

## **Resource: Bible Dictionary (Tyndale)**

### **Aquifer Open Bible Dictionary**

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## Bible Dictionary (Tyndale)

### W

*Wadi, Wages, Waheb, Walnut, Wanderings in the Wilderness, War of the Sons of Light against the Sons of Darkness, Warfare, Watch, Watchman, Watchtower, Water, Water Gate, Water Hen, Water Lily, Water of Bitterness or Jealousy, Water of Separation, Waters of Merom, Wave Offering, Wealth, Weapons, Weasel, Weaving, Wedding, Weeds, Week, Weeks, Feast of, Weights and Measures, Well, Western Text, Whale, Wheat, Wheel, Whirlwind, White, Whore, Wickedness, Widow, Wife, Wild Gourd, Wild Ox, Wilderness, Wilderness of Sin, Wilderness of Zin, Wilderness Wanderings, Will of God, Willow, Wine, Winepress, Wineskins, Winnow, Wisdom, Wisdom Literature, Wisdom of Jesus Ben Sirach, Wisdom of Solomon, Wise Men, Witch, Witchcraft, Withered Hand, Witness, Witness, Altar of, Wizard, Woe, Wolf, Woman, Wonders, Wool, Word, Word of God, Words of God, Work, World, Worm, Wormwood, Worship, Wrath of God, Writer, Writing*

### Wadi

A wadi is a stream or river that flows only during certain times of the year in the dry and semi-dry regions of the Middle East. These streambeds are usually dry, but they can become filled with rushing water during spring when snow melts or after heavy rains fall.

The most important wadi in the Bible was the Wadi of Egypt (also called the "Brook of Egypt" in modern Bible versions). This wadi marked the southwestern border of Canaan according to the instructions God gave to Moses ([Numbers 34:5](#); [Joshua 15:4, 47](#); [1 Kings 8:65](#); [Isaiah 27:12](#)). During dry seasons when there was no water flowing, wadis were useful as paths for travel.

### Wages

A payment received by a laborer in return for his work. Wages are usually in a medium of exchange, like money. But, they can be paid for any goods or services.

Jacob worked seven years for Laban's younger daughter, Rachel ([Genesis 29:18-20](#)). He then had to work another seven years when Laban did not honor their agreement. Later, Jacob's wages were sheep and goats ([Genesis 30:31-32](#); [31:8](#)). Nebuchadnezzar was given the country of Egypt as wages for his work in capturing the city of Tyre ([Ezekiel 29:18-20](#)).

Wages were usually agreed upon by employer and employee ([Genesis 29:15-19](#); [Matthew 20:2](#)). Sometimes, the employer decided the pay ([Matthew 20:4](#)). A fair wage for honest work is a biblical principle ([Luke 10:7](#); [1 Timothy 5:18](#)). The Lord established laws to cover this principle and judged those who violated it. Wages were to be paid promptly ([Leviticus 19:13](#)). The holding back of wages is condemned in the Scripture ([Malachi 3:5](#); [James 5:1-6](#)).

Wages were often a source of discontent and dispute between employer and employee. When soldiers came to John the Baptist to be baptized, they asked about their future conduct. He urged them to be content with their wages ([Luke 3:14](#)). Jacob and Laban disagreed about wages. Twice, Jacob complained, "He has cheated me and changed my wages ten times" ([Genesis 31:7, 41](#)).

The Bible also speaks of ill-gotten wages. A prostitute's wages could not be brought into the house of the Lord ([Deuteronomy 23:18](#)). People are warned against Balaam's error. He corrupted Israel because he "loved the wages of wickedness" ([2 Peter 2:15](#)).

*See also* Money; Banker, Banking; Poor, The; Riches; Work.

### Waheb

A town in the area of Suphah ([Numbers 21:14](#)).

*See* Suphah.

## Walnut

A walnut is a type of tree that produces round, sticky fruit with an edible nut inside. The "nuts" mentioned in [Song of Solomon 6:11](#) likely refer to the Persian or common walnut (*Juglans regia*). This tree is believed to have originally come from northern Persia, but it also grows wild in many parts of northern India, as far east as China, and as far west as Persia.

During King Solomon's time, the walnut tree was widely grown for its fruit throughout the East. Solomon's "garden of nuts" mentioned in the Bible was possibly part of his large gardens at Etham, which was located 9.7 kilometers (6 miles) from Jerusalem.

## Wanderings in the Wilderness

See Wilderness Wanderings.

## War of the Sons of Light against the Sons of Darkness

A scroll found in Cave One at Qumran between 1947 and 1948. It gives us information about:

- military rules of Jewish forces
- religious life of the Qumran community
- expectations of the Qumran community for the end times

It was likely written around the middle of the first century BC or the beginning of the first century AD. Professor Sukenik of Hebrew University bought the scroll from a seller in Bethlehem. The scroll had 19 sheets. Sukenik edited it, and it was published after his death in 1954 (see discussion of discoveries at Wadi Qumran in Bible, Manuscripts and Text of the (Old Testament)).

The Qumran community divided all humankind into two camps:

- the sons of light
- the sons of darkness

Only the members of the Qumran community belonged to the sons of light. All other Jews and all gentiles belonged to Satan and his army. The scroll talks about hope for victory over these forces of

darkness. It says the rule of the Romans (called Kittim) "shall come to an end and iniquity shall be vanquished, leaving no remnants; [for the sons] of darkness there shall be no escape." The sons of light will participate in the last battle.

The scroll teaches the biblical rules of war so the sons of light can fight the Lord's battle. Because of the Sabbath, they believe they will fight for 35 out of 40 years, resting every seventh year.

The scroll describes how the battle will happen:

Six priests in special clothes will go ahead of the army, blowing trumpets. The trumpets have writing that shows the battle belongs to God. Priests and Levites will blow horns to confuse the enemy. The priests will have an important role in the battle divisions. Priests and Levites will lead the battle formations as God's representatives.

In the end, they expect God will defeat evil for his faithful people: "This is the day appointed by him for the defeat and overthrow of the Prince of the kingdom of wickedness, and he will send eternal succor to the company of his redeemed by the might of the princely Angel of the kingdom of Michael."

## Warfare

The means by which one nation tries to control another by using force. The importance of ancient warfare is shown by the effort put into improving weapons and defenses.

### Methods of Warfare

#### Standard Combat

Cavalry units (soldiers on horseback) appeared at the end of the second millennium BC and the start of the first. The cavalry charge acted as a powerful force for large armies. Their easy movement allowed them to focus firepower at important points. The Assyrians combined their infantry, cavalry, and chariots into a strong battle force. Smaller neighboring nations often had to retreat behind their walls. They could not fight the large Assyrian army in open fields. Iron Age II is rich in illustrated monuments. Assyrian war reliefs show detailed images of their victories and the size of defended cities. Few scenes show standard combat in open fields. In these, chariots charge from all directions, engaging the enemy throughout the

battle. Other groups clean up, eliminating enemy resistance left after the chariot charge.

Terrain has always been a crucial factor. In typical battles on open ground, commanders usually placed their best troops on the right side. A Greek commander, Epaminodas, who died in 362 BC, surprised the Spartan army with a new tactic. He used a slanting attack with a stronger left wing. Philip of Macedon and his son Alexander also surprised their enemies. They used different attack plans based on the phalanx formation.

### Battle in Open Terrain: The Duel

In ancient Near East times, duels offered an alternative to regular combat. A duel was a fight between two champions representing opposing forces. Both armies agreed beforehand to accept the duel's result. This method aimed to avoid the high casualties of large-scale battles. The earliest detailed account of this warfare style is in the Tale of Sinuhe. Sinuhe, a chamberlain in the 12th dynasty's royal court, chose exile and traveled to northern Palestine and Syria. There, he lived among Semitic tribes and was challenged to a duel by a local champion. Sinuhe defeated him and took his goods.

Duels were common in other armies later, but Israel did not know of them before David and Goliath ([1 Samuel 17](#)). The Philistine army had reached Judah as far as Socoh and was positioned on one hill. Opposite them, on another hill, was Saul's army. The valley of Elah lay between the two camps. Each day, the Philistine champion, Goliath, challenged the Israelites, suggesting the battle be decided by two warriors fighting. David accepted the challenge, and after he killed Goliath, the Philistines fled, refusing to honor the agreement. The Israelite army then pursued the Philistines, causing many casualties.

### Assaults on Fortified Cities

Most cities in the ancient Near East were built in places easy to defend and with economic benefits. A fortified city was protected by strong walls. Attacking a fortified city posed different challenges for both the attacker and the defender. Each side acted in response to the other's moves. Defense systems aimed to block attack methods, which were created to break through defense systems.

There were five ways to conquer a fortified city:

1. Going over the walls

2. Breaking through the walls
3. Tunneling under the walls
4. Laying siege
5. Using tricks

Often, combining two or more methods was needed to break through the defenses.

The biblical story of Abimelech's conquest of Shechem ([Judges 9](#)) describes an attack on a fortified city during the time of the judges (Iron Age I). When the people of Shechem and their allies rebelled against Abimelech, he responded by attacking the city. He moved his army of hired soldiers at night and launched a surprise attack at dawn ([Judges 9:32-35](#)). The men of Shechem fought outside the city gates but had to retreat behind the city walls. The next day, Abimelech attacked the city itself. He split his forces into three groups and led one group to attack the city gates at a critical moment ([Judges 9:43-44](#)). They broke through the gate and took control of the main walls, but the city's remaining defenders escaped to an inner fortress, the temple of Baal-berith.

Many reliefs show groups of soldiers defending a citadel (the strongest part of a city's defenses) after enemies breached a city wall. Archaeological digs at Shechem confirm its temple, like those in other Canaanite cities, was built as a fortified tower with strong bastions near the entrance. The tower of Shechem was well fortified and covered a small area, allowing its defenders to focus their attacks on Abimelech's troops. Since they could not capture it by force, Abimelech ordered his soldiers to cut brushwood with their battle-axes. They piled the brushwood against the stronghold and set it on fire ([Judges 9:48-49](#)). All the defenders inside the tower died.

Attacking an inner citadel was always risky for an army, as seen after capturing Shechem's tower. Abimelech then targeted the city of Thebez, using the same successful plan from Shechem. However, while he prepared to burn the tower door where the defenders had fled, a woman dropped a millstone on him, crushing his skull ([Judges 9:50-53](#)). This event became a saying about the danger of getting too close to fortified tower walls ([2 Samuel 11:19-21](#)).

### Communications and Intelligence

During the patriarchal period (middle Bronze period), we have detailed records about wartime

communication systems. Documents from Mari on the Euphrates show a well-developed system using signals. At night, people used torches or firebrands to send signals based on a prearranged code. This system was common in Mesopotamia and other regions to quickly request help when a city faced an attack.

In the late Bronze Age, horsemen were sometimes used for communication tasks and to gather intelligence (information about the enemy). Intelligence services helped plan and carry out military operations. The Bible highlights the importance of intelligence and the use of spies or scouts during the conquest of Canaan. Before entering the land, Moses sent men on a spying mission. He told them to gather information about the land's geography, the strength of its people, whether the land was fertile, the condition of the cities, and if they were fortified. He also asked them to report if the land could support a large population ([Numbers 13:17-20](#)).

Tactical intelligence was crucial. Joshua sent spies to Jericho and Ai before starting military actions against them ([Joshua 2:1](#); [7:2](#)). The reports he got about the Canaanites' strength and spirit helped him plan his attack. During the time of the judges, the conquest of Bethel ([Judges 1:22-26](#)) was directly due to intelligence from a reconnaissance patrol. The tribes of Joseph sent scouts to watch the city. It was heavily fortified and seemed impossible to capture. The scouts caught a man leaving the city—not through the main gate, which was tightly shut, but through a hidden door or tunnel. To save his life and his family's, he revealed the tunnel's location under the walls. The city was entered through the tunnel and captured.

### Attack and Penetration: The Breach

To directly penetrate an ancient city's defenses, attackers would break through the gate or main walls using hammers, axes, pikes, spears, swords, or a battering ram. Illustrated monuments and written records show that during the early middle Bronze period, attackers used battering rams against fortified cities. The earliest known image of a battering ram is in a siege scene from the wall paintings at Beni Hasan, dating to the 20th century BC. This ram is a simple device, resembling a small hut with a slightly pointed roof. It could be moved close to a fortress using two parallel crossbars. The structure sheltered two or three soldiers who manually operated a very long pole with a sharp, likely metal, tip.

The Mari documents give information from 200 years later. They describe how effective battering rams made mostly of wood were. Despite being very heavy, people could move the siege weapon over long distances. One document mentions using a wagon pulled by draft animals and a boat to transport a battering ram to a besieged city.

Moving a battering ram into position always exposed the demolition unit to heavy fire from defenders above. Its weight made it hard to move. The ground near the walls was often rough, rocky, and steep. When the target was a section of the wall, the assault force had to build an earthen ramp. They sometimes reinforced it with wooden planks or stones. The ramp provided a path to move the battering ram from the slope's base to the outer wall. Once in position, they had to brake the ram to stop it from rolling back. Building such a ramp was necessary in Joab's campaign against the fortified city of Abel in Beth-maacah ([2 Samuel 20:15](#)). The biblical account shows that Israel used some type of battering ram under King David during the early monarchy.

The earliest Assyrian reliefs show that protecting the attack units was very important. They used tall, mobile assault towers made of wood alongside a battering ram. These towers, positioned near a breach operation and manned by archers, provided covering fire against the defenders on the wall. Siege towers reduced the defenders' firepower advantage and distracted them from the crew breaking through the walls.

The details of the Assyrian reliefs help us clearly imagine what happened to Jerusalem, as told to the prophet Ezekiel ([Ezekiel 4:1-3](#); [21:22](#)). The gate was the main target because it was the weakest part of the wall. The path to the gate made building a special ramp unnecessary. During a gate's destruction, swords were sometimes used to pry open the doors and break the hinges. Wooden doors without metal protection were often set on fire.

The battering ram was still used to break walls during the Hellenistic-Roman period. In 63 BC, the Roman commander Pompey used battering rams from Tyre against Jerusalem's defenders. With these, he broke through the fortified wall around the temple. The siege machine on Trajan's column had a beam with an iron head shaped like a ram. It moved to a wall in a frame protected by a wooden roof covered with clay or hides. A version designed to bore into walls was used by Titus during the siege of Jerusalem in AD 70.

The battering ram was not the only tool used to break through a wall. Troops trained as sappers (soldiers who break down walls) would tear down a section of the wall using sharp-headed levers like pikes, swords, or spears, and sometimes sledgehammers (see [Ezekiel 26:8-9](#)). In Ashurnasirpal's army, these men wore full-length coats of mail for body protection. Under later Assyrian kings, they used both round and rectangular shields, which they carried on their backs during demolition. Later, Ashurbanipal relied only on these sappers to directly penetrate a fortified city. He designed a huge shield for their protection. The curved head of the shield could be propped against the wall, protecting the sapper from missiles while he worked beneath it.

### Scaling the Walls

A battle scene on limestone in the tomb of Anta at Dashashe in Upper Egypt (24th century BC) shows the earliest known siege activities. It depicts Egyptians using a scaling ladder against a fortified city's walls. By Sargon's time, walls became much thicker, allowing for taller and more resistant walls. These strong walls also reduced the effectiveness of battering rams. Sargon, and especially his successor Ashurbanipal, adapted by building longer scaling ladders. Some ladders reached 25 to 7.6 to 9.1 meters (30 feet) based on the number of rungs.

### Breaking Through the Walls

A tunneling operation could start beyond the range of any weapons the defenders had. Once underground, the unit was safe from enemy fire. Tunneling could happen at night to maximize surprise. However, it was a long process that needed a lot of technical skill. If the defenders discovered the operation before it finished, they could destroy the unit as it emerged. Tunneling under city walls was common in Iron Age II warfare. Reliefs, written documents, and archaeological digs confirm this, as they have found remains of attack tunnels from that time.

### Siege

When a walled city was on a high hill, a long siege was another way to conquer it. By surrounding the city and stopping help or supplies from reaching the defenders, the attacking army could starve the people inside. This method reduced risk for the attackers. Success depended on their ability to block outside help and stop defenders from

escaping. Armies usually chose a siege when a city's defenses were too strong for a direct attack. The Assyrians besieged Samaria for three years ([2 Kings 18:9-10](#)).

The unique conditions of a siege led to the creation of the catapult. This was a major Greek artillery innovation and an improvement on the bow and sling. Initially, it was a strengthened bow on a stand used to fire arrows. It was introduced around 400 BC by Demetrius I, who may have borrowed the idea from the Phoenicians in Carthage.

Over time, the instrument improved. The torsion catapult, a powerful weapon, used tightly twisted strands of elastic material, often made from women's hair. A windlass tightened these strands, and they released suddenly. The catapult could fire arrows, large stones, or fire-baskets up to 182.9 meters (200 yards). It could clear defenders from a wall while a battering ram broke through or a boarding party attacked from a mobile tower.

In a besieged city, the main problems were food and water supplies. The Bible highlights the horror of famine during the siege of Samaria by the Syrian Ben-hadad in the time of the prophet Elisha. Women were forced to eat their children ([2 Kings 6:26-29](#)). A besieging army would try to worsen these conditions. In one of Ashurnasirpal II's siege reliefs, a defender lowers a bucket from the wall to get water from a stream below, while an Assyrian soldier cuts the rope with his dagger.

### Ruses and Stratagems

Different tricks could lure defenders out of a city or sneak troops inside. If a small group entered a city using a clever plan, they could overpower the guards and open the gates for an attacking army. A city's walls were useless once the enemy got inside. Also, breaking through defenses at one spot often made the whole system fall apart. The story of the Trojan horse is the most famous example of a trick bypassing the defenses of a well-protected ancient city.

In the biblical story of the siege of Samaria by Ben-hadad, the Syrian siege suddenly ended. Joram, the king of Israel, thought it was a trick. He did not believe the report from four lepers that the Syrians had left, leaving behind large food supplies ([2 Kings 7:12](#)). Joshua had used a similar tactic at Ai ([Joshua 8:3-8](#)).

At other times, powerful armies used psychological warfare to weaken resistance. For example, Sennacherib tried to capture Jerusalem during



Hezekiah's reign ([2 Kings 18-19](#)). The conversation between the Assyrian general and Hezekiah's delegates shows the Assyrian aimed to undermine the defenders' confidence.

An ambush is a trick to trap and defeat an enemy when they are least prepared. Its success relies on surprise. With good information, knowledge of the land, and night cover, a small group can launch a powerful ambush against a much larger force.

Ambushes were a common combat tactic during the conquest of Canaan. The fall of Ai happened because of a successful ambush ([Joshua 8:1-23](#)). At night, Joshua moved a large force to a hidden spot behind the city. He then led the rest of the Israelite army to a valley north of the fortified city, making it look like they planned to attack. This trick drew Ai's main force away from the city to fight Israel on the Arabah plain. When the Israelites retreated, appearing defeated, Ai's remaining defenders chased Joshua's fleeing army. With the city undefended, the main Israelite force emerged from hiding, entered the city, and set it on fire. Too late, Ai's men saw the smoke and realized the trap. Joshua's army turned to attack their pursuers, trapping them between two Israelite forces. Attacked from both front and back, Ai's army was destroyed by the well-planned ambush.

