaria (Acts 8).
- The Holy Spirit broke down barriers between different groups of people, as seen in the story of Peter and Cornelius (Acts 10–11).
- The Holy Spirit sent believers to tell others about Jesus in different places (Acts 13).

The Resurrection of Jesus in the Book of Acts

Luke makes Jesus's resurrection a central theme in his narrative, using it as a foundation for Christian faith. Luke, like Paul, believed that without Jesus's resurrection, there would be no Christian faith (1 Corinthians 15:12–21). The resurrection showed that God approved of Jesus's life and work, proving that everything Jesus said was true.

Luke's emphasis on the resurrection is evident from the beginning of Acts. He notes that to replace Judas as an apostle, the new person needed to have

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seen Jesus alive after his death, just like the other disciples. Throughout the book of Acts, the early church kept telling people about Jesus's resurrection. They explained how God had changed everything by raising Jesus from the dead. Peter talked about this at Pentecost and when he spoke to the Jewish leaders (Acts 2:22–24, 36; 3:14–15; 5:30–31; 10:39–42). Later, Paul also spoke about it when he talked to Felix and Agrippa, who were Roman leaders.

Structure

The book of Acts can be divided into two main parts: chapters 1–12 and 13–28. The first part tells mostly about Peter's work, while the second part focuses on Paul's work.

Acts 1–12 describe the "acts of Peter" where Peter plays the main role in several important events:

- Peter leads the selection of Matthias as Judas Iscariot's replacement (Acts 1).
- Peter delivers the sermon at Pentecost, marking the beginning of the church (Acts 2).
- Peter interprets the healing of a lame man as a sign of Jesus's role as God's chosen one, the Messiah (Acts 3).
- Peter defends the apostles' teachings before the Jewish council (Acts 4).
- Peter leads the apostles in healing people and speaks on their behalf (Acts 5).
- Peter confronts Simon the magician, a man who practiced magic in Samaria (Acts 8).
- Peter starts sharing the good news with non-Jewish people (gentiles), beginning with a man named Cornelius (Acts 10–11).
- Peter is put in prison by King Herod during a time when the king was attacking the church, but God helps Peter escape in an amazing way (Acts 12).

Acts 13–28 describe the "acts of Paul" and focuses on how Paul shared the good news about Jesus with non-Jewish people. This section tells about three main missionary journeys. During each journey, Paul traveled to new places where people had not yet heard about Jesus, and he also strengthened the work that had been done in earlier visits.

The story of Paul's work reaches its most important part with three major events:

1. Paul is arrested in Jerusalem (Acts 21–22).
2. Paul is imprisoned in Caesarea (Acts 23–26).
3. Paul travels by ship to Rome (Acts 27–28).

Thematic Structure

Acts can also be organized based on how the message about Jesus spread to different places. This follows Jesus's words in Acts 1:8: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." This statement is often called the Great Commission because it gives Jesus's followers their main task.

The book of Acts shows how the followers of Jesus carried out this task in three main stages:

1. They shared the good news about Jesus with Jewish people (Acts 1–7). They started in Jerusalem. They spread the message to the surrounding area of Judea. They also went north to the region of Galilee
2. Next, they shared the message in Samaria (Acts 8:1–9:31). This work was done by Philip, Peter, and John.
3. Finally, they shared the good news with non-Jewish people (Acts 9:32–12:25; Acts 13–28). This began slowly with Peter. It then began happening quickly through Paul's work.

See also Luke (Person); Paul, The Apostle; Simon Peter; Theophilus #1; Timeline of the Bible (New Testament).

Book of the Cock

This story, also called *The Book of the Rooster*, is preserved by the Ethiopian church and is still read on the Thursday before Easter. In the Book of the Cock, on the night of the Last Supper, Akrosina, the wife of Simon the Pharisee, gives Jesus a well-cooked rooster. After Judas leaves, Jesus touches the rooster, and it comes to life.

Jesus tells the rooster to follow Judas and report what he does. The rooster returns and tells Jesus and the disciples about Judas's plan to betray him. The rooster also mentions Paul of Tarsus as one who will later take part in these events. When the disciples hear this, they begin to weep.

Then Jesus sends the rooster to the sky, where it will stay for a thousand years.

A similar story exists in a fragment written in Sahidic Coptic. In that version, the rooster's return to life symbolizes Christ's resurrection.

See also Apocrypha.

Book of the Covenant

The term "Book of the Covenant" appears in two places in the Old Testament:

1. A document Moses read to the people of Israel at Mount Sinai (Exodus 24:7)
2. A document found in the temple by the priest Hilkiah. Hilkiah found the document while the temple was being repaired during King Josiah's reign (2 Kings 23:2, 21; 2 Chronicles 34:30).

The Book of the Covenant at Mount Sinai

The word "covenant" refers to the covenant laws God made with the people of Israel during the time of Moses. In Hebrew, "book" can mean any written document. It includes texts written on clay, stone tablets, or parchment scrolls. Ancient covenants were often written down. The main problem in understanding the two references to "book of the Covenant" is figuring out what exactly was in these documents.

The book Moses read at Mount Sinai may have referred to either the Ten Commandments or to the whole section of Exodus 20–23, without the narrative parts. When the people heard it, they responded, "All that the Lord has spoken we will do." This shows the document contained laws or rules, but we cannot know exactly what was in it.

The Bible says that Moses wrote this book (Exodus 24:4). This does not mean it could not include the Ten Commandments, even though the Bible clearly states God wrote those commands (32:15–16). It is possible that Moses also wrote down the Ten Commandments at an earlier stage (Exodus 19:25; 20:1).

Josiah's Book of the Covenant

The contents of the "book of the covenant" that King Josiah read to the people of Judah are not clearly known. Some scholars have tried to figure out what was in it by looking at the reforms Josiah made. They think these reforms match the teachings in the book of Deuteronomy.

However, this approach has several problems:

1. Some of Josiah's reforms are not mentioned anywhere in the Law. For example, he burned the chariots of the sun (2 Kings 23:11). This suggests Josiah may have been making his own interpretations based on the Law. This makes it hard to know how much of his reform came directly from the Book of the Covenant and how much came from his own understanding.
2. The account in 2 Chronicles 34:30–33 shows that much of the reform happened *before* the discovery of the Book of the Covenant.

On the other hand, 2 Kings clearly states that some of Josiah's reforms were based on the Book of the Covenant. The book must have contained instructions about the Passover celebration (2 Kings 23:21). It probably also had rules about mediums, wizards, and other idol worship practices, unless Josiah made these reforms based on his own understanding of the text.

Also, the book contained warnings that God would bring destruction if the people did not follow God's words (2 Kings 22:16–19). This suggests that Josiah's "Book of the Covenant" was larger than Exodus 21–23. In the older book, the Passover is only mentioned as the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Exodus 23:15). Exodus 22:18 might possibly be the basis for Josiah's action against wizards. But in Exodus 21–23, there is no warning of judgment for disobedience strong enough to explain the wording

in 2 Kings 22:16–19. The closest thing to it is Exodus 23:33.

Finally, Josiah's Book of the Covenant is also called the Book of the Law (2 Kings 22:8). This suggests that many other references to the Book of the Law throughout the Old Testament might also be referring to the Book of the Covenant.

See also Exodus, Book of; Law, Biblical Concept of.

Book of the Dead

The term "Book of the Dead" is a modern name for ancient Egyptian funerary texts. It is a collection of any text, whether found on pyramid walls, coffins, or papyri, that describes a person's journey from this life to the next. Sometimes, it refers to a smaller collection of texts written on papyri (a plant-based form of paper).

The ancient Egyptian name for these texts was "Chapters of Coming Forth by Day." They were written for any important deceased person. But, in later times, they were mass-produced with spaces left for the person's name. For influential people, these papyri could be up to 100 feet (30.5 meters) long and were often lavishly illustrated with scenes depicting their experiences after death.

The ultimate goal of the deceased was to reach the Other World, the kingdom of Osiris, and become a god. To get there, the soul had to pass through various gates, knowing the names of the gatekeepers to be admitted. The texts provided this crucial information. One important phase was the judgment in the Hall of Truth, where the person's heart was weighed against the feather of truth and justice. The soul would make a "negative confession," denying any guilt, especially regarding theft and social relationships. If the heart was as light as the feather, it was declared truthful. If it was not light as a feather, it was destroyed. The texts also included hymns and prayers to assist the soul on its journey, emphasizing magic and ritual more than moral character.

Book of the Law

Another name for "the book of the covenant," a document found in the temple by Hilkiah the priest during King Josiah's temple repairs.

See Book of the Covenant.

