

Resource: Bible Dictionary (Tyndale)

Aquifer Open Bible Dictionary

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Bible Dictionary (Tyndale)

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Cab, Cabbon, Cabul, Caesar's Household, Caesarea, Caesarea Philippi, Caiaphas, Cain (Person), Cain (Place), Cainan, Calah, Calamus, Calcol, Caleb, Caleb-Ephrathah, Calebite, Calendars, Ancient and Modern, Calf, Caligula, Call, Calling, Callisthenes, Calneh, Calno, Calvary, Camel, Camel's Thorn, Camon, Camphire, Cana, Canaan, Canaanite, Canaanite Deities and Religion, Candace, Candle, Candlestick, Cane, Sweet Cane, Canker, Cankerworm, Canneh, Canon of the Bible, Canticles, Caper Plant, Capernaum, Caphar-salama, Caphtor, Caphtorim, Caphtorites, Capital, Capital Punishment, Cappadocia, Captivity, the, Caravan, Carbon Dating, Carbuncle, Carcas, Carchemish, Careah, Caria, Carmel, Carmi, Carmite, Carnaim, Carnelian, Carob Tree, Carpenter, Carpus, Carrion Vulture, Carshena, Casiphia, Casluhim, Casluhites, Caspin, Cassia, Castanet, Castor and Pollux, Castor Oil Plant, Caterpillar, Catholic Letters, Cattle, Cauda, Caulk, Caulker, Cavalry, Cedar, Cedron, Cenchrea, Cenchreae, Cendebeus, Censer, Census, Centurion, Cephas, Cereal Offering, Cerinthus, Certificate of Divorce, Certificate of Divorce, Chabris, Chaereas, Chaff, Chalcedony, Chalcol, Chaldea, Chaldeans, Chalkstone, Chalphi, Chamberlain, Chambers of the South, Chameleon, Chamois, Chanaan, Channels of the Sea, Chant, Chaos, Waters of, Chaphenatha, Chapter, Charashim, Charax, Charchemish, Chariot, Charismata, Charm, Charmis, Charran, Chaspho, Chasten, Chastisement, Chebar, Chedorlaomer, Cheese, Chelal, Chelleans, Chelluh, Chelous, Chelub, Chelubai, Chemarim, Chemarims, Chemosh, Chenaanah, Chenani, Chenaniah, Chephar-Ammoni, Chephar-Haammonai, Chephirah, Cheran, Cherethims, Cherethites, Cherith, the Brook, Cherub (Place), Cherub, Cherubim, Chesalon, Chesed, Chesil, Chestnut, Chesulloth, Chezib, Chicken, Chicory, Chidon, Chief Priest, Child, Childless, Children of Eden, Children of God, Children, Song of the Three, Chileab, Chilion, Chilmad, Chimham, Chinnereth, Chinneroth, Chios, Chisleu, Chislev, Chislon, Chisloth-tabor, Chitlish, Chittim, Chiun, Chloe, Choba, Choinix, Choir Director, Choirmaster, Choose, Chor-Ashan, Chorazin, Chosen, Chozeba, Christ, Christian, Christology, Chronicles, Books of First and Second, Chronology of the Bible (New Testament), Chronology of the Bible (Old Testament), Chrysolite, Chrysoprase, Chrysoprasus, Chub, Chun, Church, Church Meetings, Church Officers, Chushan-Rishathaim, Chusi, Chuza, Cilicia, Cinnamon, Cinneroth, Circumcision, Cis, Cistern, Citadel, Cities of Refuge, Cities of the Plain, Citizenship, Citron Tree, City, City of David, City of Destruction, City of Destruction, City of Palms, City of Salt, City of the Sun, City of the Sun, Civil Law and Justice, Claudia, Claudia, Claudius, Claudius Lysias, Claudius, Edict of, Clay, Clay Tablet, Cleanness and Uncleaness, Regulations Concerning, Cleanthes, Clement, Clement of Rome, Clement, Epistle of, Cleopas, Cleopatra, Cleophas, Cloak, Clopas, Closed Womb, Cloth and Cloth Manufacturing, Clothing, Cloud, Pillar of, Cnidus, Coal, Coat, Coat of Mail, Cock, Cockatrice, Cockle, Codex, Coelesyria, Coffin, Coins, Col-Hozeh, Color, Colossae, Colosse, Colossians, Letter to the, Comforter, Command, Commandment, Commandment, the New, Commandments, the Ten, Communication, Communion, Holy, Compassion, Conaniah, Concision, Concubinage, Concubines, Conduit, Coney, Confection, Confectionaries, Confession, Conform, Conformation, Congregation, Congregation, Mount of the, Coniah, Cononiah, Conquest and Allotment of the Land, Conscience, Consecration, Constantine the Great, Constellation, Consul, Consumption, Conversion, Convocation, Holy, Coos, Copper, Coppersmith, Coptic Lives of the Virgin, Cor, Coral, Corban, Core, Coriander, Corinth, Corinthians, First Letter to the, Corinthians, Second Letter to the, Cormorant, Corn, Cornelius, Corner Gate, Corners of the Earth, Cornerstone, Cornet, Correction, Corruption, Mount of, Cos, Cosam, Cosmetics, Cotton, Couch, Counsel, Counselor, Court, Courts and Trials, Covenant, Covenant of Salt, Covenant, Book of the, Covering of the Head, Covet, Covetousness, Cow, Coz, Cozbi, Cozeba, Craftsmen, Valley of, Crane, Crawling Things, Creation, Creation Myths, Creation, New, Creature, New, Credit, Creditor, Creeping Things, Crescens, Crete, Cricket, Criminal Law and Punishment, Crimson, Crispus, Crocodile, Crookback, Cross, Crown, Crucifixion, Cruse, Crystal, Cub, Cubit, Cuckoo, Cuckow, Cucumber, Cummin, Cun, Cuneiform, Cup, Cup of Blessing, Cup-Bearer, Curse, Cursed, Curtains, Cush (Person), Cush (Place), Cushan, Cushan-Rishathaim, Cushi, Cushite, Custodian, Cuth, Cuthah, Cyamon, Cylinder Seals, Cymbal, Cypress, Cyprus, Cyrene, Cyrenians, Cyrenius, Cyrus Cylinder, Cyrus the Great

Cab

A *cab* was a dry measure used in Bible times. The Jewish historian Josephus said it was about the size of a quart (about one liter). Some experts think it may have been larger (see [2 Kings 6:25](#)).

See Kab.

Cabbon

Town in the foothills of Judah ([Jos 15:40](#)) east of Lachish, identified with Hebra and sometimes equated with Macbenah ([1 Chr 2:49](#)).

Cabul

1. Asherite town near Mt Carmel on the border between Israel and Tyre ([Jos 19:27](#)).
2. Territory given to Hiram, king of Tyre, by Solomon in exchange for a gift of 120 talents (9,000 pounds, 4 metric tons) of gold for completion of the temple. Hiram, not impressed with this northern Galilean province ([1 Kgs 9:13-14](#)), later returned it to Solomon ([2 Chr 8:2](#)).

Caesar's Household

Caesar's household was the group of people who worked for the Roman emperor. This included both slaves and free people. They lived in Rome and in other parts of the Roman Empire.

The apostle Paul greeted "those from the household of Caesar" in one of his letters ([Philippians 4:22](#)). Caesar was the title of the emperor of Rome. The emperor's household had hundreds of workers. Many of their jobs were respected and important in Roman society.

When Paul arrived in Rome, many people from Caesar's household welcomed him. This is reported in a second-century writing called the Martyrdom of Paul. Paul also spoke with Jewish leaders in Rome and taught openly about Jesus. He preached without being stopped ([Acts 28:17, 31](#)). Some men and women believed his message ([Acts 28:23-24](#)). Some of these new believers were likely from Caesar's household. The message about Jesus even reached the whole Praetorian Guard ([Philippians 1:13](#)), a special group of Roman soldiers who guarded the emperor.

Some Bible scholars believe that certain people mentioned in [Romans 16](#) may have also belonged to the emperor's household.

See also Caesars, The.

Caesarea

City named in honor of Augustus Caesar, built by Herod the Great from 22 to 10 BC. The 8,000-acre (3,240-hectare) site lies 25 miles (40 kilometers) south of modern Haifa, in the beautiful plain of Sharon on Israel's Mediterranean coast. Known as Caesarea Maritima, it became the administrative center of the country throughout the period of Roman occupation. Three Roman governors of Palestine lived there: Felix ([Acts 24](#)), Festus ([25:1, 4-6, 13](#)), and Pontius Pilate, who visited Jerusalem on special occasions (as in [Jn 19](#)). Archaeologists found Pilate's name carved in stone in the theater at Caesarea.

Caesarea served as the major seaport of Judea in NT times. Since the southern Palestinian coastline lacked a good harbor, Herod created one by building two huge breakwaters that could shelter ships from Mediterranean storms.

A Roman officer named Cornelius was converted to Christianity in Caesarea ([Acts 10:1, 24](#)). Later, the apostle Peter visited Philip, a prominent Christian leader who lived there ([21:8](#)). Paul spent more than two years in prison in Caesarea ([24:27-25:1](#)) and embarked from there on his journey to Rome (ch [27](#)). In AD 70 Roman general Titus returned to Caesarea after conquering Jerusalem, as did Flavius Silva in AD 73 after defeating the fortress cities of Masada and Herodium (both in eastern Judea).

Continuous excavations since 1971 have added to the wealth of information about Caesarea. Herod built a high-level aqueduct to bring freshwater from Mt Carmel to Caesarea; the water originated from springs to the northeast and traveled in an underground aqueduct to Mt Carmel. A smaller aqueduct brought brackish water from a spring north of the city for irrigation. Large sewers (mentioned by the Jewish historian Josephus), flushed by the action of the sea, have been found running under the city. A 30,000-seat hippodrome (racetrack) lay on the east side of the city. It appears to have been built in the second century AD but was destroyed during the Muslim invasion of 640, along with a large archives building on the coast. Excavation of the archives building produced

several inscriptions on its mosaic floors, among which were two quotations of the Greek text of [Romans 13:3](#). Still lying beneath the ground and visible only in infrared photography is a large amphitheater northwest of the hippodrome.

Excavations in 1976 produced the first evidence of Strato's Tower, the Hellenistic site near which Herod built Caesarea, according to Josephus. A small synagogue was excavated north of a large fort built at the Herodian harbor during the Crusades. The harbor area contained many stone storerooms; although 7 have been entered, as many as 73 may still lie unexcavated. One storeroom was reused by the Roman legions as a Mithraeum (a cultic center dedicated to the Persian god Mithras), the only one ever found in Palestine. The city of Caesarea was not rebuilt after its destruction by Muslims in the 13th century.

Caesarea Philippi

A city at the northern end of Palestine. It is located on the southern slopes of Mount Hermon, near the ancient city of Dan. Caesarea Philippi is in a beautiful area near one of the three sources of the Jordan River, the Wadi Banias.

Early History

In the second century BC, the place was called Panion because the Greek god Pan was worshiped in a cave there. A Greek historian named Polybius describes Panion. He identifies Panion as the place where Syrian king Antiochus III defeated the Ptolemies of Egypt. This was an important battle in about 200 BC.

The Jewish historian Josephus (*Antiquities* 15.10.3) wrote that "Panium" was governed by Zenodorus. This place of worship was "a very fine cave in a mountain. Under the mountain, there is a great hole in the earth. The hole opens quickly and is very deep. It is full of still water. A vast mountain covers the cave. The springs of the Jordan river rise from under the caves."

Under Roman Rule

After the death of Zenodorus, Augustus Caesar gave the city to Herod the Great. Josephus says Herod "made this place very beautiful. It was already a very beautiful place." It had a "beautiful temple made of white stone."

When Herod died in 4 BC, his son Philip was given the territory surrounding Panion. The area was known as Paneas. In *War* 2.9.1, Josephus reported that "Philip built the city Caesarea, at the fountains of Jordan, and in the region of Paneas." Philip made it his capital. He named it Caesarea Philippi after the Roman emperor Tiberius Caesar and himself. This helped separate it from the larger Caesarea Maritima on the Mediterranean coast.

In *War* 3.9.7, Josephus wrote that emperors Vespasian and Titus both "marched from Caesarea by the sea to Caesarea Philippi."

Peter's Confession

Caesarea Philippi is where the apostle Peter confessed (declared his belief) that Jesus is "the Christ, the Son of the living God" ([Matthew 16:13-16](#); [Mark 8:27-29](#)).

Later History

About AD 50, Agrippa II made Caesarea Philippi larger. He renamed the city Neronias to honor the emperor Nero. Today, the city is called Banias because Arabic speakers found it difficult to pronounce the older name Paneas.

Caiaphas

Caiaphas was the high priest during Jesus' life and ministry. As the leader of the Jewish nation, he headed the Sanhedrin, the highest court. Next to the Roman governor, Caiaphas was the most powerful man in Judea, responsible to the Romans for the nation's behavior. He was particularly worried about the excitement and unrest surrounding Jesus, especially with the growing activities of the Zealots, who would soon start a rebellion.

The raising of Lazarus ([John 11](#)) caused a big stir, pushing tensions to a peak. Caiaphas, fearing that those seeking a political messiah might trigger a Roman crackdown, suggested that Jesus be put to death ([John 11:48-50](#)). The Gospel of John notes that, in doing so, Caiaphas unknowingly prophesied about the atoning nature of Jesus' death ([John 11:51-52](#)).

Caiaphas played a central role in Jesus' arrest and trial. The religious leaders made their plans in his palace ([Matthew 26:3-5](#)), and part of Jesus' trial took place there with Caiaphas presiding ([Matthew 26:57-68](#)). Before this, Jesus was first brought to

Annas, Caiaphas's father-in-law ([John 18:13](#)). Although Matthew, Mark, and Luke do not mention the visit to Annas, and Mark and Luke do not refer to Caiaphas by name, John's account shows Annas was still influential.

When Jesus admitted he was "the Christ, the Son of God," Caiaphas tore his robes and accused him of blasphemy ([Matthew 26:63–66](#)). After Pentecost, Caiaphas, along with other Jewish leaders, led the trial of Peter and John, trying to stop the apostles' preaching ([Acts 4:5–6](#)).

Annas, a former high priest, remained important in Jewish affairs, which explains why Luke mentions both Annas and Caiaphas in connection with John the Baptist's ministry ([Luke 3:2](#)) and in Acts called Annas the high priest ([Acts 4:6](#)). John's Gospel also shows Annas was still commonly called "high priest" ([John 18:22](#)).

According to the historian Josephus, Caiaphas was appointed high priest around AD 18 and served until he was removed around AD 36. Since the high priest served at the Romans' discretion, Caiaphas's long tenure suggests he was politically skilled. After being removed by the Roman proconsul Vitellus, nothing more is known about him.

Cain (Person)

The first son of Adam and Eve. He became a tiller of the soil while his brother, Abel, was a keeper of sheep. When people talk about terrible acts of violence, they often mention Cain's murder of his brother Abel as an example ([Jude 1:11](#)). Each of the two brothers had brought a sacrifice to the Lord ([Genesis 4:3–4](#)). According to [Hebrews 11:4](#), Abel had acted in faith by bringing a more acceptable sacrifice than that of Cain. Cain became very angry because God did not accept his offering. Because God accepted Abel's offering but not his own, Cain killed his brother ([Genesis 4:5–8](#)).

When explaining why Cain acted with violence, the Bible tells us that he belonged to the evil one ([1 John 3:12](#)). The Lord confronted Cain with his guilt, judged him, and pronounced a curse upon him. God made Cain leave the land of Nod, east of Eden ([Genesis 4:9–16](#)). Cain complained to God that his punishment was greater than he could bear. He was afraid that someone would find him and kill him. So, the Lord put a mark on Cain to protect him. The Lord also promised that if anyone killed Cain,

that person would receive punishment seven times worse.

In the land of Nod, Cain built a city and named it after his son Enoch ([Genesis 4:17](#)). Through Enoch, Cain had many descendants. In the early generations, these descendants developed different skills. Some lived in tents and took care of animals. Others became musicians, and some learned how to make things from metal (verses [18–22](#)).

Cain (Place)

KJV spelling of Kain, the name of a city in the southern hill country of Judah's territory, in [Joshua 15:57](#). See Kain (Place).

Cainan

1. A son of Arphaxad ([Luke 3:36](#); [Genesis 10:24](#), in the Septuagint; [11:12–13](#)).
2. Adam's great-grandson, also called Kenan ([Genesis 5:9–14](#); [1 Chronicles 1:2](#); [Luke 3:37](#)). See Kenan.

Calah

One of the ancient capital cities of Assyria built by Nimrod ([Gn 10:11–12](#)). Calah is the ancient name for modern Nimrud, which is located 24 miles (38.6 kilometers) south of Nineveh on the east bank of the Tigris River. It was excavated by Henry Layard from 1845 to 1849 and by the British School of Archaeology in Iraq from 1949 to 1964. The site was occupied from prehistoric times down to the Hellenistic period.

Excavations at Calah revealed a large ziggurat and temples dedicated to Ninurta and Nabu. A large citadel constructed by Shalmaneser I in the 13th century BC and a palace built by Ashurnasirpal II (883–859 BC) were also uncovered there. Palaces of Shalmaneser III (858–824 BC) and Esarhaddon (680–669 BC) were partially cleared. Among other notable discoveries from the city is the black obelisk of Shalmaneser III, which is presently in the British Museum. The monument is important to biblical studies because of its record of tribute paid by King Jehu of Israel to the Assyrians.

Tiglath-pileser III (745–727 BC) and Sargon II (721–705 BC) launched their attacks on Israel and Judah from Calah. Sargon captured Samaria. Tiglath-pileser was involved with Judah when Ahaz formed a coalition with him against Israel and Syria ([Is 7:1–17](#)). Calah was eventually destroyed by the Babylonians and Medes in 612 BC.

Calamus

A sweet-smelling cane plant ([Exodus 30:23](#); [Ezekiel 27:19](#)). Calamus refers to either a plant or its aromatic root. It was one of the plants that grew in Solomon's garden ([Song of Solomon 4:14](#)).

Two plants have been suggested as the source of biblical calamus:

- the sweet flag (*Acorus calamus*), and
- the beardgrass (*Andropogon aromaticus*).

The sweet flag has a strong pleasant smell and grows in Europe and Asia, but it is not found in Israel and the surrounding areas. Beardgrass, which comes from India, releases a strong fragrance when crushed and is thought to be the calamus mentioned in the Bible. Beardgrass produces an oil called ginger-grass oil.

Calcol

One of Mahol's three sons and a member of Judah's tribe ([1 Kgs 4:31](#), kjv "Chalcol"; [1 Chr 2:6](#)). He and his brothers were noted for their wisdom and musical abilities.

Caleb

1. A son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite ([Numbers 32:12](#); [Joshua 14:6](#)). He was the older brother of Kenaz ([Judges 1:13](#)). Caleb was one of the 12 spies sent to explore the land of Canaan. While most of the spies were afraid to attack, Caleb and Joshua recommended moving forward immediately. The Israelites rejected their advice because they feared the strongly defended cities. Because of this lack of faith, God delayed Israel's entrance into Canaan, the promised land, for many years ([Numbers 14:21–23, 34–35](#)). When Israel finally entered Canaan under Joshua's leadership, Caleb was 85 years old ([Joshua 14:6–7, 10](#)). Joshua assigned Hebron as the territory of Caleb. Caleb conquered the Anakim who lived there (verses [13–14](#)). Caleb offered his daughter Acsah in marriage to anyone who conquered the nearby town of Kiriath-sepher (also called Debir). His nephew Othniel (who was Acsah's cousin) conquered the city and married Acsah ([15:16–17](#)). Hebron later became a city of refuge for Levites ([Joshua 21:13](#); [1 Chronicles 6:55–57](#)). In part of Caleb's territory, David spent time hiding from King Saul. There David met his future wife Abigail, who was then married to Nabal, a descendant of Caleb ([1 Samuel 25:3](#)). This area was also where David's wives were captured by Amalekite raiders who had attacked southern Judah and "the Negev of Caleb" ([1 Samuel 30:14](#)).
2. A son of Hezron and brother of Jerahmeel ([1 Chronicles 2:18, 42](#)). This Caleb is also called Chelubai (verse [9](#)). Many scholars think this might be the same person as the Caleb mentioned above. They believe this because:

3. Both men have a daughter named Achsah (verse [49](#)).
4. It would be unusual for an otherwise unknown Caleb to have such an important place in the family records.

According to these scholars, Caleb is a son of Hezron and the grandson of Judah. This was to establish his position and inheritance in the tribe of Judah. But Caleb was a foreigner. He was a son of Jephunneh, a Kenizzite. He had joined himself and his clan to the tribe of Judah. Some scholars support this view. They argue that the name Caleb is Horite, not Israelite.

1. The King James Version calls Caleb a son of Hur ([1 Chronicles 2:50](#)). But it is likely the King James Version combines what should be two separate phrases. The Berean Standard Bible correctly shows this as two separate statements: “These were the descendants of Caleb. The sons of Hur...”

Caleb-Ephrathah

Possibly a Hebrew place-name ([1 Chr 2:24](#), kjv, nlt). A number of modern translations follow the Septuagint (early Greek translation of the OT) in treating Ephrathah as the name of one of Caleb’s wives instead of a place.

Calebite

Descendant of Caleb, Jephunneh’s son ([1 Sm 25:3](#)). See Caleb #1.

Calendars, Ancient and Modern

Visual representation of the beginning and length of each year and its division into days, weeks, and months. The modern calendar is usually taken for granted. But without a calendar, it would be difficult to agree on a uniform timeline of events. Also, it would be impossible to predict the seasons.

The modern (Gregorian) calendar had several stages of development.

Preview

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- Jewish Festivals
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Days and Their Divisions

The earliest way to record time was likely by counting days, which led to dividing each day into twenty-four equal parts called hours. The Sumerians seem to have been the first to measure time by minutes, hours, and days. They also knew the narrower definition of “day” for a twelve-hour period.

Measuring time in the days of King Ahaz was done with sundials ([2 Kings 20:9](#); [Isaiah 38:8](#)). Dividing the day into hours came later. Both the early Europeans and ancient Egyptians began the day at midnight. They both divided the day into two twelve-hour segments. In the second century BC, the Egyptian astronomer Ptolemy and his followers calculated the beginning of the day at high noon, when the sun was at its highest point. In Rome, the day began at sunrise, and the second part of the day began at sunset.

Astronomy and the Calendar

Ancient peoples based their calendars on the “cycles” of the sun and moon. A solar year is the amount of time it takes for the earth to complete its orbit around the sun.

The life of ancient peoples was closely tied to the changes in temperature and in the relative length of days and nights characteristic of the four seasons. The earth’s tilt while orbiting the sun creates the changing seasons. In the northern hemisphere, the longest day of the year is called the summer solstice (about 21 June), while the shortest day of the year is called the winter solstice (21 or 22 December). During the winter solstice (21 or 22 December), the noonday sun appears lowest (farthest south). However, in the southern hemisphere, summer and winter are reversed.

The vernal (spring) equinox is about 21 March, and the autumnal (fall) equinox is about 23 September. The sun is directly over the equator, so the days and nights are equally long. The term “equinox” comes from the Latin word for “equal night.” A solar year was measured by ancient peoples by

tracking the period between two similar solstices or equinoxes.

The solar calendar defines days by tracking the time it takes for the sun to return to the same place above the earth (for example, the rising, setting, or highest point at midday). So a “day” is one complete rotation of the earth on its axis, now divided into twenty-four hours. The earth’s rotation around its axis is not related to the earth’s annual orbit around the sun. For this reason, some problems arise because a solar year is not easily divided into any number of days. Rather, a solar year is 365 days plus a fraction of a day.

Defining a year by more factors than the rotation around the earth causes the largest problems with the calendar. The ancients encountered considerable difficulties when they tried to combine solar and lunar periods. This was made worse since months corresponded to the phases of the moon, which are unreliable. The orbits of the sun, moon, and earth cause many complications.

The lunar calendar measured time by lunations (the number of days between new moons). A lunar month is just over twenty-nine and a half days, beginning with the new moon. In reality, the moon’s orbit of the earth is about twenty-seven and one-third days. However, the earth’s rotation around the sun causes the moon to take two extra days to come to the same position between the sun and earth and produce a “new moon.”

Twelve lunar months was approximately 11 days shorter than the solar year. So, more days were added to make up for the difference. The practice of adding days is called intercalation. It was a common device used in lunar calendars. For instance, the ancient Chinese people added an extra month every 30 years to their calendar. This year would be made of 12 months of 29 or 30 days each. The Muslim lunar calendar, which is still used in Islam, also has a 30-year cycle. The second year of each cycle, and every three years afterwards, contains a “leap year” (a year of abnormal length). In the Muslim calendar, a leap year is 355 days long, rather than the ordinary Muslim year of 354 days. The ancient Hebrew calendar had the same problems as other lunar calendars.

Jewish Calendar

The lives of the ancient Israelites were greatly affected by the calendar. The Jewish calendar starts from the supposed date of Creation: 3,760 years and three months before the Christian era. The

current year in the Jewish calendar is 3,759 to the date in the Gregorian calendar. However, this does not account for months since the Jewish year begins in the autumn rather than on 1 January.

Months

The Jewish calendar after the Babylonian exile has twelve months. The names of the months were borrowed from the Babylonians. The months do not align with the months of the Roman calendar.

Over half of the months are mentioned in the Old Testament:

- Kislev/Chislev ([Nehemiah 1:1](#); [Zechariah 7:](#))
- Tebeth ([Esther 2:16](#))
- Shebat ([Zechariah 1:7](#))
- Adar ([Esther 3:7, 8:12](#))
- Nisan ([Nehemiah 2:1](#); [Esther 3:7](#))
- Sivan ([Esther 8:9](#))
- Elul ([Nehemiah 6:15](#))

The Jewish month always begins with the new moon. Since months are approximately twenty-nine and a half days, the Jewish year is 354 days. We are not sure how the Jewish people originally adjusted the lunar calendar to realign with the actual solar year. Eventually, they added an extra month called Veader (“second Adar”) between Adar and Nisan seven times in a 19-year cycle. In the 19th year, Adar would receive an extra half day.

The names for the Jewish months, as now known, originated after the return from Babylonia to Palestine. Before the Babylonian exile, at least four other names were used:

- Abib ([Exodus 13:4](#))
- Ziv ([1 Kings 6:1, 37](#))
- Ethanim ([8:2](#))
- Bul ([6:38](#))

After the Babylonian captivity, these months were renamed Nisan, Iyyar, Tishri, and Heshvan, respectively. The original names were related to agriculture. For example, in Abib, the heads of the grain became ripe and in Ziv, the desert flowers bloomed.

The oldest Hebrew calendar was found at Gezer (southeast of Tel Aviv) in 1908. It was made in the 10th century BC. In it, months are broken down by agricultural activities such as sowing, reaping, pruning, and storage. It was probably made by a Jewish schoolboy.

The months were religiously significant to the Jewish people. It allowed them to remember some important events in their history. The beginning of every month was considered holy. The moon was a spiritual symbol to the ancient Israelites. It represented Israel, and the sun eventually became symbolic of the Messiah, God's anointed one ([Malachi 4:2](#)). Just as the moon produces no light of its own, Israel was supposed to reflect the Messiah's light to the world.

The Jewish calendar remained unchanged during the four hundred years between the Old Testament and New Testament, despite Greek rulers trying to change it. In the Greek calendar, five days were added to the final month of the year, with each of the 12 months containing 30 days. Despite this, it was not the same length as a solar year.

Reckoning of Dates

Ancient Israelites did not record dates by month and day. They recorded dates by referencing significant events, such as the year the reigning king rose to power. In New Testament times, Jewish people continued this method by synchronizing dates with their religious calendar or the Roman calendar. Writers of the New Testament followed the same principle ([Luke 1:5](#); [John 12:1](#); [Acts 18:12](#)). The calendar created by Julius Caesar caused people to change from this method to a more standardized system.

Jewish Festivals

In addition to keeping the Sabbath, Jews observe seven annual festivals.

1. **Passover** begins on the evening of the 14th of Nisan. It marks the exodus from Egypt. The first day of Nisan determines the date for Passover. Passover is observed for seven days and includes the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which marks Israel's quick preparation for the escape from Egypt ([Exodus 12:15](#)). The festival for the firstfruits of the barley harvest follows afterwards ([Leviticus 23:10](#)).

2. **Pentecost** is observed 50 days after Passover. Pentecost is a time of celebration where the first

fruits of the wheat harvest are collected ([Exodus 34:22](#); [Leviticus 23:15–17](#)).

3. **Rosh Hashanah** is observed on the 1st of Tishri. According to the Jewish religious teachers known as rabbis, the 1st of Tishri was the day when the Lord created the world. Rosh Hashanah means "head of the year."

4. **Yom Kippur** is observed on the 10th of Tishri. It is Israel's most solemn day. It is a holy day known as "the Sabbath of Sabbaths." The complicated ritual required to observe it is described in the Bible ([Leviticus 16](#)).

5. **Succoth** is observed from the 15th–22nd of Tishri. It is also known as the Feast of Tabernacles. It is a festival based on farming habits. It celebrates gathering the autumn harvest. The apostle John called it "the feast" ([John 7:37](#)). The Feast of Tabernacles is also called the Feast of Booths (Shelters). It also remembers God's care over his people during Israel's 40 years in the wilderness ([Leviticus 23:39–43](#)).

6. **Hanukkah** is observed on the 25th of Kislev and the following seven days. It was added to the calendar later in Jewish history. It is also called the Feast of Dedication. It remembers Judas Maccabeus's victory over Antiochus Epiphanes and the Syrians 150 years before Christ. The time of Judas Maccabeus was after the last of the Old Testament prophets. So, tradition determines how Hanukkah is celebrated. For the week of Hanukkah, joyous activities mark the Jewish calendar.

7. **Purim** is observed on the 14th–15th of Adar. The feast, which began in ancient Persia, remembers the deliverance brought through Mordecai and Esther when they stopped Haman's plot to destroy the Jews ([Esther 9](#)).

Conclusion

In the same way, ancient sundials and modern clocks track minutes and hours, a calendar tracks days, weeks, months, years, and even centuries. A uniform way to measure time helps with farming, business, and government. It is also helpful for historians and unifies the celebration of religious festivals. The development of the modern (Gregorian) calendar reflects both science and religious traditions. For Christians, the calendar highlights the biblical contrast between God's timelessness and human mortality ([Psalm 90](#)). Psalm 90 asks God to "teach us to number our days, that we may present a heart of wisdom" ([Psalm 90:12](#)).

See also Astrology; Astronomy; Day; Feasts and Festivals of Israel; Jubilee Year; Moon; Night; Sun.

Calf

A young cow or bull.

See Animals (Cattle).

Caligula

Caligula was the nickname of Gaius Julius Caesar, who became emperor of Rome at age 25, after the death of Emperor Tiberius. Caligula was emperor of Rome from AD 37 to 41.

Early Life and Name

Gaius was the son of Germanicus, a respected Roman military leader. The emperor Augustus told Tiberius to adopt Gaius and name him as the next emperor.

As a child, Gaius traveled with his father along the Rhine River in what is now Germany. Soldiers called him *Caligula*, which means “Little Boot,” because he wore small soldier’s boots. The name stayed with him.

Caligula Becomes Emperor of Rome

When Caligula became emperor, he first tried to win the people’s support. He freed prisoners and allowed exiled people to return. But he quickly used up all the money in the Roman treasury. He had to create new taxes, and the people grew unhappy with him.

Six months after becoming emperor, Caligula became very sick. After this illness, his behavior changed. He began to act strangely. He once made his horse a consul (a top government leader). He also insulted many people and killed others without reason.

Conflict with the Jews

Caligula believed the Jewish people in Jamnia had insulted him. (Jamnia was a town in Judea, near the Mediterranean Sea.) In anger, he ordered a statue of himself to be placed in the Jerusalem temple.

The Jewish people were very upset. A major revolt was only stopped because the governor of Syria, Petronius, delayed carrying out the order. Not long

after this, Caligula was killed by one of the men he had mistreated.

One of Caligula’s first acts as emperor was to make Herod Agrippa I king over a region near Galilee ([Acts 12](#)). Caligula and Agrippa had been friends in Rome before gaining power. While Caligula ruled badly, Agrippa was a wise and well-liked king.

Like many eastern rulers, both Caligula and Agrippa claimed to be gods. Caligula even said he was equal to Jupiter, the chief Roman god. But the Roman Senate never agreed to this claim.

See also Caesars, The.

Call, Calling

A call or calling in the Bible refers to God inviting or directing someone to a specific task, role, or way of life.

See Elect, Election.

Callisthenes

Callisthenes was a Syrian in the army of General Nicanor. He set fire to the temple gates during the persecution of the Jews by Antiochus Epiphanes ([2 Maccabees 8:33](#)). In 165 BC, Nicanor’s army was defeated. After the battle, the Jews punished Callisthenes and others who had burned the temple gates. They were burned to death.

Calneh

1. City in Babylon ([Gn 10:10](#)).

2. City identified as Kullani (Kullan Koy), about 20 miles (32.2 kilometers) north of Aleppo in northern Syria. This northern identification is hinted at in [Isaiah 10:9](#), where Calno is associated with Carchemish, some 50 miles (80.5 kilometers) to the northeast, as well as in the context of [Amos 6:2](#) (note the north-to-south progression—Calneh, Hamath, Gath). Canneh in [Ezekiel 27:23](#) seems to refer to the same general location and is perhaps to be linked with Calneh. Kullani was captured by Tiglath-pileser II, king of Assyria, about 741 BC.

Calno

Another name for Calneh, a city in northern Syria ([Isaiah 10:9](#)).

See Calneh #2.

Calvary

In [Luke 23:33](#), the King James Version translation of Golgotha ("the skull"), the place where Jesus was crucified.

See Golgotha.

Camel

A large animal that lives in desert areas. Camels can go for many days without drinking water. People have trained camels to be work animals. They use camels for travel and to carry heavy loads across the Middle East

The camel (*Camelus dromedarius*) has special features that help it live in the desert. It has been called the "ship of the desert" because, like ships that carry cargo across oceans, camels carry heavy loads across vast desert areas. Its feet have thick elastic pads of fibrous tissue that allow it to walk on hot desert sands. It can go without water for long periods and can live on plants growing on the salty sand. The camel can close its pinched nostrils to keep out sand in violent sandstorms.

Camels are used for transporting both goods and people. A person riding a camel can cover from 96.5 to 121 kilometers (60 to 75 miles) in a day. A camel can carry a load weighing 272 kilograms (600 pounds) or more. Camels were vital in the spice trade ([Genesis 37:25](#)). They traveled in camel trains between Arabia, Egypt, and Assyria. They were also ridden in time of war ([Judges 6:5](#)). Farmers can even hitch a camel to a plow in areas where they farm.

The hair shed by camels during the early spring is kept and used in making cloth and tents. One camel can make as much as 4.5 kilograms (ten pounds) of hair. A rough cloak of camel's hair, as worn by John the Baptist ([Matthew 3:4](#)), is still worn by people who live in the desert. A camel's hair garment was also the sign of a prophet ([Zechariah 13:4](#)).

There are two types of one-humped camels: the slow, burden-bearing camel from [Genesis 37:25](#) and the fast racing camel mentioned in [1 Samuel](#)

[30:17](#). The racing camel can be up to 2.1 meters (seven feet) tall and 2.7 meters (nine feet) long. Its stomach holds 14.2 to 28.4 liters (15 to 30 quarts) of liquid. This camel can go without water for five days in summer or 25 days in winter. Its hump stores fat, allowing it to survive on little food during desert trips.

Another species of camel lives in the holy land, the Bactrian camel (*Camelus bactrianus*). It has two humps. It is heavier, bigger, and has longer hair than the one-humped camel and is slower than the fast racing camel. [Isaiah 21:7](#) may refer to the Bactrian camel. Both kinds of camel are referred to in [Esther 8:10](#). In ancient times, camels were as important as sheep, cattle, and donkeys. The Bible mentions camels 66 times. One third of these references list camels alongside other animals.

Camels chew the cud, but do not have cloven hooves. So, they were unclean, forbidden by the Israelites to eat ([Leviticus 11:4](#); [Deuteronomy 14:7](#)). They are eaten by Arabs, however, who also drink their milk (see [Genesis 32:15](#)).

According to the Bible, Abraham had camels when he traveled to Egypt ([Genesis 12:16](#)). At first, Job had 3,000 camels, and after his recovery, 6,000 ([Job 1:3](#); [42:12](#)). Most people began using camels around 1000 BC ([Judges 6:5](#)). But, Sumerian texts from the Old Babylonian period show people had trained camels even earlier. Archaeologists have found camel bones and figurines at various eastern sites dating from well before 1200 BC.

See also Travel.

Camel's Thorn

Camel's thorn is a low, thorny shrub (a small, bushy plant with sharp points). It grows in dry places. People used the root of the camel's thorn to make a sweet-smelling oil or ointment. ([Sirach 24:15](#)).

See also Thistle, Thorn.

Camon

KJV form of Kamon, the burial place of the Israelite judge Jair, in [Judges 10:5](#). See Kamon.

Camphire

The King James Version name for henna. Henna is a fragrant shrub with pale-green leaves and white, pink, or yellow blossoms ([Song of Solomon 1:14; 4:13](#)).

See Plants (Henna).

Cana

Galilean town that was the scene of Jesus' first miracle: changing water into wine at a wedding feast ([Jn 2:1, 11](#)). Jesus was again in Cana when he told a nobleman that his son, who was seriously ill at Capernaum, would live ([Jn 4:46](#)). Cana was also the home of Jesus' disciple Nathanael ([Jn 21:2](#)).

During the first Jewish rebellion, which resulted in the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70, Cana was made headquarters for defending Galilee against the Romans. After the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, the town became the seat of the priestly family of Eliashib. John's Gospel refers to it as "Cana of Galilee," evidently to distinguish it from the Kanah located near the Phoenician city of Tyre ([Jos 19:28](#)). The traditional site of Cana, revered as such since Byzantine and medieval times, is Kefar Kana, about four miles (6.4 kilometers) east of Nazareth on the main road from Nazareth to Tiberias. Contemporary scholarship, however, has almost unanimously settled on Khirbet Kana as the site of NT Cana. That ruin is about eight miles (12.9 kilometers) north of Nazareth on the northern edge of the Battuf Plain. The Arabs of the region call it Cana of Galilee to this day. Archaeologists exploring at the site have found pottery from the Hebrew monarchy period (c. 900–600 BC) as well as from Hellenistic, Roman, Arabic, and Crusader times.

Canaan, Canaanite

Palestinian territory (the Promised Land) west of the Jordan River, settled by the Israelites at the time of Joshua's leadership. Portions of southern Syria were also frequently considered part of Canaanite territory, the northern borders of which were never clearly defined. The pre-Israelite peoples of western Palestine, excluding northern Syria and such places as Ugarit (Ras Shamra) on the Mediterranean coast of Syria, carried the broad designation of Canaanites.

Preview

- Land and People
- Language
- Literature
- History
- Religion
- Influence on Israel

Land and People

In the "table of nations" ([Gn 10:15–19](#)), Noah's grandson Canaan was progenitor of 11 groups that lived in the area of Syria and Palestine. The first six evidently occupied territory at or south of Sidon, whereas the others lived farther north. The northerners mostly settled on the edge of the coastal plain; in the south, settlement spread eastward to the upland areas. OT references specifically placed the Canaanites in western Palestine's valleys and coastal areas; the upland country was occupied by Amorites and other peoples ([Nm 13:29](#); [Jos 5:1](#); [7:9](#); [Jgs 1:27–36](#)).

One of the earliest known references to the people of Canaan is in a tablet from Mari (15th century BC), in which a military officer reported his surveillance of "thieves and Canaanites." The Canaanites were listed as a group on the Memphis Stele (inscribed column) of the Egyptian pharaoh Amenophis II (c. 1440 BC). The land of Canaan was mentioned in a 15th-century inscription of Idrimi, king of Aleppo (west of Ugarit), who fled to the Canaanite seaport of Ammiya and then became ruler of Alalakh (north of Ugarit). During the Amarna Age (15th–14th centuries BC), Palestine was politically dominated by Egypt, according to the Egyptian Amarna tablets.

Just as "Canaan" designated the whole western Palestinian area, so "Canaanite" described its pre-Israelite inhabitants without specifying race. Among the peoples who lived in Palestine, the Amorites first appeared in the second millennium BC as immigrants from Mesopotamia.

Several OT references seem to equate Amorite territory and the land of Canaan ([Gn 12:5–6; 15:18–21; 48:22](#)), a tradition reflected in the 18th-century BC Alalakh tablets, which depicted "Amurru" as part of Syria-Palestine. Tablets from Mari from about the same period speak of an Amorite ruler of Hazor in northern Palestine. The Tell el-Amarna texts (14th–13th centuries BC) indicate that the Amurru kingdom of the Lebanon

region was monopolizing coastal trade and commerce; therefore, references to the two peoples (Amorites and Canaanites) together in Moses' time and throughout the late Bronze Age (c. 1550–1200 BC) are not surprising.

At the end of that period, the “Sea Peoples” (largely Philistines) destroyed the Hittite Empire, and in the time of Ramses III (c. 1180 BC) occupied western Palestine. The Israelite conquest of Palestine broke the power of many Canaanite and Amorite city-states, while the rise of a Philistine confederacy on the southern Palestinian coast restricted further the range of specifically Canaanite territory. From the beginning of the Iron Age the cultural heirs of the Canaanites were the Phoenicians, centered in the city-states of Tyre and Sidon, who themselves liked to be known as Canaanites (cf. [Mt 15:21–22](#); [Mk 7:24–26](#)).

Language

The various groups that inhabited western Palestine in the pre-Israelite period probably spoke related dialects of the Northwest Semitic linguistic family. The large territory covered by those peoples and the possible influence of Amorite, Hurrian, and Ugaritic languages complicate modern theories about what is properly meant by “Canaanite” as a language.

Literature

As with language, it is difficult to be specific about Canaanite literature. One clear fact is that our own alphabet originated in middle Bronze Age Canaan. Before that time, writing was either pictographic (words or ideas represented by pictures), cuneiform (wedge-shaped impressions in soft clay representing syllables and whole words), or hieroglyphic (Egyptian pictorial writing). Alphabetical writing was passed on through the Hebrews and Phoenicians to the Greeks, who gave our present alphabet its classical form.

Until 1929 little Canaanite literature was known, but with the discoveries at Ugarit a large body of literary material came to light. The discoveries included portions of an epic poem about the god Baal and his consort Anath (possibly from c. 2000 BC), a legend about a royal personage named Aqhat (from c. 1800 BC), the legendary activities of King Keret (written c. 1500 BC), and fragmentary religious, medical, and administrative material.

History

Archaeological evidence shows that western Palestine was occupied as far back as the Old Stone Age. Mesolithic, Neolithic, and Chalcolithic deposits have also been found at several sites. It is possible that Semitic-speaking peoples inhabited places such as Jericho, Megiddo, and Byblos around 3000 BC. Discoveries at Tell Mardikh (Ebla) show that a vigorous Canaanite Empire existed in Syria about 2500 BC, and there is no doubt that both Amorite and Canaanite peoples were firmly settled in Syria and Palestine by 2000 BC. The best evidence for Canaanite occupation of western Palestine has come from the middle and late Bronze Age (c. 1550–1200 BC), when the land was dotted with Canaanite and Amorite city-states.

The Egyptians made periodic forays into Palestine during their 5th and 6th dynasties; in the 13th dynasty (second millennium BC) they controlled much of Syria-Palestine both politically and economically.

Canaanite contacts with Mesopotamia from about 2000 BC are indicated in texts discovered at Mari and Ugarit. Evidently Amorites, Hurrians, early Assyrians, and other peoples periodically migrated to Canaan, bringing with them a diversity of political and social forms. By the late 16th century BC, most of the small Canaanite kingdoms were firmly under Egyptian control. Within two centuries the most northerly ones were subject to Hittite political influence.

Canaanite history is further complicated by the activities of the Hyksos people between about 1800 and 1500 BC. Of mixed Asiatic origin, the Hyksos owed much of their political influence to their military use of iron-fitted chariots and the compound Asiatic bow. From Canaanite locations like Hazor and Jericho, they invaded Egypt and established control there from about 1776 to about 1570 BC. When they were expelled at the start of Egypt's New Kingdom (1570–1100 BC), they retreated to fortified sites in southern Canaan.

Egyptian control over western Palestine had disappeared by the time of the Israelite conquest of Canaan; Joshua met predominantly Canaanite and Amorite opposition. The Israelite occupation of Canaan was aided by the state of decay into which the small Palestinian kingdoms had fallen. With the destruction of Hittite culture by the Sea Peoples and their occupation of the northern and coastal regions, the traditional city-states collapsed. From

about 1100 BC, Canaanite culture was restricted to Tyre, Sidon, and a few other places.

Religion

Before the Ugaritic discoveries, little was known about Canaanite religion apart from OT references to it. From what is now known of Canaanite culture, the head of the Canaanite list of gods was a shadowy personage named El, who was worshiped as the “father of man.” His consorts were Athirat, known to the Israelites as Asherah, Astarte, and Baaltis. El had a son, Baal, a fertility god described in myths as the lord of rain and storm. Baal succeeded his father as head of the pantheon (list of gods) and supposedly resided in the distant northern heavens. A monument found at Ugarit represented him carrying a thunderbolt at his left side and a mace in his right hand.

Many small terra-cotta figurines with exaggerated secondary sexual characteristics, representing one or the other of the female deities, have been recovered from middle and late Bronze Age sites in western Palestine. A center devoted to the Anath cult, excavated at Byblos in Phoenicia, was evidently notorious for religious prostitution and sexual fertility rites; many naked female figures were found there. Other Canaanite cult objects included a sacred pillar of some sort (*massebah*) and a wooden image (*asherah*), probably of the goddess herself.

In the Amarna Age, Canaanite orgiastic religion was especially influential in the Near East; it infiltrated to some extent even the conservative religions of Egypt and Babylonia. Four principal festivals associated with agriculture seem to have been celebrated by the Canaanites, invariably occasions of revelry, drunkenness, and sexual excess. Canaanite religion was evidently the most sexually depraved of any in the ancient world.

Influence on Israel

Israelite morality, as defined by the covenant laws of Mt Sinai, was very different from the cultic traditions of Canaanite life. Hebrew ethical monotheism was in many ways opposite to the depraved polytheistic nature worship of Canaanite religion. It was clear that the two systems could not coexist. Hence the law contained strict instructions that the Canaanites and their ways were to be eliminated from the Promised Land ([Ex 23:24; 34:13-16; Dt 7:1-5](#)) and that the Hebrews were to remain separate from Canaanite religion in loyalty to God’s covenant. That was far from easy, if only

because both peoples spoke closely related dialects and therefore used similar expressions of speech. Further, the invading Israelites under Joshua found that the Canaanites were superior to them in building stone structures and in making metal tools, implements, and weapons. The Hebrews, at a disadvantage, must have faced the prospect of requiring technical help from the Canaanites. In the time of King Solomon, Canaanites from Phoenicia were enlisted to design and construct the temple of the Lord in Jerusalem. A superficial resemblance between some aspects of Canaanite and Hebrew religion, such as peace offerings and certain divine titles, also made it difficult to maintain Israel’s cultural distinctiveness.

Except for the “ban” imposed at Jericho, the Israelites were able to use Canaanite equipment captured in battle. Hence their determination to destroy all traces of the Canaanites, including their corrupt religion, was gradually weakened. By the time of King Ahab, when the worship of the Tyrian Baal was firmly entrenched in the northern kingdom of Israel, the Hebrews were in serious danger of losing their spiritual and theological distinctiveness. Their priests, who should have played a major part in maintaining the uniqueness of the covenant faith, often lapsed into Canaanite ways, emulating the immorality of their pagan neighbors and encouraging the Israelite people to do likewise (cf. [1 Sm 2:22](#)).

As a result, Hebrew prophets proclaimed that their nation, which had almost completely succumbed to Canaanite blandishments, would have to be purified by exile before a renewed faith could become a possibility for Israel.

See also Canaanite Deities and Religion; Israel, History of; Palestine.

Canaanite Deities and Religion

Study of the polytheistic religion of the Canaanites has contributed much to our understanding of the religion of ancient Israel. The Hebrew theological and religious structures were given by God to a people who were influenced and affected by other religions. To appreciate the Israelites’ monotheistic faith fully, one must understand the polytheistic setting that challenged their life and unity as a nation.

Contact among the many religions of the ancient Near East produced not only tension but also much

syncretism or borrowing of concepts and practices. The Arameans and Philistines who settled in Canaan adopted the practices of the Canaanites; similarly the Amorites accepted much of the Sumerian religion as their own when they moved into Mesopotamia. Among all those peoples, however, the Hebrews took an independent course. Their God was the unique and cosmic deity who demanded exclusive allegiance. Such a concept ran against the grain of all the religions of the day.

Until the early part of the 20th century, most of what was known about Canaanite religion came from the Bible. In 1928 many clay tablets were found at a site called Ras Shamra, which was the ancient Syrian city of Ugarit. They contained abundant new information about the religious life of Canaan. Most of them were in a cuneiform alphabet and written in a previously unknown Northwest Semitic language quite similar to Hebrew, Aramaic, and Arabic. The documents are often called the Ugaritic texts or the Ras Shamra tablets.

Discovery of these texts opened doors of understanding that had long been closed. The texts provided scholars with an important mythological literature that gave not only the names and functions of the gods but also much information on Canaanite society.

Canaanite deities had two striking features: an extraordinary fluidity of personality and function, and names whose meanings and sources could be easily traced. These facts, coupled with the nature of the mythology, mark Canaanite religion as relatively primitive.

The general Canaanite word for “god” probably meant “the strong, powerful one.” The head of the pantheon, or array of gods, was called El (“the mighty one”). El, a remote and shadowy figure, lived far away from Canaan “at the source of the two rivers,” hence in paradise. He apparently had three wives who were also his sisters: Astarte, Athirat (Asherah, also called Elat), and Anath. He presided over a divine council of gods who were his children. Although he was brutal enough to slay his own son, he was called Lutpan (“the kindly one”) and was described as an old man with white hair and a beard.

Baal, the great storm god, king of the gods, was the central figure in the pantheon and was functionally far more important than El. Baal acted as El’s prime minister and eventually dethroned him. “Baal”

means simply “lord” and could be applied to different gods. Soon, however, the ancient Semitic storm god Hadad became the “Baal” par excellence. Hadad was considered to be the “lord of heaven,” the “one who prevails,” the “exalted, lord of the earth.” He alone reigned over all else. His kingdom was “eternal to all generations.” He was the giver of all fertility. When he died, all vegetation and procreation ceased. He was the god of justice, the terror of evildoers. Baal was called the “son of Dagon.” Dagon, meaning “fish,” was the chief god of Ashdod (cf. [1 Sm 5:1–7](#)).

The Canaanites explained nature by reference to their gods. Each god represented some force of nature. The moon, sun, important stars, and visible planets were each considered a god or goddess. Baal, seen as god of the thunderstorm, personified the power of all nature.

The Canaanites’ personification of the forces of nature accounted for the succession of the seasons. The dry period from April to the end of October represented the duration of Baal’s death after his unsuccessful battle each spring with Mot (or with “the devourers,” who at Ras Shamra performed the same general function as Mot). Revival of the rain-and-vegetation deity Baal toward the end of October signaled commencement of the autumn rains, which continued intermittently until the following April. The Canaanites believed that the land regained its fertility because of the annual mating of Baal and Anath. What better form could their own religious activities take than that of imitating the sexual behavior of their chief deities? Hence there was always a pronounced orgiastic element in Canaanite religion.

The three goddesses—Athtarat (Astarte or Ashtaroth in the OT, [Dt 1:4](#), kjv “Astaroth”; [Jgs 2:13](#)), Anath (appearing in the OT in the name of the town Anathoth and as Shamgar’s progenitor), and Athirat (Asherah in the OT)—presented an intricate set of relationships. Astarte was the same as Ashtar or Venus, the evening star. Anath’s original character is uncertain. Athirat was primarily goddess of the sea and the wife of El. She was also called Elat, the feminine form of El. All three goddesses were concerned mainly with sex and war. Their primary function was to have sexual relations with Baal on a continual yearly cycle, yet they never lost their “virginity”; they were “the great goddesses who conceive but do not bear.”

Ironically, the goddesses were considered sacred prostitutes and as such were called the “holy ones.” Idols representing the goddesses were often nude

and sometimes had exaggerated sexual features. In what circumstances early cultic prostitution was practiced is a matter of some debate, but there is no doubt that both male and female temple prostitutes were used in the cult of Canaanite religion.

The fertility deities were also goddesses of war. In the Baal Epic of Ugarit, Anath has a gory thirst for blood. In New Kingdom Egyptian sources, Astarte appears as a nude and ferocious cavalry warrior, sporting shield and lance.

In the kjv the name Asherah was translated "grove," following the Septuagint (third-century BC Greek translation of the OT). She seems to have been represented by some kind of wooden cult object set up in "high places" beside incense altars and stone pillars.

Continual struggle for survival no doubt led the Canaanites to worship things that they felt would benefit them materially. If the gods and goddesses were pleased by the worship, the result would be a plentiful harvest. Canaanite worship centered on a cultic shrine or "high place" where sacrifices were offered. Archaeological evidence indicates that animals of all sizes were offered at great temple-shrines such as Beth-shan. The city received its name from the temple located there: beth means "temple," and Shan was patron deity of the city.

As noted, human sacrifice became a part of religious practice in Canaan. [Second Kings 3:27](#) mentions Mesha, king of Moab, who, after defeat at the hands of a confederation of kings, offered up his son as a burnt offering to his god Chemosh.

See also Canaan, Canaanite; Gods and Goddesses; Idols, Idolatry.

Candace

A title given to ancient Ethiopian queens. Philip, a leader in the early church, met and baptized an Ethiopian eunuch who was a minister under Candace, queen of the Ethiopians ([Acts 8:27](#)). That particular Candace ruled over Nubia (modern Sudan) from AD 25 to 41. Her name was probably Amanitere.

Candle, Candlestick

The words candle and candlestick appear in older Bible versions like the King James Version. But

these words are better translated as lamp and lampstand.

Candles made of wax with a wick like we use today did not exist in Bible times. People used small clay or metal lamps filled with oil. A piece of cloth served as the wick.

See Lamp, Lampstand.

Cane, Sweet Cane

A tall grass plant grown for its sweet sap. The sap is used to make sugar. Two types of sugarcane are thought to have grown naturally in Israel and the surrounding areas. One type, *Saccharum sara*, is known to grow only in Lebanon. The other native type is *Saccharum biflorum*, which grows along ditches and streams. It grows from Syria and Lebanon through Israel and the surrounding areas, and south to Stony Arabia and the Sinai. This may be the wild cane familiar to the Jewish people.

Most experts, however, believe that the "sweet cane" mentioned in [Isaiah 43:24](#) was the true sugarcane (*Saccharum officinarum*). This plant is believed to have come from the tropical areas of the eastern part of the world. People have grown this plant since ancient times, and it is not known to grow wild anywhere today. It is a tall, thick perennial grass that looks similar to maize (corn). It has many jointed stems and a large, feathery cluster of flowers at the top.

See also Aromatic Cane.

Canker

This is how the King James Version translates "cancer," or more literally, "gangrene" ([2 Timothy 2:17](#)).

See Gangrene.

Cankerworm

Cankerworm is a word used in the King James Version to translate a Hebrew word that means "locust." Locusts are insects that eat plants and crops. Large groups of locusts can cause great damage to farmland.

See Locusts.

Canneh

Alternate name for Calneh, a city in northern Syria, in [Ezekiel 27:23](#). See Calneh #2.

Canon of the Bible

The officially accepted list of books that make up the Christian Scriptures.

See Bible, Canon of the.

Canticles

Another title for the biblical book, Song of Songs (or Song of Solomon). The name comes from the Latin name of the book, *Canticum Canticorum* (which means "Song of Songs").

See Song of Songs.

Caper Plant

A low, spreading plant whose fruit was used to stimulate appetite. The caper (*Capparis sicula*) is a spiny, trailing shrub that grows in the Mediterranean region. [Ecclesiastes 12:5](#) mentions the caper berry.

The common caper or caper berry grows abundantly in Syria, Lebanon, Israel and the surrounding areas, and in the mountain valleys of Sinai. The plant sometimes grows upright but more often spreads weakly over the ground like a vine, covering rocks, ruins, and old walls similar to ivy. The young flower buds, pickled in vinegar, were used by ancient people as a condiment for meat. The berries were also used in cooking.

Capernaum

Capernaum was a city in Galilee where Jesus based his work and taught regularly. This city is only mentioned in the Gospels. It was on the northwest side of the Sea of Galilee (also called Lake of Gennesaret). Capernaum means "village of Nahum." The name might refer to Nahum, who

wrote a book in the Old Testament, or it could be named after a different person called Nahum.

Where Was Capernaum Located?

The Gospel of Matthew says Capernaum was located near the Sea of Galilee, in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali ([Matthew 4:13](#)). The west shore of the lake was where the tribe of Naphtali lived.

Two stories about people in Capernaum show it was near the border of the Jordan River and the political border. The story of the centurion suggests there was a small group of about 100 soldiers in this border town ([Matthew 8:5](#); [Luke 7:2](#)). In another story, Jesus asks Levi to leave his job collecting taxes. It also shows the town was on a border ([Matthew 9:9](#); [Mark 2:14](#); [Luke 5:27](#)).

Ancient Jewish writings tell us that Capernaum was located at a place called Tell Hum. We know Capernaum existed in the year AD 110 because it was referred to in Midrash Kohelet 1.8 and 7.26 as "Kaphar nahum." This shows that Capernaum still existed in the second century.

Capernaum is not mentioned again until 1160, when Benjamin of Tudela talks about "Capharnaum which is Kaphar Nahum." The Franciscans (a religious order of priests) now own the site. They have found many coins from the time at Tell Hum. They also found ruins of a Jewish place of worship (called a synagogue) that was probably built around AD 300.

Recent digging at Tell Hum has proven this was definitely where ancient Capernaum stood. Archaeologists found an old house under a building that Jewish Christians used for meetings in the fourth century. This house had been used as a meeting place for early Christians since around the first half of the second century. Based on ancient writings and markings found on stones, many scholars think this was Peter's house.

Capernaum in the New Testament

Capernaum was an important city where Roman soldiers were stationed. After the people of Nazareth rejected Jesus, he came to live in Capernaum ([Matthew 9:1](#)). Capernaum was his home and Jesus did many miracles ([Mark 2:1](#); [1:34](#)).

- He healed the centurion's servant ([Matthew 8:5](#)).
- He healed Peter's mother-in-law ([Mark 1:31](#)).
- He healed a man with an unclean spirit ([Mark 1:23](#); [Luke 4:33](#)).

Even though Jesus did a lot of good things in Capernaum, he said bad things would happen to the city because the people did not change their ways: "And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted up to heaven? No, you will be brought down to Hades" ([Matthew 11:23](#)).

Caphar-salama

A village where Judas Maccabeus fought the Syrian commander Nicanor ([1 Maccabees 7:31](#)). After about 500 of the men of Nicanor died, the fugitives took refuge in the "city of David." This means Caphar-salama must have been near Jerusalem.

Caphtor, Caphtorim, Caphtorites

Place-name and the name of the people associated with the place. The Caphtorim among the Hamitic peoples in the "table of nations" are listed as the "sons" of Egypt ([Gn 10:13-14](#); [1 Chr 1:12](#), kjv "Caphthorim"). The text makes the Casluhim the parent people of the Philistines. However, prophets referred to the Philistines as colonists from Caphtor ([Jer 47:4](#); see [Am 9:7](#)). This has been the basis for some translators to transpose the clause of [Genesis 10:14](#) and to translate "Caphtorites, from whom the Philistines were descended" (neb). Others understand that although the Philistines may originally have been a Casluhian colony, they settled in regions that became known primarily as those of the Caphtorites.

Caphtor is referred to as *Kaptara* in Accadian, *kp̄tr* in Ugaritic, and *Keftiu* in Egyptian. These references are to be dated from as early as 2200 BC down to about 1200 BC. The Egyptian sources are especially helpful in identifying Caphtor as Crete. On the other hand, there is a Jewish tradition that the Caphtorim were from Cappadocia; the Septuagint reads "Cappadocia" instead of "Caphtor." This has led some to suggest that Caphtor is to be identified with a coastal region of Asia Minor or with the island of Carpathos. Perhaps by the 13th century

BC, "Caphtor" was used in a broad sense for the Aegean area from which the Philistines came.

The Caphtorim are mentioned also as a people who invaded the region around Gaza, dispossessed the Avvim, and settled there ([Dt 2:23](#)). It appears that the Caphtorim were firmly settled around Gaza before Israel crossed the Jordan at the time of the Conquest. See Casluhim, Casluhites.

Capital

In architecture (building design), the capital is the top part of a pillar. Capitals are often decorated with detailed designs. Capitals ("chapter" in the King James Version) were on top of the five pillars of the tabernacle during the Israelite's wandering in the wilderness ([Exodus 36:38](#)). They were also on top of the pillars called "Boaz" and "Jachin" in Solomon's temple ([1 Kings 7:16-22, 40-42](#)).

See also Architecture.

Capital Punishment

The practice of killing someone as a legal penalty for certain crimes.

See Criminal Law and Punishment.

Cappadocia

Plateau region of eastern Asia Minor intersected by mountain ranges. The name Cappadocia does not occur in the Hebrew OT. Passages that mention Caphtor or Caphtorim ([Dt 2:23](#); [Am 9:7](#)), however, were rendered "Cappadocia" in the Septuagint (ancient Greek translation of the OT). A few scholars suggest that Cappadocia was the original home of the Philistines.

In the NT, Cappadocia was the homeland of some of the visitors to Jerusalem who were amazed at hearing their own languages spoken on the day of Pentecost ([Acts 2:5-13](#)). Cappadocia was later one of the places in Asia Minor where Christians settled, people to whom the apostle Peter addressed his first letter ([1 Pt 1:1](#)).

Cappadocia was bordered by Pontus on the north, Syria and Armenia on the east, Cilicia on the south, and Lycaonia on the west. Noted for its wheat, cattle, and horses, it also exported alabaster, mica,

silver, and lead. The region was traversed by important trade routes, such as the route through the Cilician Gates northward to Pontus. The area was controlled or dominated in turn by Hittites, Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, Greeks, Seleucids, and Romans.

Reference to a letter to Ariarathes, Cappadocia's king ([1 Macc 15:22](#)), may indicate that a significant Jewish settlement was there at the beginning of the second century BC. Jews from that community were apparently visiting in Jerusalem at the time of Pentecost. Christianity seems to have spread northward into Cappadocia along the road from Tarsus. Cappadocia became a region of strong Christian church leaders by the fourth century AD.

Captivity, the

The period when many people from Judah were taken to Babylonia after Nebuchadnezzar's conquest of Jerusalem in the sixth century BC. *See* Diaspora of the Jews.

Caravan

Traveling group of merchants, pilgrims, or others in Bible times who joined together for mutual protection. Usually travelers used pack animals to carry their wares or personal belongings. To transport goods from one district to another, donkeys were mainly used until about 1100 BC, when the use of camels became more common. Ancient Palestine, situated between the Mediterranean Sea and Egypt on one side and Syria, Mesopotamia, Arabia, and lands farther east on the other, was crisscrossed by trade routes. The nation of Israel was thus intimately acquainted with caravans, many in OT times coming from Transjordan and Arabia. Arabian caravans often transported spices and incense, products that were particularly lucrative. The rulers of Sheba were engaged in that enterprise ([1 Kgs 10:2](#)). The size of a caravan depended on the amount of traffic, precariousness of the route, and availability of camels. Perhaps 40 camels might be joined by ropes attached from the saddle of one camel to the nose ring of the trailing camel. Caravans could travel in single file or with three to four camels abreast. In hot weather or on an extensive journey, a camel could carry about 350 pounds (159 kilograms); on short, cool trips, it could carry much more. Joseph was sold into slavery to a spice

caravan going to Egypt ([Gn 37:25-28](#)). Raiding expeditions also formed caravans at times ([Jgs 6:3-5](#); [1 Sm 30:1-20](#)).

See also Travel.

Carbon Dating

In archaeology, a method used to determine the age of organic objects by measuring the radioactive isotope carbon-14.

See Archaeology and the Bible.

Carbuncle

A red or fiery colored stone, like a garnet or ruby. It is mentioned as one of the gems in the high priest's breastplate ([Exodus 28:17](#)).

See Stones, Precious.

Carcas

One of King Ahasuerus's seven counselors, in [Esther 1:10](#).

Carchemish

Ancient city commanding an important ford on the west bank of the upper Euphrates River, about 65 miles (104.6 kilometers) northeast of Aleppo. Today part of the ruin is located in Turkey and part in Syria. The word is also written "Charchemish" ([2 Chr 35:20](#), kjv). The meaning of the name is uncertain, although recent discoveries at Ebla suggest "city of Chemosh" (Moabite god).

A north-south trade route (roughly following the river) and an east-west route (connecting Nineveh with the Mediterranean Sea) both passed through Carchemish. Pottery finds indicate that the site was occupied in prehistoric times. The earliest reference to it is in the Ebla tablets (c. 2400 BC). Since Carchemish is about 75 miles (120.7 kilometers) west of Haran, Abraham probably passed through Carchemish on his way to Canaan.

Early in its history Carchemish was allied first to Mari and then to Aleppo. In 1355 BC it fell to the Hittites, became a regional capital of eastern Hatti, and adopted Hittite culture and language. After

several centuries of unsuccessful attempts to incorporate Carchemish into their empire, the Assyrians under Sargon II finally conquered the city in 717 BC ([Is 10:9](#)) and made it their northwestern stronghold. When Nebuchadnezzar's Neo-Babylonian kingdom succeeded the Assyrian Empire, Carchemish was the last city to fall (605 BC). The Assyrians were aided in their defense by Pharaoh Neco II of Egypt ([2 Chr 35:20](#); [Jer 46:2](#)). Thereafter, the city decreased in importance.

Archaeological excavations show that the city had features of both Hittite and Assyrian architecture. It had a casemate wall atop sloping embankments to hinder attackers. Within the city on the highest point stood a citadel surrounded by its own wall, as well as a palace with its own temple and monumental staircase.

Careah

The King James Version spelling of Kareah in [2 Kings 25:23](#). Kareah was the father of Johanan.

See Kareah.

Caria

Caria was a region in the southwest part of Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey).

When Simon was high priest in Jerusalem, Lucius, a Roman leader, sent a letter to King Ptolemy (who ruled from 145 to 116 BC). The letter talked about friendship between Rome and Simon.

Caria was one of several Greek regions that received this letter ([1 Maccabees 15:23](#)). In the letter, Lucius said that anyone who ran away from Israel to these regions should be sent back to Simon. Simon would then punish them according to Jewish law (verse [21](#)).

Carmel

1. A mountain ridge that stretches about 32.2 kilometers (20 miles) along the Mediterranean Sea and extends southeast into the Jezreel Valley. Its widest point at the southeast is 20.9 kilometers (13 miles). Its highest peak stands at 530.7 meters (1,742 feet). The ridge is made of the same limestone as the central mountains of Palestine.
The mountain forms a point of land that extends into the sea south of the Bay of Acre. The modern city of Haifa, which is built on different levels of the hillside on the northwest corner of Carmel, has excellent harbor facilities. Several Jewish settlements and two large Druze villages are also located on the slopes of Mount Carmel. (Druzes are members of a distinct sect within Islam.) The plain of Sharon extends to the south.
Mount Carmel was known for its beauty and fertile land ([Isaiah 33:9; 35:2](#)). In ancient times, it was covered with oak forests, olive trees, and vineyards. The name "Carmel" comes from a Hebrew word that means "vineyard" or "garden of God." The mountain was so thick with wild plants that, along with its gorges and caves, it became a hideout for robbers and people rejected by society ([Amos 9:3](#)).
Today, Mount Carmel is still forested, and large areas have been turned into a nature reserve. In [Song of Solomon 7:5](#), the poet describes his beloved, saying, "Your head crowns you like Mount Carmel," perhaps suggesting her hair was thick and full like the many trees on the mountain.
Mount Carmel's rocky terrain was a barrier to north-south trade and military routes. Most conquerors and traders went around it. They traveled through the Jezreel Valley to the east or the Zebulun Valley to the northeast. However, important passes cut through the mountain. One

narrow pass at the southern end connects the plains of Sharon and Esdraelon. Pharaoh Thutmose III used this pass in the 15th century BC. British General Lord Allenby used it in 1918 when he conquered Palestine. The tribal lands of Asher, Zebulun, Issachar, and Manasseh met at Mount Carmel, but it seems that none of the tribes fully controlled the mountain's heights.

Mount Carmel also held religious importance. It was the site of the famous confrontation between the prophet Elijah and the prophets of Baal ([1 Kings 18](#)). This was a good location because Mount Carmel lay between Israel and Phoenicia. It demonstrated the struggle between the Phoenician god Baal and the God of Israel. Elijah was not the first to build an altar to God on the mountain. Before offering his sacrifice, he repaired an old, ruined altar of the Lord ([1 Kings 18:30](#)).

The event's traditional site is Qeren ha-Carmel. It is 481.7 meters (1,581 feet) high and overlooks the Jezreel Valley. The small stream Kishon, mentioned in [1 Kings 18:40](#)) runs through the Jezreel Valley and around the north side of Mount Carmel before emptying into the Bay of Acre.

2. A town in Judah ([Joshua 15:55](#)) identified with el-Kirmil (Kermel), 11.3 kilometers (seven miles) south of Hebron. King Saul set up a memorial to his conquest of the Amalekites there ([1 Samuel 15:12](#)). Carmel was also the home of Nabal, a grumpy man who refused kindness to David ([1 Samuel 25:2-14](#)). After Nabal's death, his beautiful wife, Abigail, married David. Carmel is mentioned as the home of Hezro, one of David's 30 heroes ([2 Samuel 23:35](#)).

Carmi

1. One of Reuben's sons; he joined his grandfather Jacob in moving to Egypt ([Genesis 46:9](#); [Exodus 6:14](#); [1 Chronicles 5:3](#)). He founded the family of Carmites ([Numbers 26:5-7](#)).
2. Achan's father and a member of the tribe of Judah ([Joshua 7:1, 18](#); [1 Chronicles 2:7](#); [4:1](#)).

Carmite

A name for a descendant of Carmi. Carmi was one of the sons of Reuben ([Numbers 26:6](#)).

See Carmi #1.

Carnaim

Carnaim was a strong city in the region of Gilead. It became important after the Babylonian exile. Judas Maccabeus attacked and destroyed Carnaim ([1 Maccabees 5:26, 43-44](#); [2 Maccabees 12:21-23, 26](#)). He also destroyed the temple in the city. This temple was for Atargatis, a Syrian goddess linked to fish.

See Ashteroth-karnaim.

Carnelian

Carnelian is a type of stone called chalcedony. Its color can range from deep red to light pink or almost white. The Bible lists carnelian as one of the foundation jewels in the wall of the new Jerusalem ([Revelation 21:20](#)).

See Stones, Precious.

Carob Tree

An evergreen tree that belongs to the bean family and is common throughout the Middle East. It produces edible seeds contained in a pod. The seeds look similar to peas.

Scholars generally agree that the "husks" mentioned in Jesus's parable of the prodigal son were the pods of the carob or locust tree ([Luke 15:16](#)). The carob (*Ceratonia siliqua*) is an

attractive evergreen tree that grows commonly throughout Israel and the surrounding areas, Syria, and Egypt. The pods are most plentiful in April and May. They contain numerous seeds surrounded by a sweet, pleasant-tasting pulp.

These pods were widely used in ancient times, as they are today. They were used as food for cattle, horses, and pigs. During times of food shortage, people also ate the pods. It is possible those who were very poor ate them regularly. The Talmud frequently mentions the carob as a good food source for domestic animals.

The seeds of the carob were once used as a standard of weight and are the origin of the term "carat." Some commentators suggest that the "locusts" that John the Baptist ate were not insects but actually the fruit of the carob tree ([Matthew 3:4](#)).

Carpenter

One who worked with wood, building the framework of houses, the roofing, windows, and doors. Often small structures like houses were built by the owner. Temples and palaces required skilled workers. For these larger structures, carpenters worked alongside stonemasons, skilled workers who knew how to cut and prepare stone for building ([2 Kings 12:11](#); [22:6](#); [1 Chronicles 14:1](#); [22:15](#); [2 Chronicles 24:12](#); [34:11](#); [Ezra 3:7](#)). Carpentry is rarely referred to in the New Testament, though it was the profession of Jesus and his father Joseph ([Matthew 13:55](#); [Mark 6:3](#)).

Carpus

A man with whom the apostle Paul left his cloak at the city of Troas in Asia Minor. Paul instructed his disciple Timothy to bring the cloak when he visited him in prison ([2 Timothy 4:13](#)). It is possible that Carpus was one of the converts of Paul. According to tradition, Carpus became the bishop of Berytus (Beirut) in Thrace.

Carrion Vulture

Another name for the Egyptian vulture (*Neophron percnopterus*) in [Leviticus 11:18](#) and [Deuteronomy 14:17](#). The King James Version calls it the gier eagle. The Berean Standard Bible translates it as "osprey" in these verses, likely meaning the Egyptian vulture, not the modern fish-eating osprey.

See Birds; Vulture.