### *Fortifications and Defense*

The earliest known fortifications in the world, dating back to around 7000 BC, were found in 1954 at Jericho. They were impressive in both design and construction. The main part of the defense system was a wall, with a section on the western edge of the ancient city still standing 6.4 meters (21 feet) high. Further excavation revealed a large moat carved from solid rock at the wall's base, measuring 8.2 meters (27 feet) wide and 2.7 meters (9 feet) deep. How they achieved this with only stone tools remains a mystery. A third part of Jericho's defense was a massive stone circular tower, 9.1 meters (30 feet) high, likely attached to the inner side of the western wall. The exact purpose of the tower is still unknown, but Neolithic Jericho shows the earliest evidence of a fortified city with a wall, tower, and moat.

By the middle of the Bronze Age, a standard defense system had four parts: a moat, an outer wall, an inner wall, and a strong gate structure. The moat, outer wall, and extra defenses protected the steep slope and lower part of the main wall. They aimed to stop a battering ram from breaking through.

### **City Walls**

Building a simple wall could only temporarily stop an enemy advance, as walls could be climbed or broken. Walls served as a platform for defenders to fight back. The wall system had three main parts: the wall as the barrier; an upper structure for defenders to stand and take cover; and obstacles and traps in front of the wall to keep archers away and stop battering rams.

The battlement, a protective feature built along the top edge of the wall, gave defenders security and mobility. It had openings for directing fire. From afar, the square notches resembled a row of teeth with gaps. The teeth, called merlons, acted as a barrier against enemy missiles. The gaps, known as embrasures or crenels, allowed defenders to fire their weapons. Special towers jutted out from the wall, spaced no farther than twice the range of a bow. These towers let defenders shoot at troops who reached the walls. To protect the main wall, builders could add an outer wall. This wall could only be breached or climbed under heavy fire from the main wall's battlements. Another method was to dig a wide, deep moat around the main wall's base. A moat stopped the enemy from using a battering ram unless they bridged or filled it, all while under heavy fire from defenders.

Casemate fortifications, introduced in the middle Bronze period, evolved from double walls made of cut stones. The space between the walls was divided into chambers, or casemates, used for storage or living. The Hittite casemate system, introduced into Palestine by the time of Saul, was widely adopted in Syria and Palestine. A fine example was found at Gibeah, where Saul's citadel was located, dating to the end of the 11th century BC. The double walls, including the casemates, are 4.6 meters (15 feet) thick. The same construction type was found in excavations of three Solomonic cities: Hazor, Gezer, and Megiddo (see [1 Kings 9:15](#)). The casemate walls of these ancient cities are 5.5 meters (18 feet) thick.

The divided kingdoms of Judah and Israel were not known for offensive warfare technology. However, several kings focused on improving defenses. Uzziah was especially known for his achievements in defensive warfare, "he made skillfully designed devices to shoot arrows and catapult large stones from the towers and corners" ([2 Chronicles 26:15](#)). These machines were special protective structures that helped archers and allowed large stones to be dropped on attacking troops.

## Entrance

In any attack on a fortified city, the gate was always the main target. City gates were designed to put attackers at high risk while keeping defenders safe. Roads leading to a city on a hill would wind up the slope, either to the left or right. These roads usually approached the gate from the right. This forced attackers to expose their right side to defenders on the wall. Since they held their shields in their left hands, this made them more vulnerable.

To stop the heavy wooden gate doors from catching fire, people often covered them with metal. A gate wide enough for chariots needed double doors. The line where the two doors met was the weakest point. To strengthen it, they added large bolts and a heavy beam across the back of both doors. Sockets in the doorposts held the beam in place.

Another part of the defense complex at a gate included towers on each side of the gate, sticking out from the wall's outer face. Enemy soldiers trying to break the doors with axes or set them on fire with torches were exposed to heavy side attacks from defenders on the towers. From a roof over the gate with a balcony, defenders could focus their firepower on the attackers below. These extra structures turned a gate into a small fortress.

## Inner Fortress

A major weakness of a city's walls and gate was their large size. An average city might have a perimeter of 0.8 kilometers (half a mile), while a larger city could have over 1.6 kilometers (a mile). The entire wall needed defense against breaches, scaling, or tunneling. An attacking army would use tricks to spread defenders along the whole perimeter but focus their main attack on one spot. Once attackers broke through the wall, the perimeter defenses became useless. Therefore, cities often added internal walls to divide them into sections, each able to defend itself. Additionally, a fortress would be built on the highest point in the city as a separate defensive unit.

The earliest examples of these fortifications, called *migdols*, date back to the late Bronze Age. They were small citadels built to protect important military targets like water sources, strategic routes, farmlands, or borders. In 1960, archaeologists discovered a *migdol* near Ashdod, Israel. It had a square layout with rectangular bastions and was two stories high, similar to structures shown in Egyptian reliefs from that time. People used the same design to fortify

temples within cities. These fortified temples served as places of refuge and as a city's last defense if its walls were breached (see [Judges 9:45-51](#)).

In later times, an inner citadel might include a complex with the governor's fortified palace, homes of his main ministers, and sometimes a temple. These citadels looked like fortified cities, with a main wall, a gateway, an outer wall, and sometimes a moat. Small and heavily fortified, citadels allowed the governor and remaining people to defend them as a last resort. Zimri might have resisted Omri's army for a long time in the citadel of Tirzah, if he had not set it on fire and committed suicide ([1 Kings 16:17-18](#)).

## Water Supply under Siege

To defend a city during a long siege, it was essential to ensure a supply of food and water. Several Judean kings worked to solve the food storage issue. For example, Rehoboam strengthened several cities on his kingdom's western, eastern, and southern borders. He turned them into centers for storing food, oil, and wine ([2 Chronicles 11:5-11](#)).

Storing food was easier than storing water. Cisterns built to collect rainwater helped, but they often ran dry, especially during droughts. Cities were sometimes built by streams or rivers, using the water as part of their defense. However, for a city on a hill, the water source might be a spring at the bottom of the slope, outside the city walls. Sometimes, people could block the spring's mouth and hide its location from enemies while still allowing access for residents. At Megiddo, a vertical shaft 274.3 meters (100 feet) deep connected to a horizontal tunnel about 548.6 meters (200 feet) long, leading to the water supply at the city's western end, beyond the fortifications. This work was done during the time of either Solomon or Ahab.

Hezekiah's efforts to ensure fresh water during a siege in Jerusalem are famous. His engineering work is noted both in the "Praise of Famous Men" in the Bible and the apocryphal book of Sirach ([2 Kings 20:20](#); [2 Chronicles 32:30](#); [Sirach 48:17](#)). Hezekiah sealed the Gihon spring and cut an 548.6-meter (1,800-foot) channel through rock to bring water into the city. Hezekiah described this in the Siloam inscription. Two crews worked with hammers, wedges, and pickaxes, starting from opposite ends. The crew at the spring used an older tunnel ([Isaiah 22:11](#)) and moved south toward the



city. The other crew started at the reservoir, moving northeast, then southeast, until they aligned with the first crew. They almost missed each other, being about one and a half meters (five feet) apart, but a shout through a rock crevice helped them connect. Both crews turned sharply right, completing the tunnel. Hezekiah's actions, taken before Sennacherib's invasion of Judah, explain why the Assyrians could not capture Jerusalem, unlike Samaria during Sargon's time.

### *Hebrew Military Organization*

#### **Tribal Army**

When the Israelites left Egypt, they were organized by tribes and divisions. This organization set an example for military structure. After staying at Mount Sinai, the 12 tribes were divided into divisions or army corps, and military ranks began to form. The "officers of the army" ([Numbers 31:14](#)) commanded units of 1,000 or 100 men, indicating the army was divided into groups of ten. Later, there were references to units of:

- One thousand (the division)
- One hundred (the company)
- Fifty (the platoon)
- Ten (the section)

Except for the Levites, who cared for the tabernacle ([Numbers 2:33](#)), men aged 20 and older who could fight were assigned to the tribal army. Some individuals, however, were exempt from military service (see [Deuteronomy 20:5-9](#); [24:5](#); [Judges 7:3](#)).

Until after the conquest of Canaan, the tribal army was mainly a militia (an army of ordinary citizens) called up during emergencies. The tribe managed the militia's organization. Each clan and family sent their required number of warriors when tribal leaders called them to battle. Since the clan was the basic unit, recruits followed their own leaders. For example, David's brothers served in a division made up of fighters from their clan, led by a captain ([1 Samuel 17:18](#); [18:13](#)). When the emergency ended, the militia disbanded, and the soldiers returned to their home areas.

Before Saul, no tribal or clan leader controlled the entire group of tribes working together (tribal confederation) because the land was divided among the tribes (see [1 Samuel 11:1-11](#)). Tribal jealousies and rivalries often threatened national

unity and made it hard to act together, even during critical times. However, sometimes a severe crisis forced the tribes' armies to unite. These multitribal armies were organized into companies of 1,000, 100, and 50, and further divided into families under appointed officers. There is evidence of organization based on weapon types (see [1 Chronicles 12:24-38](#)). The tribe of Benjamin specialized in the bow and sling, while the tribes of Gad, Judah, and Naphtali were skilled with the spear and shield.

Each tribe had to supply its own army ([Judges 20:9-10](#)). One out of every ten soldiers gathered food for the others, either from wealthy landowners (see [1 Samuel 25](#)) or from natural resources. In that early military organization, soldiers were usually paid with supplies and a share of the battle spoils (see [1 Samuel 30:21-25](#)).

#### **Professional Army**

Israel did not have a regular army until the united kingdom. The shift from a people's militia to a professional army happened under Saul. During his rule, Saul changed the system from separate tribes into a kingdom with one ruler ([1 Samuel 13:2](#)). Philistine attacks on Israel led to the creation of a strong standing army. However, the army was small, with 3,000 men divided into three groups of 1,000 each ([1 Samuel 13:2](#); [24:2](#)). Sometimes, these career soldiers received land grants as payment ([1 Samuel 8:14](#)) and a share of the loot. In Saul's army, Abner, Jonathan, and David had specific roles. Abner was appointed as the army commander ([1 Samuel 17:55](#)) and likely led one of the divisions. David's group of brave men, known as "the thirty," formed the leadership core for his military when he became king.

David kept a professional army and created a national militia with 12 regiments. Each regiment served for one month a year under professional officers ([1 Chronicles 27:1-15](#)). Each regiment, recruited from different tribes, had 24,000 soldiers. This system gave David a large reserve force for emergencies. The reserves and likely the professional army were organized into units of 1,000, 100, 50, and 10. Joab, an expert in siege warfare ([2 Samuel 20:15](#)), led the professional army, while Amasa led the citizens' militia. David was the overall commander of the military.

King David's professional army grew from a small group of fighters who served him during his conflict with Saul. This veteran group included David's family, clansmen, and others who felt

oppressed by Saul's rule ([1 Samuel 22:1-2](#)). The group had between 400 and 600 men ([1 Samuel 22:2](#); [23:13](#); [27:2](#)). Mercenaries (paid soldiers) were clearly part of David's army. Uriah the Hittite and Ittai of Gath are notable examples, along with many career soldiers from Philistine origins, such as the Cherethites and the Pelethites under Benaiah ([2 Samuel 8:18](#); [15:19-22](#); [23:22-23](#)).

The rulers who descended from King David and ruled after him kept a permanent army of paid soldiers until 701 BC. After that, it became too expensive. The high cost of maintaining this army, funded by heavy taxes and forced labor, was a key reason for the kingdom's troubles after Solomon's death (see [1 Kings 10:26-29](#); [12:4-19](#)). After Sennacherib's invasion in 701 BC, the southern kingdom of Judah relied entirely on a citizens' militia for defense. People generally believe that the northern kingdom of Israel did not use a professional army, but King Ahab did use some mercenaries to defend against Ben-hadad of Syria ([1 Kings 20:15-20](#)).

*See also* Armor and Weapons.

## Watch

A period of time used to divide the night in both the Old and New Testaments.

During the Old Testament period, the night was divided into three military watches (guard shifts):

- The beginning or evening watch ran from sunset to roughly 22:00 ([Lamentations 2:19](#)).
- The middle or night watch was from 22:00 to 02:00 ([Judges 7:19](#)).
- The morning watch was from approximately 02:00 until sunrise ([Exodus 14:24](#); [1 Samuel 11:11](#)).

During the Roman period, the number of watches was increased from three to four. These were sometimes described by the numbers, first, second, third, and fourth. Or they were sometimes described as evening, midnight, cock-crowing, and morning ([Matthew 14:25](#); [Mark 6:48](#)). The respective watches ended at roughly 21:00, 00:00 (midnight), 03:00, and 06:00.

*See* Night.

## Watchman

A watchman was a person who kept guard over a city or military place. Watchmen helped protect the people from surprise attacks or dangers like fire or war ([1 Samuel 14:16](#); [2 Samuel 18:24-27](#); [2 Kings 9:17-20](#); [Isaiah 21:6-9](#)). A watchman stood in a high place and watched for danger. If the enemy was coming, the watchman would warn the people. A watchman also announced the start of a new day ([Psalm 130:6](#); [Isaiah 21:11-12](#)).

God sometimes called prophets "watchmen." Like a watchman, a prophet had to warn the people if danger was coming. The prophet warned about sin and about God's judgment. If the prophet failed to warn the people, he would be guilty of their death ([Ezekiel 33:2-9](#); compare [Jeremiah 6:17](#); [Ezekiel 3:17](#); [Hosea 9:8](#)).

Not all leaders were good watchmen. Isaiah said some leaders were like blind watchmen. They could not see the danger and did not help the people turn back to God ([Isaiah 56:10](#); [Micah 7:4](#)). Faithful prophets were the first to see the destruction coming to Israel. But they were also the first to say that God would bring the people back to their land ([Isaiah 21:11-12](#); [52:8](#)).

## Watchtower

A raised platform farmers used to watch over land and animals. Soldiers used similar towers or platforms to watch over their cities. Watchtowers were also built in the vineyards of Palestine.

Watchmen assigned to towers oversaw vineyards, protecting them from wild animals and thieves ([Isaiah 5:2](#); [Matthew 21:33](#); [Mark 12:1](#)). Watchtower structures are still used in Palestine. Some of the tower buildings also serve as living quarters for the vineyard workers.

Some watchtowers, like the tower of Eder in [Genesis 35:21](#), were built in wilderness areas. They provided a protected shelter for shepherds to watch their flocks. Some towers were fortified outposts for watchmen to guard a city by protecting trade traffic from thieves ([2 Kings 18:8](#); [2 Chronicles 20:24](#); [Isaiah 32:14](#)).

## Water

One of the essentials of life, which covers much of the earth's surface. It is the primary component of

the human body. Living things cannot survive more than a few days without it.

In the beginning, water covered the earth. Then God brought up the dry land from the water ([Genesis 1:9–10](#)). As Peter said, “By God’s word the heavens existed and the earth was formed out of water and by water” ([2 Peter 3:5](#)).

When God created the garden of Eden, he made a river to water it. This river divided into four rivers. Two of the rivers are identified with certainty, the Euphrates and the Tigris. These two rivers have supported farming in Mesopotamia both in ancient times and today ([Genesis 2:10–14](#)). According to the Bible, early in the history of the earth, there was no rain but only a mist that watered the earth (verses [5–6](#)). In the time of Noah, the Lord used a flood (an overwhelming mass and movement of water) to destroy “the world of that time” ([2 Peter 3:6](#)). This was punishment for the world’s evil.

In the Near East, water is especially importance. Much of the area receives only moderate amounts of rainfall. For example, Egypt only receives two to four inches (or 5.1 to 10.2 centimeters) of rain around Cairo, and at Aswan the average annual rainfall is zero. Egypt relies on the Nile, which gets water from equatorial rains. By contrast, Palestine is well-watered by “the rain from heaven” ([Deuteronomy 11:10–11](#)).

Water has many symbolic usages in Scripture. The righteous person is like a tree planted by streams of water ([Psalm 1:3](#); [Jeremiah 17:8](#)). The soul’s longing for God is like thirsting for water: “My soul thirsts for You. My body yearns for You in a dry and weary land without water” ([Psalm 63:1](#)); “My soul thirsts for You like a parched land.” ([143:6](#)).

Jesus fulfills this need and declares, “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. Whoever believes in Me, as the Scripture has said: ‘Streams of living water will flow from within him.’” ([John 7:37–38](#)). And Jesus said, “The water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a fount of water springing up to eternal life” ([4:14](#)). The Spirit of Jesus is that spiritual water that satisfies the thirst of the human spirit ([7:38–39](#)).

The word of God is also presented as water by which we are spiritually cleansed. The Lord speaks of the cleansing of the church by “the washing of water with the word” ([Ephesians 5:26](#)). And Paul said that people are saved “through the washing of new birth and renewal by the Holy Spirit” ([Titus 3:5](#)).

In the Bible’s last chapters, the Lord declares, “To the thirsty I will give freely from the spring of the water of life” ([Revelation 21:6](#)). Even in the description of the heavenly Jerusalem there is mention of water—the river of the water of life: “Then the angel showed me a river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the main street of the city” ([22:1–2](#)). Similarly, the Bible’s final invitation says: “And let the one who is thirsty come, and the one who desires the water of life drink freely” (verse [17](#)).

## Water Gate

One of the principal gates on the east side of Jerusalem. It was rebuilt during Nehemiah’s day and served as the location for Ezra’s reading of the law ([Neh 3:26](#); [8:3, 16](#); [12:37](#)).

## Water Hen

A name for several kinds of birds that live near water. This may include the marsh hen, swan, or even the horned owl.

The Revised Standard Version lists the water hen among unclean birds in [Leviticus 11:18](#) and [Deuteronomy 14:16](#). This is one of the hardest biblical birds to identify. Most Bible versions translate the Hebrew word as “white owl” or “barn owl.” The King James Version translates it “swan.” Most scholars think the swan is unlikely because it eats plants, not animals, and should not be called unclean. An owl is still a possible match.

The marsh hen is a kind of rail. Several rail species live in Israel. One of them is the purple gallinule (*Porphyrio porphyrio*).

Rails are thin water birds. They can be 15 to 51 centimeters (6 to 20 inches) long. They live in marshes and eat many kinds of animals and plants. This diet may be one reason some scholars think a bird like the marsh hen could match the unclean bird named in the Law of Moses.

See Birds.

## Water Lily

A water lily is a type of water plant with flat, floating leaves and beautiful, showy flowers. The

carved lily decorations mentioned in [1 Kings 7:19–26](#) and [2 Chronicles 4:5](#) were probably designed to look like water lily flowers. Few flowers can match the Egyptian lotus or water lily (*Nymphaea lotus*) in beauty. It resembles a large white rose and once grew abundantly on the surface of the Nile River.

The common European white water lily (*Nymphaea alba*) would also have been familiar to the people of Israel. It grows in Europe, the Holy Land, and North Africa. However, it is not as common in Egypt as the white lotus.