Book of the Resurrection of Christ by Bartholomew

This ancient **apocryphal work** (a writing not included in the Bible) exists only in **Coptic**, the language of early Egyptian Christians. It was probably written in the fifth or sixth century AD. Like many other ancient writings of uncertain origin, it claims to tell more about Jesus than the biblical Gospels do.

The writer claims to be the apostle Bartholomew and says he wrote the book for his son, Thaddaeus. He warns Thaddaeus not to let non-Christians or false teachers read it. The book is not a story but a description of visions meant to show Bartholomew's holiness and spiritual insight.

The text is incomplete and has many gaps. It also includes several contradictions and historical mistakes. For example, it says that two people, Joseph and Philogenes, buried Jesus. It also confuses Mary, the mother of Jesus, with Mary Magdalene. In his version of the Last Supper, the author goes beyond biblical statements about the bread and wine: "His Body was on the Table around which they gathered; and they divided it. They saw Jesus's blood pouring as living blood into the cup."

The author adds imaginative details to the resurrection story. For example, he says Christ brought Adam out of Hades (the place of the dead). The story about the apostle Thomas doubting the resurrection of Jesus is also made longer and more dramatic than in the Gospel of John.

The most complete text of the Book of the Resurrection is in the British Museum in London. Several other fragments exist, probably from an earlier version.

See also Apocrypha; Bartholomew, the Apostle.

Book of the Wars of the Lord

A document mentioned once in the Old Testament. Numbers 21:14 mentions it in a description of the border of Moab at the Arnon River. Although we no longer have this book today, ancient writers used it as a source of information. The book probably contained records of how Israel conquered the land east of the Jordan River (called Transjordan).

It may be the same as "the Book of Jashar" (Joshua 10:13; 2 Samuel 1:18). The passage in Numbers 21 is written like poetry and talks about Israel's battles and victories. Scholars disagree about which verses come from the Book of the Wars of the Lord. Some think it is only verse 14, while others include verse 15, and still others include verses 27–30.

Book of Tobit

The book of Tobit is a story about a man named Tobit and his family. Some church traditions include it in their canon (the official list of books in the Bible), while others do not. The Council of Trent accepted it as part of their canon in AD 1546 and it is included in the Roman Catholic Bible. It was not included in the Hebrew Old Testament. Protestants include it as part of the Apocrypha (a collection of writings that are related to the Bible but are not considered Scripture).

Preview

• Who Wrote the Book of Tobit? When Was It Written?

• Why Was the Book of Tobit Written?

• What Is the Story of the Book of Tobit?

• What Is the Message of the Book of Tobit?

Who Wrote the Book of Tobit? When Was It Written?

The book of Tobit is a tale about faithfulness and religious devotion. It was written by a faithful Jew who was possibly born in Palestine. The book shows a strong belief in one God. The writer describes God in several important ways. The writer refers to God as:

- "the God of our fathers" (Tobit 8:5),
- "our Lord and God, he is our Father forever" (13:4), and
- "the King of heaven" (verses 13:7, 11, 15).

The Book of Tobit has survived in many ancient versions and translations:

- three versions in Greek
- two versions in Latin
- two versions in Syriac
- four versions in Hebrew
- one version in Ethiopic

The Book of Tobit has survived in many ancient versions and translations at Qumran (where many old religious texts have been discovered). Because of these findings, some scholars think the book was first written in Hebrew or Aramaic.

The book does not mention any events from the time of the Maccabees (a period of Jewish history that started around 167 BC). This suggests the book was written before that time. However, the book contains some mistakes about history and places that show it could not have been written as early as it claims. Most scholars think it was written around 200 BC or shortly after that.

Why Was the Book of Tobit Written?

Since the events in the Book of Tobit are likely not actual historical events, we should ask why the writer created this story. The writer wanted to teach people about living a good life that pleases God. He shows this through the main character, Tobit.

The story teaches this lesson through Tobit's actions. Even when Tobit faced many difficulties in his life, he kept helping other Jewish people. One way he showed his kindness was by giving proper burials to Jewish people who had been killed by the king. This was dangerous and difficult work, but Tobit did it because he believed it was the right thing to do.

What Is the Story of the Book of Tobit?

The story begins with Tobit, a faithful Israelite from the tribe of Naphtali. He lived in the city of Nineveh. Although Tobit lived a good life and helped many people, he became blind after birds dropped waste into his eyes. In his pain and sadness, he prayed to God asking to die (Tobit 1:1–3:6).

Far away in another city called Ecbatana, a young woman named Sarah was also praying for death. Sarah was a relative of Tobit's family. She had been married seven times, but each of her husbands had died on their wedding night. An evil spirit called Asmodeus had killed them because he was jealous

(3:7–15). So, God sent the angel Raphael to help both Tobit and Sarah (Tobit 16–17).

Tobit decided to send his son Tobias on an important journey. He needed Tobias to go to the city of Rages in Media (the city is now called *Rai*, near Teheran, Iran). He was sent there to collect some money that Tobit had left with a friend. Raphael disguised himself as a man named Azariah and said he was a relative of Tobit's family (5:13). The angel offered to guide Tobias on his journey. Tobias's dog also went with them.

On their journey, Tobias caught a large fish. Raphael told Tobias to keep the fish's heart, liver, and gall because they could be used as medicine (Tobit 6:1–8). When they reached Ecbatana, Raphael arranged for Tobias to marry Sarah. Tobias used the fish's heart and liver to protect himself and Sarah from the evil spirit Asmodeus on their wedding night (Tobit 6:9–8:21).

Raphael helped collect Tobit's money, and then Tobias, Sarah, Raphael, and the dog returned to Nineveh. In Nineveh, Tobias used the fish's gall to heal his father's blindness. After this, Raphael revealed that he was really an angel and then disappeared. Tobit was so grateful that he sang praises to God (Tobit 13).

The final chapter tells us that Tobit lived to be 112 years old (Tobit 14). Before he died, he predicted that the city of Nineveh would be destroyed. Following his father's advice, Tobias and Sarah moved back to Ecbatana before this happened.

What Is the Message of the Book of Tobit?

The book of Tobit helps us understand how Jewish people lived their faith even before the time of the Maccabees. It shows us beautiful examples of how Jewish families lived after they returned from exile. Many early Christian teachers valued this book highly. Martin Luther, one of the leaders of the Protestant Reformation, described Tobit as "a truly beautiful, wholesome, and profitable fiction, the work of a gifted poet … a book useful and good for Christians to read."

The book teaches many important lessons about God's mercy and love. It tells us that "all his ways are mercy and truth" (Tobit 3:2). The story describes God as a Father who cares for his people (13:4). Even when God allows his people to face difficulties because of their wrong actions, he still shows them mercy (verse 5). The book explains that even when God's people are spread out among different nations, he does not abandon them (13:6; 14:5).

The story also teaches that one day, people from all nations will come to know God. They will "come from afar to the name of the Lord God, bearing gifts in their hands, gifts for the king of heaven" (13:11).

The Book of Tobit teaches many important lessons about living a good life:

- Children should honor and respect their parents (Tobit 4:3–4)
- People should follow God's commands (Tobit 4:5)
- Everyone should live a well-ordered life (Tobit 4:14)
- The book gives this important rule: "what you hate, do not do to anyone" (Tobit 4:15)

This religious story held a special place in Jewish homes. It has also influenced many Christians throughout history. Its teachings about family life, showing mercy to others, and living faithfully continue to inspire people today.

Booth

A booth is a small, temporary hut or shelter made of branches and sticks. Booths were made when permanent buildings were unavailable. They provided shade during the day and protection from the dew and winds during the night (Genesis 33:17; Jonah 4:5).

The word is also used as a figure of speech for something fragile and easily destroyed. For example, the word is translated "hut" in Job 27:18 and "shelter" in Isaiah 1:8.

See also Feasts and Festivals of Israel; Pavilion.

Booz

The King James Version form of Boaz in Matthew 1:5 and Luke 3:32.

See Boaz (Person).

Bor-Ashan

Alternate name for Ashan, a town originally assigned to Judah's tribe, in 1 Samuel 30:30. *See* Ashan.

Born Again

"Born again" is a phrase Jesus used to explain to Nicodemus how a person enters the kingdom of God (John 3:3–7). Jesus said that to enter the kingdom of God, a person must be born again. This means they need a new kind of life from God. It is not a physical birth. It is a spiritual change that comes from God's Spirit.

See Regeneration.

Borrow, Borrowing

Receiving money or goods that a person promises to return. The law of Moses regulated borrowing and lending (Deuteronomy 23:19–20).

See Banker, Banking.

Boscath

The King James Version form of Bozkath in 2 Kings 22:1. Bozkath was a city in Judah.

See Bozkath.

Bosor (Person)

The King James Version form of Beor, father of Balaam (2 Peter 2:15).

