

Resource: Bible Dictionary (Tyndale)

Aquifer Open Bible Dictionary

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Bible Dictionary (Tyndale)

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Fair Havens, Faith, Faithfulness, Falcon, Kestrel, Fall of Man, Fallow Deer, False Christs, False Messiahs, False Prophets, Family Life and Relations, Famine, Farmer, Farming, Farthing, Fast, Fasting, Father (Human), Father-in-Law, Fathom, Fawn, Fayum, Fear, Feast of Booths, Feast of Ingathering, Feast of Lights, Feast of Tabernacles, Feast of Trumpets, Feasts and Festivals of Israel, Felix, Antonius, Fellowship, Ferret, Fertility Cults, Festival, Festus, Porcius, Field of Blood, Fiery Serpent, Fig, Fig Tree, Finance, Finger (Measure), Fir Tree, Fire, Lake of, Fire, Pillar of, Firkin, Firmament, First Book of Esdras, First Day of the Week, First Jewish Revolt, Firstborn, Firstfruits, Fish, Fish Gate, Fishermen, Fitch, Flag, Flax, Flea, Flesh, Flint, Flogging, Flood Myths, Flood, the, Flour, Flower, Flute, Fly, Followers of the Way, Food and Food Preparation, Footstool, Fords of the Jordan, Foreigner, Foreknowledge, Foreordination, Forerunner, Forest of Ephraim, Forgetfulness, Land of, Forgiveness, Former Rain, Fort, Fortification, Fortunatus, Forum, Forum of Appius, Foundation Gate, Fourth Book of Ezra, Fowler, Fox, Frankincense, Freed Slaves, Freedmen, Freedom, Freedom, Liberty, Freewill Offering, Friends, Fringe, Frog, Frontlet, Frost, Fruit, Fruit of the Spirit, Fuller, Fuller's Field, Fullness, Fullness of Time, Funeral Customs, Furlong, Furnace, Furnaces, Tower of the, Furniture, Futility

Fair Havens

A small harbor located along the southern coast of Crete, an island in the Mediterranean Sea. Today it is known as Limenes Kali. Fair Havens is about 8.1 kilometers (5 miles) east of Cape Matala and is near the city of Lasea.

This harbor appears in the Bible when the apostle Paul's ship stopped there to find protection from strong winds during his journey to Rome ([Acts 27:8](#)). The ship's crew sought shelter in this harbor because the weather made it dangerous to continue sailing.

Faith

Belief in that which has no tangible proof; trust in God.

Definition of Faith

In the OT and NT, "faith" carries several meanings. It may mean simple trust in God or in the Word of God, and at other times faith almost becomes equivalent to active obedience. It may also find expression in the affirmation of a creedal statement. Thus, it also comes to mean the entire body of received Christian teaching or truth—"the truth." In [Colossians 2:7](#), the term suggests something to be accepted as a whole and embodied

in personal life. In [2 Timothy 4:7](#), Paul witnesses to having "kept the faith."

Faith in the Old Testament

The OT also strongly emphasizes faith as confidence in God's covenant or in the covenant God made with Abraham and his descendants. The call of Abraham and the promise that his descendants would be used in the history of redemption became the basis of the narratives of the OT, being seen as the working out of that covenant. Once the nation Israel was brought into being, God sustained and protected it. The exodus from Egypt is a prominent indication that God was at work restoring his people to the Promised Land. The obedience of the people of God as the proper expression of faith is seen clearly in the OT. Without seeing God, his people believed and obeyed him. Abraham left his native land to go into unknown territory. The people of Israel left Egypt following the leadership of God to a land they could not see. The promise of God gave them courage to possess the land promised to them. After the exodus, the covenant of Abraham was confirmed with the people of Israel by the sprinkling of blood ([Ex 24:6-7](#)). There was to be strict obedience to God's commands as an expression of faith. This response of human faith to the Lord's faithfulness was national and collective. There also were commands to, and instances of, personal faith.

Not only the narrative and legal portions of the OT but also the poetic and prophetic writings

emphasize faith. The Psalms abound in expressions of personal confidence in the Lord even in dark times. Habakkuk points out that “the righteous shall live by his faith” ([Hb 2:4](#)). From such instances it is clear that, as the Lord’s education of Israel proceeded, the matter of faith in God’s faithfulness became more and more a matter of individual and personal response, and it is in the Prophets that several ingredients—such as trust, obedience, fear, and certainty—blend into the understanding of such personal faith.

Faith in the New Testament

As over against the OT, where the accent is on the faithfulness of God, in the NT the emphasis is placed on the active, responding faith of the hearer to the promised, final revelation in the Messiah, Jesus. Both verb and noun regularly describe the adequate response of people to Jesus’ word and to the gospel.

The Synoptic Gospels

The most striking feature of the synoptic Gospels (quoted below from the rsv) is the use of faith without identifying its object: “If you have faith as a grain of mustard seed” ([Mt 17:20](#)); “When Jesus saw their faith” ([Mk 2:5](#)); “Your faith has saved you” ([Lk 7:50](#)). Jesus is portrayed as one who by his work and word opens the door to faith and makes faith possible. The question is not whether the faith is in Jesus or in the Father; the implication is undoubtedly both, but as with every true bearer of the Word of God, the eye of faith is turned to the One who sends.

On more than one occasion, Jesus denies the request for a miracle to substantiate his words ([Mt 12:38–39](#); [16:1–4](#)). Faith is response to the Word alone without any supporting props. No sign is to be given but the sign of Jonah. In the story of the rich man and Lazarus ([Lk 16:19–31](#)), Jesus denies the request for the spectacular and insists that the hearer must respond to the word given to him (cf. [Jn 20:29](#)). The Word demands self-surrender and commitment. Hence, the very nature of the Word and of faith becomes an obstacle to the proud and the powerful.

Faith is the medium by which the power of God is made visible. It moves mountains, heals the sick, and is the means of entrance into the kingdom. It may be mingled with doubt, as with the father who sought healing for his son (“I believe; help my unbelief!” [[Mk 9:24](#)]), or as with John the Baptist in prison, who, even with his doubts, was confirmed

by Jesus as the greatest of the offspring of woman ([Mt 11:2–15](#)). Peter’s (and the other disciples’) perception was faulty, but Jesus affirms Peter’s confession as the foundation stone of the church. The synoptic Gospels portray the early faith of the disciples in all its limitations and weaknesses, yet it is still faith in that it is their positive response to Jesus’ word and work.

The Fourth Gospel

Faith is an especially significant concept in the Gospel of John (quoted below from the rsv), though the word (in the Greek) occurs only as a verb. Quite often the reference has to do with the acceptance that something is true, that is, simple credence, or belief: “Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father in me” ([Jn 14:11](#)); “If you believed Moses, you would believe me” ([Jn 5:46](#)).

Even more significant is the special expression “to believe into” in the sense of putting one’s trust into another. The particular form of the expression is without parallel before the fourth Gospel and may well express the strong sense of personal trust in the eternal Word made flesh. In [John 3:16](#), whoever puts trust in him has eternal life. Those who put their trust in him are given power to become sons of God—to be born of God ([Jn 1:12](#)). They will never thirst ([6:35](#)); they will live, even though they die ([11:25](#)).

In other places, John speaks of trust or faith in an absolute sense, that is, without referring to the one in whom trust is placed. In [John 11:15](#) Jesus arrives after the death of Lazarus and is glad “in order that you might believe.” The outcome is going to be faith. Similarly, in the prologue ([1:7](#)), John the Baptist bears witness in order that through him all might believe. As Jesus satisfies the doubt of Thomas concerning the resurrection, he says, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe” ([20:29](#)). In these and other passages the fundamental outcome of Jesus’ witness to himself is trust.

Faith and knowledge are closely related. In [John 6:69](#) Peter says, “We have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God.” In his priestly prayer Jesus says that eternal life is to “know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent” ([Jn 17:3](#)). Also, God is seen through the eyes of faith. No one has ever seen God, but the Only Begotten has revealed him ([1:18](#)). He who has seen Jesus has seen the Father ([14:9](#)).

To believe is also expressed in the verb “receive.” Those who receive Christ are given power to become the sons of God ([Jn 1:12](#)). Trust is that form of knowing or seeing by which the glory of God ([1:14](#); [17:4](#)) is made present.

Paul's Writings

In Paul's letters (quoted below from the rsv), he writes about faith from a number of angles. He sets faith over against “works of the law” as the only and true basis for righteousness ([Rom 1-4](#); [Gal 1-4](#)) and appeals to Abraham to prove his point: “Abraham believed God and it was reckoned to him for righteousness” ([Gn 15:6](#); cf. [Rom 4:5](#); [Gal 3:6](#)). This is entirely apart from the law ([Rom 3:21](#)); righteousness is the gift of God through faith in Christ, specifically in his atoning work. Behind Paul's conviction lies his awareness of the radical and pervasive sinfulness of humans that renders each one helpless. Humanity is dead in sin but is made alive by faith in the word and work of Jesus mediated through the gospel.

Faith, then, is faith in Jesus Christ. The number of metaphors Paul employs to describe the consequences of faith is staggering. It is by faith that believers are justified ([Rom 5:1](#)), reconciled ([2 Cor 5:18](#)), redeemed ([Eph 1:7](#)), made alive ([2:5](#)), adopted into the family of God ([Rom 8:15-16](#)), re-created ([2 Cor 5:17](#)), transported into a new kingdom ([Col 1:13](#)), and set free ([Gal 5:1](#)). Faith is, for Paul, the *sine qua non* of every aspect of salvation, from the grace that convicts to the receiving of the full inheritance at the coming of the Lord.

In Paul's letters, faith is bound up with love so that the great exponent of justification by faith becomes also the articulate exponent of distinctive Christian love. To say that faith is indispensable to salvation is only part of the truth, for faith expresses itself through love: “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is of any avail, but faith working through love” ([Gal 5:6](#)); “If I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing” ([1 Cor 13:2](#)). Love is both the genesis and the ultimate expression of faith. Hence, even for Paul there can be no *total* separation between faith and works. This love of which Paul speaks is the essential fruit of the Spirit through whom the life of faith is lived. Only by virtue of the indwelling Spirit does faith find expression in love.

General Epistles

James speaks of faith as being completed by works ([Jas 2:22](#)). He opposed that concept of faith that thinks primarily of creedal assent, of believing that something is true without acting upon it. James, like Paul, assumes the primacy of faith, but he is warning against those who would draw wrong conclusions. Faith apart from works is not faith; it is barren (v [20](#)). The practical dimension of faith is the burden of much of this epistle.

The writer of Hebrews recognizes that faith has always been characteristic of the people of God and their specially called leaders. Faith makes substantial what is otherwise nebulous and uncertain; it makes evidential what is not visible. By faith the people of God have a more certain ground for their lives and their actions than the world is able to discern ([Heb 11:1](#)). The great cloud of witnesses ([12:1](#)) bear testimony by their faith to the faithfulness of God.

Faith is opened up by the Word of God, finds expression through the Holy Spirit who is given, and bears witness to the lordship of Jesus Christ.

Faithfulness

Faithfulness means staying loyal and true to someone or something. It shows itself through strong dedication and keeping promises. In the Bible's original Hebrew language, the words for “faith” and “faithfulness” are closely connected.

The main Hebrew word for faithfulness is related to our word “amen.” This word means “to make strong,” “support,” or “hold up.” In a physical sense, it is used of pillars that provide support for doors ([2 Kings 18:16](#)). Moses used this word when he said he could not support all the Israelite people by himself ([Numbers 11:12](#)). God, however, is a firm support for his people forever ([Deuteronomy 7:9](#); [Isaiah 49:7](#)).

Words like “firmness,” “constancy,” or “trustworthiness” best describe the concept of faithfulness. Trustworthiness or steadfastness are characteristics of the person one trusts. To be unfaithful is to be unworthy of confidence or belief. In the Old Testament, “faithfulness” and “truth” are close in meaning. God is consistently true, so he is the logical object of human trust ([Psalms 71:22](#); [Isaiah 61:8](#)). When applied to God, “faithfulness” indicates his unwavering commitment to his promises.

God's Faithfulness

Despite Israel's faithlessness, God showed himself reliable ([Deuteronomy 32:20](#); compare [Romans 3:3](#)). His faithfulness is great ([Lamentations 3:23](#)). He is loyal to his covenant (special agreement) and will always show his constant love to his people ([Psalms 136](#)).

Jesus Christ shows the greatest example of faithfulness in the Bible. He proved himself faithful to God the Father and in telling the truth about God ([Hebrews 3:2](#); [Revelation 1:5](#)). God calls all people to be faithful by following Jesus Christ and depending on him for all things ([Habakkuk 2:4](#); compare [Romans 1:17](#)).

Human Faithfulness

In both the Old and New Testaments, faith and faithfulness go together. Having faith means more than just agreeing that God tells the truth. It means committing to that truth and showing it through continued obedience.

Abraham's life shows us what faithfulness looks like. He believed God's words and acted on them. He showed his faith by:

- Leaving his home and country
- Living in a foreign land
- Being willing to offer his only son Isaac as God commanded

Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son Isaac shows extraordinary faithfulness to God. The New Testament praises Abraham's steady faith and tells Christians to follow his example ([Galatians 3:6-9](#); [Hebrews 11:8-10](#)). Faithfulness is not just a single action. It should shape the whole life of everyone who says they have faith in God.

Falcon, Kestrel

A kestrel is a small hawk (*Falco tinnunculus*) about 30.5 centimeters (12 inches) long. It has brown, black, and yellow feathers on its chest. In Bible times, kestrels were common in the Holy Land. They lived in villages and the countryside. They made nests on rooftops and among rocks.

Like most hawks, the kestrel can hover in the air and then drop down on its prey. It catches prey with sharp, hooked claws. Kestrels eat mice, small reptiles, and insects.

In ancient Egypt, people embalmed kestrels. They also embalmed the hunting kestrel (*Falco cherug*). This bird can be tamed and trained to hunt rabbits and other small animals. Falconry (hunting with trained hawks) was well known in ancient times. The Assyrians also practiced falconry, as shown in the records of Ashurbanipal.

Because kestrels hunt and eat other animals, they were considered ceremonially unclean ([Leviticus 11:14](#); [Job 28:7](#)). Some Bible translations use the word "kite" instead of "kestrel" in [Leviticus 11:14](#) and [Deuteronomy 14:13](#). This shows how difficult it can be to identify biblical birds exactly.

See also Birds; Kite.

Fall of Man

Transition from a condition of moral innocence and favor with God to a condition of being condemned to death, which occurred in the history of humankind with Adam's eating of the forbidden fruit.

Biblical Evidence

The narrative of Creation in [Genesis 1](#) and [2](#) affirms the distinctiveness of both man's nature and task. Man (used in this article as a generic term for male and female human beings) was created in the image of God for the purpose of communion and fellowship with God. As God's representative, he was given dominion on the earth to cultivate and use its resources for the glory of God.

In addition to the cultural mandate, man also received a specific command. He was authorized to use the vegetation of the Garden of Eden for food, but he was expressly forbidden to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The purpose of this command was to introduce into the human consciousness the radical antithesis between good and evil and to confirm man in the service of the Creator. As a faithful and loyal servant, man was to enjoy all the blessings bestowed by his Father in heaven and at last be led into the fullness of eternal life with God.

Man was made a living creature, as were the animals, but the core of his life was to be union and communion with God. Fellowship with God was to become Adam's conscious possession, in contrast to the animals that know neither the possibility of sin nor conscious communion with God. In full awareness of the evil of the alternative, man was to

serve God willingly and lovingly. His life before God was therefore to be religious rather than instinctive.

The purpose of God in giving the command not to eat the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil was to establish humans in the ways of righteousness and faith, but Satan used the command as an occasion to tempt man to rebel against God. Although there was no evil for man in being tempted, it was evil for Satan to tempt man to sin. This means that there was evil in the universe prior to the fall of man. It was the apparent purpose of Satan to subject man to himself, and through man to extend his kingdom of darkness over the earth. The fall of man and the subsequent program of redemption must be understood in the context of the cosmic conflict between God and Satan, in which the ultimate triumph of God is assured. Satan approached Adam by way of Eve, using the serpent as his instrument to entice them to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

The difference between good and evil was not concealed from man prior to the fall, though man's experiential knowledge was only of the good. Adam was to receive instruction concerning the nature of this distinction and the consequences of eating or not eating only from God. As he had received life in the beginning from his Creator, so now he was to live in obedience to every word that proceeded from the mouth of God. The purpose of the temptation was to urge independence from God. Satan called into question the truth of God and challenged his authority. He led man to think that he could determine for himself the difference between good and evil and that he could control the consequences to his own advantage. It was the temptation for man to be a god to himself.

Adam fell when he yielded to the temptation of Satan and, together with his wife, ate of the forbidden fruit. The act of rebellion was an act of disobedience, disloyalty, faithlessness, and unbelief. As the command not to eat summarized and brought to a focus all that was involved in righteousness before God, so the transgression epitomized radical apostasy from God. Undivided obedience to God gave way to whole-souled rebellion and complete revolt: the authority of God was repudiated; the goodness of God was doubted; the wisdom of God was disputed; and the truth of God was contradicted. A whole new complex of affections and emotions took possession of the heart and mind of man.

Effects of the Fall

The immediate effects of the fall are visible in the loss of boldness and joy in the presence of God and the emergence of fear and shame. They are visible also in the alienation of Adam and Eve from God. This is exemplified in the curse in relation to man, but more pointedly in the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden. The Garden was the dwelling place of righteousness, the sphere of union and communion between man and God. Expulsion was inevitable once the communion was severed by unrighteousness. As God had warned, the consequence of sin was death. Since death intervenes at every point where there is life, it works itself out also in the dissolution of the body in the grave.

The consequences of the fall are not limited to Adam and Eve but extend to all those descended from the first pair by natural generation, because there is a unique relation of solidarity existing between Adam and the rest of the race. Some theologians accent the generic connection between Adam and his descendants, while others focus on the covenant relationship of Adam as the head and representative of his posterity. The consequences of Adam's transgression for the human race are the imputation of his sin to all his descendants, their consequent liability to death, and their inheritance of a depraved nature.

The results of the fall are also manifest in the cosmos as the curse works itself out in the resistance offered to the accomplishment of the original cultural mandate. Only with the pain and danger attendant upon childbirth is the world populated, and only with arduous, toilsome labor are the food, clothing, and shelter necessary to sustain life provided.

However, the fact that death does not descend *immediately* upon man after the fall as *final* judgment is indicative of God's saving purpose for man. Adam does not hear the curse of death pronounced until he has heard the promise of a Savior ([Gn 3:15](#)).

After [Genesis 3](#), the Bible only infrequently refers to the fall of man, but this historical event is the indispensable presupposition of all that follows. The thrust of the Bible is toward the future—the widening effects of sin and the unfolding of God's remedy.

See also Adam (Person); Death; Sin.

Fallow Deer

KJV translation of roebuck, a ruminant and member of the deer family, in [Deuteronomy 14:5](#). See Animals (Deer; Gazelle).

False Christs, False Messiahs

A false christ or false messiah is someone who wrongly claims to be God's chosen leader (the Christ or Messiah). Jesus warned about false messiahs in his teachings about the future, as recorded in [Matthew 24:24](#) and [Mark 13:22](#).

Jesus taught his followers about what would happen in the future. He told them that the temple in Jerusalem would be destroyed. He also warned them that they would face people who would try to trick them and treat them badly. He especially warned them about the difficult times that would come when the temple was destroyed. During this time, they should not believe people who falsely claimed to be the promised savior ([Mark 13:21-23](#)).

These false teachers would say things like "The Messiah is here!" or "The Messiah is there!" ([Mark 13:21](#)). They would even perform miraculous signs to try to fool God's chosen people. But Jesus helped prepare his followers by teaching them that before he returns as the divine Son of Man, there would be signs in the sky ([Mark 13:24-25](#)). When he does return, everyone will be able to see his power and glory.

From history, we know that Jesus's teaching helped Christians to escape from Jerusalem before it was destroyed along with its temple in AD 70. His teaching also helped them avoid being fooled by people who falsely claimed to be the Messiah. Today, Christians continue to wait for Jesus to return in glory as the Son of Man.

See also Antichrist.

False Prophets

See Prophets, False.

Family Life and Relations

In Bible times, the family comprised members of a household, including not only parents and children,

along with other relatives and concubines, but also servants, travelers, aliens, and anyone else who happened to be within the house and was therefore under the protection of the head of the family. The family of Jacob, for example, comprised three generations ([Gn 46:8-26](#)). Biblically, the term "family" is interchangeable with "house," and "founding a house" can refer to setting up a separate dwelling as well as establishing a family. In the broader sense, "house" may refer to an entire nation ("house of Israel"). The heads of families returning from Babylon in the postexilic period controlled sometimes several hundred family members ([Ezr 8:1-14](#)). The family was a smaller part of a clan and tribe. In nomadic times the responsibilities and allegiances centered on the larger family group.

Those who belonged to the clan knew that they had to work for common interests and accept responsibility for the whole group. All members of the family were to be protected and assisted in time of need.

As the life of the Israelites became more settled, families (in the wider sense of the term) lived in villages surrounded by fields of wheat, barley, and flax, with areas of grazing land for sheep and goats. Each group of villages consisted of an intermarried, interdependent family group, such as that of the Danites of Zorah and Eshtaol ([Jgs 18:11](#)). The hard life of those days demanded a sharing of work and the loyal cooperation of the entire family for survival.

As crafts and trades developed, along with a more sedentary lifestyle, sons learned their fathers' skills and continued the family trade. Consequently, the whole village might follow a particular craft ([1 Chr 4:14](#); [Neh 11:35](#)). By specializing in such trades, however, the villagers became less self-sufficient, depending more on farmers for food and on other specialized villages for the production of cloth or pottery ([1 Chr 4:21-23](#)).

With the growth of cities, related groups lived together in specific areas. Many members of the tribes of Benjamin and Judah were listed in the census of Jerusalem by Nehemiah ([Neh 11:4-8](#)), and by the writer of Chronicles ([1 Chr 9:3-9](#)). One consequence of life in the cities was the fragmentation of the family group. As the bonds of the wider family were loosened, the unit consisted increasingly of a husband and wife with their children, living in one house. The size of houses that have been excavated precludes the idea of any larger family unit as the norm in OT societies.

During the kingdom period, King David's sons Amnon and Absalom set up their own separate houses ([2 Sm 13:7-8, 20](#)). At that time there were few slaves in Hebrew society, but they also were considered members of the family. As bonds of the wider family loosened, and the master of the household lost a degree of authority, the society became one in which the king was sovereign and all the people were his subjects.

The early kings of Israel promoted such a change in order to establish a central ruling authority for the entire country. The king's subjects fell broadly into the categories of employers and employees, corresponding to the rich and poor of society. By the eighth century BC, members of the wider family no longer worked for the communal good under the authority of the clan's head; rather, individuals worked primarily for the good of their own immediate family. Hence one's labor and devotion were focused more narrowly, and the greatest beneficiary was the king, the personal symbol of the nation.

Emphasis on the smaller family unit increased, and old duties that had been willingly accepted by the wider groups in former times came to be neglected. People did not always help relatives in times of need, and they frequently had to be reminded of their obligations, particularly toward widows and orphans ([Is 1:17](#); [Jer 7:6](#)). Family feuds also declined because members no longer felt responsible to take vengeance as a way to uphold the honor of the clan ([2 Sm 3:27](#); [16:8](#); [2 Kgs 9:26](#)). Nevertheless, Nehemiah expected Israelites to fight for their family honor ([Neh 4:14](#)). In NT times, the family was such a unit that it could be sold for a debt incurred by one of its members ([Mt 18:25](#)).

The Hebrew religion's emphasis on family participation in certain celebrations strengthened the small unit. The Passover, for example, was always celebrated as a family thanksgiving meal ([Ex 12:3-4, 46](#)). The prophet Samuel's parents made a traditional annual pilgrimage to the shrine at Shiloh ([1 Sm 2:19](#)). In modern times, a young Jewish boy's arrival at the threshold of manhood is celebrated with the Bar Mitzvah ceremony. Being so honored in the midst of a religious family preserves the ancient Hebrew tradition of family participation in religious ceremonies.

In his preaching Jesus used the family as a symbol for the relationship of God to his people ([Mt 19:14](#); [23:9](#); [Lk 8:21](#)). From the cross he handed over responsibility for the care of his mother to his disciple John ([Jn 19:27](#)).

In NT times, the communion meals in the Jerusalem church took place by households ([Acts 2:46](#)). Early Christian meetings were held in the homes of believers because of opposition by the authorities. The book of Acts contains examples of entire families being converted to Christianity ([Acts 10:24, 44-48](#); [16:15, 31-32](#)). Timothy learned the gospel from his grandmother and mother ([2 Tm 1:5](#)).

Preview

- Status of Family Members
- Marital Security
- Position of Children
- The Rights of Children
- Daily Life of the Hebrew Family
- In New Testament Times

Status of Family Members

From nomadic times, a father's authority held the family group together in their encampment, and he became the symbol of their security. In ancient patriarchal societies, the father was an absolute master who had the power of life and death over family members, ruling with unchallenged authority. Although he had extensive responsibilities for those under his care, his power was awesome and his status unquestioned.

A man's possessions included his wife, servants, slaves, and animals ([Ex 20:17](#); [Dt 5:21](#)). In fact, the phrase "to marry a wife" comes from a Hebrew root meaning "to become the master of a wife." A husband was as much the master of his wife as he was of his home or his fields. Consequently, the wife addressed him in a subservient manner, as a slave would address a master ([Gn 18:12](#); [Jgs 19:26](#)). This low status for a woman extended to a daughter's position in the ancient household. Females were always under the authority of a male relative: first, the father; then a husband. If a woman became a widow, she was subject to her husband's nearest male relative, who became her "redeemer." The bride price ([Gn 29:18, 27](#); [Ex 22:16-17](#); [1 Sm 18:25](#); [2 Sm 3:14](#)) paid by her husband was not exactly a purchase of the woman from her father, but the exchange of money did stigmatize her. The amount of a bride price depended on the father's status ([Gn 34:12](#)). The usual price was probably 20 to 30 shekels of silver. The bride received gifts of jewelry, ornaments, and clothing from her future husband, and she

occasionally enjoyed some sort of financial or material return from the bride price for her own use ([Jos 15:19](#); [Jgs 1:15](#)). When her father or husband died, the money frequently reverted to her.

