

Resource: Bible Dictionary (Tyndale)

Aquifer Open Bible Dictionary

This work is an adaptation of Tyndale Open Bible Dictionary © 2023 Tyndale House Publishers, licensed under the CC BY-SA 4.0 license. The adaptation, Aquifer Open Bible Dictionary, was created by Mission Mutual and is also licensed under CC BY-SA 4.0.

This resource has been adapted into multiple languages, including English, Tok Pisin, Arabic (عَرَبِيٌّ), French (Français), Hindi (हिन्दी), Indonesian (Bahasa Indonesia), Portuguese (Português), Russian (Русский), Spanish (Español), Swahili (Kiswahili), and Simplified Chinese (简体中文).

Bible Dictionary (Tyndale)

L

Laadah, Laadan, Laban (Person), Laban (Place), Lachish, Lachish Letters, Ladan, Lael, Lahad, Lahai-Roi, Lahmam, Lahmi, Laish (Person), Laish (Place), Laishah, Lake of Fire, Lakkum, Lakum, Lamb, Lamb of God, Lamech, Lament, Lamentation, Lamentations, Book of, Lamp, Lampstand, Lance, Land, Landmark, Laodicea, Laodiceans, Lapis Lazuli, Lappidoth, Lapwing, Lasciviousness, Lasea, Lasha, Lasharon, Last Days, Last Judgment, Last Supper, Last Times, Latin, Latter Days, Laughter, Laver, Law of Moses, Lawless One, Lawyer, Laying on of Hands, Lazarus, Lead, Leah, Leather, Leaven, Lebana, Lebanah, Lebanon, Lebaoth, Lebbaeus, Lebo-Hamat, Lebonah, Lecah, Leech, Leek, Lees, Legion, Lehabim, Lehabites, Lehi, Lemuel, Lentil, Leopard, Leper, Leprosy, Leshem, Lethech, Letter of Aristeas, Letter of Egnostos, Letter of Jeremiah, Letter of Lentulus, Letter to Philemon, Letter to the Galatians, Letter to the Romans, Letter Writing, Ancient, Letters of Christ and Abgarus, Lettuce, Letushim, Letushites, Leummim, Leummites, Levi (Person), Leviathan, Levirate Marriage, Levites, Levitical Cities, Leviticus, Book of, Libation, Libertines, Libnah, Libni, Libnite, Libya, Libyans, Lice, Licentiousness, Life, Life Everlasting, Life of Adam and Eve, Life of John the Baptist, Life of the Virgin, Life, Book of, Light Lightning, Lign Aloes, Ligure, Likhi, Lilith, Lily, Lily-Work, Lime, Linen, Lintel (Top of a Doorframe), Linus, Lion, Lion of the Tribe of Judah, Litter, Little Owl, Liver, Lizard, Lo-Ammi, Lo-debar, Lo-Ruhahmah, Loan, Locusts, Lod, Log, Logia, Logos, Loins, Lois, Longsuffering, Loom, Lord, Lord of Hosts, Lord's Prayer, the, Lord's Supper, the, Lot, Lotan, Lots, Casting of, Lotus Bush, Lotus Tree, Love, Lubim, Lucas, Lucifer, Lucius, Lud, Ludim, Ludites, Luhith, Luke (Person), Luke, Gospel of, Lute, Luz, Lycaonia, Lycia, Lydda, Lydia (Person), Lydia (Place), Lye, Lyre, Lysanias, Lysias, Lysimachus, Lystra

Laadah

Shelah's son and the father of Mareshah from Judah's tribe ([1 Chr 4:21](#)).

Laadan

1. KJV spelling of Ladan, Joshua's ancestor, in [1 Chronicles 7:26](#). See Ladan #1.
2. KJV spelling of Ladan, an alternate name for Libni the Gershonite, in [1 Chronicles 23:7](#) and [26:21](#). See Libni #1.

Laban (Person)

Bethuel's son ([Gn 24:24, 29](#)), brother of Rebekah ([vv 15, 29](#)), father of Leah and Rachel ([29:16](#)), and the uncle and father-in-law of Jacob. Laban's forebears lived in Ur, but his father, Bethuel, was called the Aramean of Paddan-aram, and Laban also is referred to as the Aramean (kjv "Syrian," [25:20](#); cf. [28:5](#)). Their hometown was Haran, which was in Syria and which, like Ur, was a center of the worship of the moon god, Sin or Nannar.

When Isaac came of age, Abraham sent his servant Eliezer back to Haran to find a wife for Isaac. Laban greeted Eliezer hospitably and made provision for him and his camels ([Gn 24:29–33, 54](#)). Laban acted as the head of the house; he made the decision concerning Rebekah's marriage to Isaac (vv [50–51](#)), and it was to him and his mother that Eliezer made gifts of costly ornaments (v [53](#)).