See Beor #2.

Bosor (Place)

Bosor was a city in the region of Gilead. Judas Maccabeus captured the city to rescue the Jewish people living there (1 Maccabees 5:26, 36). Today, this place is called Busr El-Hariri.

See Bozrah #3.

Bottomless Pit

A phrase used in the Bible to describe a very deep place that is home to both the dead and evil spirits.

Bottomless Pit in the Old Testament

The Hebrew word means "the deep." In many Bible translations, this place is called "the abyss." In ancient times, people used this term for any place that was too deep to measure, like very deep wells or springs. The Old Testament uses this idea when talking about the waters at the creation of the world (Genesis 1:2) and the deep parts of the ocean (Psalms 33:7; 77:16).

In the cultures of the ancient Near East, people thought of this deep place as the opposite of heaven above. Over time, they began to use it as a way to talk about the grave, which they also called "Sheol" (Psalm 71:20). Later, in the time between the Old and New Testaments, people began to describe it as a place where evil spirits lived (Jubilees 5:6; 1 Enoch 10:4, 11).

Bottomless Pit in the New Testament

In the New Testament, "abyss" is used in both of these symbolic ways. For example, demons begged Jesus not to send them into "the abyss" (Luke 8:31). Many scholars believe this links to later references to a "prison" (2 Peter 2:4; Jude 1:6). The meaning of this "prison" is unclear. But, studies of these verses, plus 1 Peter 3:19 and 4:6, suggest that the abyss is probably not the same as Hades (the realm of the dead). Instead, it seems to be a place where evil spirits are held. However, in Romans 10:7, Paul uses the word "abyss" to describe the grave, contrasting it with rising to heaven. Paul reworks a passage from Deuteronomy 30:12–13 in this context.

Bottomless Pit in the Book of Revelation

The term "bottomless pit" is used often in the book of Revelation. In this book, it is described as the home of several beings:

- Creatures that look like locusts with scorpion stings (Revelation 9:1–11)
- A ruler of this dark place, whose name is "Abaddon" or "Destruction"(Revelation 9:11)
- The “Beast,” or Antichrist (Revelation 11:7; 17:8)

The bottomless pit is also where Satan will be kept for 1,000 years (Revelation 20:1, 3).

The book of Revelation shows us three important things about the bottomless pit:

1. God has complete control over it. An angel receives a key to open the pit (Revelation 9:1). The Beast will come out of the pit and then be destroyed (Revelation 17:8). God's power is shown when Satan is captured, tied up, thrown into the pit, and locked inside it (Revelation 20:2–3). 4
2. The pit was created for destruction. When it was opened, thick "smoke rose out of it like the smoke of a great furnace" (Revelation 9:2). It is not the place of torment (called “the lake of fire” in Revelation 20:10–15). After the end times, the pit will be replaced by this final place of punishment (compare Revelation 17:8).
3. The pit is the opposite of heaven. Evil comes from the pit, just as good things come from heaven. In Revelation, the dragon and the Beast try to copy God's power and glory, but they cannot (Revelation 12:9). While heaven brings everything good, the bottomless pit brings everything evil.

See Revelation, Book of.

Bow

A curved weapon that shoots arrows, used in biblical times for hunting and warfare.

See Archer, Archery.

Bowels

The word *bowels* means the intestines (the lower part of the stomach area). The King James Version also uses this word as a metaphor to describe the place where a person feels pity, mercy, and tenderness (see Philippians 1:8; 2:1–2).

Bowl

A round, deep dish used for holding food or liquids.

See Pottery.

Bowman

A person skilled in using a bow and arrow.

See Archer, Archery.

Box Tree

The long-leaved box tree (*Buxus longifolia*) is a hardy evergreen tree. It is also known as boxwood. These trees are found in the mountainous regions of the northern part of Israel and the surrounding areas. It grows in the Galilean hills and Lebanon. The tree grows to a height of about 6.1 meters (20 feet) with a slender trunk. The trunk is usually no more than 15.2 to 20.3 centimeters (six to eight inches) in diameter.

The wood of the box tree is very hard and can be polished to a smooth finish. The Romans cultivated the box tree for its hard wood. They used it to make cabinets and jewel boxes with ivory inlays.

The Bible mentions the box tree in Isaiah 41:19 and 60:13. The Revised Standard Version calls the same tree a "pine."

Boxthorn

A boxthorn is a thorny shrub that grows in dry areas. Some species of boxthorn have purplish flowers and brightly colored berries.

The thornbush in Judges 9:14–15 is thought to be to the European boxthorn (*Lycium europaeum*), also called desert-thorn. It is a thorny shrub that grows 1.8 to 3.7 meters (6 to 12 feet) tall. The plant

has clusters of leaves and small violet flowers. These flowers eventually produce small, round red berries. The European boxthorn is native to Israel and the surrounding areas. It grows commonly throughout the region, especially in the area from Lebanon to the Dead Sea.

Bozez

One of a pair of distinctive rocks (Seneh was the other) flanking the road between Michmash and Gaba. Jonathan and his armor bearer scaled one of these crags to take on a Philistine outpost (1 Sm 14:4). The two rocks are still visible in the modern Wadi Suweinet. *See* Seneh.

Bozkath

Town near Lachish and Eglon in Judah's territory (Jos 15:39), home of King Josiah's mother (2 Kgs 22:1).

Bozrah

1. Well-fortified city in northern Edom (Gn 36:33; 1 Chr 1:44), regarded as impossible to conquer because it was protected by cliffs on three sides. Located 30 miles (48.3 kilometers) north of Petra, at modern Buseirah, it controlled the traffic on the King's Highway. Bozrah was mentioned as one of the strongholds that would fall when God judged Edom (Is 34:6; 63:1; Jer 49:13; Am 1:12).

2. One of the cities cited by the prophet Jeremiah as collapsing with the Moabite nation (Jer 48:24); probably a variant spelling of Bezer. *See* Bezer (Place).

3. City also called Bosorah captured by Judas Maccabeus in the course of his Gilead campaign (1 Macc 5:26, 28). It is perhaps the same place as #2 above.

Bracelet

A bracelet is a piece of jewelry worn on the wrist or arm.

People in Bible times wore bracelets as decoration. Some bracelets were made of gold, silver, or other materials.

Bramble

The Palestinian bramble (*Rubus sanctus*) and the closely related elm-leaf bramble (*Rubus ulmifolius*) are prickly evergreen shrubs that spread by growing new shoots from their roots. The stems and young shoots are covered with a characteristic whitish powder or bloom and short hairs. The prickles are strong, stand upright, and have hair on them.

The flowers of these brambles can be white, pink, rose, or purple in color. The fruit is round and black. In the Bible, "bramble" is a translation of several different words that describe shrubs with prickly stems and runners. These plants often form tangled masses of vegetation.

Branch

A branch is a shoot or sprout that grows from a tree or bush. In the Bible, this word has both literal and symbolic meanings.

In its literal sense, "branch" refers to the three sets of arms that extend from the main shaft of the golden lampstand in the tabernacle (for example, Exodus 25:31–36). The word is also used for the palm branches that people used to build temporary shelters during the ancient Jewish Feast of Tabernacles (Leviticus 23:40–43).

In its figurative sense, "branch" is used as a symbol in prophecies about the Messiah (God's chosen one) and in other spiritual teachings. In the Bible, metaphoric uses of "branch" appear in several passages. Israel is described as different types of plants with branches:

- an olive tree (Hosea 14:6),
- a cedar (Ezekiel 17:23), and
- a vine (Ezekiel 17:6; compare Psalm 80:8–11).

The image of a "branch" with its new growth often represents prosperity and blessing in the Bible (Genesis 49:22; Job 8:16; Psalm 80:8–11; Ezekiel 36:8).

Branches can also symbolize judgment when they are described as being cut off, broken off, withered, or burned (Job 18:16; Isaiah 9:14; Jeremiah 11:16). Jesus combined three of these ideas (withering,

being cut, or being burned) into one metaphor (John 15:6). In a similar way, the apostle Paul wrote that the Jews who did not believe would be broken off like branches (Romans 11:19–21).

The most important use of branch symbolism in the Bible refers to the promised Messiah from King David's family line. Although this symbolism became common during the time of the prophets, its origins go back much earlier in the Bible. The concept of a "branch" was used to describe important people such as:

- a king's personal servant (Genesis 40:9–13),
- the patriarch Joseph (Genesis 49:22),
- Job (Job 29:19), or
- Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Assyria (Daniel 4:12).