An engaged woman was considered her fiancé's property just as much as if she were already married to him ([Dt 22:23-27](#)). The woman left her own family at marriage, to live with and become part of her new husband's family. Normally, any succeeding marriages would be with members of that family.

Despite the low legal status of the mother of the family, her life was not as bad as one might suppose. She was the legal wife, not an unpaid servant, and she frequently took a strong role as adviser to her husband in family affairs. Her most important function, aside from childbearing, was organization of the household, of which she was generally the respected manager. Even though the wife might have been acquired through capture in war ([Dt 21:10-14](#)), she could not be sold as a slave or daughter could ([Ex 21:7](#); [Neh 5:5](#)).

Nevertheless, her position was precarious, in that she could be disowned or divorced by her husband as the result of a simple renunciation: "She is no longer my wife, and I am no longer her husband." Perhaps he had found fault with her culinary skills, or possibly he was casting his eyes on another woman. In any event, a husband knew that if his wife did not obey even a signal or a glance, he was within his rights to obtain a divorce (cf. [Ecclus 25:26](#)). The wife, however, obtained a certain degree of protection in the letter of repudiation, by which her freedom was formally restored. Under Jewish tradition, a wife could not divorce her husband.

In matters of domestic protocol, the Hebrew wife was not introduced to her husband's guests, a tradition that subsequently led to considerable embarrassment for Abraham's wife, Sarah, and for Rebekah ([Gn 20:16](#)). A woman normally remained veiled in public ([24:65](#); [38:14](#); [Is 47:2](#)).

The imagery in [Proverbs 19:13](#) and [27:15](#) draws a vigorous comparison between a contentious woman and water dripping from a leaky roof. The OT leaves little doubt about the type of behavior expected from a woman. She was expected to be charming, soft-spoken, discreet, and calm ([Prv 9:13](#); [11:16](#), [22](#); [21:9](#)). She was also to be responsible, well-organized, intelligent, thoughtful, reverent, and a good manager of both the

household and the family purse ([31:10-31](#)). A woman should also be pious and beautiful, and in NT tradition, submissive to her husband, as befitted a woman adorned with the priceless jewel of a gentle and quiet spirit ([Ti 2:4-5](#); [1 Pt 3:1-6](#)).

The actions of a few women whose roles in life do not seem to fit the pattern of the meek, passive female pictured above, are recorded in the Bible and the Apocrypha. The books of Judith and Esther recount heroic tales of how national fortunes were saved by women. Deborah and Jael were renowned heroines ([Jgs 4-5](#)), and the kingdom of Judah was ruled by a vicious woman, Athaliah, for several years ([2 Kgs 11](#)). The women who stepped to the forefront of public life were exceptional and few in number. Judith was a rich widow, an unusual thing in Israel.

Marital Security

The security of a wife's position improved considerably when she produced her first child, particularly if it was a son. A woman's primary duty to her husband and his family was procreation ([Gn 1:28](#); [9:1](#)), and until she gave birth to a son, she feared displacement by a second wife or a concubine. Polygamous marriages were by no means rare, especially in wealthy families. They resulted in two ill-defined family groups, controlled by the mothers but under the overall authority of fathers; there were inevitable jealousies and frictions.

The legal status of a woman was consistently poor in Bible times. With no evidence at all, a husband could accuse his wife of adultery, and she was compelled to face a trial by ordeal. She had to abase herself by taking an oath, eating dust and a cereal offering, and drinking bitter water. A priest, meanwhile, made pronouncements regarding the dire results that would come to her if she were guilty: she would become an outcast with no hope of survival. But if she maintained her serenity, and if her thigh did not rot nor her abdomen swell, she was considered to have "proved" her innocence. In such an event she would go free, and her husband bore no blame whatsoever for his false accusation ([Nm 5:12-31](#)).

If a woman took a vow, it was legal only as long as her father or husband approved it. If she became a widow, the vow still remained in force and could be used against her ([Nm 30:3-15](#)).

A woman in Israel was always under the protection of a male, be it her father, grandfather, great-

grandfather, brother, husband, or some other member of her husband's family. She had few legal rights and, in contrast to Babylonian traditions, could not inherit at her husband's death. It is small wonder that widows were classed with orphans and the poor. A childless widow could on occasion return to her father's family ([Gn 38:11](#); [Lv 22:13](#); [Ru 1:8](#)), thus becoming subject again to the authority of her father. A Hebrew widow could also remain with her late husband's family. She would then come under the protection of her "redeemer," a male relative of her husband's family who assumed responsibility for her. If a husband died leaving a woman childless, it was the responsibility of the husband's brother to marry her. The first son born of such a union was then regarded as the heir of the first husband.

It was normal for a brother to accept the obligation for such a marriage (levirate). It could be refused on various grounds, but such refusal was considered dishonorable, for it was a man's duty to perpetuate his brother's name and to safeguard the family fortune.

A redeemer's responsibilities were considerable. In addition to the marriage, he was perhaps involved in avenging the family reputation, and he had to ensure that family property increased and remained within family control.

If an Israelite fell into debt and was forced to sell himself into slavery, he would normally be "redeemed" by one of his relatives ([Lv 25:47-49](#)). If in his penury an Israelite had to sell his land or his house, the redeemer had the right of first refusal over all other prospective purchasers. It was as much his duty as his right to prevent family property from passing into the hands of strangers (v [25](#)). The prophet Jeremiah bought his cousin Hanamel's field under similar circumstances ([Jer 32:6-15](#)).

The most familiar OT story of a childless widow, her "redeemer," and their levirate marriage is recorded in the book of Ruth. One of Naomi's two sons married Ruth. When Ruth was widowed, her impoverished mother-in-law, Naomi, left her home in Moab and returned to Bethlehem to sell some of the family property. Although a close relative was prepared to buy the land and keep it in the family, he was not ready to marry Ruth as well ([Ru 3:12; 4:4](#)). He knew that a son of that union would be deemed a son of the deceased, bearing the dead husband's name, and thus ultimately inheriting the land ([4:4-6](#)). The next relative in order of kinship was Boaz, who became Ruth's "redeemer." He was

prepared to accept the double obligation of purchasing the land and marrying Ruth ([4:9-10](#)).

Position of Children

Children were generally well loved, but their childhood was short and they were often regarded as laborers for the house or fields. According to the law of primogeniture, the eldest son received a double portion of the estate as his birthright ([Dt 21:17](#)). Thus, he was assured of the position of family head. Even during his father's lifetime, the eldest son took precedence over his brothers and sisters ([Gn 43:33](#)). Where twins were born, the first to emerge from the womb was considered the elder, with all the attendant privileges ([25:24-26; 38:27-30](#)).

For a serious offense, the eldest son could lose the right of primogeniture ([Gn 35:22; 49:3-4; 1 Chr 5:1](#)), or it could be surrendered voluntarily, as Esau did by selling his birthright to his brother Jacob ([Gn 25:29-34](#)). There was a law protecting the eldest son from his father's favoritism for a younger brother ([Dt 21:15-17](#)). Nevertheless, King David gave his kingdom to Solomon, his youngest son ([1 Kgs 2:15](#)).

In a family with no sons, a daughter could inherit property ([Nm 27:8](#)). Frequently, parents consulted neither sons nor daughters when marriage partners were arranged for them. Marriage was often an alliance or contract between two families, and thus the wishes and concerns of individuals were considered unimportant. Love matches were few, although occasionally a son would marry in defiance of his parents, as Esau did ([Gn 26:34-35](#)). Although it was rare for young people to express their feelings and preferences about marriage in an open fashion, Saul's daughter, Michal, made known her love for David ([1 Sm 18:20](#)).

There is no record of legal adoption among the Hebrews, but it was practiced from ancient times in Mesopotamia. It was especially useful as a means of ensuring a childless couple that their land would be tilled and that they would be cared for in their old age. All examples of adoption mentioned in the OT took place outside the land of Israel ([Ex 2:10; 1 Kgs 11:20; Est 2:7, 15](#)) and are not examples of true adoption as a lifetime member of a family.

The Rights of Children

The nature of patriarchal society made for unfortunate distinctions between male and female children. The position of a daughter, who could be

sold into slavery or sold to be the concubine of a man and then possibly sold again ([Ex 21:7-11](#)), was certainly inferior to that of a son. In the patriarchal period, however, both a son and a daughter could be put to death for disobeying the head of the family. One's children could also be sacrificed in worship rituals (see [Gn 22](#); [Jgs 11](#)). It is probable that infant sacrifice was practiced by nations neighboring Israel, including Canaan and Ammon.

The rights of children were improved considerably with the promulgation of the code of Mosaic law. A father was no longer permitted to put his child to death without referring the case to the elders ([Dt 21:18-21](#)). Both sons and daughters could be brought before such authorities and accused of being disobedient, gluttonous, or drunkards. A father's absolute authority even extended to his married son and family if they were living under his roof. The law also prohibited children from being held responsible for the crimes of their parents ([Dt 24:16](#)). In King David's time a person convicted by the community had the right of appeal to the king ([2 Sm 14:4-11](#)).

In Hebrew families both parents were held in high respect. Honor had to be given to both mother and father ([Ex 20:12](#)), and the law condemned offenses against either parent ([21:17](#); [Lv 20:9](#); [Dt 21:18](#); [27:16](#)). Respect due to the mother is a recurrent theme in the Wisdom Literature ([Prv 19:26](#); [20:20](#); cf. [Ecclus 3:1-16](#)).

Daily Life of the Hebrew Family

In the everyday affairs of a Hebrew household, it was the father's responsibility to maintain the family fortune and to be the provider. He might work in the fields, most probably with crops of flax, barley, or wheat. Or he would work at a trade, possibly as a weaver, builder, potter, dyer, fuller, or a worker in copper or bronze. If he lived near the shore, he might be a fisherman.

The father was also responsible for the religious well-being of the family. It was his duty to take over his sons' education from the mother at an early age, teaching them the tenets of Hebrew religion ([Ex 10:2](#); [12:26](#); [Dt 4:9](#); [6:7](#)). He also explained all the facets of the law and the interwoven history of the nation.

The father was the disciplinarian of the family, with the rod being used to drive home the lessons taught ([Prv 13:24](#); [22:15](#); [29:15-17](#)). Though children were loved and valued, they were not pampered

([Ecclus 30:9-12](#)). In postexilic times education also took place within the precincts of the synagogue, and shortly before the time of Christ, a general elementary education was introduced. It was also imperative that a father teach his sons a trade, normally his own, for a man without a trade either starved or became a thief. Another important paternal responsibility was to provide wives for male offspring in the household.

The mother was responsible for her sons' and daughters' early education ([Prv 1:8](#); [6:20](#)), teaching them religious songs and prayers as soon as they could talk. A father took over the education of his sons, but the mother continued with the daughters, training them to spin, weave, cook, clean, trim the lamps, and generally to become competent in all the household duties ([31:13-31](#)).

With little furniture, keeping a house clean meant sweeping the floors to keep them free from dust and dirt. Cooking was at once simple and difficult. It was simple in that much of the food was cooked in the form of a soup or stew, or else made into a cake and cooked on a griddle. It was difficult in that the corn had to be ground by hand and bread was baked daily.

A mother was expected to take wool, card it, spin it, and often weave and make clothes for her family. In addition, she would help her husband in the fields at harvesttime. Because many families had one or more olive trees, a few grapevines, and fig trees, the mother would also assist in picking the fruit. She would sometimes work at the press when the olives or grapes were being processed. Frequently the treading of grapes in the family vat would be done together by husband and wife. Drawing water from the well was considered a menial task and was generally the wife's responsibility, although sometimes it was assigned to the children ([Gn 24:15-16](#)).

As in all societies, there was a time when children laughed and played together ([Zec 8:5](#); [Mt 11:16](#)), although childhood and adolescence were not recognized as specific stages of development. Children were considered as sucklings if under three, but were regarded as boys or girls when they were able to take care of themselves. A small child sat on his mother's lap and was played with ([Is 66:12](#)). There is no evidence of organized sports for children. Toys, including whistles, rattles, dolls, and miniature cooking utensils, have been excavated at Palestinian sites.

As soon as a boy was old enough, he took his place in the family and accepted his appointed task. Among other things, children were expected to gather fuel ([Jer 7:18](#)). Young boys and girls tended the flocks. The sheep had to be protected from marauding wild beasts, guarded against their own folly when they wandered near crevices, steered toward good pasture and water, and carried home when sick or injured ([Gn 29:6](#); [Ex 2:16](#)). The care of cattle was also the responsibility of children ([1 Sm 16:11](#)). Of necessity, boys were trained in the various arts of war.

Children sometimes joined their fathers in the fields, and their presence was always welcome. From earliest times, boys in particular would watch their fathers until they too picked up a tool or implement to try their skill; girls watched and learned from their mothers. Young children frequently listened to the talk of the elders at the city gates or in the villages. A visit to a sanctuary at festival time was a family affair, furnishing an ideal learning experience. As a child, Jesus accompanied his parents, Mary and Joseph, to the temple in Jerusalem ([Lk 2:42-47](#)).

Young girls were surprisingly free to go about their appointed tasks. They were not secluded or veiled and could visit uninhibited with friends and neighbors ([Gn 34:1](#)). They were also able to converse with men without embarrassment ([24:15-25](#); [29:11-12](#); [1 Sm 9:11-13](#)).

Mealtimes were strictly family times. It is doubtful whether a meal comparable to a breakfast was eaten, and a farmer would probably have a light lunch in the fields. The main meal of the day was prepared by the mother, and it would be eaten in the early evening. Although the variety of food available was limited, its preparation was time-consuming.

Feast times were periods of great religious significance and were also the days when family members participated in the symbolic rituals of their faith. Among the Israelites several kinds of food were fundamental to their religious ritual. Family unity and the national religion were molded together by special meals in the home.

Daylight played an important part in the daily habits of the people in antiquity. Although oil lamps were readily available in later periods, it was customary to rise with the sun and go to bed relatively soon after dark. The wife would probably be up before sunrise and might continue her labor after dark.

In New Testament Times

By NT times, for those who followed the Greek and Roman style, life became more elegant. Despite that, the status of many family members did not change substantially. Wealthier families had more slaves, and the children were more likely to have formal education, sometimes spending less effort on family chores. Even in Roman times, however, the father still had a legal right to accept or reject his child.

The status of the woman had definitely improved by the NT period. A Roman matron was highly respected and exerted a strong influence over her husband. She was not sequestered in a particular section of the house, as a Greek woman was, but managed and supervised tasks in any part of her home. She helped her husband in business, had her own place in theaters, games, and religious festivals, and sometimes managed her own property. Palestinian women began to enjoy a new status and dignity as the result of Jesus' attitude toward women and its influence on the early Christian church.

See also Education; Marriage, Marriage Customs; Sex, Sexuality; Widow; Woman.

Famine

A famine is when many people in an area do not have enough food to eat, usually lasting for months or years. During a famine, crops fail to grow, and food becomes very hard to find. This causes great suffering for the people living in that area.

Famine has always been part of human life, along with other disasters (like war and disease). Sometimes there was enough rain, but other times rain would fall too early, too late, or too little ([Leviticus 26:19](#); [Amos 4:7-8](#)). People in the Near East, including the Israelites, thought famine was a judgment from God. Since God is the Creator and Sustainer, he controls the natural world. Famine was not an accident. Whether a famine was caused by lack of rain, hail, or any other event, God was the cause.

What Causes Famines in the Ancient Near East?

The most common cause of famine was lack of rain. These famines occurred in the time of Abraham and Isaac ([Genesis 12:10](#); [26:1](#)). Joseph was very worried about surviving the famines in Egypt

([Genesis 41-47](#)). The Nile River was very important for growing food in ancient Egypt. The river brought water from distant mountain regions to water the crops. If not enough water came down the river, people in Egypt would not have enough food to eat.

Besides lack of rain, famine could also be caused by:

- Hail and thunderstorms ([Exodus 9:28](#); [1 Samuel 12:17](#))
- Locusts and other pests ([Exodus 10:15](#); [Amos 4:9](#))
- Invasion by foreign armies ([Deuteronomy 28:53](#); [2 Kings 6:25](#); [25:3](#); [Lamentations 4:9-10](#))

When famines happened, diseases often spread among the people ([1 Kings 8:37](#); [Jeremiah 14:12](#); [21:9](#)).

How Did Famines Affect People in the Bible?

Famines affected the lives of many people in the Bible. It changed the lives of Naomi and Ruth ([Ruth 1:1](#)). God raised Joseph to a position of power during a famine. Famine also affected the lives of:

- King David ([2 Samuel 21:1](#))
- Elijah ([1 Kings 17](#))
- Elisha ([2 Kings 4:38](#); [6:25](#))
- Zedekiah ([2 Kings 25:2-3](#))

Why Did God Send Famines?

God sent famines for different reasons:

- To warn ([1 Kings 17:1](#))
- To correct ([2 Samuel 21:1](#))
- To punish ([Jeremiah 14:12, 15](#))

The famines predicted by Jesus and the writer of Revelation were signs of judgment ([Mark 13:8](#); [Revelation 18:8](#)).

Farmer, Farming

A farmer is a person who grows crops or raises animals. Farming is the practice of growing crops and raising animals for food and other resources.

See Agriculture.

Farthing

1. The King James Version translation for a small coin. A copper coin which was equal to one-sixteenth of the silver denarius ([Matthew 10:29](#); [Luke 12:6](#)). A denarius was one day's wage.

2. The King James Version translation for another word translated "penny." A coin worth one-fourth of #1 above, or one-sixty-fourth of the denarius ([Matthew 5:26](#); [Mark 12:42](#)).

See also Coins; Money.

Fast, Fasting

Eating sparingly or abstaining from food altogether, either from necessity or desire. In medical terms, fasting is the detoxification of the body through the restriction of food.

Spiritual fasting entails setting aside activities as well as reducing the intake of food and replacing these activities with the exercise of prayer and preoccupation with spiritual concerns. The NT word that is translated "fasting" literally means one who has not eaten, one who is empty.

Three types of fast are generally recognized: *normal*, in which there is no intake of food for a prescribed period of time, though there may be an intake of liquids; *partial*, in which the diet is limited, though some food is allowed; and *absolute*, in which there is a total abstinence from food and liquids in all forms.

In the OT the fast was regarded as an act of self-renunciation designed to mollify God's wrath and move him to act in gracious disposition. In times of emergency, the people fasted to persuade God to spare them from impending calamity ([Jgs 20:26](#); [1 Sm 7:6](#); [1 Kgs 21:9](#); [2 Chr 20:3](#); [Jer 36:6, 9](#)). Individuals fasted in the hope that God would liberate them from trouble ([2 Sm 12:16-20](#); [1 Kgs 21:27](#); [Pss 35:13](#); [69:10](#)). Fasting was accompanied by prayer ([Ezr 8:21](#); [Neh 1:4](#); [Jer 14:12](#)).

Regular fasts were usually for one day, morning to evening, with food permitted at night ([Jgs 20:26](#); [1 Sm 14:24](#); [2 Sm 1:12](#)), although there are reports of longer fasts, such as Mordecai's call for a three-day fast (night and day specified—[Est 4:16](#)) and the seven-day fast at Saul's death ([1 Sm 31:13](#); [2 Sm 3:35](#)). Among special fasts were Moses' 40 days on

Mt Sinai ([Ex 34:28](#)) and Daniel's three-week fast prior to receiving visions ([Dn 9:3](#); [10:3,12](#)).

In general, in the OT, fasting was abused. Instead of a sincere act of self-renunciation and submission to God, fasting became externalized as an empty ritual in which a pretense of piety was presented as a public image. Hence, the prophets cry out against the callousness of such hypocrisy. Jeremiah records the Lord as saying, "Though they fast, I will not hear their cry" ([Jer 14:12](#), rsv; see [Is 58:1-10](#)).

The setting for the NT understanding of fasting lies in the development of the rabbinic tradition that grew out of the period between the Testaments, during which fasting became the distinguishing mark of the pious Jew, even though it was largely still ritualistic. Vows were confirmed by fasting ([Tb 7:12](#)), remorse and penitence were accompanied by fasting ([2 Esd 10:4](#)), and prayer was supported by fasting ([1 Macc 3:47](#)). Special fast days were observed, some voluntarily imposed ([2 Macc 13:12](#); [2 Esd 5:13](#)).

This developed into a rabbinic tradition in which fasting was viewed as meritorious and therefore became the primary act of demonstrating piety. It was, however, a false piety consisting mostly in the externals of fastidious observance of fast days, both public and private. With the exception of ascetic groups such as the disciples of John the Baptist, the prevailing mood of fasting when Jesus appeared on the scene was one of mournful sadness, an obligatory necessity, a self-imposed requirement to produce the discipline of self-denial.

Jesus' understanding of fasting is significant in that it represents a shift in the role of fasting. His initial attitude undoubtedly reflected the fact that he grew up participating in the regular fasts and therefore shared the prevailing teachings of his day. Yet his mature teaching about fasting breaks with the rabbinic tradition. Two accounts relating to Jesus and fasting are important: his fast as a part of his temptation in the wilderness ([Mt 4:2](#); [Lk 4:2](#)), and his teaching about fasting in the Sermon on the Mount ([Mt 6:16-18](#)).

His temptation was born out of the context of struggle. Immediately after his baptism, he was cast out into the wilderness by the Spirit to face the temptation of Satan. In the midst of his temptation, he fasted and prayed, thereby showing his dependence upon God.

Jesus' words about fasting in the Sermon on the Mount constitute a radically different approach to voluntary fasting. In condemning the type of fasting

that seeks favor with men by an ostentatious display of outward piety, Jesus taught instead a robust faith that sought genuineness of relation to God through a pure heart. Jesus does not condemn fasting as such, nor does he forbid it. He does, however, give it a new meaning. Fasting is service to God.

This new understanding of fasting is set within the context of the dawning of the time of salvation. The Bridegroom is here. It is a time of joy, not of sorrow. Consequently, the prevailing mood of fasting as mournful stress and pretended piety is inconsistent with the mood of the new age that has begun.

Jesus' teachings may be summarized: Fasting is transcended by the beginning of the eschatological times. The rule of the Messiah has broken the power of the evil age. Fasting would appear to be no longer consistent with the spirit of thanksgiving and joy that marks the framework of the new age, since the Christian life is not to be dominated by tragedy but by joy and happiness. Yet the kingdom is not fully realized. There is a place for fasting, properly understood. Fasting must be done within the context of the joyful thanksgiving of the new life in Christ. The context of fasting is prayer. It should conform to the same conditions as prayer: unostentatious quietness before God, arising out of gratitude, expressing thanksgiving, grounded in faith, as a means of spiritual growth.

See also Prayer.

Father (Human)

A father is a man who is the parent of a child. In the Bible, the word "father" can also refer to ancestors or forefathers, meaning earlier generations or patriarchs.

See Family Life and Relations.

Father-in-Law

A father-in-law is the father of a person's husband or wife. For example, if a woman marries a man, her father-in-law is her husband's father. Similarly, a man's father-in-law is the father of his wife.

See Family Life and Relations.

Fathom

A unit of water measure equal to about 1.8 meters (six feet). Sailors used fathoms to measure the depth of water. During Paul's journey to Rome, the sailors measured the water depth as their ship approached land during a storm ([Acts 27:28](#)).

See Weights and Measures.

Fawn

A fawn is a young animal, usually a deer.

See Animals (Deer).

Fayum

Egypt's largest oasis, about 70 miles (112.6 kilometers) southwest of Cairo. In the center is Lake Qarun, Egypt's only large inland lake, which today covers 90 square miles (144.8 square kilometers), is about 17 feet (5.2 meters) deep, and has a surface 147 feet (44.8 meters) below the level of the Mediterranean Sea. Lake Qarun is surrounded by about a half million acres of farmland. In ancient times Qarun evidently was much larger than it is today.

Many ancient writers, following fifth-century BC Greek historian Herodotus, believed that the lake, which made the Fayum possible, was an artificial construction. But modern investigations have concluded that it was spring-fed. Sometime after 2000 BC, during the Middle Kingdom period of Egypt, a canal was dug with sluice gates to connect Lake Qarun and the Nile River. Rulers during that period also constructed an irrigation system and brought much of the area under cultivation.

Prosperity of the Fayum declined when Ramses II and others used buildings of the area for stone quarries. The Ptolemies restored its prosperity during the third and second centuries BC, when many Greek colonists arrived. In addition to exploration of the monuments of the Fayum, archaeologists have unearthed quantities of papyrus literature written in Greek. These papyri have helped to clarify the meaning of some words used in the NT.

Fear

An emotional feeling of anxiety or dread about something bad that might happen in the future. Some people think fear is what drives others toward religion, but true religion involves a desire to draw near to God, not just fear. People do not usually want to get close to someone or something they are afraid of.

In the Bible, fear means more than just feeling scared or terrified. While this is part of its meaning, especially when talking about the fear of God, it also includes a sense of awe and deep respect for God.

There is a place for fear in the sense of being anxious or concerned, especially in relation to God. The Bible says, "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" ([Hebrews 10:31](#)). Jesus taught that we should fear God because He has the power to punish sin and destroy people completely ([Luke 12:4-5](#)).

Fear can help people understand how deeply flawed their souls are and how much they need God's forgiveness. The first example of this kind of fear is in [Genesis 3](#), where Adam and Eve hid from God after they disobeyed Him. Their fear made sense because they knew they deserved judgment for what they did. Fear naturally comes as a result of sin ([Genesis 3:10; 4:13-14; Proverbs 28:1](#)).

The Bible gives many examples of deeply anxious people, like Cain, Saul, Ahaz, and Pilate. Fear grabs hold of the wicked ([Job 15:24](#)), surprises hypocrites ([Isaiah 33:14](#)), and overwhelms evildoers ([Psalm 73:19](#)). Their lives, lacking faith, are full of fear ([Revelation 21:8](#)). When God moved against Pharaoh's army, they were paralyzed by fear ([Exodus 15:16](#)). Job's friend Bildad described people as being driven to their knees by God's judgment ([Job 18:11](#)).

Fear can either stop people from acting or make them behave in ways they would not otherwise. This is especially true for people who are not fully committed to God.