Carshena

One of seven princes who were wise men of Persia and Media, and whom King Ahasuerus (also called Xerxes) asked for legal advice ([Esther 1:14](#)).

Casiphia

Place to which Ezra sent for Levites when he realized that his company of returnees from the exile lacked persons qualified for temple service ([Ezr 8:17](#)). Casiphia was perhaps Ctesiphon on the Tigris River near modern Baghdad.

Casluhim, Casluhites

Descendants of Noah through his son Ham and grandson Mizraim ("Egypt" in some versions), and ancestors of the Philistines ([Gn 10:14](#); [1 Chr 1:12](#)).

Caspin

Caspin was a town east of the Jordan River. It was probably the same place as Chaspho ([1 Maccabees 5:26, 36](#)). Ancient and modern experts do not fully agree on the location. The Jewish historian Josephus identifies Caspin with Maked ([2 Maccabees 12:13](#)). In [1 Maccabees 5:24–36](#), Judas and Jonathan Maccabeus led their army into the region called Transjordan (across the Jordan River). There Judas "took Chaspho, Maked, and Bosor, and the other cities of Gilead" (verse [36](#), Revised Standard Version).

Cassia

A type of tree that grows in tropical Asia. The bark of cassia is used as a spice that tastes similar to cinnamon but is not as high quality.

The "cassia" mentioned in the Bible comes from the cassia bark tree (*Cinnamomum cassia*). It is one of the ingredients used in holy anointing oil ([Exodus 30:24](#)). It was also a valuable trade item ([Ezekiel 27:19](#)). comes from the cassia bark tree (*Cinnamomum cassia*).

In [Psalm 45:8](#), the reference seems to be to a different plant called Indian orris (*Saussurea lappa*).

Castanet

A small hand-held percussion instrument, like a rattle. These are called "sistrums" in [2 Samuel 6:5](#).

See Musical Instruments; Music.

Castor and Pollux

According to Greek and Roman mythology, these were twin sons of Zeus. The apostle Paul sailed from Malta to Puteoli on a ship whose sign or figurehead was the "Twin Brothers" ([Acts 28:11](#)). These twin brothers were also known as the Dioscuri (which means "sons of Zeus").

See Dioscuri.

Castor Oil Plant

A large plant native to tropical Africa and Asia. The castor oil plant (*Ricinus communis*) is grown both for its appearance and for the oil that comes from its seeds. The gourd mentioned in [Jonah 4:6-7](#) was probably this plant.

The castor bean is a soft-stemmed shrub that grows 0.9 to 3.7 meters (3 to 12 feet tall). It has very large leaves that look like an open human hand. The plant can be found growing in waste places, especially near water. People grow the castor oil plant in both Lebanon and Israel and the surrounding areas. In hot climates, it can grow as tall as a tree and provides good shade because of its

many large, umbrella-like leaves. In the countries of Asia, it is known for how quickly it grows.

The oil taken from the castor bean seeds was used by the Jewish people in religious ceremonies. Rabbinical tradition approved it as one of five kinds of oil allowed for such use. It is important to note that while the oil is useful, the seeds themselves are poisonous if eaten.

Caterpillar

Wormlike larva of a butterfly, moth, and some other insects. A larva is the young form of some insects that goes through a complete change before becoming an adult. Such insects pass through four stages:

1. Egg
2. Larva
3. Pupa
4. Adult

The caterpillar is the larval stage of insects. Bees, flies, moths, and butterflies all have a larval or caterpillar stage.

The word "caterpillar" occurs three times in certain translations, like the New Living Translation in [1 Kings 8:37](#), [2 Chronicles 6:28](#), and [Psalm 78:46](#). In the book of Joel, the same word is translated "locust" ([Joel 1:4](#); [2:25](#)). The locust and grasshopper do not have a full transformation. They have only three stages:

1. Egg
2. Nymph
3. Adult

The nymph is a tiny adult. Its wings are not fully developed, though their outline may be present. There are several nymph stages known as instars. The reference to locust refers to the last instars. The wing structures are still folded and enclosed in a sac. But, they are recognizable. That form of the insect is about two and a half centimeters (one inch) long.

See Locust.

Catholic Letters

A traditional name for seven New Testament books or letters:

- James
- 1 and 2 Peter
- 1, 2, and 3 John
- Jude

The term “catholic” has been understood in different ways:

1. These letters express the views of all the apostles.
2. They are canonical or genuine.
3. Thus they were distinguished from works containing false beliefs written around the same time.
4. They are encyclical, that is, addressed to general audiences of believers rather than to specific groups, as were some of the apostle Paul’s letters. Of course, 2 John and 3 John are exceptions to this interpretation. 2 John is addressed to a lady or a local church. 3 John is addressed to an individual.

See also James, Letter of; John, Letters of; Jude, Letter of; Peter, First Letter of; Peter, Second Letter of.

Cattle

Cattle are large farm animals that people raise for meat, milk, and other uses. Cattle typically refers to cows and oxen, but in the Bible “cattle” sometimes also refers to sheep and goats.

Early Uses of Cattle

The Old Testament often emphasized the beauty of cattle. Egypt, especially the area called Goshen near the Nile River, had many cattle. The Hebrew people lived there when Joseph brought them to Egypt.

Early peoples may have first kept cattle mainly for milk rather than meat. They got their meat from wild animals they hunted. Cattle provided strong hides for shields, replacing wood. They used their dung as fuel when there was not enough wood

([Ezra 4:15](#)). Cattle were also used for heavy loads and plowing. Farmers used cattle to pull wheeled transport more than any other animal.

Types of Cattle

The Bible uses “cattle” to refer to all trained animals or livestock ([Genesis 1:24](#); [2:20](#); [7:23](#); [47:6](#), [16–17](#); [Exodus 9:3–7](#); [Numbers 3:41](#), [45](#)). Sometimes, it meant all large trained animals ([Numbers 31:9](#); [32:26](#)). However, sometimes the King James Version uses cattle to refer only to sheep and goats ([Genesis 30:32](#), [39](#), [43](#); [31:8](#), [10](#); [Isaiah 7:25](#); [43:23](#)).

Various cattle types were tamed in the holy land. In southern Judah, small, short-legged, black or brown shorthorn cattle thrived. They were easy to train and vital for farming. Along the coast, a larger cattle type was found. Meanwhile, the wild areas east of the Jordan River were home to large black cattle.

Breeding and Laws about Cattle

Cattle breeding was widely practiced by the patriarchs (see [Genesis 32:15](#); [Job 21:10](#)). Strict laws in Mesopotamia, as well as in Israel, penalized the owner of a bull that gored a man or other cattle ([Exodus 21:28–36](#)). Bulls were sometimes used as a symbol of strength or violence ([Deuteronomy 33:17](#); [Psalms 22:12](#); [68:30](#); [Isaiah 10:13](#)). Usually, one bull can breed with about 30 cows. However, more bulls were kept in Israel. This was because bulls were often used for general sacrifices ([Leviticus 22:23](#); [Numbers 23:1](#)) or for special sacrifices ([Judges 6:25](#); [1 Samuel 1:24](#)).

Particular sacrifices were offered at the:

- anointing of priests ([Exodus 29:1](#))
- Blessing of an altar ([Numbers 7](#))
- Purification of the Levites ([Numbers 8](#))
- Sin offerings ([Leviticus 16](#))
- Day of the new moon ([Numbers 28:11-14](#))
- Passover ([Numbers 28:19](#))
- Feast of Weeks ([Numbers 28:27](#))
- Feast of Trumpets ([Numbers 29:1-2](#))
- Day of Atonement ([Numbers 29:7-9](#))
- Feast of Tabernacles ([Numbers 29:12-38](#))

The Feast of Tabernacles required the most bulls for burnt offerings of all the annual feasts. A total of 71 were slaughtered over eight days.

Calves in the Bible

Calves were sometimes called “sons of the herd” in the original Hebrew ([Genesis 18:8](#); [1 Samuel 6:7](#); [14:32](#)). The calf was a symbol of peacefulness ([Isaiah 11:6](#)). It was also used to refer to the weak ([Psalm 68:30](#)). A calf's head decorated the back of Solomon's throne ([1 Kings 10:19](#)). Calves were sometimes fed in stalls to keep them from running and losing weight in the field ([Amos 6:4](#); [Malachi 4:2](#); [Luke 15:23](#)). They may also have been kept around the house. The witch of Endor kept a calf in her house. She killed it and served it to Saul and his men ([1 Samuel 28:24-25](#)). Calves supplied veal ([Genesis 18:7](#)), a delicacy of the rich. Amos criticized the wealthy for their luxurious, careless lives. He mentioned the stall-fattened calves ([Amos 6:4](#)). Calves also supplied meat for all Saul's armies at the great slaughter of the Philistines ([1 Samuel 14:32](#)). The “fatted calf” served roasted or boiled was gourmet fare, suitable for the finest banquet ([Genesis 18:7](#); [Matthew 22:4](#); [Luke 15:23](#)).

Cattle were included in the law of firstborn ([Exodus 13:12](#)). They were a sign of wealth ([Genesis 13:2](#)) and were allowed to be spoils of war ([Joshua 8:2](#)). Aaron, the first high priest, made a golden calf to rival the ark of the covenant ([Exodus 32](#); [Deuteronomy 9:16, 21](#)). Though he called the calf an image of the invisible God, it was offensive. The calf was a fertility symbol linked to Egyptian and Canaanite practices. Two calves were later made by

Jeroboam I of Israel for the shrines at Bethel and Dan ([1 Kings 12:28-33](#)). Hosea's prophetic rejection of calf worship were directed at those shrines ([Hosea 8:5-6](#); [13:2](#)).

Oxen and Their Uses

An ox is an adult bull that has been neutered (had its reproductive organs removed). A young ox is called a steer. People used oxen to do work ([Numbers 7:3](#); [Deuteronomy 22:10](#); [25:4](#)). However, cows were used to move heavy objects because they were gentler.

Oxen were also used as pack animals ([1 Chronicles 12:40](#)). However, they had less energy than donkeys, camels, or mules. They usually ate grass ([Numbers 22:4](#); [Psalm 106:20](#)), but they also ate straw ([Isaiah 11:7](#)) and salted fodder (food prepared for cattle) ([Isaiah 30:24](#)). They were kept in stables ([Luke 13:15](#)). Oxen could not be offered as sacrifices because they had been castrated ([Leviticus 22:24](#)). They could be used for food but were rarely eaten. In ancient Palestine, an ox and an ass were the bare minimum for survival in the agricultural economy ([Job 24:3](#); compare [Exodus 20:17](#)).

See also Agriculture; Food and Food Preparation; Offerings and Sacrifices.

Cauda

Cauda was a small island south of Crete. The ship carrying the apostle Paul to Rome stopped at Cauda during a storm to find temporary protection ([Acts 27:16](#)).

Behind the island, the water was calmer. In this protected area, the sailors pulled on board a small boat they had been towing behind the ship. They also worked to strengthen the ship's hull.

Even after they lowered the sails, the strong winds pushed them past the island. Eventually, the ship was wrecked.

Cauda is the modern island of Gaudos (also called Gozzo). Ancient handwritten copies of the Bible spell the name in different ways. Some use "Cauda" (as in most modern Bible versions), while others use "Clauda" (as in the King James Version and New American Standard Bible).

Caulk, Caulker

A waterproofing substance, such as bitumen, and the one who puts it into the seams of a ship's planking to make them watertight ([Ez 27:9](#), kjv "calker").

Cavalry

Soldiers who fight while riding on horses.

See Warfare.

Cedar

A tree that grows naturally in Palestine. Its wood was used for building and construction ([1 Kings 6:9](#)). Cedar refers to several types of evergreen trees with cones that are native to Europe, Asia, and Africa. Most mentions of "cedar" in the Bible refer to the cedar of Lebanon.

The cedar of Lebanon (*Cedrus libani*) is a magnificent tree. It was the tallest and most impressive tree known to the Israelite people. It grows quite quickly, reaching heights of up to 36.6 meters (120 feet). Its trunk grows as wide as 2.4 meters (8 feet) across. During King Solomon's time, these trees were plentiful on the mountains of Lebanon. Today, they are very rare because too many have been cut down for lumber.

People valued the cedar of Lebanon for many reasons: its strength, beauty, long life, pleasant smell, and wood that lasts a very long time without rotting. The tree became a symbol of greatness, power, majesty, dignity, tall stature, and wide spreading branches.

In [Ezekiel 17:3, 22-24](#), and [31:3-18](#), these towering trees are like kings of the forest. Cedars are used as symbols to represent worldly strength, power, and glory.

Cedron

The King James Version spelling of Kidron, the river valley between Jerusalem and the Mount of Olives, in [John 18:1](#).

See Kidron.

Cenchrea, Cenchreae

Seaport city that served the maritime needs of the larger city of Corinth, about eight miles (12.9 kilometers) to the west. Cenchrea is known as early as the fifth century BC in connection with an Athenian attack on Corinth. Before the Corinthian Canal was cut through the isthmus, traffic to Europe from Asia often passed from Cenchrea through Corinth to Lechaion.

Excavations begun in 1963 have located the harbor mole (breakwater), warehouse remains dating to the early first century, and a large second-century stone building. A fourth-century church testifies to the influence of Christianity in the city. Portions of the ancient road leading southeast from the Cenchrean Gate in Corinth may still be seen among the ruins of that city's agora (marketplace).

Cenchrea is mentioned twice in the NT. The apostle Paul took an oath requiring the cutting of his hair before leaving Cenchrea during his third missionary journey ([Acts 18:18](#)). In his letter to the church in Rome, Paul commended Phoebe, a deaconess of the church in Cenchrea, well known for her Christian service ([Rom 16:1](#)).

Cendebeus

Commander-in-chief of the seacoast of Syria-Palestine about 138 BC under Antiochus VII ([1 Macc 15:38](#)). Cendebeus was ordered to build a fortress at Kedron (probably the Gederah of [Jos 15:36](#)), after which he transferred his headquarters to Jamnia and from there made raids into Judea ([1 Macc 15:39-40](#)). Simon Maccabeus, unable to fight back because of his old age, dispatched his sons Judas and John Hyrcanus against Cendebeus with 20,000 soldiers and horsemen. Judas was wounded, but the Jews prevailed after slaying about 2,000 men. Cendebeus was pursued back to Kedron, and the Jews returned to Judea ([16:1-10](#)).

Censer

A censer is a container used to burn incense. On the Day of Atonement, the high priest burned two handfuls of incense in the censer. He did this inside the most holy place before the Lord ([Leviticus 16:12](#)). The censers of the tabernacle were bronze ([Numbers 16:39](#)). The censers used by the angels

in the book of Revelation were gold ([Revelation 8:3-5](#)).

See also Tabernacle; Temple.

Census

The registration and counting of people, usually for war or taxes. The Bible mentions a few censuses.

The first census was taken at Mount Sinai two years after the exodus. It counted Israelite males over 20 years old to assess military strength—603,550 in total ([Numbers 1:1-3, 46](#)). A special census of Levites, who served in the tabernacle instead of military duties, counted 22,000 males, with only 8,580 eligible for priestly service ([Numbers 3:15, 39; 4:46-48](#)).

The second census occurred at the end of Israel's 40 years in the wilderness. This is recorded in [Numbers 26](#). It was also a military census, taken just before the Israelites invaded the Promised Land. The census found 601,730 men able to fight ([Numbers 26:51](#)), not including the Levites. The 23,000 Levites were counted separately because they would not receive land ([Numbers 26:62](#)). The Israelites each paid half a shekel, about one-fifth of an ounce (6 grams) of silver, as part of this census ([Exodus 30:11-16](#)).

The third census happened near the end of King David's reign ([2 Samuel 24:1-17](#)). God commanded the first two censuses, but David's census took place when God was angry with Israel. The Bible says the Lord "incited David against them," but it does not explain David's reasons (see [1 Chronicles 21:1](#) for a later interpretation). David might have wanted the census for conscription, taxation, or to measure his power. Joab, David's top military commander, felt that taking the census was wrong and tried to stop David. After the census—though there is some uncertainty about whether it was completed (see [1 Chronicles 21:6; 27:23-24](#))—David realized his mistake and repented. But God was still angry and gave David a choice of three punishments: three years of famine, three months of fleeing from an enemy, or three days of a deadly plague. David chose the plague, which killed 70,000 men. The census found 800,000 able-bodied men in Israel and 500,000 in Judah ([2 Samuel 24:9](#)). A different account mentions a potential militia of 1,100,000 in Israel and 470,000 in Judah ([1 Chronicles 21:5](#)), plus 38,000 Levites who could serve in the temple ([1 Chronicles 23:3](#)).

Scholars have questioned why the numbers from the third census are almost twice as large as those from the first two. Many explanations have been suggested, but none are fully satisfying.

A fourth census is recorded in [Ezra 2](#), which took place when the exiles returned to Jerusalem. It included 42,360 Israelite males, 7,337 slaves (both male and female), and 200 singers (both male and female).

In the New Testament, a census played a role in the events of Jesus's birth. "Now in those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that a census should be taken of the whole empire. This was the first census to take place while Quirinius was governor of Syria. And everyone went to his own town to register" ([Luke 2:1-3](#)).

Josephus, a first-century AD Jewish historian, notes that Quirinius completed a census soon after becoming governor of Syria in AD 6. But [Matthew 2](#) places Jesus's birth during the reign of Herod the Great, who died in 4 BC, suggesting there were probably two different censuses around that time. Luke's reference to the "first enrollment" ([Luke 2:2](#)) likely distinguishes it from the census of AD 6-7. Luke probably knew about the later census, which he mentions in [Acts 5:37](#). A series of censuses in Egypt around the same time supports the idea that a similar series occurred in Palestine. The most likely explanation is that an earlier census took place during Quirinius's leadership before he officially became governor.

Luke's mention of the census under Quirinius serves two purposes. It dates Jesus's birth and explains why Joseph and Mary were in Bethlehem. The census was likely for tax purposes since the Romans did not require Jews to serve in the military. The requirement to return to one's hometown reflects both Hebrew traditions and the Roman emperor Caesar Augustus's willingness to let the Jews follow their customs.

Centurion

A centurion was a leader in the Roman army who commanded 100 soldiers. The Roman army organized its soldiers into groups. Each large unit (called a legion) had 10 groups of 1,000 soldiers. Each group had six centurions who reported to senior officers called tribunes. For example, in [Acts 22:26](#), a centurion asked his officer what to do about Paul. Centurions had a lot of power because

they worked directly with the soldiers. They went to battles with them and made quick choices based on what was happening.

Being a centurion was often the highest position a normal soldier could reach. Many centurions started as regular soldiers and moved up because of their experience. After becoming a centurion, they could get even better jobs by moving to more important positions. The best job was being the main centurion of the first group of 1000 soldiers in a legion. This meant centurions often moved around the Roman Empire.

Centurions had many jobs besides keeping soldiers in line. They were in charge of death sentences ([Matthew 27:54](#); [Mark 15:39, 44-45](#); [Luke 23:47](#)). They were in charge of their soldiers all the time, whether the soldiers were Romans or hired from other places. Being a centurion was respected and paid well. Most people who became centurions stayed in that job for a long time.

The New Testament talks about six centurions. At least two of them seem to have become followers of Christ.

1. A centurion at Capernaum asked Jesus to save his dying servant. He believed that illnesses would listen to Jesus just like his soldiers listened to him ([Matthew 8:5-13](#); [Luke 7:2-10](#)). Even though he was important, he was humble and knew he needed help. He cared for his servant. Jesus was amazed by his faith and healed the sick man.
2. The centurion in charge of the group that killed Jesus said, "Truly this man was the Son of God!" ([Mark 15:39](#)) and "Surely this was a righteous man." ([Luke 23:47](#)). The apocryphal Acts of Pilate, likely from the fourth century, called this centurion Longinus. Roman Catholics think of him as a saint. There is a stone statue of him in Saint Peter's Basilica in Rome by the 17th-century artist Giovanni Bernini.

3. A centurion in Caesarea named Cornelius became a follower of Jesus after Peter told him about the gospel. Peter did not want to share the gospel with non-Jews at first, but God showed him a vision that changed his mind ([Acts 10](#)).
4. A centurion in [Acts 22:25-26](#) helped save Paul from being beaten when he told his higher officer that Paul was a Roman citizen.
5. Another centurion helped save Paul from Jews who wanted to kill him ([Acts 23:17-22](#)).
6. A centurion named Julius had to guard Paul on his trip from Caesarea to Rome ([Acts 27:1](#)). When their ship broke in a storm, Julius stopped the soldiers from killing all the prisoners, including Paul ([Acts 27:42-43](#)).

See also Warfare.

Cephas

The Aramaic translation for the name of the apostle Simon Peter in [John 1:42](#); [1 Corinthians 1:12](#); and [Galatians 1:18](#). The name means "rock" or "stone." *See Simon Peter.*

Cereal Offering

Cereal offering is the term used in the Revised Standard Version (RSV) for what is often called a grain offering. It was one of the offerings given to God in the Old Testament. The cereal offering showed a person's dedication and commitment to God.

See Offerings and Sacrifices.

Cerinthus

Cerinthus was a false teacher who lived around AD 100. The apostle John opposed his teachings.

What Did Cerinthus Believe?

Cerinthus was probably born in Egypt and raised as a Jew. Later, he became the leader of a group with Gnostic beliefs. Gnostics believed that special knowledge could save people. Cerinthus taught that:

- God did not create the world. Instead, a lesser spirit (called the “Demiurge”) or group of angels did.
- One of these angels gave the law to the Jews.
- Jesus was just an ordinary man.
- “The Christ” (a divine power) came down on Jesus at his baptism.
- This “Christ” showed people the true God, who was far above all other beings.
- Before Jesus was crucified, the “Christ” left him.

John Opposes Cerinthus

A well-known Christian named Irenaeus (who lived around 260–340 AD) told a story about Cerinthus. He said that a student of the apostle John, named Polycarp, shared this story with him.

According to the story, John once went to a public bathhouse in the city of Ephesus. But when John heard that Cerinthus was inside, he ran out. He said, “The building will collapse because the enemy of truth is inside!”

Some people believe that parts of John’s writings in the Bible were written to correct false teachings like those of Cerinthus (see [John 1:1–3, 14](#); [1 John 4:1–3](#)).

Certificate of Divorce

An official document stating the end of a marriage between a husband and wife.

See Certificate of Divorce.

Certificate of Divorce

An official document stating the end of a marriage between a husband and wife. The laws given by

Moses required this document ([Deuteronomy 24:1–4](#); see [Matthew 5:31](#); [19:7](#); [Mark 10:4](#)). This certificate protected a woman's rights in two ways. First, it proved she was no longer married. Second, it prevented her former husband from claiming her marriage payment (the valuable items she brought into the marriage).

One example of the words used in such a document appears in [Hosea 2:2](#): “She is not My wife, and I am not her husband.” The prophets of the Old Testament used this idea of divorce to show how God felt about his people when they turned away from him ([Isaiah 50:1](#); [Jeremiah 3:8](#)). Just as a husband might separate from an unfaithful wife, God showed he was separating himself from his disobedient people.

See also Civil Law and Justice; Divorce; Marriage, Marriage Customs.

Chabris

Chabris was the son of Gothoniell. He was one of three civil officers (magistrates) of Bethulia ([Judith 6:14–15](#); [10:6](#)). When the Assyrians attacked the town, Chabris and the other leaders said they would only wait a few more days for God to save them. If nothing happened, they planned to surrender.

Judith rebuked them for this. She told them not to test God or give him a time limit ([Judith 8:9–27](#)).

Chaereas

Chaereas was the brother of Timothy. He was the governor (ruler) of the city of Gazara ([2 Maccabees 10:32](#)). The Maccabees attacked Gazara and defeated its army. Many people died in the battle, including Chaereas and Timothy (verses [36–37](#)).

Chaff

Loose hulls separated from the edible grains by threshing and winnowing. In Bible times, winnowed grain was a common sight. The wind blew away the lighter husks, leaving only the grain. This gave rise to a strong metaphor. It symbolized that good people or nations would survive judgment, but the wicked would not. So, for example, sinners “are like chaff driven off by the wind” ([Psalm 1:4](#)).

The prophet Isaiah said of the Assyrians, “You conceive chaff; you give birth to stubble. Your breath is a fire that will consume you” ([Isaiah 33:11](#)). In Nebuchadnezzar’s dream, the world’s nations collapse and are like the chaff of the summer threshing floors before the victory of the coming kingdom of God ([Daniel 2:35](#)).

In the New Testament, it is said that the coming Messiah will “gather His wheat into the barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire” ([Matthew 3:12](#)).

Chalcedony

Chalcedony is a type of quartz. It comes in different colors, but it is often gray or milky white.

See Minerals and Metals; Stones, Precious.

Chalcol

The King James Version spelling of Calcol in [1 Kings 4:31](#). Calcol was a man of wisdom.

See Calcol.

Chaldea, Chaldeans

Ancient region in Mesopotamia and its inhabitants. The name comes from the Chaldean (or Kaldu) tribes that shared Babylonia in southeastern Mesopotamia with several other peoples, especially the Sumerians and Akkadians. After the old Babylonian Empire was absorbed by the Assyrians, the Chaldeans under Nebuchadnezzar’s leadership took control and built a Neo-Babylonian Empire that dominated the Near East for nearly a century. The region called Chaldea is also associated with the patriarch Abraham, whose Mesopotamian home was “Ur of the Chaldeans” ([Gn 11:28](#)).

The Land and People

Until the end of the eighth century BC, Chaldea referred only to a small territory in southern Babylonia. Within 100 years, following a rapid and successful bid for power, it embraced all of Babylonia. At that time it included the territory from Baghdad on the Tigris River to the Persian Gulf and extended up the Euphrates River as far as the city of Hit. Although Chaldea is usually placed

between the Tigris and Euphrates, it reached into the flatlands between the Tigris and the Zagros Mountains to the east and also included some land west of the Euphrates. The Arabian Desert formed its western boundary. Chaldea rarely exceeded 40 miles (64.4 kilometers) in width, having an area of about 8,000 square miles (12,872 square kilometers), approximately the size of New Jersey. On today’s map Chaldea falls inside Iraq, with its southwestern tip touching the small kingdom of Kuwait.

History

First mention of the Chaldeans is found in the Assyrian annals of Ashurnasirpal II (885–860 BC), leading some authorities to suggest that they entered Babylonia about 1000 BC. They are usually associated (though not identified) with the Semitic Aramean tribes who were constantly pushing their way from the western deserts into Mesopotamia. They settled primarily in the southern tip of Babylonia, at the northern end of the Persian Gulf, perhaps centuries before the Assyrian annals mentioned them.

[Job 1:17](#) mentions three bands of Chaldeans who participated in a raid against Job’s camels and servants, probably in the vicinity of Edom or northern Arabia. Their presence in those regions does not necessarily mean they lived nearby, since armies from Babylonia (Sinar) and Elam ranged as far as Palestine centuries earlier ([Gn 14:1–2](#)).

Under Assyrian Rule

Living by the marshes and lakes of the extreme south, the Chaldeans maintained a high degree of independence, even when Assyrian dominion extended over them. It was difficult for invading armies to maneuver in the Chaldean marshes. As a result, the Chaldeans resisted paying taxes or providing any form of service to the Assyrian government. When the Assyrians sought to limit their freedom, the Chaldeans turned to guerrilla warfare and political intrigue. They were quick to disregard treaties or to switch alliances as circumstances dictated. Under Assyrian rule, whereas the native residents of Babylonian cities were generally content, the Chaldeans became the leaders of a national independence movement. For 250 years the Assyrians had to enforce their dominion against persistent Chaldean attempts to assert their autonomy and influence.

Finally, in 721 BC the Chaldean leader Marduk-apla-iddina II (known as Merodach-baladan in [2](#)

[Kgs 20:12](#) and [Is 39:1](#), who sent an embassy to Hezekiah, king of Judah) entered Babylon and claimed the kingship of Babylonia, a position long appointed by the Assyrian king. Crafty and resourceful, he successfully maintained his claim for 10 years before being driven back into his own southern territory by Assyria's Sargon II. On Sargon's death in 705 BC, he reasserted his claim but was defeated by the new Assyrian king, Sennacherib, who destroyed Babylon as a lesson to the Chaldeans and their allies.

Sennacherib's son and successor, Esarhaddon, pursued a policy of conciliation with the Babylonians and rebuilt their capital city, a gesture that effectively neutralized Chaldean agitation and inaugurated a period of peace that lasted over 30 years. The last unsuccessful revolt occurred under Ashurbanipal's reign and was actually instigated by his brother, whom the Assyrian king had appointed to the Babylonian throne. The Chaldeans gladly joined the rebellion, which was crushed in 648 BC.

The Neo-Babylonian Empire

Two decades later, at the time of Ashurbanipal's death, Assyrian power suddenly and dramatically slipped. Nabopolassar, a Chaldean governor, took the opportunity to drive the Assyrians out of Babylonia. He became king of Babylon in 625 BC. Allied with the Medes, the Babylonians went on to destroy the Assyrian Empire, capturing the capital cities of Asshur in 614 and Nineveh in 612. They divided the conquered lands with the Medes and annexed the Assyrian regions west and south of the Tigris, creating a new Babylonian Empire. (The first Babylonian Empire, with which Hammurabi is associated, had flourished over 1,000 years earlier.) Throughout the Near East, Chaldea and Babylonia became synonymous.

During the long and brilliant reign of Nabopolassar's son Nebuchadnezzar (or Nebuchadrezzar) II, the empire reached its zenith. As crown prince, he won a decisive victory in 605 BC over the Egyptians at Carchemish (the battle mentioned in [2 Chr 35:20](#)), which effectively established Babylonian supremacy in the Near East (see [2 Kgs 24:7](#)). That same year the southern kingdom of Judah became a vassal nation to Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar won the submission of King Jehoiachin, carried off the choicest articles from the temple for his own temple in Babylon, and took the outstanding leaders and youth of Judah captive ([2 Kgs 24:1](#); [2 Chr 36:5-7](#); [Dn 1:1-4](#)). When Judah revolted several years later at the instigation

of Egypt, the Chaldean army captured Jerusalem in 597 BC. Judah's new king, Jehoiachin, was deposed at that time together with more of its leaders ([2 Kgs 24:8-16](#)). A second revolt in 594 BC by the Chaldean-appointed king (Zedekiah) resulted in a third invasion, the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC, and the exile of most of Judah's citizens ([2 Kgs 24:20-25:12](#); [2 Chr 36:11-21](#)). With the booty from that and other conquests, Nebuchadnezzar built Babylon into one of the most dazzling cities in the ancient world. His projects included the Hanging Gardens (one of the seven wonders of the ancient world), the Ishtar Gate, and a 17-mile (27-kilometer) outer wall designed for defense of the city. His pride in such accomplishments eventually brought the judgment of God ([Dn 4:30-33](#)).

Nebuchadnezzar was succeeded by his son Amel-marduk (Evil-merodach in [2 Kgs 25:27](#) and [Jer 52:31](#), remembered there for his special kindness to the exiled king Jehoiachin). After two years he was killed in an armed rebellion led by his brother-in-law, Nergal-shar-usur (Nergal-sharezer of [Jer 39:3](#)), who attempted to establish his own dynasty. After a four-year reign Nergal-shar-usur was succeeded by his son, who lasted only a few months before being ousted by a usurper, Nabonidus.

The Fall of Babylon

Nabonidus was the last of the Chaldean monarchs. His installation as king was supported by many Babylonian officials. They were watching their former allies, the Medes, gradually become a rival power and saw in Nabonidus a ruler strong enough to meet their threat. Strong or not, his attempts to reform Babylonian religion proved extremely unpopular, and his efforts to strengthen the economy were unsuccessful. Both facts made Babylon an unpleasant residence for Nabonidus; during one extended absence from the capital city, he installed his son Belshazzar as co-regent. (Belshazzar's position explains why he is described as the king of Babylon in the OT book of Daniel and why in [Dn 5:7](#) he could make Daniel only "the third ruler in the kingdom.")

While Belshazzar was handling government affairs, the famous incident of the "writing on the wall" occurred, ominously predicting Babylon's downfall ([Dn 5](#)). The Elamites, in fact, were already attacking the empire's eastern flank. Rumors of Persian power in the north brought Nabonidus back to Babylon just in time for an invasion by the Persian king, Cyrus the Great. Cyrus took Babylon without

a fight, putting an end both to Chaldean power and to the Neo-Babylonian Empire.

See also Assyria, Assyrians; Astrology; Babylon, Babylonia; Daniel, Book of; Diaspora of the Jews; Nebuchadnezzar, Nebuchadrezzar; Ur (Place).

Chalkstone

Literally “stones of chalk,” mentioned as illustrative of the destruction of the pagan altars in Judah ([Is 27:9](#)). Chalk beds cap many of the Judean hills, and since the substance easily erodes, Isaiah’s prophecy is apt.

Chalphi

Chalphi was the father of Judas. This Judas was one of two captains in Jonathan Maccabeus’s army.

During the battle of Gennesaret, the army was ambushed. Many soldiers ran away, but Judas and the other captain, Mattathias, stayed and fought bravely ([1 Maccabees 11:67–74](#)). Jonathan, Judas, and Mattathias encouraged the troops. Together, they drove back the enemy.

Chamberlain

A royal official responsible for the king’s private quarters. They sometimes had important tasks and had influence with those in power ([Acts 12:20](#)). The chamberlain Erastus was actually the city treasurer ([Romans 16:23](#)). Nathan-melech the chamberlain was a court official at the time of Josiah ([2 Kings 23:11](#)). The Persian kings used eunuchs (men who were physically unable to have children) as chamberlains ([Esther 1:10, 12, 15; 2:3, 14–15; 4:4–5; 6:2, 14; 7:9](#)).

Chambers of the South

Possibly a constellation of stars, or the vast stretches of southern sky without stars ([Jb 9:9](#), kjv). *See* Astronomy.

Chameleon

A kind of lizard known for being able to change color quickly. Chameleons can move their eyes

separately, so one eye can look up while the other looks down. They live in trees and bushes and use their long tails to hold onto branches.

In the Old Testament, chameleons are listed as ceremonially unclean animals. This means the Israelites were not allowed to eat them ([Leviticus 11:30](#)). The Hebrew word translated as “chameleon” may come from a word that means “to pant.” This might be because of the way the animal breathes. Some ancient people believed lizards lived by breathing air alone.

See also Lizard.

Chamois

Small, goatlike antelope that lives primarily in the high mountains of Europe. In [Deuteronomy 14:5](#) “chamois” is an inaccurate translation of the Hebrew word that is better rendered “mountain sheep.” *See* Animals (Sheep).

Chanaan

The King James Version spelling of Canaan in [Acts 7:11](#) and [13:19](#).

See Canaan, Canaanite.

Channels of the Sea

Valleys or stream beds in the ocean floor. The Lord saved David from all his enemies and King Saul. Then David praised the great power of God. This power could expose the ocean floor with a blast of his breath ([2 Samuel 22:16; Psalm 18:15](#)).

Chant

A chant is a type of singing or speaking in a repeated, rhythmic way that often sounds like one continuous tone ([Psalm 8:1; Ezekiel 32:16](#)).

See Music.

Chaos, Waters of

In ancient thought, the primeval seas that were divided. The world was then situated between the

“waters above” and “waters below,” or “the Deep” ([Gn 1:1-2, 6-7](#)).

Chaphenatha

A section of Jerusalem that Jonathan Maccabeus repaired to protect the city from enemy attack ([1 Macc 12:37](#)). Pinpointing the exact location has given rise to much unsettled debate. Some scholars think the word should be emended to Chapheltha, an equivalent of the area called the Mishneh, or Second Quarter (cf. [2 Kgs 22:14](#), [Zep 1:10](#), etc.). Others say Chaphenatha refers to “the bend of the fountain,” i.e., near the pool of Siloam. There is no decisive evidence either way.

Chapiter

The word *chapiter* is used in the King James Version to mean *capital*. A capital is the top part of a pillar or column in a building.

See Capital.

Charashim

KJV rendering of Ge-harashim, a valley on the plain of Sharon’s southern border, in [1 Chronicles 4:14](#). *See* Ge-harashim.

Charax

Charax was a place that may have been in the land of Tob. Judas Maccabeus and his army passed through Charax while chasing their Syrian enemies ([2 Maccabees 12:17-19](#)).

Charchemish

KJV spelling of the city Carchemish in [2 Chronicles 35:20](#). *See* Carchemish.

Chariot

A chariot is an ancient two-wheeled vehicle pulled by animals, often horses. Chariots were used in war. They were also a means of transportation for persons of rank or wealth, and for hunting.

See also Travel; Warfare.

Charismata

Charismata is a Greek word that means “gifts” or “grace gifts.” These are special abilities that the Holy Spirit gives to people in the church ([1 Corinthians 12; 14](#)). These gifts are meant to help the church grow and serve others.

See Spiritual Gifts.

Charm

A charm is a small object worn around the neck to repel evil.

See Amulet; Magic; Sorcery.

Charmis

Charmis was the son of Melchiel. He was one of three civil officers (magistrates) of Bethulia ([Judith 6:14-15; 10:6](#)). When the Assyrians attacked, Charmis and the other leaders said they would wait only a short time for God to rescue them. If nothing happened, they planned to surrender.

Judith strongly rebuked them. She told them not to limit God or decide how and when He would act ([8:9-27](#)).

Charran

The King James Version spelling of Haran, a city in Mesopotamia ([Acts 7:2-4](#)).

See Haran (Place).

Chaspho

Chaspho was a town east of the Sea of Galilee. It is mentioned in 1 and 2 Maccabees.

Judas and Jonathan Maccabeus led their army into the region of Transjordan. They captured Chaspho, along with Maked, Bosor, and other cities in Gilead ([1 Maccabees 5:36](#)).

Most scholars think that Chaspho is the same place called *Caspin* in [2 Maccabees 12:13](#). Some believe

Chasphe was located at el-Muzeirib in the Hauran plain or at Tell el-Jamid by the Yarmuk River. But today, most scholars place it at Khisfin, about 16 kilometers (10 miles) east of the Sea of Galilee.

Chasten, Chastisement

These terms indicate correction or discipline that is intended to make a person righteous ([Deuteronomy 21:18](#); [Job 5:17](#); [2 Timothy 2:25](#)).

See Discipline.

Chebar

Alternate spelling of Kebar, a canal in Babylonia where the prophet Ezekiel had visions ([Ezekiel 1:1, 3; 3:15, 23; 10:15, 20, 22; 43:3](#)).

See Kebar.

Chedorlaomer

Alternate spelling of Kedorlaomer, a king of Elam mentioned in Genesis who led a coalition of kings in a war against Sodom and Gomorrah ([Genesis 14](#)).

See Kedorlaomer.

Cheese

Milk product produced by curdling milk, draining the whey, pressing the curds into cakes, and drying them. One of the earliest biblical references to cheese is in [Job 10:10](#): "Didst thou not pour me out like milk and curdle me like cheese?" (rsv). See Food and Food Preparation.

Chelal

The son of Pahath-moab. Chelal obeyed Ezra's instruction to divorce his non-Jewish wife after the people of Israel returned from exile in Babylon ([Ezra 10:30](#)). It is also spelled Kelal.

Chelleans

The Chelleans are a group of people mentioned in the book of Judith. They appear in a list of places that Holofernes, the top general of King Nebuchadnezzar, passed through during his military campaign ([Judith 2:23](#)).

Scholars do not agree on exactly who the Chelleans were. Some have linked them to the town of Chelous (modern Khalasa), but that location is too far from the others listed in the same passage.

A better option is ancient Cholle, which was between Palmyra (also called Tadmor) and the Euphrates River. That place, now called el-Khalle, fits well with the geography in [Judith 2:21-25](#).

Chelluh

KJV rendering of Keluhi, Bani's son, in [Ezra 10:35](#). See Keluhi.

Chelous

Chelous was one of the cities that received messengers from King Nebuchadnezzar asking for help in his war against Arphaxad ([Judith 1:9](#)). Most scholars think Chelous is the same as the ancient city Elusa. Today, that place is called Khalasa. It is south of Beersheba, near the southern edge of the Dead Sea.

Khalasa was close to an important crossroads in the region.

Chelub

1. The brother of Shuhah and the father of Mehir from the tribe of Judah ([1 Chronicles 4:11](#)).
2. The father of Ezri. Ezri was in charge of the workers who farmed King David's fields ([1 Chronicles 27:26](#)).

Chelubai

A different spelling of the name Caleb. He was the son of Hezron and the brother of Jerahmeel ([1 Chronicles 2:9](#)). In Hebrew, "Chelubai" is a variant

form of the name "Caleb," as shown in [1 Chronicles 2:18, 42](#).

See Caleb #2.

Chemarim, Chemarims

Hebrew term often translated "idolatrous priests" ([2 Kgs 23:5](#); [Hos 10:5](#); [Zep 1:4](#)). In the kjv this word appears in [Zephaniah 1:4](#) as a proper name, spelled either Chemarim or Chemarims. The exact meaning of the word is uncertain.

Chemosh

Chemosh was the name of the main god that the Moabite people worshipped ([Numbers 21:29](#)). The Bible also mentions that the Ammonite people were connected to this false god ([Judges 11:24](#)).

See Canaanite Deities and Religion; Moab, Moabites.

Chenaanah

Alternate spelling of the name Kenaanah.

See Kenaanah.

Chenani

Alternate spelling of Kenani, the Levite who participated in Ezra's public reading of the law after the Israelites returned from exile in Babylon.

See Kenani.

Chenaniah

An alternate spelling of the name Kenaniah.

See Kenaniah.

Chephar-Ammoni, Chephar-Haammonai

Alternate spellings of the name Keph-ar-ammoni, the city given to Benjamin's tribe for an inheritance after Israel conquered Canaan ([Joshua 18:24](#)).

See Keph-ar-ammoni.

Chephirah

An ancient city where the Hivite people lived. The city became part of Israelite territory through an unusual agreement. The people of Gibeon (a nearby city) tricked Joshua and the Israelites into making peace with them when the Israelites were conquering the land of Canaan ([Joshua 9:17](#)).

Later, the city became part of the land given to the tribe of Benjamin, one of the twelve tribes of Israel ([Joshua 18:26](#)). Many years later, after the Jewish people returned from being forced to live in Babylon, some people came back to live in Chephirah ([Ezra 2:25](#); [Nehemiah 7:29](#)).

Today, the ruins of this ancient city are called Khirbet Kefireh. These ruins are located southwest of where the ancient city of Gibeon once stood.

Cheran

Cheran was the son of Dishon. He was was a member of the Horite tribe during the time of Esau ([Genesis 36:26](#); [1 Chronicles 1:41](#)).

Cherethims, Cherethites

Alternate spellings for Kerethites, a tribal group that lived in southern Judah near Hebron ([1 Samuel 30:14](#)). See Kerethites.

Cherith, the Brook

A brook or valley where the Lord told the prophet Elijah to hide from King Ahab. This happened during a time when there was no rain and very little food in the land, which Elijah had predicted would happen. While Elijah stayed by this stream, he had water to drink, and God sent birds (ravens) to bring him food every morning and evening ([1 Kings 17:2-6](#)).

The stream was located east of the Jordan River ([1 Kings 17:3](#)). Some people think it was in a valley called Wadi Qelt, near the city of Jericho. However, it was more likely in the region of Gilead, where Elijah came from. The Brook of Cherith is

sometimes called the "Cherith Valley" or "Cherith Ravine."

Cherub (Place)

One of five Babylonian cities. Israelites who came from there could not prove their ancestry, they returned there after the exile ([Ezra 2:59](#); [Nehemiah 7:61](#)).

See also Kerub.

Cherub, Cherubim

Cherubim are special winged creatures described in the Bible. The word "cherubim" is the plural form of the Hebrew word "cherub." These beings are a type of supernatural creatures, like seraphim and angels. Some scholars think the term "cherub" may come from the *karibu* (meaning "intercessor") in Akkadian mythology. In Mesopotamian art, they were often shown as griffins (half lion and half eagle) or humans with wings. The sphinx (a mythical creature from ancient Egypt that had a human head and a lion's body) might also be connected to this idea. However, the descriptions in the Bible show that cherubim were different from these other ancient creatures.

The prophet Ezekiel described four "living creatures." Each creature had four faces and four wings ([Ezekiel 1:5-24](#)). Later in his writings, Ezekiel revealed that these creatures were cherubim ([Ezekiel 10:2-22](#)). Later in his writings, Ezekiel revealed that these creatures were cherubim ([Ezekiel 28:13-16](#)). Some people believe this story about the king of Tyre also tells us about Satan. They think it describes how Satan fell from his position as one of God's high-ranking heavenly beings.

Even though Ezekiel described cherubim in detail, it is difficult to know exactly what they looked like. So, in [Ezekiel 41:18](#), the cherubim in the temple he saw in a vision had only two faces: one of a man and one of a young lion. This is different from the four-faced creatures in his earlier vision. In [Ezekiel 1:10](#) were those of a man, a lion, an ox, and an eagle. However, in [Ezekiel 10:14](#), one of the faces is called "the face of the cherub," which could refer to an ox's face. This may explain why ancient Near Eastern art showed cherubim as four-legged creatures. They are usually different from the biblical cherubim. In Ezekiel's vision, cherubim had wings,

straight legs, and hooves like those of a calf ([Ezekiel 1:7](#)).

Some scholars, puzzled by this, seek links between biblical cherubim and statues or carvings from other cultures. For example, the throne of Ahiiram, king of Byblos, had sphinxes on both sides. Some believe they were cherubim. The sphinx was a common decorative symbol in the ancient world. It was on objects from Megiddo, Samaria, and Nimrud. Also, ancient art shows other decorative creatures. They have human and animal parts, and wings. But, none match the Old Testament's descriptions of cherubim.

The four living creatures in Revelation are like Ezekiel's cherubim. But, they lack the "whirling wheels" from Ezekiel's vision ([Revelation 4:6-9](#)). Later references to the creatures in Revelation ([Revelation 5:6-14](#); [6:1-8](#); [7:1-11](#); [14:3](#); [15:7](#); [19:4](#)) do not describe them further.

In [Genesis 3:24](#) cherubim guard the entrance of Eden. This is a common role for supernatural beings in Near Eastern traditions. In [Ezekiel 10](#) cherubim also carry out God's judgment by spreading burning coals over a city ([Ezekiel 10:2, 7](#)).

In early Israelite tradition, cherubim provided God with a throne by stretching out their wings ([1 Samuel 4:4](#); [2 Samuel 6:2](#); and more.). God spoke to Moses from this throne, which was located on the cover of the ark of the Testimony ([Exodus 25:22](#)). In Ezekiel's vision ([Ezekiel 1:26](#); [10:1](#)) God sits on a chariot with four wheels that is moved by cherubim, who lift it with their wings. In Hebrew poetry, God is sometimes described as riding on clouds ([Psalm 104:3](#); compare [Isaiah 19:1](#)) or flying on a cherub ([2 Samuel 22:11](#); [Psalm 18:10](#)). Near Eastern art shows gods standing on the backs of animals. It also shows cherubim supporting a divine throne.

In Israel, cherubim were carved on the ark of the Testimony ([Exodus 25:18-20](#); [37:7-9](#)). They were also on the tabernacle's curtains and the veil covering the innermost sanctuary (most sacred room), where the ark was kept.

The Most Holy Place in Solomon's temple featured two large cherubim made of olive wood and covered in gold. With their wings outstretched, they spanned the inner sanctuary's width. The temple's wooden panels and doors were carved with smaller cherubim and palm trees. They were also on the sides of the laver stands ([1 Kings 7:29, 36](#)). Ezekiel's vision of the temple showed

cherubim and palm trees alternating in the decoration ([Ezekiel 41:17–20](#)).

See also Angel; Seraph, Seraphim.

Chesalon

A city in northern Judah near the border of the territory of Dan. The city was built on the northern side of Mount Jearim. Today, this place is believed to be a site called Kesla, which is about 14.5 kilometers (nine miles) west of Jerusalem.

The Bible mentions Chesalon only once, when describing how the Israelites, led by Joshua, took control of the land of Canaan ([Joshua 15:10](#)).

See also Jearim, Mount.

Chesed

A son of Milcah and Nahor ([Genesis 22:22](#)). Nahor was a brother of the patriarch Abraham.

Chesil

A city on the borders of Edom in the Negev. It was given to the tribe of Judah ([Joshua 15:30](#)). In another lists of towns, Chesil is replaced by:

1. Bethul ([Joshua 19:4](#))
2. Bethuel ([1 Chronicles 4:30](#))
3. Perhaps Bethel, though not the Bethel north of Jerusalem ([1 Samuel 30:27](#))

Bethuel or Bethul is considered by many scholars to be the original name, with Chesil as a later error.

See also Bethuel, Bethul (Place).

Chestnut

KJV mistranslation for plane tree, a tree indigenous to Palestine ([Gn 30:37](#); [Ez 31:8](#)). *See* Plants (Plane Tree).

Chesulloth

A town in Issachar ([Joshua 19:18](#)). It is also called Kisloth-tabor in [Joshua 19:12](#). Chesulloth is

probably the modern village of Iksal, about 4.8 kilometers (three miles) southeast of Nazareth.

Chezib

Another name for Aczib, a city in the territory of Judah ([Genesis 38:5](#)).

See Aczib #1.

Chicken

A common domestic bird raised for its edible eggs and meat.

See Fowl (Domestic).

Chicory

A plant (*Cichorium intybus*) that grows wild in many parts of Israel and the surrounding regions. It has bright blue flowers and leaves that can be eaten as a vegetable. Some scholars suggest it may have been one of the bitter herbs used in ancient times, though this is uncertain.

See Bitter Herbs.

Chidon

The threshing floor where God struck down Huzzah as he attempted to steady the ark of the covenant ([1 Chronicles 13:9](#)). The parallel passage in [2 Samuel 6:6](#) refers to this place as “the threshing floor of Nacon.” Following the death of Uzzah, King David renamed the place, “Perez-uzzah.” This means either “the breach of Uzzah” or “the outbreak against Uzzah” ([2 Samuel 6:8](#); [1 Chronicles 13:11](#)).

Chief Priest

The chief priest was the highest leader among the priests and Levites in ancient Israel.

Only the chief priest could enter the most holy place in the temple. He did this once a year to make atonement (a special sacrifice to cover sins) for the

whole nation of Israel. This happened on the Day of Atonement.

See also Priests and Levites.

Child

See Family Life and Relations.

Childless

A word used to describe someone who does not have a child or children. *See* Barrenness.

Children of Eden

KJV name for the inhabitants of Beth-eden, an Aramaic city-state conquered by Assyria, in [2 Kings 19:12](#). *See* Beth-eden.

Children of God

See Sons and Daughters of God.

Children, Song of the Three

An addition to the book of Daniel that begins with the "Prayer of Azariah." The song is also called "Song of the Three Young Men." *See* Daniel, Additions to.

Chileab

The second son of King David. Chileab was the first child born to him by Abigail ([2 Samuel 3:3](#)). Another name for Kileab is Daniel in [1 Chronicles 3:1](#).

Chilion

One of the two sons of Elimelech and Naomi ([Ruth 1:2](#)). Chilion married a girl from Moab named Orpah (verse [4](#)). Chilion later died in Moab (verse [5](#)).

Chilmad

A Mesopotamian city listed with Haran, Canneh, Eden, and Asshur as those who traded with Tyre ([Ezekiel 27:23](#)).

Chimham

A son of Barzillai, according to the Jewish historian Josephus. Chimham was a very wealthy man who provided King David and his men with food. This happened while they were in Mahanaim when David was escaping from his son Absalom ([2 Samuel 19:32](#)). David invited Barzillai to come back with him to Jerusalem. But Barzillai declined this offer. Instead, he asked that David show kindness to Chimham (verses [37–40](#)). David agreed to this request. He later instructed his son Solomon to give Chimham regular support from the palace ([1 Kings 2:7](#)).

His name appears centuries later in a place called Geruth Chimham, which was located near Bethlehem. This is where the people whom Johanan had rescued from Ishmael stayed temporarily before they planned to continue their journey to Egypt ([Jeremiah 41:17](#)).

Chinnereth, Chinneroth

1. A fortified town in the territory of the tribe of Naphtali ([Joshua 19:35](#)). An Egyptian list of towns from the time of Thutmose III in the 15th century BC also names it. The site is identified as Tell el-'Oreimeh on the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee. Archaeologists believe people lived in the town from about 2000 to 900 BC.
2. A district in Naphtali's territory that included the town mentioned above (#1). Ben-hadad, king of Aram (Syria), conquered it in the early ninth century BC during the reign of Baasha, king of northern Israel ([1 Kings 15:20](#)).

3. An early name for the Sea of Galilee ([Numbers 34:11](#); [Deuteronomy 3:17](#); [Joshua 11:2](#); [12:3](#); [13:27](#)). It is uncertain whether the city was named after the sea or the sea after the city. The name means “lyres,” possibly because the sea is shaped like a lyre (a stringed instrument similar to a harp). In New Testament times, the name became Gennesaret ([Luke 5:1](#)).
See Sea of Galilee.

Chios

A rocky, mountainous island in the east-central part of the Aegean Sea. During Paul's third missionary journey, his ship anchored opposite Chios between stops at Mitylene and Samos as he traveled to Jerusalem ([Acts 20:15](#)). Although the island was not very fertile, Chios was known for producing wine, figs, and gum mastic. The island is separated from the mainland by a strait that is 8 kilometers (5 miles). In Paul's time, the main city on the island, also called Chios (modern Scio), was a free city in the Roman province of Asia.

Chisleu, Chislev

Chislev is one of the months in the Hebrew calendar. On our modern calendar, it usually occurs during parts of November and December. The name can also be written as Chisleu or Kislev.

See Calendars, Ancient and Modern.

Chislon

The father of Elidad, a leader of the tribe of Benjamin during the wilderness wanderings of Israel. Elidad was one of those chosen by Moses to divide the land of Canaan among the tribes ([Numbers 34:21](#)).

Chisloth-tabor

A city mentioned in [Joshua 19:12](#).

See Chesulloth. *See also* Tabor (Place).

Chitlish

A city given to the tribe of Judah ([Joshua 15:40](#)). Chitlish was located in the lowland area of Judah, also known as the Shephelah. We do not know the exact location of Chitlish.

Chittim

Another spelling of Kittim, the ancient Hebrew name for the island of Cyprus.

See Kittim.

Chiun

KJV form of Kaiwan, an Assyrian astral deity, in [Amos 5:26](#). *See* Kaiwan.

Chloe

Woman whose household members (possibly slaves) informed Paul in Ephesus of arguments in the Corinthian church ([1 Cor 1:11](#)). It is not known whether Chloe lived in Corinth or Ephesus, or even whether she herself was a believer.

Choba

Village mentioned in the book of Judith as being fortified by the Jews when Assyrian commander Holofernes invaded Palestine ([Jdt 4:4](#)). The precise location cannot be identified, but it may be el-Makhubbi, three miles (4.8 kilometers) from Besan, or possibly the Hobah of [Genesis 14:15](#). The account indicates that the Jews pursued Holofernes' army to Choba and beyond Damascus ([Jdt 15:4-5](#)).

Choinix

Dry commodity measure equivalent to a little more than a quart (one liter) ([Rv 6:6](#); see nlt mg). The rsv and niv read “quart.” *See* Weights and Measures.

Choir Director, Choirmaster

Director of music; referred to in the superscriptions of 55 psalms. *See* Music; Musical Instruments.

Choose

To choose means to select or decide between different options. In the Bible, choosing often refers to God's decision to call people for his purposes.

See Elect, Election.

Chor-Ashan

KJV rendering of Bor-ashan in [1 Samuel 30:30](#). Bor-ashan was an alternate name for Ashan, a town originally in Judah's territory. *See* Ashan.

Chorazin

A city in Palestine where Jesus performed many miracles but the people did not repent, causing him to pronounce judgment on them ([Matthew 11:21-24](#); [Luke 10:13-14](#)). Most of Jesus's miracles had been done in Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum. But, the people there did not respond or repent ([Matthew 11:20](#)).

Chorazin was likely near Capernaum and Bethsaida. The church father Jerome (who lived around AD 400) wrote about Capernaum. He said that it was about 3.2 kilometers (2 miles) from Capernaum, which is on the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee.

Most scholars believe that the ruins called Khirbet Kerazeh, located on the hills north of Capernaum, are the remains of ancient Chorazin. These ruins show that it was once an important city. Among the remains is a synagogue (Jewish place of worship) probably built in the fourth century AD. The synagogue contains a carved stone seat with an inscription, which is an example of a "Moses' seat" ([Matthew 23:2](#)). According to the Jewish Talmud (a central text in Judaism), Chorazin was known for its wheat.

Chosen

The word *chosen* means someone or something selected for a purpose. In the Bible, this often refers to God choosing individuals, groups, or nations for his work.

See Elect, Election.

Chozeba

KJV form of Cozeba in [1 Chronicles 4:22](#). Cozeba was an alternate name for Achzib, a city in Judah's territory. *See* Cozeba.

Christ

The official title people used for Jesus in the New Testament. It shows his role as the anointed Savior and refers to his spiritual qualifications for saving his people.

What Does "Christ" Mean?

The word comes from the Greek word *Christos*. *Christos* is the Greek translation of the Hebrew word Messiah ([John 1:41](#)). Both words come from verbs meaning "to anoint with sacred oil" and as titles they mean "the Anointed One." When people call Jesus "Christ," they express the belief that God chose him for his role and function.

How Did Jesus and Others Use the Title "Christ"?

In the New Testament, the title is used in different ways:

- combined with Jesus's name, as "Jesus Christ" ([Matthew 1:1](#); [Mark 1:1](#); [Romans 1:4](#)) or "Christ Jesus" ([Romans 1:1](#); [1 Corinthians 1:1](#))
- with the article "the" ([Romans 7:4](#))
- with another title like "Lord" ([Romans 16:18](#))
- alone as the one preferred other name or title for Jesus ([John 20:31](#); [Romans 15:3](#); [Hebrews 3:6](#); [5:5](#); [1 Peter 1:11, 19](#))

The Gospels show Jesus as humbly accepting the title and role of the Messiah. His baptism shows that God chose him for three important jobs:

- to speak God's messages (prophet)
- to help people come to God (priest)
- to lead God's people (king)

At his baptism by John (the new Elijah, [Matthew 11:14](#)), the Holy Spirit came down on Jesus and God told him to begin his ministry ([Matthew 3:16–4:17](#)). John himself denied being the anointed one but suggested Jesus was the Christ ([John 1:20](#); [Luke 3:14–17](#)).

Jesus's first disciples followed him because they knew he was the Messiah ([John 1:41](#)). The demons recognized him as "the Holy One [anointed] of God" ([Mark 1:24](#); compare [Matthew 8:29](#)). The crowds followed him as the Prophet, the new Moses ([John 6:14, 32](#)). But they deserted him when they understood that his kingdom was a spiritual realm, not a political realm (verse [66](#)). The Twelve remained loyal, saying, "We believe . . . You are the Holy One of God" ([John 6:69](#)). The confession of the disciples spoken by Peter and approved by Jesus as a divine revelation (a message from God) is "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" ([Matthew 16:16](#)). At his trials, Jesus's claim to be the Christ was the main reason he was condemned ([Matthew 26:63–64, 68](#); [27:11, 17, 22, 37](#)).

An important part of the earliest Christian preaching was declaring that Jesus is the Christ ([Acts 2:36](#); [3:18–20](#); [9:22](#); [28:23, 31](#)). This remains the earliest (as in [Matthew 16:16](#)) and most basic article of Christian confession ([1 Corinthians 1:23](#); [1 John 5:1](#)). It affirms that Jesus perfectly fulfilled the role of anointed prophet, priest, and king as God's servant for his people ([Luke 7:16](#); [1](#)

[Corinthians 15:25](#); [Hebrews 7:22–28](#); [Revelation 19:16](#)).

See also Jesus Christ, Life and Teachings of; Messiah.

Christian

Name first given to the followers of Jesus Christ ([Acts 11:26](#)). When the Christian movement reached Antioch in Syria, the gospel was preached to Gentiles as well as Jews. Such evangelism marked the sect as more than a new type of Judaism; it was a new religion. The Gentiles in Antioch invented a name for the new group. Since members of the group constantly talked about Christ, they were called Christians, meaning the "household" or "partisans" of Christ. Some satire may have been intended in the name. For instance, since the "Augustinians" were an organized group who led the public praise of the emperor Nero Augustus, the citizens of Antioch may have made a comparable Latinized name out of Christ as a joke. Similar groups included Herod's partisans, the Herodians. "Christ" was an unusual and meaningless name to Gentiles, but Chrestos (meaning "good" or "kind") was a common name; some pagans called the new sect "Chrestians." Thus, Suetonius wrote of the Jews being expelled from Rome in AD 49 on account of "Chrestus."

The Christians themselves apparently did not appreciate the name, but like many other nicknames, "Christian" stuck. It appears only three times in the Greek NT: [Acts 11:26](#) describes its origin; [Acts 26:28](#) records Herod Agrippa II saying satirically to Paul, "In a short time you think to make me a Christian!"; [1 Peter 4:16](#) instructs believers not to be ashamed if they suffer because the name has been applied to them. No further record of the name appears until the second century, when Ignatius of Antioch became the first Christian to call believers Christians. The Roman governor Pliny (from the area to which 1 Peter was addressed) wrote to the emperor Trajan about people accused in his court of being Christians. From that time on, the nickname became popular among Christians. What better name could there be than one declaring that they belonged to Christ?

Christology

The study of who Jesus Christ is and what he did. The belief that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, was first boldly stated by Peter at Caesarea Philippi ([Matthew 16:16](#)). This is the central belief of the Christian faith. It is what makes someone a Christian. All Christian theology is centered around understanding the meaning of this belief.

The first significant theological decision in the church, based on this belief, was accepting that Jesus, the Son of God, is truly divine. This means he shares the same essence with God the Father and the Holy Spirit. This belief was made explicit in the doctrine of the Trinity at the Council of Nicaea in AD 325. Since this doctrine was applied to Jesus of Nazareth, it led to the question: How can one person be both God and man? How can someone infinite become finite? How can someone eternal become part of time? How can God become human?

To answer this, the church accepted the doctrine of the Incarnation, which says that God became a human being in Jesus. This doctrine was developed after a lot of discussion. During these debates, the church rejected certain ideas:

- Docetism denied Jesus's humanity to emphasize his divinity
- Adoptionism denied his divinity to emphasize his humanity
- The Apollinarians believed that Jesus only looked human, but his spirit was divine
- Others believed that Jesus was human but became divine through moral development and then became God. This either happened at his baptism when he received the Holy Spirit or his resurrection, as suggested by [Acts 13:33](#)—"Today I have become Your Father"
- Nestorianism believed that Jesus was two separate persons—one divine and one human
- Monophysitism believed that Jesus had a mixed divine and human nature

The Chalcedonian Creed

At the Council of Chalcedon in AD 451, the church declared that Jesus Christ is truly God and truly man. The creed from this council stated:

"[He is] consubstantial with the Father as to his Godhead, and consubstantial also with us as to his manhood; like unto us in all things, yet without sin; as to his Godhead, begotten of the Father before all worlds; but as to his manhood, in these days, born for us men and for our salvation, of the virgin Mary, the mother of God, one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, only-begotten, known in two natures, without confusion, without conversion, without severance, and without division; the distinction of the natures being in no wise abolished by their union, but the peculiarity of each nature being maintained, and both concurring in one person and subsistence. We confess not a Son divided and sundered into two persons, but one and the same Son, and only-begotten, and God-Logos, our Lord Jesus Christ."

During the Reformation, the Protestant Reformers also accepted this confession.

This understanding of Christ does not explain the mystery of the Incarnation but defines how believers should think about Christ. This has been important in Christian thought throughout history.

Some key terms from the creed are:

- **Nature** (from the Greek *physis*)
This does not refer to physical things that can be studied through science. Instead, "nature" refers to a thing's essence. Jesus Christ's nature being "divine" means that all the qualities that define God also apply to him. He is not just like God, he is God. But, the same thing is true about his human nature—Jesus does not only look like a man, he is a man. He is not only a man or only God, he is the God who became a man. Jesus did not stop being God when he became a man, nor did he trade a divine spirit for a human one. Instead, he took on humanity, so now he is both divine and human.
- **Person** (from the Greek *hypostasis*)
This describes Jesus Christ as a self-aware, free individual, someone who can refer to himself as "I" and relate to others as "you." As a connection between God and humanity, Jesus is a person with both divine and human natures. While there cannot be a "person" without a "nature," there can be a "nature" without a "person." For example, an object like a stone may have the "nature" of being gray, hard, round, and smooth, but it is not a "person" because it is not self-aware or free.

Christ is a "person" with both a "divine nature" and a "human nature." The church fathers taught that while Christ had all divine and human qualities (including physical human attributes—the Word "became flesh," [John 1:14](#)), He was not "two persons." He is a divine person with a human nature. He is not a human person. All humans have a beginning. A human becomes self-aware at some point. However, Jesus said, "Before Abraham was, I am" ([John 8:58](#)). This statement is the absolute truth. The person who preached on the mountainside and called fishermen to follow him by the sea is the same person who existed before there was any sea, mountain, or even fishermen.

Jesus is not only a human who was given insight by the Word of God. Jesus is the eternal Son of God who became a human being. The Son of God did not enter a human person. He added human nature to his divine person. He remains the same person, though he now shares in our humanity. Therefore, Jesus is living in history and transcends history. For example, he said, "I have glorified You on earth by accomplishing the work You gave Me to do. And now, Father, glorify Me in Your presence with the glory I had with You before the world existed" ([John 17:4–5](#)). Jesus speaks as someone in the world who also existed before the world began and shared in the Father's glory.

Trying to understand this mystery usually results in oversimplifying it. Some attempts have been:

- **Docetism:** Christ is a divine being who only appears human.
- **Adoptionism:** Christ is a human being who became divine.
- **Ritschlianism:** Christ only has divine value for others.

To preserve Jesus Christ's two natures, the creed uses four phrases that tell us what is true about the Incarnation (when Christ became a man):

1. Without confusion
2. Without conversion
3. Without separation
4. Without division

Some people have mocked these as "four simple negatives," but they are actually very important. If any of these are false, we will lose a central belief of the Christian faith—that Jesus Christ is fully both God and man.

The creed does not only say what did not happen in the Incarnation, it also tells us what did happen:

- Jesus's two natures were unified.
- The two natures occur in one person.
- That person is the eternal Son of the Father.

This union of the two natures was done by the Son of God. This is the primary mystery of the Incarnation: no one knows how an infinite God became a finite man. Theologians have thought

deeply about this, and more explanations have been written since the Council of Chalcedon.

The union of the divine and human natures in Jesus is called the "hypostatic union." This term comes from a Greek word that means "person." The union is personal because it is the act of a Person—the Son of God, who became human. This means that Jesus is a divine person who is worthy of worship. He is not only a human like anyone else. Worshipping a human would be idolatry. Because Jesus's divine and human nature are united in one person, Jesus is one Person, not two. Worshipping two persons—one human and one divine—would be absurd. Therefore, this Person, who combines both divine and human natures, is often called the "God-man." As long as this term is understood to mean that Jesus Christ is fully both God and man, it is consistent with the creed's teaching.

Christology After Chalcedon

After the Council of Chalcedon, understanding Jesus's humanity became challenging, and there were not many agreements between theologians. However, the view that is most consistent with the Chalcedonian Creed and widely accepted by Protestants refers to the "impersonal humanity" of Jesus. Modern theologians like Karl Barth, Emil Brunner, and G. C. Berkouwer have also supported this view.

"Impersonal humanity" does not mean the incarnate Jesus lacked human qualities. Instead, it means his humanity only exists as part of the divine Person who took on human nature in the Incarnation. Jesus's human nature exists in and through the Word (the Son of God), who is God. While God is present in all creation, God does not share his identity with anything. Even when the New Testament says that the Holy Spirit lives in Christians, it does not mean they are the same as God. The human and divine are not the same. However, Jesus Christ was unique: Jesus is identical with God because he is the Word made flesh. As Karl Barth says, Jesus is not just living through God or with God; he is God. His human nature is united with his divine nature, meaning his humanity is a characteristic of his divinity. His human nature only exists because of the divine Word acting in and through him.

Simply put, Jesus is so united with God that he can only exist as a man because he is God. This is confirmed by two doctrines:

- **Anhypostasy:** Jesus's human nature does not exist by itself
- **Enhypostasy:** Jesus's human nature exists through its union with the divine Son of God. Jesus of Nazareth did not become the Son of God, the Son of God became Jesus of Nazareth

The Incarnation is an act of a divine Person, not an experience of a human person becoming divine. In the Incarnation, the Son of God acted, but a human person was not acted upon. Because the divine Son acts to become the man, Jesus of Nazareth, this man is the Son of God in a way that no other human can be.

The scriptural proof for the doctrine of the Incarnation includes:

- The Gospels
- Several passages in Paul's letters, especially [Philippians 2:6–8](#) which is the most important statement about Christ in the New Testament. Paul speaks of Jesus, "Who, existing in the form of God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in human likeness."

The Chalcedonian Creed does not solve the mystery of the Incarnation, and theologians have made many efforts to understand it better. One well-known theory, based on the passage from Philippians mentioned earlier, is called "kenosis." It suggests that when the Son of God became human, he abandoned ("emptied himself") some aspects of his divinity. However, the text in Philippians does not say that he emptied himself of anything, but rather that he "emptied himself," which is a figure of speech meaning that he humbled himself (the King James Version says "made himself of no reputation"). Despite the difficulty of interpreting this statement, the theory of kenosis is still present, especially in British theology. Another interpretation suggests that Jesus's humanity was a disguise (a term used by the philosopher Søren Kierkegaard) that hid his divine identity from everyone except those with faith. According to this view, the Incarnation reveals the truth but also hides it.

See also Ascension of Christ; Christ; Incarnation; Jesus Christ, Life and Teachings of; Kingdom of God, Kingdom of Heaven; Messiah; Parable; Son of God; Son of Man; Virgin Birth of Jesus; Word.

Chronicles, Books of First and Second

Two OT books, historical records of King David and his successors in the land of Judah. The books of Chronicles are among the most neglected books in the Bible, partly because most of the material can be found in Samuel, Kings, or elsewhere in the OT. Fourteen chapters ([1 Chr 1-9](#); [23-27](#)) are little more than lists of names; the rest of the material is primarily historical narrative, which some people find almost as boring as lists. Yet the content of Chronicles is not history in a professional or academic sense because the materials used are comparable to the annals compiled by ancient Near Eastern court scribes. Those sources recorded each year's most important events and were frequently more propagandistic than objectively historical. The records in Chronicles, somewhat eclectic in nature and ignoring certain facets of national history while emphasizing others, deal with only a selected portion of the history of the Israelites. A good deal of the criticism that the work is historically unreliable has come from lack of understanding the book's character. Chronicles is not so much a history as a metaphysical interpretation of events in Israelite life in light of covenantal values. It was not sufficient for the Chronicler that kings rose and fell; the events were interpreted from a special religious standpoint.

Preview

- Author
- Date
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Author

In the Hebrew Bible, 1 and 2 Chronicles form a single book. The Bible does not say who wrote that book or when it was written. According to the Jewish Talmud, Ezra wrote "his book and Chronicles—the order of all generations down to himself." Although many scholars defend the view that Ezra wrote Chronicles, there is still no general

agreement about the date and authorship of the book.

The author is usually called "the Chronicler," a title suggesting that he was a historian. It is possible that he was a scribe, priest, or Levite. Evidently the writer had access to government and temple archives, because repeated references are made to a number of official records of kings ([1 Chr 9:1](#); [27:24](#); [2 Chr 16:11](#); [20:34](#); [25:26](#); [27:7](#); [28:26](#); [32:32](#); [33:18](#); [35:27](#); [36:8](#)) and prophets ([1 Chr 29:29](#); [2 Chr 9:29](#); [12:15](#); [13:22](#); [20:34](#); [26:22](#); [32:32](#); [33:19](#)).

The evidence is suggestive, but not conclusive, that the author of Chronicles also wrote the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. The last two verses of Chronicles are almost the same as the first three verses of Ezra. The language and literary style of all three books are similar. The same theological concerns for the temple and its worship and the same interest in lists and genealogies appear in all three books. In the Hebrew Bible, Ezra-Nehemiah is considered one book and stands before Chronicles. Chronicles stands at the very end of the Hebrew Bible.

Date

It is not possible to determine precisely when the book of Chronicles was written. The book ends with a reference to the decree of Cyrus, king of Persia, permitting the Jewish captives in Babylon to return to their homeland. Since Cyrus's decree is usually dated about 538 BC, Chronicles could not have been written before that date. But if Ezra-Nehemiah is a part of the same work as Chronicles, the materials could not have been written until Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem in 444 BC.

Genealogies in Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah may shed some light on the dating of the books. In [1 Chronicles 3:10-24](#) the lineage of David and Solomon is traced through the sixth generation after the exile, which would make the date for Anani (the last person in the list) about 400 BC.

The language of Chronicles is definitely that of postexilic Hebrew. The use of the Persian word *daric* ([1 Chr 29:7](#)), plus a lack of any Greek words, places Chronicles in the Persian period (538–331 BC). The word *midrash* ("exposition") appears in the OT only in Chronicles ([2 Chr 13:22](#); [24:27](#)) but is very common in postbiblical Hebrew. Around 400 BC is probably the best estimate for the date of Chronicles, based on evidence now available.