Passages such as 2 Samuel 23:4 and Psalm 132:17 speak of the Davidic line as "growing" or "sprouting forth" (which is the literal meaning of the Hebrew verbs used in these verses). Finally, images of a bountiful harvest were used to describe the blessings that would come when the Messiah would come and rule (compare Leviticus 26 with the prophetic passages mentioned earlier). From these earlier uses, it makes sense how the term "branch" eventually became a special title for the Messiah in later prophecies.

Brass

A yellowish metal made from copper and zinc, often used in biblical times for making tools, weapons, and decorative items.

See Minerals and Metals.

Brazen Serpent

A bronze snake Moses made on God's command to heal Israelites bitten by snakes in the desert.

See Bronze Serpent, Bronze Snake.

Bread

A type of food made from dough, which is created by mixing flour or meal from grains with water. This can include items such as bread, pasta, and other baked goods.

Kinds of Seed Used in Making Bread

The Bible tells us that people used wheat, barley, rye, beans, lentils, millet, and manna to make bread.

Wheat

Wheat is often mentioned in the Bible, with about 48 references in the Old Testament and 14 in the New Testament. The hard winter wheat (*Triticum aestivuum*) is still popular with farmers in Palestine, who plant it in the fall and harvest it the following summer.

Barley

Barley grows faster and produces more than wheat. In Egypt, the plague of hail destroyed the barley because it had already ripened, while wheat and rye were not yet mature (Exodus 9:31–32). Barley is mentioned 32 times in the Old Testament. It could grow even during famines (Ruth 1:22; 2:17, 23; 3:2, 15, 17). It was cheaper than wheat (2 Kings 7:1, 16). Because of this, poorer people relied on barley. The boy who gave his lunch to Jesus to feed 5,000 people had barley bread (John 6:9, 13). Barley was also fed to cattle (1 Kings 4:28). Barley has a larger husk and long, wiry hair, making it harder to separate the chaff (the outer covering of the grain). This, along with its less popular flavor, made barley cheaper than other grains.

Rye

The word "rye" in the Bible translates a Hebrew word that can also mean "vetch," "fitches," or "spelt" (Exodus 9:32; Ezekiel 4:9). Rye is a hardy grass that can grow even in poor soil. Rye bread became popular in northern Europe and to some extent in Egypt (Exodus 9:32). In Isaiah 28:24–28, there is a summary of the work farmers did in growing and threshing various seed crops, including rye. The people of Israel occasionally made bread from rye (Ezekiel 4:9). But, they normally used it as food for their cattle.

Other Seeds

Beans, lentils, and millet were also ground and mixed with wheat, barley, and spelt to make bread (Ezekiel 4:9). The prophet Ezekiel ate this mixture as a symbol of the "defiled bread" that the Jews would eat while in captivity among the gentiles (non-Jewish people).

Manna

Numbers 11:8 says that the people ground manna in mills or crushed it in a mortar, then baked it in pans to make bread. God called manna "bread" in its original state (see Exodus 16:4–32). Manna looked like coriander seed (Exodus 16:31; Numbers 11:7). The grains were smaller than wheat. The Hebrews complained that they had no bread and said that their souls hated "wretched food" (Numbers 21:5). The psalmist referred to it as "the bread of the angels" (Psalm 78:25).

Tools Used to Make Bread

Ancient Near Eastern people used many different tools and methods to make bread. Most of the equipment used in ancient bakeries can be seen in the bas-reliefs (carvings that stand out slightly from a flat background) found in Egyptian mastaba tombs (a type of ancient Egyptian tomb with a flat roof). These detailed carvings show historians how bread was prepared, shaped, and baked thousands of years ago. By studying these images, archaeologists have learned about the bread-making process that was essential to daily life in biblical times.

Sieve

A sieve, similar to a strainer, was used to remove small impurities from the grain.

Grindstones

A pair of stones was used to grind grain into flour. The top stone would be turned against the bottom stone, crushing grain into flour.

Jars

Clay jars were used to hold olive oil, water, and liquid yeast, which were mixed with the flour to make dough (Leviticus 2:4; 1 Kings 17:12–16).

Bowls

People used kneading bowls, or wooden boards or tables, to mix the ingredients thoroughly (Exodus 8:3; 12:34; Deuteronomy 28:5, 17).

Pans

People who were poor often used heated flat stones or the inner walls of their ovens as baking surfaces. Most people used iron griddles, plates, or pans (Leviticus 2:5; 6:21; 7:9; Numbers 11:8; 1 Chronicles 9:31; 23:29; 2 Chronicles 35:13; Ezekiel 4:3). These pans were usually flat and had handles that could be as long as 1.5 meters (five feet). The dough was placed on the griddle to be baked.

Ovens

Some ovens had a separate chamber for the fire, but most did not. Wood, dried grass, or dung heated the oven (Leviticus 2:4; 7:9; 11:35; 26:26; Ezekiel 4:12, 15; Hosea 7:4–7; Matthew 6:30. Once the fire heated the oven and the coals and walls retained the heat, the bread was placed inside. Thin, hard unleavened cakes or small leavened cakes were baked in just a few minutes (Matthew 14:17; Mark 6:38; Luke 9:13). Larger loaves were about 30 centimeters (one foot) in diameter. When baked, these loaves would rise to over 7.6 centimeters (three inches) thick. A typical large loaf would weigh more than 0.9 kilograms (two pounds), and needed about 45 minutes to bake completely (1 Samuel 17:17; 2 Samuel 16:1).

Bread as a Symbol

Bread was very important for life and survival in Bible times. Because of this, the Bible uses bread to teach spiritual truths. In the Old Testament, the priests had to place special loaves of bread on a table in the holy place in the tabernacle and later in the temple (Exodus 25:30). This bread was called the "Bread of the Presence."

Both the Old Testament law and Jesus teach that "Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4; Deuteronomy 8:3). All four Gospels tell stories of Jesus multiplying bread to feed large crowds of people (Matthew 14:13–21; Mark 6:30–44; Luke 9:10–17; John 6:1–14). Jesus explained that the true “bread of life” was not manna that God sent from heaven to the Israelites in the wilderness. Instead, Jesus himself is the true bread of life who gives eternal life (John 6:28–35).

Before his death, Jesus took bread and shared it with his disciples along with wine. He presented the bread as a symbol of his body and the wine as a symbol of his blood. This was because his death would be the sacrifice for the sins of the world. By eating this bread and drinking this wine, the disciples accepted Jesus's sacrifice for their sins (Matthew 26:26–29). In Revelation 2:17, Jesus makes this mysterious promise: "To the one who overcomes, I will give the hidden manna."

See also Food and Food Preparation; Meals, Significance of; Bread of the Presence; Leaven; Unleavened Bread.

Bread of the Presence

The loaves of bread that were placed on a special table in the sanctuary or Holy Place of the tabernacle, and later in the temple.

What Was the Meaning of the Bread of the Presence?

"Showbread" is another term in the Old Testament used to describe the "bread of the Presence," or bread that has been set before the Lord's face (Exodus 25:23, 30; 35:13; 39:36; 1 Kings 7:48; 2 Chronicles 4:19). The term "showbread" refers to how the bread was arranged in rows on the table (1 Chronicles 9:32; 23:29; 28:16; 2 Chronicles 2:4; 13:11; 29:18).

The table of showbread, the altar of incense, and the golden lampstand were not in the Holy of Holies, but they were still believed to be in the presence of God. The loaves were offerings placed before the presence of God, so they were holy and could only be eaten by priests. Later in Israel's history, a tax of one-third shekel on all citizens funded the bread of the Presence and other temple services (Nehemiah 10:32–33).

What Was the Bread of the Presence? How Was It Prepared?

The bread of the Presence was 12 very large loaves. Each loaf was made of one-fifth ephah of fine flour, or 30.3 liters of wheat for all 12 loaves. They were sprinkled with frankincense. The loaves were arranged in two rows, one leaning on the other, and placed on the table of showbread (Leviticus 24:5–9). Arranged this way, the bread was an "offering of food" to the Lord. The loaves were changed every Sabbath.

The Bread of the Presence in the New Testament

The bread of the Presence is mentioned once in the New Testament. When David was fleeing from Saul, he went to Ahimelech, the priest at the tabernacle in Nob, in search of food (1 Samuel 21:1–6). The only food Ahimelech had was the showbread, and he agreed to share it with David's men if they had been sexually pure for some time before eating. Jesus later referred to the incident, comparing it to his ministry and meeting the needs of his followers (Matthew 12:1–8; Mark 2:25–26; Luke 6:1–5). David and his men were God's anointed and allowed to eat the holy bread. In this way, Jesus provided for others' needs despite Sabbath rules.

See also Tabernacle; Temple.

Breakfast

Breakfast is the first meal of the day.

The word means "breaking the fast," because it ends the hours without eating during the night.

See Family Life and Relations; Food and Food Preparation.

Breaking of Bread

The phrase *breaking of bread* appears in the New Testament.