- Saul disobeyed God because he was afraid of what the people would think ([1 Samuel 15:24](#))
- The parents of the blind man Jesus healed were afraid to speak up for Jesus because they feared the Jewish leaders ([John 9:22](#))
- In the parable of the talents, a man's fear kept him from doing his duty ([Matthew 25:25](#))

Jesus Christ, through His death, resurrection, and ongoing work for believers in heaven, is the one who frees people from fear. The apostle Paul told the Romans ([Romans 8:15](#)) that when they became Christians, they received the Holy Spirit, not as a spirit of fear and slavery, but as the spirit of adoption. This means they could now call God "Abba" (an Aramaic term used by Jewish children to address their fathers). This is the same word Jesus used to speak to His Father and Christians because they are part of God's family, can also use this word when speaking to God ([Galatians 4:6](#)). Those who receive God's love have a powerful force to drive away their fears ([1 John 4:18](#)).

Unnecessary fear can harm the work of God's people. God warned Jeremiah not to be afraid of his opponents ([Jeremiah 1:8](#)) because if he gave in to fear, God would allow trouble to come upon him ([Jeremiah 1:17](#)). God gave similar commands for courage to Ezekiel, who lived at the same time as Jeremiah, and to many others ([Joshua 1:7-9](#); [Ezekiel 2:6](#)). Even godly people can be tempted to fear and may sometimes feel overwhelmed ([Psalm 55:5](#)). That is why God often tells His people not to give in to fear ([Isaiah 8:12](#); [John 14:1, 27](#)). Instead, they are encouraged to place their worries in the hands of their Redeemer, who cares deeply for His people ([1 Peter 5:7](#)). Faith is the key to overcoming fear, as Isaiah says: "You will keep in perfect peace the steadfast of mind, because he trusts in You" ([Isaiah 26:3](#)). The psalmists also emphasize the role of faith in defeating fear ([Psalms 37:1](#); [46:2](#); [112:7](#)).

True faith involves deep respect for God, known as "fear of God" in the Bible. Understanding God's power is key to meaningful faith ([Psalms 5:7](#); [89:7](#)). Christians are free from fearing:

- People ([Hebrews 13:6](#))
- Death ([2:15](#))
- Life in general ([2 Timothy 1:6-7](#))

Yet, they should always respect God. This respect brings wisdom ([Psalm 111:10](#)) and guidance ([Ephesians 5:21](#); [Philippians 2:12](#)). Loving God leads to this fear through Scripture study ([Proverbs 2:3-5](#)).

Ancient Israelites showed reverence by following God's commands ([Deuteronomy 6:2](#)). Cornelius and his family were called "God-fearers" for their respect ([Acts 10:2](#)). True reverence leads to good deeds and holy living ([2 Corinthians 7:1](#)). This fear brings joy ([Psalm 2:11](#)) and life ([Proverbs 14:27](#)). It is more valuable than riches ([Proverbs 15:16](#)). God delights in those who respect Him ([Psalm 147:11](#)).

Feast of Booths

The Feast of Booths is one of the three great festivals of Israel. This festival celebrated the end of the farming year when all crops had been harvested. During this festival, the Jewish people built temporary shelters called "booths" to remember how God saved them from Egypt ([Leviticus 23:39-43](#)). These booths (or huts) were similar to the temporary shelters the Israelites lived in during their journey through the wilderness after leaving Egypt.

See also Feasts and Festivals of Israel.

Feast of Ingathering

The Feast of Ingathering was one of the three major festivals celebrated by the people of Israel. It was also called the Feast of Booths or the Feast of Tabernacles. This festival celebrated the end of the farming year when all crops had been harvested ([Leviticus 23:39-43](#)).

During this celebration, the Israelites lived in temporary shelters made of tree branches for seven days. This reminded them of the time when their ancestors lived in similar shelters in the wilderness.

See Feasts and Festivals of Israel.

Feast of Lights

Alternate name for Hanukkah, one of Israel's festivals celebrating the rededication of the temple in 164 BC. *See* Feasts and Festivals of Israel.

Feast of Tabernacles

The Feast of Tabernacles, also called the Feast of Booths, Shelters, or Ingathering, was one of the three most important festivals in Israel. It celebrated the completion of the farming year. During this festival, the Jewish people built temporary shelters called "booths" or "tabernacles" to remember how God saved them from Egypt ([Leviticus 23:33-43](#)). These temporary shelters were similar to the ones the Israelites lived in during their journey through the wilderness after leaving Egypt.

See Feasts and Festivals of Israel.

Feast of Trumpets

A holy day for the Israelites that marked the beginning of the fall feasts. It was a day of rest when no regular work was done. During this festival, the Israelites sounded trumpets to call for a time of remembrance, reflection, and preparation for the upcoming Day of Atonement. The festival was a time to remember God's covenant with them, particularly the agreement made at Mount Sinai ([Leviticus 23:23-25](#)).

See Feasts and Festivals of Israel.

Feasts and Festivals of Israel

Occasions of public or private rejoicing to commemorate some significant event or personage. The element of celebration has a special meaning in the cycle of religious occasions and the rites and ceremonies associated with these particular days. While the idea of a feast commonly implies a banquet with plenteous food and drink, this element is not indispensable. Sometimes there is only a token amount, as in the celebration of Holy Communion.

In contemporary usage "festival" usually refers to activities extending over a period of time, while "feast" indicates one part of the celebration, often a meal. However, in religious usage, both ancient and

modern, the two words are used interchangeably. The ancient Hebrews employed the words *mo'ed* ("seasons") and *hag* for their great public celebrations, while feasts of a more private nature were commonly described by the term *mishteh*. The majority of English translations of Scripture do not differentiate between these words.

Feasts and Their Functions

Each festival places great emphasis on community participation and on the continuity of social or religious tradition, especially where the celebrations are elements of a regular civil or religious calendar. Without community backing, even in a family celebration, no festival can be successful. When there is communal participation, a festival can reinforce the individual and community memory of specific occasions, and can perpetuate that store of recollection over years and generations. Such shared memory has a cohesive effect upon a cooperating community, large or small, and serves to establish the traditions by which the group lives. If the festival commemorates a particular event or celebrates some lofty ideal, that theme becomes more firmly embedded in the minds of the participants by being associated repeatedly with the rites and ceremonies performed. The feasts of the ancient Hebrews had this positive function. The great festivals of their religious calendar commemorated specific occasions when God had reached out in power to intervene for his people or had provided for them in their distress. By celebrating these feasts on a regular basis, the Hebrews continually affirmed that their God had directed their destiny. Their repeated rehearsal of God's help and love for them reminded them that he was still able to sustain them. Especially in times of hardship, it pointed to the reality of God's presence and activity among them. Faith sustained by this means furnished an invaluable spiritual dimension to the life of the nation and provided a sense of continuity under divine provision and guidance. Only when corrupt or pagan elements were introduced into festive occasions did this important ingredient of national life begin to lose its vitality.

Old Testament Festivals

General Festivals

These occasions were surprisingly numerous in Israel, considering the rather austere mode of life reflected in much of the OT. No doubt such celebrations offset or compensated for the

hardships and insecurities of existence in the ancient Near East, and the Israelites made the most of every opportunity. A wedding was one of the most obvious occasions for celebration, and it is not surprising that a feast was prepared for the marriage of Rachel and Jacob ([Gn 29:22](#)) in which the whole neighborhood participated. Just how long this particular feast lasted is unknown, but some marriage festivals continued for a week, as in the case of the marriage between Samson and the woman of Timnah ([Jgs 14:17](#)). Wine that makes glad man's heart ([Ps 104:15](#)) was consumed freely on such occasions.

Birthdays were often observed in a festive spirit, especially where a royal person was concerned ([Gn 40:20](#)). Solomon's dream was commemorated with a feast provided for his servants ([1 Kgs 3:15](#)), and when the temple was dedicated, the occasion was celebrated for a full week ([8:65](#)). Kings and queens held feasts periodically to mark certain occasions or to express goodwill (cf. [Est 1:3](#); [2:18](#); [5:4, 14](#); [7:2, 7](#); [Dn 5:1](#)). Herdsmen traditionally made a feast for the shearing of the first sheep ([Dt 18:4](#)).

Preexilic Festivals

In addition to the general festivals, which were frequently of a secular nature, communal feasts were prescribed for the Israelites that had a specifically spiritual significance. They were meant to emphasize the activity of God on behalf of his people and to remind them that continued divine blessing depended upon their obedience to his will. The catalog of festivals in [Leviticus 23:2](#) began with an injunction to observe the Sabbath. The seventh day, in which God ceased from creating ([Gn 2:3](#)), was holy, though it is difficult to determine the extent to which it was kept until the time of Moses ([Ex 20:8-11](#)). From that time on, Sabbath observance stressed refraining from all work so as to commemorate properly God's own rest from creative activity ([31:17](#)) and his deliverance of his people from bondage in Egypt ([Dt 5:12-15](#)). Sabbath celebration was the sign of a special relationship between God and the Israelites. During this 24-hour period, even trivial tasks like making a fire ([Ex 35:3](#)) or gathering wood ([Nm 15:32-33](#)) were prohibited on pain of death. Journeys of any distance also came under the Sabbath ban ([Ex 16:29](#)). Special offerings were part of the observance ([Nm 28:9-10](#)), and the bread of the Presence was replaced in the tabernacle ([Lv 24:5-8](#)). Despite the restrictions on activity, the Sabbath was meant to symbolize a time of happiness and security in the presence of God (cf.

[Is 58:13-14](#)), since its observance would bring blessing to the individual and to the whole land.

Festival of the New Moon

The new moon was a monthly celebration based on the lunar calendar. It was especially appropriate for an agricultural people, since everyone could tell when the moon was new. Special offerings were prescribed for this festival, consisting of a burnt sacrifice, a grain offering, and a drink offering ([Nm 28:11-15](#)). In addition, a male goat was sacrificed to God as a sin offering, and trumpet blasts were sounded over the sacrificial offerings as a memorial before God ([10:10](#)). The sacrifices prescribed for the new moon festival were significantly greater than those required in [Numbers 28:9-10](#) for the weekly Sabbath.

This lunar feast was popular throughout Israelite history. During the monarchy, the Levites were required to assist the Aaronic priests at the new moon festival, as well as on the Sabbath ([1 Chr 23:29-31](#)). The preexilic prophets may well have taken advantage of the large gatherings to give guidance to the people or proclaim prophetic oracles (cf. [2 Kgs 4:23](#)), though to what extent this was done is uncertain. Not everyone found the period of rest and celebration valuable, however, and Amos ([Am 8:5](#)) complained about those avaricious Israelites who felt that such observances interfered with the business of making a living. The feast could not be observed when the Judeans were in exile in Babylonia (cf. [Hos 2:11](#)), but under Ezra and Nehemiah, its observance was restored ([Neh 10:33](#)). In [Isaiah 66:22-23](#) it was related to Israel's final destiny and was an accepted part of the ordinances for Ezekiel's ideal temple ([Ez 45:17](#)).

The purpose of the festival was to enhance the unity of national life by reminding the Israelites that God's covenant with their ancestors was permanent and still binding upon the nation. It also stressed the loving nature and providence of a God who could begin such a relationship and carry out his promises with complete faithfulness (cf. [Ps 104:19](#)).

The Festival of Trumpets

The Festival of Trumpets was celebrated on the first day of the seventh new moon. This month, subsequently named Tishri, was especially holy, and for this reason was governed by certain regulations different from those of ordinary new moon festivals. The trumpets were blown on the first day ([Lv 23:24](#)) as the animal and cereal

sacrifices were offered. From [Numbers 29:2-6](#) it appears that the offerings required for this particular feast exceeded those prescribed for normal Sabbath sacrifice, but were somewhat less than those required for the regular new moon festival (cf. [Nm 28:11](#)). This feast was to be observed as a day of solemn rest and as a holy convocation, and the trumpets were sounded as a triumphant memorial to God's great provision for his people through the Sinai covenant.

The seventh month was particularly sacred, partly because of its place in the hallowed cycle of sevens, but also because the Day of Atonement (or Yom Kippur) and the Feast of Tabernacles, or Booths (Shelters), occurred during this period. The latter feast followed the Day of Atonement by some five days ([Lv 23:33](#)), and its joyful character served to offset somewhat the solemnity of the annual penitential occasion when the nation confessed its collective sins and saw them banished symbolically into the wilderness as the scapegoat was driven from the congregation.

The Sabbatical Year

Another festival closely connected with the institution of the Sabbath was the sabbatical year. At the end of each cycle of six years, the following 12 months were observed as a "sabbath of rest for the land." During this interval, the ground was to lie fallow ([Ex 23:11](#)) without any form of cultivation, and whatever sprouted and grew from it naturally was assigned to the poor and needy ([Lv 25:6](#)). This provision for the land itself constituted one of the most important ecological principles of Scripture. Like God's people, the land was holy, and just as they needed to have regular intervals of rest from daily work in order to regain their energy and spiritual vitality through worship, so the ground needed to rest and recuperate from the strain of constant cultivation. The festival reminded the Israelites that the land on which they lived had been given to them by God in fulfillment of his covenant undertaking to provide richly for their physical needs (cf. [Dt 8:7-10](#)). To keep the Israelites from experiencing any shortages or other hardships during the Year of Sabbath, God promised that in the year immediately preceding the sabbatical period, the land would bear fruit to suffice for the next three years ([Lv 25:21](#)). This assurance was based upon the experience of the wilderness wanderings, when on the sixth day of the week sufficient manna appeared to last through the Sabbath ([Ex 16:5](#)).

In this festival period, God's absolute claim over the land was reaffirmed (cf. [Lv 25:23](#)), and the faith of the nation in God's ability to provide for future needs was reinforced. The provisions that freed the land for a year from agricultural bondage were paralleled in the seventh year of rest by those requiring liberation of slaves and debtors. These underprivileged members of society were to be released from their obligations of servitude. As a result, men and women who had become slaves for one reason or another were given personal liberty ([Ex 21:2-6](#)), and under proclamation of the Lord's release, the provisions applying to debt were rescinded ([Dt 15:1-6](#)). The sabbatical year seems to have been a regular part of preexilic Israelite life, although some abuses were noted in [Jeremiah 34:8-22](#). There the prophet took advantage of the opportunity presented to instruct the people in the nature and purpose of the sabbatical year ordinance. He also warned the wayward Judeans that because they had disobeyed the commands of God in denying proper liberty to their slaves, they would have their own freedom taken away in a far more serious manner by being carried captive to Babylonia after seeing their land destroyed. The lesson was not lost upon those who returned from exile, for under the administration of Nehemiah, the Jews bound themselves by a covenant to observe the principle of the sabbatical year ([Neh 10:31](#)). This undertaking evidently took its impetus from the reading of the law of Moses at the Feast of Booths (Shelters), which coincidentally occurred at the beginning of the sabbatical year ([Neh 8:13-18](#)).

Jubilee

Still another feast based on the principle of the sabbath was the Year of Jubilee, or Pentecostal year ([Lv 25:8-55; 27:17-24](#)). As the sabbatical year was related to the concept of the seventh day, so the Pentecostal (50th) year marked the completion of a cycle of seven sabbatical years. The commencement of a jubilee year was proclaimed on the Day of Atonement throughout the land by means of trumpet blasts ([Lv 25:9](#)). The activities that took place during the Pentecostal year were similar to those prescribed for the sabbatical year. A special feature was that land that had been sold during the preceding 49 years was returned to its original owners, a procedure that sometimes involved financial adjustments. To prevent abuse of the process through opportunism or speculation, the Hebrews were instructed to deal fairly and honestly with one another in the fear of God, who was the real owner of the land ([Lv 25:14-17](#)). As with the sabbatical year, God promised to make

provision before the jubilee year so that no one would suffer hardship. It was during the Year of Jubilee that those who were slaves in Hebrew households were given their liberty, so that everyone in the land would commence a new cycle of sabbatical years on the same footing, as free persons under God.

Seasonal Festivals

Three annual festivals that followed the seasons of the year rather than phases of the moon furnished important occasions for commemorating God's power and provision in national life. These festivals were designated by the term *hag*, indicating a festival usually observed by some sort of pilgrimage. These three festivals were prescribed in [Exodus 23:14–17](#) and [Deuteronomy 16:16](#), and consisted of the Feast of Passover and Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Weeks (Pentecost), and the Festival of Booths (Tabernacles). On these occasions, all the males of Israel were commanded to make pilgrimage to the sanctuary and celebrate these festivals ([Ex 12:14](#)). The Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread were originally separate ordinances, but since the latter always followed immediately upon the Passover rite, they naturally blended into a single festival.

Passover

The Passover was of supreme theological significance for the Israelites, since it marked one of the most momentous acts of divine intervention in their history, the beginning of their deliverance from bondage in Egypt when, in the final plague, God destroyed the firstborn of the Egyptians but spared those Israelites whose homes had blood smeared on the doorposts ([Ex 12:11–30](#)). God commanded that the day was to be observed as a memorial feast (v [14](#)), and the next Passover celebration occurred in the Sinai Desert ([Nm 9:1–5](#)). In the Hebrew calendar the Passover festival came in the first month, called Abib in [Deuteronomy 16:1](#), but known after the exile as Nisan (cf. [Neh 2:1](#)). The Passover rite took place the 14th evening ([Lv 23:5](#)), and this was followed by a seven-day period during which nothing leavened was to be eaten. The principle for removing all leaven from bread was similar to that underlying the draining of blood from animal flesh. Both leaven and blood had quickening power and were to be kept separate as an offering to God. The first and seventh days of this period were marked by a holy assembly, during which the only work permitted was the preparation of food ([Ex 12:16](#)).

This period when unleavened bread was eaten was described as a festival because it opened the seven-week period of grain harvest ([Dt 16:9](#)). During this feast, special burnt sacrifices were offered, followed with a sheaf of newly harvested barley at the Feast of Firstfruits. By NT times the festivals of Passover and Unleavened Bread were well-attended celebrations and were known as the “days of unleavened bread” ([Lk 22:1](#); [Acts 12:3](#)). The theme of Israel's deliverance from the power of Egypt by divine intervention assured the Israelites that God was always ready to act on behalf of a faithful and obedient covenant people. It also reminded them that they had once been slaves ([Dt 16:12](#)). In Israelite life the early Passover and Unleavened Bread observances were comparatively simple in character, but during the monarchy more elaborate Passover rituals came into use (cf. [2 Kgs 23:21–23](#); [2 Chr 35:1–19](#)).

Pentecost

The second great festival, Pentecost (or Weeks) lasted one day only and was observed on the 50th day after the newly harvested barley sheaf had been waved before the Lord at the end of the Feast of Unleavened Bread ([Dt 16:9–12](#)). The festival marked the end of the barley harvest and the beginning of the wheat harvest, the beginning of the period when firstfruits could be offered (cf. [Ex 23:16](#); [34:22](#); [Nm 28:26](#)). The feast day was marked by the presentation of two wheat-flour loaves along with sacrifices of seven lambs, two rams, and a bull ([Lv 23:15–20](#)). Freewill gifts to God were presented to reflect gratitude for his blessings, and the entire occasion was one of communal rejoicing ([Dt 16:10–11](#)). Since Pentecost was essentially a harvest festival ([Ex 23:16](#)), the Israelites were called on to recognize that they depended entirely upon God for their material prosperity. In [Deuteronomy 26](#), specific instructions were given for the ritual of presenting firstfruits from the harvest. It comprised a great confession of faith set within the framework of Israel's history, and it recounted God's deliverance of the nation from Egyptian oppression and his provision of a land that could amply supply the needs of his people.

Festival of Tabernacles

This festival, known variously as the Feast of Booths, Tabernacles, Shelters ([Lv 23:34](#); [Dt 16:13](#)), or Ingathering ([Ex 34:22](#)), was the third great occasion that all Hebrew males were required to observe annually. It began on the 15th day of the seventh month (Tishri), shortly after the

observance of the Day of Atonement, which fell on the 10th day. The Feast of Booths lasted for one week and involved pilgrimage. It was associated initially with the end of the year ([Ex 34:22](#)), when the agricultural work had been completed. The first day was marked by a symbolic cessation from all activity, after which burnt offerings were presented to the Lord. The eighth day was also one on which the congregation of Israel abstained from manual work and again offered burnt sacrifices. [Leviticus 23:39–43](#) furnished details for the rituals that gave the festival its special name of booths or shelters or tabernacles. The fruit of “goodly trees” was to be gathered on the first day of the feast, along with palm fronds, willow branches, and boughs from trees in full leaf. From these, rough shelters or booths were to be constructed in which the people lived for the week of the feast. Every seventh year the observances were marked by a public recital of the covenant provisions to which the Israelites under Moses had committed themselves, a procedure designed to keep fresh in their minds the obligations as well as the blessings of the covenant relationship. A particularly significant observance of the Feast of Tabernacles took place in the time of Ezra, when the Judean community returned from Babylon—a celebration of a kind unknown for centuries ([Neh 8:13–18](#)). From the context it appears that observance of the feast had lapsed during the monarchy. The feast at Shiloh where Hannah was mistaken for a drunken woman and the feast referred to in [Judges 21:19](#) were evidently the Feast of Booths. In a prophetic vision in which he saw all nations coming to Jerusalem to observe the Festival of Booths, Zechariah warned that those who did not continue this tradition could expect hardship and shortages of food ([Zec 14:16–19](#)).

Postexilic Festivals

There are a few minor festivals that were created in the period after the Jews returned from exile; some of these festivals had their origin in specific historical occasions.

The Festival of Purim

The Festival of Purim, also known as the Festival of Lots, was a joyful occasion occurring on the 14th day of the 12th month (Adar). It celebrated the way in which Esther and Mordecai were used by God to deliver his people in the Persian Empire from extermination by Haman ([Est 9:21, 24–28](#)). The feast was observed on the 14th day of Adar by those living in villages, and on the 15th by the

inhabitants of walled towns and cities. The explanation of the name of the festival is given in [Esther 9:24–26](#), and its observance reminded the Hebrews of God’s ability to save them during a time of anti-Semitic activity in Persia. The deliverance memorialized in this festival has consoled the Jews on other occasions when they have suffered persecution. Traditionally the scroll of Esther was read aloud in the synagogue on the evening before the feast, and there was a great outcry, especially among the children present, whenever the names of the hated Haman and his sons were mentioned.

Festival of the Dedication of the Temple

Another joyous festival that lasted for eight days was the Feast of the Dedication of the Temple ([1 Macc 4:52–59](#); [2 Macc 10:6–8](#)), familiar to modern readers as Hanukkah, or the Festival of Lights. The specific dedication that prompted the feast occurred in 164 BC, when Judas Maccabeus reconsecrated the temple in Jerusalem after it had been defiled by Antiochus IV Epiphanes. The celebrations commenced on the 25th day of the ninth month (Kislev) and were marked at night by blazing lights and lanterns. The stories of brave opposition by the Maccabees to the crushing forces of paganism were recounted, and the feast was one of praise to God for his marvelous deliverance of the Jews during the Maccabean period.

New Testament Festivals

In Christ’s time the Sabbath was observed rigorously and was the occasion for synagogue worship (cf. [Lk 4:16](#); [Acts 13:14](#); [18:4](#)). Pharisaic law prohibited all work, and Jesus came into conflict with the authorities periodically for breaches of the Sabbath regulations (cf. [Mt 12:1–4](#); [Mk 3:1–5](#); [Lk 13:10–17](#)). In the primitive church, worship occurred on “the first day of the week” (i.e., Sunday) to commemorate Christ’s resurrection. The early Christians initially participated in Jewish ceremonies (cf. [Acts 20:16](#); [1 Cor 16:8](#)). It was during the Feast of Pentecost, after Christ’s resurrection and ascension, that the Spirit was poured out ([Acts 2:1–4](#)), fulfilling [Joel 2:28–32](#) and commencing the history of the Christian church as such.

The Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread were of great significance in the life of Christ (cf. [Jn 4:45](#); [5:1](#); [6:4](#); [12:1–26](#)), for the occasion was a very popular one in NT times (cf. [12:20](#)). On the Passover, Pilate had instituted the custom of clemency to a prisoner nominated by the populace ([Mt 27:15](#); [Mk 15:6](#)). Jesus participated actively in

the Passover rituals (cf. [Lk 2:42](#); [Jn 2:13](#); [6:4](#)). The Last Supper with his disciples occurred just prior to the Passover ([Jn 13:1](#)), when Judas Iscariot betrayed Jesus to the Pharisees ([Lk 22:4-6](#)). The breaking of bread and the drinking of wine at that Passover celebration ([Mk 14:22-25](#)) were related directly to Christ's forthcoming death on the cross in a sacramental manner. Christ's disciples were instructed to observe this rite as a memorial of his suffering and death for human sin ([1 Cor 11:24-26](#)) and as a proclamation of the power of the cross until the Lord returns in glory. Some scholars have suggested that Christ was actually hanging on the cross when the Passover lamb was being slaughtered, and if that chronology is correct, it would represent Jesus graphically as the "Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" ([Jn 1:29](#), rsv). Jesus was also present once when the Feast of Tabernacles was celebrated ([7:10](#)). In his day water was carried in procession from the pool of Siloam as an offering to God, and the ceremony most probably prompted Christ's discourse on living water and eternal life (vv [37-39](#)). On at least one occasion Jesus was in Jerusalem when the Festival of Lights occurred ([Jn 10:22](#)) and narrowly missed death by stoning.

Jesus was entertained occasionally at private feasts (cf. [Lk 5:29](#)), and once remedied an emergency situation when the wine ran out at a wedding ceremony ([Jn 2:8-10](#)). He was critical of the Pharisees for securing the chief seats at feasts ([Mt 23:6](#); [Mk 12:39](#); [Lk 20:46](#)) and taught that festivals ought to benefit the poor ([Lk 14:13](#)).

Symbolism of Feasts

Many aspects of the ancient Hebrew feasts were interpreted symbolically in the early church. Paul regarded the earliest Hebrew Christians as the firstfruits of the Israel of God ([Rom 11:16](#)). In [Romans 8:23](#), the Holy Spirit as possessed by Christians was regarded as only a token of what was to come, and as such was the firstfruit of the Spirit. Christians themselves were described in [James 1:18](#) as the firstfruits of God's creatures who were brought forth by the Word of Truth. The resurrection of Jesus was considered by Paul to be the firstfruits of those who slept ([1 Cor 15:20, 23](#)). In an allusion to OT festivals, Paul spoke of the Sabbaths, new moons, and feasts as merely being a shadow of good things to come ([Col 2:16-17](#)). The Passover was used figuratively to emphasize that Christ our Passover Lamb had been sacrificed for us. Believers were urged to keep the feast with the

unleavened bread of sincerity and truth, and not with the old leaven of malice and evil ([1 Cor 5:7-8](#)).