Background

During the Persian period, some of the Jews returned to Jerusalem from Babylon soon after Cyrus's decree. They rebuilt the temple and waited for the messianic age to come. But with drought, economic hardships, and moral and spiritual laxness, their hopes faded. Judah was stable politically as a part of the large, dominant Persian Empire. There was not the slightest possibility of restoring the Davidic kingdom.

If the kingdom of David could not be restored politically, how was a Jew of the early fourth century BC to understand history and the place of the Jews in God's plan? The Chronicler, living at that time, found the key to history in God's covenant with David. The first 10 chapters of 1 Chronicles lead up to David; chapters [11-29](#) detail events of David's rule. Moses is mentioned in Chronicles 31 times; David, more than 250 times. David planned the temple and collected money to build it. He appointed Levites, singers, and gatekeepers. He divided the priesthood into its orders. He was responsible for the temple worship, which was tremendously important to the Chronicler and his contemporaries.

The Persian period of Israel's history is largely a silent one, both in other OT materials and in archaeological finds. Of course, all the evidence is not yet in, as archaeologists continue their investigations of the period.

Origin and Purpose

The Chronicler must have lived in Jerusalem and written for the Jewish community there. He refers to Jerusalem about 240 times and to Judah more than 225 times. A negative feeling toward the northern kingdom of Israel can be seen in the almost total lack of references to any northern king. The Chronicler's attitude toward the north is clearly expressed in the two following verses: "The northern tribes of Israel have refused to be ruled by a descendant of David to this day" ([2 Chr 10:19](#), nlt) and "Don't you realize that the Lord, the God of Israel, made an unbreakable covenant with David, giving him and his descendants the throne of Israel forever?" ([13:5](#), nlt).

The Chronicler wanted the Jewish people to see that God was sovereign over all things. For example, he includes David's affirmation: "Yours, O Lord, is the greatness, the power, the glory, the victory, and the majesty. Everything in the heavens and on earth is yours, O Lord, and this is your

kingdom. We adore you as the one who is over all things. Riches and honor come from you alone, for you rule over everything. Power and might are in your hand, and it is at your discretion that people are made great and given strength" ([1 Chr 29:11-12](#), nlt).

Compiled in the postexilic period, Chronicles was meant to emphasize the significance of the theocracy seen in light of earlier history. The theocracy was a social configuration God planned for postexilic Judah, a religious rather than secular community. Instead of a king, the Jews had a priesthood of which the Lord approved (as distinct from the corrupt priests who had been to a large extent responsible for the preexilic moral and spiritual collapse of the nation).

The postexilic Judeans were to live as a holy nation, not as people with political and nationalistic ambitions. Therefore, the Chronicler demanded implicit obedience to the Mosaic covenant so that the returning Jews could find prosperity, divine blessing, and grace. The Jews were still the chosen people, purged by the experience of exile, with a new opportunity to fulfill the Sinai covenant.

The Chronicler gave great weight to divine retribution and was insistent that all action be guided by specific moral principles, to reflect God's character clearly in his people. Because the writer saw God's hand in all history, punishing the apostate and being gracious to the penitent, he saw in the chastened remnant of the exile the true spiritual heirs of the house of David. He insisted that the postexilic community adhere rigorously to the morality of Sinai, guarding against preexilic apostasy and ensuring divine blessing.

The writer wanted the Jews to know God's power. He also wanted them to believe in the Lord so that they would be "established." If they believed God's messengers, they would succeed ([2 Chr 20:20](#)). He also wanted the people to know that Jerusalem was God's chosen place of worship ([2 Chr 5-6](#)), and that the temple, priests, singers, Levites, and gatekeepers had been divinely appointed ([1 Chr 28:19](#)). The temple was meant to be a place where all their needs could be met ([2 Chr 6:19-7:3](#)).

Content

Chronicles can be briefly outlined as follows: 1 Chronicles—genealogies ([1-9](#)); the reign of David ([10-29](#)); 2 Chronicles—the reign of Solomon ([1-9](#)); the kings of Judah ([10:1-36:21](#)); epilogue on the exile and return ([36:22-23](#)). Since the Chronicler's

writings do not have a didactic format, the reader must draw out those ideas and principles that are prominent and basic.

One important idea running through Chronicles is the greatness, power, and uniqueness of God. It is expressed most beautifully and forcefully in [1 Chronicles 29:11–12](#), which declares that everything in heaven and earth belongs to God and he is head over all. Other passages make a similar claim. When Sennacherib, king of Assyria, attacked Judah and Jerusalem, King Hezekiah of Judah admonished his people not to fear the king of Assyria.

Several times the Chronicler repeats the idea that Israel's God is unique: there is no other God like the Lord. In [1 Chronicles 16:25–26](#), [Psalm 96:4–5](#) is quoted: “Great is the Lord! He is most worthy of praise! He is to be revered above all gods. The gods of other nations are merely idols, but the Lord made the heavens!” (nlt). Both David and Solomon are quoted as saying that there is no other God but the Lord ([1 Chr 17:20](#); [2 Chr 6:14](#)).

Chronicles emphasizes that the Lord is “greater than all gods” ([2 Chr 2:5](#)). The classic passage that stresses the differences between God and the “god” of a nation is in [2 Chronicles 32](#). When Sennacherib attacked Jerusalem, he asked the people what they were relying on to withstand the siege in Jerusalem. Sennacherib was saying, in effect, “Don’t let Hezekiah deceive you by telling you that your God will deliver you. No god of any nation so far has been able to stand against me. Your God is like the gods of all the other nations. He will not be able to deliver you from me.” The Chronicler observes that the Assyrians spoke of the God of Jerusalem as they spoke of the gods of the peoples of the earth. But God did deliver Hezekiah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem from Sennacherib.

Several passages declare that God rules over the nations ([1 Chr 17:21](#); [2 Chr 20:6](#)). In fact, the Chronicler saw the Lord as the one who directs history. The Lord brought Israel out of Egypt and drove the Canaanites out of their land ([1 Chr 17:21](#); [2 Chr 6:5](#); [20:7](#)). Some seeming quirks of history are explained with such phrases as “it was ordained by God” ([2 Chr 22:7](#), rsv). Over and over in telling the story of the struggles of the kings of Judah with other nations, Chronicles points out that the Lord always decided the battle ([1 Chr 10:13–14](#); [18:6](#); [2 Chr 12:2](#); [13:15](#); [20:15](#); [21:11–14](#); [24:18](#); [28:1, 5–6, 19](#)).

To the Chronicler the Lord was a covenant-keeping God ([2 Chr 6:14](#)). He was the God of justice and righteousness ([12:6](#)), so human judges must judge honestly and fairly ([19:7](#)). The Chronicler made it clear that no individual or nation could succeed by opposing God ([24:20](#)); not only would people fail against God, but they were powerless without him ([1 Chr 29:14](#); [2 Chr 20:12](#)).

The Lord is seen not only as a unique, righteous, and powerful God, but also as a wise God. God tests the human heart and knows when he finds integrity ([1 Chr 29:17](#)). Solomon prayed for God to “hear thou from heaven thy dwelling place, and forgive, and render unto every man according unto all his ways, whose heart thou knowest; (for thou only knowest the hearts of the children of men)” ([2 Chr 6:30](#), kjv).

Although God knows all about human beings, and has supreme power in heaven and on earth, men and women are still free to obey or disobey the Lord. The stories in Chronicles depict people who chose to obey or disobey God. Those who obeyed succeeded; but to the extent that others, even kings, disobeyed God, they failed. Three of the Chronicler's heroes were Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah, and Josiah. Each was a great reformer, and each was commended for obeying the Lord. But each one sinned near the end of his life and incurred the disfavor of God. Jehoshaphat joined an alliance with a wicked king from the north ([2 Chr 20:35–37](#)). Hezekiah sinned in receiving envoys from Babylon and “God left him to himself” ([32:31](#)). Josiah did not obey the word of God spoken by Pharaoh Neco and was killed ([35:21–24](#)).

The Chronicler believed that all human beings have sinned ([2 Chr 6:36](#)), and should repent with all their mind and heart ([6:38](#)). One of the greatest passages on repentance in all the Bible is in [2 Chronicles 7:14](#).

A prominent theme in Chronicles is the importance of the temple as the place to meet God in worship. One could say that almost everything in Chronicles is related to the temple in one way or another. For a person living in Jerusalem in the fourth century BC under the domination of the Persians, temple worship was very significant. The Chronicler expressed the importance of true community and institutional worship.

Worship was the dominant attitude of the Chronicler, whose God was worthy to be praised. A worship service is described in [2 Chronicles 29:20–30](#). Hezekiah commanded a burnt offering and a sin

offering to be made for all Israel. The Levites were stationed in the house of the Lord with cymbals, harps, and lyres. The priests had trumpets. "Then Hezekiah ordered that the burnt offering be placed on the altar. As the burnt offering was presented, songs of praise to the Lord were begun, accompanied by the trumpets and other instruments of David, king of Israel. The entire assembly worshiped the Lord as the singers sang and the trumpets blew, until all the burnt offerings were finished. Then the king and everyone with him bowed down in worship. King Hezekiah and the officials ordered the Levites to praise the Lord with the psalms of David and Asaph the seer. So they offered joyous praise and bowed down in worship" ([2 Chr 29:27-30](#), nlt).

See also Chronology of the Bible (Old Testament); Israel, History of; King; Kings, Books of First and Second.

Chronology of the Bible (New Testament)

Chronology is a branch of biblical studies that attempts to discover the sequence of NT events and the amount of time that elapsed between them. Chronology is essential to historians, whose task it is to determine the causes and effects of past events. Generally, for a historian's purpose, assigning absolute dates is less important than knowing the sequence of events that may have influenced each other. In other words, it is more important for historians to understand the order of events and how they may have affected each other, rather than assigning specific dates to them. Very few NT happenings, in fact, can be given exact dates.

A remarkable testimony to the influence of Christianity is the fact that the entire Western world now divides history into BC (before Christ) and AD (*anno Domini*, "in the year of the Lord"). Before that method of dating became widespread in the Middle Ages, events were dated by their relation to other important events such as the founding of Rome or the beginning of a king's reign. When a monk named Dionysius Exiguus (sixth century) invented our present method of dating, with the birth of Christ dividing history, he made a mistake in his computations. The result of this mistake is the historical anomaly that Jesus himself was born no later than four years "before Christ."

Chronology of Jesus' Life

Beginning of Life

According to [Matthew 2:1](#) Jesus was born "in the days of Herod the king." A first-century AD historian, Josephus, recorded that Herod died in the spring of the year we identify as 4 BC. Hence, Jesus was born sometime before that, but how much before is uncertain. [Luke 2:1-2](#) records that Jesus' birth occurred when "Caesar Augustus," the Roman emperor, decreed that a census, or enrollment, should be taken throughout the nation. This was the first census taken when Quirinius was governor of Syria. Those statements raise two questions: When was such a census taken, and when was Quirinius governor of Syria? Neither question has received a completely satisfying answer.

Census documents discovered in Egypt, together with earlier references, suggest that such enrollments were held every 14 years. That would put a census roughly in 8 or 9 BC. In view of the time needed to carry out the census (which required a person to travel to his birthplace), the birth of Jesus may have been somewhat later than the actual year of the decree (perhaps 7 BC). It is important to note that the term "BC" refers to the time before the birth of Jesus, and is used in reference to the dating system used in the Western world.

Josephus recorded that Quirinius became governor of Syria in AD 6, rather late as a date for Jesus' birth. But some scholars have argued from ancient inscriptions that Quirinius also served in Syria as a special legate of the emperor Augustus before 6 BC. That could be the period referred to in [Luke 2:2](#). Why did Luke choose to cite Quirinius instead of the regular governor of Syria at that time? Perhaps by so doing he could provide a more exact date for the birth of Jesus, since Quirinius was in authority for a shorter time than the regular governor of Syria. It is possible that Luke chose to mention Quirinius instead of the regular governor of Syria at that time in order to provide a more precise date for the birth of Jesus, as Quirinius had a shorter term in authority.

A reasonable conclusion is that Jesus was born about 7 or 6 BC. That fits with [Matthew 2:16](#), which seems to say that Jesus was born at least two years before Herod's death in 4 BC. No clear evidence exists concerning the day and month of his birth. Celebration of December 25 as Christmas originated in the fourth century, probably as a

Christian alternative to the pagan winter solstice festival (Saturnalia). It is important to note that the celebration of December 25 as Christmas is a Christian tradition that originated in the fourth century and was likely intended as an alternative to the pagan festival of Saturnalia.

The Start of Public Service

[Luke 3:23](#) says that Jesus, “when he began his ministry, was about thirty years of age”; since the age given is only approximate, he may have been two or three years older or younger (cf. the pseudepigraphal Testament of Levi 2:2; 12:5). If exactly 30 is added to the suggested date of birth, one gets AD 24. That date cannot be right, because Jesus’ ministry began after John the Baptist appears; [Luke 3:1-3](#) dates John’s public appearance precisely in “the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberias Caesar” while Pilate was procurator (governor) over Judea. Pilate governed from AD 26 to 36, and the 15th year of Tiberius was most likely AD 27. Therefore Jesus did not begin his public ministry before AD 27. If only a short time elapsed between the beginning of John’s ministry and the beginning of Jesus’ ministry, then Jesus probably began in AD 27 or 28 when he was approximately 33 years old.

The Death of Jesus

All four Gospel records seem to imply that Jesus ate the Last Supper with his disciples on Thursday evening, was crucified on Friday, and rose from the dead early Sunday morning ([Mt 28:1](#); [Mk 16:1](#); [Lk 24:1](#)). The claim that Jesus rose on the third day ([1 Cor 15:4](#)) comes from the Jewish custom of counting a part of the day as a whole day. According to Matthew ([26:19](#)), Mark ([14:12](#)), and Luke ([22:15](#)), the Last Supper was the Passover meal, a yearly celebration of Israel’s escape from Egypt ([Ex 12-15](#)). But according to [John 13:1](#) and [19:14](#), the Passover meal had not yet been eaten on Friday; hence the Last Supper in John was not the Passover meal. However, it is important to note that the Last Supper in John was still a significant meal shared by Jesus and his disciples before his crucifixion.

No completely satisfying solution to the apparent discrepancy has been put forward. Some scholars suggest plausibly that the use of two different calendars was responsible. According to that theory, Jesus was following a calendar that placed the Passover meal on Thursday night. Temple officials, on the other hand, followed an alternate calendar that placed the killing of sacrificial victims

on the next day. John may have used the second system to emphasize the fact that Christ was offered as the Passover sacrifice (cf. [Jn 19:36](#); [1 Cor 5:7](#)). This may have been done to highlight the significance of Christ’s sacrifice as the Passover lamb.

To find out how long Jesus’ public ministry lasted and thus the year in which he died, one can turn to time references in John’s Gospel. John referred to at least three Passovers ([2:13](#); [6:4](#); [13:1](#)) and possibly four ([5:1](#)). Since the Passover was a yearly feast, the ministry of Jesus would have lasted at least two and possibly three years. In Matthew, Mark, and Luke the Friday of Jesus’ death occurred on the 15th of the Jewish month Nisan (which overlaps March and April). According to John, Jesus died on 14 Nisan. The question is: In which years from 26 to 36 (when Pilate was procurator in Judea) did 14 or 15 Nisan fall on a Friday? The answer is AD 27, 29, 30, and 33. Of those, the year 27 is too early and 33 is probably too late. Thus Jesus was probably crucified in 29 or 30, his public ministry lasted two or three years, and he was 35 or 36 years old when he died.

Events from AD 30 to 50

Acts is the only NT book that records how much time elapsed between Jesus’ death and his ascension: “To them he presented himself alive after his passion by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days, and speaking of the kingdom of God” ([Acts 1:3](#), rsv). The next key event after the ascension of Jesus into heaven was Pentecost ([Acts 2:1](#)). Pentecost, the Greek word for “fiftieth,” referred to a celebration of the Feast of Weeks/Harvest (cf. [Ex 34:22](#); [Dt 16:9-12](#)) 50 days after the Passover. Since Jesus was crucified during the Passover season, the Pentecost of [Acts 2:1](#), during which the disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit, took place in AD 29 or 30, some 50 days after the Crucifixion and about 10 days after the Ascension.

After that, it becomes difficult to determine the exact dates of events in the early chapters of Acts because no specific timeframes are mentioned. Therefore, the typical approach for dating events in the apostolic age is to first identify at least one event that can be accurately dated using sources outside of the New Testament. Then, the time between events before and after that event can be estimated. Occasionally, Acts does mention the amount of time between two events, but usually it does not, so the dating can only be approximate.

One pivotal starting point is the great famine prophesied by Agabus, which befell Palestine during the reign of the Roman emperor Claudius ([Acts 11:28-29](#)). Josephus, who was alive at the time, gives enough information to locate the famine sometime between the years 46 and 48. We also know from the Mishnah, a collection of Jewish laws, that the autumn of 47 to the autumn of 48 was a sabbatical year, when the Jews let the land rest and harvested nothing (cf. [Lv 25:2-7](#)). That could have aggravated and prolonged a famine, but one cannot be sure how early the famine started; some scholars propose 46 and some 47.

At first, it seems peculiar that Luke, the author of Acts, should have recorded that famine ([Acts 11:28](#)) before recording the death of Herod Agrippa ([12:20-23](#)). From facts reported by Josephus, the death of Herod (a grandson of Herod the Great) can be dated in AD 44, probably in the spring. That means that Herod must have died several years before the famine Luke recorded earlier. Some scholars think that Luke simply got his chronological facts wrong. Others see [Acts 12:1-24](#) as a kind of flashback to bring the history of the church in Jerusalem up to date. Such a practice was common among ancient historians, who often followed one source up to a suitable stopping point before moving on to another source. To charge Luke with inaccurate dating, it is argued, is to misunderstand the techniques of historical writing he was using.

Since Herod Agrippa died in AD 44 ([Acts 12:23](#)), the apostle James, whom Herod put to death with the sword (v [2](#)), must have died soon before 44, perhaps during the Passover season of 43 (v [3](#)). The apostle Peter's imprisonment and his miraculous escape (vv [3-17](#)) also belong to that period. It is important to note that the apostle James was killed by Herod, who was a ruler at the time, and that the apostle Peter was imprisoned and miraculously escaped during this time period.

When the Christians of Antioch decided to send relief to the Christians in Jerusalem in the midst of the great famine ([Acts 11:29](#)), Barnabas and Paul were appointed to transport the money to Jerusalem. That was Paul's second visit to Jerusalem after his conversion. The first visit is recorded in [Acts 9:26-30](#). The third comes in [Acts 15](#) when Paul and Barnabas were sent to discuss with the apostles and elders whether gentile converts to Christianity had to be circumcised. How one dates the first and third visits to Jerusalem, as well as Paul's conversion, depends on how those

Jerusalem visits are related to those reported in Paul's letter to the Galatians.

The main issue, which still divides NT scholars, is this: In [Galatians 1:15-2:10](#) Paul recounted that his conversion was followed by two visits to Jerusalem, one three years after his conversion ([1:18](#)) and one 14 years after that ([2:1-10](#)). All scholars agree that the first visit three years after his conversion is the same as the first visit recorded in [Acts 9:26-30](#). Answers differ, however, to the question of whether [Galatians 2:1-10](#) refers to the second (famine) visit to Jerusalem in [Acts 11:30](#) (in which case the third visit of [Acts 15](#) is the one omitted from Galatians) or whether [Galatians 2:1-10](#) refers to the visit in [Acts 15](#) (in which case the famine visit was the one omitted from Galatians).

Those who favor the first reconstruction offer six arguments: (1) The reason Paul gave such a rigorous account of his comings and goings in [Galatians 1:15-24](#) was to show that he did not get his gospel from men, nor was he taught it ([1:12](#)). In other words, his visits to the Jerusalem apostles were not for the purpose of receiving his gospel. If that is so, for Paul to omit the second Jerusalem visit would jeopardize his integrity and his authority with the Galatians. The first reconstruction avoids that difficulty; omission of a third Jerusalem visit from [Galatians 2:1-10](#) could mean that it had not yet happened when Galatians was written. (2) Galatians 2:1-10 pictures a private meeting between Paul and Barnabas on one hand and the "pillar" apostles on the other. But the meeting in [Acts 15](#) was public and before the whole church. Hence Galatians 2:1-10 more likely refers to a private meeting during the visit of [Acts 11:30](#), which Galatians does not record. (3) Paul's eagerness to give to the poor mentioned in [Galatians 2:10](#) connects naturally with the second Jerusalem visit, when he was in fact delivering relief to the poor ([Acts 11:30](#)). (4) If Galatians 2 recorded the same trip as [Acts 15](#), one would expect some mention of the decision reached by the Jerusalem Council, especially since that decision related directly to the problem of circumcision that Paul was handling in his Letter to the Galatians. (5) Further, it seems unlikely that the Jerusalem Council preceded the event of [Galatians 2:11-21](#), when Peter was rebuked by Paul for withdrawing from fellowship with gentile believers; that incident could hardly have happened so soon after the issue of gentile status in the church had been settled in Jerusalem. (6) According to [Galatians 1:6](#), the letter was written "quickly" after Paul had established the Galatian

churches. That makes sense if Galatians was written soon after the first missionary journey, hence just before the Jerusalem Council of [Acts 15](#); that would make Galatians Paul's first letter.

Scholars who favor the second reconstruction offer four arguments: (1) The main purpose of Paul's visit in [Galatians 2:1–10](#) appears to be the same as that in [Acts 15:1–20](#); both dealt with the issue of whether circumcision should be required of gentile converts ([Gal 2:3–5](#); [Acts 15:1, 5](#)). That similarity is obvious, but there is no such explicit similarity between [Galatians 2](#) and [Acts 11:30](#). (2) On the basis of form and content Galatians is similar to Romans and to 1 and 2 Corinthians; it would thus seem to come from the same period—considerably later than the Jerusalem Council. If so, it is likely that Paul would have included a reference to the Jerusalem Council (namely [Gal 2:1–10](#)) in his recollections, since its outcome supported his own stance on circumcision set forth in the letter. (3) [Acts 11:30](#) pictures Barnabas as the leader of the Barnabas/Paul team, since his name is given first place (as in [Acts 12:25](#); [13:1–2, 7](#); cf. [11:25–26](#)). But in the description Paul gives of the visit in [Galatians 2](#), he sees himself as the leader of the team. Since Acts does picture Paul as the leader from the time of the first missionary journey ([Acts 13:9, 13, 43, 46, 50](#)), including the third Jerusalem visit ([15:2](#)), it is more likely that [Galatians 2](#) records the trip of [Acts 15](#). (4) Finally, in [Galatians 2:7–8](#) Paul was recognized as an apostle to the Gentiles with a standing equal to that of Peter. But if [Galatians 2](#) recorded the events of [Acts 11:30](#) and the first missionary journey had not yet occurred, the “pillar” apostles could hardly have recognized Paul's authority as apostle to the Gentiles. It is more likely that [Galatians 2](#) followed the first missionary journey, just as [Acts 15](#) followed the first missionary journey in Acts, and that both refer to the same event.

The significance of those arguments for chronology is that, according to the first view, Paul's conversion came 17 years before the famine visit of [Acts 11:30](#) (cf. [Gal 1:18](#); [2:1](#)). According to the second view, Paul's conversion took place 17 years before the Jerusalem Council in [Acts 15](#). The difference amounts to only one year, however. This means that, according to the first view, Paul's conversion happened 17 years before the famine visit of Acts 11:30, while according to the second view, it occurred 17 years before the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15. However, the difference between the two views is only one year.

It is helpful to consider one more date that can be fixed with high probability—namely, Paul's arrival in Corinth on his second missionary journey ([Acts 18:1](#)). On the second missionary journey ([15:40–18:22](#)), Paul and Silas set out on land through Syria, Cilicia, Phrygia, and Galatia, visiting churches founded on the first missionary journey. They came to Troas, then passed over to Philippi and continued down the coast through Thessalonica and Berea. Paul went on to Athens before arriving at Corinth. From [Acts 18:12](#) we know that Gallio was a proconsul in Corinth while Paul was there. An inscription discovered at nearby Delphi indicates that in all likelihood Gallio's term of office was from mid-51 to mid-52. The incident recorded in [Acts 18:12–17](#) probably occurred at the beginning of Gallio's term, since the Jews hoped to get a ruling against Paul from their new proconsul. Not long after that, Paul left Corinth, probably in the summer or autumn of 52. According to [Acts 18:11](#) Paul had spent 18 months in Corinth; that means that he probably arrived in the early months of 50 or the end of 49. That arrival date is confirmed by [Acts 18:2](#), which says that Aquila and Priscilla had only recently been exiled from Rome when Paul came to Corinth. A fifth-century historian, Orosius, dated the edict of Claudius expelling the Jews from Rome in AD 49. Therefore, Paul and Aquila and Priscilla probably arrived close together late in 49 or early in 50. Early in his 18-month stay Paul wrote his First and Second Letters to the Thessalonians.

The two fixed dates, then, are 46 or 47 for the famine visit ([Acts 11:30](#)) and late 49 or early 50 for Paul's arrival in Corinth ([Acts 18:1](#)). Taking into account the time gaps mentioned in [Galatians 1:18](#) and [2:1](#), as well as the supposition that the first missionary journey lasted about a year, the two reconstructions are presented in the following table. Keep in mind that they are approximations and that they reflect the ancient custom of counting a part of a year as a whole year.

Events from AD 50 to 70

[Acts 24:27](#) describes an event that helps us date events in the rest of the book, namely, Porcius Festus's replacement of Felix as the governor of Judea. A careful analysis of the evidence given by Eusebius, a fourth-century historian, leads to the probable conclusion that Felix was replaced in the summer of 59.

Working backward from that date, Paul's arrest in Jerusalem ([Acts 21:33](#)) must have occurred in 57,

some two years before the coming of Festus. More precisely, Paul's arrest probably occurred in the late spring or summer of 57; Paul's goal ([20:16](#)) was to arrive in Jerusalem by Pentecost of that year, and Pentecost occurred at the end of May. He was not long in the city before he was arrested.

The Passover festival, 50 days before Pentecost, was celebrated by Paul with the church in Philippi ([Acts 20:6](#)). That would have been April 7–14, AD 57. Only after the feast did he continue his hurried journey to Caesarea and Jerusalem ([20:6–21:16](#)). Before his Passover visit to Philippi, Paul had spent three months in Greece ([20:3](#)). Allowing some time for him to travel through Macedonia and visit the Thessalonians and Bereans, those three months were probably the winter months of 56–57 ([Acts 20:3](#); cf. [1 Cor 16:6](#)). No doubt they were spent in the main church of Greece, Corinth, and were used in part for the writing of the Letter to the Romans.

Between Paul's departure from Corinth on the second missionary journey ([Acts 18:18](#)) in the autumn of 51 and his arrival in Corinth on the third missionary journey ([20:2](#)) in the late winter of 56 are five years of activities that cannot be given exact dates. Paul said that he worked during three of those years in Ephesus ([20:31](#); cf. [19:1–20:1](#)). With enough time allowed for the travels before and after, that stay at Ephesus probably lasted from 52 or 53 to the summer of 55 or 56 (cf. [1 Cor 16:8](#)). During his long stay in Ephesus, Paul wrote his First Letter to the Corinthians. Then, on his way to Corinth in 56, he wrote 2 Corinthians from Macedonia.

Festus arrived as governor in the summer of 59, after Paul had been in prison in Caesarea for two years. Within a matter of days, Paul was tried before Festus ([Acts 25:1–12](#)). Not wanting to be remanded to the Jewish authorities, Paul appealed to Caesar (v [12](#)), which meant that he would go to Rome. The account in Acts gives no hint of a delay, so the voyage most likely began in the summer or fall of 59 ([27:2](#)). It is important to note that Festus was a governor, which is a political position in the Roman government. This was during the time when Paul was imprisoned in Caesarea for two years. After being tried before Festus, Paul appealed to Caesar, which meant he would be taken to Rome. The account in Acts does not mention any delays, so it can be assumed that the voyage began in the summer or fall of 59.

Luke reported that when Paul the prisoner got to Fair Havens on the island of Crete, the weather had become dangerous for sea travel "because the fast

had already gone by" ([Acts 27:8–9](#)). One ancient writer said that sailing became dangerous between mid-September and mid-November, and after that, impossible until spring. The fast referred to was no doubt the one in preparation for the Day of Atonement, which in the year 59 fell on October 5. It is not surprising that, 14 days after leaving Fair Havens, the ship in which Paul was traveling was wrecked on the coast of Malta, south of Sicily (vv [27–44](#)). Three months later Paul set sail for Rome again in a ship that had spent the winter at Malta ([28:11](#)). Soon he was welcomed into Rome by Christians who came out to meet him (v [15](#)). Thus Paul arrived in Rome in the early part of AD 60. The book of Acts closes with the remark that "For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house" (v [30](#), niv). The NT does not report the outcome of his trial. During that period, according to the traditional view, he wrote Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon.

According to tradition, Eusebius wrote that after defending himself, the Apostle was sent on the ministry of preaching again and was martyred under Nero during his second visit to the same city. Nero, who was the Roman emperor from 54 to 68, put to death a multitude of Christians in Rome soon after a disastrous fire in July of 64, according to the Roman historian Tacitus. A number of early Christian writings (e.g., Clement) seem to indicate that Peter and Paul were both killed in Rome during that savage persecution. If this is true, and if Eusebius was correct, then Paul may have spent the two years from 62 to 64 freely ministering back in the eastern provinces. Many conservative scholars date Paul's First Letter to Timothy and his Letter to Titus from that period. Written from Rome shortly before Paul's martyrdom in 64, 2 Timothy was most likely his last letter ([2 Tm 2:9](#); [4:6](#)).

In Jerusalem, within three years after Paul had been carried off to Rome, James the brother of Jesus was stoned to death by the Jewish authorities. According to Josephus, that occurred in 62. Not long afterward, according to Eusebius, the church in Jerusalem received a prophecy warning them to leave that doomed city and settle in Pella, one of the cities of the Decapolis ("ten cities") east of the Jordan. Thus when war broke out between the Jews and the Romans in 66, the Christians for the most part escaped its fury. That war ended in 70 with the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple (cf. [Mk 13:2](#); [Lk 21:24](#)).

See also Acts of the Apostles, Book of the; Apostle, Apostleship; Age; "Date" under each New

Testament book; First Jewish Revolt; Ancestry of Jesus Christ; Jesus Christ, Life and Teachings of; Paul, The Apostle.

Chronology of the Bible (Old Testament)

Branch of biblical studies that attempts to assign dates and sequences to OT events. Chronology is a science. It deals with evidence, theories, assumptions, and the balance of probabilities. Often it boils down to a matter of choosing among theories that are equally unable to solve all the problems raised by other points of view. OT chronology is an accredited branch of biblical studies primarily because it is essential for understanding the proper historical background of the biblical texts. In general, the chronology of the OT is understood well enough to vindicate the basic accuracy and sequential order of Scripture.

Both biblical and nonbiblical materials are utilized by students of OT chronology. Biblical data include (1) genealogies showing personal and tribal affiliations among various peoples; (2) specific numbers given by biblical authors to indicate a person's longevity, a king's reign, or the duration of a specific event; (3) synchronizing statements that date an event in a specific year of a king's reign or relate it to a natural phenomenon assumed to be common knowledge at the time of writing (e.g., [Am 1:1](#); [Zec 14:5](#)).

From the abundance of such chronological passages in the OT, one might conclude that establishment of OT dates and sequences would be a simple procedure. Each of the three kinds of biblical materials, however, exhibits special problems that must be solved first.

Nonbiblical materials that shed light on OT chronology are quite numerous, and more are discovered year by year. They include (1) official records of important affairs such as military campaigns from countries like Egypt or Babylonia; (2) official inscriptions that are dedicatory or commemorate a great victory; (3) annals listing major accomplishments of a ruler year by year; (4) ostraca (inscribed pieces of pottery) containing letters, tax transactions and economic records, military dispatches between field leaders and command headquarters, or other information. Ostraca may be dated archaeologically and are often used to supplement the biblical record.

The chronologist tries to examine the pertinent biblical and nonbiblical information, notes areas of correlation among all the data, and finally establishes a working system into which the most facts can be fitted. New evidence uncovered at any time may necessitate shifts in the present working system. Although the basic structure of biblical chronology seems reasonably firm, many details will no doubt be subject to change as new evidence is discovered.

As a general rule, the earlier the period, the less certain one can be of one's dating. In the second millennium BC, for example, many dates can be assigned within a range of about 100 years. By the time of David and Solomon (c. 1000 BC), the margin of error over which scholars debate is a decade or less. The range narrows as one comes toward the present, so that, with the exception of one or two problem eras, dates accurate to within one or two years are possible by roughly the middle of the ninth century BC. Such limitations must be kept in mind in any examination of the major periods of OT history.

Preview

- Prepatriarchal Period
- From Abraham to Moses
- Conquest and Consolidation
- The Monarchy
- Judah after the Fall of Israel
- Beyond 587 BC

Prepatriarchal Period

Biblical Evidence

In the first 11 chapters of Genesis are found accounts of the Creation (chs [1-2](#)), the fall (ch [3](#)), Cain and Abel (ch [4](#)), the Flood (chs [6-9](#)), and the Tower of Babel (ch [11](#)). Those events are set within a certain chronological framework.

According to [Genesis 5](#), a period of 10 generations elapsed between the Creation and the Flood. Although the individuals listed enjoyed a total life span of a hefty 847 years plus, the total time elapsing between Adam and the Flood was only 1,656 years.

According to [Genesis 11](#), another 10 generations elapsed from the time of the Flood until the time of Abraham (at least in the Septuagint, the third-century BC Greek translation of the OT; the Hebrew

Masoretic text has 9). In that period the average age attained by individuals in the list is 346 years (using a figure of 460 for Arphaxad's son Cainan, who is included in v [13](#) of the LXX; cf. [Lk 3:36](#)); the total elapsed time from the Flood to Abraham is only 520 years. Taken literally, that would mean that all of Abraham's ancestors as far back as Noah's son Shem were still alive at Abraham's birth, and that a total of only 2,176 years elapsed from the time of Creation to Abraham.

Interpretation of the Biblical Data

A literalistic or slavishly mathematical interpretation of the figures, as has appeared in the margin of many kjv Bibles, requires a number of assumptions: that no names are omitted from the genealogies, that all the numbers given are consecutive, and especially that numbers used in an ancient biblical source carry the same meaning as that associated with them in the modern Western mind. Each assumption needs serious examination in the light of other established facts.

A cursory reading of other biblical genealogies, for example, reveals that not all the names of a given family were always included. Even Matthew recorded a total of 28 generations (two sets of 14 each) between David and Jesus, and comparison with OT genealogies reveals that Matthew omitted several names. Luke listed a total of 42 generations for the same interval. Omissions are also obvious when one compares the genealogical lists given in [1 Chronicles 1-8](#) with those recorded earlier in Genesis, Exodus, Numbers, Joshua, 1 and 2 Samuel, and 1 and 2 Kings.

Further, ancient peoples thought of numbers in a schematic or stylized way. Use of numbers among the ancient Near Eastern nations differed sharply from current Western practice. Examples of that practice are known from both biblical and nonbiblical sources. For example, a list of eight Sumerian kings who ruled in the city of Shuruppak before the "great flood" of the Jemdet Nar era (c. 3000 BC) assigns each man an average reign of more than 30,000 years. Berossus, a Babylonian priest of Marduk living in the third century BC, added two names to the eight found in that earlier list of kings and assigned an average of 43,200 years to each king. Such extraordinarily high numbers provide a perspective for considering the numbers of Genesis.

Therefore, although one can assume that the numbers assigned to the ages of the patriarchs preceding Abraham in Genesis had real meaning

for those responsible for their preservation, they should not be employed in a purely literal sense to compute the length of the various generations mentioned in the text. Further, the numbers given in the Septuagint and in the Samaritan Pentateuch, another early version of the Pentateuch, diverge in many details from those of the Hebrew Masoretic Text. That means, among other things, that the Genesis numbers caused problems for even the earliest scholars of Scripture.

Nonbiblical Evidence

Archaeology provides no evidence that may be used to date either the Creation or any other account preserved in [Genesis 1-11](#). The Flood is an example that illustrates some of the difficulties. Many claims have been made by persons from a wide variety of backgrounds (scientists, explorers, theologians, and others) to the effect that archaeology has proven the Genesis Flood narrative to be true. Yet no city so far excavated in Palestine and Syria (including some of the oldest towns in the world) shows archaeological evidence of the Flood.

Although several cities in Mesopotamia do exhibit evidence of a flood, three factors make it difficult to link that evidence with [Genesis 6-9](#). Each of the flood levels so far discovered dates from a different period. Further, since nearby sites show no evidence of flooding, all of the Mesopotamian flood evidence points to relatively small local floods. Finally, the evidence indicates no great cultural discontinuities of the sort that would result from destruction of an entire population. Thus, it seems that the ancient Mesopotamian floods discovered through archaeological research are of the same kind as the floods that still occur in the Euphrates River valley.

Clearly, certain questions one might ask of the Genesis narratives simply cannot be answered. Many who regard the Bible as the Word of God have concluded that the dating of events found in [Genesis 1-11](#) must be less important than the theological truths of salvation, faith, and obedience that these accounts present.

From Abraham to Moses

The Patriarchal Age

The date of Abraham is still a lively topic among biblical scholars who agree that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were indeed historical persons. Opinions range from an early-date view that estimates that

the patriarchal age extended from 2086 to 1871 BC, to a late-date view placing Abraham at around 1400 BC. Since each position claims to fit the biblical data, a closer look at the two points of view is in order.

Many OT passages seem to support the view that puts Abraham at a comparatively early date. [First Kings 6:1](#) computes 480 years back from the founding of the temple in the fourth year of Solomon's reign (961 BC, according to the early-date view) to the exodus from Egypt, which would then be dated 1441 BC. Counting 430 years as the period of the Israelite sojourn in Egypt (see [Gn 15:13](#); [Ex 12:40](#)) takes the date back to 1871 BC. To that date are added the 215 years demanded by the total of (1) Abraham's age upon entering Canaan (75 years according to [Gn 12:4](#)); (2) 25 additional years before the birth of Isaac ([Gn 21:5](#)); (3) 60 more years to the birth of Jacob ([Gn 25:26](#)); and (4) the appearance of Jacob before the pharaoh at age 130 ([Gn 47:9](#)). Those 215 years added to the previous total give a date of 2086 BC for the entrance of Abraham into Canaan and a date of 2161 BC for his birth.

Such a calculation does not use all of the chronological evidence presented in the OT; consequently, the date for Abraham is open to challenge. For example, the 480 years between the exodus and Solomon's fourth regnal year represent a period of time into which the wilderness wanderings, the career of Joshua and his immediate successors, the period of the judges, Samuel, Saul, and David must all be placed. Although the OT does not specifically say how long were the careers of Joshua, Samuel, or Saul, even a modest reckoning pushes the total years required by all the biblical data together to approximately 600.

In addition, the length of time to be assigned to the Egyptian sojourn is problematic. The Samaritan Pentateuch and the Septuagint both view the number 430 (in [Ex 12:40](#)) as applicable not only to the years in Egypt but to the years of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in Canaan as well. Evidently Paul followed the Septuagint tradition when he dated the giving of the law 430 years later than the time of God's promise to Abraham (see [Gal 3:15-18](#)). That means the Septuagint figure cannot be dismissed lightly.

The late dating of Abraham (c. 1400 BC) is based on two propositions: (1) The picture of patriarchal society portrayed in Genesis most closely parallels that reflected in the cuneiform tablets recovered

from Nuzi, a town in northeastern Mesopotamia about 175 miles (282 kilometers) north of Baghdad. (2) Because those tablets must be dated in the 15th and 14th centuries BC, the parallel patriarchal age must have fallen within the same general time period.

Those who hold the late-date view are aware that their date for Abraham cannot be equated with the set of numbers on which the early-date view depends. They point to other data, also from the OT. Joseph, who was already a highly placed Egyptian official when Jacob moved to Egypt, lived to be 110 years old ([Gn 50:26](#)). Moses was a great-grandson of Levi, Joseph's older brother. Since Joseph lived to see his own great-grandchildren born (who would probably be younger than Moses since their great-grandfather was younger than his), the late-date view concludes that Joseph could have been alive when Moses was born. The four-generation genealogy of Moses (Levi-Kohath-Amram-Moses, in [Ex 6:16-20](#); [Nm 3:17-19](#); [26:58-59](#); [1 Chr 6:1-3](#)) was evidently thought to be complete according to [Genesis 15:16](#), which predicted that Abraham's descendants would be freed from Egyptian bondage "in the fourth generation."

However, a date of around 1400 BC for Abraham cannot be aligned with certain other biblical data, including the long Egyptian sojourn demanded by [Genesis 15:13](#) and [Exodus 12:40](#) and a 40-year (or "one-generation") wilderness existence. Some normally moderate scholars are forced to reduce the wilderness time to two years in order to maintain their late date for Abraham.

In short, the late-date theory is consistent with part of the biblical evidence (the genealogies of Moses), but the early-date theory conforms to another part (the actual year figures listed in scattered verses from Genesis and Exodus). The late-date theory holds that the genealogies represent more reliable information in Semitic societies generally, whereas the early-date theory computes years given in the biblical account literally throughout its scheme.

Because of problems attached to both positions, a large group of scholars take a middle ground in dating the patriarchal age. Archaeologically, they say, Abraham and his life and times fit perfectly within the early second millennium, but imperfectly within any later period. By placing Abraham roughly between 1800 and 1600 BC, they provide enough latitude for a merging of all the available evidence, biblical and nonbiblical, into a workable chronological scheme. Archaeology

provides four major bits of evidence for an early second-millennium patriarchal era.

1. Though the Nuzi tablets furnish a clear parallel to patriarchal social life, other tablets from other towns and an earlier era reflect many of the same customs common to Nuzi and Genesis. Since the Nuzians were Hurrians who came to northeastern Mesopotamia from elsewhere (perhaps Armenia), their social customs originated no doubt much earlier than the time of their tablets now in our possession. Accordingly, the 15th-century BC date of the Nuzi tablets does not preclude an earlier date for Abraham.

2. The names of several of Abraham's ancestors listed in [Genesis 11](#) can now be identified with towns in the northern area of Mesopotamia around Haran, the city from which Abraham migrated to Canaan ([Gn 11:31-12:3](#)). Significantly, Haran flourished in the 19th and 18th centuries BC.

3. Shortly after 2000 BC Semitic nomads from the desert invaded the civilized communities of the Fertile Crescent. Those invaders, called Amorites in the OT, established themselves in several cities in northern Syria and Mesopotamia. One of the Amorite cities was Babylon, ruled by Hammurabi sometime around the beginning of the 18th century BC. Although the King Amraphel of [Genesis 14:1](#) is not linguistically identifiable with the Babylonian king Hammurabi, as earlier scholars believed, the picture of the times following the Amorite invasion still accords well with the Genesis narratives generally.

4. Mari, another Amorite town, is now well known because of more than 20,000 tablets recovered from its royal palace and archives. Geographically, Mari is located in the general area of Haran. Chronologically, the tablets recovered come from the 18th century BC. One 18th-century king of Mari, Zimri Lim, carried on extensive correspondence with Hammurabi of Babylon. The tablets from Mari also furnish valuable information about tribal and ethnic groups and their movements in the general region. Of basic importance for dating the Genesis materials are certain documents from Mari that include personal names very similar to Abraham (Abi-ram), Jacob, Laban, and several other West Semitic names.

Archaeological evidence neither proves nor disproves the actual existence of Abraham, Isaac, or Jacob. That is admitted on all sides. What archaeology has done is to provide a framework of

probabilities within which the biblical patriarchal narratives appear more and more to be at home.

Date of the Exodus

The problem of dating the patriarchal age is closely related to the problem of assigning a date to the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt. Since the evidence does not permit a precise date for Abraham, a precise date for the entry of Joseph or Jacob into Egypt is likewise unobtainable. Further, the biblical evidence does not yield an exact figure for the length of the Israelite sojourn in Egypt.

For many years biblical scholars viewed [1 Kings 6:1](#) as a foundation upon which to build an unshakable date for the exodus. Because Solomon's fourth year could be unquestionably fixed to within at least a 10-year span (967–958 BC), the exodus too could be dated with the same precision simply by adding 480 years. But other biblical data raise serious questions about that simple procedure. When the Bible deals with all the events between the time of the exodus and the founding of Solomon's temple, that is, from Numbers to [1 Kings 5:18](#), the precise numbers given total not 480 but closer to 600 years.

Because the evidence is insufficient to allow a precise date for the exodus, scholarly opinion remains divided between two possibilities. A 15th-century exodus is supported by several pieces of evidence. The chronology in [1 Kings 6:1](#) appears to be independently corroborated by a passage in [Judges 11:26](#). It claims that Israel had occupied the area around Heshbon for 300 years preceding Jephthah's own day. If Jephthah is dated at roughly 1100 BC, one is obviously led back to an exodus in the middle of the 15th century. Also, three successive generations of pharaohs who ruled in the 16th and 15th centuries produced no male offspring, making it more likely that Moses would have become the foster son of a royal princess during that time; all of the 19th-dynasty kings (1306–1200 BC) had legitimate male heirs.

In addition, a 15th-century date makes possible a connection between the Habiru invasion of Canaan (1400–1350 BC)—described in the Amarna letters found at Tell el-Amarna, Egypt—and the invasion of Canaan by the Hebrews described in the OT book of Joshua. Related to that is a reference to "Israel" in the Merneptah Stele, a stone pillar inscribed with the deeds of the Egyptian king, Merneptah, of about 1220 BC. It implies that the people referred to, met by Merneptah in the course of a Canaanite military campaign, had been in existence for some time.

Finally, an excavator of Jericho, John Garstang, placed the destruction of that city at around 1400 BC.

Other evidence, however, strongly implies not a 15th- but a 13th-century date for the exodus. Many scholars assign a date between 1290 and 1275 BC on the basis of that evidence. First, the 480 years of [1 Kings 6:1](#) discussed above may be interpreted as schematically representing 12 generations, as indicated by [1 Chronicles 6:3–8](#). Thus if 12 generations averaged 25 years instead of 40 years, the reduction of 480 schematized years to 300 actual years would point to an exodus date of around 1266 BC. Second, archaeological evidence exists that dates destruction at the assumed sites of several cities conquered by Joshua (Lachish, Debir, Bethel, and Hazor) to the late 13th century. Third, there is no biblical mention of Egyptian military campaigns (such as Merneptah's 1220 BC incursion); Israelites living in Canaan before the time of the militarily active pharaohs Seti I (1319–1301 BC) and Ramses II (1301–1234 BC) would certainly have been affected by such activity. Fourth, [Exodus 1:11](#) mentions the city of Rameses, the capital built by Ramses II, according to his own inscriptions. A fifth line of argument comes from archaeological conclusions that Transjordan and the Negev Desert were not occupied by sedentary people between 1900 and 1300 BC, whereas the Bible states clearly that the Israelites encountered stiff opposition from groups in that same region. Thus, it is argued, the Israelites must have entered that region after 1300 BC. Sixth, connecting the Habiru with the Israelites of the Conquest lacks weight because many texts besides the Amarna tablets attest to the existence of Habiru groups virtually all over the ancient Near East. "Habiru" seems to be a much broader term, possibly meaning "trespasser," and is probably unrelated etymologically or semantically to "Hebrew." Seventh, and finally, Garstang's work at Jericho has now been revised by archaeologist Kathleen Kenyon, who showed that the fallen walls that Garstang had dated about 1400 BC in reality were destroyed in 1800 BC or earlier.

So far, it has been impossible to decide with precision between the two centuries proposed for the exodus. The majority opinion among OT scholars generally, including a growing number of moderate or conservative scholars, is in favor of the 13th-century option. On the other hand, many other conservative scholars continue to favor the 15th-century date. Dogmatism is unwarranted

since problems remain unresolved with either option.

In accordance with the majority opinion, however, a date of about 1290 BC for the exodus will be used in dealing with subsequent problems.

Conquest and Consolidation

The chronological task for the period of conquest and consolidation is to fit all the events narrated by the OT, chiefly in Joshua and Judges, between the exodus (c. 1290 BC) and the times of David (c. 1000 BC) and Solomon (d. 930 BC). In other words, one must fit roughly 550 years of biblical events between Moses and David into a 290-year span.

Although assigning an early date for the exodus (c. 1447 BC) would make the task somewhat easier, the mere addition of about 157 years does not by itself solve all the problems. Neither date allows enough time for all the OT events from Joshua to David to take place singly and consecutively. Accordingly, advocates of both dates assume that some of the judges ruled simultaneously rather than consecutively. The difference is one of degree only.

The book of Joshua furnishes most of the OT evidence regarding the conquest of Canaan by the Israelites. Unfortunately, the book of Joshua has no chronological notes that specify the amount of time elapsing during Joshua's career. Further, there are no biblical references to major contemporary events in other parts of the ancient world, the dates of which could be used to fix the chronology. Rather, in what is obviously a telescoped account, the book of Joshua records the fall of Jericho and Ai, followed closely by a southern and then a northern campaign. After those victories, covering much of the total territory of Canaan, various parcels of land were distributed to the tribal groups of Israel; the tribes were expected to complete the task of destroying whatever Canaanite inhabitants remained in their particular region. One seeks in vain, however, for any statements indicating how long those events took.

In the book of Judges a slightly different circumstance prevails. There the OT furnishes a rather complete list of figures to indicate the duration of periods of foreign oppression, judgeships, and ensuing peace. The total number of years described for that period is 410, but that total does not include any time for the many "minor" judges. It seems obvious, therefore, that most if not all of the judges were simply local chieftains whose

activity was simultaneous with that of other judges, at least for part of their reign. Unfortunately, the book of Judges provides no cross-reference system to indicate which judges were contemporaries of which others. Perhaps the best one can do is to assume general guidelines for the chronology of that period between Moses and David.

Two significant facts should be kept in mind. First, archaeological information seems to demand a Conquest date beginning about 1250 BC rather than 200 years earlier. Assuming concurrent careers for the judges allows one to compress the literal OT figures into the general scheme demanded by other evidence.

Second, the ancient scribes evidently related the chronology of the period to a 40-year or generation-based schema, a practice that lasted until the time of the divided kingdom, when a regular dynastic chronology was introduced. In the face of so many careers being assigned exactly 40 years, the fact remains that the literal totals of such numbers cannot be harmonized with either the biblical or the archaeological evidence for the period. Accordingly, most scholars doubt that the number 40 was ever intended to be an exact mathematical calculation. That view permits enough leeway for cautious fitting of biblical and other evidence into a general timetable.

The Monarchy

Types of Evidence

For the period of the Israelite monarchy, chronological evidence is abundant.

The OT itself strives to provide all the information necessary for the chronology of the period, including (1) a complete list of all the kings in Israel and in Judah both before and after the division of the kingdom; (2) the age of each king (except Saul) at his accession; (3) synchronisms of the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah showing in what year of his contemporary in the other kingdom each king came to the throne; and (4) precise calculations of the length of each king's reign. In addition some important events are dated by reference to another event; others are coordinated with concurrent events in secular history.

Outside the OT an abundance of material provides evidence for a chronology of the period. By far the most important single source is a collection of Assyrian *limmu* lists. In Assyria a record of each

king's reign was kept on a particular kind of annal. Each year of reign was named after an individual of high rank in the court; the first year was named after the king himself, the second after the next highest-ranking official (though that name appears to have been selected by lot originally), and so on, down until the death of the king. The word *limmu* was used to introduce the name of the official after whom the current year was to be named, hence the designation "*limmu* lists."

Assyrian *limmu* lists are tied precisely to the solar year, making the documents highly reliable. Further, in addition to many events in Assyrian history, notable natural phenomena were dated on the basis of the *limmu* in which they occurred. For example, a solar eclipse dated by the Assyrian scribes in the *limmu* year of Bur-Sagale has been computed astronomically as June 15, 763 BC. Beginning with the year 763, then, and working both backward and forward, a complete list of Assyrian *limmu* officials has been obtained for the period between 891 and 648 BC.

With the accuracy of the Assyrian *limmu* lists corroborated by a number of sources, they can be used with confidence in reconstructing the chronology of the corresponding period of biblical history. That is especially true where a biblical writer related an Israelite or a Judahite event to a particular year in the reign of an Assyrian king whose *limmu* list indicates the precise years of his reign.

There are also records from Chaldean (Babylonian) king lists and from later Greek historians. Ptolemy, in the second century AD, for example, gave dates for Babylonian kings from 747 BC and continued with dates for Persian, Greek, and Roman rulers down to AD 161. Finally, useful information is found in inscriptions from monuments, stelae, and other artifacts from Assyria and elsewhere.

Monarchical Chronology

The *limmu* list of the Assyrian king Shalmaneser III provides a basis for the first comparison of dates among Assyria, Israel, and Judah. In the *limmu* of Daian-Assur, Shalmaneser's sixth year on the throne, Ahab of Israel was listed as one of the kings who fought against the Assyrians in the battle of Qarqar. Thus the date for that battle may be placed confidently in 853 BC.

Assyrian records also indicate that Shalmaneser III came into contact with an Israelite king 12 years later, in 841 BC. That king was Jehu. Thus two fixed

points are available for correlating the biblical information. Following the death of Ahab, which is not dated exactly by reference to the Assyrian records, two of his sons came to power. The first, Ahaziah, reigned two years ([1 Kgs 22:51](#)); the second, Joram (also called Jehoram), reigned a total of 12 years ([2 Kgs 3:1](#)). Recognizing a nonaccession-year reckoning by the Israelites in that era, the apparent total of 14 years may be reduced to an actual total of 12. Thus it seems evident that Ahab not only fought Shalmaneser III in 853 BC but also died in that year. Ahab was then followed by his two sons for a total of 12 years before the accession of Jehu in time to account for his contact with Shalmaneser II in 841 BC. Further, because Jehu murdered both the king of Israel (Jehoram) and the king of Judah (Ahaziah) at the same time ([2 Kgs 9:24-27](#)), a fixed synchronism is provided between the two kingdoms for the year 841 BC.

The first nine kings of Israel ruled an apparent total of 98 years or an actual total (taking into account Israel's nonaccession-year policy) of 90 years. Zimri, who ruled only seven days ([1 Kgs 16:15-18](#)), counts as one of the nine but does not insert an extra year in either the actual or apparent totals. The accession of Jeroboam I thus occurred in 930 BC (adding 90 years to 841 BC), and Rehoboam of Judah began to rule in that same year as well. Allowing Solomon the 40-year reign indicated in [1 Kings 11:42](#) points to the year 970 BC for his accession. The death of David would also be pinpointed in that period, although allowance must be made for the possibility of a short co-regency of David and Solomon before David's death. The reign of Saul then falls approximately in the late 11th century BC.

In Judah the period between the death of Solomon in 930 BC and the murder of Ahaziah by Jehu in 841 BC was occupied by the kingships of six men whose time on the throne totals 95 biblical years. Computation of that era in Judah is not as simple as for the Israelite kings for several reasons. Problems include a change from accession- to nonaccession-year reckoning sometime around 850 BC, at least two co-regencies (Jehoshaphat with Asa and then Jehoram with Jehoshaphat), and the calendar differences between the two kingdoms. It is clear that the 95 apparent years must be reduced, on the basis of the differences in computation and calendar, to 90 actual years in order to bring the Judahite figures into line with the established Assyrian and Israelite synchronisms.

After the year 841, the next biblical event to be certified by nonbiblical materials is the fall of Samaria in 722 BC. That date is furnished by the annals of Sargon II of Assyria (722-705 BC), successor to Shalmaneser V (727-722 BC). Although that date comes just 120 years after the fixed point of 841 BC in Israelite history, the chronological materials for that period are quite difficult to interpret accurately. In the past, scholars resorted to assumptions of extensive co-regencies, to presumed confusion on the part of certain scribes over methods to be followed in computations, or to other theories in attempting to understand the period. In spite of the many difficulties, however, all the biblical and Assyrian dates for the period of the divided monarchy have been harmonized—with the exception of four figures related to the closing years of the Israelite kingdom, all connected in some way with the problematic reign of Hoshea.

Judah after the Fall of Israel

Following the fall of Samaria in 722 BC, OT chronology is concerned only with the southern kingdom of Judah until its destruction some 135 years later. Two events in the biblical record important for establishing a chronology for that period are the siege of Jerusalem by Sennacherib of Assyria in the late eighth century and the eventual fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians in the early sixth century.

Sennacherib's Invasion of Judah

The Assyrian invasion (704-681 BC) is recorded in [2 Kings 18:13-16](#), where verse [13](#) dates the event to the 14th year of King Hezekiah. Sennacherib's own inscriptions include a lengthier version of the affair. From them the date of 701 BC is established, placing the accession of Hezekiah in 715 BC. That much is simple, but problems still arise. For example, [2 Kings 19:9](#) reports that Sennacherib was in contact with an Ethiopian king, Tirhakah (c. 690-664 BC), during the course of his campaign, which included a siege of Jerusalem. Obviously, contact with a ruler who came to power in 690 BC at the earliest could not refer to events in 701 BC. It is possible, however, that Sennacherib actually made two invasions of Judah, the first in 701 and the second sometime later. The date of that supposed second invasion is not assured, although [2 Kings 19:35-37](#) may imply that Sennacherib was murdered only shortly after his withdrawal from Jerusalem. Since Sennacherib was succeeded by his son Esarhaddon in the year 681, the presumed

second invasion of Judah would have occurred somewhere in the last half of the same decade.

A number of scholars oppose the assumption of a second invasion of Jerusalem by Sennacherib. They suggest the possibility that Tirhakah, though king only from 690 BC, may have led troops against Sennacherib as early as 701, before acceding to the throne. The reference to King Tirhakah in [2 Kings 19:9](#) would then be understood as use of his eventual title in an effort to identify him to a later generation of readers.

However the question of the number of invasions is decided, it is certain that Sennacherib invaded Judah in 701 BC, the 14th regnal year of Hezekiah. Such a synchronism establishes Hezekiah's accession year as 715 BC, but that date raises another problem. The fall of Samaria, now established at 722, is dated by [2 Kings 18:10](#) in the sixth year of Hezekiah's reign. The most likely solution is that Hezekiah began a co-regency with his father, Ahaz, six years before Samaria fell. The possibility for confusion arises from the fact that one verse ([2 Kgs 18:13](#); repeated in [Is 36:1](#)) synchronizes Sennacherib's 701 BC invasion with the 14th year of Hezekiah's independent reign; another verse ([2 Kgs 18:10](#)) correlates the fall of Samaria with the beginning of Hezekiah's co-regency. Thus from about 728 to 715 BC Hezekiah was co-regent with Ahaz. From 715 to 697 he reigned alone. From 696 to 686 his son Manasseh was co-ruler with him.

According to the chronological information given by a number of verses in 2 Kings, a total of 128 years and six months elapsed between the time of Hezekiah's accession in 715 and the capture of King Jehoiachin in 597, a date to be discussed below. Thus another problem is to explain the more than 10-year excess apparently demanded by the biblical totals. The best solution appears to lie in the assumption that Manasseh first came to power in 697 as co-regent with his father, Hezekiah. Manasseh died in 642, following what [2 Kings 21:1](#) states was a 55-year reign. Hezekiah, who came to the throne in 715, is said to have reigned 29 years ([2 Kgs 18:2](#)), which would mean that he was king until 686, roughly 11 years after the time when Manasseh must have come to the throne in order to have completed a 55-year reign by 642.

Fall of Jerusalem

Contemporary Babylonian records are available to shed valuable light on the last few years of Judah's existence. For the years 626–623, 618–595, and

556 BC the Babylonian Chronicle, a formal record of Babylonian affairs of state, has been recovered. From information contained in that chronicle and other cuneiform documents of the period, three dates in Judah's history may be fixed firmly. The first is the death of Josiah in 609; the second is the battle of Carchemish in 605; the third is the end of the reign of Jehoiachin, which is dated by the Babylonian Chronicle to the second month of Adar in the ninth year of Nebuchadnezzar, or March 16, 597.

After Jehoiachin's capture, Zedekiah became puppet king of Judah for 11 years ([2 Kgs 24:18](#)). On the tenth day of the tenth month during Zedekiah's ninth regnal year ([2 Kgs 25:1](#)), the final siege of Jerusalem was begun by the Babylonian army. That day was January 15, 588. On the ninth day of the fourth month during the 11th regnal year of Zedekiah, after a siege of almost 18 months, the wall of Jerusalem was broken through ([2 Kgs 25:3–4](#)). The temple was burned on day seven of the following (fifth) month.

Beyond 586 BC

Following the tragedy of 586 BC, several further developments are given chronological notice in the OT. [Jeremiah 52:30](#) records a third deportation of Jews to Babylonia in the 23d year of King Nebuchadnezzar (582 or 581 BC). Both [2 Kings 25:27](#) and [Jeremiah 52:31](#) give evidence of the release of King Jehoiachin from prison; the Babylonian Chronicle dates that event at 27 Adar, or March 21, 561 BC.

In 539 BC the Babylonians themselves were destined to learn the meaning of defeat. In that year a Persian ruler, Cyrus the Great, launched a successful campaign against Babylon and its king, Nabonidus. Inheriting control over the exiled Jews and many other groups of people conquered earlier by Babylonia, Cyrus moved quickly to initiate a policy of tolerance toward his new subjects. In the first year of his rule Cyrus issued an edict making it possible for Jews to return to their former land ([Ezr 1:1](#)). On the first day of the following year, 1 Tishri ([Ezr 3:6](#)), an altar was set up in Jerusalem. In Iyyar of the following year (April/May 536) work was begun on the temple itself ([Ezr 3:8](#)).

After a period of frustrating work stoppages of varying lengths, the preaching of Haggai and Zechariah spurred on the Jews to complete the temple. Work resumed in 520 ([Ezr 4:24](#); [Hg 1:1, 15](#)) and was finally completed on 3 Adar, or March 12, 515 ([Ezr 6:15](#)). The final stages of OT chronology

pertain to the careers of Ezra and Nehemiah. The traditional view of their era places Ezra in the seventh year of Artaxerxes I (458 BC) and Nehemiah in the 20th (445 BC).

See also "Date" under each OT book; Conquest and Allotment of the Land; Diaspora of the Jews; Exodus, The; Israel, History of; Patriarchs, Period of the; Postexilic Period; Wilderness Wanderings.

Chrysolite

Magnesium, iron silicate, usually olive green; mentioned in Ezekiel's vision of the four wheels ([Ez 1:16](#)) and as one of the gems in the foundation wall of the new Jerusalem ([Rv 21:20](#)). *See* Minerals and Metals; Stones, Precious.

Chrysoprase, Chrysoprasus

Light-green variety of chalcedony; mentioned as one of the gems in the foundation wall of the new Jerusalem ([Rv 21:20](#); kjv "chrysoprasus"). *See* Minerals and Metals; Stones, Precious.

Chub

The King James Version spelling of Kub, a place in [Ezekiel 30:5](#) identified as Libya.

See Kub.

Chun

KJV spelling of Cun, a city from which David took much bronze, in [1 Chronicles 18:8](#). *See* Cun.

Church

The word "church" refers to a group or assembly of people who come together for a specific purpose. Although the term is only mentioned twice in the Gospels ([Matthew 16:18](#); [18:17](#)), it appears often in the book of Acts, most of Paul's letters, and other New Testament writings, especially in the book of Revelation.

In the Old Testament, one way to describe the people of Israel was by calling them "the congregation." Some groups who believed they

were the true Israel called themselves "the congregation." They believed they were not Israel by birth. This term was used by the writers of the Dead Sea Scrolls and by early Christians, and it is what the word "church" originally meant. Christians often referred to themselves as "the church" or "the congregation" (with "of God" being understood without saying it).

The term "church" could mean all believers worldwide or any local group of them. It represented the presence of God's people in a specific place. That is why the New Testament often uses the singular "church." It does this even when talking about many groups of believers ([Acts 9:31](#); [2 Corinthians 1:1](#)); the term "churches" is rarely found ([Acts 15:41](#); [16:5](#)). Each group or the whole group was the place where God was present ([Matthew 16:18](#); [18:17](#)). The congregation was something God had purchased with the blood of his Son ([Acts 20:28](#)).

Different Ways "Church" Is Used in the New Testament

The word "church" in the New Testament also has connections to the Greek world. In Greek, the word translated as "church" meant an assembly, a meeting. It referred to a political gathering or any group coming together. The word is used this way in [Acts 19:32, 39, 41](#).

The Christian use of the word "church" in the New Testament varies widely:

1. **As a Church Meeting:** Sometimes, like in the Old Testament, it refers to a church meeting. For example, Paul tells the Christians in Corinth, "When you come together as a church" ([1 Corinthians 11:18](#)). This means that Christians are especially seen as God's people when they gather for worship.
2. **As the Entire Group in One Place:** In passages like [Matthew 18:17](#), [Acts 5:11](#), [1 Corinthians 4:17](#), and [Philippians 4:15](#), "church" refers to the entire group of Christians living in one place. The local nature of a Christian group is often highlighted. For example, in phrases like "the church in Jerusalem" ([Acts 8:1](#)), "in Corinth" ([1 Corinthians 1:2](#)), and "in Thessalonica" ([1 Thessalonians 1:1](#)).

3. **As House Churches:** In other texts, small groups of Christians who met in someone's home are called churches, such as those who met in the house of Priscilla and Aquila ([Romans 16:5](#); [1 Corinthians 16:19](#)).
4. **As the Universal Church:** Throughout the New Testament, "the church" can also mean the universal church, which includes all believers ([Acts 9:31](#); [1 Corinthians 6:4](#); [Ephesians 1:22](#); [Colossians 1:18](#)). Jesus' first mention of the founding of the Christian movement in [Matthew 16:18](#) uses the term in this larger sense: "I will build My church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it."

Paul often refers to the church as "the church of God" ([1 Corinthians 1:2](#); [10:32](#)) or "the churches of Christ" ([Romans 16:16](#)). This gives a common Greek word a distinct Christian meaning. It sets the Christian assembly apart from other groups, both secular and religious.

The New Testament as a whole makes it clear that the Christian community saw itself as the community of the end times. They believed they were called into existence by God's final act of revelation and divine presence in Jesus of Nazareth. Paul tells the Christians in Corinth that they are those "on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come" ([1 Corinthians 10:11](#)). This means that God had visited his creation and called out new people from both Judaism and the non-Jewish world. These people were empowered by God's Spirit to be present in the world, sharing the Good News of God's radical, unconditional love for his creation ([Ephesians 2:11-22](#)).

The Gospels tell us that Jesus chose 12 disciples who became the foundation of this new people. The connection to the 12 tribes of Israel is clear. It shows that the church was seen as both rooted in Judaism and as God's plan to make Israel "a light to the nations" ([Isaiah 49:6](#); [Romans 11:1-5](#)). Because of this, Paul can call this new Gentile-Jewish community, this new creation, "the Israel of God" ([Galatians 6:15-16](#)). In this new community, traditional divisions of race, class, and gender were broken down. They had separated and ranked people into inferior and superior groups. "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor

female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" ([Galatians 3:28](#)). This one group is called "the body of Christ."

The Church as the Body of Christ

Paul is the only New Testament writer to call the church Christ's body ([Romans 12:5](#); [1 Corinthians 12:27](#); [Ephesians 1:22-23](#); [4:12](#); see also [1 Corinthians 10:16-17](#); [12:12-13](#)). He also describes the church as "the body" of which Christ is the "head" ([Ephesians 4:15](#); [Colossians 1:18](#)). The exact origin of this way of speaking about the church is not clear, but two ideas are particularly helpful for understanding Paul's thinking:

1. **Paul's Damascus Road Experience:** According to the accounts in [Acts 9:3-7](#); [22:6-11](#); [26:12-18](#), Jesus identified himself with his persecuted disciples. When Paul persecuted these early Christians, he was actually fighting against Christ himself. Reflecting on this experience may have led Paul to believe that the living Christ was so closely identified with his community that it could be called his "body," meaning the real, physical expression of his presence.

2. **The Hebrew Concept of Corporate Solidarity:** Corporate solidarity is the idea that a group can be represented by one person. Paul was deeply Jewish, and Jewish ideas shaped his thinking ([Philippians 3:5](#)). In this context, the individual is seen as closely connected to the nation as a whole. The individual does not truly exist apart from the whole people. At the same time, the whole people can be represented by one individual. For example, “Israel” is both the name of one person and the name of a whole people. The “servant” in [Isaiah 42–53](#) can be both an individual ([Isaiah 42:1–4](#)) and the nation of Israel ([Isaiah 49:1–6](#)). This idea of corporate solidarity (or unity) is the background for the close connection Paul makes between “the first Adam” and sinful humanity. It also connects “the last (or second) Adam” (Christ) with renewed humanity ([1 Corinthians 15:45–49](#); see also [Romans 5:12–21](#)).

Paul expresses the close relationship between Christ and his church by comparing it to the unity and working together of a physical body ([Romans 12:4–8](#); [1 Corinthians 12:12–27](#)). For Paul, the Lord’s Supper is a specific example of this reality: “The bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one loaf, we who are many are one body; for we all partake of the one loaf.” ([1 Corinthians 10:16b–17](#)). Because of this, Paul argues, every function within the body has its rightful place.

Division within the body (meaning the church) shows that something is not right. Paul’s repeated call for unity within the Christian community is based on this image of the church as “the body of Christ.”

Church Meetings

Gatherings of believers. In the New Testament, the Greek word *ekklesia* (usually translated as “church”) is used primarily in two ways:

1. It is used to describe a meeting or an assembly.
2. It is used to refer to the people who take part in these gatherings—whether they are actually meeting at the time or not.

The New Testament mentions a few non-Christian Greek assemblies ([Acts 19:32, 41](#)). Every other instance refers to Christian gatherings.

Sometimes *ekklesia* means the actual meeting of Christians. This is what Paul meant in [1 Corinthians 14:19, 28](#), and [35](#), where the Greek phrase *en ekklesia* must mean “in a meeting” and not “in the church.” Translating this phrase as “in the church” (as is done in most modern English versions) is misleading. Most listeners or readers will think it means “in the church building.” The New Testament never calls the place where people meet a “church.”

Apart from these few instances where the word means the actual gathering of believers, *ekklesia* is most often used to describe:

- The believers who are part of a local church (such as the church in Corinth, the church in Philippi, and the church in Colossae); or
- All the believers (past, present, and future) who are part of the universal church, the complete body of Christ.

When hearing or reading the New Testament, Christians need to be aware of the various ways in which the word *ekklesia* (“church”) is used. The most basic meaning of *ekklesia* is any gathering of believers. *Ekklesia* can also refer to an organized local group—including all the believers in one place, led by a group of elders. The *ekklesia* is also the universal church whose members are all the believers who have ever been, are now existing, and will ever be.

The word *ekklesia* was used by the New Testament writers with these various aspects of meaning. Sometimes it is hard to tell which meaning is intended. However, being careful about this can help avoid confusion when studying the New Testament. Some people teach that the smallest part of the church is the local church. But those who wrote the New Testament sometimes used the word “church” to mean a small group meeting in a home.

Others confuse the local church with the universal church. But some things in the New Testament are addressed to a local church that do not necessarily apply to the whole church. Some great things are said about the universal church that could never be achieved by any particular local group. For example, in Paul's letter to the Ephesians (which was actually meant for several churches), he talks about the church in ways that a local church could never fully achieve. No local church could become fully like Christ.

There is much to be said about how interpreters have confused the local church with the universal church, but this article is focused on clearly explaining what constitutes the smallest unit of the church—the local church, or what could be called the house church or home gathering.

The New Testament shows that a local church (all the believers in one area led by one group of elders) could have several *ekklesiai*—"meetings" or "assemblies" in different homes. Thus, the smallest unit to comprise a "church" was one of these home meetings.

However, the New Testament does not say that each of these home meetings had its own separate leaders or was completely separate from other *ekklesiai* ("gatherings") in the same area. According to [Acts 14:23](#) and [Titus 1:5](#), elders were appointed for every local church and not for every house church (compare the expressions "appointed elders in every church" and "appoint elders in every city"). Even so, it seems that every local church of some size had several such *ekklesiai* ("meetings") happening within that area.

The church in Jerusalem must have had several home meetings (see [Acts 2:46](#); [5:42](#); [8:3](#); [12:5, 12](#)), as did the church in Rome (see [Romans 16:3-5, 14-15](#)). A small local church may have had only one home gathering—as was probably the case with the church at Colossae (see [Philemon 1:2](#)). But this would have been impossible for large local churches like those in Jerusalem, Rome, and Ephesus, in which there must have been several "house churches" (see [1 Corinthians 16:19-20](#) [1 Corinthians was written from Ephesus]). We can better understand the idea of "house church" from these passages: [Romans 16:3-5, 14-15](#); [1 Corinthians 16:19-20](#); [Colossians 4:15-16](#); and [Philemon 1:1-2](#).

[Romans 16:3-5, 14-15](#)

In the last chapter of Romans, Paul asked the believers in Rome, to whom he had written this epistle, to greet Priscilla and Aquila and the church that met in their home ([16:3-5](#)). The entire church in Rome could not have met in Priscilla and Aquila's home, for the church was much too large to have gathered in a single home. Rather, the church in Priscilla and Aquila's home must have been one among several such "house churches" in Rome. The following discussion supports this idea.