Another water lily that the Israelites probably knew is the blue lotus (*Nymphaea caerulea*). Its leaves are 30.5 to 40.6 centimeters (12 to 16 inches) across. It has light-blue flowers that measure 7.6 to 15.2 centimeters (3 to 6 inches) across.

*See also Lily.*

## Water of Bitterness or Jealousy

The water of bitterness was part of a "trial" used in ancient Israel when a husband suspected his wife of adultery but had no proof. This ceremony is described in [Numbers 5:11–31](#). Some scholars think this belongs to a group of procedures called "trials by ordeal." In these trials, the accused person had to face some physical challenge to determine if they were innocent or guilty. People believed that a higher power who knew the truth would control the outcome.

In ancient Israel, like many old societies, women had few rights. An Israelite husband could use this test when he had no proof of his wife being unfaithful but simply had a "spirit of jealousy" about her ([Numbers 5:11–14](#)). Most likely, a pregnant wife would be tested if her husband thought the baby might not be his.

The suspicious husband would bring his wife to the priest with a special offering of rough barley meal ([Numbers 5:15](#); compare [Leviticus 2: 5:11](#)). The priest would:

1. Bring the woman to stand "before the Lord"
2. Mix "holy water" (probably from the tabernacle water basin) with dirt from the tabernacle floor
3. Untie the woman's hair (possibly to show shame)

4. Place some of the barley meal offering in her hands ([Numbers 5:16–18](#)).

Then the priest made her take an oath stating that if she had been unfaithful, drinking the "water of bitterness" would bring a curse upon her. She agreed by saying "Amen, Amen" (verses [19–22](#)). After writing the words of the curse, the priest would wash them off into the water. After making a ceremonial offering of a handful of barley meal, the priest made the woman drink the water (verses [23–26](#)). If she was guilty, the result would be bitter suffering, causing the woman to become unable to have children (verse [27](#)).

## Water of Separation

The King James Version translation of "the water for the purification ceremony." In newer Bible translations, this same water is called "the water for the purification ceremony." This special water was used to cleanse people from sin or impurity ([Numbers 19:9, 13, 20–21; 31:23](#))

*See Cleanness and Uncleaness, Regulations Concerning.*

## Waters of Merom

*See Merom, Waters of.*

## Wave Offering

A wave offering was part of ancient Jewish worship. When someone brought food as a gift to God (called a peace offering), the priest would lift up the first portion and move it back and forth in front of the altar. This action showed that the food was being presented to God. The priest would then eat this portion of the food as God's representative

*See Offerings and Sacrifices.*

## Wealth

An abundance of money or material goods. Wealth is usually counted using a common system, like money. Wealth is nearly the same as riches and can also refer to having many family members, friends, or good moral qualities.

### Wealth in the Old Testament

In the Old Testament, riches represent favor with God ([Psalms 112:3](#)). God gives power to gain wealth ([Deuteronomy 8:18](#)). Both the piety and the wealth of Job are well known ([Job 1:1-3](#)). Solomon was perhaps the richest man who ever lived. God granted him "riches, possessions, and honor" because Solomon had asked first for wisdom and discernment ([1 Kings 3:10-13](#); [2 Chronicles 1:11-12](#)). But the Bible makes it clear that a person's life is not measured by the abundance of possessions ([Luke 12:15](#)).

### Wealth in the New Testament

In the New Testament, wealthy men are often seen as godless. For example, the rich farmer and the rich man who neglected the beggar Lazarus ([Luke 12:16-21](#); [16:19-31](#)). The wealthy are condemned for oppression and greed ([James 5:1-6](#)). [Luke 6:24](#) pronounces woe against the rich, and three Gospels speak of the dangers of riches ([Matthew 13:22](#); [Mark 4:19](#); [Luke 8:14](#)). Some rich men were identified as good. Jesus was buried in the tomb of a rich man from Arimathea, Joseph ([Matthew 27:57](#)). Nicodemus provided very generously for the burial of Jesus ([John 19:39](#)). He was "a ruler of the Jews" and probably a man of wealth ([3:1](#)).

*See also* Mammon; Money; Poor, The; Riches; Wages.

## Weapons

Weapons are tools used for fighting or hunting. In Bible times, these included swords, spears, bows and arrows.

*See* Armor and Weapons; Warfare.

## Weasel

A small animal with brown fur that hunts mice and rats.

*See* Animals.

## Weaving

The process of making cloth by crossing threads over and under each other.

*See* Cloth and Cloth Manufacturing.

## Wedding

*See* Marriage, Marriage Customs.

## Weeds

*See* Plants (Darnel Grass).

## Week

*See* Calendars, Ancient and Modern.

## Weeks, Feast of

A celebration of the beginning of the wheat harvest ([Exodus 23:14-17](#); [Deuteronomy 16:16](#)). It occurs seven weeks after Passover on the sixth day of Sivan (June). It is also known as the Feast of Pentecost.

*See* Feasts and Festivals of Israel.

## Weights and Measures

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### Introduction

Units of measure in the ancient world were largely based on practical standards: the length of an arm, a day's journey, how much a donkey could carry, and so forth. While this was a convenient system, it also suffered from a lack of standardization. Some arms were longer than others, and some donkeys could carry more than others. The history of weights and measures, therefore, becomes the story of seeking standards. This was not achieved



in the OT but began to take place under Greek and Roman influences in NT times.

In the OT the measures that were used are frequently attested to in Mesopotamian, Egyptian, and Canaanite literature as well. The Israelites did not have their own unique set of measurements. Yet while the terms are shared, it is not unusual to find a particular term having one value in Israel and a noticeably different value in one of the other cultures.

By the time of the NT, other variables were added. The Israelites of this period were still using many of the measures that had been used and developed throughout the OT period. But added to that were the Greek and Roman systems of measurement. Sometimes these terms were adopted wholesale, while at other times Hebrew terms were adapted to Greco-Roman standards. On still other occasions, the Roman terms were apparently used when dealing with the government, whereas Hebrew terms were still used in everyday practice.

In most of the kinds of measurement, the base unit (i.e., the one that all of the others are fractions or multiples of) is the one about which there is the most uncertainty. So the cubit (length), the shekel (weight), the homer (dry volume), and the bath (liquid volume) are all to some degree uncertain. This makes all of the other measures based on them equally uncertain.

### *Weight Measures*

The terms used for weights have benefited most from archaeological discoveries. Excavations provide stone weights that are occasionally inscribed with the unit they represent. When the stones are weighed, they frequently give a range of weights that have only a general consistency. However, comparing this data with that provided by the text has given the basis for fairly accurate determinations. The relative scale in any given location is more important than absolute values.

There was standardization of weight measures, but precision was difficult to attain. The Israelite system is similar to that used by the Mesopotamians and the Canaanites. For most of the OT period, the weights system provided the monetary system. Minted coinage was the invention of the Persians. Up until that time, silver or gold or any other trading commodity had to be weighed out so that bartering or purchasing could take place. This made the weights system the core of the ancient economy. It also explains why the

Scriptures speak so seriously against the use of false weights ([Lv 19:36](#); [Dt 25:13](#); [Prv 16:11](#); [20:10, 23](#); [Mi 6:11](#); [Hos 12:7](#); [Am 8:5](#)).

Stone weights were used on a set of balances for conducting business in the ancient marketplace. Scales or balances are mentioned half a dozen times in the OT, but none of those are in actual economic contexts ([Jb 6:2](#); [31:6](#); [Ps 62:9](#); [Is 40:12](#); [Ez 5:1](#); [Dn 5:27](#)). The scales used were generally of the beam-balance type with dishes on each end.

### **Talent**

According to [Exodus 38:25–26](#) the talent must have been equal to 3,000 shekels. (A hundred talents would then have been equal to 300,000 shekels, and if that is added to the 1,175 shekels in verse [25](#), the total is 301,775, or half a shekel for each of the 603,550 men—as verse [26](#) states.) Excavated talents weigh from about 65 to 80 pounds (29.5 to 36.3 kilograms). In the OT the talent is used only for precious metals, usually silver or gold. According to [1 Kings 10:14](#), the annual tribute income of Solomon's kingdom was 666 talents, which apparently was considered quite extravagant. David bequeathed 100,000 talents of gold and 1,000,000 talents of silver to Solomon for the building of the temple ([1 Chr 22:14](#)).

### **Mina**

In the Canaanite material from Ugarit the mina equals 50 shekels, while in Babylon the mina equals 60 shekels. In [Ezekiel 45:12](#), the mina is set at 60 shekels, but it is unclear whether this represents a change from previous standards.

### **Shekel**

The shekel was the basic unit of weight. Besides the regular shekel, there was a “royal” shekel ([2 Sm 14:26](#)). Calculating by weights that have been excavated and found labeled as “beka” (one-half shekel), the shekel has been estimated to be about .4 ounce (11.4 grams).

The shekel is used in Scripture almost exclusively in contexts dealing with monetary value. Whether silver, gold, barley, or flour, the shekel valuation assigns the commodity a relative value in the economy. Exceptions to this are Goliath's armor and spear ([1 Sm 17:5–7](#)), which are described in terms of their shekel weight.

### Pim

The only reference to this unit is in [1 Samuel 13:21](#), where it is the price charged to the Israelites by the Philistines for sharpening a plowshare. Excavated weights range from .25 to .3 ounce (7.1 to 8.5 grams), suggesting that the pim was two-thirds of a shekel.

### Beka

Seven stones inscribed with this label range in weight from .2 to .23 ounce (5.7 to 6.5 grams). In [Exodus 38:26](#) it is the amount levied on each individual for the census tax. There it is the equivalent of one-half shekel.

### Gerah

Equal to one-twentieth of a shekel, or .02 ounce (.6 gram). The term is used five times ([Ex 30:13](#); [Lv 27:25](#); [Nm 3:47](#); [18:16](#); [Ez 45:12](#)) and on each occasion is used to give a valuation to the shekel. Its use is strictly monetary in these contexts.

### Litra

The NT uses the same weights that have already been identified in the OT usage, particularly the shekel, mina, and talent. There is one additional unit used: the litra, which is used in [John 12:3](#) and [19:39](#) with regard to spices. In Greek literature one litra is approximately 12 ounces (327 grams).

### *Linear Measures in the Old Testament*

Measurements of length and depth generally were derived from a part of the body used to make the measurement. The basic unit was the cubit, and most others were related to it. Precise measurements of geographic distance are lacking in the OT and was most frequently stated in terms of the number of days it would take to arrive at a destination. A single day's journey was mostly likely 20 to 25 miles (32.2 to 40.2 kilometers). A "pace" was equal to a "step"—about a yard ([2 Sm 6:13](#)).

### Cubit

The length from the tip of the forefinger to the elbow. There are both long and short cubits, which are used not only in Israel but in Mesopotamia and Egypt as well. [Ezekiel 40:5](#) identifies the long cubit as being the equivalent of a cubit plus a handbreadth (about 20 to 21 inches, or 50.8 to 53.3 centimeters). The inscription found inside the

Siloam tunnel built by Hezekiah (715–686 BC) indicates that the tunnel is 1,200 cubits long. The actual length of the tunnel was determined to be 1,749 feet (533.1 meters). This would yield a cubit of 17.49 inches (44.4 centimeters). All things considered, 17.5 inches (44.5 centimeters) is a good estimation of the length of the cubit in Israel. This would set the long cubit at approximately 20.5 inches (52.1 centimeters). The cubit was most frequently used to give the dimensions of buildings or objects (e.g., curtains, pillars, pieces of furniture, etc.). The largest structure measured in cubits was the ark that Noah built, which was 300 cubits long ([Gn 6:15](#)).

### Span

The distance measured by the stretch of the hand from fingertip to fingertip, equal to one-half a cubit, or eight and three-quarters inches (22.2 centimeters). It is used only seven times in the OT, and four of those are to describe the dimensions of the high priest's breastplate ([Ex 28:15–16](#); [39:8–9](#)).

### Handbreadth

The width of the hand at the base, equal to one-sixth of a cubit, one-third of a span, or just under three inches (7.6 centimeters). The term is used only five times and gives the width of the rim around the table of showbread ([Ex 25:25](#)) and Solomon's molten sea ([1 Kgs 7:26](#)).

### *Linear Measures in the New Testament*

In the NT some of the units of length and depth represent Greco-Roman standards, while others are those used in the OT. Like the OT, the NT frequently uses imprecise designations for distance, such as a stone's throw or a day's journey. There are, however, a few occurrences of precise terms borrowed from Roman culture.

### Cubit

For the Romans, the cubit was set at one and a half times their standard foot of 11.66 inches, equaling 17.5 inches (44.5 centimeters), just as the OT cubit.

### Fathom

The distance between the fingertips of the left and right hand when the arms were outstretched. It is used only in [Acts 27:28](#) and is considered to be about six feet (1.8 meters).

### Furlong/Stadium

The length of the ancient Greek racecourse, equal to one-eighth of a Roman mile, or a little over 200 yards (182.9 meters). It is usually used to give approximate distance, but in [Revelation 21:16](#) it is used to give the dimensions of the New Jerusalem and is measured with a measuring rod.

### Mile

The only occurrence of this term, [Matthew 5:41](#), has reference to the Roman mile of 1,620 yards, about nine-tenths of a modern mile (1.4 kilometers).

### *Capacity (Dry Measure) in the Old Testament*

Amounts of dry goods were oriented toward practical matters such as typical donkey loads, how much seed could be sown in a day, or how much seed would be needed to sow a certain size plot. As with the other types of measures, these then became standardized.

### Cor/Homer

The most common dry commodity measure and the equivalent of one donkey load. Estimates of its standard size vary greatly, ranging from 3.8 bushels to 7.5 bushels (133.9 to 264.3 liters). Other than the seven occurrences in [Ezekiel 45:11-14](#), the term occurs only four times in the OT. Three of these contexts feature seed or barley ([Lv 27:16](#); [Is 5:10](#); [Hos 3:2](#)), while the fourth is in the context of Israelites gathering quail in the wilderness. A cor is used nine times and occurs with a variety of commodities, including oil, flour, wheat, and barley, in multiples all the way up to 20,000 ([1 Kgs 5:11](#)).

### Lethek

Unit occurring only in [Hosea 3:2](#). The early versions of the Bible identified it as one-half of a cor, or homer.

### Ephah

This is equal to one-tenth of a homer ([Ez 45:11](#)), or one-half of a bushel (17.6 liters). The term occurs dozens of times with all sorts of agricultural products. It seems to have been the unit most used in trading and selling. According to [Zechariah 5:6-10](#), the ephah refers to a container that would hold an ephah of produce, much like the modern-day bushel basket.

### Seah

A fraction of the homer, which has a very wide range. The term measures flour, seed, barley, and grain, and is roughly one-third of an ephah. A bushel was about five seahs ([1 Sm 25:18](#), nlt mg).

### Omer/Issaron

The omer occurs only in the account of the collecting of manna by the Israelites ([Ex 16:22](#)). It represents a day's ration of manna and is identified as one-tenth of an ephah ([Ex 16:36](#)). The issaron is a term that means a tenth. Its 25 occurrences are all in Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers (mostly in [Nm 28-29](#)); it refers only to measures of fine flour.

### Cab, Kab

This unit occurs only in [2 Kings 6:25](#). The estimate given by Josephus, one-eighteenth of an ephah (or about one-half of an omer), is usually accepted.

### *Capacity (Dry Measure) in the New Testament*

The following dry measures are used in the NT.

### Choinix

Occurring only in [Revelation 6:6](#) (see nlt mg), the choinix is a little more than a quart (1.1 liters). In Greek literature it was considered the amount of one man's daily allowance of corn.

### Modius

This is the "bushel" under which one's lamp should not be hid ([Mt 5:15](#); [Mk 4:21](#); [Lk 11:33](#)). It is actually equal to about a peck, 7.68 dry quarts (8.5 liters).

### Saton

This is the equivalent of the OT seah and can therefore also be approximated at about a peck. It is used only twice in the NT in parallel passages of the parable of the leaven, which is like the kingdom of God ([Mt 13:33](#); [Lk 13:21](#)).

### *Liquid Measures in the Old Testament*

Three basic measures were used for liquids in the OT.

### Bath

The base unit for the measurement of liquids. The biblical data ([Ez 45:11-14](#)) sets it as the liquid equivalent to the dry measure, the ephah. It is one-

tenth of a homer. Archaeology has also been able to provide some data for this determination. Jars inscribed as “bath of the king” were found at Lachish and Tell en-Nasbeh, and jars marked “bath” were found at Tell Beit Mirsim. The jars are not complete, so their capacity must be calculated based on a reconstruction. Using this data, the bath was approximately 5.5 gallons (20.8 liters). This estimate would provide acceptable results when factored into the information given in [1 Kings 7:23–26](#), where the “molten sea” of Solomon’s temple is described as being 30 cubits in circumference, 10 cubits in diameter, 5 cubits deep, and capable of holding 2,000 baths of water.

### Hin

One-sixth of a hin of water was considered a person’s minimum daily requirement ([Ez 4:11](#)). A hin is equal to one-sixth of a bath, approximately one gallon (3.8 liters). It is used for a measure of oil, wine, and water, but no context ever mentions more than one hin. Rather, fractions of a hin are used. Occurrences are limited to Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Ezekiel and are therefore most commonly attested in the context of sacrificial libations.

### Log

This unit occurs only in [Leviticus 14:10–24](#) and equals one-twelfth of a hin, so about .3 quart or .3 liter.

### *Liquid Measures in the New Testament*

The following liquid measures occur in the NT.

#### Bath

This is used only once ([Lk 16:6](#)) and is the same as the OT bath.

#### Metretres

This is used only in [John 2:6](#), where it describes the containers in which water was turned to wine. Josephus identifies it as equivalent to a Hebrew bath, but in Greek usage it was the equivalent of about ten gallons (37.9 liters).

#### Sextarius/Xestes

A measure of capacity equal to about one and one-sixth pints (552 milliliters). In [Mark 7:4](#) the word is translated “pitcher” (nlt) or “pot” (kjb, see mg).

## Well

Man-made reservoir fed either by subterranean springs or by rainwater. Because the majority of the biblical world ranges from arid to semiarid, wells were a critical source of water for humans, livestock, and the irrigation of crops. Unfortunately, most wells did not offer a reliable source of water, being dependent on the scarce rainfall or intermittent springs ([Prv 25:26](#)). The discovery of a reliable source of water was therefore the cause of much rejoicing ([Nm 21:17–18](#)) and frequent conflict ([Gn 21:25–30](#); [26:19–22](#); [2 Kgs 3:19](#)). Successfully digging a well and defending one’s water rights often served as an important determinant of property rights ([Gn 21:25–30](#); [29:2–3](#)).

Good wells were generally considered signs of God’s providence ([Gn 16:14](#); [21:19](#); [Nm 21:16–18](#)). Biblical writers therefore compared the water of spring-fed wells to God’s provision of salvation for his people ([Is 12:3](#); [Jn 4:14](#)). The distinction between the relatively poor quality of water in cisterns that captured rainwater and the high quality of those wells that tapped springs of “living” (i.e., flowing) water helps clarify the dialogue between Jesus and the Samaritan woman when Jesus offered her “living water” ([Jn 4:10–15](#)).