See also Calendars, Ancient and Modern; Offerings and Sacrifices; Tabernacle; Temple.

Felix, Antonius

Roman procurator (governor) of Judea (AD 52-60) succeeding Cumanus, appointed by Claudius and succeeded by Festus Porcius. Felix's brother, Pallas, a prominent, more influential Roman, interceded on his behalf after he was recalled from his procuratorship by Nero. During his oppressive rule, Felix utilized the aid of robbers to have Jonathan, the high priest, murdered. His tyranny has been cited as the cause for the Jewish revolt that broke out six years after he was recalled. Felix had three wives: one unknown, another the granddaughter of Mark Antony and Cleopatra, and another the Jewish sister of Agrippa II, whose name was Drusilla. At the age of 16 Drusilla left her husband, King Azizus of Emesa, to marry Felix. She later bore him a son, Agrippa.

Felix was serving as governor when the apostle Paul was brought before him in Caesarea to answer charges against him after the riot in Jerusalem ([Acts 23:24-24:27](#)). After a five-day delay, Tertullus, spokesman for the Jews, and others arrived to state their charges. Felix put off a decision until he could hear from Lysias, the tribune. In the meantime Paul was placed in limited custody. Felix hoped to obtain bribe money for his release. As a result, Paul was detained for two years, during which time he and Felix often conversed. The apostle's message of "justice, self-control, and future judgment" alarmed Felix greatly ([24:25](#)). Record of his life after being recalled by Nero is not available.

Fellowship

Fellowship means having a close relationship with God and sharing this relationship with other believers.

Fellowship in the Old Testament

At first, Adam was put in the Garden to enjoy friendship with God. When Adam and Eve chose to be independent instead of living under God's kind care, their relationship was broken. As a result, Adam and Eve hid from God ([Genesis 3:8](#)). But God

immediately looked for them and shared his plan to save sinners through the work of the Savior ([3:15](#)).

The Old Testament tells how God started to bring special people into a relationship with himself. Enoch is described as a man who walked with God ([Genesis 5:22, 24](#)). Noah also walked with God ([6:9](#)). And Abraham, the father of Israel, is called “a friend of God” ([James 2:23](#)). No one in the Old Testament had a closer relationship with God than Moses during his 40-day meeting with God on Mount Sinai ([Exodus 24](#)). Later, David wrote psalms that show a heart deeply connected with God ([Psalms 16, 34, 40, 63](#)).

Fellowship in the New Testament

Because of Jesus's work on the cross, God now lives in each believer's heart ([John 14:23](#)). As a result, the relationship we now have under the new covenant is the important, spiritual union of the believer with Jesus ([14:20-21](#)). A relationship with God is the goal of the Christian life ([1 John 1:3](#)), and this relationship will be made perfect forever when we see our Savior “face to face” ([1 Corinthians 13:12](#)). This is when God dwells with his people forever ([Revelation 21:3](#)).

The good news restores our relationship not only with God but also among believers. Jesus's Last Supper with his disciples shows the connection between our relationship with God and with others ([Mark 14:22-25](#)). In the upper room, Jesus shared a special meal with his disciples. The hearts of Jesus and his followers were joined by a deep love and commitment. Later, the disciples found their hearts were strongly united because of their shared loyalty to Jesus. After the cross and the coming of the Spirit, the church was born. The church is a new group of people in a relationship with God and each other.

The early chapters of Acts show a deep friendship among the first Christians. The believers met in house groups for teaching, fellowship, the Lord's Supper, and prayer ([Acts 2:42, 46](#)). Their sense of unity was so strong that the Christians shared their possessions and gave them to their brothers and sisters in need ([2:44-45; 4:32-35](#)). Perhaps the main feature of this early Christian fellowship was the love among the believers ([1 Thessalonians 4:9; 1 Peter 1:22](#)).

Driven by love, Paul organized a collection among the non-Jewish churches for poor believers in Jerusalem. [Romans 15:26](#) talks about the gifts of

the churches in Macedonia and Achaia. Paul uses the common Greek word for “fellowship” to describe this “contribution.” Similarly, the fellowship that the Philippian church shared with Paul assumed the form of gifts to support the apostle's work ([Philippians 1:5; 4:14-15](#)).

The Bible uses several images to describe the spirit of togetherness which was typical of the early church. The first is “God's household” ([Ephesians 2:19; 1 Timothy 3:15](#)), or “the family of faith” ([Galatians 6:10](#)). In God's household, love and hospitality should be the rule ([Hebrews 13:1-2](#)). Also, the church is shown as God's family on earth ([Ephesians 3:15](#)). God is the Father, and believers are his faithful sons and daughters. The life of God's family should be guided by love, kindness, compassion, and humility ([Philippians 2:1-4](#)). Finally, the Christian fellowship is shown as the “one new person” or the “one body” ([Ephesians 2:15-16](#)). Despite great natural differences in the body, the Holy Spirit joins believers together into a single organism ([4:4-6](#)). In this fellowship of love, no believer is unimportant. Each member has been given gifts for the spiritual growth of the entire body.

Guidelines for Christian Fellowship

The Bible explains how to have true fellowship in [1 John 1:7](#): “If we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another.” This means that when we live according to God's truth, just as God is truth, we can have real spiritual communion (a special relationship through God's Spirit) with other believers. Jesus Christ is the one who makes fellowship possible. We can only have true fellowship with other Christians when we first have a close relationship with Jesus.

Just as light and dark cannot exist together, believers cannot have true fellowship with people who do not believe in Jesus. The Bible also says Christians should not have close fellowship with people who claim to be believers but who:

- reject Jesus's teachings ([2 John 1:9–11](#))
- do evil things
- worship false gods
- are often drunk
- steal from others ([1 Corinthians 5:11](#)).

The Bible gives several guidelines for improving the communion of believers in the body:

1. Love one another with the same compassion that Jesus showed to his own ([John 13:34–35](#); [15:12](#)). The law of the fellowship should be the rule of love ([Hebrews 13:1](#)).
2. Develop a spirit of humility that seeks to honor others ([Philippians 2:3–5](#)).
3. Help fellow believers by sharing their burdens ([Galatians 6:2](#)).
4. Share material blessings such as money and food with brothers and sisters in need ([2 Corinthians 9:13](#)).
5. Gently correct a sinner while helping to find solutions to the problems ([Galatians 6:1](#)).
6. Help a fellow believer in times of suffering ([1 Corinthians 12:26](#)).
7. Pray for one another in the Spirit without stopping ([Ephesians 6:18](#)).

The Christian should seriously consider the saying of an unknown saint, “You cannot come close to God if you are far from your brother.”

Ferret

The ferret is an animal mentioned in the King James Version of the Bible ([Leviticus 11:30](#)). However, modern Bible scholars believe this is not actually a ferret but rather a gecko, which is a type of small lizard.

See Gecko; Lizard.

Fertility Cults

See Canaanite Deities and Religion.

Festival

See Feasts and Festivals of Israel.

Festus, Porcius

Roman procurator (governor) of Judea, who succeeded Felix Antonius and who was succeeded by Albinus. The precise date of Porcius Festus's accession to power is debatable but has been narrowed to sometime between AD 55 and 60. The only sources mentioning Festus are the book of Acts and the writings of Josephus, a Jewish historian who lived in Rome in the first century AD (*Antiquities* 20.8.9–11; 9.1).

Josephus wrote that Festus ruled wisely and justly, in contrast to Felix and Albinus. Sicarii bandits (named after the small swords they carried) who had terrorized the Palestinian countryside were eliminated under Festus's rule. In spite of this, he could not reverse the damage incurred by his predecessor, Felix, who had aggravated the conflict between pagans and Jews.

The NT recounts that the new procurator Festus traveled from Caesarea (where Paul was in custody) to Jerusalem ([Acts 25:1](#)). The Jewish leaders confronted him there and brought charges against Paul. Upon returning to Caesarea, Festus heard Paul's defense (v [6](#)). He granted the apostle's appeal to be heard by Caesar (the right of any Roman accused of a capital offense) in an effort to avoid further religious disputes in his jurisdiction (vv [11–12](#)). When King Agrippa arrived a few days later, Festus was in a quandary, unable to understand the Jews' charges against Paul (vv [25–27](#)). After Paul's address before the king, Festus loudly declared him to be mad ([26:24](#)), though still agreeing that Paul had done nothing to deserve death or imprisonment (v [31](#)).

Field of Blood

See Blood, Field of.

Fiery Serpent

The fiery serpent was a bronze snake figure that Moses made to heal the Israelites. When the people

of Israel complained against God and Moses during their journey through the wilderness, God sent poisonous snakes as punishment. Many of the Israelites died from the snake bites ([Numbers 21:4-9](#)).

The people admitted their sin and asked Moses to pray for them. God told Moses to make a fiery (bronze) snake and put it on a pole. Anyone who was bitten could look at the bronze snake and be healed.

to this story when explaining his coming death. He said that just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, he would be lifted up (on the cross), and everyone who believes in him would have eternal life ([John 3:14-15](#)). The apostle Paul also used this story as a warning to Christians not to test God as the Israelites did ([1 Corinthians 10:9](#)).

See also Bronze Serpent, Bronze Snake.

Fig, Fig Tree

Any of several trees or shrubs that grow naturally in the Mediterranean region. It produces a fruit can be eaten. The common fig (*Ficus carica*) is mentioned about 60 times in the Bible, making it one of the most important plants in the Bible. The first occurrence is "fig leaves" in [Genesis 3:7](#).

Most experts believe the fig tree originally came from southwestern Asia and Syria. In early times, people grew figs widely across Egypt and Israel and the surrounding areas. In these places it was one of the main foods eaten by people. In [1 Samuel 25:18](#), Abigail sent David a gift that included 200 cakes of figs.

The fig tree has a special type of fruit called a syconium, which is actually a very enlarged and fleshy base that holds the flowers. A special wasp pollinates the fig. Without this wasp, the tree cannot produce fruit. People discovered this when they first brought the fig tree to the state of California in the United States of America.

The fig tree produces its earliest fruit buds before its leaves. The buds appear in February, and the leaves grow in April or May. When the leaves are fully out, the fruit should be ripe ([Matthew 21:19](#)).

When the ancient prophets warned the people about their wrongdoing, they often threatened that the vine and fig crops would be destroyed. And when they promised great rewards, they said the vine and fig crops would grow again ([Jeremiah](#)

[8:13](#); [Hosea 2:12](#); [Joel 1:7, 12](#); [Micah 4:4](#); [Zechariah 3:10](#)).

Finance

See Money; Banker, Banking.

Finger (Measure)

Linear measure equivalent to the width of a finger ([Jer 52:21](#)). *See* Weights and Measures.

Fir Tree

A translation of several Hebrew words in the Old Testament that might refer to a tree with cones (conifer trees). Experts cannot identify exactly which tree this is.

Fir tree is a general term for various evergreen trees that have flat needles and upright cones. Most likely, most of the references to fir trees in the Bible are actually talking about pine, cypress, or juniper trees. The only true fir tree in Israel and the surrounding areas grows in the higher parts of Lebanon and the mountains to the north. *Abies cilicica* grows to a height of 9.1 to 22.9 meters (30 to 75 feet) and many people grow it for various uses.

Fire, Lake of

See Lake of Fire.

Fire, Pillar of

Supernatural phenomenon of God's presence that guided the Israelites in the wilderness. *See* Pillar of Fire and Cloud; Wilderness Wanderings.

Firkin

Measure of about 10 gallons (37.9 liters). In [John 2:6](#), firkin is the kjv translation for the name of a Greek liquid measure. *See* Weights and Measures.

Firmament

A biblical word for the atmosphere around the earth. The original meaning of this word means space that is stretched out or expanded. The Hebrews considered the "firmament" as the empty sky where the clouds, sun, and moon were.

During the second day of Creation, God created the atmosphere above the earth. He did this to divide the waters under it from the waters above it. God called the firmament heaven ([Genesis 1:6-8](#)). The firmament provides an environment for the sun, moon, planets, and stars to exist and function as God made them to. On the fourth day of Creation, God created the lights in the firmament. They were to identify night and day and indicate the seasons. The greater light in the firmament, the sun, controlled the days, and the lesser light, the moon, controlled the nights (verses [14-19](#)).

The word "firmament" is mentioned twice in the Psalms as the place of God's handiwork ([Psalms 19:1](#); [150:1](#)). In the books of Ezekiel ([Ezekiel 1:22-26](#); [10:1](#)) and Daniel ([Daniel 12:3](#)), the firmament is always related to Creation.

First Book of Esdras

A book that is largely a compilation of material from 2 Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah.

Preview

- Who Wrote the First Book of Esdras? When Was It Written?
- What Is the Background of the First Book of Esdras?
- What Is the Message of the First Book of Esdras?

Who Wrote the First Book of Esdras? When Was It Written?

The author of 1 Esdras is unknown. Bible scholars have different ideas of where it came from. There are three main possibilities:

1. 1 Esdras might be the original Septuagint (ancient Greek translation of the Old Testament) version. Ezra and Nehemiah may contain changes made by Theodotion, who revised the Septuagint in the second century AD.

2. 1 Esdras began as a Hebrew text not included in the Old Testament. That Hebrew text is now lost.
3. 1 Esdras is an edited collection of pieces from the Septuagint translation of 2 Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah. Most Bible scholars agree with this idea.

Esdras (also known as Ezra) was a descendant of Aaron's priestly line. He was one of the leaders of the exiled Jews who returned to Judea from Babylon. His work as a leader and promoter of the law likely took place during the reign of Persian king Artaxerxes I from 465 to 424 BC.

1 Esdras must have been written before AD 90. This is likely because the first-century Jewish historian Josephus quoted from it. The most likely date of authorship is likely between 150 and 100 BC.

What Is the Background of the First Book of Esdras?

There are four books about Ezra and the restoration of the Jews in Judea after the exile. Two of those books, titled Ezra and Nehemiah, are accepted as Scripture by Jewish people, Roman Catholics, and Protestants alike. The other two, 1 Esdras and 2 Esdras, are not part of the Old Testament. However, they were included in the Latin Vulgate Bible (a translation by Jerome in AD 404). The Roman Catholic Council of Trent, which took place from 1545 to 1663, included 1 and 2 Esdras in the Old Testament scriptures as part of the apocryphal books. The books of Esdras in the Vulgate are named as follows:

- 1 Esdras is named Ezra
- 2 Esdras is named Nehemiah
- 3 Esdras is named 1 Esdras
- 4 Esdras is named 2 Esdras

What Is the Message of the First Book of Esdras?

First Esdras is a history of the Jews from the reign of King Josiah in Jerusalem, from 640 to 609 BC, through the ministry of Ezra. It describes the career of Ezra but does not mention Nehemiah. Originally written in Greek, 1 Esdras retells the material found in [2 Chronicles 35:1-36:23](#), [Ezra 1:1-10:44](#), and [Nehemiah 7:73-8:12](#). However, it removes

[Ezra 4:6](#) and moves [4:7–24](#) before [2:1](#). 1 Esdras adds two sections of material that are not in the Bible:

- [1 Esdras 1:23–24](#) is a minor addition
- [1 Esdras 3:1–4:63](#) is a major addition. It is a story about three youths who served Darius I of Persia, who ruled from 522 to 486 BC. They compete to decide if wine, power, or women are strongest. The third youth, Zerubbabel, argues that women are strongest but adds “truth” to his argument and wins. As a reward, he asks for permission to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem, and Darius agrees. The story ends with Zerubbabel planning to build the temple. 1 Esdras is different from Ezra and Nehemiah by placing Zerubbabel’s return to Judea under Darius I instead of Cyrus, who ruled from 559 to 530 BC.

First Day of the Week

Sunday. *See* Lord’s Day, The.

First Jewish Revolt

An uprising in AD 66–70, which occurred as the result of a series of ineffective Roman governors in Judea. After the last Jewish king, Agrippa I (the Herod of [Acts 12](#)), died in AD 44, the next 20 years were filled with persecution and humiliation for the Jews in Palestine. For the unrest to become a revolt, only one more reason was needed. The final reason was provided by Florus, the Roman governor appointed in AD 64. He provoked the Jews into an uprising in the year 66 by demanding money from the temple treasury. Under his rule, Roman soldiers slaughtered and pillaged the Jews.

Rebellion quickly spread throughout Palestine, accompanied by a general struggle between Jews and pagans in several eastern Mediterranean cities. The revolt in Palestine was led by the Zealots, a Jewish group that had long wanted the Romans to leave Palestine. After an initial Jewish victory at the pass of Beth-horon, the emperor Nero dispatched

his most able general, Vespasian, to direct the operation of punishing the rebels.

By the end of AD 67, all of Galilee and other northern lands were back under Roman rule. In AD 67 and 68 further operations in Samaria and Judea left only four strongholds in Jewish control. At this point, the Roman campaign slowed. Nero committed suicide in AD 68. After three short-lived emperors, General Vespasian gained control of the empire in AD 69. His son Titus took command of the forces in Palestine and laid siege to Jerusalem in AD 70.

The Jews in the capital might have been better prepared had they taken advantage of the turmoil in Rome to strengthen their own position and resolve disputes among warring Jewish groups. Instead, the arrival of Titus with 80,000 soldiers forced them to unify for a last defense of the city.

The siege of the city lasted for five months. Jerusalem fought heroically against the advancing Romans, forcing a slow conquest of the city. A tragic moment in Jewish history came early in August of AD 70 when for the first time in centuries the morning and evening sacrifices were not offered at the temple. About 29 August, under circumstances still not clear, the sanctuary was burned and the temple destroyed. This fulfilled Jesus’s prophecy ([Matthew 24:1–2](#); [Mark 13:1–2](#); [Luke 19:43–44](#); [21:5–7](#)). For another month some resistance continued, but by the end of September, the conflict was over in the ruined city. In all, perhaps one million Jews were killed and 900,000 taken captive during the revolt.

See also Israel, History of; Jerusalem; Judaism.

Firstborn

The oldest son or daughter in a family ([Genesis 22:21](#); [29:26](#)).

Israel was called God’s firstborn because of that nation’s miraculous beginning and special rescue from Egypt ([Genesis 17:5, 15–16](#); [Exodus 4:22](#)). As God’s firstborn, Israel had a special status over all other nations. Gentiles (non-Jewish people) were “blessed” only in relation to their kindness to Israel ([Genesis 12:3](#); [Exodus 19:6](#); [Deuteronomy 4:5–8](#)). The prophet Isaiah foresaw a day when Israel would have a double portion of inheritance ([Isaiah 61:7](#)). Thus, being firstborn implies priority or superiority, as well as an inheritance.

The expression “firstborn of the poor” in [Isaiah 14:30](#) means one who is the most poor, the poorest of the poor. The expression “firstborn of death” in [Job 18:13](#) suggests that Job’s disease would kill him.

Because God saved Israel’s firstborn sons from death in Egypt, he expected that all future firstborn sons be set apart for his service ([Exodus 11:4–7; 13:12](#)). The first male child was a representative of the entire offspring ([Genesis 49:3; Exodus 22:29; Numbers 3:13](#)). God commanded that the firstborn of all animals used for offerings should be set apart for him ([Exodus 13:2, 15](#)).

Firstborn and Redemption

Each tribe was to redeem their firstborn, except Levi’s, by paying a sum not to exceed five shekels ([Numbers 18:15–16](#)). Redemption implied a prior bondage. It was to remind Israel of their liberation from Egypt ([Exodus 13:2–8](#)).

The firstborn of ritually clean animals was devoted to the Lord. It was brought to the tabernacle (or later, the temple) within a year from the eighth day after birth. This animal was then sacrificed and its blood sprinkled on the altar. The meat of the sacrificed animal was for the priests ([Exodus 13:13; 22:30](#); compare [Numbers 18:17](#)). The firstborn of unclean animals could be redeemed with an addition of one-fifth of the value as determined by the priest. If not redeemed, these animals were sold, exchanged, or destroyed by the priests ([Leviticus 27:27](#)). The colt of an ass was to be redeemed with a lamb ([Exodus 13:13](#)). If not redeemed, it was to be killed. Meat from unclean animals was not eaten.

Firstborn and Birthright

The firstborn acted as the priest of the family if the father was gone or dead. Esau and Reuben are both examples ([Genesis 27:19, 32; 1 Chronicles 5:1–2](#)). This position of the firstborn ended when the priesthood was committed to Levi’s tribe ([Numbers 3:12–13](#)). All the firstborns of later generations had to be redeemed. The redemption money became part of the Levites’ yearly income ([Numbers 8:17; 18:16](#)).

A double portion of the family inheritance was the right of the firstborn. This protected the firstborn when a man had more than one wife. The son of a favorite wife could not take the place of the first son born of the household ([Deuteronomy 21:17](#)).

The title “firstborn” is applied to Jesus ([Luke 2:7; Romans 8:29; Colossians 1:15, 18; Hebrews 1:6; Revelation 1:5](#)). It stresses Jesus’s priority over all because he was the first to rise from the dead. As firstborn, Jesus’s is:

- Heir of all things ([Hebrews 1:2](#))
- The head of the church ([Ephesians 1:20–23; Colossians 1:18, 24; Hebrews 2:10–12](#))

See also Birthright; Heir; Inheritance; Primogeniture.

Firstfruits

A firstborn child, animal, or the first parts of any crop. They were considered holy in Hebrew thought and belonged to God. The firstfruits were a way to thank God for his goodness by offering the first part, a sign of more to come.

Firstfruits in the Old Testament

Firstfruit offerings could be crops or products like dough, bread, wine, olive oil, or wool. The firstborn son and the firstborn animals also belonged to God. For children and unclean animals, the firstborn had to be “redeemed.” This meant they were paid for with money. Firstborn cows, sheep, and goats were sacrificed to God ([Numbers 18:14–17](#)).

The firstfruits were reserved for priests. The Bible mentions “the first of the firstfruits” at least three times. This could mean the first to ripen or the best of the harvest. These offerings were for the priests. Only the ritually clean could eat them ([Numbers 18:12–13](#)). For other references to the firstfruits, see [Exodus 23:15–19; 34:22, 26; Leviticus 2:14; 23:10–17; Numbers 15:20–21; 28:26–31; and Deuteronomy 26:1–11](#).

To present the firstfruits, people brought their offerings to the priest at the tabernacle or, later, the temple ([Deuteronomy 26:2](#)). The priest would take the offering and, on the first day of the week, wave it before the Lord with outstretched arms. On the same day, the person offered a male lamb, a grain offering of flour mixed with olive oil, and a wine offering. Fifty days later, a grain offering was made. Each family gave two loaves of bread to the Lord, along with animal, grain, and drink offerings ([Leviticus 23:9–22](#)).

Firstfruits in the New Testament

In the New Testament, Paul called Jesus's resurrection the firstfruits of the future resurrection of believers at his return ([1 Corinthians 15:20, 23](#)). The Holy Spirit, who lives in all believers ([Romans 8:9](#)), is also called the firstfruits of full redemption to come. "Firstfruits" also referred to the first believers in a region ([Romans 16:5](#); [1 Corinthians 16:15](#)). It symbolized a promise of a larger spiritual harvest.

Christian believers are firstfruits. They are God's unique, holy possession ([James 1:18](#)). In Revelation, the 144,000 are described as the firstfruits of God's people. They belong to both God and Jesus Christ, who is called the Lamb ([Revelation 14:4](#)).

See also Feasts and Festivals of Israel; Offerings and Sacrifices.

Fish

Aquatic animals with fins and gills that live in rivers, lakes, and seas.

The Bible often mentions fish without naming them or providing descriptions. Fish have been a key food for humans since ancient times. Today, they remain a major protein source in many regions. In biblical times, the fish trade was advanced. Notably, one of Jerusalem's gates was named the Fish Gate. ([Nehemiah 3:3](#); [Zephaniah 1:10](#)). The law in [Leviticus 11:9-12](#) allowed the Israelites to eat fish, but only those with both fins and scales. Scaleless fish such as catfish were not allowed, even though they had fins.

Fishing in the Ancient World

Egyptian paintings show different fishing methods. The Philistines fished in the Mediterranean Sea. However, Israel was not a seafaring nation. Thus, they likely caught most fish from freshwater sources, especially the Sea of Galilee. This lake is home to 36 fish species, such as:

- Perch
- Carp
- Barbel
- Sardines
- Catfish

In New Testament times, fishing with a dragnet was common. Boats would head out into deep waters, throw a large net into the water, and drag it toward shore ([Luke 5:4](#)). Rowers and sometimes a crew in another boat would have to help row back. The catch was divided on shore ([Matthew 13:47-48](#)). Fishing was usually done at night. The cool water brought fish closer to the surface. They could not see the approaching nets.

The Jews also fished by:

- Hook and line ([Matthew 17:27](#))
- Spear ([Job 41:7](#))
- Throw net ([Ezekiel 47:10](#))

The book of Habakkuk refers to hook-and-line fishing, netting, and seining ([Habakkuk 1:15](#)). Seining is a method of fishing by dragging a net in the water.

Early in the Christian church, the fish symbolized Christ and faith. It was scratched in Roman catacombs and now decorates walls, altars, pews, and vestments. The symbol emerged because the Greek word for "fish" (*ichthus*) represents the phrase "Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior."

See Whale.

Fish Gate

Gate probably located in the north wall of the city of Jerusalem. The Fish Gate was built in David's time and later formed part of Manasseh's fortifications ([2 Chr 33:14](#)). After the Babylonian exile, it was restored under Nehemiah ([Neh 3:3](#); [12:39](#)); it is mentioned along with the Mishneh or Second Quarter ([Zep 1:10](#)). The gate was probably so named either because fish were brought into the city from the north, or because it was located near the city's fish market.

See also Jerusalem.

Fishermen

Fishermen are people who catch fish to earn a living. In ancient Israel, fishing was an important job that many people did to earn money and feed their families. The Bible mentions fishing and fishermen many times, both in the Old Testament ([Isaiah 19:8](#); [Jeremiah 16:16](#); [Ezekiel 47:10](#)) and the New Testament ([Matthew 4:18-19](#); [Mark 1:16-17](#); [Luke 5:2](#); [John 21:7](#)).