Laban figures largely in the narrative of his nephew Jacob in his quest for a wife. After the deception of Isaac by Rebekah and Jacob, Rebekah feared that Esau would kill Jacob, so she suggested that he flee to her brother, Laban ([Gn 27:43](#)); meanwhile, she persuaded Isaac that Jacob should go to Haran to find a wife from among their own people. When Jacob arrived in the area of Haran, he met Rachel, the younger daughter of Laban, and was warmly welcomed ([29:13](#)). Laban hired Jacob to tend his flocks, and it was agreed that after seven years of work Jacob would receive Rachel as his wages. At the end of that period Laban substituted Leah, his older daughter. Jacob protested, but the two men finally decided that Jacob should serve another seven years for Rachel.

Both Jacob and Laban were schemers and had serious disputes about wages. Jacob proposed that his wages should be a certain portion of the flocks. When this was accepted, the Lord blessed Jacob

and his flocks, and Laban became angry. Jacob claimed that Laban had changed his wages ten times ([Gn 31:7, 41](#)).

Jacob fled from Haran. Laban pursued him because he was missing his household gods, whose possession made the holder heir to Laban's estate. Rachel had taken them but adroitly concealed them from her father's search.

Laban and Jacob parted after making a covenant of peace and erecting a pillar of stones to serve as a witness between them ([Gn 31:46-50](#)).

See also Jacob #1.

Laban (Place)

Israelite camping place in Sinai ([Dt 1:1](#)). Some equate it with the Libnah of [Numbers 33:20-21](#). Proposals for its location have ranged from just south of Rabbath-ammon to the Arabian coast south of Elath. Its site is still unknown.

Lachish

Place first mentioned in the Bible in connection with Joshua and the Israelite conquest of Palestine. At that time, its king and army were among the coalition of southern Palestinian towns that faced Joshua at Gibeon. After Joshua's victory, he executed the king of Lachish and later took the town itself ([Jos 10:26, 32](#)). Though David probably brought the town to life again, it gained new significance when King Rehoboam of Judah (c. 920 BC) made it one of his fortified cities to protect the realm against Egyptian and Philistine attacks ([2 Chr 11:9](#)). About a century later, Amaziah, king of Judah, was killed at Lachish, where he had fled to escape from conspirators ([2 Kgs 14:19](#)).

Lachish resisted valiantly when Sennacherib of Assyria invaded in 701 BC, but it ultimately fell under furious onslaughts ([2 Kgs 18:13-17; Is 36](#)). Reoccupied and rebuilt by the Judeans, it was one of the last outposts of Jerusalem to fall to the Babylonians when Nebuchadnezzar invaded in 588–586 BC and brought the southern kingdom to an end ([Jer 34:7](#)). In addition to biblical references, the Egyptian Amarna letters and Assyrian records allude to Lachish.

The location of Lachish was long debated. Originally, it was placed at Umm Lakis, then in 1891 at Tell el-Hesi, and finally in 1929 at Tell ed-

Duweir, 30 miles (48.3 kilometers) southwest of Jerusalem and 15 miles (24.1 kilometers) west of Hebron. This last identification has now been confirmed by a variety of indicators.

See also Lachish Letters.

Lachish Letters

The Lachish Letters are a collection of writings sometimes called "a supplement to Jeremiah." J. L. Starkey made this important discovery at Lachish in 1935. He found 18 ostraca (pieces of pottery with writing on them) in a guardroom between the outer and inner gates of the city. They were in a layer of ash left by the fire Nebuchadnezzar started when he destroyed the city. This probably happened late in 589 BC after the olive harvest, as many burned olive pits were found nearby. After taking Lachish and other towns, Nebuchadnezzar then attacked Jerusalem in January 588. In 1938, three more short, incomplete letters were found at Lachish, but their date is uncertain.

All 21 texts were written in black ink on broken pottery using a wood or reed pen. The writers used the Phoenician script, which was used for classical Hebrew.

Most of these documents were letters from an officer at an outpost to the commander at Lachish. Unfortunately, only seven of the texts are clear enough to understand fully. The rest is blotted or uses unfamiliar language. Scholars do not always agree on what the others say.

One interesting letter is number 4, which says, "We are watching for the fire signals of Lachish, according to all the signs my lord has given, for we cannot see [the signals of] Azekah." [Jeremiah 34:7](#) mentions Lachish and Azekah (12 miles, or 19.3 kilometers, northeast of Lachish) as two of Judah's last surviving cities. This letter suggests Azekah may have fallen, but it is possible the signals were not visible for other reasons. This letter provides evidence that ancient Israel used fire signals, which are also mentioned in [Jeremiah 6:1](#).