*See also* Cistern; Jacob’s Well.

## Western Text

B. F. Wescott and F. J. A. Hort classify the Western Text as one of the four principal text types of the Greek New Testament. *See* Bible, Manuscripts and Text of the (New Testament).

## Whale

A whale is the largest living creature on earth. It is even larger than any extinct animal. Whales are air-breathing mammals that live in the sea. They belong to the scientific order Cetacea.

Two types of whales occasionally visit the shores of the Holy Land:

- the finback whale (*Balaenoptera physalus*)
- the sperm whale (*Physeter catodon*)

The finback whale weighs about 181 metric tons (200 tons). It lives mainly in the Arctic but sometimes passes through the Straits of Gibraltar into the eastern Mediterranean Sea. It has no teeth. Instead, it strains small sea creatures through plates called whale bone. Its throat is narrow.

The sperm whale is about 18.3 meters (60 feet) long. Its large head looks like a battering ram. Male sperm whales have lower jaw teeth that are 17.8 centimeters (seven inches) long. They eat large fish, including sharks. They have a wide throat.

### Whales in the Bible

The King James Version uses the word “whale” in [Genesis 1:21](#) and [Job 7:12](#). The “great fish” that swallowed Jonah ([Jonah 2:1](#)) may not have been a whale. It could have been a large shark, such as the whale shark (*Rhineodon*). The whale shark grows to 21.3 meters (70 feet) long and does not have the sharp teeth of other sharks. Whatever the sea creature was, Jonah’s rescue was a miracle.

In Greek, the word for “whale” can also mean “sea monster” or “huge fish.” This may be the meaning in [Matthew 12:40](#).

See also Animals.

## Wheat

Wheat is a type of cereal grass that is widely grown for its edible grain. Five kinds of wheat grow naturally in the Holy Land, and at least eight other types are grown there today. Most, if not all, of these wheat types were likely known in Bible times. The wild varieties were probably more common then than they are now. Some of these wild wheat types include:

- einkorn (*Triticum monococcum*),
- thaoudar (*Triticum thaoudar*), and
- wild emmer (*Triticum dicoccoides*).

Composite wheat (*Triticum compositum*) has branched spikes that often have up to seven heads per stalk. This type is clearly mentioned in [Genesis 41:5-57](#). It appears on many Egyptian monuments and inscriptions and is still commonly found in the

Nile Delta, where it is called “mummy wheat.” People also grow it in the Holy Land.

The most common wheat mentioned in the Bible is the regular summer and winter wheat, *Triticum aestivum*. This wheat is an annual grass (a plant that completes its life cycle in one year). It has been grown in Egypt and other Eastern lands since ancient times. No one knows exactly where it first came from. People have found wheat grains in very old Egyptian tombs and in the remains of prehistoric lake homes in Switzerland. Wheat was certainly the main grain of Mesopotamia in Jacob’s time ([Genesis 30:14](#)).

In biblical times, staple crops often included peas, beans, lentils, cumin, barley, millet, and spelt, but wheat was always the main ingredient. Egypt was a major grain-producing country, and Abram ([Genesis 12:10](#)) and Joseph’s brothers (chapter [42](#)) naturally went to Egypt to buy wheat when there was a famine (severe food shortage) in Canaan.

The mills, millstones, granaries, and threshing floors mentioned in the Bible all refer to equipment used to process grain into flour. The fine flour used to make the showbread loaves ([Leviticus 24:5](#)) was definitely wheat flour. People often stored wheat for home use in the central part of their houses. This explains the story told in [2 Samuel 4:6](#). Sometimes people also stored wheat in dry wells ([2 Samuel 17:19](#)).

See Agriculture; Food and Food Preparation.

## Wheel

A wheel is a round, flat device used for moving things. It was first created in Mesopotamia (modern-day Iraq), around 3500 BC. The earliest known form is the two-wheeled cart of Sumer. The first wheels were likely simple discs cut from trees. Later wheels were made by joining three shaped wooden planks together with copper clamps that ran the entire length of the wheel. After 2000 BC, wheels with spokes began to appear in northern Mesopotamia.

In the Bible, four Hebrew words are used for different types of wheels. These include:



- the potter's wheel ([Jeremiah 18:3](#)),
- chariot wheels ([Exodus 14:25](#)), and
- wheels for grinding grain ([Isaiah 28:28](#)).

The most important use of "wheel" in the Bible is in Ezekiel's vision of God's chariot ([Ezekiel 1, 10](#)). In this vision, wheels appear along with a cloud in a stormy wind ([Ezekiel 1:4](#)) fire, and strange creatures. Ezekiel draws the reader's attention to each of these events. The wheels move in whatever direction the creatures go.

What makes these wheels special is their shape. Ezekiel describes each as "a wheel within a wheel." This does not mean two wheels on the same axis. Instead, it describes one wheel set inside another wheel at a 90-degree angle. This arrangement allows the wheel to roll in any direction. It can roll from east to west and from north to south. Wherever the living creatures go, the wheels follow. This represents God's universal judgment, which no one can escape.

*See also* Ezekiel, Book of.

## Whirlwind

Any strong, potentially destructive wind ([Job 27:20](#); [Psalms 77:18](#); [Daniel 11:40](#)). Whirlwinds are sometimes called dust devils. While whirlwinds are common in the arid regions of the Middle East, the apparent fury and destructiveness of the biblical "whirlwinds" makes it unlikely that the relatively harmless dust devils are meant (compare [Amos 1:14](#); [Habakkuk 3:14](#)). Sirocco winds from the eastern deserts are sometimes cyclonic in form, but the winds in Scripture may not be whirlwinds in the technical sense.

Biblical whirlwinds were often associated with divine activity. Elijah was taken into heaven by a whirlwind ([2 Kings 2:1, 11](#)). God frequently spoke out of the whirlwind ([Job 38:1](#); [40:6](#); [Psalms 77:18](#)). The description of the sudden destruction of divine judgment was frequently associated with storms, tempests, and whirlwinds ([Hosea 8:7](#); [Amos 1:14](#); [Nahum 1:3](#); [Habakkuk 3:14](#)).

## White

*See* Color.

## Whore

*See* Prostitute, Prostitution.

## Wickedness

Wickedness is doing what is morally wrong or evil. The Bible uses this word for actions and attitudes that go against God's commands. Wickedness is one way to describe sin. It is closely related to evil, which means anything that is harmful, corrupt, or against what is good.

*See* Sin; *see also* Evil.

## Widow

A woman whose husband has died. The Scriptures often list widows with the fatherless and orphans ([Deuteronomy 14:29](#); [16:11](#); [24:19-20](#); [26:12](#); [Psalm 94:6](#)). There were laws to make special provision for this group. The laws protected them against people who tried to mistreat them. The primary law had to do with levirate marriage. This meant that the closest relative would marry the widow if she had no son. This was so the family line could continue (see discussion under Marriage).

### *Widows in Israel*

Many Old Testament laws recognized the difficulties of the widow. God designed these laws to protect and ensure the survival of the widow. God was her legal protector ([Psalm 68:5](#)). He made sure she had the essentials of food and clothing ([Deuteronomy 10:18](#)). God pronounced a curse on those who denied her justice ([27:19](#)). At harvest-time, the widow could glean the grain in the fields. She was also allowed some grapes and olives ([Deuteronomy 24:19](#); [Ruth 2:2, 7, 15-19](#)). The law also qualified her to receive some help from the third-year tithe. Yet, widows were often poor and given cruel treatment. Frequent references in the Bible attest to this widespread abuse ([Job 24:21](#); [Psalm 94:6](#); [Isaiah 1:23](#); [Malachi 3:5](#)). A special law ordered that the garment of a widow could not become security for a loan ([Deuteronomy 24:17](#)).

### *Widows in the Early Church*

In the early Christian church there was a recognized group of widows. The church qualified

them to receive charity. There were several requirements that qualified them. These women need to be at least 60 years of age. They must have been a faithful wife. The church also required that they be poor with no relatives to support them. The church required them to be blameless and devoted to Christian good works ([1 Timothy 5:9-16](#)).

*See also* Family Life and Relations; Marriage.

## Wife

*See* Family Life and Relations.

## Wild Gourd

The wild gourd appears in the Bible in [2 Kings 4:39](#), where one of Elisha's followers unknowingly gathered its fruit and added it to a stew during a famine. When people tasted it, they cried out, "There is death in the pot!" because of its extreme bitterness and potential toxicity. Most scholars identify this plant as *Citrullus colocynthis* (colocynth or bitter apple), a vine that spreads along the ground or climbs over shrubs and fences.

The colocynth fruit looks like a small, round gourd and contains a spongy, bitter pulp. In large amounts, it can cause severe stomach distress and act as a strong laxative.

Some scholars suggest that the bitterness of colocynth may explain why the Bible sometimes uses the word "gall" (*rosh* in Hebrew) as a symbol of extreme bitterness or poison ([Psalm 69:21](#); [Lamentations 3:5, 19](#); [Matthew 27:34](#)).

*See also* Gourd.

## Wild Ox

A wild ox (*Bos primigenius*) was a large, fierce, agile, stubborn animal. It had a long, lean rump, a straight back, and a long, narrow head. The animal described in [Job 39:9-12](#) is clearly the wild ox. The two horns were its most noticeable feature ([Deuteronomy 33:17](#)). They were straight and as long as the head ([Numbers 23:22](#); [24:8](#); [Psalm 22:21](#)). Kings often symbolized their rule by wearing a helmet with two wild ox horns (compare [Psalms 92:10](#); [132:17-18](#)). The Israelites often used horns as drinking vessels. Some could hold 15 liters (four gallons).

Hunting the wild ox was a favorite sport of Assyrian kings. Tiglath-pileser I hunted in the Lebanon Mountains around 1100 BC (compare [Psalm 29:6](#)). Some thought that [Job 39:9-12](#) referred to the oryx or antelope because the Hebrew word in Job and Arabian name for oryx are similar. The King James Version translators called the wild ox a "unicorn." They chose that translation because of Babylonian mosaics and Egyptian drawings. These showed the animal in profile with one horn, thus the term "unicorn." Similarly, Jerome's fourth-century Vulgate and Martin Luther's German translation also did.

## Wilderness

Land that is wild and sparsely inhabited or unfit for permanent human settlement. Wilderness areas may be deserts, mountains, forests, or marshes.

### *What Is the Wilderness Like?*

In the Near East, the wilderness is characteristically dry, desolate, and mostly rock and sand. It is rough, uneven, and crossed by dry riverbeds. The wilderness is not completely barren but provides seasonal pasture for flocks, depending on the rainfall.

[Joel 2:22](#) declares that "the pastures of the wilderness are green." [Psalm 65:12](#) states that the pastures of the wilderness drip with richness. But Jeremiah says that "the pastures of the wilderness are dried up" ([Jeremiah 23:10](#); compare [Joel 1:20](#)). Job refers to the wilderness as a land where no human can live ([Job 38:26](#)). The wilderness is a place for various animals and birds, such as wild asses, jackals, vultures, and owls ([Psalms 102:6](#); [Jeremiah 2:24](#); [Isaiah 13:22](#); [34:13-15](#)).

### *Named Wilderness Areas in the Bible*

Certain wilderness tracts are identified by name and are related to definite cities, persons, or events. For example, Hagar wandered in the wilderness of Beersheba ([Genesis 21:14](#)).

In the exodus from Egypt, the Israelites traveled or stopped in several named wilderness areas:

- Shur ([Exodus 15:22](#))
- Etham ([Numbers 33:8](#))
- Sin ([Exodus 16:1](#))
- Sinai ([19:1-2](#))
- Zin ([Numbers 13:21](#); [20:1](#))
- Paran ([13:26](#))
- Kadesh ([Psalms 29:8](#))
- Moab ([Deuteronomy 2:8](#))
- Kedemoth (verse [26](#))

While fleeing from Saul, David hid in the hill country of the wilderness of Ziph ([1 Samuel 23:14-15](#)). He also took refuge in the wilderness of Maon (verses [24-25](#)), and in the wilderness of En-gedi ([24:1](#)).

Villages or towns are sometimes associated with a wilderness setting. [Joshua 15:61-62](#) lists the names of six cities and their villages "in the wilderness." Isaiah proclaimed the future joy of the towns of the desert ([Isaiah 42:11](#)).

### *What Was the Spiritual Meaning of the Wilderness?*

The wilderness is associated with both austerity and temptation. Elijah, by his way of life and his dress, is often thought of in connection with the wilderness. His successor, Elisha, needed to minister in the wilderness of Edom ([2 Kings 3:4-27](#)).

Isaiah prophesied about John the Baptist's message. John preached in the wilderness of Judea ([Isaiah 40:3](#); [Matthew 3:1-3](#); [Mark 1:2-4](#); [Luke 3:1-6](#); [John 1:23](#)). Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, was led by the Spirit into the wilderness for 40 days. There he was tempted by the devil (compare [Luke 4:1-2](#)). Angels also ministered to Jesus there ([Mark 1:13](#)).

The anchorites (hermits) of Egypt and the Qumran community near the Dead Sea used the wilderness as an escape from the evils of urban life. Jesus, however, used the wilderness as a place of prayer and communion with the Father ([Luke 5:16](#)).

*See Desert; Wilderness Wanderings.*

## Wilderness of Sin

A dry, sandy region in the southwest part of the Sinai peninsula. The Bible tells us it was located "between Elim and Sinai" ([Exodus 16:1](#)). It is mentioned only four times in the Bible in the descriptions of the journey of the exodus from Egypt ([Exodus 16:1](#); [17:1](#); [Numbers 33:11-12](#)). The wilderness of Sin is located southeast of Elim, which is generally thought to be the Wadi Gharandel.

*See also Sina, Sinai; Wilderness Wanderings.*

## Wilderness of Zin

The wilderness of Zin is an area located in the northern part of the Sinai Peninsula. This is different from the wilderness of Sin, which is in the southern part of the peninsula.

The wilderness of Zin is one of the four or five "wilderness" areas found in the Sinai Peninsula. The other wilderness areas are:

- The wilderness of Paran ([Genesis 21:21](#))
- The wilderness of Shur ([Exodus 15:22](#))
- The wilderness of Sinai ([Numbers 9:1](#))
- The wilderness of Sin ([Numbers 33:11](#))

The exact boundaries of these wilderness areas are not clearly defined. It is likely that some of these wilderness areas overlap with each other.

The wilderness of Zin is associated with the village of Zin ([Numbers 34:4](#)). This wilderness area was located:

- West of Edom
- Southwest of the Dead Sea
- South of Judah

Within this dry area were four large springs or oases, including Kadesh-barnea. The Israelites spent most of their 38 years in the Sinai Desert in this wilderness area.

Several important events from the Bible happened in the Wilderness of Zin:

- From the wilderness of Zin, the spies were sent to explore the land of Canaan ([Numbers 13:1–26](#); [32:8](#)).
- The people who rebelled against God were sentenced to die in this wilderness because of their unbelief ([Numbers 14:22–23](#)).
- Moses sinned in this area by failing to give God credit for bringing water out of the rock ([Numbers 20:1–13](#); [27:14](#)).
- Miriam, the sister of Moses, died and was buried here ([Numbers 20:1](#)).

The Bible describes this area as the “vast and terrifying wilderness” ([Deuteronomy 1:19](#); [8:15](#)).

*See also* Wilderness Wanderings.

## Wilderness Wanderings

After the Israelites left Egypt, they spent about 40 years traveling in the desert areas of the Sinai Peninsula and the Negev. After this time, they moved on to take control of the land God had promised them. The books of Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers describe the most important events in this period.

The Bible says that during these hard years in the desert, the tribes unified into a nation. In Sinai, they became one people with one God and one national goal, to conquer Canaan.

[Numbers 33:38](#) and [Deuteronomy 1:3](#) say Israel wandered in the wilderness for 40 years. The number 40 is sometimes used to mean “a long time” or a large round number, and not exactly 40. But in these stories, many exact dates are given. This implies it was a literal 40 years. However, it is hard to know when this period began and ended.

According to [1 Kings 6:1](#), Solomon began building the temple 480 years after the Israelites left Egypt. The building of the temple began about 960 BC. This means the Israelites left Egypt around 1440 BC (an event known as the exodus). Israel's conquest of Canaan was about 1400 BC. However, scholars date the exodus and conquest to 1290–1250 BC due to certain discoveries of material remains from ancient history. There is no convincing proof for either timeline.

Within the 40 years of wanderings, there are detailed accounts of the first year and a half spent in the desert, from the exodus to the return of the spies ([Exodus 12–Numbers 14](#)). Also, more details are provided about the final year of the conquest of Transjordan ([Numbers 20–Deuteronomy 34](#)). Not much is known about the years in between when the tribes camped near oases like Kadesh-barnea. The stories described in [Numbers 15–17](#) likely happened during this time that we do not know much about.

*See also* Timeline of the Bible (Old Testament); Exodus, The; Israel, History of; Sinai, Sinai; Sin, Wilderness of; Zin, Wilderness of.

## Will of God

Important NT term indicating God's choice and determination, emanating from desire.

Paul used a Greek word in [Ephesians 1:5, 9](#), and [11](#) that conveys the idea of desire, even heart's desire. The word is usually translated as “will”—“the will of God.” But the English word “will” sublimates the primary meaning. The Greek word (*thelema*) is primarily an emotional word and only secondarily is it volitional. “God's will” is not so much “God's intention” as it is “God's heart's desire.” God does have an intention, a purpose, a plan. It is called *prothesis* in Greek (see [Eph 1:11](#)), and it literally means “a laying out beforehand” (like a blueprint). This plan was created by God's counsel (called *boule* in Greek, [Eph 1:11](#)). However, behind the plan and the counsel was not just a mastermind but a heart—a heart of love and of good pleasure. Therefore, Paul talked about “the good pleasure of God's heart” ([Eph 1:5](#)). Paul also said, “He made known to us the mystery of his heart's desire, according to his good pleasure which he purposed in him” (v [9](#)). Indeed, God operated all things according to the counsel of his heart's desire or will (v [11](#)).

The impetus of God's eternal purpose came from a heart's desire, and that heart's desire was to have many sons and daughters made like his only Son (see [Rom 8:26–28](#)). In love, he predestined many people to participate in this—not by their own merits but by virtue of being in the Son ([Eph 1:4–5](#)). Notice how often in [Ephesians 1](#) Paul speaks of the believers' position “in him.” Outside of him (the Son), no one could be a son or daughter of God and no one could be pleasing to the Father. The many sons and daughters owe all their divine privileges

to the Beloved, as ones graced in him and selected in him (v 6). Thus, predestination and election are issues of God's will.

*See also* Elect, Election; Predestination.

## Willow

A willow is a tree or shrub with long, narrow leaves and flexible branches.

In the Bible, the word "willow" may refer to several kinds of trees that grow near water. Some Bible translations use the word "aspen" for these same trees because the exact species is uncertain ([Leviticus 23:40](#); [Job 40:22](#); [Isaiah 15:7](#)).