Fishermen were recognized as their own social class in society. Jesus included several fishermen among his disciples ([Matthew 4:18-22](#); [Mark 1:16-20](#); compare [Luke 5:2-11](#)). Their work was difficult and not always rewarding ([Luke 5:2-5](#); [John 21:3](#)). Jesus compared the work of his disciples to the work of fishermen. Jesus's disciples would be "fishers of men." They would "catch" people for the kingdom ([Matthew 4:19](#); [Mark 1:17](#); [Luke 5:10](#)).

Fitch

KJV translation of two Hebrew words. "Fitch" is actually an older form of the word "vetch," the name of many species of leguminous plants. The "fitch" of [Isaiah 28:25-27](#) (nlt "dill") is the nutmeg flower, the seeds of which are used as a condiment. The "fitch" of [Ezekiel 4:9](#) (nlt "spelt") is probably emmer, an inferior kind of wheat.

See also Plants (Nutmeg Flower; Spelt).

Flag

KJV rendering of an uncertain marshland plant in [Job 8:11](#). *See* Plants (Papyrus; Reed; Rush).

Flax

Flax (*Linum usitatissimum*) is one of several plants of this genus. One type is widely grown both for the linseed oil from its seeds and the fine textile fibers from its stems. Flax is the oldest known textile fiber. Cloth woven from flax is called linen. Cotton appears only once in the Bible ([Esther 1:6](#)). There is no mention of any other fiber plant being grown in Egypt or Israel and the surrounding areas in biblical times. For this reason, experts think linen was the material used to make clothes other than woolen ones.

People also used linen for household items such as:

- towels ([John 13:4-5](#)),
- napkins ([11:44](#)),
- belts and undergarments ([Isaiah 3:23](#); [Mark 14:51](#)),
- nets ([Isaiah 19:8-9](#)), and
- measuring lines ([Ezekiel 40:3](#)).

The priests serving in the temple had to wear only linen clothes. The Jews were strictly forbidden to use cloth made of a mixture of wool and flax ([Leviticus 19:19](#); [Deuteronomy 22:11](#)).

People in biblical times used at least three kinds of linen, and each kind had particular uses. The Bible mentions ordinary linen of the coarsest texture in [Leviticus 6:10](#), [Ezekiel 9:2](#), [Daniel 10:5](#), and [Revelation 15:6](#). It mentions a second type of linen of better quality in [Exodus 26:1](#) and [39:27](#). A third type of linen of the finest texture and high cost appears in [1 Chronicles 15:27](#), [Esther 8:15](#), and [Revelation 19:8](#).

The common flax plant grows from 0.3 to 1.2 meters (1 to 4 feet) tall. It has a simple, slender, wirelike stem and many small, pale, lance-shaped green leaves. The failure of the flax crop is listed as one of God's punishments ([Hosea 2:9](#)). Jewish women made linen from flax fibers as a household industry ([Proverbs 31:13, 19](#)). They made everything from ordinary clothing to the robes and aprons worn by priests and temple attendants. People also used linen for wicks in lamps ([Isaiah 42:3](#)).

See Cloth and Cloth Manufacturing.

Flea

Small, wingless insect with strong legs for jumping. The flea is mentioned only in [1 Samuel 24:14](#) and [26:20](#), where David refers to himself as a flea. *See* Animals.

Flesh

The body; the physical being of humans; the human person and human existence; the carnal nature of humans.

In the Old Testament

Term commonly used to designate the material stuff of the body, whether of people ([Gn 40:19](#)) or of animals ([Lv 6:27](#)). However, “flesh” is used in the OT with a variety of meanings. Sometimes it is used as equivalent for the whole body ([Prv 14:30](#)), and the meaning is extended to designate the whole person (“my flesh also shall rest in hope,” [Ps 16:9](#), kjv). This idea leads to the union of two different persons, man and wife as “one flesh” ([Gn 2:24](#)), and a man can say of his relatives, “I am your bone and your flesh” ([Jgs 9:2](#)). The idea of flesh as the whole person leads to the expression “all flesh,” denoting the totality of humankind, sometimes including also the animal world.

Perhaps the most distinctive use of “flesh” in the OT is found in those passages where it designates human weakness and frailty over against God. “My spirit shall not abide in man for ever, for he is flesh” ([Gn 6:3](#), rsv). In [Psalm 78:39](#), God attributes sin to the fact that men are but flesh. In [2 Chronicles 32:8](#) the arm of flesh of the king of Assyria (i.e., his weakness) is contrasted with the all-powerful God. The one who puts trust in God need not fear what “flesh” can do ([Ps 56:4](#)), but the one who puts trust in human flesh instead of in God is under a curse ([Jer 17:5](#)). In [Isaiah 31:3](#) flesh is contrasted with spirit, as weakness is with strength.

However, nowhere in the OT is flesh viewed as sinful. Flesh is conceived as being created by God of the dust of the earth ([Gn 2:7](#)), and as God’s creation, it is good.

In the New Testament

Paul ascribes many—often unique—definitions to the word “flesh” (Greek *sarx*).

Flesh as the Stuff of the Body

“Flesh” is frequently used to describe the tissues that constitute the body. There are different kinds of flesh—“of men,” “of animals,” “of birds,” “of fish” ([1 Cor 15:39](#)). Pain and suffering may be experienced in the flesh ([2 Cor 12:7](#)). Circumcision is done in the flesh ([Rom 2:28](#)). While “flesh” in such references is not sinful, it is corruptible and cannot inherit the kingdom of God ([1 Cor 15:50](#)). Jesus’ body was also a body of flesh ([Col 1:22](#)).

Flesh as the Body Itself

By a natural transition, the part is used for the whole, and in many places “flesh” is synonymous with the body as a whole rather than designating

the fleshy part of the body. Paul may thus speak either of being absent in the body ([1 Cor 5:3](#)) or in the flesh ([Col 2:5](#)). Paul can say that the life of Jesus may be manifested in our body or in our mortal flesh ([2 Cor 4:10–11](#)). “He who joins himself to a prostitute becomes one body with her. For, as it is written, ‘The two shall become one flesh’ ” ([1 Cor 6:16](#), rsv).

Flesh as Person with Reference to Origin

Following OT usage, “flesh” was used by Paul to refer not merely to the stuff of the body or to the body itself, but concretely to the person as constituted by flesh. In this usage the word may refer to the person’s human relationship, the physical origin and the natural ties that bind one to other humans. Paul speaks of his kinsmen “according to the flesh,” his fellow Jews ([Rom 9:3](#), kjv), and even uses “my flesh” ([11:14](#), kjv) as a synonym for these kinsmen. The “children of the flesh” ([9:8](#)) are those born by natural generation in contrast to those born as a result of divine intervention. Christ was descended from David according to the flesh ([1:3](#)). The phrase does not designate the source merely of his bodily life but of his entire human existence, including both his body and his human spirit.

Flesh as Human Existence

Another use of “flesh” simply designates human existence. As long as a person lives in the body, that one is “in the flesh.” Thus, Paul can speak of the life that he lives “in the flesh” as lived by faith in the Son of God ([Gal 2:20](#), rsv). Referring to Jesus’ earthly ministry, Paul says that he abolished “in the flesh” the enmity between Jew and Gentile ([Eph 2:15](#)). Peter has the same meaning when he speaks of Jesus having been put to death “in the flesh” ([1 Pt 3:18](#)). So also John: “Jesus Christ is come in the flesh” ([1 Jn 4:2](#)). This usage is reflected most notably in the Johannine saying “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us” ([Jn 1:14](#)).

Flesh as Human Existence in Terms of Outward Presentation

“Flesh” also extends beyond humans in their bodily life to include other factors crucial to human existence. Thus, “confidence in the flesh” ([Phil 3:3](#), rsv) does not mean confidence in the body but confidence in the whole complex of the outward realm of human existence. It includes Paul’s Jewish ancestry, his strict religious training, his zeal, and his prominence in Jewish religious circles. The

phrase to “glory after the flesh” ([2 Cor 11:18](#), kjv) is rendered “boast about their human achievements” in the nlt. A good showing “in the flesh” is practically synonymous with worldly prominence ([Gal 6:11–14](#)). The Judaizers insisted upon circumcision to promote a sense of prideful attainment in the religious life so that they might have a ground of glorying. But these external distinctions and grounds for glorying no longer appealed to Paul, because the world had been crucified to him and he to the world.

“Flesh” is also used of outward relationships, as when describing the social ties existing between slave and master ([Eph 6:5](#); [Col 3:22](#); [Phlm 1:16](#)). “In the flesh” also describes the realm of marital relationships, which entails certain troublesome problems ([1 Cor 7:28](#)).

This usage illuminates an otherwise difficult saying, “Henceforth know we no man after the flesh; yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more” ([2 Cor 5:16](#), kjv). The rsv correctly renders the phrase “from a human point of view.” The verse does not mean that Paul had heard and seen Jesus in Jerusalem at some previous time and had gained some acquaintance with Christ “after the flesh.” “After the flesh” modifies the verb “to know,” not the noun “Christ.” Before his conversion, Paul knew all people “after the flesh”; that is, he judged them by worldly, human standards. To know Christ “after the flesh” means to look at him through merely human eyes. As a Jew, Paul had felt that Jesus was a deluded messianic pretender. According to the Jewish understanding, the Messiah was to reign over the earth as a Davidic king, save his people Israel, and punish the hated Gentiles. But Paul surrendered this false human view and came to know Christ as he really is—the incarnate Son of God, the Savior of all who believe. As a Christian, Paul no longer judged others according to the flesh.

Flesh as Fallen Humanity

When Paul says that “flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God” ([1 Cor 15:50](#), rsv), he does not mean that humans cannot inherit the kingdom of God but rather that human fallenness cannot; as the next clause shows, “neither does corruption inherit incorruption.” The weak, fallen, corruptible body cannot inherit the kingdom of God; there must be a change; the “corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality” ([1 Cor 15:53](#), kjv). This is not the

salvation of the soul or spirit but the exchange of one kind of body for another that is suited to the final glorious kingdom of God.

When Peter confessed the messiahship of Jesus, Jesus replied, “Flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven” ([Mt 16:17](#), rsv). The meaning of this verse is obvious. This knowledge of Jesus’ messiahship was not a human deduction; it could be achieved only by divine revelation.

Flesh as Sinful Humanity

There remains a group of ethical references that are distinctly Pauline. The most important feature of this usage is that man is seen not only as fallen and weak before God, but as fallen and sinful. Flesh is contrasted with human spirit regenerated by the divine Spirit, and without the aid of the Spirit, one cannot please God. The most vivid passage is the first part of [Romans 8](#), where Paul sharply contrasts those who are “in the flesh” with those who are “in the Spirit.” To be “in the Spirit” in this sense does not mean to be in a state of ecstasy but to be living one’s life in that spiritual realm that is controlled by the Spirit of God. Those who are “in the flesh,” that is, unregenerate, cannot please God. There are two contrasting and mutually exclusive realms: “in the flesh” and “in the Spirit.” To be “in the Spirit” means to be indwelt by God’s Holy Spirit, that is, to be a regenerate person.

In [Romans 7–8](#) Paul makes it clear that the unregenerate person cannot please God by loving and serving him as God requires. Thus, the Law was unable to make mankind truly righteous, because the flesh is weak ([8:2](#)). To live after the flesh is death; to live after the Spirit is life ([8:6](#)). Elsewhere Paul says, “For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing” ([7:18](#), kjv). Flesh here cannot be the physical flesh, for the body of flesh is the temple of the Spirit ([1 Cor 6:19](#)) and a member of Christ ([6:15](#)) and is to be the means of glorifying God ([6:20](#)). Paul, therefore, means that in his unregenerate nature there dwells none of the goodness that God demands.

While Paul makes a sharp and absolute contrast between being “in the flesh” (unregenerate) and “in the Spirit” (regenerate), when one becomes regenerate and comes to be “in the Spirit,” that person is no longer in the flesh, but the flesh is still in him. In fact, there remains in the believer a struggle between the flesh and the Spirit. Writing to people who are “in the Spirit,” Paul says, “For the flesh lusteth [strives] against the Spirit, and the

Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would" ([Gal 5:17](#), kjv). Because the Christian life is the battleground of these two opposing principles, it is impossible to be the perfect person that one would wish to be.

The same situation is reflected in [1 Corinthians 2:14–3:3](#) where Paul describes three classes of people: the "natural" ([2:14](#), kjv); the "carnal," that is, fleshly man ([3:1, 3](#), kjv); and the "spiritual man" ([3:1](#), kjv). The "natural man" is unregenerate. Those who are "in the flesh" ([Rom 8:9](#)) have devoted the whole of their life to the human level and hence are unable to know the things of God. "Spiritual man" refers to those whose life is ruled by the Spirit of God, so that the fruits of the Spirit ([Gal 5:22–23](#)) are evident in their life. Between these two there is a third class—those who are "fleshly" yet who are babes in Christ. Therefore, they must be "in the Spirit," yet they do not walk "according to the Spirit." Because they are "babes in Christ," the Spirit of God dwells in them, yet the Holy Spirit is not allowed to have full control over them, and they are still walking "like men" ([1 Cor 3:3](#)), manifesting the works of the flesh in jealousy and strife.

Works of the Flesh

In [Galatians 5:19–23](#) Paul contrasts the life in the flesh and the life in the Spirit: "Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like" ([Gal 5:19–21](#), kjv). The important thing to note about this list is that while some of these are sins of bodily and sexual appetite, others are religious sins—idolatry, witchcraft—and several are sins "of the spirit," that is, of the disposition—hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife. The words "seditions" and "heresies" refer not to theological heresies but to a factious, divisive spirit. This proves conclusively that for Paul the "flesh" is not synonymous with the body but includes the whole person, with all the inner attitudes and disposition.

Victory over the Flesh

While a struggle remains in the Christian between the Spirit and the flesh, Paul knows of a way of victory for the Spirit. The flesh of the body comes within the sphere of sanctification ([1 Thes 5:23](#)),

but the flesh as the unregenerate human nature can only be put to death.

This is called the tension between the objective and the subjective. Because certain things have happened in Christ (objective), certain inevitable results should accrue (subjective). In Paul's view, the flesh has already been put to death in the death of Christ. Those who belong to Christ have already crucified the flesh with its passions and desires ([Gal 5:24](#)). Paul elsewhere says, "I have been crucified with Christ" ([2:20](#)) and "our old self was crucified with him" ([Rom 6:6](#)). Such references make it clear that "flesh" and the "self" are in some ways to be identified. This identity is further supported in the teaching about crucifixion, for Paul means the same thing by the crucifixion of the flesh that he means when he says, "How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein? We were baptized into his death. We are buried with him by baptism into death" (vv [1–4](#)). It is I myself who have died with Christ.

This crucifixion and death of the flesh does not, however, work automatically. It is an event that must be appropriated by faith. This involves two aspects. First, believers are to recognize that the flesh has been crucified with Christ. "Reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord" ([Rom 6:11](#), kjv). One cannot consider the self dead with Christ to sin unless that person has actually died and been crucified with Christ, but because this has already happened at the moment of saving faith, it can be put into daily practice. Those who have died with Christ are to "mortify [put to death] the deeds of the body" ([8:13](#), kjv). "Body" is here used as a vehicle for the works of the "flesh"—the sensual life of the unregenerate nature. Those who have been brought from death into life are to yield their members to God as instruments of righteousness ([6:13](#)). One who has died with Christ is to "mortify" (kjv), that is, put to death what is earthly—fornication, uncleanness, covetousness ([Col 3:5](#)). Having already put off the old nature and put on the new, the believer is to put on compassion, kindness, lowliness and the like.

Victory over the flesh is sometimes described as walking in the Spirit. "Walk by the Spirit, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh" ([Gal 5:16](#), rsv; cf. [Rom 8:4](#)). Walking in the Spirit means to live each moment under the control of the Holy Spirit.

See also Body; Sin.

Flint

Dark, fine-grained, hard silica (rock) used for blades of tools. Flint when struck against other hard surfaces produces sparks and so was used for lighting fires. *See* Minerals and Metals.

Flogging

Beating a person with a whip or other instrument, sometimes used as a legislated punishment. *See* Criminal Law and Punishment.

Flood Myths

See Gilgamesh Epic.

Flood, the

A rising and overflowing of water to cover the land, specifically the flood associated with Noah in [Genesis 6–9](#).

Biblical Account

The story of Noah's flood is told in [Genesis 6–9](#). It is mentioned often in the Bible, always as a real event ([Genesis 10:1, 32](#); [11:10](#); [Matthew 24:38–39](#); [Luke 17:27](#); [2 Peter 2:5](#)). In the Bible, God sent the flood because of sin, which was so bad that "the wickedness of man was great upon the earth" ([Genesis 6:5](#)). God decided to destroy everyone and start again with people who would obey him (compare [Genesis 1:26–28](#)). The only people who were faithful to the Lord were Noah, his sons, and their wives. God used them to recreate the earth after its destruction.

Noah spent 120 years building a great ship and warning people about God's coming judgment ([Genesis 6:3](#); compare [Hebrews 11:7](#); [1 Peter 3:20](#); [2 Peter 2:5](#)). When the flood came, it rained heavily, and the underground waters rose ([Genesis 7:11](#)). Only Noah's family and any land animals he brought onto the ship were saved from the water. The flood lasted for more than a year. Finally, the waters went down, and the earth was dry again ([Genesis 7:6–12, 24](#); [8:3–6, 10–14](#)). When Noah and his family left the ark, they gave sacrifices to God to thank him. God promised he would never send another flood to destroy the earth.

The Size of the Flood

Those who believe the flood account is true disagree about its size. The story seems to suggest that the whole earth was flooded as high as the top of the highest mountains ([Genesis 7:17–20](#); [8:4](#)). Some have argued that waters that were high enough to cover "all the high mountains under all the heavens" ([Genesis 7:19](#)) would cover the entire earth. Those who argue for a local flood note that the text says that it *appeared* that all the earth was flooded. So, a worldwide flood was unnecessary. God wanted to destroy humans, who may have only lived in Mesopotamia at that time. Others argue that in the Bible, "earth" is often not meant literally. In [Genesis 1:1](#), "heaven and earth" means "the universe." Sometimes "earth" describes a single country ([Genesis 47:13](#)), the soil itself ([23:15](#)), and so on. So, it isn't necessary to think that the Genesis flood story implies the entire world was flooded.

Some people who believe in a universal flood argue that there are marine fossils on the tops of mountains, so the water must have covered them. Others disagree, saying that all mountains originally came from the seas, so it is reasonable that there is evidence of marine life on them. Theological beliefs and interpretations of the Bible determine whether people think the flood was global or local. *See* "Scientific Evidence for the Flood?"

See also Gilgamesh Epic; Noah #1.

Flour

A fine, powdery substance made by grinding the inner kernels of wheat. In the Bible, flour was used in baking and also for cereal offerings ([Leviticus 2](#)).

See Food and Food Preparation.

Flower

A flower is the part of a plant that produces seeds and often has colorful petals. Flowers attract insects or animals, which help the plant spread its seeds.

In the Bible, flowers are sometimes used to symbolize beauty or the shortness of life (for example, [Isaiah 40:6–8](#)).

See Plants.

Flute

Translation of several Hebrew words designating various kinds of wind instruments played by blowing across or through a hole. *See* Musical Instruments (Halil).

Fly

Two-winged insect. In Scripture, several species are in view, including the common housefly ([Eccl 10:1](#)) and the horsefly ([Is 7:18](#)). *See* Animals.

Followers of the Way

A name used for Christians in the book of Acts ([Acts 9:2](#); [19:9](#), [23](#); [22:4](#); [24:22](#)). In its early years, Christianity was called "the Way."

See Way, The.

Food and Food Preparation

The things the body needs to stay alive, and the ways to make them ready to eat. In Bible times, people ate:

- Bread
- Milk products
- Fruit
- Meat
- Fish

Food was also given as sacrifices or given as gifts. Finding enough food was a constant worry because it was often limited by:

- Droughts ([2 Kings 4:38](#); [Jeremiah 14:1, 4-6](#); [Haggai 1:11](#))
- Hail ([Haggai 2:17](#))
- War ([2 Kings 6:25](#))
- Locusts

There was more food in Palestine, called a "land flowing with milk and honey," than in other parts of the Near East. However, farming in shallow soil made crops dependent on regular rainfall. Egyptian crops were more reliable because the Nile was a dependable source of water.

Food shortages were seen as warnings or punishment from God ([Lamentations 4:9, 11](#); [Amos 4:6-9](#)). They were meant to remind people that life is more than food and they must keep their faith in hard times ([Deuteronomy 8:3](#); [Habakkuk 3:17-18](#)).

The main foods that the early Israelites ate when they traveled with their herds were milk and dairy products like cheese. As people settled in one place, they grew grains and vegetables and planted orchards and vineyards. They would sometimes grow grain for a season, harvest it, and then move their flocks to other pastures. Religious sacrifices and festivals were times to be somber but also to joyfully feast. Victories were celebrated with banquets and feasting on the food taken from the camp of the defeated enemy.

Preview

- Dairy Products
- Grain Crops
- Animal Products
- Insects and Their Food Products
- Vegetables and Seasoning
- Fruits, Nuts, and Wine

Dairy Products

Milk and its by-products were important to the Israelite diet (see [Judges 4:19](#)). Goat's milk was most common, but they also used milk from camels, cows, and sheep ([Genesis 32:15](#); [Deuteronomy 32:14](#); [Proverbs 27:27](#)).

Fresh milk could not be kept fresh in the hot Palestinian weather, so it was turned into buttermilk, curds, and cheese. Milk was poured into goatskins, where it would sour and thicken. The unclean condition of the used skins and the movement as it was transported would transform it. The movement of the pouch (usually a cow's stomach, with the enzyme rennin, which is used in cheese making) produced curds. Curds are mentioned as part of the meal that Abraham provided for his special guests ([Genesis 18:8](#)).

The Hebrew word for curds (*chena*) is also translated "butter" ([Job 10:10](#)). This butter would be similar in consistency to yogurt without the liquid. When squeezed and rolled into small balls, it lasted for a long time regardless of climate. Thus, these curds were valuable for long journeys.

Grain Crops

Bread is the most frequently mentioned food in the Bible. The term refers to food prepared from grain. In biblical times, bread could be made from several grains. Wheat, barley, and spelt were grown in Egypt ([Exodus 9:31–32](#)).

An Egyptian physician, Sinuhe, wrote in the mid-20th century BC that bread was baked daily in Palestine and Syria, and likely served with every meal. This bread was probably a flat cake made from barley or a lesser form of wheat because these were the two crops that Sinuhe saw. Wheat was the most expensive grain. Fine wheat flour was a luxury for the rich ([Genesis 18:6](#); [Ezra 16:13, 19](#)). Later, wheat became a valuable export from Tyre to the Mediterranean.

Barley could be grown in poor soil and tolerate drought. So, it was a popular grain crop in the ancient Near East. Barley bread ([Judges 7:13](#); [2 Kings 4:42](#)) and barley cakes ([Ezra 4:12](#)) were eaten by the poor laborers. Jesus multiplied a boy's five barley loaves and two fishes and fed five thousand ([John 6:9–13](#)).

Two other grains were planted around the edges of fields and used when food was scarce:

- Millet: a small grain that grows on short stalks less than 0.6 meters (two feet) tall
- Spelt: a type of wheat

A primitive way to process grain was to rub them between the hands to separate the kernels like Jesus and his disciples did ([Luke 6:1](#)). Doing this on the Sabbath (the day of rest) was considered work and was forbidden.

Parching (roasting the grain lightly in a pan) was another easy preparation method ([Joshua 5:11](#); [1 Samuel 17:17](#)). It made a quick meal for laborers or kings ([Ruth 2:14](#); [1 Samuel 25:18](#); [2 Samuel 17:28](#)). Parched corn was good for journeys.

Making bread was hard work. In ancient Egypt (around 2900 BC), flour was ground using mortars, pestles, and simple mills. To use these mills, one would need to kneel. The result was a coarse meal that was filled with small pieces of husk.

Water was added to the flour, and the result was kneaded into a dough. This dough could be made into cakes, pancakes, or unleavened bread ([Genesis 19:3](#)). The flat cakes would be baked on hot stones

in ovens. Adding leaven made a lighter dough. Leaven was a piece of dough left over from an earlier batch that would ferment before being used. Flour meal was also mixed with lentil porridge to stretch the food supply.

Animal Products

Meat became part of the diet after Noah's time ([Genesis 9:3](#)). However, animals were valuable, so only the wealthy could afford to eat them. Peasants had a simple diet, while the rich ate meat, delicacies, and imported commodities. Meat was a luxury the poor rarely enjoyed. The exception was special occasions like the Passover or sacrifices ([Exodus 12:8](#)). It was expensive to slaughter an animal that produced food like milk, curds, and cheese. However, the rules of hospitality in the Near East dictated that an animal should be killed for an honored guest ([2 Samuel 12:2–4](#)).

Domestic sheep, goats, and oxen were the main source of meat, but venison was popular with the rich. When Jacob deceived Isaac, he offered his father kid's meat and wild game ([Genesis 27:3, 9, 19](#)). Ox or fatted calves were reserved for festive occasions ([Matthew 22:4](#)).

Meat sacrifices were regulated in Leviticus and Deuteronomy. The Law made slaughtering an animal and its child on the same day illegal ([Leviticus 22:28](#)). It also made cooking a baby goat in its mother's milk illegal ([Deuteronomy 14:21](#)). Mosaic law forbids eating blood in any form. Animal blood was believed to be the source of life. Priests offered it as a sacrifice to God to make up for sin ([Leviticus 17:11](#)).

Pigs, camels, badgers, and rabbits were all considered unclean and were forbidden to eat ([Leviticus 11:4–8](#)).

Meat was cooked by boiling or stewing. Meat would be roasted on special feasts or sacrificial rituals. Meat might also be roasted for members of the royal palace or a king's special guests.