Paul wrote his letter to the Romans to "all in Rome who are loved by God" ([Romans 1:7](#)), not to "the church in Rome." When he wrote this, Paul had not been to Rome, and no other apostle had either. The church in Rome probably started when Jewish Romans visited Jerusalem during Pentecost ([Acts 2:10](#)) became believers in Jesus, and then went back to Rome. Since no apostle had started the church, there might not have been any official leaders (elders) in Rome. There were likely several groups of believers meeting in different parts of Rome and nearby areas.

Paul knew some of the saints in Rome (whom he addressed by name in the last chapter). So he wrote to all the believers in that area, instead of to the church as a whole—which is what he usually did (see [1 Corinthians 1:1](#); [2 Corinthians 1:1](#); [1 Thessalonians 1:1](#); [2 Thessalonians 1:1](#)). Even so, "all in Rome who are loved by God" would make up "the church in Rome" (compare [Philippians 1:1](#), in which Paul addressed his letter to all the saints in Philippi).

In the final chapter of Romans, Paul asks all the believers in Rome (which equals the "local" church in Rome) to greet the church in Priscilla and Aquila's house. Later in the chapter, Paul asks the church to greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermas, Patrobas, Hermes, and the brothers with them. And then again he asks the church to greet Philologus, Julia, Nereus and his sister, Olympas, and all the saints with them ([Romans 16:14-15](#)).

Evidently, Paul was identifying two other groups of believers who must have met together. (And perhaps Paul was referring to two more groups in [16:10-11](#), which in the Greek could mean the ones of Aristobulus's and Narcissus's *households* or the ones of their *fellowships*.) It seems that the church in Rome, like the church in Jerusalem and Ephesus, had several home *ekklesiai* (meetings).

Paul wrote his letter to the Romans around AD 58. The time when Nero badly hurt Christians (known

as the Neronian persecution) began around AD 64. Nonreligious historians such as Tacitus tell us that a large number of Christians were tortured and killed during this persecution (*Annals* 15.44). Another writer, Suetonius (in his book *Nero*, chapter 16), said that the fast growth of Christians in Rome made them unpopular.

Indeed, at the time Paul wrote his letter to the Romans he said their faith was known throughout the world ([1:8](#)). This indicates that the church in Rome had already made an impact on the Mediterranean world. When Paul came to Rome three years later in AD 61, he came to a city that had a large church there already. From [Romans 15:23](#), we know that the church had been in existence for many years even before Paul wrote his letter to them.

In short, the church in Rome was a large church around the time Paul wrote his letter to them. The whole church could not have met in Aquila and Priscilla's home. They were tentmakers and would have had only a medium-sized house. Also, Paul greeted more than 25 people by name in chapter [16](#)—and he had not even been to Rome yet!

There must have been several *ekklesiai* in Rome, meaning several home churches that together made up the one local church in Rome. For example, the Christians in Rome apparently worshiped in many homes such as Priscilla and Aquila's. Other churches in homes are mentioned in [Colossians 4:15](#) and [Philemon 1:2](#). Groups of Christians met in houses of important believers or in other available rooms (compare [Matthew 26:16](#); [Acts 12:12](#); [1 Corinthians 16:19](#); [Colossians 4:15](#); [Philemon 1:2](#)).

The church in Priscilla and Aquila's house is the first of five groups of believers in Paul's list, but the only one referred to definitely as a church (see [Romans 16:5, 10–11, 14–15](#)). Priscilla and Aquila opened their home for Christian meetings. The church mentioned there was only a part of the total number of Christians in Rome. Verses [10–11](#) and [14–15](#) seem to refer to two other household churches in Rome. There were at least three churches there, and probably more. Each house church could not have been a separate group with a separate church government. Instead, each house church must have been simply one home meeting of some of the saints in the one local church at Rome.

[1 Corinthians 16:19–20](#)

In this passage we again see Aquila and Priscilla and again we learn that a church met in their house. According to Romans, their house church was in Rome. According to 1 Corinthians (which was written from Ephesus), their house church was in Ephesus.

Many scholars think Aquila and Priscilla left Rome around AD 49 when the emperor Claudius ordered all Jews to leave Rome. They might have already been Christians then. According to [Acts 18](#), they joined Paul in Corinth (where they all worked together as tentmakers) and then went on with him to Ephesus, around AD 51 when the church in Ephesus was first established. Paul continued his second missionary journey, while Aquila and Priscilla remained in Ephesus.

The early church in Ephesus likely first met in their home. Paul returned to Ephesus a few years later and remained there for two years (around AD 53–54). During this time, Paul's teaching about Jesus spread from Ephesus (as a center) to all of Asia Minor (see [Acts 19:8–10](#)). As this was going on, the church in Ephesus grew (see verses [18–20](#)).

During these years Paul wrote to the Corinthians. He sent greetings from the churches in Asia, from Aquila and Priscilla—and the church in their house, and from all the brothers ([1 Corinthians 16:19–20](#)). In giving this kind of greeting, it seems that Paul was sending greetings from:

1. all the churches in Asia Minor,
2. the church in Ephesus (equivalent to “all the brothers”), and
3. those believers who gathered with Aquila and Priscilla in their home.

It would be hard to imagine that all the saints in Ephesus met at Aquila and Priscilla's home. The church probably began that way, but as it grew, so did the number of home meetings.

From other parts of the New Testament, we learn that there must have been several home meetings in Ephesus because there were so many saints there. This is true of 1 Timothy, which was written around AD 64 by Paul to Timothy while Timothy was leading the church in Ephesus. There must have been a large number of saints in Ephesus— young men, young women, older men, widows, and so forth ([1 Timothy 5–6](#)).

Many believers must have hosted a church meeting (*ekklesia*) in their home. (Aquila and Priscilla left Ephesus around AD 56/57 and went back to Rome, where they again hosted a church in their home. Others in Ephesus would have opened their homes.) But each home meeting didn't have its own leaders. Instead, all of the church in Ephesus was under one group of leaders—led by Timothy, Paul's coworker.

[Colossians 4:15–16](#)

In this part, we again read about a church existing in the home of one called Nymphas. In his final remarks to the church in Colossae, Paul asked the saints in Colosse to send his greetings to:

1. the brothers that are in Laodicea,
2. Nymphas in particular, and
3. the church in Nymphas's house.

According to the structure of [Colossians 4:15](#), it seems that the first greeting included all the believers in Laodicea (a neighboring church to Colossae), who would comprise the entire church in Laodicea (called “the church of the Laodiceans” in [Colossians 4:16](#)). The second and third greetings were to a specific individual named Nymphas in the church in Laodicea and a church meeting in Nymphas's house. This church meeting in Nymphas's house would probably be one of several home meetings—all part of the one local church in Laodicea.

There is a problem with the text in this passage that could have some effect on how it is interpreted. Some manuscripts read “his house”; others read “her house”; still others read “their house.” Because it cannot be determined from the Greek text whether Nymphas was male or female, various scribes used different pronouns before “house.” Between the readings “her” and “his,” it is far more likely that the pronoun “her” was changed to “his” than vice versa.

Some scholars say that “their” refers to “the brothers” at Laodicea. But that does not make sense if we understand that “the brothers in Laodicea” refers to the church in Laodicea. How could the church in Laodicea have the church in their house?

Other scholars indicate that the Greek word for “their” (*auton*) refers to the ones with Nymphas—the members of his household.

Whether the reading was “her house” or “their house,” a particular group of believers within the church of Laodicea met there. Their meeting could legitimately be called an *ekklesia*—an assembling together.

[Philemon 1:1–2](#)

This is the last time we read about a church in a particular home in the New Testament. Paul wrote a short epistle to Philemon, a leader of the church in Colossae. He wrote about Onesimus, Philemon's runaway slave who Paul had led to believe in Christ.

In his introduction to this short letter, Paul sends his greetings to Philemon, Apphia, Archippus, and the church in Philemon's house. Paul did not send greetings to all the saints in Colossae and then to the church in Philemon's house. This was the pattern in [1 Corinthians 16:19–20](#) and [Colossians 4:15](#). Instead, he just sent greetings to Philemon and to the church in his house. Therefore, we can assume that the entire church in Colossae must have met at Philemon's house.

Worship in the Home Meetings and Church Meetings

When the church first began in Jerusalem, the believers met in homes for fellowship and worship. The early Christians met in homes to hear the apostles' teachings and to celebrate Communion, which is called “the breaking of bread” ([Acts 2:42–47](#)).

During these meetings, Christians often shared meals in what was called a love feast ([2 Peter 2:13](#); [Jude 1:12](#)). At these meetings, they recited Scripture, sang hymns and psalms, and joyfully praised the Lord (see [Ephesians 5:18–20](#); [Colossians 3:16–17](#)). Christians also gathered together in homes to pray ([Acts 12:12](#)) and read Scripture.

Small groups of believers met in homes for worship regularly. In a city where there were several such *ekklesiai*, all the believers would gather together for special occasions. Scripture tells us that all the believers would come together to hear a letter from the apostles read out loud (see [Acts 15:30](#); [Colossians 4:16](#)). We can guess from the New Testament record that all the Christians in a city met together once a week on Sunday, which was called the Lord's Day.

First Corinthians tells us how the early Christians worshiped together when all the believers in one

city met together. We know that 1 Corinthians talks about this larger gathering because in [11:20](#) Paul spoke of all the believers coming together in one place. Likewise, in [14:23](#) he spoke of the whole church coming together in one place.

Paul used this letter to correct how the Corinthians were behaving in two areas:

- When they celebrated the Lord's Supper ([1 Corinthians 11:17-34](#))
- When they used spiritual gifts during church meetings ([1 Corinthians 14](#))

Paul's corrections show us what he thought a good Christian meeting should be like. He probably based this on his experience in other church meetings.

Paul told the Corinthians to celebrate the Lord's Supper together in a way that matched how Jesus started this meal. They were to remember the Lord and how he died for them, and they were to eat the bread and drink the wine in a serious way. At the same time, they were to be aware that they were members of the same body of Christ—joined to one another, and also to Christ.

In chapter [14](#), Paul says this “body awareness” should be evident in the way the believers worshiped together. One’s personal experience and freedom should not stop the group from worshiping God together. Thus, when the believers used their spiritual gifts it should be done in an orderly way and to help the whole group grow, not just themselves. These spiritual gifts include:

- Prophesying (sharing messages from God)
- Speaking in tongues (speaking in special languages)
- Interpreting tongues (explaining what was said in tongues)
- Teaching

When all the church gathered together to worship God, it should demonstrate spiritual unity.

See also Church.

Church Officers

Church officers are leaders who serve in official positions within a church, helping to guide the

congregation and provide leadership in areas such as teaching, administration, and pastoral care. The specific roles and titles vary among Christian traditions, but most churches have a recognized leadership structure based on roles mentioned in the New Testament.

See Bishop; Deacon, Deaconess; Elder; Overseer; Pastor; Presbyter; Priesthood; Spiritual Gifts.

Chushan-Rishathaim

KJV spelling of Cushan-rishathaim, a Mesopotamian king and oppressor of Israel, in [Judges 3:8-10](#). *See* Cushan-rishathaim.

Chusi

Place mentioned near Acraba and beside the brook Mochmur ([Jdt 7:18](#)). Chusi is probably south of modern Nablus in Israel.

Chuza

The steward of Herod Antipas and a powerful and influential man. Chuza was either a manager of Herod's property or a political appointee. He was married to Joanna, whom Jesus healed. She then traveled with Jesus and his disciples ([Luke 8:3](#)).

Cilicia

A province of the Roman Empire, located in southeastern Asia Minor. The capital city was Tarsus, Paul's hometown ([Acts 21:39; 22:3](#)). This is why Paul had Roman citizenship even though he was a Jew ([16:37](#)).

History of Cilicia

Antiochus the Great settled 2,000 Jewish families in the Asia Minor regions of Lydia and Phrygia in the second century BC (Josephus's *Antiquities* 12.3.4). This may be the origin of the Jewish population in the area.

In the Old Testament, Cilicia was called Kue. The region formed a bridge between the country now known as Turkey and Syria. The country was divided between Cilicia Tracheia and Cilicia Pedias.

- Cilicia Tracheia is the mountainous region in the western half. Cilicia Tracheia was territory Mark Antony had given to Cleopatra in 36 BC. By the time of Paul, the Greek King Antiochus IV of Commagene ruled this area. He was king from AD 38 to 72. The Cilician Gates, a narrow pass in the Taurus Mountains, provided entry into Turkey.
- Cilicia Pedias was the plains to the east. Cilicia Pedias was connected to the province of Syria (about 38 BC). The New Testament refers to Syria and Cilicia as one region ([Galatians 1:21](#)).

In AD 72, the Roman emperor Vespasian united the two areas into one Roman province called Cilicia.

Cilicia in Early Christianity

Jews from Cilicia participated in the persecution of Stephen ([Acts 6:9](#)). After Paul converted to Christianity, he returned to Tarsus. Paul later traveled with Barnabas to Antioch ([Acts 11:25–26](#)). Because of Paul's story, Syria and Cilicia became the first major center of non-Jewish Christianity. Christianity spread from this area to the rest of the gentile population of the Roman Empire.

See also Kue.

Cinnamon

A spice made from the dried inner bark of several trees that come from tropical Asia. The bark has a pleasant smell. It can be ground and used as a spice. The cinnamon mentioned in [Exodus 30:23](#), [Proverbs 7:17](#), [Song of Songs 4:14](#), and [Revelation 18:13](#) is certainly from the *Cinnamomum zeylanicum* tree.

The cinnamon tree is relatively small, never growing taller than 9.1 meters (30 feet). It has smooth, ash-colored bark, wide-spreading branches, and white flowers. Its shiny, beautifully veined evergreen leaves grow about 22.9 centimeters (9 inches) long and 5.1 centimeters (2 inches) wide.

The Jewish people considered cinnamon a deliciously fragrant substance and valued it highly both as a spice and a perfume. It was one of the

main ingredients used to make the precious ointment, or "holy oil," that Moses was commanded to use in the tabernacle. This oil was used for anointing the holy vessels and the priests who served there. Cinnamon was certainly very expensive and highly treasured.

See Food and Food Preparation.

Cinneroth

KJV spelling of the place-name Kinnereth in [1 Kings 15:20](#). *See* Kinnereth.

Circumcision

Surgical removal of the foreskin of the male reproductive organ. In Bible times circumcision was the seal of God's covenant with Abraham ([Genesis 17:1–14](#)). While circumcision originated as an ancient tribal or religious rite, since the early part of this century it has been practiced in Western nations for hygienic purposes. Many physicians believe that circumcision helps prevent genital cancers in both men and their wives, so that this minor operation is performed a few days after birth on nearly all newborn males in North America. Outside of Judaism the procedure no longer carries religious significance.

Preview

- Circumcision in the Ancient World
- Circumcision in the Old Testament
- Circumcision in the New Testament

Circumcision in the Ancient World

The rite of circumcision is far older than the Hebrew people. Cave paintings give evidence that it was practiced in prehistoric times. Egyptian temple drawings show that the operation was common in 4000 BC and probably earlier. People groups that practiced circumcision lived on almost every continent. The rite was observed among Central and South American Indians, Polynesians, the peoples of New Guinea, many Australian and African tribes, Egyptians, and pre-Islamic Arabs. The rite is not mentioned in the Qur'an, but because Muhammad was circumcised, tradition dictates that male Muslims follow the ancient custom. Arab ancestry is traced to Abraham through Ishmael ([Genesis 17:20](#)), so a common age for Muslim

circumcisions is 13, because Ishmael was circumcised at that age (v [25](#)).

Among the West Semitic people, the Ammonites, Edomites, Midianites, Moabites, and Phoenicians all practiced circumcision ([Jeremiah 9:25–26](#)). The Philistines, however, did not ([Judges 14:3](#); [15:18](#); [1 Samuel 14:6](#); [17:26, 36](#); [18:25, 27](#); [31:4](#); [2 Samuel 1:20](#); [3:14](#); [1 Chronicles 10:4](#)).

Young men were usually circumcised at puberty, evidently in preparation for marriage and entrance into full tribal responsibilities. The Hebrews were the only ancient practitioners of circumcision to observe the rite in infancy, thus freeing it from association with fertility rituals.

Circumcision in the Old Testament

In the Bible the practice of circumcision began in [Genesis 17](#) as a sign of the covenant between God and Abraham. God promised Abraham a land and, through a son yet to be conceived, numerous descendants, from whom kings would come. Blessings would come upon Abraham and through him to all nations ([Genesis 12:1–3](#)). After the covenant was formally inaugurated (ch [15](#)), God sealed it, ordering Abraham to be circumcised along with all the males in his household ([Genesis 17:9–13](#)).

Circumcision was to be an expression of faith that God's promises would be realized. Because Abraham's faith had lapsed ([Genesis 16](#)) even after he had seen the awesome display of God's majesty ([15:9–17](#)), a permanent reminder of God's covenant promises was placed on his body and the bodies of his male descendants ([17:11](#)). This sign was so closely related to God's covenant promise that the rite itself could be termed the "covenant" ([Genesis 17:10](#); [Acts 7:8](#)).

Circumcision was to be performed on the eighth day after birth ([Genesis 17:12](#); [Lv 12:1–3](#); see [Genesis 21:4](#); [Lk 1:59](#); [2:21](#); [Acts 7:8](#); [Philippians 3:5](#)), customarily by the boy's father ([Genesis 17:23](#); [21:4](#); [Acts 7:8](#)), at which time a name would be given ([Luke 1:59](#); [2:21](#)). Flint knives were used in the early days ([Exodus 4:25](#); [Joshua 5:2–3](#)). Later, the rite was carried out by a trained practitioner called a mohel. Medical research has determined that prothrombin, a substance in the blood that aids in clotting, is present in greater quantity on the eighth day than at any other time in life.

Theological Meaning

Circumcision had to do with the fulfillment of God's promise concerning Abraham's descendants ([Genesis 17:9–12](#)). Because it was applied to the reproductive organ, the sign involved the propagation of the race. Its application to the eight-day-old infant demonstrates the gracious character of God's promise to Abraham's descendants and indicates that God's people are in need of cleansing grace from birth ([Leviticus 12:1–3](#)). The promises of the covenant were reaffirmed to each generation before the recipients could respond in either faith or unbelief. Nothing in the hearts of the chosen people could affect the ultimate fulfillment of the promises given to Abraham and his descendants.

Circumcision also had to do with the fulfillment of God's promise concerning the land ([Genesis 17:8](#)). The land was God's holy possession, and the Israelites had to be holy to possess it. When Joseph and his descendants were in Egypt, they continued to circumcise their sons. But following the great sin at Mt Sinai after the exodus, the unbelieving Israelites failed to place the covenant sign upon their children as they wandered in the wilderness. Because the new generation had not been circumcised, the people were unprepared to enter the Promised Land. Therefore, God ordered Joshua to circumcise the men of Israel. The people's obedient response was an act of faith, since the armies of the enemy were camped nearby as the Israelite warriors lay incapacitated by the surgery ([Joshua 5:2–9](#)).

From the beginning, participation in the covenant promises was open to persons outside Abraham's household ([Genesis 17:12–13](#)). [Exodus 12:43–49](#) gives non-Israelites the opportunity to participate in the Passover if they are willing to fulfill the same stipulation placed upon the Jews—that of circumcision.

Circumcision in the New Testament

John the Baptist was circumcised, as were Jesus and Paul ([Luke 1:59](#); [2:21](#); [Philippians 3:5](#)). Jesus recognized the cleansing significance of circumcision ([John 7:22–23](#)), contrasting the rite with his healing ministry that made a man completely well and therefore ceremonially "clean." Just before he was stoned, Stephen referred to the covenant of circumcision and blamed his Jewish accusers of being, like their ancestors, stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, and of always resisting the Holy Spirit ([Acts 7:8, 51](#)).

For a time the first Christians continued to participate in the Jewish rites and customs, even attending the services of the temple ([Acts 3:1; 5:21, 42](#)). As Gentiles came to Christ, controversy arose between those who said that participation in the covenant community required circumcision and those who believed the rite was unnecessary. It was argued that since the covenant promise of the Messiah was given to the Jews, Gentiles must first be circumcised and become Jews before they could receive salvation in Christ.

In the time of Christ, many Jews misunderstood the significance of circumcision, believing that the physical act was necessary for and a guarantee of salvation. Thus for Jews the observance became not only a symbol of religious privilege but also a source of racial pride ([Philippians 3:4-6](#)). These Jews associated the ceremony with the Mosaic law rather than the promise to Abraham ([John 7:22; Acts 15:1](#)). Because Greeks and Romans did not practice circumcision, Jews had come to be called “the circumcision” (King James Version [Acts 10:45; 11:2; Romans 15:8; Galatians 2:7-9; Ephesians 2:11; Titus 1:10](#)), and following OT practice ([Ezekiel 28:10; 31:18; 32:19-32](#)), Gentiles were termed “the uncircumcision” (King James Version [Galatians 2:7; Ephesians 2:11](#)).

During their visit to Caesarea, Jewish believers were amazed to realize that uncircumcised Gentiles received the purifying gift of the Holy Spirit ([Acts 10:44-48](#)). Moses had promised that God would circumcise the hearts of his people to love the Lord with heart and soul ([Dt 30:6](#)). Ezekiel had prophesied that the Lord would sprinkle clean water on his people, giving them a new heart and putting his Spirit within them ([Ezekiel 36:25-27](#)). When these Jewish believers witnessed the fulfillment of the prophecy that God would pour out his Spirit upon all flesh ([Joel 2:28; Acts 2:17](#)), they realized that the inward reality symbolized by circumcision could be achieved without the physical sign. Therefore, the gentile believers were immediately baptized.

Not all the Jewish believers were immediately willing to accept Gentiles into the church. When Peter returned to Jerusalem after his visit to Caesarea, “the circumcision party” criticized him. But after telling how the Spirit had fallen upon the Gentiles, Peter declared that he could not stand against God. At this the Jewish believers were silenced and glorified God that repentance unto life had been granted to Gentiles ([Acts 11:1-3, 15:8](#)).

Certain “Judaizers” of the Pharisaic party taught the Christians in Antioch that circumcision was necessary for salvation ([Acts 15:1, 5](#)). After debating these persons, Paul and Barnabas went to Jerusalem to consult with the other apostles and elders (v [2](#)). Peter argued that God had given the Spirit to Gentiles and “cleansed their hearts by faith,” affirming that “we believe that we shall be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will” (vv [8-9, 11](#), rsv). Therefore, James and the other Jerusalem leaders agreed that circumcision should not be imposed on the Gentiles (vv [13-21](#)).

It was decided that Peter, James, and John would be entrusted with the gospel to “the circumcised,” while Paul and Barnabas would preach to “the uncircumcised” ([Galatians 2:7-9](#)). Because of his evangelistic policy to be “all things to all people” with respect to spiritually indifferent matters of custom ([1 Corinthians 9:19-23](#)), Paul had Timothy circumcised. Timothy was reckoned by Jews as one of their race because his mother was Jewish ([Acts 16:1-2](#)). But Paul resisted attempts to have Titus circumcised, since he was a Gentile ([Galatians 2:3](#)). Paul apparently allowed Jewish believers to circumcise their sons ([Acts 21:21](#)).

Yet Paul charged that those who argued that the Galatian Christians must be circumcised and keep the law did not keep it themselves but wanted to boast in the Galatians’ flesh and avoid persecution for the cross of Christ ([Galatians 6:12-13](#))—persecution Paul was willing to bear ([5:11](#)). Granting for the sake of argument the Pharisaic assumption that salvation could be merited by keeping the law, Paul declared that those who received circumcision must obey every other Jewish law (vv [2-3](#)). Christ would be “of no advantage” to those who “would be justified by the law”; this attempt at works righteousness would evidence that the Galatians were “severed from Christ,” having “fallen from grace” (vv [2-4](#)). These Christians were being tempted to turn to “a different gospel” ([1:6-7](#)).

Because of the serious threat the Judaizers posed to the gospel of free grace, Paul wished that those who unsettled the Galatians would “mutilate themselves” ([Galatians 5:12](#)). He termed the Judaizers “dogs” and “evil workers” (kiv “concision”), asserting that Christians are “the true circumcision,” because they worship God in spirit and glory in Christ Jesus, putting no confidence in human works to merit salvation ([Philippians 3:2-3](#)).

Paul taught that circumcision was indeed of value to Jews, for it was the sign that to them had been committed the “oracles of God,” that is, God’s word concerning the promise of salvation ([Romans 3:1–3](#)). He reminded the prideful Ephesians that as Gentiles they had once been “strangers to the covenants of promise,” not bearing the covenant sign in their flesh ([Ephesians 2:11–12](#); see [Colossians 2:13](#)). Likewise, Jews had no cause for pride, for disobedience could cause outward circumcision to be counted as uncircumcision ([Romans 2:25](#)).

Paul and the other apostles followed Moses and the OT prophets in teaching that true circumcision was a matter of the heart. The teaching of the NT goes further to affirm that a faithful believer, though physically uncircumcised, is regarded by God as circumcised, “for he is not a real Jew who is one outwardly, nor is true circumcision something external and physical” ([Romans 2:28](#), Revised Standard Version). Both Jews and Gentiles are saved by grace ([Acts 15:11](#)), and circumcised and uncircumcised alike are justified on the ground of their faith, apart from works of the law ([Romans 3:28–30](#)).

Abraham served as an example of a person whose faith was reckoned to him as righteousness ([Rom 4:3](#); see [Gn 15:6](#)). Paul argued that both Gentiles and Jews are justified by faith, because Abraham was accounted righteous before he was circumcised. Abraham did not receive circumcision to obtain righteousness, but as a sign or seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. Thus, Abraham is the father of all who believe without being circumcised, as well as those who are circumcised but also follow the example of Abraham’s faith ([Romans 4:9–12](#); see [Galatians 3:6–9](#)).

See also Baptism; Cleanness and Uncleanness, Regulations Concerning; Uncircumcision.

Cis

The King James Version spelling of Kish, the father of King Saul ([Acts 13:21](#)).

See Kish #1.

Cistern

Place to store water; a man-made catch basin or reservoir. Stone cisterns plastered with lime came into common use in Palestine in the 13th century BC.

Leaky or abandoned cisterns were often used as burial, torture, or prison chambers. For example, the dungeon into which the prophet Jeremiah was lowered was an abandoned muddy cistern ([Jer 38:6](#)). Ishmael threw the bodies of 70 murdered men into a large cistern originally constructed by King Asa for a wartime water supply ([41:4–9](#)).

Cisterns were vitally important in the arid Near East. King Uzziah of Judah is described as hewing out many cisterns in areas where springs or wells were lacking ([2 Chr 26:10](#)). An Assyrian general taunting King Hezekiah and his people promised that, if they would submit, everyone would drink the water of his own cistern ([Is 36:16](#); cf. [2 Kgs 18:31](#)). Much earlier, Moses had assured the Israelites that cisterns already hewn out would be among God’s blessing in the Promised Land ([Dt 6:11](#)).

Citadel

A citadel is a strong building or tower inside a city that people used for protection during attacks from enemies. It was usually the strongest and safest place in the city where people could go when they were in danger.

Gideon destroyed the citadel of Penuel after he captured two Midianite kings ([Jgs 8:17](#)). Abimelech and his men burned down the citadel of El-berith at Shechem ([9:46–49](#)). After, a woman in the citadel at Thebez dropped a millstone on Abimelech’s head and crushed his skull (verses [50–54](#)). David conquered Jerusalem by capturing its citadel ([2 Samuel 5:7–9](#); [1 Chronicles 11:5–8](#)).

In the second century BC, during the time when the Maccabees fought for freedom, the citadel in Jerusalem was an important place that helped whoever was in power ([1 Maccabees 1:29–33](#); [11:41–42](#); [13:49–51](#)). The last major citadel in Jerusalem was called the Fortress of Antonia. The Romans captured it in AD 70.

Cities of Refuge

Six cities, three in Canaan and three in Transjordan (area east of the Jordan River), designated as places of safety for persons suspected of manslaughter. The six cities were among the 48 assigned to the Levites ([Nm 35:6](#)). The three Transjordanian cities were Bezer, Ramoth, and Golan ([Dt 4:43](#); [Jos 20:8](#)). The three cities west of the Jordan were Kedesh, Shechem, and Kiriath-arba (that is, Hebron) in the hill country of Judah ([Jos 20:7](#)). They were distributed so that east of the Jordan, Golan was located in the north, Ramoth in the center, and Bezer in the south. West of the Jordan, Kedesh, Shechem, and Hebron were located north, center, and south respectively. That made it possible for an accused manslayer to reach a city of refuge quickly.

In ancient Israel the nearest relative of a murder victim was required to take the life of the murderer ([Nm 35:19–21](#)). It was his duty to the widow, other family members, and to society. Murderers were not allowed to live, and there was no way to ransom them ([v 31](#)).

Accidental death, however, was another matter. Manslaughter without malice or premeditation had a special provision in the law of Moses. A man who accidentally killed someone could flee to the nearest city of refuge, where the local authorities would grant him asylum ([Dt 19:4–6](#)). When the case came to court, if the man was found guilty of premeditated murder, he was handed over for execution ([19:11–12](#)). If the death was deemed accidental, the person was acquitted. Nevertheless, he had to pay a penalty. The manslayer had to stay in the city of refuge as long as the current high priest was in office ([Nm 35:22–28](#)). That would be a considerable hardship in some cases. It meant either separation from one's family or the expense and risk of moving from one's ancestral land and trying to make a livelihood in a new city.

See also Asylum; Civil Law and Justice.

Cities of the Plain

A group of five cities located in the plain or basin of the Jordan River was also known as the “cities of the valley.” This region was very fertile, which attracted Abraham’s nephew Lot when the need to separate their large flocks and herds arose ([Genesis 13:10–12](#)). These cities are named:

- Sodom
- Gomorrah
- Admah
- Zeboiim
- Bela (later known as Zoar)

Each of these cities was likely a city-state, meaning they had their own kings.

These cities play a significant role in the Bible in four key ways:

1. The region offered a place where Lot could settle, and he eventually chose to live in Sodom.
2. The five kings of these cities fought against a stronger force led by four kings from distant lands in the east. They were defeated, and their cities were looted. The invaders took a lot of goods and captives, including women and children ([Genesis 14](#)). Lot was among those captured, which led Abraham to launch a successful rescue mission. He recovered Lot, the other captives, and the stolen goods.
3. The cities later received God's judgment. Their sinfulness was so severe that even Abraham's intercession could not save them ([Genesis 18:22–33](#)). Their evil is highlighted by the story of the mob in Sodom attempting to harm Lot's guests ([Genesis 19](#)). Soon after, Lot and his family were warned to flee before the cities were destroyed. Brimstone and fire rained down, wiping out the cities and drastically altering the landscape.
4. The destruction of these cities is mentioned in many other parts of the Old and New Testaments as a warning of divine punishment for sin ([Isaiah 3:9](#); [Jeremiah 50:40](#); [Ezekiel 16:46–56](#); [Matthew 10:15](#); [Romans 9:29](#)).

Citizenship

In the New Testament, this term has two meanings:

1. Belonging to the city or city-state where one was born and raised.
2. The status of sharing the privileges and responsibilities of the Roman Empire.

So, the apostle Paul claimed to be a citizen of both Tarsus and Rome ([Acts 21:39](#); [22:27–28](#)).

The right of Roman citizenship was most commonly acquired by birth, as was true of Paul. A child's status with married parents is based on the father's status at the time of conception. The status of a child born outside of marriage was determined by that of the mother at the child's birth. Slaves automatically became citizens when freed by their masters. Though called "freedmen," they were often denied the rights of freeborn citizens.

Greedy officials often sold the right of citizenship for a high price. The official, Claudius Lysias, received his citizenship that way ([Acts 22:28](#)). Citizen rights could also be granted by treaty or command by the empire. After a war in Italy called the Social War (around 90–85 BC), Rome gave citizenship to everyone living in Italy. Later, Julius Caesar gave citizenship rights to people living in Roman colonies in Gaul (which is now France) and Asia Minor (which is now Turkey). According to the census of the emperor Augustus (mentioned in [Luke 2:1](#)), there were approximately 4,233,000 Roman citizens at the time of Jesus's birth. By the time of Paul's ministry, the number had reached 6,000,000.

Roman citizens often had to provide proof of their citizenship. This was usually done by checking the census archives (official lists of citizens), which recorded every citizen's name. Also, freeborn citizens had a small wooden birth certificate, which listed their birth status. Military documents and tax records also listed the names of registered citizens. Also, every Roman citizen had three names, whereas noncitizens generally had only one.

Roman citizenship granted many rights. These included the right to vote, to hold office, and to serve in the military. Citizens could buy, own, sell, and gift property. They could enter into contracts, have a fair trial, and appeal to Caesar. So, upon mentioning his Roman citizenship, the officials at Philippi apologized for imprisoning him without a trial ([Acts 16:38–39](#)). He also avoided a whipping

in Jerusalem and was able to request a trial before Caesar ([Acts 22:24–29](#); [25:10–12](#); compare [26:32](#)).

Citron Tree

A tree native to Asia that produces fruit similar to lemons with a thick, fragrant rind. The citron tree (*Tetraclinis articulata*) usually grows no taller than 9.1 meters (30 feet). It has hard, dark-colored, long-lasting, fragrant wood that can be polished to a fine finish.

This wood was one of the most valuable woods in ancient times. People used it extensively for making fine furniture and cabinets. It was commonly said to be worth its weight in gold. Because of its natural resin content, the wood resists decay and remains mostly undamaged by insects.

City

The Bible does not generally distinguish between a city, town, or village. There is an emphasis upon walls and fortifications ([Leviticus 25:29–31](#); [Joshua 19:35](#)). The Bible repeats references to towers, gates, and sieges. So, cities provided the primary security for the surrounding towns and villages.

Ancient Times

Practical Requirements

Settled communities depended upon a controlled food supply. Unlike city dwellers, nomads (people who moved from place to place) lived in tents that they could carry as they searched for food. There is a contrast between settled city life and the nomadic experience. The Bible shows this difference when it talks about Abraham, who lived a partly nomadic life: "For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God" ([Hebrews 11:10](#)).

The First Biblical City

The first biblical reference to a city is in [Genesis 4:17](#). The Hebrew verb indicates that Cain "was building" the city. It is probable that he did not complete it. Nor did he stay there. God earlier condemned him to a life as "a fugitive and a wanderer" (verse [12](#)).

The Genesis account is consistent when affirming that city life started early. The first human offspring were Cain and Abel. They produced food ([Genesis 4:2](#)). Cain was a farmer, and Abel a shepherd. [Genesis 4](#) shows both the need to produce food and the specialization that results. Jabal was a tentmaker (verse [20](#)). Jubal was a musician (verse [21](#)). Tubal-Cain was a metalworker (verse [22](#)).

Archaeological Evidence

Archaeological discoveries generally support the idea that cities began very early. Jericho is the oldest known city discovered in the land of Canaan. By testing wood from the site using carbon-14 dating, archaeologist Kathleen Kenyon determined Jericho existed before 7000 BC. Although less than 4 hectares (10 acres), it was a well-developed city. It had an impressive wall 1.8 meters (6 feet) thick. It also had a round stone tower almost 9 meters (30 feet) high with a staircase inside from top to bottom.

Jericho seems to be 3,000 years older than other Canaanite cities. Most of the great Sumerian cities like Ur, Ish, Lagah, and Uruk came later. They originated in the fourth or early third millennium BC.

Location and Name

Topographical Necessities

There were four primary considerations in the selection of a site for a city:

1. *Security.* The topography (terrain or location) of the ancient city must contribute to its defense. A city built on a natural hill tended to be less vulnerable than one built in the valley. Defenders had a substantial advantage if an enemy had to attack on an incline. The location of Jerusalem illustrates the importance of a secure location. Higher mountains surround it ([Psalm 125:2](#)). They first established Jerusalem on a limestone ridge. On the east the deep Kidron Valley protected it. On the west was the impressive Tyropoean Valley. The two valleys met, providing Jerusalem with protection from the south. To complete the security, they constructed walls around the city. They focused on the northern side, otherwise this would expose Jerusalem (compare [2 Samuel 5:6](#)).

2. **Water.** There was one absolute necessity for the existence of a city. This was a water source located in a convenient place. The city spring or well became the center of social communication. This was most true for the women. They were the usual water carriers. There are many Biblical examples of socializing at the village well ([Genesis 29:1-12](#); [1 Kings 1:38-39](#)). In general, valleys were the source for water. So the nearest spring to a city was often outside the walls. An attacking enemy might seize the water source. The water supply stored inside the city walls could run dry. This could cause a city to surrender. In Jerusalem, King Hezekiah constructed a water tunnel. He made it to neutralize the impending attack of the Assyrian king Sennacherib ([2 Kings 20:20](#); [2 Chronicles 32:30](#)). It was an amazing accomplishment of engineering. The tunnel extended more than 518 meters (1,700 feet). Now over 2,500 years old, visitors to Jerusalem can still see it today.
3. **Food.** Every city needed enough food for those who lived there. Ancient farmers lived in a village or city. They walked each day to their fields. A city could only exist if there were enough farmable fields nearby to feed all the people.
4. **Trade.** A city must allow for importing raw materials and exporting finished products. Being close to local and international roads was desirable, if not a necessity. The important cities of the Bible were along primary roads of business.

The importance of these four factors has changed over time. When strong nations like Rome appeared, cities could rely on standing armies instead of being built on hard-to-reach hilltops. The development of plastered water tanks and aqueducts made it possible to build cities farther

from natural water sources. For example, Caesarea, built by Herod the Great, was 19.3 kilometers (12 miles) from the springs of Mount Carmel. Trade routes changed with shifting international conditions, causing some cities to decline while others grew.

See also Archaeology and the Bible.

City of David

1. A southeastern hill (also called Ophel) in the present-day city of Jerusalem. It was the site occupied by King David as his royal city. It is also called Zion (for example, in [1 Kings 8:1](#)). David captured the Jebusite fortress of Jerusalem and transferred his capital to it from Hebron ([2 Samuel 5:1-10](#)). *See* Jerusalem.
2. An alternate name for Bethlehem, David's hometown, in the New Testament ([Luke 2:11](#)). *See* Bethlehem.

City of Destruction

KJV translation in [Isaiah 19:18](#) (nlt "City of the Sun"), generally understood as a reference to the Egyptian city Heliopolis.

See also Heliopolis.

City of Destruction

A phrase in [Isaiah 19:18](#) in the King James Version of the Bible. Most Bible scholars believe this refers to Heliopolis, an ancient Egyptian city.

See Heliopolis.

City of Palms

Phrase referring to Jericho, so named for its many palms ([Dt 34:3](#)). *See* Jericho.

City of Salt

City located near the Dead Sea, assigned to Judah's tribe for an inheritance ([Jos 15:62](#)).

City of the Sun

Phrase in [Isaiah 19:18](#), generally taken as a reference to the Egyptian city Heliopolis. *See* Heliopolis.

City of the Sun

A phrase in [Isaiah 19:18](#) that many Bible scholars believe refers to Heliopolis, an ancient Egyptian city. Heliopolis means "City of the Sun" in Greek. The city was a major center for sun worship in ancient Egypt, which explains why it was called the "City of the Sun." Some Hebrew manuscripts read *'ir ha-heres* ("City of Destruction") instead, possibly reflecting a scribal variation or intentional alteration.

See Heliopolis.

Civil Law and Justice

Civil law deals with private disputes between individuals, such as those about debt, divorce, inheritance, or other relationships. Criminal law, on the other hand, deals with crimes like murder, treason, or theft. In civil cases, the guilty party must compensate the victim appropriately.

This distinction between civil and criminal law is very different from biblical thinking. Almost all offenses were handled by private prosecution. If someone was murdered, their relatives were responsible for killing the murderer or chasing him to the nearest city of refuge for a trial.

In Israel, all offenses had a religious dimension: theft or adultery was not only an offense against a neighbor but also a sin against God. This meant that every Israelite would be shocked by such behavior and would want it punished. If these acts continued, God might step in to punish the individual, their family, or even the whole nation. This religious aspect made every offense seem like a crime, even though most prosecutions were left to individuals.

See also Courts and Trials; Criminal Law and Punishment; Dietary Laws; Divorce; Divorce, Certificate of; Hammurabi, Law Code of; Law, Biblical Concept of; Leviticus, Book of; Marriage, Marriage Customs; Commandments, The Ten.

Clauda

The ancient name (and variant spelling) of a small island south of Crete ([Acts 27:16](#)).

See Cauda.

Claudia

A Christian woman known to the apostle Paul and to Timothy ([2 Timothy 4:21](#)).

Claudius

Claudius was the emperor of the Roman Empire from AD 41 to 54. He is mentioned two times in the New Testament ([Acts 11:28](#); [18:2](#)).

Early Life and Rise to Power

Claudius was born in 10 BC in Lyon, a city in what is now France. His full name was Tiberius Claudius Germanicus. He was the nephew of Emperor Tiberius and the grandson of Livia, who was the wife of Augustus.

In AD 37, Emperor Caligula made Claudius a consul (a high government leader). When Caligula died, the Praetorian Guard (the emperor's bodyguards) chose Claudius to be the next emperor. The Roman Senate agreed with their choice.

Claudius's Early Rule and Friendship with Herod Agrippa

When Claudius became emperor, he tried to repair the damage caused by Caligula's harsh rule. Caligula had treated many people badly, including the Jewish people in Alexandria, Egypt.

Claudius stopped the persecution of Jews there. The Jewish historian Josephus said Claudius sent an important message to Egypt. In it, Claudius said: "Tiberius Claudius Caesar Augustus Germanicus, high priest and tribune (official) of the people, commands this... I want to make certain rights and privileges of the Jews are not withheld on account

of the madness of Gaius. They should continue to have the rights and privileges they had before and be able to continue in their own customs.”

This decision showed that Claudius was friends with Herod Agrippa. Agrippa had helped Claudius become emperor.

To thank him, Claudius gave Agrippa control over Judea and Samaria. These lands had once belonged to Agrippa’s grandfather, Herod the Great.

Claudius trusted Agrippa so much that he removed Judea from direct Roman rule and let Agrippa rule it instead.

Herod Agrippa’s Death

Herod Agrippa did not rule for long. To please the Jewish leaders, he killed James, the son of Zebedee. He also put Peter in prison and planned to kill him after the Passover feast in the spring of AD 44 ([Acts 12:1-5](#)). But Peter escaped.

In the summer of that same year, Agrippa gave a public speech. He wore a robe made with silver thread that shone in the sunlight. He sat on his throne while speaking. The people shouted that he was a god ([Acts 12:22](#)). Immediately, he was struck down by an angel of the Lord. Five days later he died.

Claudius tried to stay on good terms with the Jewish people. But five years after Agrippa died, Claudius gave an order for all Jews to leave the city of Rome.

Luke wrote that Aquila and Priscilla were among those forced to leave ([Acts 18:2](#)). The Roman writer Suetonius explained that Claudius expelled the Jews because they were often rioting. He said the riots were started by someone named “Chrestus.”

“Chrestus” was a common name for slaves, but it sounded almost the same as “Christus,” which is Latin for Christ.

Suetonius may have meant that these troubles were related to people following Christ. He seemed to think “Chrestus” was the leader of a new movement, probably Christianity.

Famines During Claudius’s Rule

When Claudius became emperor, there was a serious shortage of grain. This was mostly due to poor leadership under Caligula before him (compare [Acts 11:28](#)). The historian Josephus wrote that during Claudius’s time, Judea, Samaria, and Galilee all suffered from famine.

To help the people in Jerusalem, Helena (the mother of the king of Adiabene) bought grain from Egypt and dried figs from Cyprus. This likely happened around AD 45–46.

Other ancient writers, such as Tacitus, Suetonius, and Eusebius, also said that famines happened often in Rome and other places. The harvests were small, and food was not shared or delivered well.

Claudius’s Family

Claudius had a complicated family life. His third wife, Messalina, was put to death because of her immoral actions.

After that, Claudius married his niece, Agrippina. She had a son named Nero from a previous marriage.

Agrippina wanted Nero to become emperor instead of Claudius’s own son, Britannicus. Britannicus was the son of Messalina and was supposed to be the next emperor.

Claudius’s Death and Legacy

In AD 54, Claudius chose Britannicus to become the next emperor.

But Agrippina wanted her own son, Nero, to rule. She poisoned Claudius so that Nero could take the throne.

After Claudius died, the Senate declared him a god. He was the third Roman emperor to receive this honor.

See also Caesars, The.

Claudius Lysias

Commander of the Roman garrison in Jerusalem who wrote a letter to the Roman procurator Felix concerning the apostle Paul ([Acts 23:26](#)). His title in Greek (chiliarch) identifies him as a commander of 1,000 troops. Although Claudius Lysias is unknown outside the NT, some information about him is supplied by the book of Acts. His surname Lysias is Greek. The Roman name Claudius was evidently taken at the time he purchased his Roman citizenship ([22:28](#)).

Stationed in the Antonia fortress overlooking the northern sector of the temple area in Jerusalem, he rescued Paul from a Jewish mob that was about to kill him there. He allowed Paul to speak to the Jews from one of the two staircases that led from the

Court of the Gentiles in the temple up to the Antonia ([Acts 21:40](#)) and prevented Paul from being scourged when he learned of Paul's Roman citizenship ([22:22-29](#)). Claudius Lysias sent Paul secretly to Caesarea under heavy guard when Paul's nephew informed the tribune of a Jewish plot to murder the apostle in Jerusalem ([23:16-35](#)).

How Luke, the writer of Acts, obtained a copy of the official letter about Paul written by Claudius to Felix the governor is not known, but the document provides an important vindication of Paul's character and conduct in the face of his opponents' accusations.

Claudius, Edict of

A message carved on a marble slab (a flat piece of stone) found in Nazareth. The message warns people not to steal from graves. It was likely written when Claudius was the Roman emperor, between the years 41 and 54 AD. *See* Inscriptions.

Clay

See Minerals and Metals; Pottery.

Clay Tablet

See Writing.

Cleanness and Uncleanness, Regulations Concerning

In ancient Hebrew religious practice, God gave rules about what was "clean" (acceptable to God) and "unclean" (not acceptable to God). These rules affected different parts of life:

1. Physical cleanness: rules about the body, food, and daily life
2. Religious ritual cleanness: rules about worship and ceremonies
3. Moral cleanness: rules about right and wrong behavior
4. Spiritual cleanness: rules about having a right relationship with God

These different types of cleanness were connected. For example, following the physical rules about clean and unclean things showed that a person wanted to be pure in their heart and close to God.

The Old Testament shows that God wanted to have a close relationship with his people. He showed this by giving his laws to Moses. These laws helped people understand what God was like and how he wanted them to live.

God was different from the false gods that other nations worshiped. The Canaanites worshiped gods called Baals, who were unpredictable and cruel. No one expected these false gods to be reliable or to do what was right.

But the Lord, Israel's God, was different. God always:

- Kept his promises
- Spoke clearly through his chosen prophets
- Treated everyone equally under his law

The law showed both God's character and his plan for individuals and the whole nation. Everyone had to follow God's law, even the high priest and the king.

God also showed his faithfulness by acting in history to:

- Protect his people
- Judge those who did wrong (both his people and their enemies)
- Work out his plan to save all people

The book of Leviticus explains what it means to be "clean" before God. Since God himself gave these laws, people had to follow his rules when they wanted to approach him in worship. He gave them specific religious rituals to follow. These rituals had two purposes:

1. To show people how sinners (those who did wrong) could come to God
2. To show how God made a way for his people to become pure and acceptable to him

This system of cleanness was described in the Psalms: "Who may ascend the hill of the LORD? Who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean

hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to an idol or swear deceitfully.” ([Psalm 24:3-4](#)). Being clean before God depends on two things:

1. What people do on the outside
2. Their personal connection with God in their heart

No one can perfectly follow all of God's rules about right and wrong. This means people must depend completely on God's help. In God's law, God explained how he would help people become clean and acceptable to him.

Preview

- Early History: How Did These Rules Begin?
- Laws from Leviticus: What Did God Command About Being Clean?
- Purification Ceremonies: How Did People Become Clean Again?
- New Testament Perspective: What Did Jesus Teach About Cleanness?

Early History: How Did These Rules Begin?

Non-Jewish Religious Background

Many ancient cultures had their own ideas about what was clean and unclean. People who were not Jewish (called "gentiles") influenced how these ideas developed.

In every major religion around the world, people felt that doing wrong things made them unclean. Many religions had special ceremonies to make people clean again, often using water for washing.

The Hebrew people (ancient Jews) had rules about staying away from certain things:

- Some things because they were too holy
- Other things because they were unclean

These rules were similar to the forbidden practices in other ancient religions, including some religions that the early Hebrew people encountered.

When we compare the ancient Hebrew religion with other ancient religions, we can easily see some similarities. This is not surprising. However, the Hebrew religion also had many unique features that made it different from other religions. These differences are important to understand.

Laws from Leviticus: What Did God Command About Being Clean?

Ceremonial and Moral Law

In the Old Testament, there is a strong connection between the external ceremonial laws of Moses and the moral requirements, such as the Ten Commandments. Throughout the Old Testament, uncleanness and sin are often considered the same. Many passages describe sin as uncleanness (for example, [Leviticus 16:16, 30](#); [Numbers 5:11-28](#); [Zechariah 13:1](#)).

The relationship between ceremonial and moral cleanness can be seen in:

- Passages mentioning clean hands ([2 Samuel 22:21](#); [Job 17:9](#); [22:30](#))
- Passages mentioning a clean heart ([Psalms 24:4](#); [51:10](#); [73:13](#); [Proverbs 20:9](#))

The prophet Isaiah felt like he had “unclean lips” when he was in God’s presence. God touched his lips with a burning coal to make him clean. This showed that God had forgiven him ([Isaiah 6:5-7](#)).

When someone is clean before God, it means they are doing what is right ([Job 11:4](#); [33:9](#); [Psalm 51:7-10](#); [Proverbs 20:9](#)). When someone does wrong things against God, it makes them unclean ([Psalm 51:2](#); [Isaiah 1:16](#); [64:6](#)).

Causes of Uncleanness

In the laws that God gave to Moses, we can find many things that made people unclean:

1. **Forbidden Foods:** Some foods were not allowed. Laws about animals “distinguish between the unclean and the clean, between animals that may be eaten and those that may not” ([Leviticus 11:47](#)). God allowed his people to eat only the foods that he approved (see also [Deuteronomy 14:3-21](#); [Acts 15:28-29](#)).

2. **Diseases:** Some diseases made people unclean according to God's law, especially leprosy ([Leviticus 13-14](#)). In Bible times, many different skin problems were called leprosy, including swellings, sores, rashes, and the disease we now call leprosy. Naaman was healed from leprosy ([2 Kings 5:1-14](#)). Jesus healed many people with leprosy (for example, [Matthew 8:1-4](#); [10:8](#); [11:5](#); [Luke 4:27](#)). When someone had one of these diseases, everything they touched also became unclean ([Leviticus 14:33-57](#)).
3. **Bodily discharges:** God's law had rules about body fluids making people unclean for different amounts of time. When a man released bodily fluid during sexual relations or accidentally during sleep, he would be unclean until evening ([Leviticus 15:16-18](#); [Deuteronomy 23:10](#)). If someone had an unusual fluid from their body because of illness, they would be unclean for seven days after it stopped ([Leviticus 15:1-15](#)). Menstruation (monthly bleeding) caused uncleanness for seven days after it had ended ([Leviticus 15:19-24](#); [2 Samuel 11:4](#)). Sexual intercourse during menstruation made both partners unclean ([Leviticus 15:19-24](#); [20:18](#)). If an unclean person's spit touched someone, that person would be unclean for one day ([Leviticus 15:8](#)).
4. **Corpses:** Dead bodies, even only a part, caused uncleanness ([Numbers 19:16](#)). People who touched a dead body were unclean for a month. They would have to delay Passover if they missed it due to uncleanness ([Numbers 9:6-11](#)). The high priest was not allowed to bury his parents because of his special duties ([Leviticus 21:10-11](#); compare [Numbers 6:6-7](#); [Haggai 2:13](#); [Matthew 23:27](#)).

5. **Idolatry:** The worship of false gods (idolatry) was the worst thing that could make people unclean before God. The whole nation of Israel could be made unclean because of idolatry ([Psalm 106:38](#); [Isaiah 30:22](#); [Ezra 36:25](#)). Non-Jewish people were also made unclean by idolatry ([Jeremiah 43:12](#)). Because of this, Jewish people believed that contact with non-Jewish people would make them unclean. But when Jesus came, his message was for everyone. This challenged the old belief about staying separate from non-Jewish people ([John 4:9](#); [Acts 10:28](#); compare [Galatians 2:11-14](#)). Evil spirits could also make people unclean ([Zechariah 13:2](#); [Matthew 10:1](#); [Mark 1:23-27](#)).

Laws About Objects

Uncleanness could spread from one thing to another, like a disease. Dead bodies and insects infected whatever they touched ([Leviticus 11:29-38](#)). Only dry grain, water from springs, and water in a cistern could not become unclean. This rule helped people survive since farming communities often found dead insects and mice in their food and water.

Unclean pottery had to be broken, but wooden vessels needed to be washed ([Leviticus 15:12](#)). Even uncovered pots in a house where someone had died became unclean ([Numbers 19:15](#)). Everyone inside of the house also became unclean.

Things that belonged to people who worshiped false gods were considered unclean. When the Israelites captured items in war, they had to clean these items. They cleaned these items by putting them through fire or washing them with water ([Numbers 31:21-24](#)).

Clothes could also become unclean with a type of disease called "leprosy." This could affect wool clothing, linen clothing, and leather items. When clothing showed signs of disease (green or red patches), people had to test it. If these patches spread after the test period, they had to burn the clothing ([Leviticus 13:47-59](#); [14:33-53](#)).

Laws About Places

The land and people of Israel were holy, but they could become unclean by oppression or idolatry ([Joshua 22:17-19](#); [Jeremiah 13:27](#)). Jerusalem was a holy city, but it could become unclean by the sins of its people ([Ezra 22:2-4](#); [Lamentations 1:8](#)). It could also become unclean by the blood of the people who lived there ([Lamentations 4:15](#)).

Unclean people could make the temple unclean. For example:

- Hezekiah needed to cleanse the temple after Ahaz's idolatry ([2 Chronicles 29:15-19](#)).
- Nehemiah had to cleanse the rooms that Tobiah lived in ([Nehemiah 13:9](#)).
- The Day of Atonement was a time to remove the impurities of the temple caused by the Israelites' sins ([Leviticus 16:16-19](#); [31-33](#)).

After its destruction, the pieces of a leprous house had to be placed in an unclean place ([Leviticus 14:45](#)). The valley of Hinnom was a garbage dump in later years. It became a symbol for "Gehenna," a place of eternal punishment in the New Testament. The Israelite camp was a holy place. So, human waste was buried outside its boundaries ([Deuteronomy 23:12-14](#)). This prevented disease during battles, which is important because plagues were a problem in ancient armies.

Laws About Food

Certain animals were unclean and could not be eaten ([Leviticus 11](#); [Deuteronomy 14:3-21](#)). Animals were unclean if they died from:

- Old age
- Disease
- Injury

Animals that predators had wounded were also unclean.

Only animals that chewed the cud (chewed their food twice) and had cloven (split) hooves were clean. This meant many animals could not be eaten, such as:

- Pigs
- Camels
- Badgers
- Rabbits

Israelites could eat only those fish that had both fins and scales. Birds of prey, scavengers, and all winged insects were unclean except for hopping insects like:

- Locusts
- Grasshoppers
- Crickets

Many "crawling things" were unclean, including:

- Worms
- Lizards
- Snakes
- Weasels
- Mice

Eating blood was also forbidden ([Genesis 9:4](#); [Leviticus 17:14-15](#); [Deuteronomy 12:16-23](#); [Acts 15:28-29](#)).

Purification Ceremonies: How Did People Become Clean Again?

Purification by Waiting

God's law gave different waiting periods before people could become clean again. Many cases of touching unclean things only lasted until evening ([Leviticus 11:24](#)). Anyone or anything that touched a dead body was unclean for seven days ([Numbers 19:11](#)).

During a woman's monthly bleeding, she was unclean for seven days ([Leviticus 15:19](#)). This was also true of anyone who touched her. When a mother gave birth, she was unclean for seven days for a boy and 14 days for a girl. The mother would have to wait another 33 days for a boy and 66 days for a girl before she could touch holy things.

Purification by Water

Touching unclean things (like bodily fluids) required washing hands and clothing, as well as waiting a day before being considered clean again ([Leviticus 15:5-11](#)).

Purification by Ceremonial Substances

Certain substances were used in purification ceremonies, such as:

- The ashes of a red heifer mixed with water ([Numbers 19:1-10](#))
- Cedarwood
- Scarlet cloth
- Hyssop
- Blood ([Leviticus 14:2-9](#))

Blood was the only thing that could purify the altar because the altar was the place of sacrifice for sin ([Leviticus 16:18-19](#); [Ezra 43:20](#)).

Purification by Sacrifice

The main way people became clean again was by bringing sacrifices to God. Different situations required different sacrifices. Bodily discharges, except those from sexual activity, were purified by offerings of doves and pigeons ([Leviticus 15:14-15, 29-30](#)). Childbirth required a lamb and a bird to be sacrificed ([12:6](#)). Those who were poor could offer birds in place of an animal ([Leviticus 12:8; 14:21-32; Luke 2:24](#)).

In sacrifice, blood symbolizes life. So, giving blood represented death. The uncleanness of disease was transferred to the victim, removing the uncleanness ([Leviticus 14:7](#)). The victim substituted for the sinner. This substitution was key because only blood sacrifices could provide the moral cleansing needed for sin. So, blood sacrifice was the basis of all cleansing, including from disease.

Purification by Fire

Some uncleanness could only be removed by fire. For example:

- Unclean metal pots could only become clean again by being put through fire ([Numbers 31:22-23](#)).
- Incest was punishable by death, and the bodies needed to be burned ([Leviticus 20:14](#)).
- Idolatry required the total destruction of the objects by burning ([Exodus 32:20](#)).
- Cities dedicated to foreign gods had to be burned.

New Testament Perspective: What Did Jesus Teach About Cleanness?

The New Testament did not reject what the Old Testament taught about clean and unclean things. Instead, it gave these teachings new meaning. The New Testament emphasized the moral meaning of the concept and connected uncleanness with sin.

The Gospels were written in the context of Old Testament laws and their interpretation by the Pharisees and Sadducees. Jesus obeyed the law but challenged the rules that had developed around it. Jesus taught that uncleanness came from the heart and not from outside forces ([Mark 7:14-23](#); [Luke 11:39-41](#)). He criticized the Pharisees for focusing on outward ceremonies. Some say Jesus "internalized" the law, but it is more accurate to say he drew attention to how the law applies to a person's inner life.

In the Gospels, evil spirits are always called "unclean spirits." This shows that they are completely evil. It's important to notice that in these books, the word "unclean" is only used when talking about evil spirits. This shows how the New Testament changed its focus. Instead of talking mainly about being physically unclean, it focused more on spiritual problems like sin and guilt.

An important event happened in the early Christian church ([Acts 10](#)). God showed Peter, one of Jesus's closest followers, that non-Jewish people (called "gentiles") were not unclean. God wanted Peter to welcome them into the church. Because of this, a man named Cornelius, who was not Jewish, became one of the first gentile followers of Jesus.

Jesus taught that uncleanness comes from what is in a person's heart, not just from breaking religious rules. This teaching influenced Paul, who later wrote many letters in the New Testament. Paul, a

Pharisee who was faithful to the law, taught that nothing is unclean in itself ([Romans 14:14–20](#)). In his letters, Paul taught that people become clean in a new way:

- Through obeying God from their heart
- Through being made new by God (called "regeneration")
- Through Jesus's death, which has the power to make people clean from sin

Paul emphasized that being unclean was about doing wrong, not about breaking religious rules (see [Romans 6:19](#); [1 Thessalonians 2:3–4](#)).

Jesus's death on the cross was the final and complete way to make people clean from their sins ([Hebrews 9:14, 22](#); [1 John 1:7](#)). In the Old Testament, people sacrificed bulls and goats, but these sacrifices only pointed to what Jesus would do later. The Bible uses symbolic language to describe this:

- People who trust in Jesus are "washed... in the blood of the Lamb" ([Revelation 7:14](#)).
- They wear clean white robes ([15:6](#); [19:8–14](#)).

When Jesus died, he gave his blood (his life) because God the Father asked him to. This met all of God's requirements for justice. Because Jesus showed that God the Father is completely right and good, God can now forgive people who have done wrong. This matches who God has always been and always will be. God is both perfectly just (does what is right) and the one who makes people right with himself when they believe in Jesus ([Romans 3:24–26](#)).

See also Baptism; Circumcision; Uncircumcision; Offerings and Sacrifices; Law, Biblical Concept of; Dietary Laws.

Cleanthes

The leader of the Stoic school of philosophy in Athens from 269 to 232 BC. The Stoics were people who followed a type of philosophy (a way of thinking about life) that began in ancient Greece. This philosophy was called "Stoicism."

Cleanthes wrote a poem called "Hymn to Zeus." Another Stoic poet named Aratus later adapted

parts of this poem when he wrote his own poem called "Phaenomena." Centuries later the apostle Paul quoted the fifth line of "Phaenomena." He was speaking to a crowd on the Areopagus in Athens. Paul quoted the words: "We are His offspring" ([Acts 17:28](#)).

See Stoicism, Stoics.

Clement

Coworker with Paul at Philippi who worked side by side with him in the furtherance of the gospel there ([Phil 4:3](#)). Paul includes him in the group of those whose names are written in the Book of Life. Even though some early church fathers identified this Clement with the third bishop of Rome, there is no evidence to substantiate their claims.

Clement of Rome

A presbyter and bishop in Rome who wrote a letter to the church at Corinth. The letter was written around AD 96. This letter is probably the earliest Christian writing outside the New Testament. Dionysius of Corinth, who was bishop around AD 170, was the first to identify Clement as the author of that letter. Origen, a theologian who lived in Alexandria, and Eusebius, the first church historian, identified the writer as the Clement listed in the *Shepherd of Hermas*. The *Shepherd of Hermas* is a Christian writing from the mid-second century.

See also Clement, Epistle of.

Clement, Epistle of

Who Wrote the First Letter of Clement?

A letter written by Clement of Rome to the church at Corinth. It was written around AD 96. This letter is probably the earliest surviving Christian letter outside the New Testament. Around AD 170, Dionysius of Corinth recorded the earliest claim that Clement was the author of this letter. Origen and Eusebius also identified Clement as the letter's author.

What Is the Message of the First Letter of Clement? Why Was It Written?

The letter instructs several younger believers who led a revolt and ousted the leading elders of the Corinthian church. These young men may have wanted a more flexible system of ministry and recognition of their spiritual gifts. They were ascetics who practiced extreme self-discipline and restraint. They also claimed to have secret knowledge (*gnosis*) of the faith that was revealed only to the elite.

This letter was sent from the entire Roman church rather than from a single individual. The early churches did not consider themselves to be isolated loners. They knew they were a part of the universal church. This meant they were not immune to the events and conditions of neighboring churches. They felt responsible to warn and advise each other.

The letter frequently cites the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament). The author mingles New Testament and Old Testament themes. Clement exemplifies the heroes of the Old Testament as patterns for Christian conduct. The apostle Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians is the pattern for Clement's letter to the same church. Clement closely imitates [1 Corinthians 13](#) in chapters 49 and 50. He bases many of his beliefs on Paul's writings about the resurrection and schisms.

Clement focuses on morality and ethics. Occasionally, the letter is more like Hellenistic Judaism and Stoicism than Pauline theology. Clement also describes a hierarchical form of ministry where different leaders have different levels of authority. He also endorses the doctrine of apostolic succession. Apostolic succession is the idea that church leaders are connected to the original apostles.

Why Is This Letter Important?

Clement used many quotes from Jesus's teachings throughout his letter. He included sayings found in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. He also quoted Romans, 1 Corinthians, and Hebrews. Clement's letter shows us that by the end of the first century, many churches were already sharing and reading the writings that later became part of the New Testament. These texts were being copied and sent from one church to another. Clement's letter provides important evidence for the martyrdom of the apostles Peter and Paul. It also provides

evidence for Paul's mission to the "western boundary" (this might refer to Spain).

Cleopas

A follower of Jesus who talked with him on the way to Emmaus ([Luke 24:18](#)). Some identify this Cleopas with the Clopas of [John 19:25](#), but this is unlikely.

See Clopas.

Cleopatra

Cleopatra was the name of a queen of Egypt and her daughter, mentioned in the Apocrypha and in the writings of the Jewish historian Flavius Josephus.

1. Cleopatra, Wife of Ptolemy VI Philometor: This Cleopatra was likely the wife of Ptolemy VI Philometor, who ruled Egypt from 181 to 146 BC. During the fourth year of Ptolemy's reign, Dositheus, claiming to be a Levite priest and Ptolemy's son, brought the Letter of Purim to Egypt ([Additions to Esther 11:1](#)). This "letter" likely refers not only to Mordecai's letter ([Esther 9:20-22](#)), but also to the Greek translation of the book of Esther by Lysimachus.
2. Cleopatra, Daughter of Ptolemy VI Philometor: This Cleopatra, likely the daughter of the queen mentioned previously, was married to Alexander Epiphanes after his conquest of Syria. He ruled Syria from 150 to 145 BC ([1 Maccabees 10:57-58](#)). Later, Cleopatra's father, Ptolemy VI, removed her from Alexander as a sign of his anger and gave her to Demetrius Nicator during his invasion of Syria ([1 Maccabees 11:8-12](#)). Alexander was later killed in battle against the combined forces of Ptolemy and Demetrius. After Demetrius was captured and held in Parthia, Cleopatra married his brother, Antiochus VII (Sidetes), who became the ruler of Syria in 137 BC.

Cleophas

KJV form of Clopas, Mary's husband, in [John 19:25](#). See Clopas.

Cloak

Translation of several words referring to outer garments. See Clothing.

Clopas

The husband of Mary, one of the women who was there when Jesus was crucified ([John 19:25](#)). In the Greek text, it is not clear if Mary, Clopas's wife, was also Jesus's mother's sister or if she was a different person. There are three different ideas about who Clopas might have been:

1. Some say Clopas was Joseph's brother.
2. Some connect him to Cleopas, who appears in [Luke 24:18](#). EHowever, the name "Clopas" comes from Hebrew, while "Cleopas" comes from Greek.
3. Some think he might be the same person as Alphaeus. This would only be possible if James, the son of Alphaeus ([Matthew 10:3](#); [Luke 6:15](#); [Acts 1:13](#)) is the same as James, the son of Mary ([Matthew 27:56](#); [Mark 15:40](#)). Mary also has to be the same person mentioned in [John 19:25](#).

These are all possible ideas, but we cannot be certain. Clopas, Cleopas, and Alphaeus might all be different people.

Closed Womb

See Barrenness.

Cloth and Cloth Manufacturing

Since antiquity, cloth has been made from such natural fibers as flax, wool, cotton, silk, and hair. Linen (spun from flax), wool, and sackcloth (woven

from goat's or camel's hair) are the fabrics most frequently mentioned in Scripture. The Bible also refers to silk and cotton.

Fibers for Weaving

Linen

Flax was cultivated extensively in the Near East. In Palestine it flourished around the Sea of Galilee. The stalks were gathered into bundles and steeped in water, causing the fibers to separate from the nonfibrous stem. The bundles were then opened and spread out to dry in the sun. Rahab hid Hebrew spies on the roof of her house amid stalks of flax laid out to dry ([Jos 2:6](#)). After drying, the stalks were split and combed to separate the fibers for spinning and weaving into linen. Biblical references to flax include [Exodus 9:31](#), [Judges 15:14](#), and [Proverbs 31:13](#).

The type of fabric from which the priestly coats, girdles, and caps ([Ex 28:40](#)) were made is not stated, though the mention of linen breeches may imply that most, if not all, of the priestly garments were made of linen. The finest linen, worn by kings and nobles, served as a mark of honor or as a special gift. Joseph was given a garment of fine linen when he was made ruler of Egypt ([Gn 41:42](#)). When the Hebrews left Egypt at the time of the exodus, they took with them a high-quality linen and donated it to the tabernacle ([Ex 25:4](#); [35:6](#)). A craftsman who was trained to work in fine linen came from Tyre to work for Solomon on temple hangings ([2 Chr 2:14](#)).

Wool

Wool was another extremely important fiber in the Near Eastern economy. Wool could come in any shade from creamy yellow to tan or black. Sometimes to obtain pure white wool a sheep was kept wrapped to prevent its fleece from being soiled. Preparation of wool was a home craft in antiquity ([Prv 31:13](#); cf. [Ex 35:25](#)). Wool had to be washed thoroughly, dried, and then beaten to detach the fibers and remove the dirt before being carded and spun. Women spun their own yarn and wove garments for their families. Wool was the fabric of seminomadic, sheep-raising people; by contrast, the growing of flax required a more settled lifestyle.

Goat's Hair

A thick cloth that was extremely warm as well as waterproof was woven from goat's hair ([Ex 35:23](#),

26). Clothing worn by the poor was often manufactured from goat's or camel's hair. That coarse-haired fabric (sackcloth) on occasions was worn next to the skin as a form of penitence ([Neh 9:1](#); [Dn 9:3](#); [Mt 11:21](#)), as a mourning vestment ([Gn 37:34](#); [2 Sm 3:31](#)), or even as a prophetic protest against luxurious living ([Rv 11:3](#)).

Cotton, Silk, and Gold Thread

The people of Judea would certainly have been aware of cotton during their Persian exile (beginning in 538 BC). Cotton is mentioned once in a description of elaborate hangings in the Persian king's palace ([Est 1:6](#)). It is doubtful, however, that cotton was cultivated in ancient Palestine or even found there until after the exile.

Earlier in Israel's history, part of the tabernacle fabric was woven with gold thread, made from thin sheets of beaten gold cut into fine wire strips ([Ex 39:3](#)). A wider type of gold wire with a flat surface was used to adorn expensive Palestinian and Syrian garments. An ancient hank of fine gold thread was uncovered during excavations at Dura on the Euphrates River.

Spinning

In Bible times a spindle was a slender rounded stick, tapered and notched at one end and weighted at the other end with a "whorl" of clay, stone, glass, or metal to serve as a kind of flywheel. The thread spun at the tapered end was wound on the spindle. Another thin stick, called a distaff, held the fibers to be fed onto the twirling spindle.

Looms and Weaving

Weaving is the interlacing of "warp" threads stretched on a loom with threads of "weft" or "woof" passed from side to side over and under the warp. A primitive warp could be stretched around pegs or rods tied to a tree or roof beam and sometimes connected to the weaver's waist.

As weaving technique developed, three types of loom emerged: the horizontal ground loom, the vertical two-beamed loom, and the warp-weighted loom. In a horizontal ground loom the warp was stretched between two wooden beams fastened to the ground by four pegs. Traveling nomads could pull out the pegs and roll up the unfinished weaving on the beams. Delilah wove Samson's hair on a horizontal ground loom ([Jgs 16:13-14](#)).

The vertical two-beamed loom had its warp stretched on a rectangular wooden frame. In

addition to the two uprights and two warp beams, another beam was often used to maintain the tension of the warp, especially on longer lengths.

The warp-weighted loom, also on a vertical frame, was worked from the top down. The lower edge was weighted with loom weights, often shaped lumps of clay.

The degree of sophistication in weaving techniques in biblical times is seen in the specifications regarding fabrics for the tabernacle and its court. Hangings for the court were to be 50 yards (45.7 meters) long and probably a standard 2 yards (1.8 meters) wide ([Ex 27:9-18](#)). The tabernacle veil ([26:31](#)) and screen for the entrance (v [36](#)) were to be of "blue and purple and scarlet stuff," probably highlighted or embroidered with linen.

Garments such as the tunic that Jesus wore were woven in one piece with the selvage (edge of the weaving) coming at the neck and hem, the areas of greatest wear. A tunic woven on a narrow loom would be constructed of three pieces.

Cloth Dyes and Dyeing

Like the fibers, the dyes used in antiquity were also of animal or plant origin. A red dye was obtained from the body of an insect. Purple came mainly from two kinds of mollusks found in many parts of the eastern Mediterranean seaboard. The purest shade of purple could be obtained from mollusks found on the shore at Tyre, so a large industry developed there ([Ez 27:1-3,16](#)). Purple, the most expensive dye, remained the distinguishing color of kings and nobles. The first Christian convert in Europe, Lydia, was a businesswoman who sold the costly purple cloth ([Acts 16:14](#)). Yellow was obtained from the petals and flower heads of the safflower. Saffron (orange-yellow) came from the stigmas of the crocus that grew extensively in Syria and Egypt. Green was usually concocted from a mixture of other dyes. In Hellenistic times woad, a plant of the mustard family, was cultivated in Mesopotamia for its blue dye. Indigo was grown in Egypt and Syria. Dyeing in antiquity was often carried out in large vats, pictures of which have been found in paintings and on pottery. The ruins of structures including vats have been excavated at some Palestinian sites.

See also Dye, Dyeing, Dyer.

Clothing

Clothing mentioned in the Bible is usually referred to in such general terms as “inner garment,” “outer garment,” or “tunic.” Few descriptions give specific details of costumes or clothing, and it is therefore necessary to rely on paintings, pottery, decorations, statues, and bas-reliefs to show the clothing styles of the period.

Many ancient Near Eastern peoples (including the Israelites) kept flocks of sheep before the discovery of spinning and weaving and used the leather of their hides for clothing. Later, wool plucked from the sheep and from branches on which the fleece had accumulated as the animals brushed past was made into a feltlike fabric. Wool remained one of the most important fabrics for clothing throughout the biblical period.