*See* Aspen; *see also* Plants; Willows, Ravine of the.

## Wine

A drink made from grape juice that has fermented. (Fermented means that a food or drink, such as wine, has gone through a natural process where it changes over time. This process is caused by tiny living things called yeast or bacteria. These tiny organisms eat the sugar in the food or drink and turn it into alcohol or acid. This changes how the food or drink tastes and sometimes how it looks.)

### *The Origin of Wine*

Noah was one of the first people to make wine ([Genesis 9:21](#)). He probably made it on the hills of Mount Ararat. But wine was not made only in that area. People in Egypt, and later in Greece, also enjoyed wine. In fact, people were making wine in Mesopotamia (an ancient region in the Middle East) before recorded history. It was brought to Egypt before 3000 BC.

The word "wine" may be related to words for vine, vineyard, and black grapes. In the ancient Near East (the area around Israel and its neighbors), people often thought of the vine (the plant that produces grapes) as the "tree of life."

People in both Egypt and Mesopotamia believed a goddess protected the vine. The goddess Siris, called the "mistress of the heavenly tree of life," was thought to live in the mountains of northwestern Assyria (part of modern-day Iraq).

In the book of 1 Enoch 32:4, the vine is called the tree of knowledge. According to Jewish tradition, Noah saved the vine from the great flood.

### *The Production of Wine*

We do not have many old documents about how wine was made in ancient times. Most knowledge came from experience and a few early plant experts. Theophrastus, a student of Aristotle, wrote two important books about plants and wine making:

1. *Enquiry into Plants* (a book about practical experience and theory)
2. *On the Life of Plants* (a book about wine making)

His ideas about when to plant, how to trim vines, and how to care for them were so good that they have not changed much in 2,200 years.

### **How Did the Greeks Grow Grapes?**

Greek wine growers took great care of their crops. They grew vines close to the ground instead of on supports. This meant they had to protect the vines from mice and foxes, and they had to remove weeds often. But overall, their method worked very well.

### **How Were Grapes Harvested and Pressed?**

In early September, workers picked grapes from the plains. At the end of the month, they picked grapes from the hills. They started with a celebration of singing and dancing. Then they brought the grapes to winepresses, which were low cement containers tilted to one corner.

Workers then stepped on the grapes to crush them. The first juice from this crushing was very valuable because it made the best wines. They got more juice by squeezing the crushed grapes in a cloth bag. A third, lower-quality wine was made by mixing or cooking the leftover grapes with water and squeezing this mixture. Only poor people drank this type of wine.

Later, the Greeks invented a beam press. This was a long beam with one end that could turn and heavy stones on the other end. It pressed layers of grapes to get the juice. Even though they had these different methods, stepping on grapes remained the most popular way to make wine in Greece and the ancient Near East.

### **How Was Wine Fermented and Stored?**

In Greece, they usually let the grape juice ferment for six months. During this time, they kept removing the scum from the top of the liquid. In the ancient Near East, fermentation usually took only



three or four days. The best temperature for this was 25 degrees Celsius (77 degrees Fahrenheit). People knew that if the wine fermented for too long, it would become sour.

After fermentation, they put the wine in animal skin containers or pottery jars for transport or sale. They stamped the handles and stoppers to show the brand, where it came from, and when it was made. They also strained the wine through metal sieves with small holes or through cloth to remove things like dirt or insects.

### *The Types of Wine*

Many ancient writers talked about different types of wine:

- Athenaeus mentions 85 different types of wine.
- Galen mentions 60 types of wine.
- Pliny mentions 150 types of wine.
- Strabo mentions 30 types of wine.

People sorted wines by their color and taste:

- Wine can appear black, red, white, or yellow.
- Wine can taste dry, harsh, light, or sweet.

The Bible talks about various kinds of wine, such as wines from Lebanon and Helbon. Hebron and Samaria were famous places for making wine.

The Hebrew language (the original language of the Old Testament) has at least nine different words for wine. The Greek language (the original language of the New Testament) has four words for wine mentioned in the New Testament.

### *The Nature of Wine*

#### **Was Ancient Wine Fermented?**

Most scholars agree that at least some wine in the Old Testament [first part of the Bible] had alcohol in it. Some people think certain types of ancient wine did not have alcohol. They say one Hebrew word for fresh wine just meant grape juice ([Proverbs 3:10](#); [Hosea 9:2](#); [Joel 2:24](#); [Micah 6:15](#)). But this idea is not certain because:

1. The Hebrew word is often used in general ways.

2. Sometimes the word clearly means a drink with alcohol (for example, [Genesis 27:28](#); [Hosea 4:11](#); [Micah 6:15](#)).
3. A similar word in Ugaritic definitely means wine with alcohol.
4. Greek translations of this word in the Septuagint mean wine with alcohol.
5. In Bible times, grape juice turned into wine in only about three days.
6. The Mishnah does not talk about wine without alcohol.

It seems that people back then did not try to keep grape juice from turning into wine. This might have been very hard to do. When we look at all the words for wine in the Bible's original languages (Hebrew and Greek), it seems that ancient people mostly did not know about unfermented (non-alcoholic) wine.

#### **Mixing Wine with Water**

There is a lot of evidence that shows that wine, though always fermented, was usually mixed with water in the Greek and Roman world (from about 500 BC to 30 BC). The wine was stored in large jugs called amphorae, from which the wine was poured through a strainer into a large mixing bowl called a krater. In the krater the wine was mixed with water. Then the drinking bowls or cups were filled.

The amount of wine per volume varied. The mixture that represented the greatest amount of water to wine was 20 to 1, apparently because the wine was so strong (as mentioned in Homer's *Odyssey* 10.208).

In the western Mediterranean world, the word "wine" usually meant a mixture of wine and water. If someone wanted to talk about wine without water, they had to add the word "unmixed." Greeks thought drinking unmixed wine was uncivilized. But in Old Testament times, people seemed to drink wine without mixing it with water. The Bible does not mention mixing water and wine. In [Isaiah 1:22](#), wine mixed with water is used as a picture of how people had become less faithful to God (like watered-down wine is weaker than pure wine).

By Roman times, this attitude had changed. The Mishnah assumes a ratio of two parts water to one part wine. But, later Talmudic sources speak of three to one. Natural wine that was not distilled

(made stronger through a special process) could have up to 15 percent alcohol. If mixed with water using three parts water to one part wine, it would have about 5 percent alcohol. This was still strong enough to feel its effects.

### Wine Mixed with Other Things

People in ancient times mixed wine not just with water, but also with other things. This was similar to how we make mixed drinks today. Often strong wine was mixed with weak wine, which made a stronger drink. This is what is meant by "mixture" in the Bible ([Psalm 75:8](#); [Isaiah 5:22](#); [Revelation 18:6](#); [19:13-15](#)). At times the fresh wine, which had a lot of sugar, was evaporated. This concentrated *must* (juice from grapes) was mixed with regular wine to make a wine with more alcohol.

### Wine and Water Safety

Some people today think that in ancient times, people mixed wine with water to make the water safe to drink. But this idea is not correct. In the ancient world, water pollution was not as common as it is today. Sometimes water became unsafe to drink, but this did not happen very often. There are many examples of fresh wells, springs, and moving bodies of water in biblical times. There were also ways to purify any impure water. However, it should be noted that the term "pollution" may have a different meaning in the ancient world compared to modern times. It may refer to any impurities or contaminants in the water rather than just human-made pollutants.

### Wine in the Old Testament

In the Old Testament, people drank wine without mixing it with water. When used in moderation (not too much), wine was seen as a good thing. The Bible says positive things about wine:

- It "cheers both God and man" ([Judges 9:13](#)).
- It "gladdens the heart of man" [Psalm 104:15](#); compare also [Esther 1:10](#); [Ecclesiastes 10:19](#); [Isaiah 55:1-2](#); [Zechariah 10:7](#)).
- Drinking wine in moderation was a normal and accepted part of life ([Genesis 14:18](#); [Judges 19:19](#); [1 Samuel 16:20](#)).

Some people were not allowed to drink wine:

- Levitical priests in service at the temple ([Leviticus 10:8-9](#))
- Nazirites ([Numbers 6:3](#))
- Recabites ([Jeremiah 35:1-6](#))

Wine had many uses in the Old Testament world:

- The "drink offering" was wine ([Exodus 29:40](#); [Leviticus 23:13](#)).
- People brought wine when offering sacrifices ([1 Samuel 1:24](#)).
- A supply of wine was kept in the temple for sacrifices ([1 Chronicles 9:29](#)).
- At times, wine was used to help the weak and sick ([2 Samuel 16:2](#); [Proverbs 31:6](#)).

The strong drink of the Old Testament seems to be closely related to Mesopotamian date wine. This drink likely had a lot of sugar and alcohol. One Hebrew word is consistently used as strong drink ([Leviticus 10:9](#); [Deuteronomy 29:6](#); [1 Samuel 1:15](#); [Proverbs 20:1](#); [31:6](#); [Isaiah 29:9](#)). There is an equivalent word to this in Ugaritic, translated "drunk," which is used alongside the normal word for wine.

### Warnings about Too Much Wine

The Old Testament often warns against drinking too much wine:

- Isaiah spoke against those who drank too much wine ([Isaiah 28:1-8](#)).
- Proverbs give many warnings about drinking too much wine ([Proverbs 20:1](#); [21:17](#); [23:20-21](#); [23:32-34](#)).

### Wine in the New Testament

Wine in the New Testament was a fermented drink that was mixed with various amounts of water. It was also mixed with gall and myrrh ([Matthew 27:34](#); [Mark 15:23](#)). The wine used at the Lord's Supper was likely a mixture of water and wine. It was probably three parts water to one part wine. This followed the teachings of the Mishnah (Jewish oral traditions that were recorded). The phrase "fruit of the vine" in [Matthew 26:27-29](#) is often interpreted to mean fresh grape juice. But, fresh grape juice would be very difficult to find.

The New Testament, like the Old Testament, strongly advises against drinking too much wine. The biblical instruction is to not become drunk with wine ([Ephesians 5:18](#); [1 Peter 4:3](#)). Leaders in the church were to practice moderation when drinking wine ([1 Timothy 3:3, 8](#); [Titus 1:7](#)). The Greek word used suggests that they should not be "enslaved to wine."

*See also* Vines, Vineyard; Winepress.

## Winepress

A sunken area ([Judges 6:11](#)) where the grape harvest was thrown and trodden with bare feet, amid shouts of joy and vintage work songs ([Jeremiah 48:33](#); compare [Isaiah 65:8](#)). The red juice flowed through spouts into jars. Full winepresses meant prosperity; deserted ones spoke of destitution. The common winepress was a natural landmark ([Judges 7:25](#); [Zechariah 14:10](#)). A privately owned one showed the vineyard owner's care ([Isaiah 5:2](#); [Matthew 21:33](#)).

Grape treading symbolized the ruthless trampling by invading armies ([Lamentations 1:15](#)). This vivid battle metaphor mixes with divine judgment ([Isaiah 63:1-6](#)). It anticipates the Lord's final judgment, called "the great winepress of God's wrath" ([Revelation 14:18-20](#)).

*See also* Vines, Vineyard; Wine.

## Wineskins

Containers made of animal hide for keeping wine. The term is prominent in Jesus' maxim that new wine cannot be put in old wineskins but must be put in new wineskins because the new wine, when it ferments and expands, will break the old wineskins and spill out. New wine must be put into new wineskins, so that both can be preserved. This image indicates that Jesus' new teachings and new kind of spiritual life could not be put into old Judaism. They required a new container—namely, the living church.

## Winnower

One who removes chaff from grain. *See* Agriculture.

## Wisdom

The ability to direct one's mind toward a full understanding of human life and its moral fulfillment. Wisdom is thus a special capacity, necessary for full human living. It can be acquired through education and the application of the mind.

### Divine Wisdom

Although the term "wisdom" is used primarily in the Old Testament with reference to human beings, all wisdom ultimately comes from God. Wisdom forms a central part of who God is. With wisdom God created the universe ([Proverbs 3:19](#)) and human beings ([Psalms 104:24](#)). Thus wisdom, in its positive connotations, is something inherent in God, reflected in creation, and a part of the reason for human existence.

Wisdom in creation is reflected in the form and order that emerged out of primeval chaos. The wisdom of God expressed in the creation of humanity means that human life may also be marked by form and order, and that meaning in life may be found in the created world, which contains marks of divine wisdom. The wisdom of God is creative, purposeful, and good; it is not merely the intellectual activity of God. The potential for human wisdom is rooted in the creation of mankind. Created by divine wisdom, human beings have within them the God-given capacity for wisdom. Thus, it is impossible to understand human wisdom without first understanding divine wisdom.

### Human Wisdom

The word "wisdom," with reference to human beings, is used in different ways in the Old Testament. The word is often used synonymously with the term "knowledge." But in its general use, it commonly indicates applied knowledge, skill, or even cunning. Wisdom could be defined as either "superior mental capacity" or "superior skill." Thus, wisdom is used to describe both the cunning of King Solomon ([1 Kings 2:1-6](#)) and the skill of the craftsman Bezalel ([Exodus 35:33](#)). But it was also used to describe mental capacities and skills that had a moral component—the capacity to understand and to do good. Thus, when Moses delegated some of his authority to newly appointed judges, he chose men who were wise, understanding, and experienced ([Deuteronomy 1:13](#)). Such men were considered the wise men in ancient Israel. Human wisdom, in this special

sense, was not merely a gift from God, inherent at birth. It had to be developed consciously during a life lived in relationship with God.

Thus this positive and special kind of wisdom in human beings cannot be understood apart from God. A frequent theme of the wisdom literature in the Old Testament is that the “fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” ([Proverbs 9:10](#); see also [Job 28:28](#); [Psalms 111:10](#); [Proverbs 1:7](#); [15:33](#)). In several ways, this theme sets a perspective for understanding true human wisdom.

First, human wisdom is possible only because of the divine wisdom present in creation. The potential for wisdom exists only because God created it. Second, if wisdom is to be developed in a human being, it must begin with God—specifically, one must revere or fear God. This Hebrew concept of wisdom is strikingly different from the Greek concept. The Greek philosophers, with remarkable power, developed a system of thought that began without the assumption of the existence of deity. They attempted to develop wisdom through human reason alone. But Hebrew wisdom, though it sought to develop both the reason and the intellect as did the Greeks, could start only with God. The mind and its capacities were God-given. Thus, however secular in appearance the wisdom of the Hebrews might seem, it had God as its starting point. The reverence of God—namely the acknowledgment that God existed, created, and was important in human life—lay behind all the developments of Hebrew wisdom.

In the Hebrew conception, human wisdom involves developing the mind, expanding one's knowledge, and understanding the meaning of life as well as how that life must be lived. It is thoroughly intellectual but has a powerful moral result. Wisdom was sought not for its own sake but always for its application to the meaning of life because life—like wisdom—was God's gift. This emphasis in Hebrew wisdom meant that the virtues of the wise man or woman were never described in intellectual terms alone. The wise are not the educated elite of Israelite society. But as the book of Proverbs makes clear, they were those whose lives were characterized by understanding, patience, diligence, trustworthiness, self-control, modesty, and similar virtues. In a word, the wise man was the God-fearing man. His wisdom lay not just in a static attitude of reverence but rather in the conscious development of the mind toward wisdom in the context of godly living.

From this general conception of wisdom there emerged in ancient Israel a special category of men: the wise men. Though wisdom was not limited to them, they were responsible for the growth and communication of wisdom in Israel. The wise men formed one of three classes of religious leaders. First, there were priests and Levites, whose responsibilities lay primarily within the context of established religion. They were the servants of the temple and the leaders of worship and also had certain responsibilities in the area of religious education. Second, there were the prophets, the spokesmen of God to the people of God. Third, there were the wise men. From a certain perspective, they possessed the most secular task among the three groups. They were involved in a variety of tasks, from governmental administration to moral and secular education. As moral educators, they instructed the young people of their day, not in how to make a living, but in how to live. Something of their curriculum has survived in the book of Proverbs. The books of Job and Ecclesiastes also reflect the thought of the wise men.

### *Wisdom in the New Testament*

The word “wisdom” is used in the New Testament both for the wisdom of God and the wisdom of humans. The Old Testament wisdom tradition continues in the New Testament's use of the word [wisdom] in association with God and in the positive connotations of the word in relation to human beings. But the New Testament also speaks negatively of human wisdom. Thus, Paul described his message as being “not with persuasive words of wisdom, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power” ([1 Corinthians 2:4](#)). Purely human wisdom has no ultimate merit of its own, and Paul quotes the Old Testament to demonstrate that God would destroy human wisdom ([1 Corinthians 1:19](#); compare [Isaiah 29:14](#)). A clear distinction between good and evil wisdom is provided in the letter of James ([James 3:13–18](#)). A person whose life reflects jealousy and selfish ambition does not have the true wisdom of God but is earthly-minded [concerned with material or worldly matters] and unspiritual. But true wisdom is God-given. This wisdom is “first of all pure, then peace-loving, gentle, accommodating, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial, and sincere” (verse [17](#)).

As wisdom was the primary possession of God, so too it was reflected in the life and ministry of Jesus. Jesus, during the years of his growth, reflected in his life the increase of wisdom ([Luke 2:40, 52](#)). His



opponents, as well as his friends, recognized the wisdom in his teaching ([Matthew 13:54](#)).

Since wisdom is rooted and grounded in God, true and spiritual wisdom is God's gift. It could be seen in the lives and words of the servants of God such as Stephen ([Acts 6:10](#)) and Paul ([2 Peter 3:15](#)). Spiritual wisdom, which provided the knowledge enabling a person to live fully the life given by God, was to be desired for oneself and prayed for in others ([Colossians 1:9](#)).

The most central aspect of wisdom in the New Testament is in the gospel of the crucified Christ. In his first letter to the Corinthian church, Paul contrasted vividly the positive and negative senses of wisdom in proclaiming the death of Jesus Christ. The world did not know God by their own wisdom ([1 Corinthians 1:21](#)). That is, the true revelation of God and his redemption of humankind were not revealed to those who sought such truth through wisdom alone, namely, through the Greek approach to wisdom and philosophy. The gospel was declared in preaching. This was, from a strictly philosophical or wisdom perspective, a kind of foolishness. And yet the gospel of Jesus Christ was both the power of God and the wisdom of God ([1 Corinthians 1:24](#)). Jesus, for those who believed, became the ultimate source of that wisdom that could come from God alone ([1 Corinthians 1:30](#)).

*See also* Wisdom Literature.

## Wisdom Literature

Wisdom Literature refers to writings in the Old Testament that focus on wisdom. In this context, wisdom means understanding how to live well and make good decisions.

The main biblical books in this genre are Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes. Some parts of the Psalms and the books of the Prophets also contain wisdom writings.

Wisdom Literature includes different types of wisdom. The book of Proverbs mainly teaches moral wisdom. This kind of wisdom shows people how to live good and right lives. The books of Job and Ecclesiastes explore intellectual wisdom. These books look at big questions about human life and try to understand why things happen the way they do.