Letter 6 talks about princes weakening the people's resolve. It says, "And behold the words of the princes are not good, but to weaken our hands and to slacken the hands of the men who are informed about them." This is almost identical to the charge that some of the princes lodged against Jeremiah: "for he is discouraging the warriors who remain in

this city, as well as all the people, by speaking such words to them" ([Jeremiah 38:4](#)).

Letter 3 mentions a trip by the Judean army commander to Egypt, possibly for help. This shows the activities of the pro-Egyptian group during King Zedekiah's reign. The reason for this trip must have been much different from that referred to in [Jeremiah 26:20–23](#). This letter also refers to a prophet's warning. Some have tried to identify the prophet as Uriah or Jeremiah, but we can't be sure which prophet it was.

Letters 2–6 mention a Hoshaiyah (a name that appears in [Jeremiah 42:1; 43:2](#)) defending himself to his superior, Ya'osh, who wrote several of the Lachish letters. The exact charges are not clear, but they seem to involve reading secret documents. One scholar thinks these letters might have been used in Hoshaiyah's trial. The guardhouse was not only a military post but was also near the gate where trials were held in biblical times.

The Lachish Letters are valuable to Bible scholars for several reasons:

- They show what language and writing the Hebrews used in Jeremiah's time.
- They help with understanding the Hebrew text.
- They give firsthand information about the difficult political and military situation just before Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem.
- They help us study Hebrew names from the end of the monarchy.
- They provide historical details (for example, letter 20 mentions King Zedekiah's ninth year).

These letters help bring to life the unstable times described in the book of Jeremiah.

See also Letter Writing, Ancient.

Ladan

1. Member of Ephraim's tribe who was Joshua's ancestor ([1 Chr 7:26](#)).
2. Gershonite Levite, named as the head of several families ([1 Chr 23:7; 26:21](#)). He is also called Libni. *See* Libni #1.

Lael

A Levite from the family of Gershon. He was the father of Eliasaph ([Numbers 3:24](#)).

Lahad

Jahath's son from Judah's tribe ([1 Chr 4:2](#)).

Lahai-Roi

The King James Version form of Beer-lahairoi. It is the name of a well mentioned in [Genesis 24:62](#) and [25:11](#).

See Beer-lahairoi.

Lahmam

Judahite town in the Shephelah district of Lachish ([Jos 15:40](#)), usually identified with modern Khirbet el-Lahm; alternately spelled Lahmas in some versions (niv, nasb).

Lahmi

A brother of Goliath the Gittite. According to [1 Chronicles 20:5](#), Elhanan killed Lahmi. But [2 Samuel 21:19](#) says that Elhanan killed Goliath rather than his brother Lahmi. Most interpreters accept the 1 Chronicles passage as the correct reading. They consider the 2 Samuel text to be a textual corruption.

Laish (Person)

The father of Paltiel (also called Palti). King Saul gave his daughter Michal to Paltiel as a wife. Michal was previously married to David before Saul took her away and gave her to Paltiel ([1 Samuel 25:44; 2 Samuel 3:15–16](#)).

Laish (Place)

1. Early name for the city of Dan ([Jgs 18:7, 14, 27–29](#)). *See* Dan (Place) #1.

2. KJV spelling of Laishah, a Benjamite town, in [Isaiah 10:30](#). See Laishah.

Laishah

A town in the territory of Benjamin mentioned between Gallim and Anathoth ([Isaiah 10:30](#)). Archaeologists think the ancient town may have been located at a site now called Khirbet el-'Isawiyeh.

Lake of Fire

The final place where Satan, his servants, and people who refuse to turn away from evil will stay forever.

The Bible only mentions the lake of fire in the book of Revelation ([Revelation 19:20; 20:10, 14-15; 21:8](#)). The book describes it as a lake of fire or a lake of burning sulfur. The lake of fire will contain several groups:

1. the evil creature called the beast and his false prophet (who deceives people), whom Jesus (the Lamb) will defeat;
2. Satan after his final rebellion;
3. the powers of Death and the place of the dead (Hades); and
4. all people whose names are not written in God's "Book of Life."

This place is known as the second death because it completely separates people from God after the resurrection and final judgment.