Many people enjoyed hunting, but wild game was only a minor part of their diet. Wild animals that lived in Palestine were:

- Gazelle
- Roebuck
- Wild goat
- Deer ([Deuteronomy 14:5](#); [1 Kings 4:23](#))
- Pheasants
- Turtledoves
- Pigeons
- Quails
- Partridges ([Genesis 15:9](#); [Exodus 16:13](#))

Goose and marsh ducks were popular in Egypt. Chickens were eaten in the Persian period ([2 Esdras 1:30](#)). In Rome, eggs and omelettes were popular. The eggs mentioned in Deuteronomy are probably wild birds' eggs ([Deuteronomy 22:6-7](#); compare [Isaiah 10:14](#)).

Fish was abundant in the Jordan, and fishing was common on the shores of the Sea of Galilee at the time of Christ. In Roman times, fish was readily available from the Mediterranean coast. Before then, the supply of fish depended on what nation controlled the coastline. After the exilic period, Jerusalem was supplied with fish from Tyr, and it was sold near the Fish Gate ([Nehemiah 3:3](#)). Only fish with fins and scales were acceptable to eat ([Leviticus 11:9-12](#)).

In New Testament times, these laws about food were eliminated. In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus criticized Jewish food laws by saying that evil thoughts, not certain foods, make a person unclean ([Mark 7:19](#)). As Christianity spread, people were still concerned about eating meat that had been offered to idols. The question is discussed in Corinthians. The apostle Paul argued that even though the meat was acceptable, no one should upset another Christian who had a problem with it.

Insects and Their Food Products

People in ancient Palestine found honey made by wild bees in nature. While they did not raise bees themselves, their neighbors in Egypt did have farms where they raised bees for honey.

The honeycomb is mentioned in [1 Samuel 14:27](#) and [Song of Songs 5:1](#). Liquid honey is referred to in [1 Kings 14:3](#). Honey was found in crevices of

rocks and on trees ([Deuteronomy 32:13](#)). It was used to sweeten food. Although it could not be used in a sacrifice to the Lord ([Leviticus 2:11](#)), honey was a delicacy. In the 15th century BC, when Thutmose III was campaigning in Syria and Palestine, he brought back vast quantities of honey as tribute from his newly conquered lands.

Locusts began to be eaten out of desperation after they had destroyed crops. They are one of the few insects that are allowed to be eaten ([Leviticus 11:22](#)). Locusts were fried in flour or honey, or were preserved by being dried. John the Baptist ate locusts and wild honey in the wilderness ([Matthew 3:4](#); [Mark 1:6](#)). Although locusts contain little protein, they are rich in fat and minerals.

Vegetables and Seasoning

When the Israelites were wandering in the Sinai wilderness, they missed the flavorful vegetables from Egypt. They mentioned:

- Cucumbers
- Melons (possibly watermelons)
- Leeks
- Onions
- Garlic ([Numbers 11:5](#)).

Many of these vegetables would be grown later in Palestine (particularly in Gaza). When cucumbers were first grown, they were luxury items and were protected by guards who lived in shacks overlooking the gardens ([Isaiah 1:8](#)).

Beans, lentils, and parched grain were brought to David and his soldiers at Mahanaim ([2 Samuel 17:28](#)). Lentils were grown in Egypt from the 13th century BC and were popular in Israel. Lentil soup is mentioned in [Genesis 25:34](#).

In times of hunger, carob tree husks could be used for food. These are craved by the prodigal son ([Luke 15:16](#)). Many kinds of green herbs could be eaten by the poor when needed ([Proverbs 15:17](#)). In extreme cases, mallow and juniper roots could be eaten. In Elisha's time, a group of prophets at Gilgal made a stew of wild vegetables, but they accidentally added poisonous wild gourds. Elisha helped by adding flour to the pot ([2 Kings 4:38-41](#)). There is no record of which bitter herbs were used in the Passover offering ([Exodus 12:8](#); [Numbers 9:11](#)), but mint and cumin were probably included. Dill, cumin, rue, and mint were common garden herbs ([Matthew 23:23](#); [Luke 11:42](#)).

Seasonings added flavor to the typical Israelite diet. Salt from the Dead Sea area was an important seasoning and preservative. Salt was so important that sharing salt with a person at a meal meant sealing a covenant or pact ([Numbers 18:19](#)). In sacrifices, salt was part of meat and cereal offerings as it represented the sealing of God's covenant with Israel ([Leviticus 2:13](#); [Ezekiel 43:24](#)).

The mustard tree, grown for its oil, grew from a small seed to up to 15 feet (4.5 meters) ([Matthew 13:31-32](#)). Anise, coriander, and cinnamon were also common ([Exodus 16:31](#); [Numbers 11:7](#)). The most popular spice, other than salt, was garlic. Vinegar was used for flavoring and preserving. Many seeds and plants were found in Egyptian tombs from the 18th dynasty. It was common for people to use seasoning in the ancient world.

Fruits, Nuts, and Wine

Olive trees grew often in Palestine and were an excellent source of food and oil. Even in poor soil, one tree could give enough to a family for a whole year. Some green olives were pickled and eaten with bread. But, the olive was most important as a source of oil. Olive oil was used in baking bread and cakes and in frying foods. The best olive oil was saved for sacrifices.

Oil was taken from the finest olives by crushing them with a stone mortar and pestle. Pickers would often collect the olives from trees with long poles and baskets. The oil was squeezed from them in a vat, probably the same one used for grapes ([Micah 6:15](#)), which was collected four weeks later.

An oil mill needed two people to turn a heavy upper grinding stone. As the oil dripped down, it was collected in a stone vat and settled and purified. When ready, the oil was stored in skins or jars.

Fig trees grew in all areas of Palestine. They needed little work and yielded two or three crops per year. The second, in the late summer, was the most abundant. The first figs of the season were a great delicacy ([Isaiah 28:4](#); [Micah 7:1](#)). The prophet Hosea compared the Israelites to the first yield of the fig tree ([Hosea 9:10](#)). Jeremiah also compared the exiles to the first figs, while the people still in the land were like bad figs, fit for destruction ([Jeremiah 24:1-10](#)).

Figs could be eaten fresh from the trees, but some were made into cakes for traveling ([1 Samuel 25:18](#); [30:12](#); [1 Chronicles 12:40](#)). Figs were used as medicine to soothe wounds ([2 Kings 20:7](#); [Isaiah 38:21](#)). Sycamore trees produced small fruits,

similar to figs, that were eaten by the poor. Before it was harvested, the fruit would be cut, making it swell and ripen more quickly. The prophet Amos cut sycamore fruit before he was called by God ([Amos 7:14](#)).

The date palm was also pressed into flat cakes for travelers. The Bible does not reference this (see [Judges 4:5](#); [Psalm 92:12](#); [Joel 1:12](#); [John 12:13](#)).

Another popular fruit was the pomegranate. It was eaten whole, or the seeds were pressed into a drink. The pomegranate was one of the fruits brought back from Canaan to Moses by his spies ([Exodus 28:33](#)). It was also an exotic drink ([Song of Solomon 8:2](#)). The "apple" mentioned in Scripture was likely an apricot or quince ([Proverbs 25:11](#); [Song of Solomon 2:5](#)). Nuts were used for flavor in cooking. Almonds and pistachios were given by Jacob to ransom his sons ([Genesis 43:11](#)).

Grapes were popular in the early Bronze Age. Grapes were:

- Eaten from the vine
- Dried as raisins ([Numbers 6:3](#); [1 Samuel 25:18](#))
- Pressed
- Drunk as new wine
- Fermented into alcohol

The cup-bearer in ancient royal courts provided grape juice or wine to the king, his family, and guests ([Genesis 40:9-13](#)).

Grape juice provided vinegar when the wine deteriorated. Vinegar was used for flavoring and preserving. When mixed with water, it made a refreshing drink for workers. Jelly was made by boiling grapes until they thickened. This syrup was used as a sweetener.

Wine was a common drink in antiquity. It could be mixed with water or mixed with spices or honey to make a mulled wine ([Song of Solomon 8:2](#); [Isaiah 5:22](#)). The Hebrew word for "banquet" or "feast" literally means "drinking." This suggests a lot about the nature of feasts. A level of drunkenness was normal at festivals or banquets ([Genesis 43:34](#); [Judges 9:13](#); [Luke 5:34](#)).

Wine was made in a similar way to olive oil. Clusters of grapes were taken from the vine and crushed by workers. The juice ran into a lower vat, where it fermented. The wine settled so debris

could be removed. In six weeks, the wine was ready to drink or store.

See also Animals; Bread; Family Life and Relations; Leaven; Meals, Significance of; Plants; Unleavened Bread.

Footstool

A low stool used to support one's feet.

Part of King Solomon's large amount of gold was used to make a footstool for his ivory throne ([2 Chronicles 9:18](#)). The word is often used as a symbol. Both the ark of the covenant and the temple are referred to as "God's footstool" ([1 Chronicles 28:2](#); [Psalms 99:5](#); [132:7](#); [Lamentations 2:1](#); compare [Isaiah 60:13](#)). These were special places where God's presence lived and where he showed his power as king. Just as a king might rest his feet on a footstool while sitting on his throne, these holy places were seen as places where God's glory was present.

The Bible says that God would make the enemies of the Messiah (God's chosen one) become like a footstool under his feet ([Psalms 110:1](#)). This means God would give the Messiah complete power over his enemies, just as someone has control over what is under their feet. Many passages in the New Testament repeat this idea that the Messiah would defeat his enemies ([Matthew 22:44](#); [Mark 12:36](#); [Luke 20:43](#); [Acts 2:35](#); [Hebrews 1:13](#); [10:13](#)). In these verses, "footstool" literally means "something under the foot."

Fords of the Jordan

The fords of Jordan were shallow places in the Jordan River where people and animals could walk across.

Many important people in the Old Testament crossed the Jordan River at one of its fords (shallow crossing places). These included:

- Jacob ([Genesis 32:10](#)),
- Gideon ([Judges 8:4](#)),
- King David ([2 Samuel 10:17](#); [17:22](#)),
- David's son Absalom ([2 Samuel 17:24](#)), and
- Abner and his men ([2 Samuel 2:29](#))

Joshua and the Israelites crossed the Jordan River on dry ground during the flood season. This was a miracle from God ([Joshua 3:15-16](#)).

Jesus also crossed the Jordan River several times during his travels between Galilee and Jerusalem.

There were two main fords of the Jordan. The first was at Jericho ([Joshua 2:7](#); [Judges 3:28](#); [2 Samuel 19:15](#)). The second was at Bethabara, where John baptized ([John 1:28](#)).

At certain times and places, the Jordan was too deep to cross easily. This happened after snow melted in the Lebanon Mountains or near the Dead Sea. In these places, the river could be about 30.5 meters (100 feet) wide and 1.5 to 3 meters (5 to 10 feet) deep ([Joshua 3:15](#)).

See also Jordan River.

Foreigner

A person who is not a citizen. A foreigner may be a temporary guest, temporary resident, or stranger.

The Hebrew word meaning "foreigner" is translated correctly on all occasions in the Revised Standard Version. However, the King James Version uses it in its truest sense on only two occasions ([Deuteronomy 15:3](#); [Obadiah 1:11](#)). In most cases, the King James Version translates the word as "alien" ([Deuteronomy 14:21](#); [Job 19:15](#); [Psalm 69:8](#); [Lamentations 5:2](#)) or "stranger" ([Genesis 15:13](#); [Exodus 2:22](#); [Leviticus 25:35](#)). Another Hebrew word means "dweller" or "settler" ([Leviticus 25:35](#); [1 Chronicles 29:15](#); [Psalm 39:12](#)). However, it is most often translated "foreigner."

A temporary guest or sojourner was usually someone who wanted to take up temporary residence or had moved from one tribe of people to another and then attempted to obtain certain advantages or rights belonging to the native people living there. A whole tribe might be temporary residents in Israel. This was the case with the Gibeonites ([Joshua 9](#)) and the Beerothites ([2](#)

[Samuel 4:3](#); compare [2 Chronicles 2:17](#)). The Israelites themselves were temporary residents in the land of Egypt ([Genesis 15:13](#); [23:4](#); [26:3](#); [47:4](#); [Exodus 2:22](#); [23:9](#)) and in other lands ([Ruth 1:1](#)).

Foreigners or temporary residents had certain rights while in Israel. But they also had certain limitations. They could offer sacrifices ([Leviticus 17:8](#); [22:18](#)) but could not enter the sanctuary unless circumcised ([Ezekiel 44:9](#)). They were allowed to participate in the three great Jewish festivals ([Deuteronomy 16:11, 14](#)) but could not eat the Passover meal unless circumcised ([Exodus 12:43, 48](#)). Foreigners were not obliged to follow the Israelite religion, but they shared in some of its benefits ([Deuteronomy 14:29](#)). They were not to work on the Sabbath or the Day of Atonement ([Exodus 20:10](#); [23:12](#); [Leviticus 16:29](#); [Deuteronomy 5:14](#)) and could be stoned for reviling or blaspheming God's name ([Leviticus 24:16](#); [Numbers 15:30](#)). Foreigners were forbidden to eat blood ([Leviticus 17:10-12](#)) but could eat animals that had died a natural death ([Deuteronomy 14:21](#)). Israel's code of sexual morality also applied to the foreigner ([Leviticus 18:26](#)). There were prohibitions against Israelites intermarrying with foreigners, but it was nevertheless a common occurrence ([Genesis 34:14](#); [Exodus 34:12, 16](#); [Deuteronomy 7:3-4](#); [Joshua 23:12](#)).

The rights of citizens were provided for foreigners by the law of Moses ([Exodus 12:49](#); [Leviticus 24:22](#)). They came under the same legal processes and punishments ([Leviticus 20:2](#); [24:16, 22](#); [Deuteronomy 1:16](#)). They were to be treated politely ([Exodus 22:21](#); [23:9](#)). They were to be loved as those under the love of God ([Leviticus 19:34](#); [Deuteronomy 10:18-19](#)). And they were to be treated generously ([Leviticus 19:10](#); [23:22](#); [Deuteronomy 24:19-22](#)). They could receive asylum (protection or shelter) in times of trouble ([Numbers 35:15](#); [Joshua 20:9](#)). Foreign servants were to receive treatment equal to Hebrew servants ([Deuteronomy 24:14](#)). A foreigner could not take part in tribal deliberations or become a king ([17:15](#)). The prophet Ezekiel looked forward to the future time when the Messiah will reign. Then the foreigner would share all the blessings of the land with God's own people ([Ezekiel 47:22-23](#)).

In the New Testament, "foreigner" is often used symbolically. On the one hand, the work of Christ allowed all foreigners ((or example, those separated from Christ) to become members of God's household ([Ephesians 2:11-19](#)). On the other

hand, Christians should consider themselves foreigners in this world ([Hebrews 11:13](#); [1 Peter 2:11](#)).

See also Barbarian; Neighbor.

Foreknowledge

The knowledge about events or things before they happen.

In the New Testament, the Greek word for "foreknowledge" appears only seven times. It describes:

1. How Christians are warned about false teachers ([2 Peter 3:17](#))
2. The Jews' prior knowledge of Paul's early life ([Acts 26:4-5](#))
3. God's awareness of Christ's death before it happened ([Acts 2:23](#); [1 Peter 1:18-20](#))
4. God's knowledge of His people ([Romans 11:2](#))
5. God's knowledge of His church ([Romans 8:28-30](#); [1 Peter 1:1-2](#))

Although the term "foreknowledge" is not used often, the idea is present throughout the Bible. First, the Bible clearly teaches that God knows everything. His understanding is unlimited ([Psalm 147:5](#)). He knows every heart and thought ([1 Chronicles 28:9](#)). [Psalm 139](#) describes God's knowledge of all human thoughts, words, and actions. This knowledge even extends to the flight of a sparrow and the number of hairs on a person's head ([Matthew 10:29-30](#)). From this limitless knowledge, we can infer that God also knows future events in human history.

The Bible also directly states that God is aware of events before they happen. This knowledge sets Him apart from idols, who cannot foresee the future ([Isaiah 44:6-8](#); [45:21](#)). God's foreknowledge is the basis for the prophets' predictions. For example:

- God told Adam and Eve that the woman's offspring would defeat the serpent and his offspring ([Genesis 3:15](#))
- He promised future blessings to Abraham ([Genesis 12:3](#))
- God also told Moses, "I know that the king of Egypt will not allow you to go" ([Exodus 3:19](#))

The Old Testament prophets spoke about the coming glory of the Messiah ([Isaiah 9:1-7](#); [Jeremiah 23:5-6](#); [Ezekiel 34:20-31](#); [Hosea 3:4-5](#)). In [Daniel 7](#), God revealed the rise and fall of future world empires and the establishment of His kingdom (see also [Daniel 2:31-45](#)). The New Testament often sees Christ's ministry and the church as fulfilling Old Testament prophecies ([Matthew 1:22](#); [4:14](#); [8:17](#); [John 12:38-41](#); [Acts 2:17-21](#); [3:22-25](#); [Galatians 3:8](#); [Hebrews 5:6](#); [1 Peter 1:10-12](#)).

Early Greek philosophers believed that fate controlled all future events. This included human history and the gods' destinies. Sometimes, the gods might know a future event and reveal it to people, but such events were considered unchangeable. This view is very different from the biblical view of a personal Creator who knows the future and guides history according to His own purpose.

For centuries, theologians and philosophers have debated God's foreknowledge and human freedom. Some argue that if God knows what will happen in the future, then it must happen, making human choices irrelevant.

Early church theologians strongly denied that foreknowledge meant events were predetermined. Justin Martyr, for example, stated, "What we say about future events being foretold, we do not say it as though they come about by fatal necessity." In other words, just because God knows what will happen does not mean He *causes* it to happen.

Some theologians worry that foreknowledge may kill human freedom. So, they argue that God does not know future events with certainty. Modern process theology, for example, views God as developing along with nature and humanity. This view suggests that God can only know past events. It leaves the future uncertain for both God and humans. An older theologian, Adam Clarke, suggested that although God can know all future

events, He chooses not to know some of them beforehand.

Augustine had a different perspective. He argued that God lives in eternity, where all things are present at once. For God, there is no past or future. So, He would not "know" things before they happen. He sees all events from an eternal "now." However, Augustine did not deny God's knowledge of all things, including future events.

Evangelical theologians, citing the Bible, believe that God knows all future events. However, there is some disagreement. Calvin's followers assert that God knows all events. He determines what will happen in human history, even the smallest details. In this view, foreknowledge is closely tied to, or even identified with, foreordination (ensuring future events happen). Most Calvinist theologians say that humans are responsible for their choices. They are not victims of blind fate. They also hold that God is not the author of sin. Rather, sin comes from the rebellion of angels and humans against a holy, righteous God.

Armenian Evangelicals separate foreknowledge from the foreordination of events. They argue that God predetermined human history and the world's salvation. But, individual responses to God are not. Therefore, God can foreknow an event without directly causing it to happen.

Evangelical Christians may disagree on how God's foreknowledge relates to history. But, the Bible teaches both God's foreknowledge of all things and human responsibility for their choices.

See also Elect, Election; Foreordination.

Foreordination

What is Foreordination?

God's activity of deciding events and outcomes before they happen. People often use "foreordination" and "predestination" to mean the same thing. However, "predestination" and "election" specifically refer to the destiny of people.

Many early church fathers wrote about foreordination. Augustine of Hippo, who lived from 354 to 430, emphasized foreordination in his teachings. Augustine greatly influenced the Protestant Reformers, especially John Calvin. Reformed theologians start studying foreordination by looking at God's eternal decree,

as shown in statements of belief like the Westminster Confession of Faith. God's decree is one, but people usually talk about it as "the decrees of God" to help explain it. Martin Luther believed in foreordination but didn't stress it as much as Calvin. Luther's teachings don't say much about foreordination, mainly discussing predestination or election. Modern Lutheran thought emphasizes conditional election, rather than absolute election. This means they believe election or predestination is based on faith that God sees ahead of time.

Foreordination in God's Plan

Foreordination is the foundation of God's whole plan: his decision to create the universe, to care for it (providence), and to determine its destiny "by the counsel of His will" ([Ephesians 1:11](#)). The Westminster Shorter Catechism explains it like this: God has decreed "his eternal purpose according to the counsel of his will, whereby, for his own glory, he hath foreordained whatsoever comes to pass." So, foreordination is at the base of all Christian teaching, because it is about the history and destiny of the whole world, the universe, and everything in it.

The apostle Paul spoke of God's plan for the fulfillment of all creation: "The creation waits in eager expectation for the revelation of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not by its own will, but because of the One who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God" ([Romans 8:19-21](#)). Scripture describes briefly the redemption of creation. It talks about "a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells" ([2 Peter 3:13](#)). The things that harm human life and come from human sinfulness (that is, depravity) will end. God will make "all things new", so God is in control of the destiny of everything ([Revelation 21:1-5](#)).

Challenges and Debates

Foreordination creates problems for theology and commonsense thinking. This is especially true of human freedom and responsibility concerning salvation. How can people be held responsible for their actions and decisions if they are already predetermined? Some deny God's foreordination concerning human freedom to remove that difficulty. When God created humans with free will (that is, the ability to make choices that are not determined by anyone or anything else), some

argue that God necessarily limited his control over events that "must" happen. Otherwise, free and responsible human activity has no meaning. Calvinism rejects this argument, insisting that free activity is possible even though it is foreordained and known of before it happens.

Denying foreordination implies that God does not control his creation. If that were true, human activity would be determined either by something above or beyond God, or by unknown causes. God's providence and care revealed in the Bible and human experience make such a view difficult to defend. Christian thought generally states that God foreordains and controls his creation and that humans are able to act freely and responsibly within that larger control. This appears contradictory because human understanding is limited.

Foreordination in Scripture

The Bible often mentions foreordination (including predestination, or election) and foreknowledge. Foreordination is logically prior to foreknowledge, but since both are eternal in God, no such priority exists.

When he spoke of Babylon's coming judgement, God said, "This is the plan devised for the whole earth, and this is the hand stretched out over all the nations. The LORD of Hosts has purposed, and who can thwart Him? His hand is outstretched, so who can turn it back?" ([Isaiah 14:26-27](#)). God also declared that he had already determined the end since the beginning. "My purpose will stand, and all My good pleasure I will accomplish" ([Isaiah 46:10](#)). Paul stated that God carries out his purposes "by the counsel of His will" ([Ephesians 1:11](#); compare with [Psalm 119:89-91](#); [Daniel 4:35](#)).

The Bible also says:

- a person's life span is determined ([Job 14:5](#))
- God's concern extends to his creatures ([Psalm 104:14-30](#); [Matthew 10:29](#))
- the hairs on our heads are numbered ([Matthew 10:30](#))

Furthermore, God's plan extends to peoples and nations, for "from one man He made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and He determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their lands" ([Acts 17:26](#)).

God knows and even uses people's evil acts for his purposes. Joseph's brothers sinned by selling him into slavery. Joseph later said, "As for you, what you intended against me for evil, God intended for good, in order to accomplish a day like this—to preserve the lives of many people." ([Genesis 50:20](#)).

Another example is when Judas Iscariot betrayed Jesus. Jesus said, "The Son of Man will go as it has been determined, but woe to that man who betrays Him" ([Luke 22:22](#); "Son of Man" is a title Jesus used to refer to himself). On the day of Pentecost, the apostle Peter said, "He [Jesus] was delivered up by God's set plan and foreknowledge, and you, by the hands of the lawless, put Him to death by nailing Him to the cross" ([Acts 2:23](#); compare with [4:27–28](#)).

Paul refers to God's determining authority over Pharaoh's acts ([Romans 9:17](#)). [Revelation 17:17](#) says, "God has put it into their hearts to carry out his purpose". So, God foreordains history, and even evil acts fulfill his purposes.

Election of sinners to salvation through Christ is included in God's foreordination ([Romans 8:28–39](#); compare with [Acts 13:48](#); [Philippians 2:12–13](#); [1 Peter 2:9](#)). God's plan of salvation is based on his eternal love ([Ephesians 1:3–14](#); [Romans 5:6–11](#)). Christians receive God's grace by knowing God and being known (that is, loved) by God ([Galatians 4:9](#)). Both election and believers' faith are part of the salvation process.

Foreordination and Providence

Foreordination is implied in providence or God's care. Providence is the achievement of God's plan for the world. God's care and control for creation show his plan of redemption for humanity made in his image. God controls history, but God is not responsible for sin. He created human beings to be able to say "yes" or "no" to him. But God's plan cannot be stopped. It continues despite opposition. God's ultimate plan is happening throughout all events of human history, both evil and good. But his sovereignty is not imposed without reason or fairness. God is not a tyrant but rather is holy, loving, and righteous. His plan is carried out according to his nature, shown in care and concern for creation and in steadfast love for sinners.

Natural law is the set of rules God has established (foreordained) to control the universe. What about destructive forces of nature, such as earthquakes, tornadoes, and hurricanes? Why are such apparent

evils necessary in a world made by a loving God? This does not suggest that God is unable to control nature. If life's full meaning was found in the earthly, physical world, this might be a problem. But God's ultimate purpose is more than only the present life and includes the fullness of the redemptive kingdom yet to come ([Revelation 11:15](#); [21:1–4](#)). Foreordination is a great mystery, but it should bring joy and comfort to believers whose loving Lord has revealed his great plan to them.

See also Elect, Election; Foreknowledge.

Forerunner

Scout sent in advance of troops, or a herald who precedes a high official to announce his coming. The term is used to describe the man who ran ahead of Joseph when he was vice-regent of Egypt ([Gn 41:43](#)), and to refer to the first grapes of the season in the land of Canaan ([Nm 13:20](#)). In the Apocrypha, hornets are said to be sent as forerunners of the Israelite army, who were to bring judgment on the people of Canaan ([Wisdom of Sol 12:8](#)).

Although John the Baptist is commonly viewed as the forerunner of Jesus Christ, the term is not used in the Bible with reference to him. The word occurs only once in the NT, where Christ himself is described as our forerunner ([Heb 6:20](#)). Under the old covenant, the people never accompanied the high priest into the most sacred place of the temple. The book of Hebrews, in discussing the new covenant, describes Jesus as a high priest who has entered heaven—the Holy Place—ahead of those who believe in him (cf. [2:17–3:2](#); [5:1–9](#)).

Forest of Ephraim

The forest of Ephraim was a rocky, wooded area of land east of the Jordan River near a place called Mahanaim. The army of King David defeated Absalom in the forest of Ephraim ([2 Samuel 18:6](#)).