Wisdom Literature is an important part of the Old Testament. It is found in the third section of the

Hebrew Bible, called the Writings. It includes Proverbs, Ecclesiastes (also known as Qoheleth), and Job. There are also wisdom psalms (for example, [Psalms 1, 32, 34, 37](#)) and wisdom passages in the Prophets (such as the parables of Isaiah).

In the Greek Old Testament and English Apocrypha (a set of books that some churches include in their Bibles), there are two more wisdom books:

- Ecclesiasticus, which was written by Jesus ben Sirach during the second-century BC
- The Wisdom of Solomon, a work by an unknown author that shows how Jewish wisdom ideas grew during a time when Greek culture was very influential

## Proverbs

To understand Old Testament Wisdom Literature, we start with the book of Proverbs. This book teaches about morality, which means how to live a good life. While it is based on belief in God, much of its wisdom applies to everyday life.

The most important idea in Proverbs is respect for God. But the book mostly focuses on teaching basic good behavior. It talks about being honest, having self-control, being fair, and using common sense. It also shows how life can go wrong for people who do not follow this wisdom.

Proverbs was written to teach. Today, we can read it like any other book. But in the past, young people would learn it from wise teachers. They would try to remember the short, poetic sayings. These sayings would then help guide them throughout their lives. Proverbs teaches that there is a good way to live. This way is based on doing what is right. Living this way leads to success because it follows the wisdom of the one who created all life (God).

The wise teachers who wrote Proverbs were like guides. They did not create new ideas about life or try to answer difficult questions. Instead, they shared the most valuable knowledge: how to live well. Wisdom is "more precious than rubies; nothing you desire compares with her. Long life is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honor. All her ways are pleasant, and all her paths are peaceful." ([Proverbs 3:15-17](#)).



### *Ecclesiastes*

The book of Ecclesiastes shows the wisdom of someone who has lived a long life and seen the world in many ways. The writer had a deep faith that came from difficult experiences, not from an easy life. The writer of Ecclesiastes noticed that life is not always fair. He saw that good people do not always have good lives, and bad people do not always suffer for their actions. Often, good people suffer without any relief, while bad people enjoy life without worries.

The writer looked for justice in the world. He watched life carefully and honestly, but he did not always see justice being done. He also looked for ultimate truth, but even this seemed out of reach. He felt that everything in life was meaningless, like trying to catch the wind!

Even though Ecclesiastes sounds doubtful and negative, it actually shows great faith. The writer held onto his belief in God even when the world seemed full of evil and meaningless things. This is a strong kind of faith. The writer of Ecclesiastes could not be as hopeful as some other Bible writers, such as the prophets. But he held onto the basic truth of God when everything else, including his understanding, failed him. The book of Ecclesiastes can be comforting for people who see the world as it really is, with all its pain and seeming meaninglessness.

### *Job*

The book of Job looks at life's problems from the view of someone who is suffering. While the writer of Ecclesiastes watched life's sadness from the outside, Job felt it personally. Job knew and lived by the old wisdom sayings. He was a good man who followed the teachings found in the book of Proverbs. Before his troubles, Job believed that living a good life would lead to happiness and success.

But then everything in Job's life fell apart. He lost his possessions, his land, and his good name. His children died, and he became very sick. All of this made Job question the wisdom he had always believed in.

Job's story raises big questions about life and God:

1. How can God be fair when life seems so unfair?
2. How can God be just when bad people often do well in life ([Job 21:7-15](#))?

3. If Job's suffering is an example of human life, does God's creation really show goodness and order?

These are hard questions, and the book of Job doesn't give simple answers.

The most important part of Job's story is when he meets God face to face in chapters [38-42](#). This meeting helps put wisdom in the right place. It shows that there will always be things about God and his ways that people cannot fully understand. Our minds are not able to fully understand all of God's wisdom.

Wisdom means trying to know God better. But we can never know everything about God just by thinking and learning. God is always greater than what our minds can understand.

Job's story teaches us something new about wisdom. Even though Job's questions were not answered directly, they stopped being important when he met God. The meeting with God changed Job completely. So the deepest wisdom is not about finding answers to the biggest questions. It is about meeting the living God.

### *Conclusion*

Wisdom Literature in the Bible teaches us many things. It combines ideas from three main books: Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Job. There is a basic knowledge about how to live well. This wisdom is important for young people to learn as they grow up. Living by this wisdom might not always make you rich, but it can help you live well even when life is hard. The most important part of this wisdom is to respect God.

As people grow older, they often realize that life and the world are not simple. Sometimes, this makes people want to give up on the basic wisdom they learned when they were young. The book of Ecclesiastes can help during these times. It teaches that even when life seems pointless, we should still believe in God and respect Him. The last verses of Ecclesiastes ([12:13-14](#)) remind us of this important truth..

Some people might go through very hard times, like Job did in the Bible. In these times, wisdom reaches its limits. We cannot always find answers to our questions about why bad things happen. The book of Job teaches that in these moments, the most important thing is to experience God's presence, even if we do not understand everything.

## Wisdom of Jesus Ben Sirach

A deuterocanonical book (not included in the official Protestant list of books that are considered Scripture). It is also known as Sirach or Ecclesiasticus (not to be confused with Ecclesiastes). The author is known as Jesus ben Sirach. However, recently discovered Hebrew manuscripts name him Simon son of Jesus son of Eleazar ben Sirach. He was a Hebrew sage who lived in the second century BC and taught in Jerusalem ([Sirach 50:27](#); [51:23](#) and the following verses). The work seems to be written by an early Sadducean teacher. The Sadducees were a Jewish sect popular during the time of Jesus.

This work was valued highly by both Jewish and Christian readers. The author was a scribe who used Proverbs as a model to pass on his teachings. His teachings are influenced by Jewish orthodoxy (traditional and established beliefs and practices). The book was probably written about 180 BC.

## Wisdom of Solomon

A deuterocanonical work (only considered by some Christian traditions as Scripture). Its central theme is wisdom. The Wisdom of Solomon attempts to combine the piety of orthodox Judaism with the best of Greek philosophy.

The book implies that it is the work of King Solomon (see [Wisdom of Solomon 8:9-21](#); [9:7-2](#)), but this was a way to add authority to the teachings about wisdom. It was originally written in Greek rather than Hebrew. It was probably written by a well-educated Jewish person living in Alexandria, Egypt, during the first century BC. The author was influenced by Greek philosophies and familiar with the Septuagint.

Some early church fathers, such as Origen, Eusebius of Caesarea, and Augustine of Hippo, considered the book to be Scripture. It was even incorporated into the Muratorian Canon (one of the oldest New Testament fragments ever found) of the second century. Historically, Protestants view the book favorably but do not consider it to be Scripture. The Roman Catholic Church officially recognized it as Scripture at the Council of Trent in AD 1546.

The author wrote the book to inspire the Jewish people who had left the Jewish faith. It was meant

to encourage them to live faithful and godly lives despite persecution. It also tries to demonstrate the foolishness of idolatry and the truth of Judaism. The book begins with the author being told to “love righteousness, . . . think of the Lord with uprightness, and seek him with sincerity of heart” ([1:1](#)). After that, the book encourages people to become religious and to know God. By knowing God and following His will, a person can become immortal ([15:3](#)).

## Wise Men

See Magi.

## Witch, Witchcraft

See Sorcery; Magic.

## Withered Hand

See Deformity.

## Witness

A person who tells about what he or she has seen or experienced, often in a court of law. The word “witness” may also refer to the testimony the person has given.

### *Witness in the Old Testament*

In the legal procedure outlined in the Old Testament, one witness was not adequate for personal testimony against a person. Two or three witnesses were required ([Deuteronomy 17:6](#); [19:15](#)). Jewish law includes this principle, and the New Testament repeats it (compare [Matthew 18:16](#); [2 Corinthians 13:1](#)).

The truth of testimony is so important that the ninth commandment forbids false witness ([Exodus 20:16](#); [Deuteronomy 5:20](#); compare [Mark 10:19](#); [Luke 18:20](#)). The book of Proverbs often warns against false witness (for example, [Proverbs 6:19](#); [14:5](#); [25:18](#)). Yet, some people did give false testimony. ([Psalms 27:12](#); [35:11](#)). In some cases, more than one false witness was brought to bring about the death of an innocent person. The story of Naboth and his vineyard is well known for its injustice. King Ahab's wife Jezebel bribed two men

to bear false witness against Naboth so he would be stoned to death. Then Jezebel's wicked husband could take the vineyard he greatly desired ([1 Kings 21](#)).

Witnesses could be tested by the judges. If an accuser was false, that person received the punishment he had sought to do to the defendant ([Deuteronomy 19:16-21](#)). Proverbs also speaks of the punishment of the false witness ([Proverbs 19:5, 9; 21:28](#)).

The Old Testament records several accounts of legal proceedings in which witnesses are mentioned. Most of these involve the purchase or transfer of property. [Ruth 4:7-12](#) relates the redemption of a field from Naomi by Boaz. Isaiah found "reliable witnesses" concerning a property title written on a large tablet ([Isaiah 8:1-2](#)). To confirm the prophecy of the return of the exiles from Babylon, Jeremiah bought and paid for a field in the presence of witnesses. The witnesses also signed the deed for the property ([Jeremiah 32:6-15](#)).

At the end of his farewell message at Shechem, Joshua declared that the Israelites themselves were witnesses. They had chosen to serve the Lord. Joshua then he set up a large stone and declared that it also was a witness ([Joshua 24:22-27](#)). The people of Israel themselves were declared God's witnesses ([Isaiah 43:10; 44:8-9](#)). They were witnesses to the existence of God, to his uniqueness, holiness, power, and love. When the Israelites failed to acknowledge his uniqueness and holiness and turned to idolatry, he sent them into captivity. He had warned them, for they had failed in their witness and had given opportunity for the enemies of God to blaspheme (speak badly about God).

### *Witness in the New Testament*

In the New Testament the various words for witness are mainly related to the verb *martureo*, meaning "to bear witness, be a witness." The word "martyr" shows the ultimate form of witness. Christians have sacrificed their lives because of their witness for Jesus Christ.

John the Baptist was both a witness and a martyr. As the forerunner of the Messiah, his mission was to bear witness to the light and to identify the Lamb of God ([John 1:7-8, 19-36](#)). The followers of Jesus, and particularly the 12 apostles, were witnesses to the person and character of Jesus. They knew him, heard his teachings and observed his miracles.

Three were witnesses of his miraculous change in appearance (known as transfiguration, [Matthew 17:1-2; 2 Peter 1:17-18](#)). Many were witnesses to his resurrection ([Luke 24:48; 1 Corinthians 15:4-8](#)). At the time of his ascension, the disciples were commissioned to be his witnesses ([Acts 1:8](#)).

## **Witness, Altar of**

Altar built by the Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh in the frontier of Israel near the Jordan ([Jos 22:10-34](#)). The building of the altar incited the remainder of Israel to threaten war for the presumed treachery. After the Transjordanian tribes explained their motives and Phinehas mediated the conflict, the altar was called "Witness" as a memorial of the resulting treaty.

## **Wizard**

A wizard is a man who claims to have special knowledge or power through magic or contact with spirits. Wizards in the Bible were often linked with fortune-telling or calling on the dead. These practices were forbidden in Israel ([Deuteronomy 18:10-12](#)).

See Magic.

## **Woe**

An exclamation denoting pain or displeasure. Less frequently, it occurs as a noun denoting a disaster or calamity. For example, in [Revelation 9:12](#), following the release of the locusts from the abyss and their devastation upon those who follow the Beast, John announces, "The first woe has passed. Behold, two woes are still to follow." Again, in [Revelation 11:14](#), immediately before the seventh trumpet is sounded, John writes, "The second woe has passed. Behold, the third woe is coming shortly." The woes in Revelation are like the Old Testament plagues. They are more intense, though, as they are demonic in origin.

The Greek word is onomatopoeic (the sound is similar to the thing it describes): *ouai* (compare the Hebrew *oi* and *hoi*).

Woe does not automatically imply a judgment in each situation. At times, it shows regret or sorrow about the sad situation that prompted it. In each case, the context needs to be taken into

consideration. In [Matthew 11:21](#) and [Luke 10:13](#), when Jesus says, “Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida!” he was reproaching the people of those cities for their unbelief. The same is true in [Luke 17:2](#). Jesus pronounces woe upon the one who causes another to sin: “It would be better for him to have a millstone hung around his neck.” The Lucan Sermon on the Plain follows the Beatitudes with four woe statements. These statements are not so much threats as they are expressions of regret or compassion.

## Wolf

A wolf (*Canis lupus*) is a large dog-like mammal that travels in packs of up to 30 animals. From the nose to the rump, the wolf measures about .9 meters (three feet). Its drooping tail is about half a meter (18 inches) long. Its body shape is similar to some hunting dogs (such as a skinny German shepherd). The grayish-yellow pelt is coarse and short-haired.

### *Behavior and Hunting Habits of Wolves*

Wolves hunt alone or in packs, usually at night ([Jeremiah 5:6](#)). Wolves have sharp hearing and sight. They rely on scent. They usually catch prey in a swift, open chase. The wolf has a reputation for boldness, fierceness, and hunger ([Genesis 49:27](#); [Habakkuk 1:8](#)). It commonly kills more than it can eat or drag away. So, it is known for its greediness.

Wolves are always moving, driven by hunger to find new hunting grounds. In spring and fall, they travel alone or in pairs. Summer sees them in family groups. Winter brings larger packs together. Wolves are smart, social, and loyal. They mate for life. Usually, a wolf is shy and avoids humans. However, in groups, they can be very dangerous.

In Egypt, Rome, and Greece, wolves were sacred. Wolves still live in Palestine and Israel, as well as many areas in Asia Minor. There, shepherds constantly fought off wolves that attacked their flocks ([John 10:12](#)).

### *Wolves in the Bible*

The Bible refers to wolves in a literal sense only three times ([Isaiah 11:6](#); [65:25](#); [John 10:12](#)). All other references are symbolic. Usually, the wolf is a symbol of enemies or the wicked ([Ezekiel 22:27](#); [Zephaniah 3:3](#); [Acts 20:29](#)). Jacob compared the tribe of Benjamin to a wolf because wolves are both brave and fierce ([Genesis 49:27](#)).

See also Animals; Dog.

## Woman

A woman is an adult female human being. God created woman to be a companion for man ([Genesis 2:18–22](#)).

### *The Creation of Woman*

Genesis provides two accounts about how God created the first man and woman. In the first account, [Genesis 1:26–28](#), God created humans in his image, as male and female. Both the man and the woman share the image of God. This means they both reflect God's power and greatness on the earth. God told them to have children and take care of the world. In [Genesis 1:26–28](#), there is no suggestion that the woman is less important than the man, or that she must submit to his dominance. Instead, the passage shows them together, male and female, as a representation of their Creator.

The second story about the creation of woman is in [Genesis 2:20–25](#). In [Genesis 2](#), God created the man before the woman. Some people think this shows that the man might have some greater importance. But in the creation stories, God often creates things in stages, from less complex to more beautiful or complete.

Because the man was created first, he had the right to name the woman ([Genesis 2:23](#)). In Semitic culture, giving a name often showed authority or ownership. This might mean that Adam's naming of his wife was an act of authority. But the name he gave her (“woman”) was closely linked to the word for “man,” which showed that the man affirmed the woman's equality with him. So even though there is some order in their creation, the man and woman are still partners. The relationship is both structured and equal.

[Genesis 1](#) and [2](#) describe a balanced relationship between the man and the woman, the first parents of all humankind. God made both of them in his image. They were partners in God's plan. However, they also had a one-to-one relationship where one led the other. Before sin entered the world (an even often called the Fall), this balance of equality and leadership worked in harmony.

### *What Changed for Women After the Fall*

[Genesis 3](#) tells the story of sin entering the world. Because of sin, the good relationship between the



man and the woman was damaged. God spoke to the woman and told her that she would have pain when giving birth to children ([Genesis 3:16](#)). He also said that her relationship with her husband would now include conflict. God said, “Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.”

The Hebrew word “desire” (*teshuqah*) in the [Genesis 3](#) and [4](#) passages does not mean sexual longing. Instead, it means a desire to control or to be in charge (the sexual meaning of *teshuqah* is found in [Song of Songs 7:10](#)). Because of sin, the woman may try to take control over her husband. At the same time, the man may try to rule over her in a harsh way. This was not how God first designed their relationship. Sin brought a struggle between two equal partners.

In his letter to the Ephesians, the apostle Paul gives guidance to husbands and wives. He teaches that both men and women need to be changed by God’s Spirit. Paul says “Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord” ([Ephesians 5:22](#)). This means a wife should respect her husband and follow his lead, just as she follows Jesus. Paul explains that the husband is called to lead in a way that reflects how Christ leads the church ([Ephesians 5:23](#)).

But Paul also speaks strongly to husbands. He says they must love their wives “just as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her” ([Ephesians 5:25](#)). This kind of love is not harsh or controlling. It is full of care, sacrifice, and kindness.

Paul quotes [Genesis 2:24](#) in [Ephesians 5:31](#) to remind his readers that marriage was meant to bring deep unity. In Christ, this unity can be restored. The husband and wife are still equal in value. Their roles are different, but their relationship is based on love, respect, and mutual submission ([Ephesians 5:21](#)). When they follow Jesus together, they can begin to recover the peace and joy that was once found in Eden.

### *The Role of Women in Life According to the Bible*

A woman is fully a person, just like a man. She is made in the image of God and reflects God’s nature. She has the ability to think, create, love, and serve in many ways in her culture, her community, and her daily life.

The Bible often associates women with childbearing. Many women in Scripture found great meaning in bearing and raising children. But the Bible also shows that a woman’s worth does not depend on childbearing. She has value in every part

of life. She has her own identity in the family, in the community, in the church, and before God, whether or not she has children.

The Bible also shows that childbearing is not the woman’s job alone. The husband is her partner. He shares in the beginning of life, stands with her in times of birth, and helps care for the child as they grow.

The Bible connects women with a special promise from God. In [Genesis 3:15](#), after the first sin, God gave a message of hope. He said that one day, the offspring (child) of the woman would defeat the evil one, Satan. This promise gave new meaning to childbearing. It became a sign of hope and blessing.

This promise points to the birth of Jesus, who was born of a woman. Through him, God would bring salvation to the world. Every birth after that can be seen as a small part of that story, a reminder of God’s promise to bring life and healing through the family of humankind.

Some Christians see this idea in [1 Timothy 2:15](#). That verse says that women will be saved through childbearing. This does not mean that having children brings salvation. Instead, it may point to the long story of God’s promise being fulfilled through the birth of Christ.

In the Old Testament world, people often believed that a woman’s value came mainly from having children. But the Bible shows that a woman’s true worth does not depend only on childbearing. Like a man, a woman finds her deepest purpose through faith in God.

A woman may have many children and feel fulfilled. But caring for her children is not the same as knowing and honoring God. Her relationship with God is what matters most.

A woman who has no children, or even no husband, still has full worth and identity. She is made in God’s image. She can serve him in many ways. Her life has meaning because of God, not because of her family status.