As the seminomadic Israelite tribes became more sedentary in nature, flax was cultivated. It was woven into linen, which became a commonly used fabric. At the beginning of the middle Bronze Age (c. 2000 BC), fine silks began to be imported from China, and wild silk was produced in some areas of the Near East. Cotton was known in Egypt, but it does not appear to have been produced anywhere in Palestine in the biblical period.

Male Clothing

Early in biblical times the loincloth formed an important item of male clothing that was worn by all levels of society. Prior to 2000 BC, a type of loincloth was also the customary piece of clothing for all Egyptians, from the lowliest laborer to the pharaoh. At a later period, however, it appeared only as part of military dress ([Ez 23:15](#)). The inner garment (a tunic or shirt) was made of wool or linen. It had openings for the neck and arms, and appears to have had long sleeves, although some styles had half sleeves. It was worn next to the skin and fell either to the knees or, more often, to the ankles, frequently being belted at the waist. The Greek chiton (“coat”) and the Roman tunic would have been undergarments of a similar character. A man who was wearing nothing except this undergarment was considered “naked.” The young man who followed after Jesus at Gethsemane at his arrest was probably attired in this manner ([Mk 14:51-52](#)).

Generally speaking, the outer garment, formed out of a square-shaped piece of cloth, was referred to as a cloak or mantle. It had openings for the arms and was draped over one or both shoulders.

A Hebrew man was considered improperly dressed without his cloak, and one was forbidden to demand another’s mantle as a loan or pledge. At night, when the other items of clothing were removed, the cloak, which was often made of animal skin or wool, was used as a blanket ([Ex 22:26-27](#); [Dt 24:13](#)). Cloaks made of goat’s hair or camel’s hair, such as John the Baptist wore ([Mt 3:4](#); [Mk 1:6](#)), would have been particularly warm at night.

The coat of many colors that Jacob gave to Joseph was probably a striped shirt or tunic made of leather or wool felt. The entire garment may have been bound with a woolen border ([Gn 37:3](#)). The garment Hannah made each year for the young Samuel was probably a coat or mantle ([1 Sm 2:19](#)).

Cloaks were usually made with a hem; it was this that the woman touched when she came to Jesus for healing ([Mt 9:20](#)). The robe that Roman soldiers placed derisively upon Jesus to symbolize his kingship was probably a purple military cloak such as Roman officers commonly wore ([Mt 27:28-31](#); [Mk 15:17](#); [Jn 19:2](#)).

The Greeks used the term himation for an outer garment, similar to the robe that was placed on the prodigal son ([Lk 15:22](#)) when his father celebrated the son’s return with his best food, clothing, and jewelry. The cloak that Paul wore ([2 Tm 4:13](#)) may well have been a circular style of cape that was popular in the first century AD.

Garments were of different qualities and signified rank or office ([Is 3:6](#)). The scribes and prophets wore special mantles symbolic of their professions. Elijah wore a prophet’s mantle ([1 Kgs 19:13, 19](#); [2 Kgs 2:8, 13-14](#)). In NT times scribes wore special robes ([Mk 12:38](#); [Lk 20:46](#)).

Christ and his disciples probably wore tunics and sandals, and carried moneybags and staffs ([Mt 10:9-10](#); [Mk 6:8](#); [Lk 9:3](#); [10:4](#)). When Roman soldiers divided Jesus’ clothing after the Crucifixion ([Jn 19:23-24](#)), they cast lots for the inner garment, one woven without any seams and probably made of wool. This was the most valuable of Jesus’ items of clothing.

Footwear

In Bible times footwear consisted of shoes and sandals, which were an essential part of a person’s wardrobe ([2 Chr 28:15](#); [Acts 12:8](#)). Occasionally sandals had wooden soles, but usually they were leather. Sometimes they had an enclosed upper front and open back. The upper part was typically

made of open strips of leather, and sometimes the sandal merely consisted of a sole with thongs laced around the leg or ankle. A woman's sandals were considered an attractive and fashionable part of her wardrobe ([Jdt 10:4](#); [16:9](#)).

On a long journey through the country, one's sandals might be carried and saved for arrival in the next town, so that they would not be worn out. (Being barefoot in a town or city was a sign of abject poverty.) Since sandals were so open in design, one can easily understand the necessity for the ritual foot washing of a guest.

Shoes were not worn in the temple or on any holy ground ([Ex 3:5](#); [Jos 5:15](#)) and were also taken off when a person was in a house. It was customary to remove the sandals at a time of mourning. The shoes that the Israelites wore in their wilderness wanderings did not wear out ([Dt 29:5](#)).

See also Cloth and Cloth Manufacturing.

Cloud, Pillar of

Supernatural phenomenon of God's presence that guided the Israelites through the wilderness. *See* Pillar of Fire and Cloud; Shekinah; Wilderness Wanderings.

Cnidus

A port city located off the southwest corner of Asia Minor. The apostle Paul's ship passed by this harbor while he was traveling to Italy ([Acts 27:7](#)). During the second century BC, Jewish people had established a community there ([1 Maccabees 15:23](#)). Cnidus was originally built on an island, but today that island is connected to the mainland by a sandbar (a narrow strip of sand).

Coal

Coal in the Bible is a translation of several Hebrew and Greek words. It refers mainly to charcoal made from burning wood. The mineral coal that is mined from the ground is not found in Palestine (the Holy Land). People used glowing embers from wood fires for several purposes:

- For heating homes ([Isaiah 47:14](#); [John 18:18](#))
- For cooking food ([Isaiah 44:19](#); [John 21:9](#))
- By blacksmiths for metalworking ([Isaiah 54:16](#))
- In religious ceremonies, where coals from the altar had special uses ([Leviticus 16:12](#); [Isaiah 6:6-7](#))

The Bible also uses coal as a symbol in many ways. It represents:

- The infinite brightness and glory of God ([2 Samuel 22:9, 13](#))
- God's revelation ([Psalm 18:8](#))
- God's judgment ([140:10](#))
- Heavenly creatures associated with the throne of God ([Ezekiel 1:13](#); [10:2](#)).

In other places, glowing coals represent:

- Life itself ([2 Samuel 14:7](#))
- The hot breath of a huge beast ([Job 41:21](#))
- The danger of being harmed by sexual sin ([Proverbs 6:28](#))

Coat

Translation of several words referring to various garments. *See* Clothing.

Coat of Mail

Piece of armor, covering the body from the neck to the girdle, probably made of leather with small interlaced metal plates sewn onto it. *See* Armor and Weapons.

Cock

Adult male of the domestic fowl. *See* Birds (Fowl, Domestic).

Cockatrice

KJV rendering of serpent, adder, and viper in [Isaiah 11:8](#); [14:29](#); and [59:5](#), respectively. *See* Animals (Snake).

Cockle

KJV term for “foul weeds” in [Job 31:40](#). *See* Plants (Thistle, Thorn).

Codex

Earliest form of the book, consisting of sheets of papyrus or vellum folded and bound together and enclosed between two wooden leaves or tablets. *See* Writing.

Coelesyria

Literally, the term means “hollow Syria.” It was used somewhat loosely in referring to parts of the Jordan Valley. This designation is not found in the Bible but is mentioned a number of times in the Apocrypha, by itself in [1 Maccabees 10:69](#) and together with Phoenicia elsewhere ([1 Esd 2:17, 24, 27](#); [4:48](#); [6:29](#); [7:1](#); [8:67](#); [2 Macc 3:5, 8](#); [4:4](#); [8:8](#); [10:11](#)). It was the name commonly given to the approximately 100-mile-long (161-kilometer) valley that stretches between the Lebanon and Anti-Lebanon mountains after the time of Alexander the Great, but it is apparent from the use of the term by ancient writers that it did not always indicate the same territory.

Coffin

See Burial, Burial Customs.

Coins

Pieces of metal used and accepted as a medium of exchange. A coin has a specific weight and bears some type of authentication to make it easily recognizable. The word “coin” originally referred to a wedge-shaped die or stamp used to “strike” the metal blank. The first coins may have been minted in the late eighth century BC.

Preview

- Earliest Coins in Palestine
- Coinage from the Maccabees to Herod Agrippa I
- Roman Coins in New Testament Times

Earliest Coins in Palestine

Not until the time of Darius the Great (Darius I of Persia, 521–486 BC) did an official government-sponsored coinage become current in Palestine. Those earliest coins were oval-shaped gold darics, along with some silver coins.

“Dram” is another term for the Persian gold daric. It is mentioned in [Ezra 2:68–69](#) (kjv), where Zerubbabel’s caravan offered gold darics amounting to \$30,000 toward rebuilding the temple. This passage is the first mention of an actual coin in the Bible.

Almost at the same time that the Persian coins became current in Palestine, the widely popular silver tetradrachmas (four-drachma pieces) of Athens began to find their way to the mercantile centers of the Phoenician, Israelite, and Philistine coasts. Archaeologists have unearthed them in hoards throughout the eastern Mediterranean region. They continued to be used through the Persian period, which lasted until the Persian Empire was conquered by Alexander the Great in 334–330 BC. The coin was thick and heavy in appearance, but being of high-quality silver, it was in great demand for international commerce. Presumably Greek merchants found they could obtain the most desirable Asiatic imports in exchange for that particular form of currency.

The silver didrachma, or half-drachma, in general use in the Greek Empire from the fourth century BC, continued through Roman times. After Alexander’s conquests, of course, Greek coins were used throughout the Macedonian Empire from present-day Yugoslavia to Pakistan. They were almost certainly employed for business purposes in Judea, for example.

The shekels of the Phoenician trade centers of Tyre and Sidon, which had contributed substantially to the money supply in the Persian period, continued to be accepted in Judea even after the Alexandrian conquest. Typical of Sidon was a silver shekel portraying the battlements and walls of Sidon’s harbor, with a ship lying at anchor and two prancing lions in the foreground. A typical Tyrian shekel showed the god Baal robed and wearing a tiara. He was riding a hippocamp (winged horse

with the tail of a fish) on the sea, with a fish or dolphin beneath. The reverse showed an Egyptian-type owl facing right, plus a shepherd's crook and flail, both royal insignia in Egypt. The stater (or tetradrachma) found by the disciple Peter in a fish's mouth and used to pay the temple tax for himself and Jesus may have been a Tyrian coin ([Mt 17:27](#); rsv "shekel").

The talent, which represented a certain weight of gold or silver, was a common medium of exchange before the development of coinage. During the Maccabean period, John Hyrcanus saved the city of Jerusalem from destruction in 133 BC by paying a ransom from a 900-year-old hoard stored in David's sepulcher. Three thousand talents of silver were sent to the Seleucid king Antiochus VII Sidetes in return for his promise to withdraw his troops. Treasure plundered from the temple by the Romans in AD 66 is recorded as amounting to 17 talents. In gold talents that sum would represent the equivalent of the purchase price of about 15 large houses in a modern Western city.

Coinage from the Maccabees to Herod Agrippa I

Even though a native Jewish dynasty assumed the government of the Holy Land, it was many years before any indigenous Jewish coinage was minted. Presumably the inhabitants continued to use the coinage of Tyre and Egypt and of the Seleucid Empire for their commercial transactions. It was formerly supposed that silver shekels bearing images of the chalice and pomegranate cluster dated from the reign of Simon Maccabeus (142–134 BC); more recent archaeological discoveries prove that those coins date from the first Jewish revolt (AD 66–70).

When the time came to issue the first Jewish coins, the die makers faced several problems. No mint was available, and no local people were skilled in design or die sinking. Coins current in the Near East at that time, which showed a high degree of design and craftsmanship, each bore the portrait head of a ruler or a god. For the Jews to make such coins would have meant contravening the second commandment, "You shall not make for yourself a graven image" ([Ex 20:4](#), rsv). Not until well into Roman times was a coin struck in Palestine bearing a portrait head of a Roman emperor.

The earliest coinage of the Hasmonean dynasty (the regnal name of the Maccabees) was the small bronze lepton (plural, lepta) of John Hyrcanus I (134–104 BC), son of Simon Maccabeus. The

obverse showed two cornucopias with a pomegranate between them. That image symbolized the fertility that God had granted to the land. The reverse contained an inscription within a wreath, "John the high priest and the community of the Jews." Small bronze lepta from the reign of Alexander Janneus, son of Hyrcanus I, have been found in great numbers. They were evidently much in demand for transactions at the temple, where money changers converted the gentile currency of visiting worshipers into the more acceptable Jewish money. Undoubtedly Hasmonean lepta were the coins Jesus scattered over the pavement of the Court of the Gentiles when he overturned the tables of the money changers ([Mt 21:12](#); [Jn 2:15](#)). The lepton, or "mite," of bronze or copper, worth 1/400 of a shekel, was mentioned by Jesus on another occasion. He praised a widow's gift of two mites to the temple treasury with the comment that the rich "contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, her whole living" ([Mk 12:44](#), rsv).

Herod I came to power in Judea under the patronage of Mark Antony and secured the allegiance of the pro-Hasmonean Jews by marrying Mariamne, granddaughter of Hyrcanus II, in 38 BC. Herod was empowered to strike his own bronze coins. Although he had a free hand to introduce innovations, Herod's lepta followed tradition quite faithfully. The lepta carried an anchor with letters meaning "Of King Herod." The reverse bore the double cornucopias with a pomegranate (or poppy) between them. Herod also minted a large bronze coin with what appears to be a Macedonian helmet on the obverse and a slender tripod on the reverse, along with an inscription of Herod's name. Other designs he employed included wheat, eagles, and wreaths. He issued no silver coinage, relying instead on the available supplies of silver coins from Tyre, Syria, Asia Minor, Greece, and Rome.

After Herod's death in 4 BC, his son Herod Archelaus assumed control. Lepta from that period bore a hanging cluster of grapes with a Greek inscription, and on the reverse a two-plumed Macedonian helmet. Grapes were an allusion to Israel as the Lord's vine ([Is 5](#)).

When Herod Antipas began his rule, also in 4 BC, he had no authority in Judea or Samaria. That portion of the former Jewish kingdom was placed under the control of Roman governors, or procurators, appointed directly by the emperor himself. Most familiar of the Roman procurators of Judea was Pontius Pilate (AD 26–36). His bronze coinage

showed some bold innovations; his designs included representations of instruments used in the Roman religion such as the augur's wand (resembling a shepherd's crook in shape) and a ladle used in connection with broth prepared at sacrifices. The reverse bore a wreath enclosing the regnal date of AD 30–31. The two lepta put into the temple treasury ([Lk 21:2](#)) could have been lepta issued by Pilate or his predecessor. More likely, however, they were the Hasmonian lepta of Hyrcanus or Janneus, which were free of any taint of pagan Roman influence.

Herod Agrippa I (AD 37–44), grandson of Herod the Great, continued the family tradition of ingratiating himself with the Roman overlords. Many of Herod Agrippa's lepta have been found, showing a conical tasseled umbrella (perhaps symbolizing his royal protection of the people of Palestine) plus a Greek inscription indicating his reign. The reverse showed a bound cluster of three wheat ears and bore the regnal year as the legend.

Roman Coins in New Testament Times

The Roman "as" came into circulation about 348 BC as a bronze coin bearing the figure of an animal. The coin was named after the Roman one-pound weight, equivalent to 12 ounces (340 grams) in our modern system. At the time of Christ's birth, the Roman "as" minted for use in the Asiatic provinces bore the head of the emperor Augustus, with a laurel wreath on the reverse. A smaller bronze quadrans, or quarter "as," was also minted by the Romans.

Another bronze coin found in Greek and Roman currency was the assarion, first minted in the first century BC but still in use in the Christian period. One type was stamped with a winged sphinx, with an amphora on the reverse. It is still debated whether the coin described as a "farthing" in the *kjv* was in fact a Greek assarion or a Roman "as" or quadrans. The coin is mentioned four times in the NT, most familiarly in the question "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing?" (see [Mt 5:26](#); [10:29](#); [Mk 12:42](#); [Lk 12:6](#), *rsv* "penny"). There is no doubt that the *kjv* translators decided to make the coin seem more familiar to their readers by using the name of the smallest copper coin in circulation in England at that time.

The word translated "penny" in the *kjv* is the Greek form of "denarius," the normal daily wage for a laborer in NT times. In the parable of the laborers in the vineyard, for example, the master agreed to pay each man "a penny" for his day's work ([Mt 20:2](#),

kjv; *rsv* "a denarius"). "Two pence" was the amount paid to the innkeeper by the good Samaritan ([Lk 10:35](#), *kjv*). Because of the influence of the Roman denarius on British currency, the English penny has always been represented by the initial letter of its Roman equivalent.

When the denarius, or "penny," is recognized as a normal day's wage, the astonishment of Jesus' disciples when they were expected to find food for 5,000 people is better understood. They exclaimed that "two hundred pennyworth" of food would not feed such a crowd ([Jn 6:7](#), *kjv*); that sum represented more than six months' work.

As might be expected, the silver and gold coinage current in Palestine during the time of Christ and for the remainder of the first century AD came primarily from Rome. The larger silver coins, however, that are referred to as tetradrachmas or staters in the NT came from Egypt, Phoenicia, or Antioch. The silver coin most frequently mentioned in the NT was the Roman denarius or the Greek drachma. Since few drachmas have been found in excavations dating from the first century, it is possible that the term was used in popular speech to refer to the denarius (plural, denarii), which was approximately the same size as the average Greek drachma. Actually, few Greek cities were permitted by their Roman overlords to continue minting drachmas.

Caesar Augustus issued a decree for all the Roman world to be enrolled ([Lk 2:1–2](#)) in an empire-wide census just about the time that Jesus was born (6 or 5 BC). During his long reign (27 BC–AD 14), Augustus authorized a large variety of denarii. They generally carried his likeness on their obverse with the inscription "Augustus, son of the divine one" (that is, son of Julius Caesar, who had been voted divine honors by the Roman Senate).

In [Matthew 22:19](#) Jesus asked those trying to trick him with a question to show him a coin used to pay the government tax. They handed him a denarius bearing the portrait and inscription of Caesar ([Mt 22:21](#)). That coin could have been a denarius of Augustus, who had died some 16 years before, or of Tiberius (AD 14–37), who was then on the throne. The silver denarius of Tiberius read "Tiberius Caesar Augustus, son of the divine Augustus." The reverse showed the high priestess of the vestal order, flaming torch in hand, seated on her throne facing right. The title "pontif(ex) maxim(us)" referred to Tiberius rather than to the priestess.

See also Minerals and Metals; Money; Money Changer.

Col-Hozeh

The father of Shallum, who was ruler of the district of Mizpah ([Neh 3:15](#)). Col-hozeh, the son of Hazaiah in [Nehemiah 11:5](#), may be another person.

Color

The OT and NT have no exact word for “color,” although the word appears several times in our English Bibles. The words translated “color” have quite different meanings in the original languages.

The word most frequently translated “colour” in the kjv literally means “eye” and suggests “appearance” ([Lv 13:55](#); [Nm 11:7](#); [Prv 23:31](#); [Ez 1:4, 7, 16, 22, 27](#); [8:2](#); [10:9](#); [Dn 10:6](#)). Only [Leviticus 13:55](#) retains the translation “color” in the rsv. Other words translated as “color” in the rsv refer to facial appearance ([Dn 5:6–10](#); [7:28](#)), fabrics of variegated colors ([Prv 7:16](#); [Ez 17:3](#); [27:24](#)), stones ([1 Chr 29:2](#)), and breastplates ([Rv 9:17](#)). Joseph’s “coat of many colours” ([Gn 37:3](#), kjv) and Tamar’s “garment of divers colours” ([2 Sm 13:18–19](#), kjv) were either long-sleeved robes or richly ornamented tunics that served as a mark of preferred status.

In the NT, a word that means “pretense” is used archaically in [Acts 27:30](#) and was interpreted as “colour” by the kjv translators. They also added the word “colour” to [Revelation 17:4](#), evidently to clarify the meaning.

Though many colors are mentioned in the Bible, colors are not particularly singled out for emphasis. Natural colors are seldom mentioned in descriptions. Colors that appear frequently and that are most carefully differentiated are manufactured colors, especially dyes.

Colors Mentioned in the Bible

Because the Hebrews perceived color differently than we do in Western culture, it is sometimes difficult to translate precisely the various Hebrew words denoting colors. Thus there is often a wide variation in translations of such words in English Bibles. To provide a base for comparison, this article will follow the rsv except as noted.

Colors mentioned most often in the OT and NT are the following:

“Black” is the translation of five words in the OT and one in the NT, expressing varying degrees of darkness. The words describe the color of lambs ([Gn 30:32–33, 35, 40](#)), hair ([Lv 13:31, 37](#); [Sg 5:11](#); [Mt 5:36](#)), skin ([Jb 30:30](#)), horses ([Zec 6:2, 6](#); [Rv 6:5](#)), the sky ([1 Kgs 18:45](#); [Is 50:3](#); [Jer 4:28](#)), the day ([Jb 3:5](#); [Mi 3:6](#)), the darkened sun ([Rv 6:12](#)), and an invading army ([Jl 2:2](#)). Job’s “blackness” ([Jb 30:28](#)) has been understood as disease or sadness.

“Blue” probably refers to a blue-purple dye obtained from Mediterranean mollusks. A popular color, it was considered less desirable in antiquity than “royal” purple. Both dyes were produced in Tyre, which at one time had a monopoly on the manufacture of blue and purple dye ([2 Chr 2:7, 14](#); [Ez 27:24](#)). Ships of Tyre had awnings of blue and purple ([Ez 27:7](#)). Blue was used in the tabernacle fabrics ([Ex 26:1](#); [Nm 4:6–9](#)), the priests’ garments ([Ex 28:5–6](#)), in Solomon’s temple ([2 Chr 2:7, 14](#)), and in the Persian court ([Est 1:6](#); [8:15](#)). Blue is not mentioned in the NT.

“Crimson” is the English translation of three different Hebrew words. This red color of varying shades was derived from certain insects. The word describes certain fabrics in Solomon’s temple ([2 Chr 2:7, 14](#); [3:14](#)) and was used figuratively to describe sin ([Is 1:18](#)). The word translated “crimsoned” to describe garments from Bozrah ([63:1](#)) probably means “vivid colors” rather than a specific hue.

“Gray,” a color found only in the OT, is used exclusively to describe old age—as in gray hair or gray-headed ([Gn 42:38](#); [44:29–31](#); [Dt 32:25](#); [1 Sm 12:2](#); [1 Kgs 2:6, 9](#); [Jb 15:10](#); [Ps 71:18](#); [Prv 20:29](#); [Is 46:4](#); [Hos 7:9](#)). A different word used to describe dappled gray horses ([Zec 6:3](#)) probably means “spotted” or “speckled.”

“Green” translates seven words in the OT and two in the NT. Most of the words refer to vegetation and are descriptive of the fresh or moist condition of plants rather than their color. The following are described as “green”: plants ([Gn 1:30](#)), trees ([1 Kgs 14:23](#)), branches ([Jb 15:32](#)), pastures ([Ps 23:2](#); [Jl 2:22](#)), herbs ([Ps 37:2](#)), olive trees ([Ps 52:8](#); [Jer 11:16](#)), thorns ([Ps 58:9](#)), leaves ([Jer 17:8](#)), grass ([Mk 6:39](#); [Rv 8:7](#)), and wood ([Lk 23:31](#)). In addition to various plants, a dove’s wing ([Ps 68:13](#)), a couch ([Sg 1:16](#)), and a righteous person ([Ps 92:14](#)) are also described as “green.” Idolatrous worship practices took place under “every green tree” ([Dt](#)

[12:2](#); [2 Kgs 16:4](#); [Is 57:5](#); [Jer 2:20](#); [Ez 6:13](#)), although the word actually describes the luxurious growth of the leaves rather than their color.

Another word, “greenish,” is derived from one of the OT words for “green” and refers to disease ([Lv 13:49](#)) and fungus that forms on the walls of houses ([14:37](#)).

“Purple” was the most highly valued dye in the ancient world. Encompassing shades varying from actual purple to red, it was obtained from mollusks of the Gastropoda class. The first people to use the dye were perhaps the ancient Phoenicians, whose name may come from a Greek word meaning “bloodred.” At any rate, the Phoenicians monopolized the purple industry for many years. Some fabrics were described as being purple: those used in the tabernacle ([Ex 25:4](#); [26:1](#)), in the garments of the priests ([28:5–8](#), [15](#), [33](#)), in Solomon’s temple ([2 Chr 2:7](#)), in the upholstery of Solomon’s chariot ([Sg 3:10](#)), and in decorations of the Persian court ([Est 1:6](#)). Purple was customarily worn by wealthy people and royalty ([Jgs 8:26](#); [Prv 31:22](#); [Dn 5:7](#)). Mordecai was rewarded with a garment of purple ([Est 8:15](#)). Daniel was given a similar garment ([Dn 5:29](#)). It was worn by Assyrian soldiers ([Ez 23:6](#)). Jeremiah described idols that were robed in blue and purple garments ([Jer 10:9](#)). Ships of Tyre had awnings of blue and purple ([Ez 27:7](#)), and purple dye was an item of trade between Tyre and the people of Aram ([v 16](#)). It is used once to describe the color of hair ([Sg 7:5](#)).

References to purple in the NT are fewer than in the OT but affirm the continued economic importance of the dye. Purple clothing denoted wealth ([Lk 16:19](#)). Jesus was robed in purple by Roman soldiers ([Mk 15:17](#), [20](#); [Jn 19:2](#), [5](#); cf. [Mt 27:28](#), “scarlet”). The purple and scarlet garment of the harlot Babylon symbolized royal rank ([Rv 17:4](#)). Lydia of Thyatira was a seller of purple fabrics ([Acts 16:14](#)).

“Red” frequently refers to the natural color of certain objects mentioned in the Bible: skin ([Gn 25:25](#)), pottage ([v 30](#)), the eye ([49:12](#), though the word used here may mean “sparkling” or “dark”), a sacrificial heifer ([Nm 19:2](#)), water ([2 Kgs 3:22](#)), the face of a weeping person ([Jb 16:16](#)), wine ([Prv 23:31](#)), the eyes of one drinking wine ([v 29](#)), clothing ([Is 63:2](#)), a shield ([Na 2:3](#)), and horses ([Zec 1:8](#); [6:2](#)). It is used figuratively to describe sin ([Is 1:18](#)). A leprous disease ([Lv 13:49](#)), a spot on the skin ([vv 19, 24, 42–43](#)), and fungus on the wall of a house ([14:37](#)) were discolored with a reddish hue. The Red Sea is mentioned frequently in the OT ([Ex](#)

[10:19](#); [15:4](#)), but the Hebrew words thus translated actually mean “Sea of Reeds.” However, in the NT the Greek word is actually the word “red” ([Acts 7:36](#); [Heb 11:29](#)). In the NT, red is used to describe the color of the sky ([Mt 16:2–3](#)), a horse ([Rv 6:4](#)), and a dragon ([12:3](#)).

“Scarlet,” a brilliant red hue derived from certain insects, was used for fabrics and yarns and was highly valued in the ancient world ([Rv 18:12](#)). It is difficult to distinguish between “scarlet” and “crimson” in the Bible. A scarlet thread was bound to the hand of Zerah at birth ([Gn 38:28, 30](#)). The word describes certain fabrics in the tabernacle ([Ex 25:4](#); [26:1](#), [31](#), [36](#); [27:16](#)), the priests’ garments ([28:5–8](#), [15](#), [33](#)), rope ([Jos 2:18, 21](#)), clothing ([2 Sm 1:24](#); [Prv 31:21](#); [Jer 4:30](#)), lips ([Sg 4:3](#)), and soldiers’ uniforms ([Na 2:3](#)). Some kind of scarlet material was used during the ratification of the covenant at Sinai ([Heb 9:19](#)), for the cleansing of a leper ([Lv 14:4–6](#)) and of a house ([vv 49–52](#)), for covering the articles on the table of the bread of the Presence ([Nm 4:8](#)), and for the ritual of the red heifer ([19:6](#)). Matthew described Jesus’ robe at his trial as scarlet ([Mt 27:28](#)). The woman of [Revelation 17:3–4](#) was dressed in purple and scarlet and seated upon a scarlet beast. The luxury associated with Rome is suggested by the description of clothing of purple and scarlet ([Rv 18:16](#)). Scarlet, like crimson and red, is also used figuratively of sins ([Is 1:18](#)).

“White” translates a number of words found in the Bible. It is generally the color of natural objects such as goats ([Gn 30:35](#)), hair ([Lv 13:10](#); [Mt 5:36](#); [Rv 1:14](#)), diseased skin ([Ex 4:6](#); [Lv 13:4, 17](#)), manna ([Ex 16:31](#)), snow ([2 Kgs 5:27](#)), milk and teeth ([Gn 49:12](#)), horses ([Zec 1:8](#); [6:3](#); [Rv 6:2](#); [19:11](#)), a donkey ([Jgs 5:10](#), kjv; rsv “tawny”), wool ([Ez 27:18](#)), special stones ([Rv 2:17](#)), light ([Mt 17:2](#)), clouds ([Rv 14:14](#)), and fields ready for harvest ([Jn 4:35](#)). It is used to describe the color of curtains ([Est 1:6](#)), clothing ([Est 8:15](#); [Eccl 9:8](#); [Dn 7:9](#); [Mk 16:5](#); [Rv 3:5](#), [18](#); [4:4](#)), the garments of angels ([Jn 20:12](#); [Acts 1:10](#)), and a throne ([Rv 20:11](#)). It is used figuratively to describe cleansing from sin ([Ps 51:7](#); [Is 1:18](#); [Dn 12:10](#)) and the appearance of princes ([Lam 4:7](#)).

See also Cloth and Cloth Manufacturing; Dye, Dyeing, Dyer.

Colossae, Colosse

Ancient city in Asia Minor, located in the southwestern part of present-day Turkey, and remembered primarily for the apostle Paul's letter to the church there ([Col 1:2](#)). Colosse was near the Lycus River, a tributary of the Meander. The city flourished during the sixth century BC. According to Herodotus, an ancient Greek historian, when the Persian king Xerxes came to Colosse, it was a city of great size. Another Greek historian, Xenophon, related that Cyrus the Great, founder of the Persian Empire, had passed Colosse still earlier on his way to Greece.

Colosse was situated in the region known as Phrygia and was a trading center at a crossroads on the main highway from Ephesus to the east. In Roman times relocation of the road leading north to Pergamum brought about both the growth of Laodicea, a city 10 miles (16 kilometers) away, and Colosse's gradual decline. Colosse and Laodicea shared in the wool trade. Thus, the name Colosse was derived from a Latin name *collossinus*, meaning "purple wool."

In the apostle Paul's time Colosse was a small city with a mixed population of Phrygians, Greeks, and Jews. During his extended stay in Ephesus, Paul may have taught Jews and Greeks who lived in Colosse ([Acts 19:10](#)). Epaphras, a Colossian, visited Paul in Rome and informed him about the condition of the church at Colosse ([Col 1:7](#); [4:12](#)), then was later imprisoned with Paul ([Phlm 1:23](#)). Others from the Colossian church included Philemon, Apphia, Archippus, and Onesimus, a slave who became a Christian ([Phlm 1:16](#)). Subsequent history is silent on the church at Colosse. The city was weakened under Islamic rule and was eventually destroyed in the 12th century.

Colossians, Letter to the

NT epistle, one of four "prison letters" attributed to the apostle Paul. As with Ephesians, Philippians, and Philemon, Paul said he was in prison when he wrote Colossians ([Col 4:3, 10](#); cf. [Eph 3:1](#); [4:1](#); [6:20](#); [Phil 1:12–14](#); [Phlm 1:9–10](#)). He sent three of the letters to churches in Asia Minor and linked them with his colleague, Tychicus ([Col 4:7–9](#); [Eph 6:21–22](#)). That seems to indicate that he wrote them at approximately the same time and that Tychicus delivered them.

Preview

- Author
- Date, Origin, and Destination
- Background
- Purpose and Teaching

Content

Author

Though the tradition that Paul wrote Colossians stands on solid ground, many scholars today debate its authorship. Reasons for their doubts fall into two main categories—theology and style.

First, some scholars question Paul's authorship on theological grounds. Development of certain major theological themes in Colossians differs from the way they are set forth in the undisputed letters of Paul. In Colossians the doctrine of Christ is developed on the basis of a hymn about Christ in [1:15–20](#). There he is seen as the "firstborn of all creation"; all things owe both their origin and continuing existence to him. In him resides all the fullness of deity. His death is interpreted not as a victory over sin, law, and death, but as a triumph over the cosmic authorities and powers.

To some scholars that suggests that the Christology in Colossians is much more "exalted" than in any of the undisputed letters. Yet Paul characteristically regarded Christ as highly exalted. He declared Christ to be creator of all things ([1 Cor 8:6](#)) and set forth his lordship over the whole cosmic order by citing another hymn ([Phil 2:6–11](#)). Further, the kind of statements made about Christ in Colossians was demanded by the situation that had arisen in the city of Colosse. The heresy that had broken into the congregation required such statements.

Colossians also appears to teach doctrines about "the last things" and baptism that are somewhat different from the doctrines in the undisputed letters. In Corinthians, Paul based his teaching about the last things on the Jewish doctrine of the "two ages." Judaism taught that in "this age" the world is under the tyranny of the evil powers, but that in "the age to come" God would set it free. In contrast, Paul's teaching was unique in holding that the age to come had already come in the advent of Christ—though not in its fullness. Paul saw the time between the first and second advents of Christ as a period of conflict. Christ "must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet" ([1 Cor 15:25](#)). Christ by his mission is liberating the present age from the evil powers, but the conflict will not end until his second coming. Therefore

Christians live in hope of his future appearing. That future element of hope is not stressed in Colossians (though see [3:1-4](#)); rather, the emphasis is on a hope already present in heaven ([1:5](#)).

The doctrine of baptism in Colossians has been influenced by the stress on the realized aspect of hope. In his Letter to the Romans, Paul taught that baptized Christians live by faith in the resurrected Lord and are filled with hope for their future resurrection ([Rom 6:1-11](#)). In Colossians he declared that baptized believers have not only died with Christ but have already been raised with him ([Col 2:12-13](#); [3:1](#)). The hope for the future is not for resurrection but for the manifestation of the life that is already hidden with Christ in God ([3:2-3](#)). Further, in Romans Paul stated that in baptism Christians have died to sin, so they no longer need serve it. Colossians, on the other hand, states that in Christ, Christians died to what can literally be translated as the “rudiments of the universe” ([2:20](#)). Many interpret that phrase to mean the basic religious teaching of the world. In Colossians, however, a strong case can be made that the phrase means “the elemental spirits of the universe” (rsv). In either case, the emphasis, if not the meaning, differs from Romans.

Such theological matters have led many to believe that Paul could not have written the Letter to the Colossians. Rather, they see the letter as the product of a disciple of Paul who wrote at a later time. It should be noted, however, that the differences are of perspective or emphasis, not differences that result in contradiction.

The second reason for questioning Paul’s authorship of Colossians is literary, pertaining to vocabulary and style. The brief letter uses 34 words that occur nowhere else in the NT. Also, common Pauline terms are absent from passages where they might logically be expected. Further, the style of the letter, though similar to Ephesians, is notably different from other undisputed letters of Paul. In those letters the thoughts are usually developed in an argumentative style similar to the discussions of the Jewish scribes. Colossians is marked by stylistic features that one finds in hymns, liturgies, and early Jewish and Christian catechisms. But some obvious differences in theological perspective and literary style do not force one to conclude that someone other than Paul wrote Colossians.

Date, Origin, and Destination

The date of Colossians depends on where Paul was imprisoned when he wrote. Traditionally scholars have held that all four “prison letters” came from Rome. If so, Paul would have written them between AD 60 and 62.

The book of Acts indicates three places where Paul was imprisoned: Philippi, Caesarea, and Rome. Paul, writing 2 Corinthians before either of the last two imprisonments, suggested that he had already been in prison many times ([2 Cor 11:23](#)). Ephesus is a likely place for one of those imprisonments (cf. [Acts 19-20](#); [1 Cor 15:32](#); [2 Cor 1:8-10](#)). Consequently, an increasing number of scholars name that city as the probable place where Paul wrote the prison letters. If that is correct, Paul wrote Colossians sometime between AD 52 and 55. But the general consensus is that all the Prison Epistles were written in Rome, thus leading to AD 60–62 as the date of Colossians.

Background

To identify the teaching that endangered the church at Colosse is a difficult task. The problem is not insufficient data but the opposite. Historical research has uncovered a wealth of information about the religious beliefs and practices that proliferated in the first-century Roman world. Asia Minor was a particularly fertile region for religions. Many people even belonged to more than one religious sect, and it was common to select ideas and practices of several religions. Christians were not exempt from those tendencies.

Colossian Heresy

Paul gave no formal definition of the Christian heresy in Colosse. Rather, he dealt with a number of issues without precisely identifying them. If one is given only the answers to a number of questions, however, it may be possible to recreate the questions from them. The reader of Colossians must attempt to define the tenets of the false teaching on the basis of Paul’s response to them.

Some scholars have concluded that the heresy rose out of the flesh-spirit dualism that became characteristic of later Greek and oriental Gnosticism. The later Gnostics taught that the material order of things is evil, so only what is free from matter is good. Other scholars, noting Paul’s injunctions against certain food laws, festivals, sabbaths, and external circumcision, have concluded that the false teaching rose out of Jewish

beliefs. Since the tendency to blend a variety of ideas was so prevalent, both theories are probably true.

Paul regarded the heretical teaching as a “philosophy” based on human tradition (2:8). His prayer for the Colossians (1:9–11) and certain other remarks (1:26–28; 2:2–3) suggest that he was countering the notion that for certain people “philosophy” led to some special, perhaps magical, understanding. That philosophy was based on “the rudiments of the universe.” This phrase is open to two main lines of interpretation. First, the basic meaning of “rudiments” is “objects that stand in a row or series,” such as the letters of the alphabet. It can readily be extended to mean rudimentary principles or basic teaching. Such is the meaning in [Hebrews 5:12](#), where the term refers to the “first principles” of God’s Word. Second, the Greeks applied the phrase to the four physical substances they thought made up the world: earth, water, fire, and air.

A first-century BC Greek text, referring to the followers of the philosopher Pythagorus, uses several of the same words that Paul applied to the Colossian heresy. A messenger of the highest gods carries the soul through all the elements of the world, from the lowest of earth and water to the highest. If the soul is pure, it remains in the highest element. If not, it is returned to the lower ones. The required purity is achieved by self-denial and certain cultic observances. The upper air contains the sun, moon, and stars, regarded as gods who control human destinies. In addition, the atmosphere around the earth is filled with spirit powers who are to be revered. In that way, the elements of the world become associated with the gods and spirit-powers who hold all people captive and determine their fate. With the help of magical knowledge and cultic ceremonies, human beings could not only escape from the destiny imposed by the spirit powers but even manipulate them for their own advantage.

To summarize, the phrase “rudiments of the universe” can refer either to basic religious teaching or to the spirit powers of the universe. The statements in Colossians make the latter meaning probable. Through his cross, Christ has triumphed over the rulers and authorities and has publicly exposed them (2:15). They do not rule the world order; he does (1:16–20). The divine “fullness” dwells in Christ, not in a remote deity (1:19; 2:9). The spirit powers are under the authority of Christ (2:10) and owe their existence to him (1:16). The

“worshiping of angels” (a practice probably including homage paid to heavenly powers) is so wrong that it may have disastrous consequences (2:18).

Main Features of the Heresy

A major dogma of the Colossian philosophy seems to have asserted that God was remote and inaccessible. Two factors point in that direction. First, the fascination with the angels and spirit-powers just discussed seems to indicate that the remote God was accessible only through a long chain of intermediaries. Christ seems to have been regarded as one of them, perhaps enthroned above them. Second, the philosophy evidently held to a dualism that separated the high God from creation. To approach him, seekers first had to be delivered from the evil influence of the material order.

How could human beings short-circuit or manipulate the angelic star powers who hindered them from reaching the high God? How could they be delivered from the enslaving power of matter? The philosophy evidently offered magical wisdom and insight as the answer. Through worshiping angels and observing special days and cultic practices (2:16–18), seekers could placate or please the intermediaries and get through to the divine “fullness.” By voluntary self-abasement, self-denial, and the achievement of visions (2:18, 21–23) they could escape the pull of the material order. The practice of self-denial through abstinence from food and possibly from sexual relations (“touch not” in 2:21) seems to have been limited to special seasons for attaining the “vision” of God. Otherwise, the philosophy seems to have permitted freedom to engage in libertine practices (3:5–11).

Purpose and Teaching

A warning in [Colossians 2:8](#) points to the main purpose of the Colossian letter. The readers are admonished against following anyone who “makes a prey of you by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the universe, and not according to Christ” (rsv). A false teaching was settling in and threatening the health of the congregation, so Paul wrote Colossians to counter it.

Paul approached the heresy by contrasting its teachings with the correct teaching his readers had received in the traditions previously delivered to them, probably by Epaphras (1:7; 4:12–13). God through Christ had qualified them to be uniquely

his own people, his church (1:12-14). The proponents of the false teaching threatened to disqualify the Colossians from that favored position by persuading them not to hold fast to Christ, the Head of the church (2:18-19). Consequently, the traditions Paul cited mainly teach about Christ or about the church. The former are primarily related to the impressive hymn about Christ (1:15-20; referred to again in 2:9-10, the latter mainly associated with baptism).

Christ

In 1:15-20 Christ is celebrated as the preexistent Creator of all and as the divine Redeemer of all. The “all” has cosmic dimensions. It includes the earth and the heavens, the visible and the invisible, the church and the universal powers. All things, including the heavenly powers, owe their existence, sustenance, and destiny to Christ. He is not to be regarded as one of the heavenly mediaries. He is the preeminent one in whom all the fullness of God dwells (1:19; 2:9) and in whom human beings find fulfillment (2:10).

Paul gave special attention to the significance of Christ’s death. In the hymn of Colossians 1 he explained the reconciling work of Christ by the phrase “making peace through the blood of his cross” (1:20). He contrasted the past and present experiences of the readers. Formerly they were alienated from God both in attitude and behavior. Now they are reconciled “in his body of flesh by his death” (1:21-22). As a consequence of that reconciliation, God transforms human character.

The death of Christ not only brings about restored relationships between individuals and God, but it also liberates them from the hostile intentions of the “principalities and powers.” Those powers seem to be demonic agents who bring accusations against human beings—accusations grounded on a “certificate of indebtedness” based on ordinances (laws). Paul proclaimed to the Colossians that God had removed the ground of those accusations, nailing it to the cross (2:14), and that in the cross he had publicly exposed and triumphed over the accusers (v 15). Christ’s death was not a tragedy but a life-changing, liberating triumph over sin and evil powers.

The Church

The church is the “body” of Christ (1:18, 24), over which Christ is the Head and source of life (2:19). It is a community that the Father has qualified to participate in the heavenly inheritance with the

saints; he has delivered it from the powers of the evil age and made it participate in the power of the age to come, “the kingdom of his beloved Son” (1:13). The church, therefore, should not live in fear of the “rulers” and “authorities,” but should participate in Christ’s triumph over those hostile powers.

Content

In writing to the Colossians, Paul followed a standard letter form of salutation, thanksgiving, prayer, main body, and concluding remarks. The salutation (1:1-2) carries greetings to the church from himself and Timothy. Then follows a statement of thanksgiving for the good condition of the community (1:3-8) and a prayer that the Colossians may be filled with a knowledge of God’s will, which will result in worthy conduct (1:9-11).

The first part of the body of the letter summons the Colossians to praise and then quotes and applies the great hymn about Christ (1:12-23). Specifically, the first part begins with a confessional thanksgiving to the Father for calling them to be his own unique people (1:12-14). A hymn follows, celebrating Christ as the sovereign Creator and Redeemer of all that exists (1:15-20). The Colossians are participants in the results of Christ’s reconciling ministry (1:21-23).

The second part of the body of the letter describes Paul’s apostolic ministry (1:24-2:5). His was the task of making known the mystery of God concerning Christ to the Gentiles in general (1:24-29) and to the churches of Colosse and Laodicea in particular (2:1-5).

The third part of the body of the letter introduces Paul’s primary concern for the Colossian congregation: they are to follow the received tradition about Christ (that is, the teachings about Christ they had first accepted), and not to fall prey to the current false teaching (2:6-23). They are to walk in the light of the received tradition (vv 6-7), and they are warned against the false philosophy (v 8). The hymn of 1:15-20 is again referred to, here stressing Christ’s divine lordship (2:9-10) and proclaiming his victory over the principalities and powers (vv 11-15). Because of such a Christ, the Colossians are exhorted not to submit to the regulations and tenets of the false teaching (vv 16-23).

The fourth part of the body of the letter summons the church to a life befitting Christians (3:1-4:6). Those who have been raised with Christ are to seek

the things that are above ([3:1-4](#)). That means they are to put off the traits and attitudes listed in a catalog of vices (vv [5-11](#)) and to put on the traits and attitudes listed in a catalog of virtues (vv [12-14](#)). In worship they are to conduct themselves in a unified and orderly way ([3:15-4:1](#)). The so-called “household code” concerning marriage, children, and slavery ([3:18-4:1](#)) appears in a context dealing with worship ([3:15-17](#); [4:2-6](#)). The most pressing admonitions in the code are addressed to wives and slaves, groups that especially would crave the equality promised in the gospel ([Gal 3:28](#); note [Col 3:11](#)). So Paul probably used the code to call for order in the public worship service.

Paul concluded his letter by first stating that Tychicus and the recently converted slave, Onesimus, would inform the church about his circumstances ([4:7-9](#)), and then added a series of greetings (vv [10-18](#)).

See also Acts of the Apostles, Book of the; Apostle, Apostleship; Colossae, Colosse; Paul, The Apostle.

Comforter

KJV translation of the Greek word *parakletos* in [John 14:16, 26](#); [15:26](#); and [16:7](#). See Paraclete.

Command, Commandment

See Commandment, The New; Commandments, The Ten.

Commandment, the New

The New Commandment is Christ’s instruction for Christians to love one another. The term “new commandment” appears four times in the New Testament, all in the writings of John ([John 13:34](#); [1 John 2:7, 8](#); [2 John 1:5](#)). Jesus first gave this command to his disciples on the night he was arrested: “A new commandment I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you also must love one another” ([John 13:34](#)). This command appears in other places in the Bible ([John 15:12, 17](#); [Romans 13:8](#); [1 Peter 1:22](#); [1 John 3:11, 23](#); [4:7, 11-12](#)), but it is not called “new” in those passages.

Love as a Commandment

Jesus had already told his disciples to love their enemies ([Matthew 5:43-45](#)) and to love their neighbors as themselves ([Luke 10:25-37](#)). The “new commandment” focused on Christians loving each other. It did not replace the other two love commands. Jesus intended this command to create a strong and convincing testimony for those outside the church. It would show that:

1. His followers loved one another in a Christlike way.
2. True community can be found “in Christ.”
3. What Jesus said about himself and his mission was true ([John 13:35](#); [17:21-23](#)).

Jesus used the same word for “commandment” that described the Old Testament law, giving his new commandment the same authority. The Old Testament law also included commands to love ([Leviticus 19:18, 34](#); [Deuteronomy 10:19](#)). The apostle Paul referred to love as the “law of Christ” ([Galatians 6:2](#)), and James called the love command the “royal law” ([James 2:8](#)) and “the perfect law of liberty” ([1:25](#); [2:12](#)).

The word “commandment” had another meaning as well. Many Jews in Jesus’s time wrongly thought that obeying commandments would make them worthy of God’s blessing ([Romans 8:3](#); [Galatians 3:2](#)). However, Jesus made it clear that love follows from God’s blessing. It is not a requirement to earn it. For Jesus, the commandment showed how the blessed should behave. Disciples were commanded to love in the same way that branches are “commanded” to bear fruit: by staying connected to the vine (Jesus), Christians can love ([John 15:4](#)).

What Made It New?

The new commandment gets its special character from the “new covenant” ([Jeremiah 31:31-34](#); [Luke 22:20](#); [1 Corinthians 11:25](#)), which Jesus established at the Last Supper. Under the new covenant, God “writes” his law on believers’ hearts ([Hebrews 10:16](#)). This means he actively works in them through the Holy Spirit ([Ezekiel 36:27](#); [2 Corinthians 3:3](#)), giving them a new desire to obey him ([Romans 8:4](#); [Galatians 5:16](#)). The new commandment to love is the main part of the new covenant ([Romans 13:8, 10](#); [Galatians 5:14](#)). Obedience is therefore a gift, because “love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of

God" ([1 John 4:7](#)). Love is the result of faith ([1 John 3:23](#)) and is part of the gospel itself ([1 John 3:11](#)).

The close connection between the new covenant and the new commandment might explain why the command to love was called "new." Christ's coming was the beginning of a new age. John wrote, "The darkness is fading and the true light is already shining" ([1 John 2:8](#)). As Jesus prepared to return to heaven ([John 13:33-35](#)), he gave a single commandment. It was to guide his disciples until the Judgment Day ([John 5:28-29](#); [1 John 4:17](#)). Obeying the new commandment would mark them as Jesus's disciples during his absence ([John 13:35](#); [17:21-23](#)). The command was new because it had a special purpose in this new era.

What made the era new was that Jesus Christ's coming revealed God the Father in a way that had never been seen before ([John 1:18](#); [10:30](#); [17:6-8](#)). No prophet had ever been able to say, "Anyone who has seen Me has seen the Father" ([John 14:9](#)). Therefore, Jesus's command that his disciples love each other "as I have loved you" ([John 13:34](#)) was new and shocking by any human standard. No one had ever loved perfectly as Jesus did ([John 13:1](#)). Following his example of love was a new commandment. The greatness of Jesus's love led him to "lay down his life for his friends" ([John 15:13](#)). Similarly, John concluded that "we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers" ([1 John 3:16](#)). Love means never closing one's heart to a needy Christian ([1 John 3:17](#)). Instead, it means gladly sacrificing one's own good for another's benefit.

See also Commandments, The Ten; Law, Biblical Concept of.

Commandments, the Ten

List of commands given by God to Moses. The Ten Commandments are stated twice in the OT; first in the book of Exodus ([20:2-17](#)), in a passage describing God's gift of the commandments to Israel, and second in Deuteronomy ([5:6-21](#)), in the context of a covenant renewal ceremony. Moses reminds his people of the substance and meaning of the commandments, as they renew their covenant allegiance to God. In the original language, the commandments are called the "Ten Words" (from which comes the name Decalogue). According to the biblical text, they are "words," or laws, spoken by God, not the result of human legislative process. The commandments are said to have been written on two tablets. This does not

mean that five commandments were written on each tablet; rather, all ten were written on each tablet, the first tablet belonging to God the lawgiver, the second tablet belonging to Israel the recipient. The commandments pertain to two basic areas of human living: the first five concern relationships with God, the last five, relationships between human beings. The commandments were given first to Israel in the making of the covenant at Mt Sinai, shortly after the exodus from Egypt. Though the date of the Sinai covenant cannot be fixed with certainty, it was probably around 1290 BC. In order to understand the commandments, it is necessary first to understand the context in which they were given.

Preview

- The Context of the Commandments
- The Meaning of the Commandments
- The Principle of the Commandments

The Context of the Commandments

The commandments are inseparable from the covenant. The making of a covenant between God and Israel at Sinai was the formation of a particular relationship. God made certain commitments to Israel and in return imposed certain obligations upon Israel. Although Israel's obligations are expressed in detail in a mass of precise legal material, they are given their most precise and succinct expression in the Ten Commandments. The commandments set down the most fundamental principles of all Hebrew law, and the detailed laws contained in the Pentateuch are for the most part applications of the principles to particular situations. Thus, the role of the Ten Commandments in ancient Israel was to give direction to a relationship. They were not to be obeyed simply for the sake of obedience, as though obedience accumulated some kind of credit. Rather, they were to be obeyed in order to discover the fullness and richness of life in a relationship with God.

The commandments in ancient Israel were not an ethical code or compilation of advice on the fundamentals of morality. The covenant was between God and a nation; the commandments were directed toward the life of that nation and its citizens. Consequently, the initial role of the commandments was similar to that of criminal law in a modern state. Israel was a theocracy, a state whose king was God ([Dt 33:5](#)). The commandments provided guidance to the citizens of that state. In

addition, to break a commandment was to commit a crime against the state and the ruler of that state, God. Thus, the penalties were severe, for the breaking of the commandments threatened the covenant relationship and the continued existence of the state. This state context is important for understanding the commandments in their initial form.

The Meaning of the Commandments

The commandments begin with a preface ([Ex 20:2](#); [Dt 5:6](#)) that identifies the lawgiver, God, who gave the commandments to a people with whom he already had a relationship. The lawgiver is the God of the exodus, who redeemed his people from slavery and granted them freedom. The preface is vital, for it indicates that God's gift of law was preceded by an act of love and grace. The commandments were given to a people who had been redeemed; they were not given in order to achieve redemption. There are some variations in the manner of numbering the commandments. According to some systems, the preface is identified with the first commandments. It seems preferable, however, to understand the opening words as a preface to all ten commandments. In the notes on the Ten Commandments that follow, there is first an explanation of the original meaning, then some indication of the contemporary meaning.

First Commandment: Prohibition of Worshipping Gods Other Than the Lord ([Ex 20:3](#); [Dt 5:7](#))

The first commandment is in negative form and expressly prohibits the Israelites engaging in the worship of foreign deities. The significance of the commandment lies in the nature of the covenant. The essence of the covenant was a relationship, and the essence of relationship, from the biblical perspective, is faithfulness. God's faithfulness to his people had already been demonstrated in the exodus, as indicated in the preface to the commandments. In turn, God required of his people, more than anything else, a faithfulness in their relationship with him. Thus, though the commandment is stated negatively, it is full of positive implications. And its position as first of the ten is significant, for this commandment establishes a principle that is particularly prominent in the social commandments (six through ten).

The contemporary significance of the commandment is in the context of faithfulness in

relationship. At the heart of human life, there must be a relationship with God. Anything in life that disrupts that primary relationship breaks the commandment. Foreign "gods" are thus persons, or even things, that would disrupt the primacy of the relationship with God.

Second Commandment: Prohibition of Making Images ([Ex 20:4-6](#); [Dt 5:8-10](#))

The second commandment prohibits the Israelites from making images of the Lord. To make an image of God, in the shape or form of anything in this world, is to reduce the Creator to something less than his creation and to worship the created instead of the Creator. The temptation for Israel to worship God in the form of an image must have been enormous, for images and idols flourished in all the religions of the ancient Near East. But the God of Israel was a transcendent and infinite being, and could not be reduced to the limitations of an image or form within creation. Any such reduction of God would be so radical a misunderstanding that the "god" worshiped would no longer be the God of the universe.

In the modern world, the shape of the temptation has changed. Few are tempted to take power tools and shape from wood an image of God. Nevertheless, the commandment is still applicable and the danger against which it guards is always present.

Third Commandment: Prohibition of the Improper Use of God's Name ([Ex 20:7](#); [Dt 5:11](#))

There is a popular understanding that the third commandment prohibits bad language or blasphemy; however, it is concerned with the use of God's name. God had granted to Israel an extraordinary privilege; he had revealed to them his personal name. The name, in Hebrew, is represented by four letters, *YHWH*, which are variously rendered in English Bibles as Lord, Yahweh, or Jehovah. The knowledge of the divine name was a privilege, for it meant that Israel did not worship an anonymous and distant deity but a being with a personal name. Yet the privilege was accompanied by the danger that the knowledge of God's personal name could be abused. In ancient Near Eastern religions, magic was a common practice. Magic involved the use of a god's name, which was believed to control a god's power, in certain kinds of activity designed to harness it for human purposes. Thus, the kind of activity that is

prohibited by the third commandment is magic, namely, attempting to control God's power, through his name, for a personal and worthless purpose. God may give, but must not be manipulated or controlled.

Within Christianity, the name of God is equally important. Through God's name is access to God in prayer. The abuse of the privilege of prayer, involving calling upon the name of God for some selfish or worthless purpose or swearing falsely by it, is tantamount to the magic of the ancient world. In both, God's name is abused and the third commandment is broken. Positively, the third commandment is a reminder of the enormous privilege of knowing God's name, a privilege not to be taken lightly or abused.

Fourth Commandment: Requirement to Observe the Sabbath ([Ex 20:8-11](#); [Dt 5:12-15](#))

This commandment, once again, has no parallels in ancient Near Eastern religions; furthermore, it is the first of the commandments to be expressed in a positive form. While most of life was characterized by work, the seventh day was to be set aside. Work was to cease and the day was to be kept holy. The holiness of the day is related to the reason for its establishment. Two reasons are given, and though at first they appear different, there is a common theme linking them. In the first version of the commandment ([Ex 20:11](#)), the Sabbath is kept in commemoration of Creation; God created in six days and rested on the seventh day. In the second version ([Dt 5:15](#)), the Sabbath is observed in commemoration of the exodus from Egypt. The theme linking the two versions is creation: God not only created the world but also "created" his people, Israel, in redeeming them from Egyptian slavery. Thus, every seventh day throughout the passage of time, the Hebrew people were to reflect upon Creation; in so doing, they were reflecting upon the meaning of their existence.

For most of Christianity, the concept of "sabbath" has been moved from the seventh to the first day of the week, namely Sunday. The move is related to a change in Christian thought, which is identified in the resurrection of Jesus Christ on a Sunday morning. The change is appropriate, for Christians now reflect each Sunday, or "Sabbath," on a third act of divine creation, namely the "new creation" that is established in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

Fifth Commandment: Requirement to Honor Parents ([Ex 20:12](#); [Dt 5:16](#))

The fifth commandment forms a bridge between the first four, concerned primarily with God, and the last five, concerned primarily with human relationships. On first reading, it appears to be concerned with family relationships only: children are to honor their parents. Although the commandment establishes a principle of honor or respect in family relationships, it is probably also related to the responsibility of parents to instruct their children in the faith of the covenant ([Dt 6:7](#)), so that the religion could be passed on from one generation to another. But instruction in the faith required an attitude of honor and respect from those who were being instructed. Thus, the fifth commandment is concerned not only with family harmony but also with the transmission of faith in God throughout subsequent generations.

With the fifth commandment, there is little need to convert its meaning into contemporary relevance. At a time in which so much education is undertaken beyond the confines of the family unit, the commandment serves a solemn reminder, not only of the need for harmonious family life, but also of the responsibilities of religious education which rest upon both parents and children.

Sixth Commandment: Prohibition of Murder ([Ex 20:13](#); [Dt 5:17](#)).

The wording of this commandment simply prohibits "killing"; the meaning of the word, however, implies the prohibition of murder. The word used in the commandment is not related primarily to killing in warfare or to capital punishment, both of which are dealt with in other portions of the Mosaic law. The word could be used to designate both murder and manslaughter. Since manslaughter involves accidental killing, it cannot be sensibly prohibited; it, too, is dealt with in other legislation ([Dt 19:1-13](#)). Thus, the sixth commandment prohibits murder, the taking of another person's life for personal and selfish gain. Stated positively, the sixth commandment preserves for each member of the covenant community the right to live.

In the modern world, a similar statute prohibiting murder exists in almost all legal codes, having become a part of state law, in addition to purely religious or moral law. Jesus, however, pointed to the deeper meaning implicit in the commandment. It is not only the act, but also the sentiment underlying the act, that is evil ([Mt 5:21-22](#)).

Seventh Commandment: Prohibition of Adultery ([Ex 20:14](#); [Dt 5:18](#))

The act of adultery is fundamentally an act of unfaithfulness. One or both persons in an adulterous act are being unfaithful to another person or persons. Of all such crimes, the worst is that which signifies unfaithfulness. It is for this reason that adultery is included in the Ten Commandments while other sins or crimes pertaining to sexuality are not included. Thus, the seventh commandment is the social parallel to the first commandment. Just as the first commandment requires absolute faithfulness in the relationship with the one God, so the seventh requires a similar relationship of faithfulness within the covenant of marriage.

The relevance of the commandment is apparent, but again Jesus points to the implications of the commandment for the mental life ([Mt 5:27-28](#)).

Eighth Commandment: Prohibition of Theft ([Ex 20:15](#); [Dt 5:19](#))

The eighth commandment establishes a principle within the covenant community concerning possessions and property; a person had a right to certain things, which could not be violated by a fellow citizen for his or her personal advantage. But while the commandment is concerned with property, its most fundamental concern is human liberty. The worst form of theft is “manstealing” (somewhat equivalent to modern kidnapping)—that is, taking a person (presumably by force) and selling him or her into slavery. The crime and the related law are stated more fully in [Deuteronomy 24:7](#). The commandment is thus not only concerned with the preservation of private property but is more fundamentally concerned with the preservation of human liberty, freedom from such things as slavery and exile. It prohibits a person from manipulating or exploiting the lives of others for personal gain.

Just as the sixth commandment prohibits murder, so the eighth prohibits what might be called “social murder,” that is, the cutting off of a man or woman from a life of freedom within the community of God’s people.

Ninth Commandment: Prohibition of False Witnessing ([Ex 20:16](#); [Dt 5:20](#))

The commandment is not a general prohibition against lies. The wording of the original commandment sets it firmly in the context of

Israel’s legal system. It prohibits perjury, or the giving of false testimony within the proceedings of the law court. Thus, it establishes a principle of truthfulness and carries implications with respect to false statements in any context. Within any nation, the courts of law must be able to operate on the basis of true information. If law is not based on truth and righteousness, then the very foundations of life and liberty are undermined. If legal testimony is true, there can be no miscarriage of justice; if it is false, the most fundamental of human liberties are lost. Thus, the commandment sought to preserve the integrity of Israel’s legal system while guarding against encroachments on personal liberties.

The principle is maintained in most modern legal systems—for example, in the taking of an oath before giving evidence in court. But in the last resort, the commandment points to the essential nature of truthfulness in all interpersonal relationships.

Tenth Commandment: Prohibition of Coveting ([Ex 20:17](#); [Dt 5:21](#))

The tenth commandment is curious in its initial context. It prohibits the coveting, or desiring, of persons or things belonging to a neighbor (that is, a fellow Israelite). To find such a commandment in a code of criminal law is unusual. The first nine commandments prohibited acts, and a criminal act can be followed by prosecution and legal process if detected. But the tenth commandment, in contrast, prohibits *desires*, or covetous feelings. Under human law, it is not possible to prosecute upon the basis of desire, since proof would be impossible. While the crime involved in the tenth commandment could not be prosecuted within the limitations of the Hebrew system, it was nevertheless known by God, the “Chief Judge.” The genius of the commandment lies in its therapeutic nature. It is not enough merely to deal with crime once it has been committed; the law must also attempt to attack the roots of crime.

The root of almost all evil and crime lies within the self, in the desires of the individual. Thus evil desires are prohibited. If covetous desires are gradually eliminated, then natural desires may be directed toward God.

The Principle of the Commandments

The relevance of each commandment is understood in the underlying principle of the whole Decalogue. The principle of the whole is the

principle of love, the heart of Israel's religion. God loved Israel and called them in love. In return, he imposed one commandment upon Israel that superseded all others: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might" ([Dt 6:5](#), rsv). That is the central commandment of Israel's religion. How to love the invisible, intangible God is partly explained in the Decalogue. For the person who loves God, the Ten Commandments provide guidance; they point to a way of life that, if lived, reflects love for God and leads to a deeper experience of God's love. Therefore, the Ten Commandments continue to be a central part of Christianity. Jesus repeated the commandment to love from [Deuteronomy 6:5](#) and he called it "the first and greatest commandment" ([Mt 22:37-38](#)). Consequently, the Ten Commandments still serve as a guide for the Christian community.

See also Civil Law and Justice; Law, Biblical Concept of.

Communication

The act of sending a message from one place to another. In ancient times, people used different methods to send messages over long distances. Early methods included fire, light, and smoke signals. The Babylonians were the first to use a simple system called a heliograph. This used reflected sunlight to send messages over short distances.

Fire Signals

A Greek writer named Aeschylus told a story about fire signals. He said that around 1084 BC, people used fires on mountaintops to send news that Troy had fallen. The message traveled to Clytemnestra in Mycenae using about 12 or more fires.

In 587 BC, the Lachish letters described using fire signals to help Israel defend against the Babylonians. One letter concludes, "Let my lord know that we are watching for the fire signals of Lachish according to the signs my lord has given, because we do not see Azekah" (see [Jeremiah 6:1; 34:7](#)).

Later, fire signals were used in lighthouses (towers with lights to guide ships near the coast) like the famous one in Alexandria, Egypt.

Communicating with Sound

People have used loud sounds to send messages for thousands of years. Around 550 BC, Cyrus of Persia built a network of towers. Soldiers in these towers would shout messages to each other.

According to an old story, Alexander the Great had a very big horn-shaped tool (like a megaphone) that could make a voice travel several miles or kilometers.

A historian named Severus wrote that the Romans used brass tubes to talk along their defense wall in England.

The Hebrew people used a special trumpet called a shofar. This was made from a ram's horn. They used it to announce the new moon, the Sabbath, and danger ([Joshua 6:4](#); [Judges 7:16](#); [Hosea 8:1](#)).

People also used drum beats to send messages. Even today, Ashanti drummers in Ghana can use high and low drum sounds that match the tones in their spoken language.

Clay Tablets

Archaeologists (scientists who study ancient cultures by digging up and examining artifacts and remains) have found thousands of ancient letters written on clay tablets. By 2000 BC, the Assyrians used an informal postal service (a system for sending and receiving mail and packages) to speak with eastern Anatolia (Asia Minor). It used caravans (groups that traveled together) to travel between them.

Later, Assyrian roads were used by royal messengers to send mail. The postal officials in important cities managed messengers and mail. Clay tablets with a list of place names and the distances between them were used as travel guides. Historians use royal letters from Assyria and other parts of the Middle East to help understand ancient history.

Postal Service

When Persia gained power, they improved the Assyrians' postal service. The Persians built a "royal road" for government messengers, but it was open to everyone. It was more than 1,600 miles (or 2,574 kilometers) long. It stretched from Sardis in Asia Minor to Susa, the Persian capital near the northern end of the Persian Gulf ([Esther 3:13; 8:10](#)). Houses and inns were built every 15 miles (or 24 kilometers) apart. Forts and ferries were also built at important sites along the way.

Ordinary travelers could travel the full length of the "royal road" in around three months. Meanwhile, the Persian dispatch service rode on fresh mounts (horses or other animals that were well-rested). These were obtained at service stations and allowed the dispatch service to usually travel the same distance in two or three weeks. A Greek historian named Herodotus wrote that Persian messengers completed their rounds despite very bad weather.

Meanwhile, the Chou dynasty in China also developed an efficient postal system. By the third century BC, the Han dynasty of China and the Ptolemies of Egypt made the most advanced postal service in the ancient world.

Caesar Augustus, who lived from 27 BC–AD 14, created a system of communication that was able to connect all of the Roman Empire. In the Roman system, mail sent over short distances arrived quickly, but mail sent over long distances or over water took weeks. This mail system was not a benefit to the ordinary public. Rather, it was an added tax burden. Wealthy families could use their slaves to deliver mail, businesses employed could pay for letter carriers, and those who were poor sent mail with traveling friends.

In the Bible, Christian leaders in Jerusalem sent messages to the churches of Asia Minor. These messages were delivered by the apostles Paul and Barnabas ([Acts 15:22–29](#)). Later, Paul requested Timothy, Tychicus, and Epaphroditus to be messengers (see [1 Thessalonians 3:2](#); [Colossians 4:7, 9](#); [Philippians 2:25](#); [4:18](#)).

The Romans had a special way to share news in their cities. They used something called an *album*, a white-painted public bulletin board. It would display messages in the center of a city.

See also Travel.

Communion, Holy

See Lord's Supper, The.

Compassion

The quality of showing kindness, favor, graciousness, or mercy. In the Bible, God is described as being like a compassionate father to those who revere him ([Psalm 103:13](#)). Jesus Christ exemplified God's compassion through his

preaching, healing ([Matthew 9:36](#); [14:14](#)), concern for humanity's lostness ([Luke 19:41](#)), and ultimately in his sacrifice on the cross ([Romans 5:8](#)). The church is called to demonstrate compassion as part of the love Jesus commanded ([Matthew 5:4–7](#); [John 13:34](#); [James 2:8–18](#); [1 John 3:18](#)).

In the Old Testament, compassion describes an aspect of God's covenant relationship with his people. One Hebrew word for "compassion" comes from a root meaning "womb," comparing God's love to the love of a mother. God's compassion was always demonstrated through actions that affirmed his covenant with Israel. Despite Israel's rebellions, God still had compassion on his people ([2 Kings 13:23](#); [2 Chronicles 36:15](#); [Psalm 78:38](#)) and all creation ([Psalm 145:9](#)). Even when Israel feared God had withdrawn his favor ([Psalm 77:9](#); [Isaiah 27:11](#); [63:15](#); [Jeremiah 13:14](#); [21:7](#); [Hosea 13:14](#)), God's compassion would revive, and he would restore his people ([Deuteronomy 30:3](#); [Psalm 135:14](#); [Isaiah 14:1](#); [49:13](#); [54:7–8](#); [Jeremiah 12:15](#); [30:18](#); [Micah 7:19](#)).

In the New Testament, Jesus Christ perfectly reflected the Father's compassion in his interactions with humanity. He healed, cast out spirits, empowered others, and sent them to do likewise. Jesus fed the hungry and raised the dead. His parables, like the Good Samaritan ([Luke 10:33](#)) and the Prodigal Son ([Luke 15:20](#)), further illustrated compassion.

The apostle Paul listed compassion as a primary quality for the Colossian church to embody ([Colossians 3:12](#)). Compassion was an important part of the Christian community. The Greek word used literally means "to be moved in one's bowels," pointing to the core of one's inner feelings, similar to how "heart" is used today. This intense inner feeling should always lead to outward acts of mercy and kindness.

Conaniah

1. Levite and chief officer who supervised tithes, contributions, and the dedicated things given to the temple during the reign of Hezekiah ([2 Chr 31:12–13](#)).

2. One of the chief Levites during the time of King Josiah ([2 Chr 35:9](#)); perhaps identifiable with Jeconiah in [1 Esdras 1:9](#).

Concision

KJV translation in the text of [Philippians 3:2](#), meaning “mutilation of the flesh.”

Concubinage, Concubines

Concubinage is when a man lives with a woman (a concubine) who is considered either his sexual partner or a secondary wife. This woman has a lower status than his primary wife. Concubinage was practiced in many ancient cultures, especially in Mesopotamia. There, kings had harems, and even private citizens might have one or two concubines along with their main wife. The Bible also refers to both types of concubinage. Often, a concubine was a slave or captured in war ([Judges 5:30](#)).

Men might choose to have a concubine because it was a cheaper way to marry since no dowry or bride-price was needed. Having a concubine could also boost a man's prestige by giving him more children. These children were often recognized as legitimate by being presented to the primary wife, making them part of the family. The concubine also added to the household's workforce.

In the patriarchal period, concubinage was a common practice ([Genesis 22:24](#); [35:22](#); [36:12](#)), especially when the primary wife was unable to have children ([Genesis 16:1-3](#); [25:5-6](#); [1 Chronicles 1:32](#)). A concubine had certain rights, and her children could be recognized as part of the family and inherit property (for example, [Genesis 49:1-28](#) includes the sons of concubines along with those of the primary wives; see also [Genesis 35:22-26](#)). The Mosaic law did not forbid concubinage and included it in its rules for multiple wives ([Deuteronomy 17:17](#); [21:15-17](#)).

Concubinage continued during the time of the judges. Gideon had a concubine ([Judges 8:31](#)), and a Levite also had one ([Judges 19](#)). The mistreatment of this Levite's concubine by men from the tribe of Benjamin led to a bloody civil war ([Judges 20-21](#)). During Israel's monarchy, only kings could afford the luxury of concubines, such as:

- Saul ([2 Samuel 3:7](#))
- David ([2 Samuel 5:13](#); [15:16](#))
- Solomon ([1 Kings 11:3](#))
- Rehoboam ([2 Chronicles 11:21](#))

Royal harems were also common in other cultures of that time, including:

- Egypt
- Persia ([Esther 2:14](#))
- Babylon ([Daniel 5:2-3.23](#))

Although concubines were accepted in many ancient cultures, marriage between two people was seen as better. Concubinage was a result of wanting prestige and a large family but could sometimes lead to sexual freedom ([Ecclesiastes 2:8](#)). While concubinage was common in Greek and Roman cultures, it did not align with Jesus's teachings ([Matthew 19:1-9](#)).

See also Civil Law and Justice; Family Life and Relations; Marriage, Marriage Customs.

Conduit

A water tunnel or channel that carries water from one place to another. In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word can mean two things:

1. Small streams in the ground made by rain. In [Job 38:25](#), called a “channel.” In [Ezekiel 31:4](#), called a “stream.”
2. A simple trench like the one Elijah dug around the altar during his challenge against the prophets of Baal. Baal was a Canaanite god of fertility ([1 Kings 18:31-38](#)).

King Hezekiah constructed a water tunnel. He did this to bring water from the Gihon Spring to inside the city. The Bible also refers to this spring as a “pool” ([2 Kings 18:17](#); [20:20](#); [Nehemiah 2:14](#); [Isaiah 7:3](#); [22:9-11](#); [36:2](#)). The spring was originally outside the city walls, which was dangerous during enemy attacks. Hezekiah's workers sealed the spring's opening and created a tunnel to bring the water safely inside the city.