Jesus likely refers to this same place using different names in his teachings. He calls it Gehenna (a valley where garbage was burned; [Matthew 10:28; Mark 9:43; Luke 12:5](#)), the "outer darkness" ([Matthew 8:12; 22:13; 25:30](#)), and the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels ([Matthew 25:41](#); compare [Isaiah 66:24](#)). This description comes from two sources: the fires that burned in the valley of Hinnom near Jerusalem, and the stream of fire flowing from God's throne ([Isaiah 30:33; Daniel 7:10](#); compare [Is 34:9-10](#)).

Both Jewish and Christian writers wrote about this place in their ancient texts (Assumption of Moses 10:10; [2 Esdras 7:36](#)). By all these different names and descriptions, they describe the same thing: a

place where those who reject God will be separated from him and suffer forever.

See also Gehenna; Last Judgment.

Lakkum, Lakum

Fortified border town within the territory of Naphtali ([Jos 19:33](#)). Its site is identifiable with Khirbet el-Mansurah, about three miles (4.8 kilometers) southwest of Khirbet Kerak, at the head of Wadi Fejjas.

Lamb

A lamb is a young sheep. In the Bible, lambs are part of the broader group called sheep, which includes both young and adult animals.

Lambs were often used for sacrifices in Israel's worship ([Exodus 12:3-6; Leviticus 4:32](#)).

In the New Testament, "Lamb of God" is a title for Jesus Christ ([John 1:29](#)). It means Jesus gave his life as the final sacrifice to take away the sins of the world ([1 Peter 1:19; Revelation 5:6](#)). This connects to the lambs killed at Passover. God told the Israelites to mark their doors with the lamb's blood so they would be spared from death in Egypt ([Exodus 12:21-27](#)).

See Sheep; see also Animals; Lamb of God.

Lamb of God

A general term used twice by John the Baptist when he saw Jesus ([John 1:29, 36](#)). The first time, John added, "who takes away the sin of the world!" John did not explain what the term meant. Christians use this term often, but what does it mean? Why would anyone be called "God's Lamb"?

The Passover Lamb

Some scholars believe that John saw Jesus fulfilling all that the Passover means and that this is a way of referring to the Passover lamb. The fourth Gospel places the death of Jesus at the time when the Passover sacrifices were killed. But "Passover lamb" is a modern expression. No examples of its use are known from ancient times. When people wanted to refer to the animal killed for this sacrifice, they simply called it "the Passover"

([Exodus 12:21](#), compare [1 Corinthians 5:7](#)). The Passover animal was not always a lamb. It might be, and often was, a young goat. There is no clear reason to connect the Passover with the "Lamb of God" expression.

The Lamb in Isaiah's Prophecy

Some scholars think the image comes from [Isaiah 53](#). They see the lamb led to the slaughter in verse 7 as a way of referring to the Messiah (God's chosen one).

The Lamb in Apocalyptic Writings

Other scholars think there is a reference to the triumphant lamb found in apocalyptic writings. The writers of apocalyptic literature used vivid imagery to reveal their meaning to insiders and to hide it from outsiders. They sometimes used the lamb as a symbol of a conqueror (compare the use of "the Lamb" for "the Mighty One" in Revelation). These scholars think that John was pointing to Jesus as the Messiah, King of Israel. Many find this view attractive. The royal status it gives to Jesus certainly fits with John's Gospel. But this view has a problem. John was speaking about a Lamb who takes away sin, while the apocalyptic lamb is normally a conqueror. These are different roles. Also, it is not easy to see how non-Jewish readers of the Gospel would have understood apocalyptic imagery when it was written.

Other Possible Meanings

There are other suggestions. The "gentle lamb" ([Jeremiah 11:19](#)), the daily sacrifice in the temple, the scapegoat (an animal that symbolically carried away the sins of the people), and the guilt offering have all been suggested with some confidence. But no one has shown evidence that any of these was ever called "God's lamb."

The Sacrificial Meaning

In the Old Testament passages referring to a lamb, nearly all them speak of sacrifice (85 out of 96 total). Combined with a reference to taking away sin, it is difficult to avoid seeing a reference to sacrificial atonement (making things right between God and humans). Typically, the lamb in Scripture puts away sin by being sacrificed. "God's Lamb" means that this provision is made by God himself. A reference to sacrifice seems clear, but a connection with any one specific sacrifice is hard to make. Christ perfectly fulfilled all that the Old

Testament sacrifices pointed toward. God's Lamb puts sin away once and for all.

See also Feasts and Festivals of Israel; John, The Apostle; John, Gospel of.