God’s gifts in a woman’s life can lead her to find ways to show her devotion to God in the community. For example, women had the same opportunities as men to take a Nazirite vow ([Numbers 6:2](#); see also chapter [30](#)).

The Bible tells the stories of many women who served God in public ways. Miriam, the sister of Moses and Aaron, was a prophetess, a musician, and a leader of the people ([Exodus 15:20-21](#);



[Numbers 12](#)). Long after she died, God reminded Israel that he had given them Miriam as a leader ([Micah 6:4](#)).

Other women also lived faithful and courageous lives. Deborah was a prophetess and the only woman named as a judge over Israel ([Judges 4-5](#)). Esther was a Hebrew woman who became queen of Persia. She saved her people from death by bravely speaking to King Xerxes. Huldah was another prophetess. She spoke God's message to King Josiah when he began to lead the people back to God ([2 Chronicles 34:22-28](#)). This was during the time of Jeremiah and Zephaniah. Even though there were male prophets, God chose to speak through Huldah in that moment.

The New Testament also names many women who served God in public ways:

- the daughters of Philip (who were prophets)
- Phoebe
- Priscilla
- Junias
- Tryphena
- Tryphosa
- Persis
- Euodia
- Syntyche

These women show the beginning of what the prophet Joel had spoken long ago. Joel said that one day God's Spirit would be poured out on both men and women, and they would speak God's words ([Joel 2:28-29](#)). Other women, like Sarah, Ruth, and Hannah, served God through faith in their homes and families. They trusted in God and lived in obedience to him.

The most honored woman in the Bible is Mary, the mother of Jesus. She trusted God and gave birth to the Savior. In Mary, the promise given to Eve was fulfilled and through her, the one who would defeat the enemy of humankind was born.

*See also* Eve; Man.

## Wonders

*See* Miracle; Sign.

## Wool

Wool fiber, made from the hair of sheep, was an important product of the ancient Near East.

King Mesha of Moab, a sheep breeder, sent the wool of 100,000 rams as tribute to King Ahab of Israel each year ([2 Kings 3:4](#)). The people of Damascus traded wool with Tyre's merchants ([Ezekiel 27:18](#)). Woolen garments were commonly worn by the Israelites ([Leviticus 13:47-59](#); [Isaiah 51:8](#); [Hosea 2:5, 9](#)). Woolen garments mingled with linen fabric were forbidden ([Deuteronomy 22:11](#)). In fact, wearing any wool was prohibited for Israelite priests serving in the sanctuary's inner court ([Ezekiel 44:17](#)).

Wool is sometimes a biblical symbol for whiteness and purity. It is a simile for:

- redemption ([Isaiah 1:18](#)),
- the hair of the Ancient of Days ([Daniel 7:9](#)), and
- the hair and head of the Son of Man ([Revelation 1:14](#)).

*See also* Cloth and Cloth Manufacturing.

## Word, Word of God, Words of God

A "word" is a way to communicate. When people use "words," they usually mean speaking. However, when God "spoke" over the centuries, God communicated in different ways ([Hebrews 1:1](#)). The most complete and perfect example of God's communication is God's Son, Jesus Christ.

### *The Importance of Words*

In societies where most people could not read or write, the spoken word was extremely important in areas like law, trade, religion, marriage, and reputation. Written documents like receipts, agreements, and records were not as useful. Honest speech and personal integrity were essential for communication and for maintaining relationships. Because of this, the words of poets, prophets, storytellers, and teachers were carefully remembered and passed down.

People paid close attention to the truthfulness of words. Foolish words, flattery (insincere praise), lies, and harmful speech were recognized as wrong.

Oaths (promises) were very important in business, law, and community life. Once a blessing was spoken, it had power and could not be taken back ([Genesis 27:30–38](#); [Matthew 10:12–13](#)). The same was true of:

- Vows ([Judges 11:34–35](#))
- Curses ([Genesis 27:12–13](#))

Words of command, especially from priests, judges, or kings, also had great power ([Ecclesiastes 8:4](#)).

This respect for words continued into the New Testament. Words reveal what is in a person's heart, so every careless, hurtful, or deceitful word will be judged ([Matthew 12:34–37](#); [5:22](#)), as will disrespectful speech about God (blasphemy, [Luke 12:10](#)). Paul ([Ephesians 4:29](#); [5:4](#)) and James ([James 3:1–12](#)) kept this Hebrew respect for the spoken word.

### *The Words of God*

God's spoken word has been kept in the Scriptures. His word came to and through the prophets ([1 Kings 12:22](#); [1 Chronicles 17:3](#); compare [Luke 3:2](#)), who spoke and acted "by the word of the Lord." God's word also came in the law, which God "spoke" on Sinai ([Exodus 20:1](#)). So, there are many legal synonyms for God's "word" (see [Psalm 119](#)):

- "Statutes"
- "Commandments"
- "Precepts"

When there was no divine communication, it was like a "famine" ([1 Samuel 3:1](#); [Amos 8:11](#)). Along with warnings and commands, God's words included promises. All of God's words were trustworthy ([Isaiah 31:2](#)), fixed in heaven ([Psalm 119:89](#); [Isaiah 40:8](#)), and supported by divine oath ([Jeremiah 1:12](#); [Psalm 110:4](#); [Ezekiel 12:25, 28](#)). God's word, which expresses God's mind, was not meant to be burdensome or difficult to follow. Instead, it was a source of joy, hope, and protection against sin ([Psalms 1; 119](#); [Jeremiah 15:16](#)). People could live by God's word ([Deuteronomy 8:3](#); [Matthew 4:4](#)).

God's word has the power to carry out God's will. It will not return to God "empty" but will accomplish what God intends ([Isaiah 55:11](#)). By God's word alone, God created the world, and God's word sustains it ([Genesis 1](#); [Psalm 33:6](#); compare [Heb 1:2](#); [11:3](#); [2 Peter 3:5](#)). Eventually, this divine revelation was written down, making the Bible "the

word of God" ([Mark 7:13](#); compare [Luke 16:29–31](#); [John 5:39](#)).

Jesus spoke the word of God. God was "powerful in speech" ([Luke 24:19](#)) and taught with authority ([Mark 1:22, 27](#)). His words had power over nature, sickness, demons, and even death ([Matthew 8:8, 13](#)). His "word of the kingdom" is like a living seed that, when planted in willing hearts, grows and produces good fruit for God ([Matthew 13:19](#); [Mark 4:14](#)). The word that Jesus gives to his followers cleanses them and sets them free ([John 8:31](#); [12:48](#); [15:3](#); [17:14](#)). The word of faith that the church preaches ([Romans 10:8–9, 17](#)) is described in various ways:

- The word of salvation
- The word of grace
- The word of reconciliation
- The word of the gospel
- The word of righteousness
- The word of life

### *The Word of God*

At the beginning of his Gospel, John calls the Son of God "the Word." As "the Word," the Son fully reveals and communicates with God. The Greek term for "word" is *logos*, which was used in two main ways by the Greeks. It could mean the thought or reason inside a person, or it could refer to the expression of that thought, which is speech. In Greek philosophy, *logos* also meant the principle of the universe or the creative energy that made the universe.

In both Jewish and Greek thought, *logos* was connected with the idea of beginnings—the world began through the Word ([Genesis 1:3](#) and following, where the phrase "God said" is repeated). John might have had these ideas in mind. Still, he most likely created a new term to identify the Son of God as God's divine expression in human form ([John 1:14](#)).

The Son is the image of the invisible God ([Colossians 1:15](#)). He is the exact representation of God's being ([Hebrews 1:3](#)). In the Godhead, the Son reveals and makes God known, which is a key theme throughout John's Gospel. John uses a similar title in his first letter: "the Word of life" ([1 John 1:1–3](#)). In [Revelation 19:11–16](#), Jesus is shown as the King of kings and Lord of lords, with a name: "the Word of God."

See also Bible; John, Gospel of; Logos; Revelation.

## Work

A term referring either to God's activity or to people's regular occupation or employment.

### *The Value of Work*

The Bible's positive outlook on work is rooted in its teaching about God. Unlike other ancient religious writings, which regarded creation as something beneath the dignity of the Supreme Being, Scripture unashamedly describes God as a worker. Like a manual laborer, he made the universe as "the work of his fingers" ([Ps 8:3](#)). He worked with his raw material just as a potter works with the clay ([Is 45:9](#)). The intricate development of the unborn child in the womb and the vast, magnificent spread of the sky both display his supreme craftsmanship ([Pss 139:13–16](#); [19:1](#)). In fact, all creation bears witness to his wisdom and skill ([104:24](#)). The almighty Creator even had his rest day ([Gn 2:2–3](#)) and enjoyed job satisfaction when surveying his achievements at the end of the week ([1:31](#)).

This vivid biblical description of a working God reaches its climax with the incarnation of Jesus. The "work" that Jesus was given to do ([Jn 4:34](#)) was, of course, the unique task of redemption. But he was also a worker in the ordinary sense. His contemporaries knew him as "a carpenter" ([Mk 6:3](#)). In NT times carpentry and joinery were muscle-building trades. So the Jesus who stormed through the temple, overturning tables and driving out the men and animals ([Jn 2:14–16](#)), was no pale weakling but a workingman whose hands had been hardened by years of toil with the ax, saw, and hammer. Hard, physical labor was not beneath the dignity of the Son of God.

If the Bible's teaching about God enhances work's dignity, its account of mankind's creation gives all human labor the mark of normality. God "took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to till it and keep it" ([Gn 2:15](#)). And God's first command, to "fill the earth and subdue it" ([1:28](#)), implied a great deal of work for both man and woman. In an important sense, people today are obeying that command of their Creator when they do their daily work, whether they acknowledge him or not. Work did not, therefore, arrive in the world as a direct result of the fall into sin (though sin did spoil working conditions, [3:17–19](#)). Work was planned by God from the dawn of history for mankind's good—as

natural to men and women as sunset is to day ([Ps 104:19–23](#)).

With this firm emphasis on the dignity and normality of labor, it is no surprise to find that Scripture strongly condemns idleness. "Go to the ant, O sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise" ([Prv 6:6](#), rsv). Paul is equally blunt: "If any one will not work, let him not eat" ([2 Thes 3:10](#), rsv). He set a good example ([Acts 20:33–35](#); [1 Thes 2:9](#)). Those who refuse to work, he insists, even for spiritual reasons, earn no respect from non-Christian onlookers by depending on others to pay their bills ([1 Thes 4:11–12](#)). Wage earners, on the other hand, have the material resources of Christian service ([Eph 4:28](#)).

### *Vocations*

In biblical times the Greeks and Romans catalogued jobs according to importance or desirability. Routine manual labor, for example, was considered inferior to work involving mental activity.

Jewish teaching contrasts strongly with this attitude. "Hate not laborious work," taught the rabbis ([Ecclus 7:15](#)). Even the scholar had to spend some time in manual work. A few trades, like that of the tanner, were regarded as undesirable (a taboo broken very quickly by the early church—see [Acts 9:43](#)), but there is no indication in the Bible that some jobs are more worthwhile than others in God's sight. The Lord calls craftsmen into his service ([Ex 31:1–11](#)), just as much as prophets ([Is 6:8–9](#)). So Amos was summoned from his fruit-picking to prophesy ([Am 7:14–15](#)), but with no suggestion that he was being promoted to a superior role. The important thing was not the nature of the occupation but the readiness to obey God's call and to witness faithfully to him, whatever the job.

The Bible has some poignant things to say about the relationship between employer and employee. The OT prophets voice the strongest criticism. God is especially concerned to see that the weak get justice ([Is 1:17](#); [Mi 6:8](#)). So, naturally, his spokesmen declare his anger when employers exploit their laborers and cheat them of their wages ([Jer 22:13](#); [Mal 3:5](#); cf. [Jas 5:4](#)). A person who wants to please God must "stop oppressing those who work for [him] and treat them fairly and give them what they earn" ([Is 58:6](#), tlb).

In Bible times, the scales were weighted heavily in favor of the employer. But Scripture is not blind to the existence of selfish, greedy employees. Every

worker deserves a just wage ([Lk 10:7](#)), but those with special power must not try to increase their pay by threats and violence ([3:14](#)).

### *Working for Christ*

God is a working God who is pleased when his people work hard and conscientiously. That conviction lies at the heart of the Bible's teaching about Christian attitudes toward secular employment. And quite naturally, the NT extends the same positive emphasis to cover all Christian service, paid or unpaid. The world is God's harvest field, said Jesus, waiting for Christian reapers to move in and evangelize ([Mt 9:37–38](#)). Paul used the same agricultural illustration and added another from the building trade to describe the Lord's work of evangelism and teaching ([1 Cor 3:6–15](#)). Church leaders must work especially hard, he said ([1 Thes 5:12](#)), to stimulate *all* God's people to be involved in the Lord's work ([1 Cor 15:58](#)). All Christians should see themselves as "God's coworkers" ([3:9](#)).

## World

An important New Testament term from the Greek word *kosmos* meaning that which is ordered or arranged. It has five different meanings:

1. The universe created by God with design and order (for example, [Matthew 13:35](#); [John 17:24](#); [Acts 17:24](#)).
2. The planet Earth (for example, [John 11:9](#)). This includes the idea of Earth as the dwelling place of human beings ([16:21](#)) and of Earth as contrasted with heaven ([6:14](#); [12:46](#)).
3. The total of humanity ([Matthew 5:14](#); [John 3:16](#); [1 Corinthians 4:13](#)).
4. The total of human existence in this present life, with all of its experience and possessions ([Matthew 16:26](#); [1 Corinthians 7:33](#)).
5. The world order as alienated from God, in rebellion against him, and condemned for its godlessness. It is "this world," as opposed to "that which is to come" ([John 8:23](#); [12:25](#); [1 Corinthians 3:19](#)). The ruler of this world is the devil ([John 12:31](#); [14:30](#); [16:11](#); [1 Corinthians 5:10](#)). As John said it, "The whole world is under the power of the evil one" ([1 John 5:19](#)). Christians are not of this world ([John 15:19](#); [17:16](#)), even though they live in the world and participate in its activities ([17:11](#)). The believer is regarded as dead to the world

([Galatians 6:14](#); compare [Colossians 3:2–3](#)). The Christian is to be separated from the world ([James 1:27](#)).

One's relationship with the world is an indicator of one's relationship with God. Those who love the world are void of love for God the Father ([1 John 2:15](#)). The Scripture points out that "all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh, the desires of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not from the Father but from the world" (verse [16](#)). The world and its desires or lusts are transient, passing away, but the doer of God's word abides forever ([1 John 2:17](#); compare [2 Corinthians 4:18](#)). Friendship with the world is enmity toward God ([James 4:4](#)).

The discourse of Jesus on the night before his crucifixion contains much teaching about the world. The world cannot receive the Spirit of truth ([John 14:17](#)). Christ gives a peace that the world cannot give (verse [27](#)). Jesus offers love, while the world gives hatred and persecution ([15:19–20](#)). The world's hatred of God is also directed against the followers of Christ (verse [18–21](#)). Although the disciples of Jesus have tribulation "in the world," they are to be of good cheer, for Jesus has overcome the world ([16:33](#)).

Another Greek word sometimes translated "world" is *aion*. This word emphasizes the temporal aspect of the world. It is used of time without end, eternity (for example, [Romans 1:25](#); [2 Corinthians 11:31](#); [Philippians 4:20](#)). See *Age*.

## Worm

A worm is a small, soft-bodied creature. In the Bible, the word usually means insect larvae, often maggots (the young of flies).

Maggots are mentioned in stories where they feed on:

- spoiled manna ([Exodus 16:19–20](#)),
- corpses ([Job 21:26](#); [Isaiah 14:11](#)), or
- open wounds ([Job 7:5](#)).

[Mark 9:48](#) refers to a maggot that eats dead flesh. In [Acts 12:23](#), King Herod suffers a fatal disease caused by worms. Sometimes "worm" means the young of other insects ([Isaiah 51:8](#)).

In [Deuteronomy 28:39](#) and [Jonah 4:7](#) the vine weevil (*Cochylis ambiguella*) is likely meant. This pest damages vines by boring into their stems.



Calling a person a “worm” is a way of showing extreme humility or shame ([Job 25:6](#); [Psalm 22:6](#)).

See also Animals.

## Wormwood

Wormwood is a general name for a group of woody plants with a strong aromatic smell. These plants have a strong, bitter taste. The young shoots and branch tips of wormwood plants are used to make the “wormwood” product sold in markets. Because of its bitter taste, wormwood is often mentioned alongside gall as a symbol of bitter calamity and sorrow ([Proverbs 5:4](#); [Jeremiah 9:15](#); [23:15](#); [Lamentations 3:15, 19](#); [Revelation 8:11](#)).

*Artemisia herba-alba* is the most common type of wormwood found in the Holy Land today. It has a strong aromatic smell similar to camphor and tastes bitter. Another type, *Artemisia judaica*, grows only in the Sinai region.

People make a drink called absinthe from wormwood plants. At first, absinthe causes increased activity and pleasant feelings, and fills the mind with grand ideas ([Lamentations 3:15](#)). However, regular use of absinthe leads to stupor and a gradual decrease in thinking ability. It eventually causes delirium and sometimes death. Wormwood is also mentioned in [Amos 6:12](#).

## Worship

Expression of reverence and adoration of God.

### *Worship in the Old Testament*

The 1,500 years from the days of Abraham to the time of Ezra (c. 1900–450 BC) saw many significant changes in the form of worship in ancient Israel. Abraham, the wandering nomad, built altars and offered sacrifices wherever God appeared to him. In Moses’ time the tabernacle served as a portable sanctuary for the Israelite tribes journeying through the wilderness. Solomon built a temple in Jerusalem that lasted more than three centuries until its destruction by the Babylonians in 586 BC. When the Jews returned from exile, they built a new temple, which was later renovated and enlarged by Herod the Great. Though all the temple buildings were destroyed by the Romans in AD 70, the foundations remained. Jews still pray by the Western Wall (called the Wailing Wall).

If the form of worship changed with times and situations, its heart and center did not. God revealed himself to Abraham, promising that his children would inherit the land of Canaan. Abraham demonstrated his faith through prayer and sacrifice. Throughout the biblical period listening to God’s Word, prayer, and sacrifice constituted the essence of worship. The promises to Abraham were constantly recalled as the basis of Israel’s existence as a nation and its right to the land of Canaan.

From time to time every family visited the temple in Jerusalem. Eight days after a baby boy was born, he was circumcised to mark his membership in Israel. Then, a month or two later, the baby’s mother went to the temple to offer sacrifice ([Lv 12](#); cf. [Lk 2:22–24](#)).

Animals were sacrificed in the lambing and calving season. The first lamb or calf born to every ewe or cow was presented in sacrifice ([Ex 22:30](#)). Similarly, at the beginning of the harvest season, a basket of the first fruits was offered, and at the end, a tenth of all the harvest, the tithe, was given to the priests as God’s representatives ([Nm 18:21–32](#)). [Deuteronomy 26:5–15](#) gives a typical prayer for use on such occasions.