It often refers to the Lord's Supper, a special meal where followers of Jesus remember his death and resurrection.

See Lord's Supper, The.

Breastpiece, Breastplate

1. A part of the ceremonial clothing of the high priest (Exodus 25:7).
   See Priests and Levites.
2. A piece of armor worn to protect the chest. The word is used symbolically in several passages. Isaiah 59:17 says that God wore righteousness as armor. He did this to take vengeance on his enemies. The apostle Paul urged Christians to wear a breastplate of righteousness to stand against the devil (Ephesians 6:14). He also urged them to wear a breastplate of faith and love as they await Christ's return (1 Thessalonians 5:8).
   See also Armor and Weapons.

Briar

A briar is a bush with sharp thorns.

The Bible mentions briars many times. They often grow in places that are not cared for.

See Bramble; Thistle, Thorn.

Bribe, Bribery

To give a person in authority something valuable to influence them. Bribery was not allowed in the Old Testament law (Exodus 23:8; Deuteronomy 16:19). It was also condemned by the prophets (Isaiah 1:23; Amos 5:12; Micah 3:11). Although Samuel denied that he ever took a bribe, his sons did not maintain the same standard (1 Samuel 8:3; 12:3).

The difference between bribery and giving gifts was not always clear. So, giving something valuable is seen as a way to prevent unwanted conflict (Proverbs 21:14). Giving a gift is described (as neither good or bad) as a way to get ahead (Proverbs 18:16).

For the most part, the Bible says bribery is evil. “A wicked man takes a covert bribe to subvert the course of justice” (Proverbs 17:23). Any system that allows bribery gives rich people an unfair advantage when trying to persuade leaders and judges. Poor people find it difficult to get fair treatment. Innocent people who are poor can be found guilty, while guilty people who are rich can offer a large bribe and go free (Psalm 15:5b; Isaiah 5:23). In the worst cases, bribes were used to hire people to kill others (Deuteronomy 27:25; Ezekiel 22:12).

Brick, Brick Kiln

A brick is an oblong (rectangular) block made of shaped mud or clay. It is dried either by the sun or hardened by burning in a special furnace called a kiln. Bricks are used for building structures and making pavements. In the ancient biblical world, brick was the most commonly used building material, especially in Babylonia (ancient Iraq). The Hebrew word for "brick" comes from a verb that means "to be white." This refers to the appearance of the clay used to make bricks.

In Babylonia, builders rarely had good stone available, so they used stone only for small parts of buildings like lintels (horizontal supports above doors), thresholds, and door hinges. Babylonian bricks were made from the mud or clay found in marshes and plains. First, workers removed unwanted items like pebbles from the clay. Then they mixed the clay with chopped straw or grass. When this plant material decayed, it released acids that made the clay easier to shape.

Brick makers added water and kneaded the mixture with their feet. They then molded it into square bricks, 20 to 30.5 centimeters (eight to 12 inches) across and seven to ten centimeters (three to sour inches) thick. The bricks were often stamped with the name of the reigning king using a wooden block. Some bricks found near Babylon still have the stamp of King Nebuchadnezzar.

Babylonian bricks were usually burned in kilns instead of being dried in the sun. Sun-dried bricks broke down easily in heavy rain. But, kiln-burned bricks were very strong. These stronger bricks were used for important buildings, pavements, and outer walls. Archaeologists have found many ancient brick kilns in Babylonia.

In ancient Egypt, bricks built walls, temples, and storehouses. But, few brick kilns have been found there. Egyptian bricks were usually dried in the sun rather than burned. Sometimes, Egyptian bricks were made without straw. But Nile mud bricks needed straw to hold them together. Egyptian bricks were rectangular and varied in size. They were about 10 to 51 centimeters (4 to 20 inches) long, 15 to 23 centimeters (6 to 9 inches) wide, and 10 to 18 centimeters (4 to 7 inches) thick. Like in Babylonia, Egyptian bricks were often stamped with an identifying seal.

The Egyptians thought brick-making was a low-status job that should be done by slaves. During their time as slaves in Egypt, the Israelites were forced to make bricks (Exodus 1:11–14; 5:6–19). Their suffering increased when they had to gather straw while making the same number of bricks. When the Israelites left Egypt during the exodus, they took the skill of brick-making with them to the promised land.

See also Architecture; Pottery.

Bride and Bridegroom

A *bride* is a woman who is getting married or has just been married. A *bridegroom* is the man she is marrying.

The Bible sometimes uses these words to describe the close relationship between Christ and the church (Ephesians 5:25–27).

See Bride of Christ; Church; Jerusalem, New; Marriage, Marriage Customs.

Bride of Christ

One of the NT metaphors for the church. In it Christ is pictured as a husband, and the church as his bride.

Addressing the church at Corinth, the apostle Paul referred to himself as the one who gave the church to Christ, presenting her as a pure bride to her one husband (2 Cor 11:2–3). In ancient Near Eastern culture the father gave his daughter in marriage to the bridegroom, assuring him of her purity. To Paul, understanding himself as the church's spiritual father (1 Cor 4:15), the thought of the church as his daughter sprang readily to mind. To be Christ's pure bride requires the church to have pure and simple devotion. Like a concerned father, Paul was worried that the young bride (the church) might commit adultery by her willingness to accept "another Jesus," "another Spirit," or "a different gospel" (2 Cor 11:4). As between marriage partners, the relation between the church and Christ is governed by a covenant of mutual faithfulness. Disloyalty shatters the covenant.

The OT furnished Paul a rich background for that image of the church. God's covenant with Israel was commonly pictured as a marriage pledge, with Israel as God's bride. Through the prophet Jeremiah, the Lord said to Israel: "I remember the devotion of your youth, your love as a bride" (Jer 2:2, rsv). He went on to lament the fact that Israel had been faithless; by going after other gods, she had actually prostituted herself and become an adulteress (Jer 3:6–9, 20).

The theme of Israel's desertion of her lover (God) was explicitly treated in Ezekiel 16 and in Hosea. The terms "harlotry" and "whoredom" were used to connote disloyalty to Yahweh and allegiance to other gods. Thus, adultery and idolatry became synonymous. Through his own struggles with a faithless wife, the prophet Hosea experienced God's agony over his bride Israel and his longing for her to return. Hosea was given a vision of a future day in which God would betroth his people to him forever in steadfast love and faithfulness (Hos 2:19–20). That vision may have enabled Paul to transfer the image of Israel as God's bride to the church as the bride of Christ.

In Ephesians 5:22–33, the relationship between Christ and his church is compared to the relationship between a husband and wife. The image is taken from the common understanding of the husband-wife relationship in that part of the world. The church's submission to Christ is compared with the wife's submission to the husband, but the stress of the passage is on the role of the husband: he is to love her as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her. Christ relates to the whole church on the basis of self-sacrificial love. Just as a husband is joined to his wife, with a mutual interdependence so intimate that they become one, so Christ and his church become one body. As the man's love for his wife intends her wholeness, so Christ's love of the church intends her completeness.

A variation on the theme is found in John the Baptist's testimony to Jesus (Jn 3:29). John saw himself as "the Bridegroom's friend" who, according to Jewish custom, takes care of the wedding arrangements. The Messiah is identified with the bridegroom to whom the bride (his messianic community) belongs and who comes to claim that bride.

In Revelation 19 and 21 the metaphor of the church as the Messiah's bride is further developed. The vision in Revelation 19:7–8 announces the marriage of the Lamb (Christ) to the bride (church). In Revelation 21 the vision depicts the new Jerusalem coming down from heaven, "prepared as a bride adorned for her husband" (v 2). Then the seer is invited to behold "the Bride, the wife of the Lamb" (v 9) and to see the Holy City "coming down out of heaven from God" (v 10). The new Jerusalem is identified as the people of God, the bride of Christ, among whom and with whom God will be present forever.

See also Church; Jerusalem, New.

Bridechamber

A bridechamber was the room where marriage celebrations took place.

See Marriage, Marriage Customs.

Brier

A prickly or thorny bush, mentioned with frequency in the Bible.

See Bramble; Thistle, Thorn.

Brimstone

An old name for the nonmetallic element sulfur, literally "the stone that burns." Sulfur catches fire at lower temperatures than many other substances. It burns and produces acrid sulfur dioxide fumes. Sulfur occurs naturally in regions that have volcanoes, such as the valley of the Dead Sea.

In the Bible, "fire and brimstone" are often used to show God's punishment of evil (Genesis 19:24; Deuteronomy 29:23; Job 18:15; Psalm 11:6; Ezekiel 38:22; and in King James Version, Luke 17:29; Revelation 9:17–18; 14:10; 19:20; 20:10; 21:8).