It is difficult to connect this location with the territory of Ephraim. The tribe of Ephraim might have once controlled land farther east, but later lost this area after they were defeated by Jephthah and the people of Gilead in a battle near Zaphon ([Judges 12:1–6](#)). This is the most probable explanation.

People might have used the name "forest of Ephraim" when Ephraimites controlled the land. Or, people might have named it later to remember Ephraim's defeat in that area. Some scholars think that ([Joshua 17:14–18](#)).

Forgetfulness, Land of

Euphemism for the abode of the dead. Once in the land of forgetfulness, the dead are thought to be forgotten by God ([Ps 88:12](#)) and people ([Eccl 9:5–6](#)) alike. [Job 14:21–22](#), suggests, however, that the deceased retain some self-consciousness in Sheol.

See also Sheol.

Forgiveness

Forgiveness means letting go of anger and hurt for things others have done wrong. It is mainly an act of God, freeing people from being judged for their bad actions. Only God can forgive sin because only God is perfect ([Mark 2:7](#); [Luke 5:21](#)). In Christianity, forgiveness is also an act extended toward one's neighbor. Forgiveness is a sign of one's experience and acknowledgment of God's forgiveness. Forgiveness is central to the Christian faith, with its unique emphasis on grace.

While forgiveness appears in various forms across religions, the Christian understanding of forgiveness is distinctive. In some religions such as animism, people do not think about having a close relationship with God. In the religion Hinduism, everyone must face the results of their actions in many lives. The religion Buddhism also does not know about a forgiving God. Islam includes a strong emphasis on God's mercy, and Allah is seen as deeply compassionate and willing to forgive; however, it does not portray God as a "Father" in the way Christianity does. In Judaism, forgiveness is deeply connected to repentance and atonement, but the New Testament adds new dimensions to the understanding of forgiveness, building on the Old Testament's teachings.

Expressions of Forgiveness in the Old Testament

The idea of forgiveness is explained in different ways. One example is the scapegoat, which was sent into the wilderness to carry away the sins of the Israelites. The high priest confessed their sins while placing his hands on the animal's head

([Leviticus 16:21](#)). In this way, the scapegoat symbolically "carried away" their sins. Another example is God's mercy, which is central to the forgiveness of sins ([Leviticus 4:20](#); [1 Kings 8:30, 34](#); [Psalms 86:5](#); [103:3](#)).

The Hebrew word *kapar* is commonly used for forgiveness. It means "to cover up," as the sacrifice was given to cover the person's faults ([Exodus 29:36](#); [Deuteronomy 21:8](#); [Jeremiah 18:23](#); [Ezekiel 43:20](#); [45:20](#)). Related words to *salah* always refer to God forgiving ([Numbers 30:5, 8, 12](#); [Psalms 86:5](#); [130:4](#); [Daniel 9:9](#)). God lets go of the wrong. He removes it. Another word, *maha*, means to "wipe away" ([Psalm 51:1, 7](#); [Isaiah 43:25](#); [44:22](#)).

The Old Testament says God is a forgiving God ([Exodus 34:6–7](#); [Nehemiah 9:17](#); [Daniel 9:9](#)). But he is also fair and punishes wrong actions. Sometimes God does not forgive when people do not meet certain conditions, or when certain serious actions are done ([Deuteronomy 29:20](#); [2 Kings 24:4](#); [Jeremiah 5:7](#)).

Forgiveness is part of God's nature. However, God's forgiveness shows his just nature. God forgives when people truly turn away from their wrongs and seek his forgiveness. The Old Testament uses strong images to show how much God forgives:

- Sin is thrown "into the depths of the sea" ([Micah 7:19](#)).
- It is removed "As far as the east is from the west" ([Psalms 103:12](#)).
- It is hidden behind God's back ([Isaiah 38:17](#)).
- God remembers it no more ([Jeremiah 31:34](#)).
- The stain of sin is made white ([Isaiah 1:18](#)).

Sin, which feels heavy like a weight, is forever lifted and removed.

In the Old Testament, forgiveness means being free from past wrongs. The wrong actions still happened, but they no longer control the person. Forgiveness brings freedom.

Forgiveness in the New Testament

In the New Testament, the idea that God forgives without us earning it is stronger because God forgave our sins when Christ died for us. Each person owes a debt they cannot pay back ([Matthew](#)

[18:23-35](#)). We all do wrong things and cannot save ourselves ([Mark 10:26-27](#)).

This shows that Christ himself gives forgiveness. Only he can forgive sins ([2:5-10](#)). His death saves us ([Matthew 26:28](#); [Mark 10:45](#)). His blood is the basis of a new covenant (or agreement) with God ([1 Corinthians 11:25](#)). Through him, we can experience forgiveness ([Hebrews 9:15, 22](#)). So forgiveness is always part of teaching about Jesus Christ ([Acts 13:38](#); [Ephesians 1:7](#); [Colossian 1:14](#); [1 John 2:12](#)).

The New Testament has other special ideas about forgiveness. Paul uses the Greek word *charizomai*, meaning "to forgive," to explain God's gracious pardon ([2 Corinthians 2:7](#); [12:13](#); [Ephesians 4:32](#); [Colossians 2:13](#); [3:13](#)). Sin is seen as a debt. The Greek word *aphiemi* refers to canceling that debt ([Matthew 6:12](#); compare [Luke 11:4](#)).

The New Testament speaks of some limits to forgiveness. One is a type of sin that cannot be forgiven ([Matthew 12:31-32](#); [Mark 3:28-30](#); [Luke 12:10](#)). Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit means attributing to Satan what is actually the work of the Holy Spirit, as shown through Jesus Christ. Christ speaks about people who, like the Pharisees, cannot tell the difference between Satan's acts and Christ's good deeds.

In [Hebrews 6:1-8](#), the author warns about another serious danger. The author writes about people who learn about God's truth and then turn away from it. The author says it is impossible to bring these people back to God. These are people who have experienced God's kindness but then reject it. Similarly, [Hebrews 10:26-29](#) talks about people who know God's truth but choose to keep sinning anyway. The author warns that there is no way to be forgiven for these people. Instead, they can only expect God's judgment. The author explains that when people reject God's kindness and treat Jesus's death with disrespect, there are serious consequences.

The New Testament teaches that to receive forgiveness, you must be sorry ([2 Corinthians 7:10](#)). It also teaches you to forgive others ([Matthew 6:14-15](#)). If you receive forgiveness but do not forgive others, it shows that repentance is not complete. In his stories, Jesus often says that being ready to forgive others shows true sorrow for your own wrongs ([Matthew 18:23-35](#); [Luke 6:37](#)).

So Christ taught us that forgiving is something we must do without limits. We must forgive

completely, even 70 times 7 ([Matthew 18:21-22](#)). By saying "70 times 7," Jesus was not giving an exact number (490) of times to forgive. Instead, he was teaching that we should forgive others without counting or limiting how many times we do it.

Forgiveness is part of how believers relate to each other. Since we all need God's forgiveness, we all must forgive each other. "Forgive as the Lord forgave you" ([Colossians 3:13](#)).

See also Confession; Repentance.

Former Rain

KJV term for important rainfall that begins the agricultural year in Palestine, usually in October ([Dt 11:14](#); [Jer 5:24](#); [Jas 5:7](#)). See Palestine.

Fort, Fortification

A fort is a strong building or place designed for defense. A fortification is any structure built to protect a place from attack. In ancient times, cities were protected by walls, strong central fortresses (called citadels), and sometimes deep water-filled ditches (called moats).

Fortified Cities

Fortifications followed the natural landscape of the area encircling a city. Early city defenses were simple. They were made by piling earth against the walls and outer structures. This made it hard for enemy forces to approach and enter the city. When building a city, people looked for places that were naturally easy to defend. They preferred high places like steep hills or isolated areas that provided natural protection.

People also built cities in places with plenty of water, access to waterways for travel, or at the meeting point of important roads. However, these places were harder to defend, so building strong walls and defenses cost more time and money.

Building Materials

People built fortifications using any materials they could find, such as broken stones, loose rocks, and packed earth. They covered these materials with a thick layer of clay or plaster to hide what was underneath. This made it harder for enemies to know how strong the walls really were. In front of the walls, they dug deep ditches or moats,

sometimes cutting them into solid rock. These ditches made it hard for enemies to get close to the walls or dig tunnels underneath them.

Towers

People built towers at the weakest parts of the walls, like corners, gates, and places where water entered the city. These towers made the defenses stronger. Inside each tower were stairs and rooms where soldiers stayed to guard the city. Special watchmen in the towers would warn everyone when they saw danger coming.

Gates

The city gates were very strong. They were made with thick bronze or iron bars and bolts. Each gate hung on strong posts that were set into the ground below and the beam above the doorway. To make gates even harder to break through, cities often had several gates, one behind another. Between these gates were rooms where guards stayed.

How Did Fortifications Change Over Time?

Archaeological digs of ancient forts show how building methods improved over time, from simple beginnings to around the time of Jesus. The earliest forts were built with basic bricks and rough stones. The stones used in walls were different sizes and shapes, and weren't cut smoothly. Builders filled the gaps between stones with small rocks and pieces of limestone.

Later, builders learned to make a strong covering material (called mortar) to spread over the walls. This made the walls stronger. It wasn't until much later, during the time when the Jewish people ruled their land, that builders started using carefully cut and shaped stones.

God as a Fortress

The Bible often compares God to a fortress or high tower. This helps us understand how God protects those who trust in him. The prophets taught that the nation's real strength came from God, not from walls of brick and stone. They told people to trust in God as their safe place or refuge ([2 Samuel 22:2-3, 33](#); [Proverbs 10:29](#); [Isaiah 25:4](#); [Jeremiah 16:19](#); [Hosea 8:14](#); [Joel 3:16](#); [Nahum 1:7](#)).

See also Warfare; City; Watchtower.

Fortunatus

Member of the church at Corinth. Fortunatus is a Roman proper name written in Greek and found only once in the NT ([1 Cor 16:17](#)). Paul rejoiced that he, along with Stephanas and Achaicus, had come to be with him in Ephesus. The Textus Receptus has a subscript naming these three men as the carriers of Paul's letter to the Corinthians.

Forum

Open area in Roman cities used for commerce, political affairs, and judicial matters. The forum was usually on level ground, rectangular in shape, and surrounded by temples, law courts, colonnades, and other public buildings.

The forum of Appius was a traveler's stop on the Appian Way, 43 miles (69.2 kilometers) south of Rome, where Paul was met by Christians from Rome on his way to the capital under guard ([Acts 28:15](#)).

The most important of the forums were those located in the city of Rome. These were built at different times in its history, and existing forums were changed through continued building. The Rome to which Paul went for his trial had several forums, including those of Julius Caesar (begun by him but actually completed by Augustus Caesar) and of Augustus Caesar. Most important was the Roman Forum, center of the world in Paul's day. It lay between the two central hills of the seven hills on which the city was built. It contained many columns, statues, works of art, and buildings important in the political and religious life of the empire.

If Paul was brought directly into the city by the centurion who had charge of him, he would have passed the triumphal arch of Augustus, the temple of Castor and Pollux, and the temples dedicated to Julius and Augustus for emperor worship. Arriving at the Roman Forum proper, he would have noticed on the northwest the famous ideal center of the city (and thus of the empire), and on the southwest the gilded milestone, giving distances to places as far away as London to the west and Jerusalem to the east. In the background was the temple to Jupiter, chief god in the Roman pantheon. On the south side was a large public building, the Basilica Julia, completed in AD 12, the probable site of the pronouncement of Paul's death sentence. On the north side was the Basilica Aemilia, a building from

which marble columns were taken and used in the building of a church over the traditional site of Paul's tomb. That church was completed in AD 398 and stood for 1,400 years.

See also Appius, Forum of.

Forum of Appius

The marketplace in [Acts 28:15](#). This was the place where Christians met the apostle Paul when he came to appear before Caesar. It was apparently named for Appius Claudius. He was the builder of the Appian Way. The Appian Way was a major highway from southeast Italy running northwest to Rome.

Around the forum was a region of swamp and marsh. It was notorious in the ancient world for bad water, mosquitoes, expensive taverns for travelers, nighttime noisy traffic of cargoes, and passengers on mule-drawn barges along a canal cut through the area. The Appian Way passes through the Appius Forum about 64 kilometers (40 miles) south of Rome.

See also Appian Way; Forum.

Foundation Gate

Structure mentioned in [2 Chronicles 23:5](#), in the narrative about Queen Athaliah's execution. The parallel passage in [2 Kings 11:6](#) reads "Sur Gate," while the Septuagint has "gate of the ways," indicating some difficulties within the Hebrew text.

Fourth Book of Ezra

This is another name for the apocryphal book 2 Esdras.

See Second Book of Esdras; *see also* Apocrypha.

Fowler

One who traps or shoots wild birds. The catching of birds for pets, food, and sacrifices was the business of the fowler. This was done by the use of a bow and arrow, a sling, or a net ([Prv 1:17](#); [Ez 12:13](#); [17:20](#); [Hos 7:12](#); [9:8](#)). Other methods included the use of

bird lime, a sticky substance to which birds adhere, and a throw stick that broke the birds' legs. Fowlers lay in wait near their trap, placing the captured birds in a basket ([Jer 5:26–27](#)). The term "fowler" appears also as a metaphor for wicked men who trap other men ([Pss 91:3](#); [124:7](#); [Jer 5:26](#); [Hos 9:8](#)).

See also Hunting.

Fox

A small, wild, meat-eating, doglike mammal, several species of which existed in Palestine in the biblical period.

Types of Foxes

The red fox of the holy land (*Vulpes palaestinae*) looks like the North American fox but is smaller than a wolf. This nighttime creature hunts by itself. It has a long, bushy tail, about half its body length. It eats a wide range of foods, including:

- Fruits
- Plants
- Mice
- Beetles
- Birds

However, it does not eat dead animals. Grapes are its favorite food, but its burrowing can damage vineyards ([Song of Solomon 2:15](#)). The fox is intelligent and known for its cunning ([Luke 13:32](#)). It has considerable endurance and can run at speeds up to 48 kilometers (30 miles) per hour. The Jews rebuilding Jerusalem's wall were insulted that a fox jumping on it would knock it down ([Nehemiah 4:3](#)).

The Egyptian fox (*Vulpes niloticus*) is found in the central and southern parts of the holy land. It is somewhat smaller than the common red fox. Its back is rust-colored and its belly light. The Syrian fox (*Vulpes flavescens*) that lives in the northern part of the holy land is shiny gold in color.

Some Old Testament references such as [Psalm 63:10](#) and [Lamentations 5:18](#) are translated as "fox" in the King James Version but probably refer to jackals. Jackals, not foxes, hunt in packs and tend to act as scavengers. *See* Jackals.

Frankincense

Frankincense is a sweet-smelling gum resin (a thick, sticky liquid) that comes from trees. People can grind it into a powder and burn it to release a pleasant aroma.

Frankincense is mentioned 21 times in the Bible. It is often mentioned together with myrrh ([Song of Solomon 3:6; 4:6; Matthew 2:11](#)). The Hebrew people probably used it almost exclusively in sacrificial services of the tabernacle and temple until the time of King Solomon. Throughout history, frankincense has been the most important incense resin in the world.

Frankincense comes from balsam trees of the genus *Boswellia*. The main species that produce frankincense are *Boswellia carterii*, *Boswellia papyrifera*, and *Boswellia thurifera*. These trees are related to turpentine trees and have star-shaped flowers that are white or green with pink tips. To collect the resin, people make a deep cut in the tree trunk, which releases an amber-colored gum.

These trees grew naturally only in Saba (Sheba) in Arabia and Somaliland ([Isaiah 60:6; Jeremiah 6:20](#)). Because frankincense had to be brought from far away, it was expensive. It was transported to Palestine by caravans (groups of travelers with camels and other animals). The tree called the "frankincense tree" in Palestine ([Sirach 50:8](#)) was probably a different tree called *Commiphora opobalsamum*. The resin from this tree was used to make perfume.

People used frankincense by itself or mixed it with other substances to make incense. It was one of the ingredients in the holy incense used for worship in the tabernacle ([Exodus 30:34](#)). People placed frankincense on the bread of the Presence ([Leviticus 24:7](#)). They also mixed it with oil on the grain offerings ([Leviticus 2:1-2, 14-16; 6:15](#)). However, it was not included in sin offerings ([Leviticus 5:11](#)). The temple in Jerusalem kept a supply of frankincense ([Nehemiah 13:5, 9](#)). Later, people also used frankincense in cosmetics and perfumes ([Song of Solomon 3:6](#)).

Because frankincense was valuable and used in worship, giving it as a gift to the infant Jesus was considered very appropriate ([Matthew 2:11](#)).

Freed Slaves

The New Living Translation rendering of "Freedmen" in [Acts 6:9](#). These were former slaves who had been given their freedom.

See Freedmen.

Freedmen

The freedmen were members of a Jewish synagogue in Jerusalem ([Acts 6:9](#)), who had been captured and taken to Rome by the general Pompey, who lived from 106–48 BC. These Jews were later released from slavery.

Pompey found that the Jews followed their religious and national customs so strictly that they were not useful as slaves. This is why they were freed.

Not all the freedmen returned to Jerusalem. Some stayed in Rome. The Roman writer Pliny described the freedman as a "mean commoner."

The name "freedmen" (or "Freed Slaves" in the New Living Translation) comes from a Latin word for a person who was released from slavery, or the son of someone who was once a slave.

See Libertines.

Freedom

In the Bible, freedom means being set free from something that controls or harms people. It can mean physical freedom—like when God rescued the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. But it can also mean spiritual freedom—being set free from sin and death through Jesus Christ.

See also Liberty.

Freedom, Liberty

The quality or state of being free. In the ancient world, slavery was everywhere. The law of Moses said that a Hebrew slave could serve six years and go free in the seventh year ([Exodus 21:2](#)). This law is the background for [Jeremiah 34](#). Jeremiah makes two things clear: people knew the law, but many did not obey it. Even so, the law showed that freedom was important. After every 49 years, there was a special year called the jubilee. During this

time, all property would go back to its original owners and slaves would be freed ([Leviticus 25:8-24](#); compare [Ezekiel 46:17](#)).

Freedom for Slaves

Liberty might be given to a slave for other reasons. The slave must be freed if the owner caused the loss of a slave's eye or tooth ([Exodus 21:26-27](#)). Job reflects that in Sheol or death "the slave is free from his master" ([Job 3:19](#)). In another verse, he is grateful for the freedom of the wild donkey ([39:5](#)).

The Messiah and Freedom

When the Messiah (God's chosen one) comes, one of his tasks will be "to proclaim liberty to the captives" ([Isaiah 61:1](#)). Old Testament believers thought of this liberty in terms of freedom from foreign rule. But the Messiah is focused mainly on freeing people's spirits. Liberty is a way of life before God. It is also a freedom from sin.

Freedom in the New Testament

In the New Testament, freedom is sometimes seen as a literal release from capture. For example, all four Gospels refer to the Jewish custom of having a prisoner set free at Passover (see [Mark 15:6-15](#)). There are references also to the release of prisoners (see [Acts 3:13](#); [16:35](#)). Paul encouraged Christian slaves to gain their freedom if they could ([1 Corinthians 7:21](#)). He asked a slave owner, Philemon, to free the slave Onesimus. Onesimus was a slave who ran away (see [Philemon](#)). Paul did not argue for freedom from slavery as part of the Christian gospel. Rather, he emphasized freedom in Christ for all believers. All are free in Christ, both those who are free and those who are slaves.

True Freedom Through Jesus

The freedom that matters is the freedom Jesus gives. Jesus says that people are really free when the Son sets them free ([John 8:36](#)). Paul exults in the freedom that Jesus Christ brings ([Romans 7:24-25](#)). The same idea can be stated in terms of the truth making people free ([John 8:32](#)). Of course, these words must be understood because Jesus is himself the truth ([John 14:6](#)). This is not the philosophical concept that error enslaves men while truth has a liberating effect. Truth here is that truth that is associated with Jesus, "the word of the truth, the gospel" ([Colossians 1:5](#)). Paul says, "Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom" ([2 Corinthians 3:17](#)).

Freedom from Sin

The New Testament argues people left to themselves cannot defeat sin. The modern world is proof of this. We may seek to do good, but evil is too powerful for us. We cannot do the good we wish to do ([Romans 7:21-23](#)). But because of Christ's saving work, the power of sin is broken. "For in Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set you free from the law of sin and death." ([Romans 8:2](#)). This truth is advanced many times. It is expressed in different ways.

Freedom from Religious Law

There is another freedom that belongs to the Christian. Christians are freed from the law. There were many in the first century who saw the way of salvation as keeping the commandments of God. This was commonly urged among some Jews. Some of the first Christians seem to have received the idea from them. The idea seems obvious: if we lead good lives, we will be all right with God.

The trouble with this position is that we do not lead good lives. Sin is too strong. There is a further problem. Jesus did not die for the way of law. This is given special emphasis in Galatians. Paul argues strongly that salvation is not by way of the law but by faith ([Romans 4](#); [Galatians 3](#)). He complains of people who slipped in to spy on the freedom they had in Christ Jesus ([Galatians 2:4](#)). He points out that since Christ freed us, we should not submit to any form of slavery ([5:1](#)).

Freedom for Creation

Paul wrote that one day, all creation will be "set free from its bondage to decay" ([Romans 8:21](#)). Creation will, in some way, share in the freedom of the glory of God's children. This points to a wonderful future for creation. And we should not miss the "glory" that the liberty of God's children means.

Using Freedom Wisely

We may desire to take advantage of freedom since we do nothing to gain our salvation. The Bible warns us not to take advantage of our freedom ([Romans 6:1-4](#); [Galatians 5:13](#); [1 Peter 2:16](#)). We must live as free people. We must not make our freedom a way of becoming slaves to sin.

See also Slave, Slavery.

Freewill Offering

A voluntary peace offering to God ([Leviticus 7:16](#); [Deuteronomy 12:6](#)).

See Offerings and Sacrifices.

Friends

A friend is someone you know well and care about.

Jesus called his closest followers his friends ([Luke 12:4](#); [John 15:14-15](#)). So, it would have been natural for Christians to refer to themselves as "the friends of Christ." Some philosophical groups in the Greek world used terms of friendship to describe close relationships between their members. However, early Christians chose to use other words to describe themselves, such as "followers of Jesus" or "disciples."

Fringe

The border of a garment, or a "tassel." Jewish men wore four fringes on their upper garments because God commanded them to do so ([Deuteronomy 22:12](#)). Those tassels were reminders of God's laws.

Frog

A frog is an animal that lives both in water and on land. It has smooth skin and no tail. In the Bible, frogs were part of the second plague that God sent to Egypt ([Exodus 8](#); [Psalms 78:45](#); [105:30](#); [Revelation 16:13](#)).

Frogs and toads have smooth, hairless skin and no tails as adults. Their back legs are longer and stronger than their front legs. This makes them able to jump long distances. The Bible likely refers to the edible frog (*Rana ridibunda*) found in Egypt and Palestine.

Female frogs lay eggs in water, which hatch into tadpoles in a week. Tadpoles then develop arms and legs and lose their tails. Frogs need moist skin to breathe, so they stay near water. They eat insects and worms.

Frogs are common in the lowlands of Palestine. You can hear them croaking in spring and summer evenings. The Israelites thought frogs were slimy and dirty. They were grouped with other creeping

and swarming creatures, which were normally considered unclean ([Leviticus 11:29-31](#)). Since the frog was not listed, rabbis did not consider it an animal that made humans unclean through contact.

In [Revelation 16:13](#), some evil spirits looked like frogs. In ancient Egypt, people thought frogs were special and connected them with new life and babies being born. They worshipped a god named Heqet, who they believed helped with childbirth. Egyptian art showed Heqet as a person with a frog's head.

When God sent the plague of frogs to Egypt ([Exodus 8:1-14](#); [Psalms 78:45](#); [105:30](#)), it showed that Heqet had no real power. God used the very animal that the Egyptians worshipped to cause them trouble. The frogs in Egypt during this time were probably a common type that had spots on their skin (*Rana punctata*, or *Rana ridibunda*).

See also Plagues upon Egypt.

Frontlet

A translation of a Hebrew word referring to anything bound on the forehead ([Exodus 13:16](#); [Deuteronomy 6:8](#); [11:18](#)). The phylacteries (leather boxes) of Jesus's day ([Matthew 23:5](#)) were worn daily at morning prayer by every male Israelite over the age of 13. They consisted of four Scripture passages ([Exodus 13:1-10](#); [13:11-16](#); [Deuteronomy 6:4-9](#); [11:13-21](#)) written on parchment and placed in small leather boxes tied to the forehead and the left arm. The phylacteries may have been the parchments or the leather boxes. There is no proof to suggest that the Israelites made phylacteries during the time of Moses. The commands were probably not literal. They aimed to show the memorial value of the Feast of Unleavened Bread and the Law's importance in the people's lives. For the Pharisees, visibly obeying the Law had replaced the need to apply God's Word to the heart ([Matthew 23:5](#)).

See also Phylactery; Amulet.

Frost

Frozen water vapor or dew ([Pss 78:47](#); [147:16](#); [148:8](#); [Jer 36:30](#); [Zec 14:6](#)).

Fruit

See Food and Food Preparation; Plants.

Fruit of the Spirit

An expression from [Galatians 5:22–23](#). According to this passage, when the Holy Spirit guides and directs someone's life, these qualities (the "fruit of the Spirit") will be visible.

What Is The Fruit of the Spirit?

The fruit of the Spirit listed in [Galatians 5](#) is:

- Love
- Joy
- Peace
- Patience
- Kindness
- Goodness
- Faithfulness
- Gentleness
- Self-control

"Love" is not necessarily emotion, but an outgoing, self-giving kind of action. God characterized this action by loving the world so much that he *gave* his only Son ([John 3:16](#)).

"Goodness" is translated from a Greek word that includes the idea of generosity.

The word "faith" usually means trust or confidence in someone or something. The word can also refer to the causes that produce trust and faith—faithfulness and reliability. This word shows both faithfulness and being trustworthy, which are signs that the Holy Spirit is guiding someone's life.

"Self-control" means being able to control your actions and behavior.

The Fruit of the Spirit in Christian Life

The Spirit must be responsible for this fruit. Because these qualities are the fruit of the Spirit, they cannot be produced by legalism and obedience to law.