The tunnel built by Hezekiah expanded an earlier tunnel that was started by the Jebusites. The Jebusites lived in Jerusalem before the Israelites.

King David and his men may have entered Jerusalem through the first tunnel to defeat the Jebusites ([2 Samuel 5:8](#)).

See also Architecture; Siloam, Pool of.

Coney

Small, rabbitlike animal declared unclean in [Leviticus 11:5](#) and [Deuteronomy 14:7](#) (kjv). *See* Animals (Badger).

Confection, Confectionaries

The King James Version translation of perfumer in [Exodus 30:35](#) and [1 Samuel 8:13](#).

See Perfumer.

Confession

The admission of guilt or sin or a statement of religious belief. "To confess" can mean to agree, to promise, or to admit something.

Types of Confession in the Bible

The Bible talks about two different kinds of confession. The first kind happens when people admit their sins to God. They tell God about specific wrong things they have done ([Leviticus 5:5](#); [1 John 1:9](#)). When people confess this way, they accept that they have disobeyed God's law ([Psalm 119:126](#)). They understand that their wrongdoing deserves punishment ([Romans 6:23](#)). They also recognize that they have not lived up to God's requirements for holy living ([Leviticus 19:2](#); [Matthew 5:48](#)).

In Old Testament times, the chief religious leader (called the high priest) would confess sins on behalf of all the people ([Leviticus 16:21](#)). God expected the entire nation of Israel to confess when they disobeyed his laws ([Leviticus 26:40](#); [2 Chronicles 7:14](#)).

Many faithful Jewish leaders took confession seriously. Daniel, Ezra, and Nehemiah prayed to God and admitted their nation's wrongdoing. They agreed that God's punishment of their people was fair. At the same time, they asked God to show mercy and help their people ([Daniel 9:20](#); [Ezra 10:1](#); [Nehemiah 1:6](#)).

The second type of confession happens when people declare truths about God. They confess that God is in charge of everything ([1 Chronicles 29:10-13](#)). They also confess that God always shows love and kindness to his people ([Psalm 118:2-4](#)). People confess the ways God has helped them ([Psalm 105:1-6](#)). When people share these confessions during worship or in songs, the Old Testament calls this "blessing the Lord" ([Psalm 100:4](#)).

Confession in the Psalms

In the Bible, these two types of confession often appear together in special songs called psalms. Many of these psalms thank God and follow a similar pattern:

1. The writer admits their sin.
2. They describe becoming very sick or facing death.
3. They tell how they prayed to God and God saved them.
4. They share their song to thank God, as they had promised.

Many psalms follow this pattern ([Psalms 22](#); [30](#); [32](#); [34](#); [40](#); [51](#); [116](#)).

In the Hebrew language (the original language of most of the Old Testament), the same word means both "praise" and "confession of sin." For the writers of these psalms, these ideas belonged together. They would first admit their sins and accept God's fair judgment. Then, they would end by thanking God for his forgiveness and his power to save them.

Confession in the Christian Life

Both those meanings also occur in the New Testament. Christians confess that Jesus is the Christ and that they belong to him. "Therefore everyone who confesses Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father in heaven" ([Matthew 10:32](#)). Not confessing Christ is the same as denying him ([Matthew 10:33](#); [Luke 12:8](#); compare [2 Timothy 2:11-13](#); [Revelation 3:5](#)).

The Christian life begins with a public confession of faith ([Romans 10:9-10](#); [1 Timothy 6:12](#)). Details of this confession are provided in [1 John 4:2](#). The Bible teaches that Christians must also confess that "Jesus Christ has come in the flesh." This means two things:

1. Jesus is God's Son who existed before coming to earth ([1 John 4:15](#)).
2. Jesus became fully human and lived among people.

The Greek word for "confession" also means "saying the same thing." The Christian's "good confession" follows the example of Christ's confession ([1 Timothy 6:12-13](#)).

The New Testament mentions confession of sin in a few important places. When John the Baptist was baptizing people, they openly told others about their sins and turned away from their wrong actions ([Mark 1:4-5](#)).

All Christians need to agree with God that they are sinners ([1 John 1:8-10](#)). James, one of Jesus's followers, wrote more about this. He taught that when Christians are sick, they should ask their church leaders to visit them. During these visits, the sick person has a chance to confess any sins.

Just as we saw in the Psalms, James shows how confession can lead to both spiritual healing and physical healing. Because this is so important, James encouraged Christians to confess their sins to each other.

See also Conversion; Forgiveness; Repentance.

Conform, Conformation

Spiritual process of molding the believer into the image of Jesus. Paul speaks of this in [Romans 8:28-30](#):

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; and those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified (niv).

Since it is God's desire and plan to have many sons and daughters, each believer has to be conformed to the prototype, Jesus. Note how the words "predestined," "called," "justified," and especially "glorified" in [Romans 8:29-30](#) are in the past tense. That is because God, from his eternal perspective, sees this process as having been completed already. From God's perspective, believers have been glorified already because he sees them like his Son. But still, in the reality of time, they must

undergo the process of being conformed to the image of God's Son. God is working together all things in the lives of those who love him and are called according to his purpose. His goal is to conform each son and daughter to the image of his beloved Son.

When one continues to read the rest of [Romans 8](#), it is quite evident that the "things" God uses to conform Christians involve various kinds of suffering. Conformity to the image of Jesus Christ necessitates conformity to his death (see [Phil 3:10](#)). Whereas transformation involves an inward, life-imparted change in our essential constitution, conformation entails outward pressure that works the image of Christ into his children. If they are to be made like him, they must have both. To know Jesus, as far as Paul was concerned, was to know both the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings. No one likes to suffer; no one wants to be a Job. But Job was insightful when he said, "When he has tried me, I shall come forth as gold" ([Jb 23:10](#), rsv). Suffering produces an element in the believer that they do not inherently possess. God uses sufferings to conform them to the image of his Son.

The Lord Jesus left his followers a pattern of suffering that cannot be avoided. This is the path that he, the pioneer of salvation, took. The Father perfected him through suffering ([Heb 2:10](#))—i.e., he, as a man, was made fully qualified to be our leader and even our merciful High Priest because of what he suffered on our behalf. Christians should expect to suffer, at least in part, some of the things Jesus suffered. Of course, this does not mean that any believer can repeat his unique act of suffering on the cross for redemption. Peter says that "Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps" ([1 Pt 2:21](#), rsv). The Greek word underlying "example" (*hupogramma*) in common Greek usage designated a tracing tablet that contained the entire Greek alphabet. Students would use this to trace the alphabet. They would have to learn each letter, from alpha to omega. The life of Jesus, a life of suffering, is just such a tracing tablet. Those who learn to follow Jesus will be those who know what it is to suffer, for suffering is the means by which God conforms us to the image of Jesus.

See also Transformation.

Congregation

A congregation is a group of people who gather together, especially for religious purposes. In the Bible, God called the people of Israel "the congregation of the Lord" because they had a special agreement (covenant) with God. The entire nation of Israel was considered to be God's people ([Exodus 3:6-8, 15-16; 12:6; Isaiah 1:2-4; 14:1](#)).

As a chosen nation, Israel was to show God's greatness to other nations ([Deuteronomy 4:6-14; Isaiah 42:1; 45:4; 65:9, 22](#)). So, the nation was called "the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel" ([Numbers 14:5](#); see also [Leviticus 4:13; Numbers 16:3](#)).

The New Testament church builds on the spiritual foundation set by the Old Testament congregation of God's people. Several passages in the Bible show this connection between the church and God's people in the Old Testament ([Hebrews 2:10-13; 1 Peter 2:9-10](#); see also [Romans 9:1-8; Galatians 6:16](#)).

See also Church.

Congregation, Mount of the

KJV translation for "mount of assembly," the name of a mountain that figured in Babylonian and Canaanite mythology, in [Isaiah 14:13](#).

Coniah

Alternate name for Jehoiachin, king of Judah, in [Jeremiah 22:24, 28; 37:1](#). See Jehoiachin.

Cononiah

KJV spelling of Conaniah the Levite, in [2 Chronicles 31:12-13](#). See Conaniah #1.

Conquest and Allotment of the Land

Terms referring to Israel's winning of the Promised Land and the distinctive way in which it was divided among the Israelite tribes.

Conquest

The conquest of Canaan by the Israelites is one of the most remarkable events of OT history: a loosely organized nomadic people successfully invaded a long-established culture secure in its protected urban centers. That achievement, according to the Scriptures, was the result of a promise God had made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that their descendants would possess the land ([Gn 17:8; 26:4; 28:13; Ex 3:15-17](#)). Dispossession of the pagan inhabitants was a divine judgment on false religion and its associated immorality ([Dt 7:1-5](#)).

Scholars who attempt to reconstruct the history of the Conquest face certain problems. Critical scholarship has run into conflict with statements in the Bible at three key points: chronology, rate of occupation, and the issue of Israel's military annihilation of portions of the population of the Canaanite city-states.

Date

Reference works and scholarly treatments of OT history often suggest a date for the exodus from Egypt in the 13th century BC (1280 BC or later). Several biblical references to that event would seem to call for an earlier date. According to [1 Kings 6:1](#), construction of Solomon's temple was begun in the fourth year of his reign, 480 years after the exodus. Since Solomon's fourth year was about 960 BC, that would place the exodus at 1440 BC. In [Judges 11:26-28](#), when Jephthah, eighth of the named judges, argued with the king of Ammon about Israelite possession of land east of the Jordan River, he indicated that Israel had occupied this territory 300 years. Saul's accession to kingship about 1020 BC was still some decades off, so the later date proposed for the exodus does not allow sufficient time for the period of the judges. Further, the apostle Paul referred to a period of about 450 years from the exodus to Samuel's day ([Acts 13:20](#)).

Joshua's Campaigns

A picture of a concentrated period for the Israelite conquest of Canaan is given in the book of Joshua. Yet many scholars insist that an earlier gradual penetration occurred (by Hebrews who supposedly did not accompany Jacob into Egypt), plus an extended mopping-up procedure that continued down to the time of the monarchy. Although the biblical record allows for later acquisitions in some areas (e.g., Megiddo and Bethshan), there is no valid reason for rejecting the

description of the major Conquest given in [Joshua 1-12](#).

The Conquest began on the east side of the Jordan River under Moses. After Moses' death, Joshua led Israel across the river, capturing first the fortified cities of Jericho and Ai. Those strategic victories provided access to the hill country and drove a wedge into the middle of Canaan. Two major campaigns followed—a southern and then a northern—which won for Israel in six years' time the key cities of Canaan, defeating 31 kings and concluding the initial and principal stage of the Conquest.

[Numbers 32](#) records the earlier assignment of territory east of the Jordan (Gilead and Bashan, acquired by the defeat of two kings, Sihon of the Amorites and Og of Bashan) to the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh. Though their land had already been acquired, the men of those tribes were obligated to cross the Jordan with the rest to participate in the military conquest of Canaan itself.

[Joshua 2-8](#) records the unusual events of the destruction of Jericho and Ai in the initial thrust westward. Those victories tended to demoralize the remaining cities of the land. Chapters [9](#) and [10](#) describe the southern campaign, including the Gibeonites' procurement of a treaty by deception. [Joshua 10](#), with its account of the remarkable rout of the enemy forces (vv [9-12](#)) and miraculous prolonging of daylight, is the central passage about the southern campaign. In the subsequent battle, an alliance of five Amorite kings was crushed, the kings were killed, and the city-states of the area were destroyed, except for Jerusalem (later captured by David).

In his northern campaign, Joshua confronted a more formidable alliance. Yet even Jabin, the powerful king of Hazor, largest of the Canaanite cities, supported by his local vassals, was no match for Israel's armies. [Joshua 11](#) describes that phase, then sums up the entire Conquest in verses [16-23](#) and on through chapter [12](#).

See also Allotment of the Land.

Conscience

A term for self-awareness or self-knowledge. The conscience determines if something a person has done or will do agrees with their own moral

standards. The conscience also makes one aware of things done that were wrong.

The English word "conscience" and the Greek word mean "to be with knowledge." In the Old Testament, Adam and Eve felt ashamed and hid from God. This was because their consciences determined that when they disobeyed God it was wrong ([Genesis 3:8-10](#)). It is normal for all human beings to be able to know right and wrong. "The spirit of a man is the lamp of the LORD, searching out his inmost being" ([Proverbs 20:27](#)). So then, conscience is a gift from God to help a person know if something is good or bad.

What Does "Conscience" Mean in the New Testament?

The word "conscience" is found 32 times in the New Testament (see King James Version). This is especially true in the writings of the apostle Paul. In his writings, conscience is shown to determine what was right to do in the past and what will be right to do in the future. People who do not know the law of God can still do what it says. This shows that what the law requires is "written on their hearts" ([Romans 2:14-15](#)). Paul also says that every person must "submit to authority" to avoid judgment from God and "as a matter of conscience" ([13:5](#)). This teaching assumes that conscience can make obedience a requirement for what is right.

The conscience also approves or determines or judges when someone is innocent. This is just as important as when a person becomes aware that they have done something wrong. Paul said, "My conscience is clear" ([1 Corinthians 4:4](#)). Yet conscience can neither perfectly determine right and wrong nor can it sufficiently guide a person. Paul continued, "But that does not vindicate me. It is the Lord who judges me." In another passage, Paul says his conscience confirmed that he was speaking the truth. He links what the conscience approves with the Holy Spirit ([Romans 9:1](#); compare [2 Corinthians 1:12](#)). Yet he does not develop exactly what the connection is.

Paul sought to defend his ministry to the Corinthian church by asking them to judge if how he behaved was right or wrong. They were supposed to be able to do this with the help of their own consciences ([2 Corinthians 4:1-2](#)). Paul insisted that God knew what motivated his behavior. So Paul hoped that the conscience of the Corinthians would also recognize this motive of "the fear of the Lord" ([5:11](#)). When Paul wrote to Timothy, he connected a good conscience with

sincere faith ([1 Timothy 1:5](#)). When people stop living by the Christian faith, their consciences can become “seared.” This means that they are no longer aware of what is right and wrong because they persist in doing what is evil ([4:2](#)).

In his first letter to the Corinthian church, Paul answered a question about food offered as a sacrifice to idols. He spoke about how the conscience determines future and past behavior ([1 Corinthians 8–10](#)). Some Corinthians had a conscience that was “weak” since they thought it was wrong to eat foods offered as a sacrifice to idols ([1 Corinthians 8:7](#)). They failed to recognize that all food can be eaten, or is “clean” ([Romans 14:20](#)).

Consecration

Consecration refers to separating persons, utensils, buildings, or places from non-religious uses in order to dedicate them for holy or sacred purposes.

What Is the Meaning of “Consecration” in the Bible?

In the Bible, consecration was indicated by an appropriate rite or vow. Some Hebrew words imply “separation” ([Exodus 13:2](#); [Leviticus 8:10–12](#); [Deuteronomy 15:19](#)), some imply “dedication” ([Leviticus 21:12](#); [Numbers 6:9](#)), other words imply “ordination” (literally, “filling the hand,” [Exodus 28:41](#); [1 Kings 13:33](#)). The New Testament has fewer references to consecration, but they frequently are related to the idea of holiness ([John 10:36](#); [1 Corinthians 7:14](#); [1 Timothy 4:5](#)).

How Do Different Traditions Understand Consecration?

In church practice, especially among denominations with formal leadership structures, consecration describes the special ceremonies that establish a bishop in their role. It is also used to describe:

- the dedication of holy places,
- containers for holy objects,
- cathedrals (large, important churches that serve as the main church of a bishop),
- elements of the Divine Liturgy or Mass (the bread and wine used during Communion services), or
- buildings set apart for church-related functions.

Protestant teaching emphasizes the idea of the priesthood of every believer. So all Christians are considered “saints.” The word “saints” has the same root word as “consecration.” It refers to those people who have devoted their lives to God.

In Orthodox and Roman Catholic teaching, the church officially consecrates or “canonizes” great Christians as saints after they die. This honor is given to those who demonstrated especially holy lives.

Why Is Consecration Important to the Christian Life?

Consecration is important as it relates to both God and to the world. The apostle Paul defines the term in [Romans 12:1–2](#). He emphasizes that consecration involves people offering their lives symbolically as sacrifices to God. The importance of consecration as it relates to people and things is a basic theme in the first letter of the apostle Peter. Each Christian is meant to daily live as a “holy” and “royal” priesthood for the glory of God ([1 Peter 2:9](#)). Christians consider it an important mark of spiritual maturity to consecrate their own personalities as the Holy Spirit assists them.

See also Holiness.

Constantine the Great

Constantine the Great was emperor of the Roman Empire from AD 306 to 337. He ruled the whole empire by the end of his life. Many people remember him most for his support of Christianity. He was born in AD 272 or 273 and died in AD 337.

Early Life and Rise to Power

Constantine's father was Constantius Chlorus. He ruled the western part of the Roman Empire. Constantine's mother was Helena. She was not married to Constantius.

When Constantius died in England in AD 306, his soldiers made Constantine emperor. Galerius, the eastern emperor, did not like this but agreed. At that time, five men claimed to be emperor. This led to many battles.

Galerius stopped attacks on Christians before he died in AD 311. After his death, Constantine and another emperor named Licinius joined forces. They fought two rivals: Maxentius and Maximin Daia.

In AD 312, Constantine killed Maxentius in battle at the Mulvian Bridge near Rome. Licinius defeated Maximin Daia the next year. For a while, Constantine and Licinius kept peace. But in AD 323, they fought each other. Constantine won the battles of Adrianople and Chrysopolis. After that, he became the only emperor.

New Capital and Reforms

In AD 330, Constantine founded the city of Constantinople. He built it on the site of the old city of Byzantium. The city sat on the Bosphorus Strait, where Europe and Asia meet. This made it a good place for trade and defense.

Constantine continued reforms started by Diocletian (who ruled AD 284–305). He improved the money system and let people who were not Roman citizens join the army.

Favor Toward Christians

Constantine is best known for how he treated Christians. People still debate what he believed, but he clearly supported the church.

Before the battle at the Mulvian Bridge, Constantine had a dream. In the dream, he saw Greek letters that stood for Christ's name. The next day, he told his soldiers to paint the letters on their shields.

Another story says that Constantine and his army saw a cross of light above the sun. It had words that said, "win by this sign."

In AD 312–313, Constantine wrote a letter to a Roman officer in North Africa. He told him to give money to the bishop of Carthage to help the church.

In AD 313, Constantine and Licinius made a law in the city of Milan. This law allowed people to follow any religion they chose.

Laws That Helped Christians

Constantine passed new laws to support Christians:

- He let Christian bishops judge legal cases.
- He ended face branding (marking criminals with hot metal) because people are made in God's image.
- He closed courts and workshops on Sundays.
- He stopped gladiator fights.

Constantine allowed other religions to continue. Until AD 324, he still used non-Christian images on coins. Most people in the empire were not yet Christians, so Constantine tried not to offend them.

Involvement in Church Disputes

Constantine also helped settle church conflicts. In AD 313, a group called the Donatists challenged the bishop of Carthage. They said Caecilian was not the true bishop. The Donatists had separated from the rest of the African church. Constantine asked bishops in Rome to form a group to hear the case. The Donatists were not happy with the decision. So Constantine heard the case himself. In AD 316, he ruled that Caecilian was the true bishop.

In AD 325, Constantine called the Council of Nicaea. The council ruled against a teaching called Arianism. Arians wrongly said that Jesus did not exist with God the Father from the beginning. Constantine made the council's decision into law.

Constantine's Final Years and Death

In AD 326, Constantine ordered the death of his son Crispus and his wife Fausta. Some said they were guilty of adultery.

According to some stories, Constantine was baptized as a Christian shortly before he died in AD 337. After his death, three of his sons became rulers:

1. Constans
2. Constantius
3. Constantine II

See also Caesars, the.

Constellation

Certain number of stars in the sky, arbitrarily chosen as a group and named for an object, animal, or person that the outline of the group is said to resemble. A number of constellations are mentioned in the Bible.

See also Astronomy.

Consul

Title of the two highest civil and military magistrates of Rome in the time of the Republic. The consuls functioned as the heads of state, commanding the army and governing with the Senate. They also had certain judicial functions. Ordinarily a consul was appointed to a one-year term. A letter from the consul Lucius Calpurnius Piso (consul, 140–139 BC) to Ptolemy VII Physcon (reigned 145–116 BC) of Egypt is mentioned in [1 Maccabees 15:16](#).

Consumption

A medical term that in the past referred to tuberculosis of the lungs (an infection caused by bacteria). The word "consumption" appears twice in the Bible ([Leviticus 26:16](#); [Deuteronomy 28:22](#), Revised Standard Version). However, it does not specifically mean tuberculosis. Instead, it refers to any long-lasting disease that causes the body to waste away. This could include cancer, diarrhea, poor nutrition, malaria, kidney failure, and other health problems. In the Bible, consumption is listed as one of many medical conditions that would affect those who do not follow God's commandments.

See also Disease; Medicine and Medical Practice.

Conversion

A total change in how a person lives and thinks. For Christians, this means a change from a way of living that ignores God to one in which the person is submitted to Christ. Conversion is the result of repentance.

Conversion in the Old Testament

In the Old Testament, conversion is basically a turning or returning from one's former course of life toward the Lord, the God of Israel. Israel often had to return to their God ([Deuteronomy 4:30](#)), either as individuals ([Psalm 51](#)) or as a nation ([Jeremiah 4:1](#)). Foreign nations needed to turn to God for the first time ([Psalm 22:27](#)). The defining feature is that one turns away from doing evil acts ([Jeremiah 26:3](#); [36:3](#); [Ezekiel 18:21, 27](#); [33:9, 11](#)). Conversion is turning from a life of disloyalty to God to a life of obedience to God ([Isaiah 10:20–21](#); [14:2](#); [Jeremiah 34:15](#); [Hosea 14:4](#)). Conversion means a change in inward orientation that is demonstrated in a changed lifestyle.

Conversion in the New Testament

In the New Testament, John the Baptist begins the call to conversion ([Matthew 3:2](#); [Mark 1:4](#); [Luke 3:3](#)). He gives a prophetic call for people to change their minds (which is the root meaning of the Greek term) because of the nearness of God's kingdom. This change of life must include a change in actions to prove its reality ([Matthew 3:8](#); [Luke 3:8](#)). Jesus preached the same message ([Matthew 4:17](#); [Mark 1:15](#)). He also said that since the kingdom of God had arrived in his person, obedience to him was part of the good news of conversion. Yet it could also be bad news, for one would be condemned if he failed to make this radical change ([Matthew 11:20](#); [Luke 13:3–5](#)). Conversion is radical but also simple. It requires the simplicity of a child who commits their whole self, not the calculating self-protectiveness of the adult ([Matthew 18:3](#)). The contrast is between an adult's cautious, self-preserving attitude and the simple, sincere trust and openness of a child.

Outside the gospels, *conversion* is not a frequently used term except in the book of Acts. When used in the book of Acts, conversion

- forms the call to commitment at the most important part of evangelistic sermons ([2:38](#); [3:19](#); [8:22](#)),
- describes the commitment of new Christians to the Lord ([9:35](#); [11:21](#)), and
- pictures the change of life as a turning from darkness to light ([26:18–20](#)).

When referring to conversion, later writers

- remember conversion ([2 Corinthians 3:16](#)),
- worry about Christians converting to paganism or Judaism ([Galatians 4:9](#)), and
- call for the reconversion of Christians who have left the faith and are in danger of judgment ([James 5:19–20](#); [Revelation 2:5, 16, 22](#); [3:19](#)).

As in the Old Testament, and the preaching of John and Jesus, conversion has three factors.

1. Conversion is a turning *from* something, which includes specific sins, false gods, or simply a life lived for oneself ([1 Thessalonians 1:9](#); [Revelation 9:20–21](#); [16:11](#)).
2. Conversion is a product of the will of God and his gracious working in the world ([Acts 11:18](#); [Romans 2:4](#); [2 Corinthians 7:10](#); [2 Timothy 2:25](#); [2 Peter 3:9](#)).
3. Conversion is a turning *to* someone, a commitment of one's whole life to God in Jesus Christ ([Acts 14:15](#); [1 Thessalonians 1:9](#); [1 Peter 2:25](#)).

It is thus a total reorientation, whether spectacular or undramatic, sudden or gradual, emotional or calm, in which a person transfers his or her total allegiance to God.

See also Faith; Grace; Justification, Justified; Repentance; Sanctification.

Convocation, Holy

Solemn assemblies celebrated in Israel at appointed feasts in order that the people and the temple might be sanctified; the days were specially devoted to rest and sacrifice to God. *See* Feasts and Festivals of Israel; Atonement, Day of; Sabbath.

Coos

The King James Version spelling of Cos, an island and city in the Aegean Sea ([Acts 21:1](#)). This was one of the places the apostle Paul visited during his missionary journeys.

See Cos.

Copper

Reddish-brown, malleable metal found in the ground ([Dt 8:9](#)) and fashioned into ornaments, tools, and coins. *See* Minerals and Metals.

Coppersmith

A person who used bronze and copper to make tools, implements, and ornaments ([Exodus 26:11, 37](#); [27:2–10](#); [Joshua 6:19, 24](#); [1 Samuel 17:5–6](#); [2 Samuel 8:8](#)). The term “coppersmith” is only used in the New Testament ([2 Timothy 4:14](#)). However, the occupation was important throughout the history of the Bible.

See also Minerals and Metals.

Coptic Lives of the Virgin

These are ancient writings about Mary, the mother of Jesus, written in the Egyptian language of Coptic. These stories tell about her life and honor her faith and holiness. They are part of the apocryphal writings (a set of ancient texts not included in the Hebrew Bible but accepted by some Christian groups).

See Life of the Virgin; *see also* Apocrypha; Mary.

Cor

Large dry measure. *See* Weights and Measures.

Coral

Coral is a hard substance that is made when tiny sea animals build protective outer shells (similar to the hard shells that protect snails). These shells are made of calcium, the same mineral that makes bones and teeth strong. When many of these small animals live and die in the same place, their shells build up to create large structures in the ocean.

The red coral (*Corallium rubrum*) that grows in the Mediterranean Sea and Red Sea has been especially valuable throughout history. People have used this red coral to make jewelry and medicine. While

alive, it appears green and shrublike, resembling an underwater plant. It looks this way because the tiny coral animals attach themselves to one spot and cannot move around. Once out of water, it turns hard and red.

In ancient times, coral was used as currency, alongside gems, pearls, and gold. Some Bible scholars think that when the book of [Lamentations 4:7](#) mentions something red and precious, it is talking about pearls instead of coral. However, [Job 28:18](#) and [Ezekiel 27:16](#) likely refer to red coral.

See Minerals and Metals; Stones, Precious.

Corban

Corban is a word that comes from Hebrew (*korban*). In the Bible, it appears only in [Mark 7:11](#). In this verse, Mark explains that corban means something that is given to God as an offering.

Making something corban was a very serious choice. The Mishnah (a collection of Jewish oral laws and traditions) explains that once something was declared corban, this decision was rarely changed (Mishnah, Nedarim 5). Breaking a corban vow was considered very serious because people believed God would punish them.

In [Mark 7](#), Jesus rejects the teaching of the scribes. The scribes taught that by the law a son could deny his parents from gaining any benefit from his property. To do this the son would state his property was “corban to them.” This practice goes against God’s command to honor your parents ([Exodus 20:12](#)). The Jewish teachers’ rules about corban were conflicting with God’s law given through Moses.

Even if a son later felt sorry and wanted to help his parents, the Jewish religious leaders would not allow him to take back his corban declaration ([Mark 7:12](#); compare [Numbers 30:1–2](#)).

Core

The King James Version spelling of Korah, Izhar’s son, in [Jude 1:11](#). *See Korah #3.*

Coriander

An annual herb native to Palestine. The fragrant seeds of this plant are mentioned twice in the description of manna ([Exodus 16:31](#); [Numbers 11:7](#)). The references in these verses clearly refer to the common coriander plant (*Coriandrum sativum*).

Coriander was commonly found growing alongside grain in cultivated fields throughout Israel and the surrounding areas. It also grows wild in Egypt. Ancient people used it both as a food flavoring and as medicine. The leaves have a strong, pleasant smell and are used in soups and for flavoring puddings, curries, and wines.

Arabs still use coriander as a spice today. In the Bible, it is mentioned only when describing manna, which was said to look like coriander seeds in size, shape, and color.

See also Food and Food Preparation.

Corinth

Prominent city of Greece, formerly the capital of the ancient province of Achaia, in which the apostle Paul preached. The site of ancient Corinth lies to the west of the isthmus separating the Peloponnesian Peninsula from mainland Greece. The ancient ruins, largely of Roman origin, are situated about four-fifths of a mile (1,285 meters) from present-day Corinth. The area was inhabited from Neolithic times. Corinth is dominated by an outcrop of rock known as Acrocorinth (Upper Corinth). The grandeur of the Greek period is evident in the remains of the temple of Apollo, whose massive columns dominate the site. Entrance to the ancient city is by means of a very broad avenue that lies in a straight line from the city gate. That avenue ends in the marketplace, with roads leading from there to the Acrocorinth. In the apostolic period the city was a bustling commercial and industrial center boasting a population of almost 700,000.

History and Archaeology

By the mid-eighth century BC, Corinth, strategically located along east-west trade routes, was a flourishing city-state. From 350–250 BC it was the most prominent city in Greece. Then the Roman military machine began a relentless march to forge a vast empire. In 146 BC Corinth was completely destroyed and lay in ruins for a century. In 46 BC

Julius Caesar moved a mixed group of Italians and dispossessed Greeks onto the site, and once more a magnificent city arose, this time as a Roman colony. As in most Roman cities, marble temples dominated the landscape. The city was supplied with water from an underground well. It became a cosmopolitan city attracting tradespeople from all over the world, though its reputation grew simultaneously as a center of luxury, indulgence, and vice. A large colony of displaced Jews (part of the Diaspora) developed in the city, the group that undoubtedly attracted the apostle Paul.

In 1896 the American School of Classical Studies at Athens secured permission to begin excavation of the ancient site. The finds are of special interest for study of the NT Corinthian epistles. An important archaeological find was a doorway lintel bearing a portion of an inscription designating the building as the “Synagogue of the Hebrews.” It may have marked the synagogue in which the apostle preached ([Acts 18:4](#)). Another discovery was the bema, or judgment place (vv [12–17](#)), located in the center of the agora, or marketplace. There Paul appeared before Gallio, proconsul of Achaia. The dates of Gallio are well established by other inscriptions. He must not have arrived in Corinth before July, AD 51. Paul appeared before him after having ministered in the city for almost 18 months. That would date Paul’s arrival in Corinth as the beginning of AD 50.

Corinth is significant in the history of the church because of the ministry of the apostle Paul in response to his Macedonian vision ([Acts 16:9–10](#)). He established churches in Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, and possibly Athens on his way to Corinth. [Acts 18](#) describes Paul’s work at Corinth, first with the Jews, who violently opposed him (v [6](#)). At Corinth, Paul engaged in the longest ministry up to that time in either of his first missionary journeys. The Corinthian church, born in such a crucible of paganism, had to go through serious birth pangs. Paul’s letters to the group of believers there reflect a large catalog of troubles for Christians in the first century, a list not unlike the problems of Christians today.

See also Corinthians, First Letter to the; Corinthians, Second Letter to the.

Corinthians, First Letter to the

Preview

- Author
- Date and Origin
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Author

There is no doubt about who wrote 1 Corinthians, for all scholars agree that the apostle Paul wrote it on his third missionary journey while he was living in Ephesus. By this time Paul was a mature, middle-aged (perhaps 55 years old) missionary, fully seasoned from planting churches around a quarter of the Mediterranean world.

Date and Origin

Paul worked in Corinth from about AD 50 to 52. After a brief stay in Jerusalem, he returned to his missionary work, this time at Ephesus ([Acts 19](#)), where he ministered for three years (AD 53–55/56). During this period, he wrote at least three letters to Corinth and made a visit as well. His first letter, often called “the previous letter,” is referred to in [1 Corinthians 5:9–11](#). We know from this reference that the letter was misunderstood, but we know little of its content, for it has been lost.

Sometime in AD 55, after hearing reports from Chloe’s household ([1 Cor 1:11](#)), who were probably members of Chloe’s house church, he dictated a second letter to Corinth, our 1 Corinthians. This was probably sent off in the hands of Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus ([16:17](#)). Paul would later write a third letter to Corinth, called “the letter of tears” ([2 Cor 2:2–3](#)), and then finally 2 Corinthians.

Background

Corinth was a seaport city, destroyed by the Romans in 146 BC and rebuilt in 46 BC by Julius Caesar. After 27 BC, it was the Roman capital of Achaia, where the proconsul had his residence ([Acts 18:12](#)). The city itself was really three cities: the port of Cenchrea, about eight miles (13 kilometers) to the east, where ships from the Aegean would unload; the port of Lechaion, about a mile (1.6 kilometers) to the west on the Gulf of Corinth, where the ships would be reloaded, their goods having been transported in wagons over the isthmus and the ships on rollers; and the city itself on the high ground in between.

The acropolis of the city, on top of the steep, high Acrocorinth, contained the temple of Aphrodite, where 1,000 female slaves were dedicated to the service of this goddess of love. This distinctive cult of Corinth was dedicated to the veneration of Aphrodite, goddess of love, beauty, and fertility, who is identified with the Roman Venus. Associated with such religious practices was a general moral degradation. Corinthian morals were notoriously corrupt, even when compared with pagan Rome. Down in the city was the synagogue ([Acts 18:4](#)); for while the city as a Roman colony was largely populated by Italians, it had attracted other peoples from the Mediterranean, among whom were the Jews.

Purpose and Teaching

The main concern of Paul in 1 Corinthians was the unity of the church. There was a self-centeredness in Corinth that resulted in building cliques within the church, in flaunting knowledge and liberty in the face of others scandalized by it, and in selfish displays in the worship services.

Two other major concerns also surface in the book. First, along with other pagan practices, the lax sexual ethics of Corinth had influenced the church; Paul needed to erect some barriers. Second, there was a problem in accepting the resurrection of the body; Paul realized that this issue had implications for the core of the faith and vigorously affirmed the resurrection.

Both of these latter two areas, as well as aspects of the unity issue (particularly their concern with knowledge), have been identified by some scholars as Gnostic motifs, leading to the conclusion that Paul was opposing a Gnostic party in Corinth. Careful examination reveals, however, that while some of the elements floating in the Corinthian milieu would later contribute to the development of Gnosticism, it would be anachronistic to call them gnostic. While recognizing protognostic ideas in the Corinthian situation, it is important to keep interpretation within the first-century context.

Thus, the focus of Paul's concern was the church, its unity and purity. Paul was fighting to keep this church from disintegrating into a number of competing and bickering factions divided over moral and doctrinal issues. Furthermore, he wanted to keep the focus of the church on Jesus, the exalted Lord.

Content

Greeting, [1:1-9](#)

Paul begins with a standard greeting, followed by his usual thanksgiving prayer. Two features stand out. First, the greeting associates Sosthenes with Paul. While we cannot be sure who Sosthenes was, he was surely well known to the Corinthians; probably he was the Sosthenes whom [Acts 18:17](#) identifies as the ruler of the synagogue, following the conversion of Crispus.

Second, Paul stresses the Corinthians' abilities in speech, knowledge, and spiritual gifts. They had all of these, and these were genuine, but it was precisely these good things that they were abusing. Paul's solution is not to suppress these gifts (indeed, he thanks God for them), but to place them in a new context.

Report from Chloe's People, [1:10-4:21](#)

The Corinthians had made Paul, Cephas (Peter), Apollos, and even Christ into party leaders. We are not sure what each of these groups stood for, but one might guess that the Pauline group stressed Paul's slogans of liberty; the Petrine group, the need to hold to Jewish practices; and the Apollos group, the value of philosophical understanding and oratory. Whatever they stood for, Paul is appalled that it breaks their unity. His first response is to argue that his behavior was not calculated to build a following but to point to Christ. That is, he did not insist on personally baptizing converts; who performed these acts did not matter, since they were all baptized into Christ.

Paul immediately moves to the underlying issue, that of various persons wanting to show themselves better or wiser than others who did not have the insights of their party in the church. Their seeking for wisdom contradicts Paul's preaching of the gospel.

First, the message of a crucified Christ ([1:18](#)) made no sense within the wisdom and values of either Jews or Greeks. It demanded a whole new way of looking on life—God's way.

Second, God had not chosen them on the basis of their status in society; quite the contrary, he had made their only status the equal status they received from him ([1:26-31](#)).

Third, their faith had not been based on Paul's oratory but on the gifts of the Spirit that Paul had manifested ([2:4](#)), which had convinced them that

God was acting in Paul. Thus, it was not argument that led them to God, but God's Spirit. Therefore it was the Spirit, not human reasoning, that would continue to reveal God to them. Unless they became fools with respect to the world's ways of reasoning, they would never be able to rethink life from the perspective of the Spirit, who gives true wisdom.

Fourth, they were not acting on this spiritual level when they claimed Paul and others as party leaders; this activity demonstrates the evil impulse in human beings ("the flesh" or "fallen human nature") at work since it elevates human servants rather than the God who works equally in each of them.

Fifth, these servants were working together to build one "temple" for God based on the one foundation in Jesus Christ, that is, the church. God alone will judge how each Christian contributes to the work of building the church. But woe to the person who divides the church, for "if anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him" (3:17, rsv). (Note that here the temple imagery is used collectively; the church is the temple. In chapter 6 it will be used individually; each Christian is the temple.)

Finally, he points to their overrealized eschatology, for with their spiritual gifts (which were genuine) and vaunted wisdom (which was worldly) they claimed they were reigning with Christ (4:8-13). Paul, with ironic sarcasm, points out how different this claim is from the lifestyle of the apostles. The apostles lived like Jesus—a life of suffering, expecting exaltation later. The Corinthians were trying to have their exaltation now without crucifixion.

Paul closes this section with an admonition. He softens his words toward some who would be responsive, urging them to copy his lifestyle. The teacher was the message (vv 14-16). Timothy will also faithfully live the truth before them. Then he threatens the "arrogant" (v 18), pointing out that he will not challenge their words but their spiritual power if he comes.

The Report from the Corinthian Messengers, 5:1-6:20

Paul now turns to three issues raised by oral reports from the messengers bearing the Corinthians' letter to him.

The first issue is that of church discipline (5:12-13). Paul cites a case of flagrant immorality—that of incest. This immorality was so clear (even

pagans considered it immoral), that it was not a case of ignorance of Christian principles. Further, the church had taken no action but rather boasted in its tolerance, perhaps on the basis of a misunderstanding of Paul's teaching on freedom from the law.

Paul presents three principles in this section: (1) the primary goal of church discipline is the repentance and restoration of the offender; (2) the secondary goal of church discipline is the protection of the church (5:6-8); and (3) the church is not to seek to judge or control the actions of evil persons in the world—they are God's responsibility—but to discipline those within the church (vv 9-13). Paul will use these principles also in the following chapters (cf. 7:12-16).

The second issue is that of lawsuits between Christians (6:1-11). The Corinthian society was as prone to litigation as our own, and Christians did not see anything wrong in suing each other. Paul was troubled. If Christians are to judge the world, they certainly should not bring the world in to judge issues within the church. Rather than put their cases before "those who are least esteemed by the church" (6:4, rsv, i.e., pagan judges), they should decide the cases within the church.

Paul has an even better way than bypassing the pagan courts, and that is to simply suffer the wrong (1 Cor 6:7). Applying the teaching of Jesus quite literally (Mt 5:38-42), Paul argues that it would be best to allow themselves to be defrauded. Instead, the Corinthians are willing to step on their brothers in Christ to get what they feel are their rights. This raises the issue as to whether greed is not still in their hearts (1 Cor 6:9-11). While Paul accepts people who formerly did all sorts of evil (for Jesus has cleansed them), he makes it very clear that anyone presently practicing greed or immorality is not part of the kingdom, whatever their doctrinal commitments may be.

The final issue in this section is that of casual sexual intercourse (6:12-20). In a world where virginity was important if a woman wished to be married and where slaves in the temple of Aphrodite were available as prostitutes, prostitution was the major form of casual sex. The libertine party used two slogans: "All things are lawful for me," a saying that may well have been derived from Paul's teaching, and "Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food"—that is, since the body works this way, it must be the Creator's purpose. Paul qualifies rather than contradicts their slogans. Freedom is subordinate to other goals (6:12, 20).

The body is not made to be used as we wish, but is to be dedicated to the Lord, as the doctrine of the resurrection demonstrates (vv [13-14](#)).

Furthermore, sexual intercourse is an act of the whole person, unlike eating (Paul cites [Gn 2:24](#); cf. Jesus in [Mt 19:5](#)). Therefore, this act takes a member (i.e., the person) from the body of Christ and makes him a unity with a prostitute ([1 Cor 6:15-17](#)). Thus immorality is unlike other sins that are external to the self, for it changes the self and thus defiles the body, the place where the Holy Spirit dwells. It disregards the fact that Christ has redeemed the body, and that the whole of the Christian belongs to God, not to the Christian.

Paul's Answers to the Corinthians, [7:1-16:4](#)

Now Paul turns to the Corinthians' own issues, building on the answers he has already given to questions they did not ask.

The first issue is that of marriage ([7:1-24](#)). The slogan of the ascetic party in Corinth (perhaps a reaction against the libertines of ch [6](#)) was "It is good for a man not to touch a woman" ([7:1](#), kjv). The Corinthians applied this slogan to both married and unmarried, arguing that married Christians should abstain from sexual relations. Paul clarified the matter with three points. First, he said that this was totally unrealistic, for total abstinence would lead to immorality (vv [2, 7-9](#)). Second, when people get married they no longer own their own bodies; their bodies belong to each other for their mutual benefit (vv [3-4](#)). Sexual refusal denies a spouse what rightly belongs to him or her. Third, abstinence is allowed for limited periods by mutual agreement as a type of fast to help focus on Christ (v [5](#)).

While Paul will address the issue of the unmarried more fully in [7:25-40](#), in a side remark he indicates that he is himself content to be unmarried. But since some do not have this gift, full sexual expression in marriage is far better than fighting passion ([7:7-9](#)). Once two Christians are married, divorce is unthinkable. A clear word of Christ proves this ([Mt 5:31-32](#); [Mk 10:11-12](#); [Lk 16:18](#) and parallels), so there are no exceptions (Paul either does not know of the exception clause in [Mt 19:9](#) or he understands it as referring to something like premarital unchastity discovered before the wedding, not to adultery after the wedding). Although in some cases a Christian couple must live separately, it is always with a view to reconciliation. The teaching of Jesus does not allow

him to think of the marriage as ending ([1 Cor 7:10-11](#)).

But what if the spouse is not a Christian? Paul applies his principles to a situation for which Jesus did not leave a clear word. First, since Jesus told Christians not to divorce, even in this situation the Christian may not initiate a divorce ([7:12-13](#)). Second, since Christians are not to control or judge non-Christians ([6:12-13](#)), the Christian does not need to continue the relationship if the non-Christian insists on a divorce ([7:15](#)). Third, far from defiling the Christian (as the relationship in [6:15](#) does), the Christian will make the relationship holy, with positive results for the children and the possible salvation of the spouse ([7:14, 16](#)). While this is no call to remain in situations of physical or sexual abuse, it is a call to remain faithful to a mixed marriage situation.

Paul does not believe that one normally needs to change one's life situation to serve Christ ([7:17-24](#)). Therefore, normally each person should remain in that state of life in which he or she was when called to Christ. Paul's examples show that he was thinking in terms of marriage or singleness, Jew (circumcision) or Gentile, slave or free, not in terms of situations that might be immoral in themselves. In the case of slaves, they can accept freedom if it becomes available, but it does not make an essential difference in their real state before God or their ability to serve Christ (vv [21-23](#)).

The second issue is that of the unmarried ([7:25-40](#)). Paul argues that single people and widows may marry—it is not wrong. Yet he advises them to remain single. Since all in this age is passing away, it would be good to stay single so as to avoid the extra suffering to which marriage exposes a person (vv [25-31](#)). What is more, marriage always divides one's attention between the Lord and the legitimate needs of the spouse. One must not abandon the spouse or ignore his or her needs in order to serve the Lord, but one can remain single so that the Lord can be the sole focus of life and devotion (vv [32-35](#)). Finally, if one is in a situation in which marriage is expected, the person must make his own decision as to whether he should marry the woman for her sake (and perhaps that of the wider family) or whether he can and should simply care for her as a single person (vv [36-38](#)). Paul closes this section by repeating his general principles (vv [39-40](#)).

The third issue Paul deals with is that of food that has been offered to idols ([8:1-11:1](#)). Most meat

that was available in the marketplace came either from animals slaughtered as sacrifices in the temples or from groups of animals from which one was offered as a dedicatory sacrifice. To scrupulous Jews, all of this meat would be untouched. Furthermore, pagans invited Christians to feasts in their homes and to private feasts held in the precincts of pagan temples, where trade guilds also held feasts. Paul discusses these issues and uses them to teach wider principles of Christian conduct.

First, love, not knowledge, is the key to correct behavior (8:1–13). Some Corinthians felt superior because they were convinced that idols had no reality (there is only one God), and therefore any food offered to them was still fit to eat. Paul again accepts their slogans, but counters with the statement, “Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up” (v 1, niv). God is not concerned with what we know or eat, but he is concerned with whether or not we love our fellow Christians. The concern is not that a fellow Christian might become enraged because one indulged, but that he or she might have a vulnerable conscience and indulge himself, even though he believed it wrong and thus in his own eyes apostasizes from the faith (i.e., rebels against Christ). Such leading astray is not love. It would be better never to eat meat than to lead a fellow Christian into sin.

Second, he points out that one should subordinate one’s own interests to those of others, especially those of Christ and his gospel (9:1–23). Both the examples of the apostles, who expected the church to support them and their families (cf. Lk 10:5–7), and Scripture prove that Paul had the right to demand support from the Corinthians. This had not been his practice, for he had normally made tents to support his ministry, though he did accept gifts from other churches. Paul did this to prevent people from thinking he was peddling religion for profit (9:12) and for the personal satisfaction of doing more than he had to do (vv 16–17). This was part of Paul’s larger policy of subordinating his own personal preferences and interests to those of Christ and his gospel (vv 19–23).

Third, the bravado of the strong who demonstrate their liberty with disregard of fellow Christians is spiritually dangerous (9:24–10:22). It is not who begins but who completes the Christian life that counts; therefore, it is a life of discipline, not relaxed license (9:24–27). Israel in the wilderness presents an example of failure in this regard. They had “baptism” and “the Lord’s Supper” (10:2–4),

just like the church, yet most of them did not make it to the Promised Land. The reason God destroyed them was simple: they turned to sin. Likewise, the Christian has to be careful not to be so proud about faith and freedom that he becomes careless about sin and falls from the faith (v 12). On the other hand, Christians need not be fearful, for the temptation is not more powerful than they are; God has provided a way of escape, if they will take it (v 13).

Another link between the Israelites and the Corinthians pertains to partaking of a sacrificial meal (10:14–22). In the Lord’s Supper there is a sharing of the blood and body of Christ, just as real as Israel’s sacrifices on the altar. Food offered to idols is also a sharing, not with the supposed god, but with the real demon that is behind the idol. To try to share at both tables is to provoke God’s jealousy just as Israel did (v 22).

A summary of the discussion draws the three chapters together (10:23–11:1). Since the food is not changed by being offered to idols, and since all food really belongs to God, one may eat anything sold in the market—do not ask any questions (10:25–26). Likewise, the Christian may eat anything served at a dinner in the home of an unbeliever. However, if someone points out that the food was offered to idols, the Christian should pass it by, not because it would hurt him, but because it is an issue with the person who raised the question, and the Christian is concerned about the good of his neighbor (vv 27–30). In other words, follow Paul’s example as he patterns himself in turn after Christ, who served others rather than himself. Act so that God’s reputation and character shine through even in what one eats (v 31); try to offend no one but to benefit each person in moving him toward salvation (v 32).

The fourth issue Paul deals with is that of order in church meetings (11:2–14:40). The Corinthians’ house churches had lively meetings, but rather than showing unity in Christ, they demonstrated selfishness. Paul had no desire to change what they did; he did want to change how they did it.

The first problem in the meetings was the behavior of married women (11:1–16). The sign of marriage in that day was the wearing of a veil or distinctive hairstyle, as a ring is today. Women praying and delivering prophecies in church was no issue for Paul, but the women may have felt that this loosed them from their husbands (cf. Mk 12:25) and therefore was a reason to set aside their veils. Paul argues that husband and wife are intimately joined,

just as humans are to God ([1 Cor 11:3](#)). Therefore as humans should not shame but glorify God, so the wife should act toward her husband. Thus, while Paul approves of ministry by women, he puts marriage first.

The second problem in the meetings was that of making class distinctions ([11:17–34](#)). Until the weekly Lord's Supper began to be turned into the sacrifice of the Mass in the third and fourth centuries, it was a full shared meal. Middle- and upper-class Christians could come earlier to the church gatherings and also provide better food and drink for themselves. Following the customs of pagan clubs, they had no scruples against starting early and feasting as befit their class, so long as at least simple food was provided for the slaves and peasants who could not come as early ([v 21](#)). This shamed the poorer Christians and made them feel class distinctions keenly ([v 22](#)). This, argues Paul, is not the Lord's Supper but a sham ([v 20](#)).

Paul repeats the words of institution to point out that they all are participating in Christ's body and blood (cf. [10:16–17](#)), not their own meal. To do it in an unworthy manner, with divisions and class distinctions among them, is to profane his meal by failing to demonstrate the unity of his body, the church ([11:29](#)), and thus invite his judgment, which they were already experiencing. Instead, they should examine their own motives and truly gather as one to eat this common meal.

The third problem in their meetings was the use of spiritual gifts ([12:1–14:40](#)). It is possible that some people in these house churches, under the influence of Gnostic ideas in which the spiritual is good and the material evil, and feeling inspired by a spirit, cried out, "Jesus [meaning the human Jesus as opposed to the spiritual Christ] be cursed." It is not the Spirit of God saying this, argues Paul, for the Spirit in us cries the basic Christian confession, "Jesus is Lord."

Others in these churches were exalting their own particular gift, especially the gift of tongues, shouting down others or refusing to give them a turn. There is only one Spirit and he gives all the gifts, Paul argues ([12:4–6](#)). The Spirit manifests himself sovereignly in each Christian, not simply for the Christian's own benefit, but for the good of all ([v 7](#)). Since it is the Spirit, not a given manifestation, that the Christian has, the gifts manifested could change from meeting to meeting.

That same Spirit has made all Christians into one organic unity in Christ ([12:12–13](#)). Thus not only

does the one Spirit give all the gifts—all are equally inspired—but all the gifts are equally needed for the proper functioning of the body of Christ (vv [14–26](#)). No one can say that his lack of a given gift makes him less a part of the body; indeed, the less noticeable gifts may well be the more important. Thus, within the body of Christ, there are not only different manifestations of the Spirit through individuals in a given meeting, but different ministries or functions of individuals in the body (vv [27–31](#)).

Therefore, it is not the demonstration of a particular gift that shows one's spirituality, but how one demonstrates it—that is, whether one manifests it with love ([13:1–13](#)). Any gift exercised for selfish purposes may be a genuine gift of the Spirit, but it is worthless to the individual (vv [1–3](#)). This is because love is the opposite of selfishness (vv [4–7](#)). In fact, the gifts of the Spirit are only for the period between Jesus' first coming and his second coming, when the kingdom of God will be perfectly revealed and the King will be present in person, and thus the intermediary gifts of the Spirit will be no longer necessary (vv [10, 12](#)). It is not giftedness but faith and hope that will have a reward then, and love, which is the greatest, because it will continue as Christians live in perfect love with each other and with Jesus ([v 13](#)).

Applying this to Corinth, Paul argues that while one should desire all the gifts, love dictates that prophecy should be the gift of choice in the church meetings ([14:1–25](#)). The Corinthians had evidently been stressing tongues. Tongues without interpretation is of little value to anyone except to the speaker himself. It does not build anyone up; its confusion seems madness to outsiders. Outside the church meetings there is a role for tongues, both as a sign of judgment ([v 21](#)) and for private devotion ([v 18](#)), but inside, only with interpretation. Prophecy, however, both builds up and convicts, and thus is to be sought in the meetings.

In the church meetings, then, both gifts and order are to prevail ([14:26–40](#)). All types of gifts are allowed expression with a goal of mutual edification, not selfish demonstration ([v 26](#)). Tongues speakers must have an interpreter; both they and prophets must speak in turn, with time being taken to evaluate the utterances after every few speakers (vv [27–33](#)). Furthermore, the women, who were perhaps chatting in the service (perhaps due to habits learned in Jewish synagogues, where they were segregated and did not participate) are to cease their chattering, pay attention, and learn,

asking questions at home if they do not understand (vv [34-36](#)). In his concluding summary, Paul states that all should be done in an orderly manner (vv [37-40](#)).

The fifth issue Paul deals with is that of the resurrection of the dead (ch [15](#)). Some of the problems mentioned earlier concerning loose morals (chs [5-6](#)), ascetic denial, sexuality (ch [7](#)), or feeling one was resurrected already (ch [11](#)) point to the fact that some Corinthians did not believe in the resurrection of the body, though they apparently believed in the resurrection of Jesus and the immortality of the human soul.

Paul reaffirms that the resurrection of Jesus is an essential part of the gospel message ([15:1-19](#)). The unified voice of the church was that Jesus not only died but rose again and appeared to numerous witnesses (vv [3-11](#)). If they were consistent in their antiresurrection argument, Christ could not have been raised. Yet if this were the case, the whole gospel message is false and all their hopes for salvation are in vain (vv [12-19](#)).

Since Christ has been raised, Christians will also be raised because of their solidarity with him ([15:20-28](#)). As they had experienced the results of being in Adam, so now they will experience the results of being in Christ. But resurrection does not happen at once. There are progressive stages: (a) Christ was first; (b) Christians will be raised at his coming; (c) Christ must reign until he extends kingdom rule over the whole world, destroying all demonic powers (including death itself); and (d) then he will turn over the perfected kingdom to the Father (vv [23-28](#)).

Resurrection hope also explains Christian practices such as baptizing people on behalf of others who had died (probably people who had turned to Christ but had died before they could be baptized, [15:29](#)), and willingness to risk death for Christ (vv [30-32](#)).

Paul admits that there are intellectual problems involved, but these are solved when one realizes that resurrection includes both continuity and discontinuity ([15:35-50](#)). Just as seed and plant are the same and yet different, and just as many types of bodies exist, so it is with the resurrection. What was perishable, dishonorable, weak, and physical (i.e., in Adam) will be raised imperishable, glorious, powerful, and spiritual (i.e., in Christ). Indeed, it is only as Christians thus become like Christ, the heavenly man, that they can become part of God's kingdom.

With excitement Paul shares his real hope, that of transformation ([15:51-58](#)). At the coming of Christ the dead will be raised and transformed. But the living will also need transformation, and this will happen in a split second, making all of them impervious to death. Then they will truly know the victory already present in Jesus' resurrection (vv [54-57](#)). A concluding summary draws the practical conclusion that this teaching should give them assurance of a reward for anything done for Christ now (v [58](#)).

The sixth issue Paul deals with is that of the collection for the needy Jerusalem church ([16:1-4](#)). Because of famine in Judea in the 40s, the church there had become impoverished. Partly because of the need and partly to further the unity of the church, Paul took up a collection in some of his churches for the Judean church. He answers the Corinthians' practical queries by stating that the collection should be made weekly according to ability, not all at once when Paul arrives ([16:2](#)). When he comes, he will send off the money with their own messengers. Paul remains vague about whether or not he will accompany them, allaying suspicions that somehow he plans to profit from it (cf. [2 Cor 8-9](#)).

Final Remarks and Closing, [16:5-24](#)

Having come to the end, Paul discusses his travel plans, including his intention for a lengthy visit whenever he leaves Ephesus (cf. [2 Cor 1](#)). Timothy was either coming with the letter or else would arrive shortly after another mission; they were to respect him and help him return. Paul points out that he urged Apollos to visit Corinth, in case some suspect Paul is against him. A closing formal exhortation to firm faith and love leads into his final customary greetings. He praises the Corinthian messengers who had brought him their letter ([16:15-18](#)) and sends greetings from Aquila and Prisca (Priscilla), his missionaries who had helped him found the church in Corinth ([Acts 18:2-3, 18](#)). Referring to the customary greeting in the church, he tells them to greet each other with a kiss on each cheek ([16:20](#)). Paul then takes the pen from the scribe, as was normal, and writes the closing exhortation—placing a curse on those who do not love Jesus, the common Aramaic expression used in the church “Come, O Lord” (*Marana tha*, perhaps used to close services), and providing an assurance of his own love for them (vv [21-24](#)).

See also Acts of the Apostles, Book of the; Corinth; Corinthians, Second Letter to the; Paul, The Apostle.

Corinthians, Second Letter to the

Preview

- Author
- Date and Origin
- Background
- Purpose and Teaching
- Content

Author

The apostle Paul is the acknowledged author of 2 Corinthians. While some scholars argue that [2 Corinthians 2:14–7:4](#) and [10–13](#) are separate letters, only in the case of [6:14–7:1](#) is Paul's authorship disputed. This section is admittedly a strange digression, but stranger still would be the thought that an editor could have inserted it in such an unusual place. Also the repetition of thought in [7:2](#) from [6:13](#) indicates that Paul is aware that he has digressed from his topic and is repeating a phrase to bring his readers back to the subject.

Date and Origin

After writing both the “previous letter” ([1 Cor 5:9](#)) and 1 Corinthians from Ephesus in AD 55, Paul continued to work there. Sometime during the next year a crisis arose in Corinth. Paul made a quick trip across the Aegean Sea, but he could not resolve the crisis, and due to the personal opposition of a leader in the church (likely an interloper bearing letters of recommendation from Jerusalem), he had to withdraw ([2 Cor 2:1, 5](#)). Returning to Ephesus from this “painful visit,” Paul dispatched Titus with a blistering “letter of tears,” his third letter to that church ([2 Cor 2:4](#); [7:8, 12](#)), which led to the excommunication of the leader and the repentance of the church. This letter has been lost. Meanwhile a situation erupted in Ephesus during which death (probably execution) seemed so certain that Paul despaired of life (see [Acts 19:23–41](#); cf. [Rom 16:4](#); [2 Cor 1:8–9](#)). Paul was not killed, but his escape seemed miraculous.

Leaving Ephesus in early AD 56, Paul traveled north to Troas seeking Titus and news of Corinth. Unable to endure without news, he abandoned a

promising mission in Troas and sailed to Philippi. There he met Titus, who explained the change of heart in Corinth. [Second Corinthians 1–9](#) responds to this situation, with chapters [8–9](#) preparing the Corinthians for an upcoming visit. Later Paul received further news from Corinth that renewed opposition to him was present. In response he penned the self-defense found in [2 Corinthians 10–13](#). Paul followed up the letter with a visit later in the year ([Acts 20:2–3](#)). We do not know the response to 2 Corinthians or the outcome of his final visit, but later the troubled history of the Corinthian church continued, with another Christian leader needing to write a letter at the end of the century (Epistle of Clement).

Background

The Corinthian house churches always had great diversity. While those who liked Apollos undoubtedly despised Paul's crude style, others who preferred Peter likely appealed beyond Paul to the more genuine “original” apostles in Jerusalem with their Jewish customs ([1 Cor 1](#)). Traveling teachers with letters of commendation from these apostles easily drew a following when they came to Corinth and undermined Paul's authority and even his character. Furthermore, because of this outside influence, the collection for the poor in Jerusalem that Paul had initiated ([16:1–4](#)) was left in abeyance, both because it was connected to Paul and because the teachers themselves were taking money from the church. Paul writes to reaffirm his love and to repair the damage caused by the interloper.

Purpose and Teaching

In the first section of the letter, Paul has two main purposes. The first is to cement his restored relationship with Corinth, explaining situations, forgiving those who opposed him, and reflecting on the nature of ministry. For Paul, ministry meant both intense suffering and comfort. Physical and emotional suffering came from the situations and people he worked with, but his knowledge of future reward and his experience of the power of God working in him brought profound joy and comfort. Due to his own recent brush with death, Paul also reflects on what happens at death. His expectation is to receive a resurrection body and be in the presence of Jesus at death.

The second purpose of this section is to get the collection for Jerusalem on track again. In this context he gives major teaching on giving and

Christian economics: Christians are to follow Christ in giving freely; economic equality is the principle governing who gives to whom.

The second section of the letter is an impassioned self-defense, refuting the interloper's claims to superiority. Neither oratory nor pedigree counts in Christian ministry, but only the call of God.

In both sections one observes Paul's deep desire for the unity of the church, both unity within the local community and unity with leaders appointed by God, such as Paul.

Content

Greeting, [1:1-7](#)

A standard greeting ([2 Cor 1:1-2](#)) comes before Paul's usual thanksgiving (vv [3-7](#)). The topic of the thanksgiving—comfort in the midst of suffering—is the topic of chapters [1-7](#). Paul knows what it is to suffer, but it is in suffering that he has experienced God's comfort, which he passes on to the Corinthians.

Paul's Explanation, [1:8-2:13](#)

Paul informs them of the danger he had suffered in Ephesus, one so great that he did not believe he would survive. His eventual survival seemed like a virtual resurrection, reinforcing his conviction that God, not human strength, is the only Christian refuge ([1:8-11](#)). In that and in all situations, Paul's one boast is that of a clear conscience before God (vv [12-14](#)).

Paul had told them of plans for a double visit (cf. [1 Cor 16:5-6](#)), but except for his brief "painful visit," he had not fulfilled his plan ([2 Cor 1:15-2:4](#)). He defends himself from charges of either not planning in the Spirit or hypocritical vacillation. He was indeed as good as his word (cf. [Jas 5:12](#)), for his life reflected God's fulfilled promise in Jesus, but he had changed plans so as not to repeat the "painful visit" of the previous year. It was love, not fickleness, that motivated the delayed visit.

The Corinthians had responded to Paul's "letter of tears" by excommunicating the person who had opposed Paul (not the same person as in [1 Cor 5](#)). Since the person became repentant, Paul called for his restoration to the community, freely and graciously forgiving the man who had hurt him. Excommunication is for the unrepentant; its purpose is complete once the person repents ([2 Cor 2:5-11](#)).

Paul then recounted his journey from Ephesus to Philippi, when he sought news of the response to the "letter of tears" ([2:12-13](#)). After telling how he left an opportunity to minister in Troas to go to find Titus in Philippi, he breaks the narrative with a long digression.

Nature of Apostolic Ministry, [2:14-7:4](#)

The apostolic ministry in which Paul took part is like the ministry of Jesus, one of suffering and glory. Even in suffering there is triumph in Christ, for Christians share Christ's triumph. Yet just like the perfumes of a Roman triumph were joy to the victors but meant death for prisoners on their way to execution, so Jesus' triumph is life to the believer and death to the unbeliever ([2:14-17](#)).

This triumph may have sounded like a boast, but Paul is not engaging in self-exaltation. Indeed, he has no need of the letters of commendation that the interloper in Corinth carried from Jerusalem, for the Corinthians are themselves the proof of his ministry ([3:1-3](#)). His boast is not in himself but in the new covenant in the Spirit, which unlike the old covenant is not fading (here Paul follows one Jewish interpretation of [Ex 34:29-35](#), that Moses put the veil over his face so the people would not see the glory fade), nor does it veil the presence of God. The new covenant is permanent; it reveals God directly in the Spirit. There is no deceit or hiddenness, for the message is not about Paul but about Jesus, who is light itself ([2 Cor 3:4-4:6](#)).

Paul the messenger, however, is simply the cheap, breakable pot that contains the priceless treasure, revealing by way of contrast that the only power in the gospel is God's power. This contrast of weakness and power is seen in the sufferings of the apostle, a type of living death modeled after the sufferings of Jesus, out of which the life of Jesus flows to others ([4:7-15](#)).

Therefore, despite intense suffering, Paul has courage, for he looks beyond this life to the rewards of the coming life. His whole motivation is one of faith, not sight, for he lives already for unseen realities ([4:16-18](#)). When he dies, Paul expects to receive an eternal resurrection body. His hope is not of becoming a disembodied soul ("naked") but of passing immediately into a glorified bodily life, already guaranteed by the presence of the Spirit. This hope was likely the fruit of his near brush with death in Ephesus, when he must have meditated and prayed about what would come at death ([5:1-5](#)). Because this future includes Christ's judgment, Paul wanted to make every

effort to live in the light of that judgment, which he already saw by faith (vv [6-10](#)).

Far from trying to commend or exalt himself, Paul was simply presenting what he was—a person filled with the love of Christ and convinced that all should live not for themselves but for Christ ([5:11-15](#)). No one should be valued from a merely human point of view, not Paul, nor even Christ (for Paul before his conversion had a human opinion of Christ that his conversion had radically changed); everyone should be valued from the point of view of the new creation. Paul's job was simply to announce the reconciliation of the new creation, which God has already effected on his side and which only awaits a person's ratification on the human side ([5:16-20](#)).

Paul, then, was a coworker with God, announcing salvation, using every means consistent with God's character to proclaim the message, and suffering everything imaginable to demonstrate the extent of God's love ([6:1-10](#)). Therefore, Paul had nothing against the Corinthians. If there was any blockage in their relationship with him, it must be on their side ([6:11-13](#)).

Digression on Purity, [6:14-7:1](#)

Perhaps suspecting that the real block in the relationship was their love of the world, or that the Corinthians might not be totally over the problems mentioned in 1 Corinthians, Paul digressed into a discussion about the purity and sanctification of believers. There are two groups, light and darkness, Christ and the devil, believers and unbelievers. Therefore, as [Exodus 25:8](#), [Leviticus 26:11-12](#), [Isaiah 52:11](#), [Ezekiel 37:27](#), and [Hosea 1:10](#) show (phrases from these passages flow into each other in a style of chain quotation familiar to Jews), Christians should not be closely bound to unbelievers in marriage or in business, for it will affect their moral purity.

Return to the Nature of the Apostolic Ministry, [7:2-4](#)

Picking up from [6:13](#), Paul points out that the Corinthians have nothing substantial against him. He is not criticizing but simply appealing to them in love; even now he is prepared to die for them.

Explanation Concluded, [7:5-16](#)

Having concluded his digression, Paul now returns to his journey, which he left in [2:13](#). When he met Titus, he received good news about Corinth. He was

relieved that his "letter of tears" had been effective, not in simply making them sorry but in bringing them to true repentance that yielded zeal, moral purity, and joy. Furthermore, their behavior toward Titus had been so impressive that Titus's enthusiastic report of his own impressions had further cheered Paul.

Collection for Jerusalem, [8:1-9:15](#)

In the context of restored relationships Paul turns to the sensitive topic of the collection for the church in Jerusalem, which had been impoverished through famines in Judea in the 40s. This collection was both an act of charity (cf. [Acts 11:27-30](#); [Gal 2:10](#)) and a symbolic act of unity and fellowship between the Gentile and Jewish branches of the church.

The impoverished and suffering church in Macedonia (Philippi) had given eagerly. Therefore, Titus was coming back to help the Corinthians complete what they had begun the previous year (and probably dropped during the controversy with Paul, [2 Cor 8:1-7](#)). The principles of the collection are (1) the Corinthians should follow the example of Jesus, who became poor for them; (2) they should give freely what they can without regretting that they cannot give more, for God values the eagerness to give expressed in action, not the net amount of the gift; and (3) there should be an economic equality among sections of the church, no one section being enriched at the expense of another (cf. [Ex 16:18](#)). This economic equality extends to the relationship between two churches a continent apart ([2 Cor 8:8-15](#)).

Titus and two absolutely trustworthy men appointed by the churches for this work will come to supervise the final gathering—Paul would have nothing to do with the money personally—for it is important that not only God but the world be able to see the honesty and integrity of the way the church handles money ([8:16-24](#)).

In this section Paul points out that he does not need to argue the reasons for this collection; they were aware of them when they began to gather money the year before. This letter is not an argument for the collection but an encouragement to finish the work, so that when Paul arrives with representatives of other churches carrying their contributions, the Corinthians would not be embarrassed by their relatively wealthy churches not being ready or able to give generously, despite Paul's boasts about their previous eagerness. In saying this, Paul shows himself diplomatic and

insightful in motivating human behavior; he makes the best assumptions possible about the present situation ([9:1-5](#)).

Paul would not want the Corinthians giving out of guilt, although he, like Jesus ([Mt 6:19-20](#)), pointed out that the only real value of money is in giving it to help others. Rather, he wanted them so convinced of God's generosity and ability to provide that they give freely and joyfully. God wanted to enrich them so they could give more. The giving would result in thanksgiving to God by the recipients, who would also pray for those who gave the gift, thereby binding the church together. A closing reminder of the extent of God's own giving finishes the section ([2 Cor 9:6-15](#)).

Paul's Self-Defense, [10:1-13:14](#)

There is an abrupt change in tone between [9:15](#) and [10:1](#). Now, instead of the tone of conciliation found in [1:1-7:16](#), there is argument and defense, even threat. Paul's apostleship has been attacked, and he will defend it with vigor.

Paul was indeed a humble person who preferred not to use his authority. Yet when forced, he had something more than authority; he had spiritual power, capable of destroying opposing arguments and bending all to obedience to Jesus. He would use that power in Corinth if he must, though up to that time he had been gentle and had shown this side of his ministry only in letters ([10:1-11](#)).

His opponents talked of their qualifications and compared themselves favorably with other ministers. Paul would not enter into this game of comparisons. God had set the sphere of his labors, which was the area in which he founded churches. He was the one who pioneered the church in Corinth, so it is his sphere of ministry, not the interloper's (and such like him). They boasted in having reaped the benefits of his ministry; Paul could point to an original ministry given by God, for it is God's commendation in the end that counts ([10:13-18](#)).

Yet the Corinthian rebellion is serious enough to force him into self-defense, ridiculous as such an exercise is. He was shocked by how readily they turned away to every novel doctrine that came along. This tendency strikes fear in Paul's heart ([11:1-6](#)).

Paul had been criticized for refusing financial support from Corinth (even though he accepted gifts from other churches; cf. [1 Cor 9](#)). He would continue to refuse such support, for he wanted to

undermine the claims of the interloper. If the interloper was really serving God alone, let him work on the same basis as Paul! But since the interloper was false at heart, serving Satan and not God, he sought money from the church. Paul was astonished that in the Corinthians' vaunted wisdom they did not see through this hypocrisy, yet he hoped that even if he must play the fool in making a self-defense, they would at least accept a fool like Paul. The irony is that his very tender care and concern for the church, his gentleness, was being used against him as a supposed "weakness." Paul, the opponent argued, knew he was false, so therefore did not dare take money from the Corinthians ([11:7-21](#)).

Interlopers claimed to come with authority from Jerusalem. They had letters from the apostles; it is unlikely, however, that the apostles would have approved of their activities. Still, they were Jews with respectable authority behind them. Paul felt compelled to state his own credentials. If they were Jews, he was just as pure a Jew. If they served Christ, could their work and sufferings match his? The list of sufferings both gives historical information not found in Acts and points to tireless labor, including days of fasting ("gone without food") and nights spent in prayer ("gone without sleep") ([11:21-29](#)).

But this boasting was repulsive to Paul, so he isolated one particular suffering—his escape from Damascus, when he had to hide and slip out of the city in a basket. The story at once shows his effectiveness as an evangelist (in that he was a target of persecution) and shames him, for he could not defend himself and had to slip away under cover of darkness. Yet that weakness was indeed his glory ([11:30-33](#)).

His opponents boasted in revelations from God. Paul knew that this boasting was senseless; however, if he must, he would tell them of a revelation superior to theirs, a time when he actually saw the inside of heaven (he is not sure whether it was a vision or an actual bodily experience). This probably happened about AD 42, while Paul was in Tarsus, before Barnabas came for him ([Acts 9:30](#); [11:25](#)). Paul disliked telling about this, for God's power is more easily seen in his weakness. In fact, Paul's opponents were an affliction of Satan that God allowed to keep Paul humble and to demonstrate his power in Paul's weakness. (The image of a "thorn in my flesh" is one of enemies—[Nm 33:55](#); [Jos 23:13](#); Paul also describes what he means more clearly in [2 Cor](#)

[12:10](#)). If vulnerability shows God's power, Paul willingly accepts the weakness ([12:1-10](#)).

Paul felt ashamed that he had to boast. The opponents boasted in coming from the Jerusalem "superapostles." Paul pointed out that he was their equal, although both are nothing. God had set his mark upon Paul's work. With biting irony he asks forgiveness for not having taken money from the Corinthians ([12:11-13](#)).

Yet Paul would come a third time, and he would keep to the same policy of not taking any support from them but giving himself freely to them, just as Jesus had done on earth. Not only he, but all his envoys, kept to the same policy. No one could accuse him of deceit or inconsistency ([12:14-18](#)). However, he feared coming to them, for he knew that the community had not just rebelled against him but was also in internal disorder. This disunity and immorality would humble and pain Paul ([12:19-13:4](#)).

Therefore, the Corinthians had better examine themselves. Were they really following Jesus or not? If so, they should see that Paul was also following Jesus. Yet Paul's concern was not for his own position—he was content to be rejected ("weak")—but for their following the truth. He hoped for their repentance, not to protect himself, but so that he need not be severe when he came ([13:5-10](#)).

Probably taking the pen from the scribe at this point, Paul closes with a final appeal to repent and come to unity as a church. Brief greetings from the church in Macedonia and a formal blessing closes his correspondence with the Corinthians (vv [11-13](#)).