The last time volcanoes erupted in Israel was about 4,000 years ago. Scientists can tell this by measuring how old things are using a method called radiocarbon dating. These powerful volcanic events had a big impact on the people who lived there at that time. They told stories about these events, and these stories were passed down from parents to children over many generations.

See Minerals and Metals.

Bronze

Bronze is a strong metal made by mixing copper and tin. People in ancient times used bronze to make jewelry, tools, weapons, and coins.

See Minerals and Metals.

Bronze Sea

Large tank of water in Solomon's temple yard for the priests' washing (1 Kgs 7:23–44; 2 Kgs 16:17; 25:13; 1 Chr 18:8; 2 Chr 4:2–6, 15; Jer 52:17). Cast from bronze and about three inches (7.6 centimeters) thick (a handbreadth), it was mounted on 12 bronze oxen (three facing in each compass direction) in the courtyard at the southeast corner of the sanctuary. It was five cubits (about 7.5 feet, or over 2 meters) high and ten cubits (15 feet, or 4.6 meters) in diameter, with a capacity of either 2,000 baths (1 Kgs 7:26) or 3,000 (2 Chr 4:5). The discrepancy possibly comes from a scribal error. The bath (originally a vessel large enough to hold a person) was a liquid measure of about 6 gallons (23 liters), so the tank held perhaps 18,000 gallons (68,136 liters) of water.

See also Temple; Laver.

Bronze Snake, Bronze Serpent

A piece of metal art that God told Moses to make when the Israelites were being bitten by venomous snakes (Numbers 21:4–9). God sent these snakes as a punishment because the people were complaining against God and against Moses. When the people repented, God ordered Moses to make "a fiery serpent and mount it on a pole." Anyone who looked at it was healed.

Some people connect the meaning of this event with another story in which Moses's staff turned into a serpent. That serpent then swallowed the serpent-staffs of Pharaoh's magicians. Then it became a staff again (Exodus 7:8–12; compare 4:2–5, 28–30).

The serpent was worshiped as a god in both Egyptian and Canaanite religions. Therefore, the victory of God's serpent figure showed God was more powerful than these false gods. In Numbers 21, however, this understanding was probably not the main point.

This event was the last of several times the Israelites turned away from God in the wilderness (compare 1 Corinthians 10:9). All these events included four parts:

1. The people complained against God.
2. The people experienced judgment.
3. The people repented.
4. God offered forgiveness and rescue.

The focus was not on a magical way of healing, but rather on the snake as a symbol of salvation offered to all who would look at it.

The bronze serpent appears again in 2 Kings 18:4. Over the years, it had become an object of worship, and King Hezekiah (who ruled from 716–686 BC) of the southern kingdom of Judah destroyed it during his religious reforms. The final mention of it in pre-Christian writings is in the book Wisdom of

Solomon, which supports the explanation above: salvation came not through the snake itself but through God's provision. "He who turned towards it was healed, not by what he saw, but by you, the Savior of all" (Wisdom of Solomon 16:7).

With this background, Jesus said that he, like Moses's serpent, must be "lifted up" (John 3:14). The "lifting up" of the "Son of Man" clearly refers to Jesus's death and has two main points:

- One is a "death as salvation" theme (the idea that salvation comes through death). This appears in the story of Moses's bronze serpent and the divine command "must" in John's Gospel, which shows that God planned and required this way of saving people.
- The other theme is "death as exaltation" (the idea that death leads to honor and glory). This is seen in the meaning of the verb itself (which includes the idea of majesty) and in John's focus on the glory of Jesus's time on earth and his resurrected life.

Brood

A term often used in the Bible for young birds, especially trained birds, it is also used for snakes or vipers as a metaphor for "sinners" (Numbers 32:14; Matthew 3:7; 12:34; Luke 3:7).

See Birds (Fowl, Domestic; Partridge).

Brook

A small, flowing stream of water.

See Wadi.

Brook of Egypt

Natural border between the Negev Desert area of Israel and the Sinai Peninsula, about 50 miles (80.5 kilometers) southwest of Gaza. The brook of Egypt, modern Wadi el-Arish, flows only during the rainy season (Nm 34:5; Jos 15:4, 47; 1 Kgs 8:65; 2 Kgs 24:7; 2 Chr 7:8; Is 27:12; Ez 47:19; 48:28). A different Hebrew word, signifying an ever-flowing river, appears in Genesis 15:18, where God spelled out the boundaries of the Promised Land to the patriarch Abraham. That reference may be to the easternmost branch of the Nile (the Pelusiac), which flows into the Mediterranean Sea near modern Port Said, and to the line of ancient fortifications marking Egypt's border.

Brook of the Arabah

A brook (flowing stream) that flows into the Arabah (Amos 6:14). The exact location of this brook is not known.

The Arabah is a long valley of desert land that stretches from the Sea of Galilee to East Africa. There is a wadi (dry riverbed that fills with water during rains) named Arabah south of the Dead Sea.

In the Bible, the word Arabah means "desert" or "wilderness." In can refer to parts of the Jordan Valley (Deuteronomy 4:48–49; Joshua 8:14; 2 Kings 25:4). It can also refer to parts of the Salt Sea (Deuteronomy 3:17).

In the Wadi Arabah, water flows into the Salt Sea from several springs and streams that form when it rains.

See also Arabah.

Brook of the Willows

A stream or small valley mentioned in Isaiah 15:7. It is also called the "Ravine of the Willows." It was probably on the southern border of Moab. The verse says that Moab's wealth would be carried away along this brook.

Some Bible translations call it the "Ravine of the Poplars" because the exact tree meant is uncertain.

Broom

The broom is a Palestinian shrub or bush that often grows quite large and provides shade (1 Kings 19:4). It is native to Eurasia.

The King James Version translates the Hebrew word as "juniper." It does not refer to true juniper plants. Instead, it refers to a species of broom known as the white broom (*Retama raetam*).

The white broom has long, flexible branches that form an upright, dense bush growing 0.9 to 3.7 meters (3 to 12 feet) tall. Though its leaves are small and few, it provides welcome shade in desert areas. The plant produces sweet, very fragrant white flowers shaped like peas that grow in clusters along its twigs. This beautiful shrub grows in the desert regions of Palestine, Syria, and Persia. In many desert areas, it is the only bush that offers any shade (1 Kings 19:4–5).

The "roots of the broom" mentioned in Job 30:4 are neither juniper nor white broom roots. The roots of the white broom taste very bad and could not be eaten in the way Job describes. Job's "roots of the broom" were probably an edible parasitic plant (*Cynomorium coccineum*). This plant grows in salt marshes and sandy coastal areas. People often eat it during food shortages. At one time it was highly valued for its supposed healing properties in treating severe intestinal illness.

Brother

The term "brother" can refer to:

- A man or boy in relation to his siblings
- A close male friend
- A fellow member of the same race, creed, profession, or organization.

What Does "Brother" Mean in the Old Testament?

In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word for "brother" refers to male children who share at least one parent. Joseph and Benjamin were both children of Jacob and Rachel (Genesis 35:24). Still, Jacob's other sons were also Joseph's brothers (Genesis 42:6).

The love Joseph had for Benjamin was special and is not always shared between brothers. Cain killed his brother Abel (Genesis 4:8). Esau hated his brother, Jacob (27:41). A brother can be a bad influence (Deuteronomy 13:6–7), but ideally he helps in times of need (Proverbs 17:17). The law of levirate marriage meant that if a man died leaving a childless widow, his brother had to marry her and have children to continue his brother's family name (Deuteronomy 25:5).

David called Jonathan his "brother" even though they were not related (2 Samuel 1:26). A fellow Israelite could be called brother. The relationship came with certain duties: no one could charge interest on their brother nor enslave him (Leviticus 25:35–43).

What Does "Brother" Mean in the New Testament?

In the New Testament, the Greek word describes natural brothers, like Andrew and Peter (John 1:41). Jesus had four brothers (Mark 6:3). (Roman Catholics believe they were Jesus's cousins, but the Greek does not use the word for cousin.) Jesus's brothers did not believe in him at first (John 7:5). Still, after the resurrection, they joined the Christian community (Acts 1:14). Jesus taught that his disciples had one Father (God) and were all brothers (Matthew 23:8–9). He also was their brother (Matthew 28:10).

Early Christians called each other "brother" (Acts 9:17; Colossians 1:1). Twice, the Christian community is called "the brotherhood" (1 Peter 2:17; 5:9). Being a part of the Christian brotherhood comes with certain duties:

- Controlling sexual desires (1 Thessalonians 4:6)
- Providing material help when needed (James 2:15–16)
- Avoiding cause for offence (Romans 14:13).
- Christians should not "go to law" or sue their brothers (1 Corinthians 6:5–6)
- They must resolve their problems either personally in the church (Matthew 18:15–17)

A Christian's relationship with their brother is significant because they cannot worship God if he is not in harmony with his brother (Matthew 5:23–24).