In Galatians, Paul emphasizes Christian freedom from obedience to the law as a means of being

justified (made right) before God. This discussion provides the context for the fruit of the Spirit. Paul warned the Galatian Christians that getting circumcised showed they were trying to earn God's acceptance by following religious rules. No one can be made right with God just by following religious rules ([Galatians 5:3](#)).

The Galatians might have misunderstood their freedom and thought they could do whatever they wanted. But Paul explained that being free from religious rules does not mean they can sin freely. Instead, it means they can serve each other in love (verse [13](#)). Life in the Spirit means that one will not live to fulfill the desires of the flesh (verse [16](#)).

Paul then compares two ways of living: following selfish desires versus following the Spirit. When the Spirit guides someone, they show love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. These are not gifts of the spirit. Instead, they are graces—virtues from God that show up in someone's life when the Holy Spirit guides them.

Fuller

One who cleans, shrinks, thickens, or dyes cloth or newly shorn wool. It was the fuller's job to prepare fibers used for weaving by cleansing them of oil and other impurities. The cleansing materials the fuller used were white clay, urine, and ashes of special plants. The fuller's plant lay outside the town because of offensive odors and because space was needed for spreading the fibers to dry, as was the case of the Fuller's Field outside Jerusalem in Isaiah's day ([2 Kgs 18:17](#); [Is 7:3](#); [36:2](#)).

Fuller's Field

Fuller's Field was a place outside Jerusalem. It was near a spring or pool of water. A raised walkway or water channel (called an aqueduct) led to it ([2 Kings 18:17](#); [Isaiah 7:3](#); [36:2](#)). Many scholars think it was close to En-rogel, a spring also called "spring of the fuller." A fuller was someone who cleaned and prepared cloth, especially wool.

En-rogel was in the Kidron Valley, south of Jerusalem. In Bible times, it marked the border between the tribes of Judah and Benjamin ([Joshua 15:7](#); [18:16](#)). When Absalom rebelled against King David, David ran away from Jerusalem. Two of his

helpers stayed at En-rogel to gather news about the rebellion ([2 Samuel 17:17](#)).

En-rogel is often identified with a deep well called Bir Attub, or "Job's Well." This well reaches down into the rock and brings up water after it rains.

See also Jerusalem.

Fullness

"Fullness" refers to the state of being completely filled or having nothing missing. It is a common translation of the Greek word *pleroma*. In the Bible, "fullness" often refers to something being complete or filled completely. The exact meaning depends on the context in which the word appears.

In the Old Testament, one of the Hebrew words that corresponds to "fullness" is *melo*. This word appears in various passages and has meanings similar to the Greek term *pleroma*. It often describes the contents that fill something. For example, the phrase "the earth and its fullness" in [Psalm 24:1](#) refers to everything in creation being part of God's ownership.

To understand what "fullness" means in a specific verse, we need to look at the surrounding words and the overall message of that passage.

General Usage

In ancient Greek writings outside the New Testament, the word means *pleroma* means "that which fills."

People used this word to talk about:

- The cargo or crew that fills a ship
- The people that form a crowd
- The years that fill a person's life

The Greek philosopher Aristotle used the term to describe the population that fills a city. Both the Gospel of Matthew and the Gospel of Mark use this sense to describe a patch that fills a hole in an old garment ([Matthew 9:16](#); [Mark 2:21](#)). In Mark, it describes pieces of fish that fill a basket ([Mark 6:43](#); [8:20](#)).

The Earth and Everything in It

The Greek word *pleroma* appears several times in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament). It is used to translate the Hebrew word

for "fullness" (*melo*) in the phrase "the earth and its fullness" in [Psalms 24:1](#), [50:12](#), and [89:11](#). This concept is later quoted in [1 Corinthians 10:26](#). A similar phrase is "the sea and its fullness" ([1 Chronicles 16:32](#); [Psalm 96:11-12](#)). These expressions suggest more than just quantity (how much the earth or sea contain). They also suggest quality. The contents of the earth and sea are good and valuable because they come from God.

The Hebrew way of thinking considered the created world as a reflection of the Creator ([Psalms 8:5-6](#); [19:1-6](#); [Jeremiah 23:24](#)). When people connected with anything God created (through work, meals, or relationships with others) they were also connecting with God himself, who provided these things. This is why the Jewish people were deeply afraid when prophets announced God's plan to destroy "the land and everything in it" ([Jeremiah 8:16](#); [47:2](#); [Ezekiel 12:19](#); [19:7](#); [30:12](#)).

The Apostle Paul's Usage

People have debated where the apostle Paul got his idea of "fullness" as an important religious or theological term. Some believe the Gnostics used it to describe a realm of spiritual beings located between the true God and an "evil" earth. False teachers then saw Christ as just one of many gods in that "fullness." To correct this, Paul used the term to describe Christ. Paul taught that Jesus is not just one being located between God and humanity. He is everything ("the fullness") between God and humanity ([Colossians 1:15-20](#)).

Some argue against that perspective, saying Paul used the term in contexts where that interpretation does not fit ([Romans 13:10](#); [Ephesians 1:22-23](#)). Additionally, Paul, having a background as a Jewish Pharisee, probably understood the term based on its Old Testament usage. Therefore, Paul may not have borrowed the use of the term from his opponents.

Paul used the term four times in the book of Romans. It can mean "full inclusion," referring to the total number of Jews or "Gentiles" (non-Jews) who will come to God ([Romans 11:12, 25](#)). In [verse 12](#), the term contrasts with the "failure" and "trespass" of the Jews, who believe righteousness comes from their Jewish heritage rather than faith in Christ.

Paul might have used the term to mean "complete obedience to God's will." Essentially, Paul was saying, "If their disobedience brings good to the

world, imagine what their obedience will bring." [Romans 13:10](#) uses "fullness" in this active sense. Love fulfills all that the law intended. Similarly, Paul wants his life to fully express the gospel of Christ ([15:29](#)).

The book of Ephesians calls the church "the fullness of Him" and "the fullness of God" ([Ephesians 1:22-23](#); [4:13](#); [3:19](#)).

People interpret this in different ways:

1. The church is complete in Christ.
2. The church has Christ's qualities.
3. The church is how Christ does his work. The church is full of Christ because it fully shows his words and actions (see [Colossians 2:10](#)).

In the book of Colossians, Paul uses the term to describe Christ. In him lives the "fullness of the Deity" ([1:19](#); [2:9](#)). These passages often suggest that Christ is equal to God. Christ contains all of God's qualities. Everything God is, Christ is.

The Apostle John's Usage

The introduction to John's Gospel says that all Christians receive the "His fullness" ([1:16](#)). Verse [14](#) explains this fullness: "And the Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us ... full of grace and truth." Here, the Greek word for "full" means complete and whole. The Gnostics used this word to describe all gods together. John, like Paul, used it to describe Christ as the fullness of God. "For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity dwells in bodily form" (see [Colossians 2:9](#); [1:19](#)).

Since all of God's fullness is in Christ, every spiritual reality exists in him. In Christ, Christians lack nothing. No single Christian can receive all that Christ is. It takes the body of Christ to fully express his fullness ([Ephesians 1:23](#)). However, each Christian receives a portion of that fullness. Christ is always full, he never becomes empty. No matter how much Christians receive from him, he continues to give. Christians do not need to seek any other source but Christ.

Fullness of Time

A phrase meaning "when the time had fully come" or "the fullness of time" found in [Galatians 4:4](#) and [Ephesians 1:10](#). In Galatians, the reference is to the time when "God sent his Son." Paul used the idea of

a child growing up to say that Jesus came at the right time in human history and freed people from being controlled by the law.

Many religious experts have seen signs that the time was right for Jesus's birth in the events of his day. Rome's victories had created peace, so travel was safe and easy. That unity was built on the earlier wins by Alexander the Great. He grew the empire from Greece to Egypt to India and left behind the Greek language and culture. This later helped spread the message about Jesus.

Greek-speaking Jews lived in every city of the Roman Empire. Their religion was protected by Roman law, and that law protected Christianity for its first 50 years. Many non-Jews who were interested in the Jewish belief in one God and their way of life went to Jewish places of worship. So these places were a good starting point for the church's early efforts to reach non-Jews.

In Palestine, the Jews wanted a Messiah (deliverer) to save them because they were under the control of the Herods and the Romans. People were always ready to fight for freedom, sometimes they did. Poor farmers were treated badly by rich landowners. They used every chance to take more land. Many of these bad landowners were from the chief priestly families, whose greed was well known to all.

All over Palestine, people were thinking a lot about a savior coming. The Pharisees talked about what would happen when the savior came. The writers at Qumran wrote books about it. This is where the Dead Sea Scrolls community lived. The time was right for Jesus to come, as he himself said ([Matthew 13:11, 16-17](#); [Mark 1:15](#)).

In [Ephesians 1:10](#), Paul used a slightly different Greek phrase, which covers all the time between Jesus's first coming and when he will return to finish God's plan in history. Jesus revealed God's plan through the church. This happens as people turn away from wrong actions and become his followers. Paul calls it a "mystery" ([Romans 16:25-26](#); [Ephesians 1:9](#); [3:4-5](#); [Colossians 1:26](#)).

In the end, the time will be fully right when God's plan is finished and Jesus has authority over everything. Paul knew this was happening, but he waited for it to be completely done, which he hoped would be soon.

Funeral Customs

The customs and ceremonies related to human death and dying. All human societies have observed funeral practices from their very beginnings.

Most anthropologists believe that funeral customs serve important social purposes for the living. However, there is debate about what these purposes are. Some scientists believe that funeral customs soothe anxiety about death. However, others believe that the customs build religious awe or relationships among the living. Both factors are likely a part of most funeral customs. Funeral customs remind people that death is serious while also giving some comfort.

Beliefs about the afterlife influence funeral customs. Most cultures believe in some form of immortality (the notion that some part of a person exists forever). Many artifacts have been found in graves, such as:

- Tools
- Ornaments
- Food

This may be evidence of the belief in human existence after death. Pro per funeral customs were believed to help the dead reach their final resting place. This journey often included many dangers, such as crossing rivers. The customs also assured the living that the dead would not harm them.

Disposing of the Corpse

Pit graves (burial in the earth) are a common way to dispose of the dead. This might be because of the belief that the dead lived underground. The grave was often seen as the entrance to the underworld. Though, some cultures believed that the dead lived in the sky.

Certain cultures practiced above-ground disposal. Some communities placed the corpse on a rack to be eaten by animals. A few groups ate the corpse themselves, believing that they could absorb the good qualities of the dead.

Many Asian societies burn corpses. In the past, sometimes the wives and slaves of a deceased person might throw themselves in the fire. The West has begun burning corpses more because of the lack of land for graves.

Almost every society has special mourning customs during the disposal of the body. These include:

- Wearing of special clothing
- Strong emotions
- Remaining secluded
- Avoiding certain foods

Most societies have a ceremony that might involve purification rites and sharing special meals with other mourners. In most cultures, high-status individuals often have grander funeral ceremonies

Funeral Customs and the Bible

The Bible does give details about burial procedure. There are hints about the common burial practices Israel and there are certain laws about death. Most corpses were buried in the ground or a cave. Being unburied was a great disgrace ([Deuteronomy 28:26](#); [1 Kings 11:15](#)). If possible, the dead were buried on the day they died ([Deuteronomy 21:23](#)). The dead were usually not embalmed, but they were often dressed in special burial clothes and sprinkled with various perfumes ([Mark 15:46](#); [John 11:44](#)).

Funerals often involved intense weeping. This mourning was part of the funeral custom ([Matthew 11:17](#)). In ancient Israel, paid mourners would wail on cue. Much of the funeral service involved these mourners performing psalms and delivering eulogies for the dead ([2 Chronicles 35:25](#); [Jeremiah 9:17-22](#)). This emphasis on mourning came from the Hebrew appreciation of life and health as gifts from God ([Psalm 91:16](#)), and their view that life existed in the body ([16:9-11](#)). This belief might explain why the Old Testament does not have a doctrine of immortality. It does hint at a shadowy existence in Sheol and a future resurrection ([Job 14:13](#); [Ezra 37](#)).

The early Christian church agreed with the Jewish belief that life existed in the body. But early Christians also believed in existence after death. While the Greeks believed in the immortality of the soul, New Testament writers believed in the eternal life of the soul and the body.

This belief in a bodily resurrection fuels Christian funeral customs. The practices symbolize a belief in the resurrection and eternal life. Lament was replaced by joyful singing of psalms. The body was washed, anointed, wrapped in linen, and

surrounded by candles. These represent eternal life. Mourners held a vigil at the home of the dead and read scriptures on the resurrection and eternal life. The Lord's Supper would be eaten, symbolizing the sacrifice of Christ. A funeral speech was given to honor the dead and comfort the living. Many of these practices are still observed by Christians today.

See also Burial, Burial Customs; Mourning.

Furlong

Linear measure of about 202 yards (184.6 meters). *See* Weights and Measures.

Furnace

A brick or stone structure used for various purposes, both domestic and commercial. Its design included a firebox, flue, heating chamber, and access opening. Furnaces were used for:

- Smelting ore
- Melting ore
- Forging
- Firing ceramics
- Firing bricks
- Making lime

The Bible mentions different types of furnaces. The potter's kiln, used for making lime and firing pottery, is referenced in [Genesis 19:28](#); [Exodus 9:8, 10](#); [19:18](#). These dome-shaped kilns, often made of limestone, had a chimney and a fuel hole at the bottom, producing thick, dark smoke.

While the Hebrews rarely used large smelting furnaces, except possibly during Solomon's reign, they were familiar with them from their use in Lebanon. Many Old Testament references to such furnaces are symbolic ([Deuteronomy 4:20](#); [1 Kings 8:51](#); [Proverbs 17:3](#); [27:21](#); [Isaiah 48:10](#); [Jeremiah 11:4](#); [Ezekiel 22:18-22](#)). A notable story involving a large smelting furnace is that of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in [Daniel 3](#).

The Bible often uses "furnace" metaphorically to represent God's discipline, punishment, or character refinement ([Deuteronomy 4:20](#); [1 Kings 8:51](#); [Isaiah 48:10](#); [Jeremiah 6:27-30](#); [Ezekiel](#)

[22:18-22](#)). In the New Testament, "furnace" symbolizes hell ([Matthew 13:42, 50](#); [Revelation 9:2](#)). The refining image also represents life's trials preparing one for the afterlife ([James 1:12](#); [1 Peter 1:7](#)).

In [Revelation 1:15](#), John's vision describes the Son of Man with feet "like polished bronze refined in a furnace." This image of refined brass symbolizes Christ's power to defeat his enemies.

Furnaces, Tower of the

KJV rendering of Tower of the Ovens in [Nehemiah 3:11](#) and [12:38](#). *See* Ovens, Tower of the.

Furniture

Items of material culture used in homes, palaces, and temples. Because of its close geographical proximity to other nations, Israel had extensive contact with neighboring cultures. Historical surveys document parallels between the furniture of Israel and that of other tribes and countries.

Palestine in Old Testament Times

OT passages supply most of the information about furniture in ancient Palestine, although there are also significant archaeological data. There are many references to beds in the OT, using at least three Hebrew nouns. Jacob is pictured as sitting up in bed ([Gn 48:2](#)) and as dying on his bed ([49:33](#)). Moses threatened that frogs would invade the bedroom and bed of the Egyptian pharaoh ([Ex 8:3](#)). Michal, Saul's daughter, placed an effigy in David's bed ([1 Sm 19:11-17](#)) when Saul sent messengers to capture him there. King David condemned the practice of killing a defenseless person sleeping in bed ([2 Sm 4:7, 11](#)). The prophet Elijah laid a dead boy on his bed and revived him ([1 Kgs 17:19](#)).

King Ahab sulked on his bed ([1 Kgs 21:4](#)), and King Ahaziah lay on his sick bed ([2 Kgs 1:4-6, 16](#)). The prophet Amos criticized the rich who lay on beds of ivory and stretched out on their couches ([Am 6:4](#)). The prophet Ezekiel spoke symbolically of disobedient Jerusalem as a prostitute sitting on a stately couch with the Lord's incense and oil on a table nearby ([Ez 23:41](#)). Isaiah promised that the righteous would rest in their beds ([Is 57:2](#)) and also spoke of the unrighteous setting their beds among false worshipers (vv [7-8](#)). The psalmist

flooded his bed with tears ([Ps 6:6](#)), and Proverbs refers to a sluggard on his bed ([Prv 26:14](#)).

“Table” in the OT refers both to the temple table for the bread of the Presence and to the table used in the palace or home for meals or banquets. King Adoni-bezek had his captives scrambling for scraps under his table ([1 Kgs 1:7](#)). Jonathan’s disabled son Mephibosheth was allowed to sit at David’s table ([2 Sm 9:7, 10–13; 19:28](#)). Solomon’s table is described several times ([1 Kgs 2:7; 4:27](#)). The queen of Sheba was particularly impressed by the food and table service in Solomon’s palace ([10:5](#)). The prophets frequently refer to tables ([Is 21:5; 28:8; 65:11; Ez 40:39–43](#)). The few references to chairs describe people reclining at meals and indicate couches rather than actual chairs ([Am 6:4](#)).

There are numerous mentions of thrones, including those of the pharaoh ([Gn 41:40; Ex 11:5](#)), David ([2 Sm 3:10; 7:13](#)), Solomon ([1 Kgs 10:18](#)), the kings of Israel and Judah ([1 Kgs 22:10](#)), and God ([1 Kgs 22:19; Pss 9:4, 7; 11:4; 93:2](#)). The OT writers sometimes indicate thrones decorated with ivory ([1 Kgs 10:18](#)).

The exact character of furniture in Palestine is difficult to determine. Bas-reliefs and wall paintings are more common among Israel’s neighbors. Excavations in Jericho, however, have unearthed some valuable archaeological clues. Tombs of the middle Bronze Age produced reasonably well-preserved tables, stools, and boxes, making possible a study of ancient joinery methods. A variety of small trinket boxes show evidence of bone inlay and incised decoration. Some large slabs of timber may have been beds. Although primarily Canaanite styles, the furniture reflects the household furniture used in Israel in the centuries to follow.

Greek and Roman

Historians are quite informed about Greek furniture because of the abundance of decorated vases, bas-reliefs, bronze and terra-cotta statuettes, and literary descriptions. That archaeological evidence indicates that Greek furniture was influenced by preceding civilizations. The picture is generally one of comparative simplicity, far removed from the cluttered and crowded rooms of later civilizations.

The Greeks made several types of seats: (1) the throne, often with a back, legs of various shapes, and armrests; (2) the lighter curved-back chair with arm supports; (3) the four-legged stool; (4)

the folding stool with crossed legs traceable to Egyptian models; and (5) the bench. Representations that regularly appear on monuments dating from the eighth to the second century BC link Greek chairs to Egyptian and Assyrian prototypes.

Greeks used couches for sleeping and for reclining at meals. Footstools were used to rest the feet or as a step up to higher couches. Like chair legs, couch legs varied in style. Some were carved in the shape of animal legs, some were turned, some were rectangular. From about the sixth century BC, the legs projected above the frame. Such projections later became headboards and footboards. In Hellenistic times these headrests and footrests were carved and carried bronze medallions in high relief depicting children, satyrs, and animals. Turned legs replaced the rectangular ones. Couches were normally in wood, although bronze and marble couches are known.

Tables were used during meals to hold dishes and food and were removed after the meal. They were made of wood, bronze, and marble and normally had four legs, but three-legged tables were occasionally used. Chests, large and small, served to store clothes, jewelry, and other articles. They were normally of wood, although some were bronze.

Rome

Roman furniture continued many Greek patterns. The eruption of the volcano Vesuvius in AD 79 preserved actual pieces of Roman furniture in its lava flow.

Chairs with backs were heavier than their Greek counterparts and widely used. There were several types of stools: the folding stool, mostly wooden, though sometimes metal; and a newly developed decorative stool, often of bronze, that was supported by four curved legs ornamented with scrolls.

A variety of couches were in use. Some followed Greek models, but others were of Roman invention. Excellent examples of bronze bed frames have been preserved. Presumably, interlaced strips of leather or cords were stretched crisscross on the frame. Gold, silver, tortoiseshell, bone, and ivory decoration were used along with veneer work in rare timber. Later, couches in Italy and in other lands had high backs and sides. The Romans seem to have used tables more widely than Greeks. They appear often as permanent supports for vases and

other possessions. Tables were normally rectangular with four legs, but table makers also constructed some with three legs, or even resting on a single support. Round tabletops and legs of animals became popular from the fourth century BC on. Plain, undecorated wooden tables and benches were used in kitchens and workshops. Outdoor tables were usually of marble with carved animal legs or decorative figures of animals and monsters.

There were various chests and boxes in daily use. Shelves and cupboards became much more popular than in Greek times.

Palestine in New Testament Times

The nature of furniture in the NT is probably best understood in relation to contemporaneous Roman models. The NT refers to beds in several passages. People brought a paralytic lying on his bed to Jesus ([Mt 9:2, 6](#); [Lk 5:18](#)). When the apostles went into Solomon's portico, people brought the sick to them on beds ([Acts 5:15](#)). A Syro-Phoenician woman's sick child lay on a bed ([Mk 7:30](#)). Jesus spoke of setting a lamp on a stand and not placing it under a bed ([Mk 4:21](#); [Lk 8:16](#)), and described what would happen to people in bed when the Day of the Lord came ([Lk 17:34](#)). In another parable Jesus spoke of a needy person begging for bread at midnight from a friend who was already in bed with his family ([Lk 11:7](#)). Beds of the poor and sick were probably only pallets or mattresses ([Mk 6:55](#); [Jn 5:8](#)). When people reclined at meals, they would have been lying on a couch ([Jn 13:23](#)).

There are numerous NT references to tables. Jesus mentioned crumbs falling from a rich man's table ([Mt 15:27](#); [Mk 7:28](#); [Lk 16:21](#)). Jesus overthrew the money changers' tables in the temple ([Mt 21:12](#); [Mk 11:15](#)). Jesus sat with his disciples at a table for the Passover meal ([Lk 22:21](#)) and promised his disciples that they would sit at his table in God's kingdom. The apostles were relieved of serving tables in order to preach ([Acts 6:2](#)).

The household lamp is referred to a number of times ([Mt 25:1](#); [Mk 4:21](#)). Terra-cotta domestic lamps have been found in abundance in excavations.

Futility

A feeling or state of having no purpose or meaning. Futility describes actions that are useless or cannot succeed.

Futility in the Old Testament

The word "futility" appears many times in the book of Ecclesiastes ([1:2, 14](#); [2:1, 11, 15, 17](#); and so forth). The original Hebrew word (*hevel*) is hard to translate into English because it has many meanings. *Hevel* is traditionally translated as "vanity." This is found in many older translations but has been replaced in newer versions with other words. These versions attempt to more creatively capture the meaning of *hevel*.

In some translations, the idea is "meaninglessness" (see New International Version and New Living Translation). Other versions translate *hevel* as "emptiness" (see New English Bible). Still other versions render *hevel* as "uselessness" (see Today's English Version). One of the best renderings is found in the Revised English Bible: "Futility, utter futility, says the Speaker, everything is futile" ([Ecclesiastes 1:2](#)).

The writer of Ecclesiastes (called *qoheleth* in Hebrew, which is translated as "the Speaker" or "the Preacher") teaches that trying to find lasting happiness without God is like trying to catch the wind. It cannot be done. People can only find real meaning and lasting joy in God because God gives life its purpose.

Futility in Paul's Letters

The apostle Paul uses two Greek words that often mean the same thing. These words (*kenos* and *mataiotes*) communicate the idea of futility. They are often used together in the Septuagint (for example, [Job 20:18](#); [Isaiah 37:7](#); [Hosea 12:1](#)). The words also occur in classical and Hellenistic Greek. *Mataiotes* is the term used in the Septuagint. When Paul uses *kenos*, he means something that is empty and hollow (things that have no real purpose). When he uses *mataiotes*, he means something that is useless and cannot achieve its goal.

When Paul uses the word *kenos*, he describes things that are empty because they lack spiritual substance. These empty things cannot produce anything good, like a container with nothing in it. Paul used this word to describe the false teachings of people who tried to mislead believers with wrong ideas about God ("empty chatter" in [1](#)

[Timothy 6:20](#); see also [Colossians 2:8](#); compare [Ephesians 5:6](#)).

Paul was different. He said his teaching and work were not empty or futile because they had real purpose ([1 Corinthians 15:14](#)). He made the same claim about his work among the believers ([1 Thessalonians 2:1](#)). Paul made sure that his work was not useless ([Galatians 2:2](#); [1 Thessalonians 3:5](#)). This is because he had not received the grace of God “in vain” ([1 Corinthians 15:10](#)). He did not preach and work without purpose. His preaching and work had real purpose because Jesus, who rose from the dead and whom Paul taught about and served, had filled Paul with God’s life and power (verse [14](#)).

Paul’s use of *mataiotes* was likely informed by the Septuagint, especially in Ecclesiastes. The adjective *mataios* was regularly used in Greek literature to describe what is worthless or empty. The noun *mataiotes* is found mainly in the Bible. In the Septuagint it often describes uselessness, worthlessness, and futility.

[Romans 8:20](#) describes in a unique way the kind of futility that Ecclesiastes characterizes. Paul says, “the creation was subjected to futility.” He is focusing on how creation is unable to function as God first designed. When Adam and Eve sinned, God put the earth under a curse because of them. Since then, creation cannot fully show God’s glory because it is trapped in this broken state. But this is only until God releases creation from its bondage. Redeemed humanity must lead, then creation will join humanity in the final redemption and also be freed from *mataiotes* (futility).

Paul also uses the word *mataiotes* to describe how people think when they are separated from God. He says that even the thoughts of those who seem wise are actually meaningless ([1 Corinthians 3:20](#)). He describes the gentiles (non-Jewish people) as those living “in the futility of their thinking” because “they are darkened in their understanding and alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardness of their hearts” ([Ephesians 4:17–18](#)).

When people live without God’s wisdom, their thoughts have no real purpose and lead nowhere. But there is hope. People can be freed from this meaningless way of thinking. Now, salvation from *mataiotes* comes from the Spirit of Christ who dwells in the Christian (see [Romans 8:10–11, 26–27](#)). In the future, salvation will come when Christ returns and the believers (along with all creation)

receive their full redemption (see [Romans 8:22–25](#)).