See also Acts of the Apostles, Book of the; Corinth; Corinthians, First Letter to the; Paul, The Apostle.

Cormorant

A cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo*) is a large, black bird that looks like a goose. It appears often in art from Egypt and the Holy Land. Cormorants are 48 to 102 centimeters long (19 to 40 inches). They have webbing between all four toes. Their feet are set far back on the body, which helps them swim under water to catch food. They eat fish, shellfish, and amphibians (animals such as frogs). The bill is long and curves at the tip. A small sac under the bill can hold a caught fish.

Cormorants live in large groups. They make nests of sticks and plants in trees or on rocky ledges near the sea. Each pair lays up to four eggs. Both the male and female care for the young.

In Bible times, cormorants lived in swamps near the Sea of Galilee, Lake Huleh (waters of Merom), and along the Mediterranean coast. The Hebrew name for the bird comes from its habit of "diving down" to catch prey. Cormorants dive deep and move quickly under water when hunting fish. People often thought of them as greedy birds. They were unclean for the Israelites ([Leviticus 11:17](#); [Deuteronomy 14:17](#)).

See also Birds; Pelican.

Corn

Word often used to denote grain, especially wheat. Maize, the plant known in America as corn, was unknown in the Middle East in biblical times. *See* Plants (Barley; Wheat).

Cornelius

Roman centurion and the first gentile Christian mentioned in the book of Acts.

The story of Cornelius's conversion through the preaching of the apostle Peter is recorded in [Acts 10:1-11:18](#). Before his conversion, Cornelius was well known to the Jews as a person who feared God, prayed continually, and gave alms.

At first the church was composed only of Jews, who were reluctant to preach the gospel to Gentiles because law-abiding Jews never had fellowship with "pagans." Peter, a law-abiding Jew, had scruples about entering a Gentile's house and eating "unclean" food. Through a vision, however, God led Peter to Cornelius's house to preach the gospel to him and his family and close friends. Before Peter had finished speaking, and before baptism or the laying on of hands could be administered, God dramatically demonstrated his acceptance of Gentiles into the fellowship of the church by giving them the gift of the Holy Spirit. Peter remained several days in Cornelius's house, no doubt rejoicing in the centurion's conversion and instructing him in his newfound faith.

Cornelius's conversion represented a significant step in the separation of the early church from Judaism. Cornelius did not have to submit to any of

the Jewish practices, such as circumcision or eating only ritually “clean” animals. For the first time a gentile believer was accepted into the church on equal terms with Jewish Christians.

See also Acts of the Apostles, Book of the.

Corner Gate

Gate presumably located in the northwest corner of the Jerusalem wall. After King Jehoash of Israel captured King Amaziah of Judah, he tore down a section of the Jerusalem wall from the Corner Gate to the Ephraim Gate ([2 Kgs 14:13](#); [2 Chr 25:23](#)); later King Uzziah of Judah built towers at this gate ([2 Chr 26:9](#)). Jeremiah ([Jer 31:38](#)) foretells a time when the Jerusalem wall will be rebuilt from the Tower of Hananel to the Corner Gate. Zechariah ([Zec 14:10](#)) also envisions a period of security and prosperity epitomized by the presence of the Jerusalem wall, including the Corner Gate.

See also Jerusalem.

Corners of the Earth

Figurative term denoting the borders and extremities of the earth ([Jb 37:3](#); [Is 11:12](#); [Jer 25:32](#); [31:8](#); [Ez 7:2](#); [Rv 7:1](#); [20:8](#)).

Cornerstone

A cornerstone is the most important stone in a building's foundation. In the New Testament, "cornerstone" is a special title for Jesus to show how important he is.

How Did Jesus Use "Cornerstone" in His Teachings?

Jesus used this term when he told a story about workers in a vineyard ([Matthew 21:42](#); [Mark 12:10](#); [Luke 20:17](#)). He shared this story during his last visit to Jerusalem after he had driven merchants out of the temple. When the Jewish leaders questioned him about his actions in the temple, Jesus responded with this story.

In the story, some workers were put in charge of a vineyard. The vineyard represented God's people, and the workers represented the Jewish leaders. The owner of the vineyard represented God. When the owner sent his son to the vineyard, the workers

killed him. Jesus used this story to show how the Jewish leaders would reject and kill him, God's Son.

In this story, Jesus was giving a hint about his coming death. He then quoted from the Jewish Scriptures, especially [Psalm 118:22–23](#) and [Isaiah 28:16](#). These verses talk about a stone that builders rejected but which later became the most important stone in the building. Jesus used these verses to show what would happen to him: though the Jewish leaders would reject him, God would make him the most important part of his plan.

How Did Peter Use "Cornerstone" to Explain Jesus's Role?

Peter also used the word "cornerstone" when he spoke to the Jewish rulers in Jerusalem ([Acts 4:11](#)). He was explaining about healing a man who could not walk near the temple gate. Peter told them that he had healed the man through the power of Jesus of Nazareth. He reminded them that they had killed Jesus, but God had brought him back to life ([Acts 4:10](#)).

Peter then quoted from [Psalm 118:22](#) to show that these events were described in their scriptures. When Peter talked about the rejected stone, he was referring to Jesus's death. When he spoke about the stone becoming the most important one, he was describing how God raised Jesus to life and gave him the highest authority. This is why we call Jesus the "cornerstone." Jesus has the most important position with God the Father.

Peter uses the word "cornerstone" again in his letter [1 Peter 2:6–7](#). In verse [1 Peter 2:4](#), Peter combines the idea of the rejection of the stone in [Psalm 118:22](#) with the idea of the chosen and valuable stone in [Isaiah 28:16](#). Because Peter had seen Jesus alive after his death, he also describes Jesus as a "living stone." Peter encourages his readers to come to Jesus. He says that when they do this, they become like stones that God uses to build a special temple where he is worshipped. This picture helps show how important and powerful Jesus is.

In verse [1 Peter 2:6](#), Peter quotes [Isaiah 28:16](#), which speaks of the chosen and precious cornerstone. This message is for people who trust in Jesus. In verses [1 Peter 2:7–8](#), he quotes [Psalm 118:22](#), talking about the rejection of the stone, and [Isaiah 8:14](#). Isaiah describes a stone that causes people to stumble. These verses describe what happens to people who do not believe in Jesus. Through these quotes, Peter shows how important

Jesus is. He wants to remind his readers that God has chosen them to follow Jesus.

Throughout the Old Testament, a cornerstone represents something very important. The New Testament writers use this image to show that Jesus has the highest authority with God the Father. This teaches people who follow Jesus how special and important he is. Paul also uses this image in his letter to the Ephesians, saying that Jesus is the cornerstone that holds God's people together like a building ([Ephesians 2:20](#)).

Cornet

See Musical Instruments (Hatzotzrot); Music.

Correction

The act of teaching someone to change wrong behavior.

See Discipline.

Corruption, Mount of

Southern end of the Mt of Olives, called "corruption" because King Solomon built idols there for his foreign wives ([1 Kgs 11:7](#); [2 Kgs 23:13](#)). The term is possibly an ironic play on the Hebrew word for "anointing." The site may have originally been called the "Mount of Anointing" because oil from the many olive groves on its slopes was used in consecration ceremonies. See Olives, Mount of.

Cos

Cos is an island in the Aegean Sea, part of the Sporades group. The island has a city with the same name. Cos is located near the coast of Caria in Asia Minor (modern Turkey).

The apostle Paul visited Cos during his travels. It was his first stop after leaving Ephesus while he was traveling to Jerusalem at the end of his third missionary journey ([Acts 21:1](#), "Coos" in the King James Version).

In the Apocrypha (a set of ancient texts not included in the Hebrew Bible but accepted by some Christian groups), Cos is mentioned along with

other areas. These places received a letter from the Roman consul Lucius. The letter forbade war against the Jewish people who lived in these areas ([1 Maccabees 15:23](#)).

Cos (now called Kos) was an important center for shipping and trade. It was famous for its wheat, ointments, wines, and silk. Later it became one of the financial centers of the eastern Mediterranean.

Hippocrates, who is known as the "father of medicine," was born on Cos. He practiced medicine there during the fifth and fourth centuries BC. During the rule of King Herod, Cos received ongoing financial payments. The people of Cos built a statue there to honor Herod's son, Herod Antipas.

Cosam

An ancestor of Jesus. He was Addi's father and Elmadam's son. He is only mentioned in Luke's list of Jesus's ancestors ([Luke 3:28](#)).

See Ancestry of Jesus Christ.

Cosmetics

Cosmetics are things people put on their bodies to enhance their appearance.

How Were Cosmetics Used in the Ancient World?

Originally, eye paint served the medical purpose of preventing flies from spreading infection. Flies do this by settling on the eyes, especially of sleeping persons. Substances such as kohl, malachite, and stibium have properties that help clean and protect against infection. They were useful medications.

These minerals were found and made into a paste by mixing them with gum arabic or water. The paint was mixed in a small bowl and applied either with a spatula or with a finger. Archaeologists found many such bowls dating to 800 BC at various Palestinian sites. They also recovered much earlier bowls from Egypt. Egyptian women used green malachite as an eye paint. In the Roman period, antimony came into popular use.

When eye makeup became fashionable as a cosmetic procedure, the eyes were outlined in black. People used galena or lead sulfide to make them look large. This practice was followed particularly in Egypt, Palestine, and Mesopotamia.

Eyebrows were also darkened by the application of a black paste.

Cosmetics in the Bible

Jezebel decorated her eyes with cosmetics just before her dramatic death in about 841 BC ([2 Kings 9:30](#)). Many in biblical Jewish society believed women with painted eyes lacked virtue ([Jeremiah 4:30](#); [Ezekiel 23:40](#)). People used henna as a paint and applied it to parts of the body. They applied henna to the hands, feet, fingernails, and toenails.

People used oils as a protection for the skin against the sun. People often added perfume to oils. Anointing, which means putting oil on someone's body as a special ceremony, was considered very important. When the troops of the Israelite king Ahaz returned to their homeland in about 730 BC, they were clothed, fed, and anointed ([2 Chronicles 28:15](#)). As a normal act of hospitality, the host anointed a guest's feet. The process may also have been important for cleanliness. Many people found it far more convenient to apply perfumes than to wash the body. This was particularly true when water was in short supply.

An alabaster jar of ointment was a very expensive gift since it would have to be imported ([Luke 7:37](#)). At the archaeological dig of Lachish, an excellent ivory ointment flask from about the 13th century BC was found. A Babylonian inscription described a fragrant ointment made from the root of ginger grass, which was imported from Arabia. In New Testament times, costly ointments most probably came from India.

Cotton

A soft, white, fibrous material that comes from plants of the mallow family (*genus Gossypium*). These fibers surround the seeds in its round seed pod (called a boll). People weave cotton into thread and cloth ([Isaiah 19:9](#)).

Cotton plants or shrubs grow in warm climates. They are valuable both for the soft white fiber attached to their seeds and for the oil that can be extracted from these seeds.

The "white linen" in [Esther 1:6](#) is almost certainly referring to Levant cotton (*Gossypium herbaceum*). This type of cotton has been grown since ancient times in the Far East. Alexander the Great brought cotton back to the western world from India.

The Jewish people probably became familiar with cotton during the time they were held captive in Persia under King Ahasuerus.

See Cloth and Cloth Manufacturing.

Couch

Article of furniture for reclining in sleep or rest. See Furniture.

Counsel, Counselor

Counsel is advice. A counselor is someone who gives advice, especially on legal matters. Lawyers are often called counselors. In Bible times, a counselor in a king's court was like a political cabinet member today. A counselor might sometimes have been in line to succeed the king.

Counselors in the Bible

Ahithophel was a counselor to David and Absalom. He gave advice that was so trustworthy it was as if it came directly from God ([2 Samuel 16:23](#)). The elders of Israel counseled King Rehoboam ([1 Kings 12:6](#)). So did Rehoboam's childhood friends (verses [7-8](#)), although his friends gave poor advice. The Bible mentions official counselors in Egypt ([Isaiah 19:11](#)) and Babylon ([Daniel 3:2-3](#)).

A wise person seeks counsel when making plans: "Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed." ([Proverbs 15:22](#)). Counselors may be:

- one's parents ([1:8](#))
- older people ([Ezekiel 7:26](#))
- prophets ([2 Chronicles 25:16](#))
- wise men ([Jeremiah 18:18](#))
- friends ([Proverbs 27:9](#))

Some counselors are evil and give advice meant to deceive people ([Proverbs 12:5](#)).

God as a Counselor

According to the Bible, God also counsels. He frustrates the counsel of the nations who oppose him ([Psalms 33:10](#)). But, God's own counsel endures for many generations (verse [11](#)). No one may counsel the Lord ([Isaiah 40:13](#)). His chosen

leader, the Messiah, is called “Wonderful Counselor” (9:6).

According to the New Testament, the Holy Spirit counsels or comforts believers ([John 14:16–17](#)). Christ sends the Holy Spirit to his people ([16:7](#)). The Holy Spirit, also called the Spirit of truth, bears witness to Christ ([15:26](#)). Jesus Christ, after he rose to heaven, is seen as a counselor in God’s heavenly court (described as an “advocate” in [1 John 2:1](#)).

See also Spirit of God.

Court

Area enclosed by buildings or walls and without a roof. The temple had courts for priests, women, and Gentiles. Courts were common in private homes as well. *See* Architecture; Homes and Dwellings; Tabernacle; Temple.

Courts and Trials

Legal disputes were as much a part of life in Bible times as they are today. The ways that courts operated and trials were conducted, however, were quite different. Unless those customs are understood, modern readers of the Bible, thinking of contemporary legal procedures, may misunderstand the judicial accounts contained in the Bible.

Old Testament Legal Procedures

Exodus to Deuteronomy

The books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy contain most of the law in the OT, plus much other information about courts and legal procedures. Those books reveal how trials were conducted before Israel had kings. Certain changes in the legal system occurring after the establishment of the monarchy (c. 1000 BC) are described in other OT books.

The OT depicts God as supreme lawgiver and judge, with Moses and later the kings as God’s deputies. But Moses did not create the law or decide the most difficult cases, which were referred directly to God for the decision (see [Lv 24:10–23](#); [Nm 15:32–36](#); [27:1–11](#)). When disputes arose between Israel’s leaders, God intervened, judging the guilty party directly ([Nm 16–17](#)). Thus law is seen in the OT as

a divine revelation, not a human creation, as it was regarded in ancient Babylon.

Usually it was not necessary to seek God’s direct guidance; precedent was sufficient. Elders were appointed in Israel to serve as judges of all but the most serious cases, relieving Moses of the burden of judging all the people himself ([Ex 18:13–27](#)). [Deuteronomy 16:18](#) specifies that “judges” be appointed in every town; in other passages those responsible for punishing criminals are called “the elders” ([Dt 19:12](#)). The local judges were obviously nonprofessionals selected from the most respected members of each tribe or village. Difficult cases were referred to a central court of justice to be decided by the priests and, in the period of the judges, by the civil and military leader ([17:8–12](#)). Deborah and Samuel were both examples of such “judges of Israel.” Samuel even conducted a circuit court in a number of different centers ([Jgs 4:4–5](#); [1 Sm 7:15–17](#)).

In Israel, as in other ancient societies, private prosecution was the norm. An individual with a grievance had to bring the case before the court. Only in situations of idolatry or other serious religious crimes were public prosecutions instituted ([Dt 13](#); [17:2–7](#)). Even in murder cases prosecution was left in the hands of the victim’s relatives. One relative, called the “avenger of blood,” had to pursue the alleged murderer to the nearest city of refuge, where a trial was held ([Nm 35:10–34](#); [Dt 19:1–13](#)).

Trials were held in a public place, such as the open space near a city gate ([Dt 21:19](#)). During the trial, the judges were seated, but the parties to the dispute and the witnesses stood. At least two witnesses were required to convict ([19:15](#)). They had to be eyewitnesses who had caught the accused red-handed. Where such clear-cut evidence was lacking (for example in disputes over ownership), the litigants could take an oath to demonstrate their honesty ([Ex 22:8–13](#)). If a husband suspected his wife of infidelity but had no proof, he could require her to undergo an ordeal of drinking “bitter water” to demonstrate her innocence ([Nm 5:6–31](#)).

When all the evidence had been presented, the judges gave their verdict. Those who had brought the accusation had the duty of enforcing the court’s sentence. Thus, a witness of idolatry had to throw the first stone at the guilty person’s execution ([Dt 17:7](#)). Certain administrative officials may have had the job of writing down the court’s decision and seeing that it was enforced ([16:18](#)). At times it

may have been difficult for people to uphold their legal rights if their opponent came from a strong and wealthy family.

Other Old Testament Books

When Israel became a kingdom, certain changes were made in its judicial system. Most obviously, the king became the supreme judge who dealt with the most difficult cases. Solomon demonstrated his great wisdom in adjudicating between two women who both claimed to be the mother of a particular baby ([1 Kgs 3:16-28](#)). Kings, who had all the power necessary to enforce their decisions, were expected to use it to help the weak members of society, such as orphans and widows ([Ps 72:12](#)).

In practice, however, Israel's kings did not always live up to that ideal. Absalom sowed the seeds of a revolution by telling those who came to the royal court that his father, King David, did not administer justice well ([2 Sm 15:1-6](#)). One notable trial in the OT illustrates how royal judicial powers could be completely misused by unscrupulous rulers. Naboth was put to death on a trumped-up charge of blasphemy so that King Ahab could extend his palace grounds by taking over Naboth's vineyard. Though the charge was false, the trial followed correct legal procedures. Two scoundrels were found to give evidence that they had heard Naboth curse God and the king ([1 Kgs 21:10](#)); one witness would have been insufficient to secure conviction. Naboth was tried by the elders of the city in a public place. After being convicted he was taken outside the city and executed (vv [11-13](#)). In other trials the prophet Jeremiah was charged with subversive activities more than once ([Jer 26](#); [37:11-38:28](#)).

The prophets sometimes pictured God as taking Israel to court to answer for the nation's misdeeds. God would list Israel's sins and invite the people to explain their behavior. Sometimes heaven and earth, or the mountains, were called to be witnesses confirming the truth of God's accusations. Finally judgment was pronounced (e.g., [Is 1:2-26](#); [43](#); [Jer 2:4-37](#); [Mi 6](#)).

A theme running through the book of Job is Job's request for a trial. Job thought that if he were given a fair hearing, his innocence would be demonstrated and God would stop causing him so much suffering (cf. [Jb 13:23](#)). Eventually God heeded Job's request and a long cross-examination began, finally reducing Job to silence ([42:1-6](#)).

New Testament Legal Procedures

Numerous trials occur in the NT. Jesus was tried by the Sanhedrin (the supreme Jewish religious court) and also by the Roman governor. The book of Acts mentions various court actions designed to stop the spread of Christianity. Luke, the author of Acts, presents a vivid and accurate description of how courts operated in provinces of the Roman Empire. Acts reaches a climax with Paul traveling to Rome to have his case heard by the Roman emperor Nero. Legal procedures in Roman courts were governed by complicated rules broadly resembling modern judicial technicalities. Serious crime was handled by public prosecutors, and trials were usually conducted by one judge. There were lawyers for the prosecution and lawyers for the defense.

In Judea and other provinces of the empire, the local legal system was not suppressed. Traditional Jewish courts were allowed to try minor and religious offenses ([Acts 4](#); [6:12-7:60](#)) but were not permitted to handle serious cases where the death penalty might be involved. For that reason, when the Sanhedrin found Jesus guilty of blasphemy for claiming to be the Son of God and the Messiah, they had to transfer the case to Pontius Pilate, the Roman procurator (governor) of Judea. The Jews considered blasphemy worthy of death, but as they admitted to Pilate, "It is not lawful for us to put any man to death" ([Jn 18:31](#), rsv). The rule throughout the Roman Empire was that only governors could pronounce the death sentence. Execution of the apostle James by Jewish authorities, mentioned by the Jewish historian Josephus, took place during an interregnum between two governors. The stoning of Stephen was done in haste, without the consent of Pilate ([Acts 7](#)).

The Trials of Jesus

Jesus was first tried by the Sanhedrin, presided over by the high priest. By later standards of Jewish legal practice, that trial was somewhat irregular. For example, it seems to have been held both at night and on the eve of a festival. Criminal trials were not supposed to take place at such times. It is uncertain that those rules existed in Jesus' day, but even if they did, little can be made of that technicality since the Jewish court had no power to carry out its sentence.

After conviction by the Sanhedrin, Jesus was taken to Pilate, whose Jerusalem residence, the old royal palace called the Praetorium, was on the western side of the city near the modern Jaffa Gate. The Romans were unlikely to sentence anyone to death

in a religious matter, so the Jewish authorities presented their charges against Jesus in political language: he violated the law by “forbidding us to give tribute to Caesar, and saying that he himself is Christ a king” ([Lk 23:2](#), rsv). Perhaps sensing something false about those charges (they were actually religious rather than political), Pilate sent Jesus to Herod, the ruler of Galilee, who was in Jerusalem at the time. Pilate, who did not have to send Galileans to Herod for trial, probably saw this as a means of avoiding an uncomfortable decision. Herod, however, pronounced Jesus innocent and returned him to Pilate.

Pilate offered to give Jesus a disciplinary beating traditionally given to troublemakers as a warning to behave themselves in the future ([Lk 23:16](#)). But that did not satisfy Jesus’ accusers, who pressed the charge of insurrection, threatening to report Pilate to the emperor if he did not convict Jesus. Pilate, who had not been a very successful governor, feared official complaints about his administration, so the threat worked. He sentenced Jesus to be crucified on the charge of being king of the Jews. The heavy scourging that preceded the Crucifixion was never a punishment by itself but was a frequent accompaniment to other punishments. Another feature of Roman legal practice illustrated in the Gospels was the division of Jesus’ clothes among the soldiers; executioners were allowed to keep such personal effects as a fringe benefit.

The Trials of the Apostle Paul

Paul’s trials recorded in the book of Acts also reflect the division between Jewish and Roman authority in legal matters. When arrested, Paul had a preliminary hearing before the Sanhedrin ([Acts 23](#)). He was then transferred to the governor for a formal trial in Caesarea, the governor’s usual headquarters. There he was tried before Felix, who adjourned the case for two years until a new governor could be appointed. Luke reported that Felix (another unpopular governor) did that to please the Jews, but it was quite common for governors to leave cases to be dealt with by their successors.

When Festus, the new governor, arrived, he suggested that Paul be tried in Jerusalem. Paul, disliking the prospect of being tried there, exercised his right as a Roman citizen to be tried in Rome before the emperor ([Acts 25:1–20](#)). The rest of the book of Acts tells how Paul eventually reached Rome and had to wait another two years before his case was heard. No details of Paul’s trial

in Rome are known, but Nero, who was emperor when Paul arrived, tried very few cases himself. He appointed judges to handle appeals cases such as Paul’s, so it is unlikely that Paul was actually tried by Nero.

The right of appeal to the emperor was not the only legal right possessed by Roman citizens. They were also protected from being beaten without a trial, a right asserted by Paul in Philippi and Jerusalem ([Acts 16:37](#); [22:24–29](#)).

See also Avenger of Blood; Cities of Refuge; Civil Law and Justice; Criminal Law and Punishment; Sanhedrin.

Covenant

Arrangement between two parties involving mutual obligations; especially the arrangement that established the relationship between God and his people, expressed in grace first with Israel and then with the church. Through that covenant God has conveyed to humanity the meaning of human life and salvation. Covenant is one of the central themes of the Bible, where some covenants are between human beings, others between God and human beings.

The covenant theme in the OT is developed from Noah to Abraham and reaches its first climax in the covenant formed between God and Israel at Mt Sinai. After King David’s time, the history of the covenant becomes a less prominent theme.

At a low point in covenant history the Bible introduces the prophet Jeremiah’s prophecy of a “new covenant” in Israel’s future. Christians believe that Jeremiah’s prophecy eventually found fulfillment in the person and work of Jesus Christ. It is not accidental that the two volumes of the Christian Bible have been called the Old Covenant and New Covenant (the word commonly translated “testament” means “covenant”).

Preview

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- Human Covenants
- Divine-Human Covenants
- Beginnings of the Covenant Tradition
- The Sinai Covenant
- The Covenant with David

- The New Covenant Predicted in the Old Testament

The Meaning of Covenant

The essence of covenant is to be found in a particular kind of relationship between persons. Mutual obligations characterize that kind of relationship. Thus a covenant relationship is not merely a mutual acquaintance but a commitment to responsibility and action. A key word in Scripture to describe that commitment is “faithfulness,” acted out in a context of abiding friendship.

In the OT the word “covenant” was used in an ordinary human sense as well as in a theological sense. An understanding of human covenants provides a starting point for understanding the covenant between God and human beings.

Human Covenants

A variety of human relationships, from profoundly personal to distantly political, may be described as covenantal. The deep brotherly love that David and Jonathan shared led to a formal covenant between them ([1 Sm 18:3](#)). Their covenant of friendship was more than a token of esteem; it bound them to demonstrate mutual loyalty and loving-kindness in certain tangible ways. Jonathan’s covenant faithfulness was typified on an occasion when David was out of favor with the king; Jonathan braved his father’s wrath to speak favorably for his friend. Subsequently, he warned David secretly to flee into hiding ([1 Sm 19–20](#)).

To appreciate the many OT laws on marriage and divorce, one must understand that marriage itself was a covenant relationship ([Mal 2:14](#)). The solemn promises exchanged by a man and woman became their covenant obligations. Faithfulness to those promises brought marital blessing (cf. [Ps 128](#); [Prv 18:22](#)); violation brought a curse.

An individual could, at least figuratively, make a covenant or vow with himself or herself (something like a New Year’s resolution). Job, arguing his integrity before God, referred to a covenant he had made with his eyes to keep him from looking at women licentiously ([Jb 31:1](#)).

Covenants could also have a national or international character. The elders of Israel made a national covenant with King David in Hebron ([2 Sm 5:3](#)). Probably it contained explicit promises both from the elders on behalf of the people to submit themselves to the king’s authority and from David

to rule the nation justly and according to the law of God ([Dt 17:15–20](#)). The covenant relationship described mutual obligations between a senior partner (the king) and junior partners (the Israelites). In international relationships OT covenants were similar to modern treaties or alliances. King Solomon entered into such a covenant with Hiram, king of Tyre; that covenant, like many modern international treaties, was a trade agreement between the two nations ([1 Kgs 5:12](#)).

Covenant is thus an interpersonal framework of trust, responsibilities, and benefits, with broad application to almost every human relationship from personal friendship to international trade agreements. In Scripture covenant is also the most comprehensive concept covering an individual’s relationship to God.

Divine-Human Covenants

The same basic characteristics of a strictly human covenant are present in a divine covenant: (1) a relationship between two parties (God and a human being or nation), and (2) mutual obligations between the covenant partners. To the OT believer, religion meant covenant. OT religion was faithfulness to the covenant relationship between God and his chosen people; religious responsibilities for both the faith and practice of Israel were covenant responsibilities.

The concept of a divine-human covenant in the OT was not static. Although the fundamental character of covenant remains the same throughout the Bible, the specific nature and form of the covenant changed and developed in the course of ancient Israel’s history. A brief survey of covenant history will further clarify its dimensions.

Beginnings of the Covenant Tradition

Adam

Adam and Eve were placed in the Garden. God was their Creator; they were his creatures. The meaning of their lives was to be found in relationship with each other and with God, the giver of the Garden. The fall, however, brought a disruption of the divine relationship, and they were expelled from the Garden.

The fall substantially influenced the nature of subsequent religious covenants. The separation of humankind from God clarifies the nature of the human predicament. Created for a relationship

with the Creator, sinning humans are excluded from that relationship and cannot, on their own accord, reestablish it. From that circumstance emerges a distinctive feature of divine-human covenants, namely, that God alone can initiate the relationship of covenant.

Noah

The first explicit mention of covenant in Scripture refers to the initiative taken by God to bind himself again to human beings in a covenant, despite human faithlessness. When God warned Noah to build an ark in order to escape the impending Flood, he also promised to establish a covenant with him ([Gn 6:18](#)). The corruption and violence of the human race had provoked God's anger, but his grace was shown in his dealings with Noah. The promised covenant provided that God would maintain a relationship with one family, even though other divine-human relationships were being formally severed. Significantly, God's covenant promise to Noah came in a context of demand: God ordered Noah to build an ark (v [14](#)). Noah's receipt of the covenant blessing depended on his obedience to a divine command.

The covenant was elaborated only after the Flood, when Noah had made an offering to God ([Gn 8:20–22](#)). The covenant with Noah was in fact a universal covenant with humankind and all living creatures ([9:8–10](#)). God promised never to send such a flood again as judgment on the world. The sign of that covenant was the rainbow.

The covenant with Noah affords some perspective for understanding the "covenant God." Although human beings may deserve destruction because of their wickedness, God withholds that destruction. The covenant of Noah did not establish an intimate relationship between God and each living being; nevertheless, it left open the possibility of a more intimate covenant. Human beings, in spite of their evil, are allowed for a time to live in God's world; during those years, they may seek a deeper relationship with that world's Creator.

Abraham

The first explicit reference to God's covenant with Abraham is in [Genesis 15](#). When the Lord called the 75-year-old Abram (as he was first called) to leave his home city of Ur and set out on a journey, a relationship already existed between God and Abram. In that relationship, which enabled God to command Abram's obedience, God made certain promises to him: "I will make of you a great nation,

and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing" ([Gn 12:2](#), rsv).

Formal establishment of the covenant with Abram is described in [Genesis 15](#) as a profound religious experience. The initiative lay entirely with God, who approached Abram in a vision and spoke with him. Abram raised a fundamental objection: how could he experience the blessing of God if it was to come to him through a son he did not have? His wife Sarai was past the childbearing age, and he himself was "as good as dead" ([Rom 4:19](#)). God assured the old man that he would have a son through whom his descendants would eventually be as numerous as the stars of heaven. Abram's belief at that point introduced the theme of righteousness central to the covenant concept: Abram "believed the Lord, and he reckoned it to him as righteousness" ([Gn 15:6](#), rsv). At the end of that day, Abram knew that his own future and the future of his descendants were firmly in the hands of the covenant God. "On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, 'To your descendants I give this land'" (v [18](#), rsv).

The covenant is more fully expressed in [Genesis 17](#), which probably records a renewal of God's covenant with Abram. The initiative once again lay with God ([Gn 17:1](#)). God addressed the 99-year-old Abram in words that made clear that the covenant was not a relationship between equal partners. God was the Almighty; Abram was a human being to whom an extraordinary privilege had been granted.

Yet the details of the covenant in [Genesis 17](#) show that both partners assumed responsibilities. God committed himself voluntarily to Abram and his descendants while requiring certain commitments from Abram. The blessing Abram would receive as a covenant partner became clear from the new name God gave him. "I am changing your name. It will no longer be Abram; now you will be known as Abraham, for you will be the father of many nations" ([Gn 17:5](#), nlt). God would give to Abraham, through his descendants, the land of Canaan as an everlasting gift and would be the personal God of Abraham and his family in perpetuity (vv [7–8](#)).

God's giving required a response of obedience from Abraham: "Live a blameless life" ([Gn 17:1](#), nlt). Those simple words indicate the essence of covenant relationship: to relate to God is to live in his presence; since God is holy, one who knows him is expected to live a life of integrity and blamelessness.

The covenant also had a more formal aspect. Abraham and the male members of his household were to undergo the rite of circumcision as a symbol of covenant commitment. Abraham was an old man when he was circumcised ([Gn 17:24](#)), though male children born into the covenant family were to be circumcised when they were eight days old (v [12](#)). Circumcision was not in itself a ritual peculiar to the Hebrews; it was practiced in most societies in the ancient Near East (the Philistines were one exception). The distinctiveness lay in what the act symbolized: among other things, a continuing and faithful relationship with the living God.

God's covenant with Abraham was characterized by both present and future realities. The covenant established a continuing relationship between Abraham and his Creator. Yet its thrust pointed to future blessing—in the children yet to be born, the “chosen people,” and in the land that eventually his descendants would call their own.

Another dimension of the covenant lay still further in the future: “All the families of the earth will be blessed through you” ([Gn 12:3](#), nlt). Early in the OT, the idea of election (God's unconditional preference; cf. [2 Thes 2:13](#)) is present. God chose to enter into a covenant relationship with a particular man and his particular descendants. Yet God always elects a person to serve: Adam, to cultivate the Garden; Noah, to build an ark; Abraham, to leave his home for another land and to live blamelessly before God (cf. [Eph 2:8–10](#)). Further, the “particularity” of Abraham's election contained within it a universality: through his descendants the blessing of God would be offered to all.

Thus, the future aspects of Abraham's covenant reflect two stages. From Abraham's perspective, in the relatively near future his descendants would possess a land given them by God. But in the more distant future was the prospect of a universal blessing, the culmination of God's work in the world. The initial fulfillment of that distant future is perceived in the NT, but the more immediate fulfillment of God's promise was the Sinai covenant at the time of Moses.

The Sinai Covenant

The covenant established between God and Israel at Mt Sinai is the focal point of the covenant tradition in the OT. It was anticipated in the covenant of Abraham and lay behind the covenant of David and the proclamation of the prophets. It was central to OT religion, laying down the

foundations of Judaism that continue into the modern world. The Sinai covenant was the formal institution of a relationship between God and his chosen people, Israel.

In order to appreciate the impact of the Sinai covenant, one must understand its historical context. It was preceded by the exodus of the Hebrew people from Egypt under the leadership of Moses. The exodus was an extraordinary act of liberation in which God intervened in the normal course of history to free his people from slavery in Egypt. The exodus is interpreted in the OT as a divine act comparable to Creation, the act through which God “created” the nation of Israel. Examination of the two versions of the fourth commandment ([Ex 20:8–11](#); [Dt 5:12–15](#)) shows that the exodus from Egypt directly parallels the creation of the world as a basis for Sabbath observance. Although Israel was created in the exodus, the nation had neither a constitution nor land. The covenant provided the nascent state of Israel with a constitution, making it a theocratic state (a state ruled by God).

The basic account of the Sinai covenant is contained in [Exodus 19](#) and [20](#). The initiative came from God, who gave instructions through Moses to prepare for the covenant; God spoke the words that contained the covenant offer. There was no doubt that the God of Israel was the senior partner in the relationship made formal at Sinai. The God who had revealed himself through his acts in the exodus then revealed himself in words. Those two aspects—the God who acts and speaks—are central to OT theology. And although the covenant contained law, it was preceded by the exodus, an act of divine grace.

God's offer of covenant carried with it a divine promise: “You will be to me a kingdom of priests, my holy nation” ([Ex 19:6](#), nlt). The promise was one of extraordinary privilege; an entire nation was called upon to represent all other nations before the God of the universe. But the priestly office, though it carried privilege, was also a demanding office. A priest had to be pure and had to know the God whose presence he was required to enter. Thus Israel, the priestly nation, received a law that would provide direction in living, in loving God, and in serving all people. The law given with the covenant expressed the requirements for God's covenant people.

The Covenant Law

The covenant law had two principal parts. First, the Ten Commandments expressed God's requirements of Israel in a concise form ([Ex 20:2–17](#)). The commandments specified the covenant people's relationship both to God and to other human beings. Although the tendency in the present day is to view the Ten Commandments as a system of ethics or morality, they had a different role in ancient Israel. The covenant law was the foundation or constitution of a new nation, a special "nation of priests." The head of the nation-state was God. Hence, in ancient Israel the status of the Ten Commandments was approximately that of the code of criminal law in a modern nation-state. To break one of those laws was to commit a crime against God, the head of the state. Yet the laws had a positive purpose. They set down a way of life that would result in a full and rich communion with God and community with others.

The second part of the covenant law was a detailed law code covering the activities of everyday life. Examples of such laws are found in [Exodus 21–23](#). These laws were compiled and recorded in the "Book of the Covenant" ([Ex 24:7](#)). Although many laws were contained in this book, it was impossible to codify every aspect of human behavior. The diversity of the examples given indicates that for the covenant member no area of human life was beyond the influence of the covenant. Persons who entered into a relationship with God entered into a relationship that impinged on every possible aspect of their lives.

Covenant Renewal

The covenant at Sinai was made with a particular group of people under the leadership of Moses but was binding on future generations. Consequently, the covenant was renewed from time to time. Covenant renewals are recorded in the time of Joshua ([Jos 8:30–35](#); [24:1–28](#)) and, much later, during the reign of King Josiah ([2 Kgs 23:1–3](#)).

The most important passage in the Bible for understanding covenant renewal and the nature of covenant is the book of Deuteronomy. The entire book describes a particular covenant renewal ceremony that occurred at a critical juncture in Israel's early history. The Sinai covenant was renewed just before Moses' death, before the transition of leadership to Joshua, and before a major military campaign to possess the Promised Land.

The covenant since the time of Abraham had contained a promise of land. Immediately before they entered that land (c. 1250 BC), the covenant vows were renewed with a new generation of Israelites, most of whom had not stood at the foot of Mt Sinai some 40 years earlier. Although covenant renewal is the central theme of Deuteronomy, the writer focused primarily on Moses' sermon rather than on a detailed account of the renewal ceremony.

Many aspects of the ceremony were simply a repetition of what happened at the original ratification of the covenant. The Ten Commandments were repeated ([Dt 5:6–21](#)), and the laws of the Book of the Covenant were expounded in greater detail ([Dt 12–26](#)). Two points emerging in Deuteronomy are particularly significant for an understanding of covenant: a clear statement of covenant love and a detailed statement of the blessings and curses that accompanied the making and renewing of the covenant.

The Covenant with David

The covenant tradition underwent modification during the time of King David (c. 1000 BC). The Sinai covenant had been established between God and Israel, with Moses acting as mediator. In David's time an additional element was added: God entered into a covenant with David as king. That royal covenant was intimated to David through the prophet Nathan ([2 Sm 7:8–16](#)), indicating once again the divine initiative. It was to be an everlasting covenant with David's royal lineage ([23:5](#)).

Christians generally interpret the covenant with David as a messianic covenant. For several centuries the dynasty established by David ruled a united Israel, then ruled the remaining southern kingdom of Judah. But in 586 BC Judah was conquered by the Babylonians. At that point a descendant of David was no longer ruling an independent kingdom of God's chosen people. The everlasting nature of the covenant with David was brought out, however, not in the pages of ancient history but in the expectation of a Messiah who would be born of David's descendants. Matthew and Luke both pointed to Jesus' Davidic descent ([Mt 1:1](#); [Lk 3:31](#)). The NT thus extends the covenant acts of God into the new age in the person of Jesus.

The New Covenant Predicted in the Old Testament

Although David's covenant with God was eternal, in a sense the covenant established with Israel on Mt Sinai was temporal. The Sinai covenant included conditional clauses, stated in the blessings and curses of Deuteronomy. Israel's disobedience of the covenant law would at worst bring exile from the Promised Land, a central covenant theme from Abraham to Moses and beyond.

The Hebrew prophets often perceived the danger of an end to the covenant as a result of Israel's sins. Some of the prophets, especially Hosea and Jeremiah, also perceived a deeper truth; namely, that the covenant was rooted in divine love and that therefore even the curse of God could not be final.

Hosea dramatically expressed that truth through the "living parable" of his marriage ([Hos 1-3](#)). He married Gomer at God's command, but later, as a result of her unfaithfulness, the marital covenant was dissolved by divorce. Although Gomer's adulterous acts compelled Hosea to divorce her, he did not cease to love her. God later commanded Hosea to go back to Gomer ([Hos 3:1](#)). Despite her unfaithfulness, the prophet was to take her again into the covenant relationship of marriage. That acted-out parable depicted God's actions with Israel. Israel's sin would inevitably culminate in a divorce from God, but Hosea perceived a new marriage. In the new covenant between God and Israel, Israel would be graciously accepted back into a relationship with God ([2:14-18](#)).

The new covenant is given powerful expression in the writings of the prophet Jeremiah, who lived through the end of the seventh and beginning of the sixth centuries BC. In his lifetime Jeremiah saw the kingdom of Judah defeated in war. The nation lost its independence and became a vassal of the Babylonian Empire. In an external sense, that defeat in 586 BC marked the end of the Sinai covenant. Israel could no longer call the Promised Land its own. Yet Jeremiah perceived a truth beyond the contemporary political realities. God's work in the world, like his love for the world, was not over.

Thus Jeremiah spoke of a new covenant that God would bring into effect: "The days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah" ([Jer 31:31](#), rsv). The new covenant would be marked by an act of God within human hearts, a radical spiritual

transformation ([Jer 31:34](#)). At the Last Supper Jesus declared to his disciples that "this cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood" ([Lk 22:20](#), rsv). To the writer of Hebrews, the new covenant was central to a full understanding of the ministry of Jesus Christ ([Heb 8:8-12](#)).

Conclusion

Covenant is a concept central to the message and the history of the OT. The covenant theme continues into the NT as a way of interpreting the Christian gospel. Meaning in human life is to be found in a covenant relationship with the living God. Yet sinful human beings cannot work their way into such a relationship; God alone can initiate it. According to the NT, God's act in giving his son, Jesus, to die opened up the covenant relationship to all human beings. The forgiveness made available by Jesus' "blood of the new covenant" makes it possible for any individual to enter into a covenant relationship with God. Entry into such a relationship, today as in Abraham's time, hinges upon faith ([Gal 3:6-14](#)).

See also Alliance; Covenant, The New; Law, Biblical Concept of; Oath; Vows.

Covenant of Salt

A covenant of salt is a special type of agreement in the Bible. The use of salt symbolized that the agreement (or covenant) would last forever and could not be broken. In the Middle East, when people said, "There is bread and salt between us," they meant they had shared a meal together to confirm their friendship or agreement. Salt was important because it preserved food and gave it flavor, so it became a symbol of lasting relationships.

In the Old Testament, salt appears in the relationship between God and Israel. When the Israelites brought grain offerings to God, they had to add salt to show that their covenant with God would last forever ([Leviticus 2:13](#)). The salt helped purify the offering and preserve it, just like God's covenant with Israel was meant to last.

God made an everlasting "covenant of salt" between himself and Aaron ([Numbers 18:19](#)). Aaron represented the whole priesthood of Israel. Since the Levites (the tribe of priests) did not receive land like the other tribes when Israel

settled in the promised land, God promised to be their special portion forever instead. The covenant God made with King David and his sons was also a covenant of salt ([2 Chronicles 13:5](#)). This meant that God's promise to maintain David's royal line was permanent and would not be broken.

See also Covenant.

Covenant, Book of the

A phrase used by Moses. It refers to the Ten Commandments and the laws in [Exodus 20:22–23:33](#).

See Book of the Covenant.

Covering of the Head

The act of covering one's head is a way people show respect in religious worship. In the ancient world, women typically wore veils or other coverings on their heads, especially when they prayed.

Early Church Practices

In Paul's day, Jewish women always wore veils in public. Greek women generally also wore veils. The practice of women covering their heads showed deference to authority and dignified the wearer. The apostle Paul discussed the question of head covering in [1 Corinthians 11:2–16](#).

In the church at Corinth, there was a problem when some women began to pray in public without covering their heads. Since women had traditionally covered their heads out of respect for men (or "husbands"), it seemed shameful for a woman to pray or prophesy without a veil or head covering. In their culture, this was the same as if her head was shaved (verse [5](#)), which the people of Corinth saw as shameful.

Paul responded to this issue by talking about how God created men and women (verse [8](#)). He first refers to "angels" in verse [10](#) before he explains how men and women need each other in verses [11–12](#). Some interpret the word "veil" in verse [10](#) as a symbol of new authority since, in the synagogues, women could not participate in Jewish worship services. In contrast, a Christian woman could participate in Christian worship provided she wore a veil.

Paul said "nature" teaches men and women about head coverings. Some scholars think he meant that since a woman's long hair was her pride, she should cover her head (verse [15](#)). Some think that the phrase referred to hairstyles. Others believe Paul was saying that a veil was not needed since a woman's hair is given to her for a covering (verse [15](#)). Paul encouraged freedom but also insisted on order in the churches. He upheld certain customs to avoid offense (see [1 Corinthians 9:19–23](#)). Yet he challenged other customs for the sake of the gospel's integrity (see [Galatians 6:12](#)).

Paul's Teaching and Modern Practice

In most church traditions, covering the head is considered necessary only in societies where it is considered proper for women to be veiled. Some groups believe that all women should still wear hats or coverings on their heads in church services. In a few groups, women regularly wear small "coverings" in their hair so they will always be able to pray with their heads "covered." (It is important to note that views about head coverings and hairstyles vary across different cultures and times.

See also Corinthians, First Letter to the.

Covet, Covetousness

To covet means to strongly desire something that belongs to someone else—a craving or passionate longing.

Old Testament Usage

In the Old Testament, three different Hebrew words are translated as "covet." In one version of the Ten Commandments ([Deuteronomy 5:21](#)), it says, "You shall not covet your neighbor's wife." The same Hebrew word appears in [Proverbs 21:26](#): "All day long he covets more." Another Hebrew word suggests a desire for dishonest gain ([Habakkuk 2:9](#)). In the Exodus version of the Ten Commandments, a third word is used for craving a neighbor's wife ([Exodus 20:17](#)). This word is also used when Achan coveted the spoils of Ai ([Joshua 7:21](#); compare [Micah 2:2](#)). To covet means to desire something so strongly that it becomes more important than love and devotion to God.

New Testament Usage

In the New Testament, a Greek word that literally means "inordinate desire to have more" conveys

this idea. The apostle Paul included this kind of covetousness among the earthly attitudes that Christians should get rid of. He wrote, “Put to death, therefore, the components of your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires, and greed, which is idolatry” ([Colossians 3:5](#); compare [Ephesians 5:3](#); [1 Corinthians 6:10](#)).

Covetousness is shown as a serious sin that can lead to many other sins. The love of money is the root of all kinds of evil ([1 Timothy 6:9–10](#); compare [Proverbs 15:27](#)). Covetousness was the sin of Ananias and Sapphira ([Acts 5:1–3](#); compare [1 Samuel 15:9, 19](#); [Matthew 26:14–15](#); [2 Peter 2:15](#); [Jude 1:11](#)). Jesus warned, “Watch out! Guard yourselves against every form of greed, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions” ([Luke 12:15](#)). Another Greek word translated as “covet” in the King James Version is better translated as “earnestly desire” in a positive sense ([1 Corinthians 14:39](#)).

The translators of the Old Testament who produced the Septuagint used yet another Greek word for the three Hebrew words translated as “covet” in English versions. In the New Testament, the verb form of this word is used in both positive and negative ways. It means “to desire or long for,” applying to:

- Food ([Luke 15:16](#))
- Divine mysteries ([Matthew 13:17](#); [1 Peter 1:12](#))
- Something good ([Philippians 1:23](#); [Hebrews 6:11](#))
- Something bad ([Matthew 5:28](#); [1 Thessalonians 4:5](#); [1 John 2:17](#))

The noun form of this word generally reflects an attitude of disobedience to God’s law, where desire leads to an evil impulse that results in sin ([John 8:44](#); [Romans 1:24](#); [6:12](#); [7:7–8](#); [13:14](#); [Galatians 5:16, 26](#)).

See also Commandments, The Ten.

Cow

A cow is an adult female bovine (a large, four-footed farm animal). In the Bible, cows are part of the broader group called **cattle**, which includes males (bulls, oxen, steers) and females.

See Cattle; *see also* Animals.

Coz

KJV spelling of Koz in [1 Chronicles 4:8](#). *See* Koz #1.

Cozbi

A woman from Midian who had an improper relationship with an Israelite man named Zimri. This relationship broke God’s laws. During this time, a deadly disease was spreading among the Israelites as punishment. Phinehas was the grandson of Aaron the high priest. He stopped the disease by killing both Zimri and Cozbi ([Numbers 25:15–18](#)).

Cozeba

Alternate name of Aczib, a city in Judah’s territory, in [1 Chronicles 4:22](#). *See* Aczib #1.

Craftsmen, Valley of

Place named for a community of craftsmen who lived in a valley on the southern border of the plain of Sharon ([1 Chr 4:14](#); [Neh 11:35](#)). *See* Ge-harashim.

Crane

A crane (*Grus grus*) is a tall wading bird. It looks like a stork or heron but has shorter claws. Its feathers have a silvery shine. The tail feathers are wavy.

The Hebrew word in [Isaiah 38:14](#) and [Jeremiah 8:7](#) may refer to the crane, but this is uncertain.

Large flocks of cranes pass over the Holy Land in fall, flying from northern Europe to Africa. They return in spring to breed. They travel in wedge-shaped groups during the day. A migrating flock can have up to 2,000 birds.

The normal call of the crane sounds like a deep bellow. During migration, cranes make a chattering sound. [Isaiah 38:14](#) may refer to this sound. A crane’s voice is very strong and can be heard from far away. Usually one bird leads the flock and calls to guide the others.

A crane can be about 102 to 152 centimeters (40 to 60 inches) tall. Only the ostrich is taller among birds in the Holy Land. The wings can spread more than 90 inches (about 229 centimeters). The body is steel gray. The head and neck are black with a long white stripe along the side.

Cranes usually feed on land, not in shallow water. They eat mostly grass and grain. They may also eat insects, snakes, small alligators, frogs, and worms. They use their long, strong bill to kill prey.

Cranes usually nest alone in quiet places, often in shallow water or nearby. The nest is made from plants. It holds two or three light-colored eggs with darker spots.

See Birds.

Crawling Things

Translation of various Hebrew words primarily referring to reptiles. *See* Animals (Adder; Asp; Chameleon; Gecko; Lizard; Snake).

Creation

Creation is God's act of making everything. God made the world from nothing and brought it into order.

People cannot fully understand this truth by human thinking, science, or philosophy. We know about creation only because God revealed it. The Bible teaches this clearly (compare [Hebrews 11:3](#)).

Preview

- Understanding Creation
- Creation and Theology
- Creation and Science
- The Issues Surrounding Evolution
- Creation, Science, and Morality

Understanding Creation

When we talk about Creation, it is not best to begin with a comparison between Genesis and modern science. Instead, we should first ask: What did the Creation story mean to the Hebrew people in Bible times? After that, we can ask: How did the prophets of Israel use the teaching of Creation?

Here are some important points to notice:

1. **Creation was a conquering of chaos.** In most ancient stories about creation, the world began with chaos. The strongest god won by defeating chaos, which was often pictured as another god. That god then became the most important god. [Genesis 1](#) gives a different picture. It tells how the God of Israel transformed the chaos in [Genesis 1:2](#) into a well-ordered world. Unlike pagan stories, the Bible teaches that there is only one God. Chaos before God's work of creation is not another god. It is simply the state of the world before God separated the elements and filled creation.
2. **Creation happened because of God's good will.** It was the free act of God. It is good ([Genesis 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31](#)). On the basis of that fact, Christians assert that life is a gift from God. This belief opposes ideas in religion and philosophy that see life as meaningless or hopeless.
3. **Creation is no longer in its first, perfect state.** Because of sin, creation is marked by suffering and struggle ([Romans 8:18-25](#)).
4. **Creation is dependent upon God.** The relationship of God to his creation is described in [Ephesians 4:6](#). God is above all; that is, he is transcendent. God is through all; that is, he works in all things. God is in all; that is, he is divinely present or immanent in the entire creation ([Psalm 90:1-4](#); compare [John 1:3](#); [1 Corinthians 8:6](#); [Colossians 1:16-17](#)).

5. **Creation is by the word of God** ([Genesis 1](#); [Hebrews 11:3](#)). Many students of literature have said that the creation of the world by the “word of God” is one of the most most profound ideas ever expressed. It means that creation comes from a Person, not from chance or impersonal forces. The universe is vast, filled with stars and galaxies. For some people, its size can feel overwhelming or even meaningless. But Scripture teaches that the word of God stands behind it all ([Psalms 8](#); [19](#); [Romans 1:20](#)). This shows that creation has purpose because it was made by God himself.
6. **The Bible’s teaching about creation can stand up to careful study.** Scholars have compared Genesis with creation stories from other ancient peoples. None of those stories match the majesty and clear teaching about God from the Genesis account.

Creation and Theology

The doctrine of Creation is based on all the Bible’s teachings about it. When we study these passages together, we can reach several important conclusions.

1. The doctrine of Creation gives us our basic understanding of humanity. Men and women are made in the image of God ([Genesis 1:26–27](#)). That means, at least, that a human being is more than an animal, even though both were created from the dust of the earth and have much in common. People have offered many ideas about what “image of God” means. A common theme is that human beings find their meaning, purpose, and value in their special relationship to God.

2. Alongside humanity’s relationship to God is the teaching that people are given responsibility over God’s creation. [Genesis 1:28](#), [2:15](#), and [Psalm 8](#) all show that humans are set apart from animals and called to care for the world.
3. Both male and female are made in the image of God. This means the divine image belongs equally to both. It also means that human sexuality is far more than what is seen in animals. Human sexual life has greater richness, but it can also be more deeply corrupted ([Mark 10:2–9](#); [1 Corinthians 7:1–5](#); [Ephesians 5:25–31](#); compare [Hebrews 13:4](#)).
4. The teaching of prayer as “asking and receiving” depends on God’s care and guidance of the world (what Christians call providence). This care is rooted in Creation itself. Petitionary prayer (prayer that asks for something) has meaning only if there is a sovereign Creator who can answer the requests of his creatures ([Matthew 6:5–13](#); [Colossians 4:2](#); [1 Peter 5:6–7](#); [Revelation 8:3](#)).
5. The history of humanity and of Israel begins with [Genesis 1](#). Creation is the start of history, not just the background to it. The God of Creation is the God of Abraham, of Moses, of the prophets, and of Jesus Christ.
6. Creation is a witness to the existence and nature of God ([Psalm 19](#); [Romans 1:18–19](#)). In theology this is called “general revelation.” “General” means that all people everywhere can see and experience this witness in the natural world.

7. Creation is complete. Genesis describes some of the skies, seas, plants, and animals. But the number of species is in the millions, and Genesis only hints at the vast list. God has made everything that exists (compare [John 1:1-2](#)). Because there is only one Lord, no part of the universe is a threat to those who trust him. Paul affirms this in [Romans 8:38-39](#), where the apostle Paul searches the entire universe and can find nothing in it, anywhere or at any time, that can separate a believer from the love of God in Christ.
8. In the Old Testament, the main use of the doctrine of Creation is to expose idolatry as sin. Idolatry is the oldest lie. It leads people into immorality and makes their lives false.
9. One of the remarkable doctrines of the New Testament is the “cosmic Christ.” This means that Christ is the Creator and the one who sustains the whole universe ([John 1:1-2](#); [Colossians 1:16-17](#); [Hebrews 1:3](#)). The New Testament links Christ with Creation to show that he is far more than a man who lived in first-century Palestine. He is Lord of all.

Creation and Science

Does science prove Creation? Some scientists have argued that the many conditions needed for life, which we find on earth, are a kind of proof. This argument is sometimes called “cosmic theology.”

Another suggested proof is the “big bang” theory of how the universe began. This theory has become more accepted than others, but it describes only the first stages of the universe. It does not explain the absolute beginning of everything. The Christian doctrine of creation from nothing (called *ex nihilo* in Latin) means more than this. It teaches that the true origin, the sustaining power, and the meaning of all things is in the living Lord of Israel and of the church.

A third argument comes from the second law of thermodynamics, which includes the idea of entropy. Entropy is the tendency of energy to

spread out until nothing more can be used. For example, heat systems lose energy and cool down. If the universe were infinitely old, it would already be cool. Since stars and suns still shine, the universe must have begun a finite time ago. Some also argue that God designed the universe to “run down,” because in doing so it provides heat for the earth—making possible the story of God and humankind.

The Issues Surrounding Evolution

In the mid-1800s, Charles Darwin proposed the theory of biological evolution. Many evangelical Christians strongly objected, especially when writers applied evolution to human origins.

Two famous debates grew out of this controversy. The first was in England in 1860, during a meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science at Oxford. Bishop Samuel Wilberforce argued against Darwin’s theory, while scientist T. H. Huxley argued in favor. No formal decision was made, but most people present supported Huxley.

The second was the well-known Scopes trial in Dayton, Tennessee, in 1925. William Jennings Bryan defended a law that made it illegal for teacher John T. Scopes to teach evolution in the classroom. Clarence Darrow defended Scopes. Again, the popular feeling was on the side of evolution, although Bryan gave a stronger defense of his beliefs than is often remembered.

Both orthodox Roman Catholics and evangelical Protestants have taken many different views of evolution. Here are a few:

1. **Rejection of Evolution:** Some believe evolution directly opposes the teachings of Scripture. They see it as the greatest challenge to the authority of the Bible and argue that Christians must resist it completely.
2. **Theistic Evolution:** Others accept “theistic evolution.” This view says that God began and guided the evolutionary process.
3. **Genesis and Geology Together:** Some point to the parallels between the geological record (the layers of fossils in the earth) and the six days of Creation. They believe these similarities show harmony between Genesis and geology.

4. **Different Levels of Truth:** Others view evolution as simply a scientific theory. Like any other theory, it may stand or fall in the laboratory or in the field. For them, the doctrine of Creation is not opposed to evolution, because they answer different questions: science explains *how*, while Scripture explains *why*.
5. **Teilhard de Chardin's View:** The Jesuit paleontologist Teilhard de Chardin tried to connect Christianity with evolution by "christifying" the whole evolutionary process by seeing Christ as its goal and meaning.
6. **C. S. Lewis's Distinction:** The British writer C. S. Lewis distinguished between evolution as science and "evolutionism" as a worldview. He said scientists must decide whether evolution as a theory is valid. But the idea of evolution as a total explanation for life (a kind of false religion of Creation) is not science.

Creation, Science, and Morality

The world's growing population and the spread of industry have led to local and global pollution. Some scholars say Christianity caused this problem. They claim that the Bible encouraged humans, as "lords of creation," to exploit nature. But [Genesis 1:28](#) does not give permission to exploit. It calls for responsibility. Other Old Testament passages also show that God wants people to care for the earth. In this way, the Bible agrees with modern concerns about the environment.

Science often changes how we understand the universe. These discoveries can test theology, but they do not remove the biblical teaching of Creation. For Christians, the world studied by science and discussed by philosophy is still God's world, made by him.

See also Creation Myths; God, Being and Attributes of.

Creation Myths

Religious stories explaining the origin and order of the universe. Parts of some Mesopotamian creation myths bear a close resemblance to the biblical accounts of Creation and earliest times.

Stories explaining creation were known throughout the ancient Near East. Many were based on stories originating in Sumer, one of the earliest Mesopotamian civilizations. Although now commonly regarded as fanciful and even entertaining explanations for why things were as they were, the myths seem to have fulfilled an important social function. Their recital at religious festivals was believed to have magical power to revitalize nature and society. The creation stories assured worshipers that the original state of order created by the gods would continue to overcome the forces of chaos that threatened illness, ruin, sterility, and death.

Preview

- Sumerian Creation Myths
- Akkadian Creation Myths
- Egyptian Creation Myths
- Creation Myths and Genesis

Sumerian Creation Myths

The Sumerians flourished in southern Mesopotamia between 4000 and 3000 BC. Although they were non-Semitic, their cosmology influenced the Semites (various peoples inhabiting Palestine, Phoenicia, Assyria, and Arabia), who eventually adopted the Sumerian chief deities. About 5,000 tablets and fragments inscribed with an assortment of Sumerian literary works have been discovered. Although most of those tablets were inscribed in the early post-Sumerian period (c. 1750 BC), the compositions belong to at least the latter half of the third millennium (2500–2000) BC. As yet, no Sumerian account dealing directly with the origin of the universe has been uncovered. What is known about their notions of creation has been gleaned in part from brief passages scattered throughout their literature, especially from the introductions to poems, where Sumerian scribes were accustomed to writing several lines dealing with creation. In addition, nine myths have survived about the gods who organized the universe, created human beings, and established civilization.

The Sumerian religion, like that of all ancient Near Eastern peoples except the Israelites, was a naturalistic polytheism: they worshiped as gods the natural forces governing fertility (rain, wind, clouds, sun, moon, rivers, seas, and so on). Consequently, people understood the origin of the universe (cosmogony) as accompanying the origins of the gods (theogony).

Heaven and Earth

In a tablet cataloging the Sumerian gods, the sea goddess Nammu is described as “the mother, who gave birth to heaven and earth.” In another text she is described as “the mother, the ancestress, who gave birth to all the gods.” Evidently the Sumerians looked upon the primeval sea as the first cause and prime mover of all things, believing that “the heaven and earth” were somehow engendered in that sea. Moreover, in their view the major components of the universe were heaven and earth; their term for universe was a compound word meaning “heaven-earth” (exactly as in the opening verse of the book of Genesis, where “heaven and earth” designate the entire organized universe). Before Enlil, the air god, separated them, heaven-earth was conceived of as a mountain whose base was the earth and whose peak was heaven.

Enlil, called “the king of heaven and earth” or “the king of all the lands,” was the most important of the Sumerian gods. His creative work in organizing the earth is celebrated in “The Creation of the Pickax,” which describes his fashioning and dedicating that valuable agricultural instrument. In part it reads:

Enlil, who brings up the seed of the land from the earth,

Took care to move away heaven from earth,

Took care to move away earth from heaven.

... He brought the pickax into existence, the “day” came forth.

He introduced labor, decreed the fate.

Upon the pickax and basket he directs the “power.”

Thus Enlil separated heaven from earth, brought seed to fruition, and fashioned the pickax for agriculture.

Civilization

The water god Enki was also god of the abyss and wisdom. Although Enlil drew up “blueprints” for the universe, Enki did most of the work carrying

them out. His efforts went beyond fashioning the natural world to initiating the most important aspects of culture and civilization. In “Enki and the World Order,” the water god makes his way to the banks of the Tigris and Euphrates, the two rivers that water the sandy Mesopotamian valley, and fills them with life-giving rains and winds. Then, preparing the earth for cultivation, he “turns the hilly ground into fields, . . . directs the plow and . . . yoke, . . . opens the holy furrows, and grows the grain in the cultivated field.” Then the god lays the foundations of houses, stables, and sheepfolds, and builds them. He fixes the “borders” and sets up boundary stones. Finally he invents weaving, called “that which is woman’s task.” Having organized the earth, Enki entrusts each place and element to a special deity.

Sumerian Eden

Another myth, “Enki and Ninhursag: A Paradise Myth,” bears a remote resemblance to the biblical story of the Garden of Eden. The myth seems to take place before the creation of animals or humans in Dilmun, a land in the east where the gods reside—“pure,” “clean,” “most bright,” and probably without sickness or death. Having filled that land with fruitful fields, Enki successively impregnates three goddesses: Ninhursag, “the mother of the land”; Nimmu, his daughter by that union; and Ninkurra, his granddaughter by Nimmu.

Ninhursag seems to use Enki’s semen to make eight new plants. Evidently they are “forbidden fruit,” because when Enki eats them, Ninhursag curses him and leaves the garden, adding, “Until he is dead I shall not look upon him with the eye of life.” Under the curse, the garden languishes and the gods mourn. Enlil, the king of the gods, seems unable to cope with the situation. Enki lies dying. The fox, evidently already present in Dilmun, saves the day by luring Ninhursag back to Dilmun, where she heals Enki and revives the garden.

The Creation of Humans

Regarded as the mother of all gods, Ninhursag may have personified Earth. In “The Creation of Man,” she plays an important role along with Enki.

Having come into existence before there was meat or bread for them to eat, the gods face a dilemma:

They knew not the eating of bread,

Knew not the dressing of garments,

Ate plants with their mouth like sheep,

Drank water from the ditch.

To relieve that situation, Enlil and Enki fashion a cattle god and a grain goddess. Cattle and grain suddenly abound, but the gods are unable to utilize them. Something is still needed to tend the animals and make grain into bread. The gods complain to Enki and command him to create servants to take care of their needs.

Coming to their aid, Enki takes “clay that is over the abyss” and with Ninhursag oversees its fashioning into human beings who are pressed into the gods’ service, especially to make them bread. At a feast afterward, Enki and Ninhursag get drunk and ineptly make several abnormal human types, including the barren woman and the eunuch. But whole or flawed, man and woman are the clay of the abyss, and are related by nature to chaos.

Akkadian Creation Myths

The Babylonian and Assyrian cultures, both Semitic, shared the Akkadian language, which distinguished them from the non-Semitic and linguistically different Sumerians. By far the most familiar creation myth of the ancient Near East is the Babylonian creation epic known as *Enuma Elish* (from its opening words). It deals explicitly with the creation of the universe and contains some parallels to the biblical account. A later Assyrian version of the myth appropriately substituted the national god Asshur for Babylon’s god Marduk.

In *Enuma Elish* the human race is made from the blood of Kingu, leader of a rebel horde against the creator god Marduk. Consequently, in the Babylonian myth, man and woman are again related to chaos. In another myth preserved in an Old Babylonian fragment, humankind is made from the blood of a slain god:

Let [man] appear!

He who shall serve all the gods,

Let him be formed out of clay,

be animated with blood!

Enki opened his mouth,

saying to the great gods: . . .

Let them slay one god.

With his flesh and his blood . . .

let Ninhursag mingle clay.

According to another Akkadian myth, the gods created man as a perverse being, presenting him with twisted speech, lies, and untruth.

Egyptian Creation Myths

The customary Egyptian myth of creation (found, for example, in the dedication ritual of a royal pyramid or in the *Book of the Dead*) relates that before the creation there was a watery void, accompanied by darkness, formlessness, and invisibility. That watery chaos bore the name Nun, “the great god who came into being by himself . . . the father of the gods.” The void subsides, leaving a primordial mound of earth with the creator god Atum (“totality”) upon it. Atum brings into being the rest of the universe and assigns places and functions to its parts.

In a detail similar to the Mesopotamian myths, the air god Shu separates heaven-earth by lifting the sky goddess Nut from the earth god Geb and placing himself between the two.

The most significant Egyptian creation myth is the so-called “Memphite Theology” (c. 2700 BC), which sought to move the Egyptian capital to Memphis by claiming it to be the site of the original creation mound. Rather than describing the creation in purely physical terms, that myth conceives of the universe as coming into existence through the mind (“heart”) and commanding speech (“tongue”) of the creator god. According to that myth, then, an intelligent will controlled the universe.

Creation Myths and Genesis

The Genesis account of Creation differs from pagan myths in at least two ways. First, the accounts differ in their purpose. The pagan myths served principally to preserve life and society by magical recitation. Although the biblical account has implications for life and society, it serves primarily to teach a covenant people about God and is devoid of any occult claims or power.

Second, the accounts differ in their quality. The Genesis Creation narrative presents a straightforward theology with a minimum of adornment. Told as a story, it rings true even in an age of scientific discovery, when people are accustomed to mechanistic explorations of natural phenomena. An intelligent, well-informed person can accept Genesis as an authoritative statement of nature’s meaning and purpose and on it base a life of devotion to the divine Creator. In contrast, the creation myths present a debased theology and an

even more debased morality. The most ancient myths, which may appeal to modern practitioners of “occult sciences” for various reasons, are simply unbelievable as religious truth. The gods of the ancient myths have been buried in the rubble of long-dead civilizations or transmuted into the gods of modern polytheistic religions; the God of the Bible lives on.

The literary form of [Genesis 1–3](#) shows that it is not theology; that is, it does not make analytical statements about God. Yet it presents a view of God distinctively different from the gods of the pagan myths. God is present “in the beginning.” He is one; he creates with singleness of purpose, unchallenged. In contrast, the pagan myths portray the beginning as impersonal and chaotic. Chaos evolves into a cosmos, out of which the gods emerge by chance. The subsequent development of heaven and earth is viewed as a cosmic power struggle between rival gods. Again, the Creator in Genesis is different from and “bigger” than the heavens and earth he creates. The pagan gods are material and made up of the same cosmic stuff as the world; the world is bigger than they are.

Biblical and pagan anthropologies are also significantly different. In Genesis man and woman are creatures distinct from the Creator, although bearing his “image.” They are created for the purpose of ruling the earth as God’s agents and are accordingly assigned clear responsibilities. In pagan mythology human beings come from the same stuff as the gods, though humans are more closely related to chaos than to the gods who fashioned them. The pagan gods made humans as slaves to take care of the gods’ material needs, so the gods treat them with either contempt or indifference. The Near Eastern worldview was not only pessimistic but also fatalistic. Human beings, far from being responsible or significant, were assigned at birth an inexorable destiny that they could not overrule.

The best that most Near Eastern inhabitants could hope for was a relatively prosperous and regular life before their fated end, and for that they thought they had to manipulate their deities through recital and reenactment of the ancient myths. Genesis, on the other hand, as part of the larger OT teaching, sought to bring the human community into a living, personal, covenant relationship with God.

See also Creation.

Creation, New

See New Creation, New Creature.

Creature, New

See New Creation, New Creature.

Credit, Creditor

Acknowledgment of payment on a debt incurred through goods or services sold on trust, and the one who operates the business of selling on credit. The Mosaic law regulated credit and creditors ([Dt 23:19–20](#)).

See also Banker, Banking; Debt.

Creeping Things

Reference to insects, reptiles, and some other animals that crawl on the belly or creep on four or more feet. *See* Animals.

Crescens

Crescens was a coworker of the apostle Paul. He traveled to Galatia when Paul was imprisoned in Rome ([2 Timothy 4:10](#)).

Crete

Fourth largest island in the Mediterranean, located approximately 60 miles (or 97 kilometers) southeast of Greece and 110 miles (or 177 kilometers) southwest of Turkey. It is 160 miles (or 257.4 kilometers) long from east to west. It has a width of approximately 36 miles (or 58 kilometers), and an area of 3,200 square miles (or 5,149 square kilometers). Through the island stretches a mountain range dominated in the center by the sacred Mount Ida (altitude 9,000 feet or 2,742 meters). These mountains slope down sharply to the southern coast, with the result that most of the inhabitants live on the more gradual northern slopes.

Crete is important in the history of the Christian church. When Paul went to Rome as a prisoner, the ship sought refuge from a storm at Fair Havens

([Acts 27:8](#)). The ship tried to reach the larger harbor at Phoenix (verse [12](#)) but was blown off course and sought refuge at an island off the southwest coast of Crete, called Cauda (verse [16](#)). Paul may have visited Crete after imprisonment in Rome, for in his Letter to Titus, he said, “I left you in Crete” ([Titus 1:5](#)). Based on this and other evidence, many scholars conclude that Paul was released and had an extended ministry before his second imprisonment and execution ([2 Timothy 4:6](#)). Paul had little good to say about the people of Crete, quoting one of their own poets as saying they were “liars, cruel animals, and lazy gluttons” ([Timothy 1:12](#)). But the gospel must have made quite a difference there, for today the name of Titus is honored in many villages, churches, and monasteries.

Because of its location and its relative fertility, Crete has been valuable in war and commerce. The island was conquered by Rome in 67 BC and became a separate province. The inhabitants prospered under the Romans and later under the Greek Christians (Byzantines). The Saracens (Muslims) occupied the island for over a century (AD 823–960). After centuries of Christian leadership, it was conquered by the Turkish sultan, and civilization declined (1669–1898). In the 20th century, Crete has been a part of Greece, except for a period of German occupancy during World War II.

Cricket

A winged insect with four legs (from the scientific family *Orthoptera*). These insects are related to grasshoppers and locusts. Israelites considered crickets ceremonially clean to eat ([Leviticus 11:22](#)). The reference in the Bible may actually be describing one of the growth stages of the locust, rather than what we call crickets today.

See also Beetle; Grasshopper; Locust.

Criminal Law and Punishment

The science or philosophy of law is called jurisprudence. Although modern jurisprudence bears little resemblance to biblical concepts of law, the Scriptures have played a definite role in its development. Today, criminal law is clearly distinguished from civil law; in Bible times the distinction was much less clear. Today, offenses

against civil law (torts) are distinguished from minor crimes (misdemeanors) as well as from serious crimes (felonies). In the Bible, “crimes” included all punishable offenses, even religious offenses such as idolatry (worshiping a false god) or blasphemy (speaking or behaving with contempt toward God).

Preview

- Near Eastern Context
- Hebrew Criminal Law
- Punishment
- Conclusion

Near Eastern Context

In ancient societies as in modern ones, laws were considered necessary to regulate individual behavior for the good of the community, state, or nation. Today laws are thought of as made by people for their own protection. In contrast, all ancient Near Eastern law codes were considered to have come directly from some divine source. Hebrew law, though distinct, followed the general pattern of Near Eastern law codes, as is known from those that have survived—such as the Code of Hammurabi and Assyrian and Hittite laws.

Conclusions about the “origin” of ancient laws should be made cautiously. Although evidence indicates that Hammurabi based his legislation partially on earlier Sumerian codes, he declared that his code had been received from Shamash, god of justice. That declaration must have been intended to convey primarily that his code had the express sanction of Shamash, since at least some people would recognize it as a compilation based largely on earlier laws. Similarly, the clear biblical statements about Moses receiving the law on Mt Sinai ([Ex 19–24](#)) do not rule out the possibility that parts of the Decalogue (the Ten Commandments) may have existed in earlier codes. Possibly the Mosaic legislation included some social rules adapted from the period of Israel’s sojourn in Egypt.