See also Family Life and Relations; Brothers (and Sisters).

Brothers (and Sisters)

A name used for people who belong to God's family. During Jesus's time, Jewish people often called each other "brothers" (Acts 2:29, 37; 7:2; 22:5; 28:21; Romans 9:3). When the first Jewish Christians started their communities, they naturally used this same term to address each other. When they said "brothers," they meant both men and women (Acts 1:15–16; 9:30; 11:1). Many modern Bible translations use "brothers and sisters" instead of just "brothers" to make this meaning clear.

Non-Jewish (gentile) religious groups also called each other brothers. Because of this, when non-Jewish people became Christians, they were comfortable using this term in their churches, too (Acts 17:14; Romans 1:13; 1 Corinthians 1:1, 10). Paul used this term many times in his letters to these churches.

"Brothers" became one of the most common ways to refer to Christians, along with two other terms:

1. "disciples" (found in the book of Acts) and
2. "saints" (used as a plural word in Paul's letters and in Revelation).

In the books of James and 1 John, "brothers" is the main term used for Christians.

Early Christians called each individual believer a "brother," and they called the whole group "the brothers." This name showed how close the Christian community was to each other. The relationship between Christians was meant to be as close as family members, and even closer, according to Jesus (Mark 10:23–31).

The books of 1 John and James use this family term to teach that Christians who have more should help Christians who have less (James 2:15; 1 John 3:10–18; 4:20–21). The word "brothers" also shows that all members of the Christian community were equal.

Brothers of Jesus

The brothers of Jesus were James, Joses (also called Joseph), Simon, and Judas. The New Testament names them as members of Jesus's own family (Matthew 13:55; Mark 6:3). Jesus's brothers and mother Mary visited him while he was teaching (Matthew 12:47–50; Mark 3:34–35; Luke 8:19–21). During this visit, Jesus taught that everyone who follows God's will becomes part of his family.

Jesus's Family in the Gospels

The people of Nazareth knew Jesus's family well. When Jesus came to teach there, they said, "Isn't this the carpenter, the son of Mary and the brother of James, Joses, Judas, and Simon? Aren't His sisters here with us as well?" (Mark 6:3).

In Matthew's Gospel, the order of the names of the last two brothers is reversed (Matthew 13:55). When Jesus and his disciples went to Capernaum, Mary and his brothers went with them (John 2:12). Just before the Feast of Tabernacles the brothers visited Jesus to persuade him to go to Jerusalem for the festival. Although they were skeptical about his miracles, they said he should show his powers in public to gain recognition (John 7:4).

Jesus acknowledged opposition from within his family when he said, "Only in his hometown and in his own household is a prophet without honor" (Matthew 13:57). When crowds began following Jesus, his brothers and friends from his hometown thought he was acting strangely. (Mark 3:21).

Leaders in the Early Church

Later, the brothers changed their minds about Jesus and became important leaders in the early church in Jerusalem. They joined Mary in regular prayer meetings, showing they now believed in Jesus (Acts 1:14). Jesus appeared to James after his resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:7). When Paul visited Jerusalem after becoming a follower of Jesus, he met with Peter and James, "the Lord's brother," but not the other apostles (Galatians 1:19). When the apostle Peter was released from prison, he went to the home of Mary the mother of John Mark. Despite the excitement of the occasion, he immediately asked the group to "Send word to James and to the brothers" (Acts 12:17).

James became a respected leader in the Jerusalem church(Acts 15:13–21; 21:18). In the council at Jerusalem, he expressed a strong opinion on the acceptance of gentiles (non-Jewish people) into the church. He was later visited by Paul, who told him about his ministry and the many conversions among the gentiles.

Although James is mentioned more often by name, all the brothers seem to have been well respected at that time. Paul used their actions as an example when he argued that it would be appropriate for him also to have a wife accompany him on his

journeys, as Jesus's brothers did (1 Corinthians 9:5).

The author of the Letter of James is generally assumed to be the Lord's brother. Although he does not identify himself specifically that way (1:1). It seems clear that the author wrote as a recognized leader in the church. To identify him as the Lord's brother seems logical.

The author of the Letter of Jude identifies himself as the brother of James. The reference would most logically be to James, the leader mentioned in Acts and probably the author of the other letter. The author thus seems to be the Judas named as the brother of the Lord in the Gospels (Matthew 13:55; Mark 6:3).

The New Testament clearly separates Jesus's brothers from the twelve apostles (Jesus's specially chosen followers). Luke named the apostles and then said, "With one accord they all continued in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers" (Acts 1:13–14). The apostle Paul referred to the brothers of the Lord as a group separate from the apostles (1 Corinthians 9:5). Each mention of them in the Gospels describes them as family members and distinct from the disciples.

See also James (Person) #1; Joseph #7; Jude (Person); Mary #1.

Buckler

A small shield carried in the hand or worn on the arm in battle. It was usually round.

See Armor and Weapons.

Buckthorn

The Palestinian buckthorn is a shrub or small tree that grows to a height of 0.9 to 1.8 meters (three to six feet). It has velvety, thorny branches, evergreen leaves, and clusters of small flowers that bloom in March or April. This plant grows in thickets and on hillsides from Syria and Lebanon through the Israel and the surrounding areas to Arabia and the Sinai.

Build, Building

To build means to make something, often using wood, stone, or other materials. A building is something that people make for shelter or use, like a house, temple, or city wall. The Bible talks often about building or rebuilding altars, temples, homes, and cities. Sometimes the Bible uses the word *build* as a picture of God's work in his people (1 Peter 2:4–8).

See Architecture.

Bukki

1. A leader of the tribe of Dan who helped Joshua divide the land of Canaan among the Israelites (Numbers 34:22).
2. An ancestor of Ezra (1 Chronicles 6:5, 51; Ezra 7:1, 4–5).

Bukkiah

Heman's eldest son, who served with his father and 13 brothers as a temple musician (1 Chr 25:4, 13).

Bul

Eighth month of the preexilic Canaanite calendar. In this month King Solomon's temple was completed (1 Kgs 6:38). *See* Calendars, Ancient and Modern.

Bull, Bullock

A *bull* is an adult male cow-like animal, sch as oxen or cattle. A *bullock* is a young male cow-like animal. People in Bible times used bulls and bullocks for farming and as sacrifices to God.

See Cattle.

Bulrush

Any of a number of reed plants that grow in marshes and beside streams and rivers.

See Reed.

Bunah

Jerahmeel's son from Judah's tribe (1 Chr 2:25).

Bunni

1. Levite who sang praise to God after Ezra's public reading of the law (Neh 9:4).

2. Political leader who signed Ezra's covenant of faithfulness to God with Nehemiah and others after the exile (Neh 10:15).

3. Hashabiah's father (Neh 11:15), a Levite descended from Merari (1 Chr 9:14). Possibly the same as #1 above.

Burial, Burial Customs

The Bible makes frequent reference to burial practices. A society's burial customs are a reflection of its views about death and the afterlife. The ancient Egyptians, for example, thought of life after death as a continuation of physical activities in another realm, as evidenced by their elaborately furnished tombs. The ancient Hebrews emphasized a more spiritual concept of union or fellowship of the departed with generations gone on before.

Graves and Tombs

Among the Hebrews, location of burial plots was generally determined on a family basis. The OT contains many references to an Israelite's desire to be buried in the family burying place, describing his death as "going to his fathers" (Gn 15:15; 1 Kgs 13:22).

The cave of Machpelah at Hebron was one example of family "cohabitation" of a tomb for a succession of generations. Abraham purchased the site from Ephron the Hittite at the time of Sarah's death (Gn 23). When Abraham died, Isaac and Ishmael laid his body in the same tomb (25:9), and there Jacob in turn buried his parents, Isaac and Rebekah, as well as Jacob's wife Leah (49:31). After his death, Jacob's body was buried with his father's in accord with his own request (49:29; 50:13). Jacob's son Joseph made his kinsmen promise that his remains would be preserved so they could be carried back to the homeland when God enabled his people to return from Egypt (50:25). Samuel is spoken of as being buried in his house at Ramah, evidently referring to a family graveyard plot (1 Sm 25:1). Joab was buried in his own house in the wilderness (1 Kgs 2:34). King Manasseh was buried in the garden of his palace (2 Kgs 21:18), and Joshua in his own inheritance at Timnath-serah (Jos 24:30). Kings were careful to perpetuate their memory by special burial sites, often in the City of David (the part of Jerusalem on the southeastern ridge first occupied by that great king). King Josiah designated his burial place in advance, most likely an ancestral tomb (2 Kgs 23:30).