Sometimes a person would decide to offer a sacrifice for more personal reasons. In a crisis, vows could be made and sealed with a sacrifice ([Gn 28:18–22](#); [1 Sm 1:10–11](#)). Then when the prayer was answered, a second sacrifice was customarily offered ([Gn 35:3, 14](#); [1 Sm 1:24–25](#)). Serious sin or serious sickness were also occasions for sacrifice ([Lv 4–5](#), [13–15](#)).

The worshiper brought the animal into the temple court. Standing before the priest, he placed one hand on its head, thereby identifying himself with the animal, and confessed his sin or explained the reason for offering the sacrifice. Then the worshiper killed the animal and cut it up for the priest to burn on the great bronze altar. Some sacrifices (burnt offerings) involved the whole animal being burnt on the altar. In others, some of the meat was set aside for the priests, while the rest was shared by the worshiper and his family. But in every case the worshiper killed the animal from his own flock with his own hands. These sacrifices expressed in a vivid and tangible way the cost of sin and the worshiper’s responsibility. As the worshiper killed the animal, he recalled that sin would have caused his own death, had God not provided an escape through animal sacrifice.



Three times a year all adult men went to the temple to celebrate the national festivals ([Ex 23:17](#); [Dt 16:16](#)): Passover (held in April), the Feast of Weeks (held in May), and the Feast of Booths (in October). When possible, the whole family accompanied the men. But if they lived a long way from Jerusalem, they would go up for only one of the festivals ([1 Sm 1:3](#); [Lk 2:41](#)).

These festivals were tremendous occasions. Hundreds of thousands of people converged on Jerusalem. They would stay with relatives or camp in tents outside the city. The temple courts would be thronged with worshipers. The temple choirs sang psalms appropriate for the festival, while the priests and Levites offered hundreds (at Passover, thousands) of animals in sacrifice. Groups of worshipers carried away with emotion would break forth into dancing. Those of more sober temperament were content to join in the singing or simply pray quietly.

The major festivals were joyful occasions, for they celebrated the deliverance of Israel from Egypt. At Passover each family ate roasted lamb and bitter herbs to reenact the last meal their forefathers ate before leaving Egypt ([Ex 12](#)). At the Feast of Booths, they built shelters of branches and lived in them for a week, as a reminder that the Israelites camped in tents during the 40 years of wandering in the wilderness ([Lv 23:39–43](#)). These great festivals served as reminders of how God had delivered them from slavery in Egypt and had given them the land of Canaan as he had promised to Abraham.

Each of these three festivals lasted a week, but there was one day in the year that was totally different, the Day of Atonement, when everyone fasted and mourned for their sins. On this day the high priest confessed the nation's sins as he pressed his hand on the head of a goat. Then the goat was led away into the wilderness, symbolizing the removal of sin from the people ([Lv 16](#)).

Sometime after the destruction of the first temple, synagogues developed for public worship. The services were more like modern church worship, consisting exclusively of prayer, Bible reading, and preaching. There were no sacrifices made in the synagogues. When the second temple was destroyed in AD 70, synagogues became the only places where Jews could worship in public. Then there were no more sacrifices at all. The NT pictures this as fitting, for Jesus was the true Lamb of God ([Jn 1:29](#)); because of his death, there is no need for further animal sacrifice ([Heb 10:11–12](#)).

### *Worship in the New Testament*

The Jews had become far too dependent on a physical place, the temple, for their worship. When Jesus arrived on the scene, he proclaimed that he himself was the temple of God; in resurrection, he would provide the spiritual dwelling where God the Spirit and people, in spirit, could have spiritual communion (see [Mt 12:6](#); [Jn 2:19–22](#)). In other words, worship would no longer be in a place but in a person—through Jesus Christ and his Spirit the worshipers could come directly to God (see [Jn 14:6](#); [Heb 10:19–20](#)).

This shift in worship—from physical to spiritual—is the theme of [John 4](#), a chapter that recounts Jesus' visit to the Samaritans. After Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman, she acknowledged that he must be a prophet, and then she launched into a discussion concerning the religious debate between the Jews and the Samaritans over which place of worship was the right one—Jerusalem or Mt Gerizim. The Samaritans had set up a place for worship on Mt Gerizim in accordance with [Deuteronomy 11:26–29](#) and [27:1–8](#), while the Jews had followed David and Solomon in making Jerusalem the center of Jewish worship. The Scriptures affirmed Jerusalem as the true center for worship ([Dt 12:5](#); [2 Chr 6:6](#); [7:12](#); [Ps 78:67–68](#)). But Jesus told her that a new age had come in which the issue no longer concerned a physical site. God the Father would no longer be worshiped in either place. A new age had come in which the true worshipers (Jew, Samaritan, or Gentile) must worship the Father in spirit and in truth.

"In spirit" corresponds to Jerusalem, and "in truth" corresponds to the Samaritans' unknowledgeable ideas of worship, God, etc. Formerly, God was worshiped in Jerusalem, but now the true Jerusalem would be in a person's spirit. Indeed, the church is called "the habitation of God in spirit" ([Eph 2:22](#)). True worship required a people to contact God, the Spirit, in their spirit, as well as a people who knew the truth. New Testament worship must be in spirit and in truth. Since "God is Spirit," he must be worshiped in spirit. Human beings possess a human spirit, the nature of which corresponds to God's nature, which is spirit. Therefore, people can have fellowship with God and worship God in the same sphere that God exists in.

In a sense, [John 4](#) anticipates [Revelation 21](#) and [22](#), where God provides the rivers of the water of life to all the believers and where the Lamb and God

are the temple in the New Jerusalem. The believers receive life from God and they worship in God. There is a profound, even mystical connection between drinking of the Spirit and worshiping God in the Spirit (see [1 Cor 12:13](#)). This is also described in [Ezekiel 47](#), which pictures the river flowing from God's temple as a symbol of God's never-ending supply. In [John 4](#), Jesus provides the living waters to all who receive the gift of God, and he directs people to a new temple, a spiritual one, where God is worshiped in spirit.

## Wrath of God

Wrath is a word that describes God's strong disapproval of human beings and their sinful actions. In the original languages of the Bible, many different words and phrases are used to talk about wrath. All of these words express the idea of justifiable anger in response to unjust actions.

### *In the Old Testament*

In the Old Testament, God is said to be angry with nations, sinners, and even his covenant people. God's anger first showed toward Israel after they refused to believe his word about entering the promised land. After being rescued from Egypt, receiving the Ten Commandments and the covenant, and seeing God's glory, they still did not believe ([Numbers 11:10](#); [12:9](#); [22:22](#); [32:10-14](#)). So, God condemned the Israelites to wander in the wilderness until they died. The main reason for God's anger in the Old Testament was that his people constantly broke the covenant. They provoked him by:

- Worshiping other gods ([Deuteronomy 2:15](#); [4:25](#); [9:7-8, 19](#); [Judges 2:14](#); [1 Kings 11:9](#); [14:9, 15](#); [2 Kings 17:18](#))
- Mixing non-Jewish practices in with their worship ([Isaiah 1:10-17](#); [Jeremiah 6:20](#); [Hosea 6:6](#); [Amos 5:21-27](#))
- Their rebellion ([1 Kings 8:46](#))
- Their unbelief ([Numbers 11:33](#); [14:11, 33](#); [Psalm 95:10-11](#))
- Their disregard for his concern for love, justice, righteousness, and holiness ([Exodus 22:22-24](#); [Isaiah 1:15-17](#); [Amos 5:7-12](#); [Micah 3:1](#))

The wrath of God also extends to all humanity ([Nahum 1:2](#)). The Day of the Lord concept, developed by prophets, warns that no one can escape God's righteous wrath ([Amos 5:18-20](#)). The Day of the Lord is the day of his wrath ([Zephaniah 1:15](#)).

The Old Testament balances God's wrath with his patience, love, and readiness to forgive.

1. God is patient. The Hebrew word for "patient" relates to the word for "wrath" and means "length of wrath"; God does not quickly become angry. He is longsuffering ([Exodus 34:6](#)).
2. God is full of compassion and faithfulness ([Exodus 34:6](#)). Even when his children sin, he is like a father, full of compassion and love. He is always faithful to his children.
3. God is ready to forgive those who atone for and cleanse their sins ([Exodus 34:6](#)). His love is much greater than his wrath ([Psalm 30:5](#)). Micah prayed that the Lord would soon forgive and restore his people, believing he cannot be angry forever ([Psalm 7:18](#); compare [Psalm 89:46](#); [Jeremiah 3:5](#)). In [Psalm 103:8-13](#), the psalmist compares God's love and forgiveness to a father who does not stay angry or harshly discipline his children because of his great love for those who fear him.

The purpose of God's wrath is not to destroy humanity ([Hosea 11:9](#)). His wrath is not a vindictive, emotional overreaction, nor is it unpredictable. In his wrath, he controls nations (like Babylon and Assyria) and disciplines his people so they return to him ([Joel 2:13-14](#)). The Old Testament's Day of the Lord does not end with God's anger; it concludes with the earth's restoration when it will be filled with the knowledge of God ([Isaiah 11:9](#); [Hebrews 2:14](#)), and wickedness will be no more ([Isaiah 65:25](#)).

### *In the New Testament*

The New Testament also teaches about God's wrath alongside his grace, love, and patience ([Matthew 3:7](#); [Luke 21:23](#); [John 3:36](#); [Romans 1:18](#); [Ephesians 5:6](#); [Revelation 14:10](#)). Those who do not believe in the risen Christ remain in their sins and will face God's wrath. Those who believe are saved from it ([Ephesians 2:3](#); [1 Thessalonians 1:10](#)). The good news of the New Testament is that Jesus came to save us from God's wrath ([Romans 5:9](#)). Those saved are reconciled with God because they no longer are under condemnation ([Romans 5:10](#); [8:1](#)).

See also Death; Hell; Judgment; Last Judgment; Love.

## **Writer**

A professional or religious scribe and/or secretary. Scribes and secretaries were people who were trained to write and copy documents.

### *Professional Scribes and Secretaries*

Scribes were secretaries in Palestine, Egypt, Mesopotamia, and the Greco-Roman Empire. Court scribes would sometimes rise to powerful positions socially and politically.

There were schools for training scribes. Mastering the art of writing on clay probably took as much time then as it takes students now to learn to read and write. Those who wanted to be scribes could either learn at a regular school or work as an apprentice under a private teacher. The latter was much more popular. Many scribes were willing to teach. Most of the scribes had at least one student. These students were treated like family while they learned. The students learned from tutoring and by example. This experience would prepare young

scribes to write legal and business documents, as well as take dictation for private letters.

For more advanced study, the scribes would have to go to school. The schools were attached to temples, and the schools were the only places that could teach the sciences, mathematics, and literature. The most advanced scribes had to master all of these subjects. At school, a scribe could study to become a priest or a "scientist."

Archaeologists (scholars who study ancient human history) have found schoolrooms with benches on which the students sat. They have even found the "textbooks" that were used to teach scribes. Some of these ancient Near Eastern texts are nothing but basic exercises and copies of original texts. These copies are usually not as beautiful or as easy to read as the originals, which were written by master scribes.

Many types of texts were available in the temple when the teacher wanted to give the students an assignment. Elementary work included writing a series of cuneiform signs (an ancient writing script), much like our learning the alphabet—except that there were 600 signs! Another simple assignment was copying dictionaries containing lists of stones, cities, animals, and gods.

Advanced students copied literary texts like epics, hymns, or prayers. Through study and practice, a gifted student could become qualified to work in almost any field.

### *Scribes in the Old Testament*

In Israel, scribes performed many tasks. They often sat at the gate of the city or another public space, writing receipts, contracts, and letters. Religious scribes copied the Scriptures.

Several scribes are mentioned in the Old Testament:

- Shebna ([2 Kings 18:18, 37](#))
- Shaphan ([2 Kings 22:8-12](#))
- Ezra ([Ezra 7:6, 11](#); [Nehemiah 8:1, 9, 13](#); [12:26, 36](#))
- Baruch ([Jeremiah 36:26, 32](#))
- Jonathan ([Jeremiah 37:15, 20](#)).

### **Scribes in the New Testament**

The apostle Paul used secretaries and scribes to write his letters. Typically, a scribe would write the

speaker's words. Then, the author would review and edit it. The scribe would take the edits and create a final draft, which the author would sign.

Two New Testament letters give the name of a scribe:

- Tertius ([Romans 16:22](#))
- Silvanus ([1 Peter 5:12](#))

Some of Paul's letters say that he wrote the ending himself:

- [1 Corinthians 16:21](#)
- [Galatians 6:11](#)
- [Colossians 4:18](#)
- [2 Thessalonians 3:17](#)

This shows that these letters were written by someone else (Paul's scribe) before he signed them. John wrote his letters himself ([1 John 1:4; 2:1, 7-8, 12-14; 2 John 1:12; 3 John 1:9, 13](#)).

*See also* Letter Writing, Ancient; Writing.

## Writing

The process that goes into producing books.

Books have been written for many centuries but have not always been produced in the familiar form in which they are known today. If a book is defined as any written record of thoughts or acts, the production of books goes back to a very early period in the history of civilization. The Sumerians produced written documents and primers on clay tablets as early as 2500 BC. The Sumerian civilization went into decline after its conquest by the Akkadians (2300 BC). In the 21st century BC, however, there occurred a revival of Sumerian culture that produced a number of important literary works, including the first known written codified system of law. Today a rich collection of Sumerian material exists. It includes legal, mythological, and commercial documents as well as written material produced in the process of training scribes. A large collection of cuneiform tablets was found in the library of the Assyrian king Ashurbanipal, which was established in the seventh century BC. The library contained many records of religious and scientific knowledge.

We have many ancient manuscripts of the books of the Bible. As for the books of the Hebrew Bible,

scribes used quill, ink, and leather scrolls to make copies of individual books. Some of the scrolls, made of several treated animal hides stitched together, could be as long as 35 to 40 feet (10.7 to 12.2 meters) when unrolled. As scrolls wore out, or if there was a need for copies in various synagogues, Jewish scribes would make additional copies—and they did so with painstaking care. Prior to the Dead Sea Scroll discoveries, museums housed several manuscripts of the Hebrew Bible dated between the eighth and tenth centuries. The Dead Sea Scrolls are dated between 100 BC and AD 100, which makes them a thousand years earlier than these other manuscripts. The Dead Sea Scrolls contain significant portions of the OT. Every book except Esther is represented. The largest portions come from the Pentateuch (especially Deuteronomy—25 manuscripts), the Major Prophets (especially Isaiah—18 manuscripts), and Psalms (27 manuscripts). As for the books of the NT, we have nearly 6,000 manuscripts prior to the time of the printing press (c. 1500). About 200 of these manuscripts date between the early second and late fourth century. Most of the NT manuscripts were written on papyrus or vellum, and all of the NT manuscripts were written in the codex form.

## Writing Materials

### Clay

The Sumerian, Babylonian, and Assyrian clay tablets are well known. Baked clay tablets were preserved easily in almost any climate. They were suitable, however, only for a straight-line form of writing such as cuneiform, and were therefore not appropriate for the rounded Aramaic form of Hebrew script.

### Papyrus

The papyrus rolls of Egypt have been used as a writing surface since the early third millennium BC. The Greeks adopted papyrus around 900 BC, and the Romans adopted its use later. The oldest extant Greek rolls of papyrus date from the fourth century BC. The inner pith of the papyrus plant was called byblos. From this comes the Greek word *biblion* ("book") and the English word "bible." The word "paper" is derived from "papyrus."

Unfortunately, papyrus is perishable, requiring a dry climate for its preservation. That is why few papyri have been discovered anywhere other than in the desert sands of Egypt. Some papyrus

fragments have also been found in the caves near the Dead Sea, where the climate is likewise sufficiently dry.

### Potsherds

Broken pieces of pottery furnished an inexpensive writing material because the supply was so abundant. The Samaria and Lachish ostraca are examples.

### Wood

Wooden tablets covered with stucco or wax were sometimes used as a writing surface. A NT example is [Luke 1:63](#).

### Leather, Parchment, and Vellum

These are all made from animal skins. Leather (tanned skins), the forerunner of parchment, has been in use about as long as papyrus, but it was rarely used because papyrus was so abundant. The ancient Hebrews probably used leather and papyrus for writing materials. The Dead Sea Scrolls were sheets of leather sewed together with linen thread. Metal scrolls also existed (e.g., copper).

Parchment, made in the beginning from sheep and goat skins, began to replace leather as early as the third century BC, though actual parchment codices date from the second century AD. To prepare parchment or refined leather, the hair was removed from the skins and the latter rubbed smooth. The most common form of book for OT and NT documents was evidently a roll or scroll of papyrus, leather, or parchment. The average length of a scroll was about 30 feet (9.1 meters), though the famous Harris Papyrus was 133 feet (40.5 meters) long. Scrolls were often stored in pottery jars ([Jer 32:14](#)) and were frequently sealed ([Rv 5:1](#)).

Vellum had a finer quality than parchment and was prepared from the skins of calves, lambs, or kids. In the fourth century AD, vellum or parchment as a material and the codex as a form became the norm.

### Paper

Paper, made from wood, rags, and certain grasses, began to replace vellum and parchment as early as the tenth century AD in the Western world, though it was used considerably earlier in China and Japan. By the 15th century, paper manuscripts were common.

## Kinds of Books

### Scroll

The scroll is a roll of papyrus, parchment, or leather used for writing a document or literary work. The papyrus scroll of Egypt can be traced as far back as 2500 BC. One of the most famous literary productions of ancient Egypt is the Book of the Dead. Jews used leather scrolls for writing the books of the Old Testament. Most of the scrolls discovered from the Dead Sea area were written on leather, with a few having been written on papyrus.

### Codex

An important development in the evolution of book production occurred with the advent of the codex in the middle of the first century. A codex was constructed much like our modern books by folding sheets of papyrus or vellum (treated animal hide) in the middle and then sewing them together at the spine. This kind of book was advantageous because it enabled the scribe to write on both sides; it facilitated easier access to particular passages (as opposed to a scroll, which had to be unrolled); and it enabled Christians to bind together all four Gospels or all Paul's epistles or any other such combination.

## Writing Utensils and Ink

Different kinds of writing implements were used, depending on the writing surfaces in use at various periods of history. Metal chisels and gravers were used for inscribing stone and metal. A stylus was used for writing cuneiform ("wedge-shaped" characters) on clay tablets. For writing on ostraca (potsherds), papyrus, and parchment, a reed was split or cut to act as a brush. In Egypt rushes were used to form a brush. Later, reeds were cut to a point and split like a quill pen. Apparently this was the type of pen or "calamus" used in NT times ([3 Jn 1:13](#)).

Ink (cf. [2 Jn 1:12](#)) was usually a black carbon (charcoal) mixed with gum or oil for use on parchment or mixed with a metallic substance for papyrus. It was kept in an inkhorn as a dried substance, on which the scribe would dip or rub his moistened pen. It could be erased by washing ([Nm 5:23](#)) or with a penknife, which was also used for sharpening pens and trimming or cutting scrolls ([Jer 36:23](#)).

*See also* Hieroglyphics; Inscriptions; Lachish Letters; Letter Writing, Ancient; Scribe; Writer.