Hebrew Criminal Law

Laws Governing Offenses against God

Since Hebrew law was designed for a group of people for whom religion was of paramount importance and whose faith was endangered by the influence of the beliefs of their pagan neighbors, it is not surprising that so much of

Hebrew law dealt with crimes committed against God. The prohibition against worshiping idols is stated and repeated in the Torah, or Pentateuch (first five books of the Bible): “You shall not make for yourself a graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them or serve them” ([Ex 20:4–5](#), rsv). Sacrifice of infants, practiced in some pagan religions, was specifically prohibited in Israel. The penalty for that crime, as for the other forms of murder, was stoning to death ([Lv 20:2](#)).

In the book of Leviticus, death by stoning was recorded as the appropriate punishment for blaspheming the name of God ([Lv 24:11–16](#)). False prophecy was also a criminal offense; that accusation could apply to a person making a prediction in the name of a god other than the Lord, or implying falsely that one’s prophecy resulted from a communication with God. Jeremiah, whose prophecy of Nebuchadnezzar’s victory over the southern kingdom of Judah was for a time considered to be false, was almost lynched by a mob ([Jer 26:8–9](#)).

The idea of keeping the seventh day holy stemmed from the celebration of God’s work in creating the universe in six days and resting on the seventh. Keeping the Sabbath required cessation of manual work for the entire family, including farm animals ([Ex 16:23](#); [20:8–11](#)). People were also required to meet together on the Sabbath for worship, which at a later period in Hebrew history included the reading of Scripture, prayer, and preaching. Anyone breaking the Sabbath could be sentenced to death, as happened to a man caught gathering firewood on the Sabbath ([Nm 15:32–36](#)).

Any type of premeditated crime was considered an offense against God, the giver of all law; hence, it was punishable by death ([Nm 15:30–31](#)). Hebrew law also insisted on donation of the firstfruits of harvest to the Lord without delay. That requirement was sometimes carried over to include a first child, whose life was dedicated to service in the temple ([Ex 22:29–30](#); [Dt 15:19](#)).

Personal Injury

Murder, an offense against “God’s image,” was one of many crimes punishable by death in OT times. The book of Exodus stated unequivocally that “anyone who hits a person hard enough to cause death must be put to death” ([Ex 21:12](#), nlt). A murderer who killed by using a weapon such as a

stone, a piece of wood, or iron could be killed in revenge by a relative of the deceased. If the original death happened accidentally, the community would sometimes help to conceal the killer and encourage him to hide in a nearby city of refuge, where he would be safe as long as he remained within its gates. He had to stay in that sanctuary until the death of the high priest then in office, after which he was free to return to his own city ([Nm 35:10–28](#)). The sixth commandment enjoined, “You shall not kill” ([Ex 20:13](#)). The Hebrew word referred specifically to murder, not to all forms of killing. Killing an enemy in battle and the execution of a murderer were considered necessary and were not prohibited. More than one witness was required for any conviction, particularly in a murder case ([Nm 35:30](#); [Dt 17:6](#); [19:15](#)).

In the Code of Hammurabi a man responsible for an accidental injury to another was required to pay for the services of the physician. If the victim died, a fine was payable according to the victim’s rank. In a sense the Hebrews went further by requiring payment for any loss of time suffered by the injured person ([Ex 21:18–19](#)).

Kidnapping was punishable by death in the OT. Exodus states that “Kidnappers must be killed, whether they are caught in possession of their victims or have already sold them as slaves” ([Ex 21:16](#), nlt). Joseph’s being sold into slavery by his brothers illustrates this kind of kidnapping.

Laws concerning Property

The book of Exodus is quite specific about anyone responsible for damage to the property or crops of another. If a field caught fire and the fire spread, damaging crops in other fields, the person who started the fire, or perhaps the owner of the first field to catch fire, was responsible for the damage ([Ex 22:6](#)). Hammurabi’s code cited a similar instance of a man who neglected to keep a dike in repair and was therefore responsible for flood damage to his neighbor’s crops.

Injuries to animals, especially oxen, or injuries to people or property caused by such animals formed an important area of Hebrew law. If an ox that had been previously good-tempered killed a man, the owner would be blameless, although the ox would be put to death—a severe financial penalty for the owner. If an ox with a history of goring killed a man because its owner failed to restrain it adequately, both ox and owner would be put to death. The owner’s life could be ransomed by payment of an agreed-upon sum. If the person an ox gored was a

servant, the ox was stoned and the owner paid a fine ([Ex 21:28–32](#)). The Code of Hammurabi also recommended no punishment for a first offense by an animal, but if the owner knew that the ox was dangerous and had taken no steps to prevent harm, a fine in silver was payable—a very large fine for an upper-class victim, slightly less if the victim was a slave. However bad the circumstances and however vicious the ox, the Code of Hammurabi stopped at a fine for the offense, never imposing a death penalty on either the animal or the owner.

Negligence causing injury to an animal was also punished in Hebrew law. If an ox or a donkey fell into a pit carelessly left uncovered, the owner of the animal was reimbursed for its loss ([Ex 21:33–36](#)).

In ancient cultures women were generally considered chattel (personal property), much like animals or slaves. A daughter was considered to be her father's property until her marriage, then the property of her husband. Therefore, any offense against a married woman was regarded as an offense against the property of the husband. According to the Code of Hammurabi, a child could be sold into slavery as a servant or bondsman, usually in payment of the father's debt (cf. [Ex 21:2–7](#); [Neh 5:5–8](#); [Is 50:1](#)). Parental authority was so highly regarded in biblical law that a stubborn and rebellious son could be brought before the elders on the grounds of being disobedient and a glutton or a drunkard. He might then be convicted and stoned to death on the spot by the men of the city ([Dt 21:18–21](#)). Even that, however, was a protection of the child's rights; some Near Eastern legislation allowed a parent to order the death of his offspring without reference to the elders or to anyone else. With daughters in particular being held in such low esteem, it is perhaps remarkable that a daughter could inherit property if there were no sons ([Nm 27:8](#)).

Adultery, prohibited in the Decalogue, was another crime against a man's property, specifically his wife. The book of Deuteronomy goes into considerable detail about cases of adultery—the punishment for both persons being death ([Dt 22:22](#)). If a man seduced a young woman who was not betrothed, he was required to pay her father the bride price (50 silver shekels); he could not divorce her but had to keep her as his wife for the rest of his life ([Ex 22:16](#); [Dt 22:28–29](#)).

In a situation where a wife was accused of adultery but without evidence, a trial was conducted. The husband would bring his wife to a priest and present a small offering (a tenth of a measure of

barley meal, with neither oil nor frankincense on it), indicating the low esteem in which he now held his wife. The woman then stood before the Lord holding an earthen jar of “holy water.” Dust from the floor of the tabernacle was mixed with the water, and the cereal offering was placed in her hands. Her hair was loosened by the priest to show not only her grief but also to give an impression of abandonment. She was then required to take an oath. After that, the priest pronounced a curse upon her to the effect that her womb would be fertilized easily, but that she would have many miscarriages. She had to give her consent to that pronouncement. The priest then wrote the curses in a book and symbolically washed them off into the “bitter water.” The woman was required to drink the water while the priest waved the cereal offering from her hands before the Lord and burned some of it on the altar. The priest told her that if she was guilty, the water would make her thigh rot and her abdomen swell. If that happened, she would become an outcast; but if she were proved innocent, she would be free. Whatever the result, no blame for false accusation fell upon the husband ([Nm 5:12–31](#)).

If a slave was struck by his master in such a manner as to cause instant death, the slave's death had to be avenged. If the slave lingered, possibly for days, he did not need to be avenged, his loss being a sufficient punishment for the owner ([Ex 21:20–21](#)). It is unlikely that the Hebrews had much experience with that law, which had no parallels in Hammurabi's code. If an owner injured his slave by causing the loss of an eye or a tooth, Hebrew law required that the slave be set free (vv [26–27](#)). The Code of Hammurabi gave an example of a man injuring another man's slave; the owner had to be paid half the slave's value.

Little emphasis was placed on burglary or larceny in the Hebrew law code. A burglar was presumed to be repentant and ready to make restitution. After return of the stolen property and payment of a small additional fine, a thief could again “approach the Lord” ([Lv 6:2–7](#)). By contrast, the Code of Hammurabi prescribed the death penalty for burglary. In Hebrew law, theft of an animal required restitution to be made in the ratio of at least two to one; if a bull or a cow had been stolen or sold, the thief had to restore the property fivefold. The Code of Hammurabi contained a similar statute: “If a man steal ox or sheep, ass or pig, or goat—if it be from a god or a palace, he shall restore thirtyfold; if it be from a freeman, he shall render tenfold. If the thief have nothing wherewith

to pay, he shall be put to death.” In Hebrew law goods stolen from a home were simply to be restored without additional penalty. If the thief no longer had the goods and was unable to pay the equivalent value, he might be sold into slavery until restitution was made ([Ex 22:1-4](#)).

General Laws

The Hebrew code as contained in Exodus and Deuteronomy included many general prohibitions. Some concerned business dealings such as the removal of boundary markers ([Dt 19:14](#)). The use of false weights and measures was condemned ([Lv 19:35](#); [Dt 25:15](#); [Prv 11:1](#); [20:23](#); [Mi 6:11](#)). Bribery was strictly forbidden ([Ex 23:8](#)), yet no punishment was specified for those who broke that law. In the Code of Hammurabi, if a judge changed his decision and was unable to give a satisfactory explanation, particularly if bribery was suspected, the judge had to pay 12 times the amount of the penalty and lost his seat on the bench. In the Hebrew code, perjury was also dealt with, although again no punishment was specified. The Code of Hammurabi stated that for perjury in cases where the punishment was death, persons giving false testimony were to be sentenced to death themselves (cf. [Ex 23:1](#)).

A number of Hebrew laws reflected concern for the poor. For example, poor people were not to be subjected to usury if they were in debt, or left cold at night if their coats were taken as a pledge. Widows, orphans, and strangers were also to be treated with mercy and understanding ([Ex 22:21-27](#); [23:9](#); [Dt 23:19](#); [24:17](#)).

Some Hebrew laws concerned family behavior, such as those previously mentioned who cursed or disobeyed their parents ([Ex 21:17](#); [Lv 20:9](#); [Dt 27:16](#); cf. [Prv 20:20](#); [30:17](#)). Family responsibilities were strong; an entire family frequently suffered punishment for the crime of one of its individual members ([Jos 7:20-26](#); [2 Sm 3:29](#); [21:1-9](#); [2 Kgs 5:27](#); [Lam 5:7](#)). Over a period of time, as individual responsibility came to be recognized, parents were no longer put to death for the crimes of their children, or vice versa (cf. [Jer 31:29-30](#)).

Sorcery and witchcraft were forbidden. The book of Exodus stated explicitly, “A sorceress must not be allowed to live” ([22:18](#), nlt). Sexual perversions, such as intercourse with animals, were forbidden under penalty of death. Regulations prohibiting marriage with close relatives were given in detail ([Lv 20:17-21](#)).

In Hebrew law no parallel existed for some interesting items in the Code of Hammurabi concerning surgery. That code mentioned veterinary surgery and even operations on the human eye. A Babylonian surgeon had to be wary, for “if a physician makes a deep incision upon a man with his bronze lancet and causes the man’s death or operates on the eye socket of a man with his bronze lancet and destroys the man’s eye, then they shall cut off his hand.” Surgery was virtually unknown among the ancient Israelites except for the ritual practice of circumcision.

Punishment

Near Eastern punishments for murder and personal injury were retaliatory and often of the same nature as the offense. Other methods of punishment tended to vary with individual countries or traditions. Many kinds of punishment were inflicted on people defeated in both a full-scale war or a small insurrection.

Physical Punishment

Many forms of punishment stopped short of killing but could nevertheless be quite severe.

1. In the OT beating with rods or switches was the traditional form of discipline for children, fools, and slaves ([Ex 21:20](#); [Prv 13:24](#); [26:3](#)). Scourging (also called flogging) was more severe than beating. The whip employed could be made of several strips of leather fastened at one end or of two interwoven leather strips. A whip nicknamed “scorpion” (because of the barbs in its end) was one of the cruelest instruments of punishment mentioned in the OT ([1 Kgs 12:11, 14](#)). The severity of punishment could be increased by inserting pieces of metal or bone into the leather.

Before a scourging, the victim would be examined for physical fitness. If death resulted from the blows, no blame was attached to the person administering the punishment. The victim was stripped to the waist and tied to a pillar, his hands bound with leather thongs. The severity of a scourging depended on the crime, although the Mosaic law set an upper limit of 40 lashes ([Dt 25:1-3](#)). To guard against a miscount, that number was later lowered by one ([2 Cor 11:24](#)). Lashes might be administered both on the chest and the back. Under some law codes, scourging could be used as a private punishment; in that case, if the victim died, another life was forfeit.

In offenses against the law, synagogue authorities administered scourgings ([Mt 10:17](#)). A husband might be scourged by the elders of the city for defamation of his wife's character ([Dt 22:18](#)). Scourging was also used as a means of interrogating a prisoner—hence, a Roman captain's comment that the apostle Paul should be "examined by scourging" ([Acts 22:24](#)).

The Romans usually reserved scourging for non-Roman citizens, such as slaves or aliens, as well as for those condemned to death. Normally, criminals were scourged after they had been condemned to death; it is therefore unusual to find the scourging of Jesus taking place before his condemnation. Pilate may have hoped to soften the people's hearts by Jesus' suffering so that they would not demand the death penalty ([Lk 23:16, 22](#); [Jn 19:1](#)).

Citizens of the Roman Empire could never be beaten or scourged before sentencing ([Acts 22:25](#)). Hence, the magistrates were afraid when they heard that Paul, a Roman citizen, had been beaten under those circumstances ([16:37-39](#)).

2. The gouging out of the eyes of prisoners and captives was a common practice in the Near East. The Philistines blinded Samson before imprisoning him ([Jgs 16:21](#)). The Babylonians did the same to King Zedekiah in 587 BC before taking him into captivity ([2 Kgs 25:7](#)). The Ammonite king Nahash was prepared to accept peace overtures from the men of the city of Jabesh on condition that all their right eyes be gouged out. Nahash's purpose was to disgrace them and prevent them from further active participation in warfare ([1 Sm 11:1-4](#)).

3. Several forms of mutilation served as punishments in the Near East. The Israelites considered their own bodies sacred and made in God's image, but that did not prevent them from mutilating their enemies by cutting off their thumbs and large toes.

The Code of Hammurabi and the Assyrian law code prescribed mutilation of the eye, nose, ear, breast, tongue, lip, hand, and finger as punishments for specific crimes. In Assyria, punishment was often inflicted by the victim of the crime under supervision of court officials. The Code of Hammurabi also contained safeguards so that criminals were not punished in excess of the law's sentence.

4. Stocks are mentioned as a form of punishment in the later OT period. The prophets Hanani ([2 Chr 16:10](#)) and Jeremiah ([Jer 20:2-3](#)) suffered the indignity of being placed in stocks. Both ankles, and

sometimes the wrists and head as well, were placed in holes in two large pieces of wood. In Roman times, stocks were converted to a form of torture, with a prisoner's legs stretched to holes increasingly far apart. In the NT, Paul and Silas had their feet placed in stocks by a Philippian jailer ([Acts 16:24](#)). The same Greek word, meaning "confinement," can refer to fetters chaining a prisoner or to an iron collar like that worn by runaway Roman slaves.

Capital Punishment

Capital punishment was common in many Near Eastern countries. Several methods were used.

1. Those who offended a king were beheaded with a sword ([2 Sm 16:9](#); [2 Kgs 6:31-32](#)), as were idolaters and murderers (according to the Mishnah, the Jewish commentary on the law). The sword was probably used for private executions as well. Inhabitants of entire cities were sometimes "put to the sword" for their denial of the faith ([Ex 32:27](#); [Dt 13:15](#)).

2. Certain sexual offenses were punished with death by burning ([Lv 20:14](#); [21:9](#)). Tamar, Judah's daughter-in-law, was accused of adultery and ordered to be burned to death outside the city ([Gn 38:24](#)). The Lord instructed that anyone whose feet touched the holy ground of Mt Sinai was to be shot with arrows or stoned ([Ex 19:13](#)).

3. Hanging may have been a form of execution in biblical times. But many scholars think the word translated "hanging" or "hanging on a tree" actually meant impalement ([Nm 25:4](#); [Dt 21:22-23](#); [Jos 8:29](#); [2 Sm 21:6, 9](#); [Est 9:14](#)). A spiked wooden stake was set in the ground and the victim's body was forced onto the spike, the tip of which probably protruded from the chest or mouth. Commonly practiced by the Assyrians, that form of execution was reserved for those guilty of the worst crimes and for prisoners of war or deserters. The Persian king Darius is reputed to have impaled 3,000 men when his army entered Babylon. Impalement was the penalty Darius set for changing his edict concerning the rebuilding of the temple ([Ezr 6:11-12](#)). It is not certain whether Haman was hung or impaled (see [Est 7:9-10](#), nlt and mg notes).

Usually "hanging" was a means of exhibiting a corpse as a warning to local inhabitants ([Gn 40:19](#); [Jos 8:29](#); [10:26](#); [2 Sm 4:12](#)). Corpses were exhibited for only one day and were buried before nightfall. The hanging corpse was considered a defilement of the land that God had given ([Dt 21:22-23](#)).

According to the Mishnah, the hands were tied together and the body hanged from the arm of a wooden gallows.

4. Crucifixion was a punishment employed by the Syrian king Antiochus IV Epiphanes in 167–166 BC; according to Josephus, a first-century AD Jewish historian, Jews who refused to give up their traditional faith were so executed. During the Maccabean period (167–40 BC), Alexander Janneus crucified 800 rebellious Pharisees in an attempt to reestablish his authority. Crucifixion was a widespread form of execution: it was used in most places in the Roman Empire, including India, North Africa, and Germany. Between 4 BC and AD 70, on some occasions the number of people crucified at one time reached into the thousands.

Three types of crosses seem to have been used: a cross with the crossbar below the head of the upright bar (Latin cross); a T-shaped cross (St Anthony's cross); and an X-shaped cross (St Andrew's cross). Matthew records that an inscription, "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews," was placed over Jesus' head ([Mt 27:37](#)). That indicates that for Jesus' crucifixion a Latin cross was used, as artists have traditionally depicted it. In crucifixions the victim was most likely affixed to the cross while it was still lying flat on the ground. Then the cross was raised into position and dropped into a hole. The hands were either nailed or bound to the cross; it is uncertain whether the feet were nailed with one or two nails. The weight of the body was supported by a piece of wood at the feet and possibly by another that was like a spike between the legs.

5. Stoning was the most common Hebrew death penalty. The first stones were thrown by the prosecution witnesses, who were then joined by spectators. Stoning was the punishment for certain religious offenses ([Lv 24:16](#); [Nm 15:32–36](#); [Dt 13:1–10](#); [17:2–5](#)), adultery ([Dt 22:23–24](#)), child sacrifice ([Lv 20:2](#)), divination of spirits ([Lv 20:27](#)), and rebellion ([Dt 21:18–21](#)). Before his conversion, the apostle Paul witnessed and consented to the stoning of Stephen ([Acts 7:58–59](#)). Paul himself later survived a stoning at Lystra ([14:19](#)). In Roman times, a person would occasionally be stoned as he stood on a gallows.

Conclusion

Hebrew law was part of the Torah ("instruction") given by God to make his covenant people holy. At that time the Israelites were a seminomadic band of former slaves. Although there are similarities

with the Code of Hammurabi and other laws of settled Near Eastern cultures, there are also many differences. Hebrew law often had a broader view, even in its less sophisticated cultural setting, as though its purpose was more to teach godly behavior than to stabilize society. The simplicity and directness of the Ten Commandments, in particular, continue to influence jurisprudence, even in modern secular society.

The Bible's primary message is God's love for his covenant people, yet it never overlooks the harsh realities of life in a fallen world. Human beings sin and they commit crimes; they suffer estrangement from God because of their sin and are punished for their crimes. Christians are constantly reminded of the realism of God's love by the cross as the symbol of Christian faith. They see the crucifixion of Jesus Christ as the fulfillment of OT prophecy that the Lord put our iniquity on him ([Is 53:5–6](#)). The NT conviction is that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures ([1 Cor 15:3](#)).

See also Civil Law and Justice; Courts and Trials; Hammurabi, Law Code of; Law, Biblical Concept of.

Crimson

A deep red color mentioned in the Bible. *See* Color.

Crispus

A leader of the Jewish synagogue in Corinth. Crispus and everyone in his household became followers of Jesus during the apostle Paul's 18-month missionary visit to the city ([Acts 18:8, 11](#)). Paul mentioned Crispus as one of the few people he personally baptized in Corinth ([1 Corinthians 1:14](#)).

Crocodile

A crocodile is a large reptile that lives in water and eats meat. It has a long, flat snout and a powerful tail. While the crocodile looks similar to other lizards, it has a larger body with short legs.

The crocodile is the largest living reptile (scientific name *Crocodilus vulgaris*). It can grow up to six meters (20 feet) long. Crocodiles have large, lizard-like bodies with short legs. Their heads have flattened snouts with strong, cone-shaped teeth. Each tooth sits in its own socket, and new teeth

grow to replace old ones. Their toes are webbed for swimming. The back and tail have square-shaped shields arranged in rows that touch at the edges. Their eyes have movable lids that close when the crocodile is in water.

Crocodiles spend most of their time in water. They eat fish, birds, and small animals. On land, crocodiles can move quickly despite their short legs that cause their belly and tail to drag on the ground.

Until the 1900s, crocodiles lived in the marshes and rivers of western Palestine. A Roman writer named Pliny mentioned a place in the holy land called "crocodile city," or Crocodeilopolis, located south of Mount Carmel. Visitors in the 1800s also reported seeing crocodiles in that area.

The description of "Leviathan" in [Job 41](#) seems to be based on the crocodile. The "dragon" of [Ezekiel 29:3](#) which refers to the Egyptian pharaoh, may also be describing a crocodile.

See also Dragon; Leviathan.

Crookbackt

The King James Version translation of "hunchback" ([Leviticus 21:20](#)).

See Deformity.

Cross

A cross is a wooden structure used in ancient times by the Romans to execute people, often by nailing or tying them to it until they died. This is called "crucifixion." Crucifixion was a painful and shameful form of execution, typically used to kill the worst criminals, slaves, or rebels. Jesus was crucified on a cross even though he was innocent ([Matthew 27:32–56](#)).

Jesus told his followers they must "take up their cross" to follow him ([Matthew 16:24](#)). This means being willing to face hardship and suffering for the sake of faith.

See Crucifixion.

Crown

Headpiece symbolizing honor or high office. In addition to using the word metaphorically, the Old Testament refers to three kinds of crowns.

One type of crown was worn by the high priest and Hebrew kings. The high priest's "holy crown" was a gold plate engraved with the words "Holy to the Lord" and fastened to the front of a turban ([Exodus 29:6](#); [39:30](#)). [A turban is a type of headwear (usually made of cloth) that wraps around the head.] The high priest's "holy crown" symbolized his consecration as the people's representative before God. The Hebrew kings wore a crown light enough to be worn into battle ([2 Samuel 1:10](#))—perhaps a narrow band of silk studded with jewels. Like the high priest's crown, the king's crown also indicated a divinely appointed office ([2 Kings 11:12](#); [Psalms 89:39](#); [132:18](#)).

A second type of crown was a massive gold and jeweled symbol of office worn by pagan kings and idols ([2 Samuel 12:30](#); [Esther 1:11](#)). The prophet Zechariah placed such a crown on Joshua the high priest to indicate the union of royal and priestly functions ([Zechariah 6:11, 14](#)).

A third type of crown was a wreath of flowers used at a banquet to symbolize joy and celebration ([Song of Solomon 3:11](#); [Isaiah 28:1](#); [Wisdom of Solomon 2:8](#)).

The word "crown" is used metaphorically to indicate rule or royalty ([Nahum 3:17](#), King James Version), glory or honor ([Job 19:9](#); [Psalm 8:5](#); [Ezra 16:12](#)), joy ([Ezra 23:42](#)), or pride ([Job 31:36](#); [Isaiah 28:3](#)).

In the New Testament the most common word for "crown" means a laurel wreath worn at banquets or a prize given as a civic or military honor. The apostle Paul alluded to its use as an athletic prize when he urged Christians to be disciplined in striving for a "crown" that would not wither ([1 Corinthians 9:25](#); [2 Timothy 2:5](#)). Paul regarded his converts as his "joy and crown" ([Philippians 4:1](#); [1 Thessalonians 2:19](#)).

A victor's wreath symbolizes the eternal life inherited by Christians who have persevered ([James 1:12](#); [1 Peter 5:4](#); [Revelation 2:10](#); [3:11](#)). In the book of Revelation, the victories of the locusts ([9:7](#)), the woman ([12:1](#)), and Christ ([6:2](#); [14:14](#)) are symbolized by laurel crowns. A different Greek word, meaning a royal crown, is used for the diadems on the heads of the dragon ([12:3](#)), the beast from the sea ([13:1](#)), and Christ ([19:12](#)).

Jesus's crown of thorns was a circular band formed from a prickly shrub—an ironic parody of a victor's wreath ([Mark 15:17–18](#)). Its combination with the robe, scepter ([Matthew 27:27–29](#)), and satirical inscription on the cross that Jesus was “the King of the Jews” ([Mark 15:26](#)), were all meant to mock him as a failed messiah.

Crucifixion

Form of execution employed in the death of Jesus Christ. Two concepts related to crucifixion occur in Scripture: the “cross,” a pagan mode of capital punishment, and the “tree,” which was a Jewish form. Jesus' crucifixion was the way he atoned for the sins of humanity. The term “cross” was also used figuratively by Jesus to portray the sacrifice required in discipleship, and it was used by the apostle Paul to symbolize the death of self in the process of transformation.

Preview

- Historical Background
- Christ's Crucifixion
- The Theological Significance of Christ's Crucifixion

Historical Background

The Pagan Mode

Literally, the word “cross” in Greek referred to a pointed stake used for various purposes, including an instrument of execution. It could be an upright stake, used to impale a victim, or a vertical stake with a crossbeam either across the top (T) or across the middle (+), used to hang or crucify a criminal, with the added disgrace of public display. Crucifixion was practiced first by the Medes and Persians and later by Alexander the Great (356–323 BC), the Carthaginians, and the Romans. Both Greeks and Romans restricted its use to slaves, considering it too barbaric for citizens. In the imperial era the Romans extended the use to foreigners, but even so it was used mainly for crimes against the state.

Crucifixion was universally recognized as the most horrible type of execution. In the East, in fact, it was used only as a further sign of disgrace for prisoners already executed, usually by beheading. In the West the condemned criminal was whipped, usually at the place of execution, and forced to

carry the crossbeam to the spot where a stake had already been erected. A tablet stating the crime was often placed around the offender's neck and was fastened to the cross after the execution. The prisoner was commonly tied or sometimes nailed to the crossbeam (with the nails through the wrists, since the bones in the hand could not take the weight). The beam was then raised and fixed to the upright pole. If the executioners wished a particularly slow, agonizing death, they might drive blocks or pins into the stake for a seat or a step to support the feet. Death came about either through loss of blood circulation followed by coronary failure or through the collapse of one's lungs, causing suffocation. That could take days, so often the victim's legs would be broken below the knees with a club, causing massive shock and eliminating any further possibility of easing the pressure on the bound or spiked wrists. Usually a body was left on the cross to rot, but in some instances was given to relatives or friends for burial.

The Jewish Mode

A different form of crucifixion is seen in the OT. King Saul's body was decapitated and affixed to a wall by the Philistines ([1 Samuel 31:9–10](#)). The Persian king Darius made impaling the penalty for altering his decree ([Ezra 6:11](#)). According to [Deuteronomy 21:22–23](#), the Eastern form was employed by the Jews with the added condition that the body must be removed from “the tree” before nightfall, because the victim was “cursed by God” (compare [Galatians 3:13](#)) and must not remain to “defile the land.” The Roman form of crucifixion was not employed by the Jews. The only exception was a mass crucifixion of 800 rebels by the Jewish ruler Alexander Janneus in 76 BC, reported by the Jewish historian Josephus as being universally condemned by the Jews. Some believe that Jewish courts did practice the Western method of crucifixion after the second century BC.

Christ's Crucifixion

The NT has much to say about Christ's crucifixion because it is the central theme of the Christian faith.

The Predictions

The Gospels record three predictions by Christ of his own crucifixion ([Mark 8:31](#); [9:31](#); [10:33–34](#) and parallel passages). In addition, John recorded three sayings about the Son of Man being “lifted up” ([John 3:14](#); [8:28](#); [12:32–33](#)), which parallel the synoptic predictions. Several themes are interwoven into

those passages: (1) Christ's passion (a term used for his suffering on the cross) was part of God's redemptive purpose ([Mark 8:31](#), "must"). (2) Both Jew and Roman were guilty of "delivering" and of "killing" Jesus. (3) His death would be followed by vindication through the resurrection. (4) His death itself, in a seemingly contradictory way, was seen as a means of his entering into "glory" (seen in the symbolism John attached to "lifted up"). Other sayings that hint at Jesus's fate are his comment about the murder of the prophets ([Matthew 23:29-30](#); [Lk 13:33](#)), his parables about the death of the prophets and the "son" (the marriage feast, [Matthew 22:1-14](#); the wicked tenants, [Mk 12:1-10](#)), and his teachings about the similar suffering his disciples would endure ([Matthew 10:24-28](#); [Mark 8:34-35](#); [John 15:18-25](#)).

The Historical Event

The crucifixion of Jesus combined Roman and Jewish elements. Although the Gospel writers stressed Jewish guilt for their own polemical purposes, they were careful to distinguish between the leaders and the common people. It was the leaders who initiated Jesus's arrest ([Mark 14:43](#)) and his trial by the Sanhedrin (vv [53-64](#)). Though Pilate seemed to vacillate and in the end surrendered weakly to the crowds by "washing his hands" of any guilt ([Matthew 27:24](#)), Rome was clearly implicated in the Crucifixion. Since the Sanhedrin did not have the power to inflict capital punishment, Pilate's decision was necessary before crucifixion could occur. Further, Romans actually carried out the execution.

At Jesus's crucifixion Roman custom was observed in his scourging, his mock enthronement and stripping, the bearing of his own crossbeam, his being nailed to the cross, and the breaking of the two thieves' legs. The elevated site fits the custom of displaying certain criminals publicly. So does the height of Jesus's cross, probably seven to nine feet (2 to 3 meters). The presence of a tablet bearing the inscription "The King of the Jews" on the cross suggests that the crossbeam was fixed somewhere below the top of the stake. Jewish elements are seen in the wine mixed with myrrh ([Mark 15:23](#)), the vinegar on the hyssop reed (v [36](#)), and the removal of the body before sunset and the beginning of the Sabbath ([John 19:31](#)).

Although the fact of Jesus's crucifixion is rarely challenged historically, the varying details in the four Gospels are sometimes regarded as later additions due to the influence of prophetic

"fulfillment," to Christian-Jewish polemics or to cultic considerations. However, one cannot conclude from the differences in the Gospel accounts that the details are not historical. The fact that the Gospel writers were selective about the crucifixion details, is not a proof at all that their narrative was fabricated.

The Emphasis in Each Gospel

The elements found in the passion narratives were selected by each writer to present a particular view of the crucifixion scene. The Gospel writers were not only historians but also theologians, selecting scenes and portraying them to show the significance of the events for the Christian faith.

Mark and Matthew both show the horror of the Messiah being put to death by human beings. The first half of Mark's scene contrasts the mockery of the crowd with the true meaning of Jesus's death. The two types of "save yourself" ([Mark 15:29-31](#)) repeat Jesus's words about rebuilding the temple in three days—prophetically pointing to the resurrection. The second half of Mark's description stresses the horror of the scene, progressing from darkness to the cry of abandonment to further mockery (vv [33-36](#)).

The Gospel of Matthew extends Mark's imagery in certain important directions, adding that Jesus refused the drugged wine (meant to alleviate his pain) "when he tasted it" ([Matthew 27:34](#)), as well as adding "yielded up his spirit" to the death scene (v [50](#)). Matthew thus emphasizes that Jesus voluntarily faced his death fully conscious and in complete control of himself. Matthew's irony and allusion also bring out the difference between Jesus's suffering and his vindication. Elements of vindication include the ripping of the temple veil (v [51](#)) and the centurion's testimony (v [54](#)). In the remarkable supernatural scene of [Matthew 27:52-53](#), Jesus's death is followed immediately by an earthquake that opened tombs and revived "many bodies of the saints" who had died. For Matthew those events and others inaugurated the last days, the new age of salvation, when the power of death is broken and life is made available for all.

The account in Luke's Gospel is also quite remarkable. It has two major emphases. First, Jesus is portrayed as the perfect example of the righteous martyr who forgives his enemies and by his attitude converts some of his opponents. The mockery of the rulers and soldiers are reversed when the crowd returns home "beating their breasts" ([Luke 23:48](#)) and the centurion cries,

“Certainly this man was innocent!” (v 47). Second, in Luke the entire setting has an atmosphere of reverence and worship. Omitted are the wine and myrrh, the cry of abandonment, and the Elijah taunt. Other episodes are noted instead—in particular, the prayers of Jesus. In Luke alone are related (1) Jesus’s prayer that God forgive his executioners, placing it in contrast with the soldiers’ mockery; (2) the promise in answer to the prayer of the “believing” criminal; and (3) the commitment of Jesus’s spirit to the Father. Luke’s presentation makes the Crucifixion a kind of worshipful commemoration.

In the Gospel of John there is also a change of theological focus. It goes further than Luke in removing shocking details such as the darkness and the mockery. Calm pervades throughout. Stress is laid on Jesus’s sovereign control of his situation, as the Crucifixion virtually becomes a crowning procession. John alone states that the inscription on the cross was written in Hebrew, Latin, and Greek—the charge thus becomes a worldwide proclamation of Christ’s enthronement. The inscription, “Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews,” continues Pilate’s dialogue on kingship beyond Jesus’s trial. John thus adds to Matthew’s emphasis: Jesus has not only become king but has been sovereign all along. The king is pictured as performing the priestly function and himself becoming the sacrifice. John alone mentions the hyssop (which had been used to sprinkle the blood of the lamb at the Passover, [Exodus 12:22](#)) and Jesus’s cry, “It is finished” ([John 19:29–30](#)). Further, the piercing of Jesus’s side (vv [31–37](#)), which shows the reality of his death, may also be seen symbolically, along with the “rivers of living water” ([7:37–38](#)), as a type of the outpouring of life in the new age.

Thus, each Gospel pictures the meaning of Jesus’s death from a different standpoint. To combine their pictures gives new understanding of the meaningfulness of the cross. Rather than contradiction, one sees separate parts of a compelling whole.

The Theological Significance of Christ’s Crucifixion

The cross plays a dual role in Christian theology. Some theologians emphasize the significance of the historical crucifixion of Jesus Christ and what it accomplished for the believer. Others focus on the symbolism of the cross in each believer’s life.

The death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth are the central events of Christian theology. The cross has meaning because of the significance of the person who was put to death on it and because of what his death accomplished. “The word of the cross” was central in the salvation proclamation of the early church. Above all, the event of the cross was God’s principal saving act in history; therefore the cross, though a past event, has present significance. Christ crucified and risen is the core of the church’s message ([Galatians 3:1](#)).

The central passage is [1 Corinthians 1:17–2:5](#). There the “word of the cross” ([1:18](#)) is contrasted with “eloquent wisdom” (v [17](#)). Sounding like foolishness, it is offensive to both Greek philosophy and Jewish legalism (compare [Galatians 6:12–15](#)), but that very “weakness” in human eyes opens the door for the “power of God” ([1 Corinthians 1:18](#)). The cross in the church’s proclamation illustrates the pattern of God’s action: he makes out of the weak things of life both power and wisdom (vv [26–30](#)). Because philosophical speculation replaces God’s message with human wisdom and thus empties the cross of its significance, Paul rejected “lofty words” and preached only the “crucified Christ.” The “Holy Spirit’s power” thus became evident in Paul’s “weakness” ([2:1–5](#)). The central core of the gospel is God’s demonstration of victory emerging from seeming defeat, of power arising out of frailty.

The cross as the basis of atonement is the main emphasis in the Letters (see [Ephesians 2:16](#); [Colossians 1:20](#); [2:14](#)), whereas in the book of Acts the resurrection seems more central (see [Acts 2:33–36](#); [3:19–26](#); [13:37–39](#)). The reason for this is the different purposes of those writings: the cross tends to be used in teaching sections, the resurrection in persuasive (or apologetic) sections, when the basis for salvation is being presented. In fact they were a single event in salvation history. Jesus “was put to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification” ([Romans 4:25](#)).

Paul expressed the significance of the cross in the words “redemption,” “propitiation,” and “justification.” The first two concepts have the “for us” theme which is linked back to the suffering servant ([Isaiah 53:10–12](#)), whose death was for “the sin of many.” The idea of redemption in both Testaments is the payment of a price to “ransom” those held captive. That price, the NT explains, was paid on the cross, and humanity was thereby freed from sin ([Mark 10:45](#); [Titus 2:14](#); [1 Peter 1:18](#)). The connection between Jesus’s death and the “instead

of” is also seen in [Galatians 3:13](#), which adds to the curse of [Deuteronomy 21:23](#) the interpretation “for us” (compare [Romans 5:10–11](#), [18](#); [1 Corinthians 11:24](#); [Ephesians 1:7](#); [2:13](#)). Similarly, Paul’s concept of justification centers on the cross. It is “Christ crucified” who declares humanity righteous and makes freedom from sin possible ([Romans 6:6](#); [Gal 2:19–21](#)). Human guilt was transferred to the cross and expiated there, opening up God’s legal forgiveness of all who take advantage of its power ([1 Peter 1:18–21](#); [2:24](#); [3:18](#)). Finally, the result is “reconciliation”—both vertically, between humans and God ([Colossians 1:20](#)), and horizontally, between previously opposed human forces (e.g., in [Ephesians 2:13–16](#), between Jew and Gentile).

Beyond the theological meaning of the literal cross on which Jesus Christ was put to death in Judea nearly 2,000 years ago is the symbolic meaningfulness of the cross for his followers today.

Jesus made “bearing the cross” a condition of discipleship in five passages. There are two major variants: one, found in the material common to Matthew and Luke ([Matthew 10:38](#); [Luke 14:27](#)), is phrased negatively (“cannot be my disciple”); the other, which is found in all three synoptic Gospels ([Matthew 16:24](#); [Mark 8:34](#); [Luke 9:23](#)), is phrased positively (“If anyone would come after me”). Two major patterns are found in the sayings. The major pattern comes from the imagery of a condemned man carrying his cross to an execution site; a necessary part of discipleship is a daily ([Luke 9:23](#)) willingness to sacrifice all and to suffer for the sake of Christ. The central point is not death but disgrace; the disciple must be ready to become an outcast from society.

Paul extended Christ’s metaphor to the death of self. He may have taken the idea from the early church teachings, as seen in the baptismal creed of [Romans 6:1–8](#), which identifies baptism as being “buried with him.” Paul interpreted the Christian’s identification with Christ’s death to mean that “our old self was crucified with him so that the sinful body might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin” ([Romans 6:6](#)). As further developed in [2 Corinthians 5:14–17](#), the believer participates in the death and resurrection of Christ, so that the old life has passed away and the new has come ([5:17](#)). The same view is found also in Galatians, which contrasts the mystical death of self to the legalistic system of those who thought Christians needed to follow the Jewish laws. The believer is “crucified with Christ,” with the result that “it is no longer I who live” ([Galatians 2:20](#));

“the flesh with its passions and desires” is “crucified” ([5:24](#)); and “far be it from me to glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world” ([6:14](#)). Believers must experience the cross before they can find the resurrection life.

See also Atonement; Criminal Law and Punishment; Eli, Eli, Lema Sabachthani; Golgotha; Redeemer, Redemption; Seven Last Sayings of Jesus.

Cruse

Small earthen vessel or flask, about four to six inches (10 to 15 centimeters) tall, used for holding liquids ([1 Kgs 17:12–16](#)). In the kjv, two other Hebrew words are translated “cruse.” However, a bottle or jar is probably in view in [1 Kings 14:3](#), and an open dish or bowl in [2 Kings 2:20](#).

See also Pottery.

Crystal

Variety of quartz, usually clear or nearly so. Two Hebrew words and two Greek words are translated “crystal.” *See* Minerals and Metals; Stones, Precious.

Cub

Name of a place, identified as Libya (rsv mg), in [Ezekiel 30:5](#). *See* Libya, Libyans.

Cubit

Linear measure, about 18 inches (46 centimeters), the length of a man’s forearm from the elbow to the tip of his middle finger. *See* Weights and Measures.

Cuckoo, Cuckow

A small brown bird known for laying its eggs in the nests of other birds. The King James Version lists the “cuckow” (cuckoo) in [Leviticus 11:16](#) and [Deuteronomy 14:15](#). This may refer to either the common cuckoo (*Cuculus canorus*) or the great spotted cuckoo (*Clamator glandarius*). The Berean Standard Bible and many modern translations use “gull” or “seagull” for the same Hebrew word.

The cuckoo is a brood parasite. This means it lays its eggs in another bird's nest after pushing out one of the host bird's eggs. The young cuckoo hatches before the host's young and pushes the other young out of the nest. The host birds then raise the cuckoo chick as their own.

Cuckoo in the Bible

The cuckoo eats insects and is listed as an unclean bird in the Bible. Some think this means it was believed to be a predator or to eat dead animals. For that reason, some scholars believe the Hebrew word refers instead to a seagull or sea mew. Gulls, terns, and petrels are common on the coasts and lakes of the Holy Land.

Other scholars think the Hebrew word may refer to an owl, possibly the long-eared owl.

See also Birds; Owl; Seagull.

Cucumber

A garden vegetable of the gourd family. [Numbers 11:5](#) mentions it as one of the foods desired by the wandering Israelites when they remembered the foods they ate in Egypt.

The cucumber is an annual climbing or trailing vine. No one knows for certain where cucumbers originally came from. People have grown cucumbers in all the warm countries of the Europe, Asia, and Africa since prehistoric times.

Cucumbers are usually eaten raw. A cucumber and a barley cake or some other kind of bread often make up a simple meal. The reference to "a shack in a cucumber field" ([Isaiah 1:8](#)) refers to the roughly built small house or shelter often set up in Palestinian cucumber fields and vineyards. These shelters protected the farmers or watchmen who guarded the crops.

See Food and Food Preparation.

Cummin

A herb from the carrot family that is grown for its fragrant seeds. The seeds are used for seasoning food ([Isaiah 28:25–27](#); [Matthew 23:23](#)).

Cumin (*Cuminum cyminum*) is believed to be native to Egypt and the eastern Mediterranean region. People have grown cumin for a long time to harvest its strongly aromatic and sharp-tasting seeds.

Cumin seeds are similar to caraway seeds but larger. They do not taste as pleasant as caraway seeds, but were still used widely as a flavor or spice. Sometimes people even mixed cumin with flour when making bread. Besides being used in cooking, people also used cumin as medicine and as a seasoning with fish and meats.

See Food and Food Preparation.

Cun

A Syrian city belonging to Hadadezer, King of Zobah. King David attacked Cun and took large amounts of bronze from the city ([1 Chronicles 18:8](#)). In another account of this same event, Berothai may refer to the same place ([2 Samuel 8:8](#)).

See also Berothah, Berothai.

Cuneiform

An ancient writing script that used nail or wedge-shaped marks to cut into a writing material, usually clay, in specific patterns. Each pattern, or "sign," represents a sound or word. The system was used by the Akkadians, Elamites, Hittites, Hurrians, and Sumerians. Ugaritic is also a cuneiform language script.

See also Writing.

Cup

The word may refer to the container or to what it holds. It can be used literally or figuratively.

1. A small drinking container made of different materials (leather, metal, or pottery) and in different sizes and designs.

2. A figure of speech to represent someone's share or involvement in something. It is used in the Bible to discuss:

- Consolation ([Jeremiah 16:7](#))
- Demons ([1 Corinthians 10:21](#))
- Divination ([Genesis 44:2, 5](#))
- Drunkenness ([Proverbs 23:31](#))
- Immorality ([Revelation 17:4](#); [18:6](#))
- Inheritance ([Psalm 16:5](#))
- Judgment ([Psalms 11:6](#); [75:8](#); [Isaiah 51:17, 22](#); [Jeremiah 49:12](#); [Ezekiel 23:33](#); [Zechariah 12:2](#); [Revelation 14:10](#); [16:19](#); [18:6](#))
- The Lord ([1 Corinthians 10:21](#))
- Prosperity or blessing ([Psalm 23:5](#))
- Salvation ([Psalm 116:13](#))
- Suffering ([Matthew 20:22](#); [26:39](#); [Mark 10:39](#); [14:36](#); [Luke 22:42](#); [John 18:11](#))
- Thanksgiving ([1 Corinthians 10:16](#))

See also Cup of Blessing.

Cup of Blessing

Theological phrase used in two contexts: (1) in Jewish usage, a cup of wine drunk at the end of a meal and having special Passover significance; (2) in Christian usage, the Communion goblet.

In the Passover feast the cup of blessing is the third of four cups required in the ceremony of the Paschal meal. It derives its name from the prayer offered over the cup: "Blessed art thou, O Lord our God, who givest us the fruit of the vine."

The apostle Paul used the term in reference to the wine of the Lord's Supper ([1 Cor 10:16](#)). His words are taken by many interpreters as evidence that the early church saw the Lord's Supper as a transformation and fulfillment of the Passover celebration. To participate in drinking the cup of blessing is to commit oneself to Christ, "our paschal lamb" ([5:7](#)), whose death it commemorates, and to enter into "communion" or fellowship with him. The phrase "cup of the Lord" ([10:21](#); [11:27](#)) or simply "the cup" ([11:25](#)) is also used. Paul added that true communion with Christ, signified by the cup of blessing, should exclude communion with

spiritual forces opposed to Christ, signified by the "cup of demons" ([10:21](#)).

See also Lord's Supper, The.

Cup-Bearer

Official whose primary duty was to taste the wine served to the king as a precaution against poisoning. Cup-bearers frequented the courts of kings and high officials in antiquity ([1 Kgs 10:5](#)). These men were close to those in authority and sometimes exercised considerable influence. Generally several of them served the king with the "chief cup-bearer" (butler) at their head ([Gn 40:1-23](#)). Solomon's court included cup-bearers ([2 Chr 9:4](#)), and Nehemiah was the king's cup-bearer ([Neh 1:11-2:1](#)); Rabshakeh may have been a cup-bearer ([2 Kgs 18:13-19](#); [Is 36:2](#)).

Curse, Cursed

Invocation of evil or injury against one's enemies. As practiced in Bible times, cursing was the opposite of blessing and should not be confused with profanity in the modern sense.

Pagan Beliefs

Curses and blessings were linked to the ancient pagan belief that spirits of "the gods" could be invoked to act on behalf of a person who repeated certain incantations or performed certain deeds (such as sacrifices). It was thought that a spoken curse possessed an occult power to work calamity on one's enemies. In some pagan cultures, curses were written on clay jars that were then smashed, symbolically initiating or effecting the intended curse.

Tombs were protected against would-be desecrators by means of curses. Royal inscriptions were protected by maledictions aimed at anyone who might alter, destroy, or defy the written decree ([Ezr 6:11-12](#)).

Curses in Old Testament Times

Among the Hebrews a curse, valid only within a covenant framework overseen by God, was spoken for the sake of justice. In the OT the curse was an integral part of a covenant relationship—between God and the community, between God and an individual, or among members of the community.

To break the terms of a covenant was to merit the covenant curse or curses. A curse invoked under other conditions was powerless. “Like a sparrow in its flitting, like a swallow in its flying, a curse that is causeless does not alight” ([Prv 26:2](#), rsv). A curse could be retracted by pronouncing a blessing ([Ex 12:32](#); [Jgs 17:1–2](#); [2 Sm 21:1–3](#)).

The Mosaic law forbade the cursing of parents ([Ex 21:17](#); cf. [Prv 20:20](#); [Mt 15:4](#)), the ruler ([Ex 22:28](#)), and the deaf ([Lv 19:14](#)). A man who suspected his wife of unfaithfulness could require that she submit to a test administered by the priest that would result in a curse upon her if she was guilty ([Nm 5:11–31](#)). Individuals might pronounce a curse upon themselves to show the truthfulness of their assertions or promises ([Nm 5:19–22](#); [Jb 31:7–10](#), [16–22](#); [Ps 137:5–6](#)). In the NT the apostle Peter followed the OT practice when he used a curse to deny that he knew Jesus ([Mk 14:71](#)). Certain men who wished to kill the apostle Paul proved their sincerity by such a solemn curse ([Acts 23:12](#), [14](#), [21](#)). Cursing God was punishable by death ([Lv 24:10–16](#); cf. [Ex 22:28](#); [Is 8:21–22](#)).

Curses in Bible history include God’s curse on the serpent, Adam, and Eve ([Gn 3:14–19](#)); on Cain ([4:11–12](#)); on those who might curse the patriarch Abraham and his descendants ([12:3](#)); and on those who put their trust in human strength instead of in the Lord ([Jer 17:5](#)). When the people of Israel passed through Moab on their way to the Promised Land, Moab’s king, Balak, hired Balaam to curse the Israelites; he and Balaam learned, however, that they could not curse those whom God had blessed ([Nm 22–24](#)). Joshua cursed anyone who might try to rebuild Jericho ([Jos 6:26](#); fulfilled in [1 Kgs 16:34](#)). King Saul made a curse that almost cost his son Jonathan’s life ([1 Sm 14:24](#), [43–45](#)). Many other curses are mentioned in the OT (see, e.g., [Gn 9:25](#); [49:5–7](#); [Jos 9:22–23](#); [Jgs 9:7–21](#), [57](#); [2 Sm 16:5–13](#); [1 Kgs 21:17–24](#); [2 Kgs 2:24](#); [Mal 2:2](#); [4:6](#)). The pronouncement of “woe” (nlt “destruction”) is also the language of curse ([Is 5:8–23](#); cf. [Mt 23:13–33](#), where “alas” and “woe” can be used synonymously and may be either an exclamation of sorrow or of impending doom and calamity).

[Psalm 109](#) contains a lengthy imprecation against the psalmist’s enemies, evidently because they had spoken some words against him falsely (see also [Pss 58:6–11](#); [69:19–28](#); [143:12](#)). The prophet Jeremiah was not averse to calling on God to punish his tormentors ([Jer 11:20](#); [12:3](#); [15:15](#); [17:18](#); [18:21–22](#); [20:11–12](#)) or asking God not to forgive them ([18:23](#)). Such imprecations against one’s

enemies are difficult for Christians today to understand because they contrast sharply with the NT commands to “bless those who curse you” ([Lk 6:28](#); cf. [Rom 12:14](#)). Jesus’ injunction to “love your enemies” ([Mt 5:44](#)) may be intended to point beyond the cursing practiced in the OT to a fuller understanding of God’s command to love one’s neighbor as oneself.

Covenant Curses

Protection of a contract or treaty by invoking a curse on the violator was common in OT times. Sometimes a covenant was sealed by cutting up an animal and having the covenanting individuals walk between the severed pieces; the slain animal symbolized the curse to befall the violator. God agreed to submit to such a curse on himself if he broke the covenant he made with the patriarch Abraham ([Gn 15:7–21](#)). Later, God accused the leaders and people of Israel of breaking their covenant with him and warned them of the consequences to follow ([Jer 34:18–19](#)). An essential part of the covenant God made with Israel at Mt Sinai was the promise of blessings for keeping the covenant and curses for breaking it ([Dt 11:26–28](#); [27:15–26](#); [28:15–68](#); [30:19](#); cf. [Lv 26:3–39](#)). Israel suffered those curses in the time of the prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel; the covenant breakers, including the king, were threatened with a curse ([Jer 11:3](#); [Ez 17:11–21](#)).

The Ban on “Devoted Things”

A special kind of curse was the ban or anathema. Strictly speaking, it was a vow to devote persons, animals, or objects under such a curse to God. In some cases the priests could use objects that had fallen under the ban ([Nm 18:14](#); [Ez 44:29](#)), but that provision did not apply to living beings. All persons or animals under the ban were sacrificed or destroyed ([Lv 27:28–29](#)). The ban was commonly used in Israel’s wars against its pagan neighbors. Sometimes everything was declared anathema ([Jos 6:17–19](#)), but normally only persons and heathen images were destroyed ([Dt 2:34](#); [3:6](#); [7:2](#), [25–26](#)—not even the melted gold of images was to be kept). To violate the ban by preserving any part of the cursed things was to come under the ban oneself. Because Achan did not respect the ban placed upon Jericho, the terms of that curse came upon all Israel until Achan confessed and was executed ([Jos 7](#)).

After the exile, the Jews did not practice the anathema (or ban) by putting people to death; people who violated a curse were excommunicated

and put out of the congregation of Israel ([Ezr 10:8](#)). That meant that the person was no longer part of God's people and was considered "dead."

Curses in New Testament Times

Jewish synagogues practiced excommunication, or anathema, in the NT period ([Lk 6:22](#); [In 9:22](#); [12:42](#); [16:2](#)). Later, Christians excommunicated persons by declaring them outside of the redeemed community ([Mt 18:17](#)) or "delivered to Satan" ([1 Cor 5:5](#); [1 Tm 1:20](#)). Both practices stemmed from the OT ban. Unlike that curse, however, the excommunication could be removed as soon as the person repented.

Since the anathema branded a person as "rejected" or "cursed by God," Saul of Tarsus, before his conversion, tried to compel Christians to renounce Christ by calling him accursed (cf. [Acts 26:11](#)). Later, as an apostle, Paul (Saul) warned that no one speaking by the Spirit of God could call Jesus accursed ([1 Cor 12:3](#)). Paul pronounced anathema (destined for judgment and perdition) upon anyone who preached another gospel than the one he and the other apostles preached ([Gal 1:8-9](#)). Paul said he wished he could be accursed, cut off from salvation and the people of God, if that could lead to the salvation of his fellow Israelites ([Rom 9:3](#)). His desire reflected the love of Christ, who accepted the "curse of the law" upon himself in submitting to suffering and death on the cross in order to redeem human beings from that curse ([Gal 3:8-14](#); cf. [Dt 21:22-23](#)). The NT promises that a time will come when "there shall no longer be any curse" ([Rv 22:3](#), nasb).

See also War, Holy.

Curtains

See Furniture; Homes and Dwellings; Tabernacle; Temple.

Cush (Person)

1. Eldest of Ham's four sons ([Gn 10:6](#); [1 Chr 1:8](#)). Because the other three (Egypt, Put, and Canaan) are place-names, it is likely that Cush also is a place. It is usually identified with Ethiopia. *See* Cush (Place); Ethiopia.

2. Benjamite and presumably David's enemy, mentioned in the title of [Psalm 7](#).

Cush (Place)

Cush is a name used in Egyptian, Akkadian, and Hebrew writings to refer to the countries along the Upper Nile River, south of Egypt. In a narrower sense, Cush was the area between the second and fourth cataracts (large waterfalls) of the Nile River. This is roughly the northern part of modern Sudan. This area was also known as ancient Nubia.

In general, the Old Testament uses the term in the narrower sense. The Greeks called this region Ethiopia, which later gave its name to the modern country of Ethiopia. (The modern country of Ethiopia is located farther to the south and east.)

Cush in the Book of Genesis

The meaning of "Cush" in the book of Genesis is not as clear. In the garden of Eden story, Cush seems to be in Mesopotamia ([Genesis 2:13](#)). This is the region of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers (verse [14](#)). This "Cush" might be the same as Kassite (Cossaeon), which was the name used for the Babylonian rulers who controlled Mesopotamia for about 500 years until the 12th century BC.

So, the Cush mentioned in [Genesis 10:6-8](#) could refer to two different places: Nubia (verses [6-7](#)) and Mesopotamia (verses [9-12](#)). Another possibility is that the Cush in [Genesis 2:13](#) and [10:8](#) could be Kish. This was a Mesopotamian city that was traditionally considered the seat of the first Sumerian dynasty after the great flood.

Cushites in the Bible

There is less confusion about the term "Cushite." With one possible exception in [Numbers 12:1](#), Cushite always refers to people from Nubia, the African Cush.

The first messenger whom Joab, King David's military commander, sent to announce Absalom's defeat to David was a Cushite ([2 Samuel 18:21-32](#)). We can tell this messenger was a foreigner because he did not know about a shortcut and because he was not sensitive to David's feelings when delivering the message. The King James Version translates the Hebrew word as the name "Cushi," but most scholars think this is incorrect. Most English Bible versions translate the other occurrences of Cush and Cushite as Ethiopia and Ethiopians.

Moses had a wife who was known as a Cushite ([Numbers 12:1](#)). This description can be understood in several ways:

1. She could have been from Nubia, which would make her a second wife, different from Zipporah.
2. She could have been from Cushan, making her possibly a Midianite, perhaps the same person as Zipporah.
3. The term might refer to her darker skin and foreign origin, possibly but not necessarily referring to Zipporah.

See also Cushan; Cushi #1; Ethiopia.

Cushan

Name of a tribe or place mentioned only once in the Bible ([Hb 3:7](#)). Some have identified Cushan with the people and land referred to in the OT as Cush, or Ethiopia in most English versions. The parallel position of "Cushan" to "the land of Midian" in [Habakkuk 3:7](#), however, as well as the location of the other places mentioned in the passage (Teman, Mt Paran) seems to place Cushan in the vicinity of Edom and Midian, south and southeast of the Dead Sea.

See also Cush (Place).

Cushan-Rishathaim

King of Mesopotamia whom Israel served for eight years. The Lord raised up Othniel, Kenaz's son, to deliver Israel out of his hand; later, Cushan-rishathaim was defeated by Othniel in war ([Jgs 3:8-10](#)). His exact identity is uncertain.

Cushi

1. A messenger sent by Joab to King David. He was sent to announce the defeat of Absalom ([2 Samuel 18:21-32](#)). The Hebrew word written as "Cushi" in English should probably be translated as "Cushite," which means a person from Cush.
See Cush (Place).

2. The great-grandfather of Jehudi. Jehudi was a prince in the court of King Jehoiakim of Judah in the time of Jeremiah the prophet ([Jeremiah 36:14](#)).
3. The father of the prophet Zephaniah ([Zephaniah 1:1](#)).

Cushite

A person from the African region of Nubia ([2 Samuel 18:32](#)).

See also Cush (Place).

Custodian

A servant who was responsible to accompany, protect, and sometimes discipline his master's son until the boy reached maturity.

See Guardian.

Cuth, Cuthah

Town in southern Babylonia ([2 Kgs 17:24](#)) from which some people were taken and relocated in Samaria after the Assyrian conquest (722 BC). The name appears also in Assyrian and Babylonian sources. In 1881 Hormuzd Rassam identified Cuthah as an ancient city whose towering ruins are located at modern Tell Ibrahim, about 20 miles (32.2 kilometers) northeast of Babylon. Cuthah was the location of a temple dedicated to Nergal, its patron deity (v [30](#)).

The Cuthans seem to have been a predominant segment of the population of postexilic Samaria, since Jews in later centuries applied that name to Samaritans in general. The religious syncretism of which the Cuthans were a part produced hostilities between Judah and Samaria following the Jews' return from their exile. That animosity between Jews and Samaritans continued across the centuries to Jesus' day ([In 4:7-9](#)).

Cyamon

Site mentioned in the book of Judith as demarcating the camp of Holofernes' army ([Jdt](#)

[7:3](#)). The name is uncertain: “Cyamon” is found in the Greek text, but the Syriac has “Cadmon.” Two later Hebrew manuscripts have “Selmon,” another “Hermon.” The Latin Vulgate has “Chelmon.” Some scholars have connected the site with Jokneam, modern Tell Qeimum ([Jos 12:22](#)). The only clue in the book of Judith is that it faced Esdraelon, the western portion of the plain of Jezreel.

Cylinder Seals

Cylinder seals were stone cylinders with inscriptions used for identifying ownership. They were developed by the ancient Sumerians and used mainly by other Mesopotamian peoples from about 3200 BC to the fourth century BC. These seals were also occasionally used in regions like Asia Minor (the Hittite Empire) and Persia. After 700 BC, stamp seals replaced cylinder seals. In Palestine, stamp seals were common in biblical times.

Early cylinder seals had unique scenes that signified ownership. A cylinder seal was usually less than an inch (2.5 centimeters) long and had a hole drilled through it so it could be worn around the neck or waist. By 2700 BC, seals also had a cuneiform inscription of the owner’s name and title. During the Akkadian period (2360–2180 BC), they also indicated professions. Early in the second millennium BC, owners identified themselves as servants of particular gods. By the mid-second millennium, prayers were commonly added.

In the fourth and third millennia BC, cylinder seals were mainly used to show ownership of property by rolling the seal across wet clay on jars or packages. They were also used to identify and seal clay tablet documents. Initially, only kings and top officials used them, but by the second millennium BC, many aristocrats had them. Cylinder seals were often buried with their owners; nearly 15,000 have been found. These seals are important for studying the art, economy, sociology, and religion of Mesopotamia and nearby regions.

Cymbal

A cymbal is a musical instrument made of two round, thin, slightly curved metal plates that are hit together to make a ringing sound. Israelites used cymbals in the worship of God ([2 Samuel 6:5](#); [Ezra 3:10](#); [Psalm 150:5](#)).

See also Musical Instruments (Zelzelim); Music.

Cypress

The cypress tree is known for its dark leaves and symmetrical shape. It was used in Solomon's temple ([1 Kings 5:8](#)).

The cypress (*Cupressus sempervirens horizontalis*) is a massive, tall-growing evergreen tree with small, scale-like leaves. It grows widely in the mountainous regions of Israel and the surrounding areas. On Mount Lebanon and Mount Hermon, it grows together with cedar and oak trees. Cypress trees usually grow 15.2 to 18.3 meters (50 to 60 feet) tall, but can grow up to 24.2 meters (80 feet) tall.

The Phoenicians, Cretans, and Greeks are said to have used cypress wood extensively in building ships. Most scholars agree that the “gopher wood” mentioned in [Genesis 6:14](#) is cypress because the wood lasts a very long time without rotting. Noah used this wood to build the an extremely large boat (the ark).

Cyprus

An island country located in the northeastern Mediterranean Sea. Cyprus is 80.5 kilometers (50 miles) south of Turkey (Asia Minor), 112.6 kilometers (70 miles) west of Syria, and 394.2 kilometers (245 miles) north of Egypt. The island is about 177 kilometers (110 miles) long and 80.5 kilometers (50 miles) wide. The fertile Mesaoria Plain divides two mountain ranges, the Kyrenia and Troodas Massif ranges. A narrow strip of land 64.3 kilometers (40 miles) long and 8 kilometers (5 miles) wide extends from the northeastern part of the island.

Cyprus has many natural harbors. In ancient times, these harbors were a strategic connection point for sea routes from Asia Minor, Syria, Palestine, and Egypt. The Cypriot copper mines are now mostly depleted, but they historically provided major industry for the island.

Historical Cyprus

Cyprus's population and economic significance grew during the Bronze Age in the late fourth–second millennia BC. The island was first named Alashiya, according to the ancient documents of Ebla from the 24th century BC. Documents from Mari in the 18th century BC, as well as from Ugarit

and Tel el-Amarna in the 14th century BC also identify it by that name. Elishah appears to be an Old Testament name for the island. The name may be a Hebrew interpretation of Alashiya (compare [Ezra 27:7](#)).

Trade networks with Syria, Palestine, and Egypt made the island known for exports, especially copper, oil, wood, and pottery. Alashiyan pottery remnants have been found in Egypt, Palestine, and Syria. The ancient texts of Ebla, Mari, and Amarna record the business details about valuable copper trades. Toward the end of the Bronze Age Greeks from Mycenia and Achaia began to migrate to Cyprus. The Greek colonies of Salamis and Paphos were founded around 1270 to 1190 BC.

In the ninth and eighth centuries BC, the Phoenicians settled people and asserted dominance on Cyprus. King Hiram II of Tyre ruled over Cyprus, according to the inscriptions found at Mount Sinoas. He was king from 741 to 738 BC. Kition, near modern Larnaka, was a Phoenician settlement whose residents were called Kittim. The Hebrews named the whole island Kittim ([Numbers 24:24](#), King James Version "Chittim"). Hebrew texts eventually referred to any maritime country by this name ([Jeremiah 2:10](#); [Daniel 11:30](#); [1 Maccabees 1:1](#)). Isaiah announced that reports of Tyre's destruction would be confirmed from the ports of Kittim (Cyprus) ([Isaiah 23:1,12](#)).

Assyria, the rising superior power in the Near East during the eighth and seventh centuries BC, made Cyprus one of its tributaries. The stele of King Sargon II, who ruled from 721 to 705 BC, is a stone monument that records money and gifts received by seven kings of Cyprus. King Esarhaddon kept records on a clay object shaped like a prism. He ruled around 670 BC. The prism lists ten kings who ruled different cities in Cyprus. During the Assyrian occupation, Cyprus was called Iadnan. After the Assyrian Empire ended, Cyprus was governed by Amasis. He ruled Egypt from 569 to 527 BC. Later, Cyprus was governed by King Cambyses II of Persia. He ruled from 529 to 522 BC.

Alexander the Great defeated the Persian army at Issus in 333 BC. After that, Cyprus sent 120 ships to help support his siege against Tyre. The Ptolemies of Egypt (a subdivision of the Greek Empire) gained possession of the island after Alexander's death in 323. Egypt kept control of Cyprus from 294 to 258 BC. This period brought relative peace and prosperity to the island. The name Cyprus, meaning copper in Greek, was then assigned to it.

Cyprus was annexed to Rome in 58 BC. Cicero was appointed governor of Cyprus in 52. In 22 BC, Rome made Cyprus into a senatorial province; Sergius Paulus was selected as its proconsul in AD 46. Later, Hadrian suppressed a violent Jewish revolt in 117, after which he banished all Jews from the island.

Cyprus in the New Testament

In the New Testament, Cyprus is first mentioned as the birthplace of Barnabas ([Acts 4:36](#)). Later, Jewish believers sought refuge at Cyprus from persecution in Jerusalem because of Stephen ([11:19-20](#)). Paul and Barnabas set sail from Seleucia, crossing to Cyprus before going on to Asia Minor (around AD 47) on Paul's first missionary journey.

Landing at Salamis, they traveled across the island to the western harbor town of Paphos. Here they met Bar-Jesus, the false prophet, and converted the Roman proconsul Sergius Paulus. From Paphos, Paul and Barnabas sailed to Asia Minor, docking at Perga in Pamphylia ([13:4-13](#)).

Paul bypassed Cyprus on his second missionary journey. Barnabas with John Mark revisited the island ([15:39](#)). On Paul's final trip to Jerusalem, Cyprus was a navigational landmark in crossing from Patara to Tyre ([21:3](#)). On the journey to Rome, Paul's ship sailed under the lee of Cyprus to avoid rough winds ([27:4](#)).

Cyrene, Cyrenians

A city on the coast of North Africa, known as the capital of Cyrenaica. It was founded in the seventh century BC by Greeks who were mainly farmers. Herodotus, a historian from the fifth century BC, noted that Cyrene was unique because it had three harvest seasons, resulting in a long, continuous autumn of eight months: "the land of Cyrene, the highest of that part of Libya which is inhabited by Nomads, has the remarkable peculiarity of three separate harvest-seasons . . . making for the fortunate people of Cyrene, a continuous autumn of eight months on end" (4.199).

Alexander the Great conquered Cyrene in 331 BC, and it later became part of the Roman Empire. During the New Testament period, the city had a large Jewish population from Alexandria. One of these Jews, Simon of Cyrene, was in Jerusalem during the Passover when he was compelled to

carry Jesus's cross ([Matthew 27:32](#)). On Pentecost, Peter preached to Jews from Cyrene in Jerusalem ([Acts 2:10](#)). Stephen was attacked by Jews from a synagogue that included people from Cyrene ([Acts 6:9](#)). Some of these Cyrenian Jews were later converted to Christianity and became preachers ([Acts 11:20](#)), traveling as far as Antioch, where Lucius of Cyrene was a notable Christian teacher ([Acts 13:1](#)).

Cyrenius

The King James Version spelling of Quirinius, in [Luke 2:2](#). Quirinius was the governor of Syria when Christ was born.

See Quirinius.

Cyrus Cylinder

A baked clay barrel, nine inches (22.9 centimeters) long and inscribed in cuneiform. It was found by archaeologist Hormuzd Rassam during his excavations at Babylon from 1879 to 1882. It is now kept in the British Museum in London. The inscription was written by Cyrus the Great (who founded the Persian Empire and ruled it from 539 to 530 BC) to describe and justify his policies. The text, nearly intact, is about 1,000 words long and dates from around 536 BC.

Cyrus began by criticizing Nabonidus, the last ruler of the Neo-Babylonian Empire, calling him a “weakling” who had removed the gods' images from their temples and neglected the worship of Marduk, the chief Babylonian god. Nabonidus also forced his people to work on many public projects.

Historians now believe that Nabonidus had abandoned Marduk's worship for that of Sin, the moon god worshiped in Ur and Haran. Before Babylon fell, Nabonidus tried to bring many of the gods from Babylonian cities to the capital, which angered the powerful religious leaders and many people.

Cyrus continued the inscription by saying that Marduk had heard the gods' complaints and looked for a righteous ruler. He found Cyrus, who had “good deeds” and an “upright heart.” Marduk helped Cyrus conquer many lands and ordered him to march against Babylon, supporting him like a friend. Cyrus took Babylon without a fight, and Marduk delivered Nabonidus to him. Greek sources

say Nabonidus's life was spared, and the people of Babylonia were happy with Cyrus's rule, as they avoided damage and disaster.

Cyrus then spoke of his lineage, showing he came from a royal line in Anshan, a region east of the Persian Gulf. He claimed that the Babylonian gods Bel and Nebo were pleased with him. Cyrus probably felt the need to make this statement because he had taken the Median and Neo-Babylonian Empires by force.

After establishing his right to rule, Cyrus described his reception by the people, his faithful worship of Marduk, and his kind treatment of his subjects. He controlled his troops to prevent terror, maintained peace, stopped forced labor, and developed public housing projects. Cyrus believed Marduk was pleased with his actions and would favor him, his son Cambyses, and his troops. Princes from across the empire came to Babylon to pay tribute to Cyrus.

The next part of the inscription is important to biblical history. Cyrus reversed the deportation policy of the Babylonians and Assyrians, allowing all captive people to return to their homes. He also returned the gods' images to their temples and helped rebuild them. This shows that the decree in the Book of Ezra, allowing Jews to return to Palestine ([Ezra 1](#)), was part of Cyrus's broader policy, not due to his conversion to the God of Israel. Other captive peoples also had similar decrees.

In the last paragraph, Cyrus asked the gods to intercede with Bel and Nebo for a long life for him and to commend him to Marduk. He believed that grateful priests and worshipers praying for him would be loyal subjects, removing sources of discontent.

See also Cyrus the Great.

Cyrus the Great

Persian king (559–530 BC) who founded the Achaemenid dynasty and the Persian Empire. Cyrus (II) was the son of Cambyses I (600–599 BC), who ruled the unified territories of Parshumash-anshan and Parsa. Cyrus's mother was Mandane, daughter of the Median king Astyages (585?–550 BC). The ancestor of the dynasty was Achaemenes. Cyrus succeeded his father and established himself in Pasargadae about 559 BC. Ambitious and daring, he aligned his kingdom with neighboring peoples and tribes into a solid block of Persian power, then

revolted against Astyages of Media. When it became evident that Cyrus would win in the struggle to control Media, the troops of Astyages mutinied and deserted to Cyrus. When Cyrus conquered the Median kingdom, however, he came into conflict with Babylon, since the two kingdoms claimed much of the same territory.

Cyrus consolidated his power before fighting with Babylon. First, he conquered Asia Minor. Wealthy King Croesus of Lydia and the Lydians submitted to him. Then he overran the northern mountainous region between the Caspian Sea and the northwest corner of India.

By 539 BC, Cyrus was ready to move against Babylon. The Babylonian governor of Elam defected to Cyrus and joined his army. With a minimum of opposition, the armies of Cyrus entered the Babylonian capital in 539 BC. Nabonidus was taken prisoner but was treated with respect and mercy. Sixteen days later Cyrus himself entered the city, to the acclaim of many of its inhabitants.

Isaiah's prophecy spoke of Cyrus as the Lord's anointed ([Is 45:1](#)). Israel regarded him as called and empowered by their God to free them. Under Cyrus, the Jews were allowed to rebuild Jerusalem and its temple ([44:28](#)). Documents preserved in the OT state that in his first year in Babylon, Cyrus issued a decree permitting the reconstruction of the house of God at Jerusalem ([2 Chr 36:22-23](#); [Ezr 1:1-3](#); [6:2-5](#)). He also returned sacred vessels taken from the temple by Nebuchadnezzar. Biblical descriptions of the decree say nothing about rebuilding the city, but that would be in harmony with the king's policy.

During excavations (1879-82) at Babylon, archaeologist Hormuzd Rassam discovered a clay barrel inscription on which Cyrus told of taking the city and of his resulting policies. Isaiah and Chronicles reflect the content of the inscription, which says that captured peoples were allowed to return home and build sanctuaries to their own gods.

Nothing is known about the death of Cyrus. Accounts that have been preserved make it clear that he was killed in battle, but the statements are conflicting. Probably the Greek historian Herodotus is right in indicating that Cyrus died in a terrible disaster that destroyed the Persian army fighting the Massagetae. The tomb of Cyrus can still be seen at Pasargadae in Iran.

See also Cyrus Cylinder; Persia, Persians.