Individual burial sites, such as that of Deborah near Bethel (Gn 35:8) and of Rachel on the road to Ephrath (Gn 35:1, 20), were an exception necessitated by sudden death at some distance from the family tomb.

Bodies were buried in tombs, that is, natural caves or rock-hewn sepulchers, such as that belonging to Joseph of Arimathea where the body of Jesus was laid (Mt 27:59–60). They were also buried in shallow graves covered with rock heaps, serving both to mark them and to prevent desecration of the body by animals.

Some graves were marked by a monument erected in love (Gn 35:20) and honor (2 Kgs 23:17), but stones were sometimes heaped on a dishonorable burial place, as in the case of Achan (Jos 7:26) and Absalom (2 Sm 18:17). Tombs were often adorned or embellished, sometimes whitewashed, in part to warn against ceremonial contamination prohibited by Mosaic law. Jesus spoke of such embellishment in a rebuke of the Pharisees (Mt 23:27).

Treatment of the Corpse

The assurance given by God to Jacob that "Joseph's hand shall close your eyes" (Gn 46:4, rsv) probably alludes to the custom of a near relative closing the eyes of one who died with a fixed stare. Close relatives might also literally embrace and kiss the body immediately upon expiration. The body was washed and dressed in the deceased one's clothing. Pins and other ornaments found in excavated tombs are evidence that the dead were buried fully clothed. Soldiers were buried in full regalia, with shields covering or cradling the armored bodies, their swords under their heads (Ez 32:27).

Embalming was not a usual practice in Israel. Egyptian treatment for Jacob and Joseph was the exception rather than the rule. According to the Greek historian Herodotus, the Egyptians commenced embalming procedures by removing

the brain from the cranium through the nasal apertures, piecemeal, using a long curved hook. When this had been done, the cranial cavity was rinsed out with a mixture of resins and spices. The corpse was eviscerated, and the entrails were placed in four canopic jars. The body was soaked in a solution of natron for a period of from 40 to 80 days, depending on the cost of the burial. At the time of interment, the corpse was wrapped in strips of fine linen cloth from head to foot and put in an anthropoid coffin. The canopic jars were placed in the tomb along with the body, symbolizing the reuniting of the personality and its survival after death.

Cremation of the bodies of Saul and his sons (1 Sm 31:12–13) was also an exception to normal practice. The Roman historian Tacitus wrote that in contrast with Roman custom, Jewish piety required the burying rather than burning of dead bodies. Under Mosaic law such burning was reserved as a sentence of judgment (Lv 21:9; Jos 7:25).

After preparation of the body, it was carried on a bier (a simple frame with carrying poles) without being placed in a coffin. The body was laid either in a prepared niche in the wall of a rock-hewn chamber or directly in a shallow grave dug in a burial plot. Neither bier nor any form of casket entered the pit with the corpse. The spices used as a perfume and temporary deterrent to decay cannot properly be considered an attempt at embalming (Mk 16:1).

As we know from the Gospel record of Jesus' burial, some cave tombs had a seal at the doorway, either a hinged wooden door or a flat stone shaped so it could be rolled into place. Such a stone seal could be reopened only with extreme effort (Mk 15:46; 16:3–4). By NT times the Jews sometimes economized on the use of a family tomb by placing the dry bones of formerly buried relatives in ossuaries. These boxlike receptacles were probably an adaptation of chests used by the Romans for holding ashes after a cremation.

Under Mosaic legislation, ceremonial defilement was contracted either through physical contact with the corpse or by participation in the formalities of mourning. Especially stringent prohibitions applied to the priests of Israel. The high priest himself could have nothing at all to do with mourning. In particular, he "must never defile himself by going near a dead person, even if it is his father or mother. He must not desecrate the sanctuary of his God by leaving it to attend his parents' funeral, because he has been made holy by the anointing oil of his God" (Lv 21:10–12, nlt).

Although the customs and procedures were evidently modified little from OT to NT times, some added details are given in the NT record. For example, it is noted that the corpse was washed (Acts 9:37). The body was then anointed and wrapped in linen cloths with spices enclosed (Mk 16:1; Jn 19:40). Finally, the limbs were tightly bound and the head covered with a separate piece of cloth (Jn 11:44).

See also Mourning; Funeral Customs.

Burning Bush

The flaming bush on Mount Horeb, where Moses encountered God and was sent to lead Israel out of Egypt (Exodus 3:1–15; Mark 12:26; Luke 20:37; Acts 7:30–34). The mystery of a plant burning without being destroyed allowed God to reveal his name, "I Am Who I Am." The burning bush was a theophany, a visible sign of God's presence. In the Bible, God's glory is associated with clouds, fire, and smoke (see Exodus 13:21; 19:18; 1 Kings 8:10–11; 2 Kings 1:12; 2:11; Isaiah 6:1–6; 2 Thessalonians 1:7; Revelation 1:14; 19:12).

The burning bush symbolizes God's holiness. Moses was told to remove his shoes because he was standing on holy ground (Exodus 3:5). The gods of Egypt were often thought to live in gloomy darkness, But, Israel's God lives in unapproachable light (1 Timothy 6:16). The burning bush symbolized his intention not to destroy his people, but to save them, and lead them out of slavery in Egypt and into the Promised Land.

See also Exodus, Book of; Moses; Theophany; God, Names of.

Burnt Offering

A burnt offering was a type of sacrifice in ancient Israel. In this sacrifice, an animal without any defects was completely burned on the altar. None of the animal was eaten. It was entirely consumed by fire. The Israelites offered burnt offerings to seek forgiveness for sin and to restore their relationship with God (Leviticus 1).

See Offerings and Sacrifices.

Bush

A bush is a low, branching, woody plant. A bush is usually smaller than a tree. There are different opinions about the bush from which God appeared to Moses (Exodus 3:2–4). From the biblical account, it seems most likely that this was a miraculous event.

However, some people look for a natural explanation. They believe the burning bush may have been the crimson-flowered mistletoe or acacia strap flower (*Loranthus acaciae*). This plant grows in great numbers as a partial parasite on various acacia shrubs, such as the thorny acacia (*Acacia nilotica*). These shrubs grow in Israel and the surrounding areas, as well as Sinai. When in full bloom, the mistletoe makes the shrub or tree appear to be on fire. This happens because its brilliant flame-colored blossoms stand out against the green leaves and yellow flowers of the host plants.

Bushel

1. A small vessel ("basket," New Living Translation) that could cover a light (Matthew 5:15; Mark 4:21; Luke 11:33). *See* Weights and Measures.

2. A unit of measure roughly equal to 19 quarts or 18 liters. In Hebrew, this is called an "ephah."

Butler

Translation of a Hebrew word meaning "cupbearer" or "wine taster" in Genesis 40 and 41. *See* Cup-bearer.

Buttercup

The Persian buttercup (*Ranunculus asiaticus*) is one of the flowers or grasses of the field (Matthew 6:28–30). It is a showy plant that blooms in all brilliant colors except blue. Its double flowers sometimes measure 5.1 centimeters (two inches) across.

Buz (Person)

1. Abraham's nephew, and one of Nahor's eight sons (Genesis 22:21).

2. A member of Gad's tribe (1 Chronicles 5:14).

Buz (Place)

Buz was a place mentioned in the Old Testament (Jeremiah 25:23). Its exact location is unknown, but it is listed with two Arabian places, Dedan and Tema. Dedan and Temas were either villages or oases (a place in the desert where there is water and plants can grow).

Buzi

The father of the prophet Ezekiel (Ezekiel 1:1–3).

Buzite

Resident of Buz. Elihu, one of Job's protagonists, is described as being the son of Barachel the Buzite (Jb 32:2, 6). *See* Buz (Place).

Buzzard

A buzzard (*Buteo vulgaris* or *Buteo ferox*) is a hawk-like bird that soars in the air. It looks like the kite but has a straight tail, not a split one.

Some Bible versions lists buzzards among unclean birds (Deuteronomy 14:13). Other Bible translations use different names, such as "kite" (Berean Standard Bible) or "glede" (King James Version). In the parallel list in Leviticus 11, some translations use "kite" or "vulture" instead of "buzzard." Because of this, it is not certain whether the buzzard is actually named in the Bible. The bird is, however, common in Israel.

Like other large birds that soar, the buzzard has sharp eyesight. Job 28:7 mentions a bird with this quality, but translations differ on whether it was a falcon, eagle, or vulture. A buzzard may follow its prey for hours and can see a dead animal from far away.

The long-legged buzzard is somewhat larger than the common buzzard. It lives in Israel, western Asia, and Syria.

See also Birds; Falcon, Kestrel; Kite; Vulture.