Lamech

1. Methushael's son, a descendant of Cain, and the husband of Adah and Zillah.

Lamech's sons with Adah were:

- Jabal, "the father of those who dwell in tents and have livestock"
- Jubal, "the father of all who play the harp and flute"

His children with Zillah were:

- Tubal-cain, "a forger of every implement of bronze and iron,"
- Naamah ([Genesis 4:18-22](#))

In the early chapters of Genesis, Lamech's sons represent the beginnings of herding, music, and metalworking. Lamech's song ([Genesis 4:23-24](#)) is an early example of Hebrew poetry. In this song, Lamech boasts about killing a man who had wounded him, comparing his act of vengeance to Cain's murder of Abel ([Genesis 4:8-12](#)). He asserts that "If Cain is avenged sevenfold, then Lamech seventy-sevenfold." Lamech's song shows how as civilization grew, so did pride and violence. This contrasts sharply with Jesus' teaching on forgiveness, where he advises forgiving "seventy times seven" ([Matthew 18:22](#)).

1. Methuselah's son, and the father of Noah ([Genesis 5:25-31](#); [1 Chronicles 1:3](#)). When Noah was born, Lamech hoped that the child would bring relief to humanity from the curse placed upon Adam ([Genesis 5:29](#); compare [Genesis 3:17](#)). He lived for 777 years, one of the longest lives among those who lived before the Flood. The Dead Sea Scrolls contained long conversations between Lamech and his father, Methuselah. Lamech is listed as an ancestor of Jesus in the family list recorded in [Luke 3:36](#). *See also* Genealogy of Jesus Christ.

Lament, Lamentation

See Mourning.

Lamentations, Book of

Book consisting of five poems that constitute a formal dirge lamenting the fall of Jerusalem.

Preview

- Author
- Date
- Background
- Structure
- Purpose and Theological Teaching
- Content

Author

The book of Lamentations has been traditionally ascribed to the prophet Jeremiah. This ascription is supported by the Latin Vulgate and the Septuagint.

The Jeremaic authorship of the book has been questioned by many scholars, however. The chief reasons for this are the different literary styles of the books of Jeremiah and Lamentations and the alleged conflicting viewpoints in the two books.

The literary styles of these books are strikingly different. The prophecies of the book of Jeremiah are flowing pronouncements that create an impression of spontaneity and are quite unlike the contrived literary structures of Lamentations. But

it is somewhat arbitrary to assert that Jeremiah could not have written the book of Lamentations on the basis of style. The choice of the acrostic form would naturally limit the scope of the writer's freedom and profoundly affect his style. It is clear from [2 Chronicles 35:25](#) that Jeremiah composed the same type of material as that found in Lamentations. Since the sermons of the book of Jeremiah were intended for public proclamation, they would naturally have a spontaneity that the book of Lamentations would not possess. Certainly, the sensitive nature reflected in Jeremiah's prophecies characterized the author of Lamentations as well.

Typical of the alleged differences of viewpoint used to deny Jeremaic authorship is the role of the nations in the destruction of Jerusalem. In his prophecy Jeremiah saw the invading Babylonians as a tool of God's punishment, and appealed to the Jews to surrender to the invaders ([Jer 28:3](#)). The book of Lamentations seems to make God the direct author of the punishment and sees the enemy nations only as onlookers who will also experience God's wrath ([Lam 1:21](#); [3:59-66](#)). It must be noted, however, that the enemies referred to in Lamentations are not only the Babylonians but all of the hostile powers that threatened Judah and gloated over its destruction ([1:21](#)). The assurance that God will judge these enemies is not a denial of the message of the book of Jeremiah, for it would be artificial for Jeremiah to suppose that the Babylonians, even though they were an instrument of God's anger, were exempt from punishment. Such a concept is at variance with [Jeremiah 12:14-17](#).

A number of phrases used in the book of Jeremiah are found in Lamentations as well. The expressions "terrors on every side" ([Lam 2:22](#); cf. [Jer 6:25; 20:10](#)) and "wormwood" ([Lam 3:15, 19](#); cf. [Jer 9:15; 23:15](#)) are examples of these. This fact lends support to the concept of Jeremaic authorship of the book.

Other reasons cited for the denial of Jeremaic authorship are the absence of the name of Jeremiah in Lamentations and the position of the book in the Writings, not the Prophets, in the Hebrew Bible. The absence of Jeremiah's name is not a cogent argument against his authorship; there are a significant number of OT books whose authors are not cited. Since the book of Lamentations is a formal dirge, and is thus unlike the book of Jeremiah with its numerous autobiographical

references, one would not expect personal allusions by the author.

The position of Lamentations in the third division of the Hebrew Bible is sometimes appealed to by those who question Jeremaic authorship. Since Jeremiah is in the second division, it is argued that Lamentations was written too late for it to have been authored by Jeremiah. It should be noted, however, that there is a lack of unity in the early lists of the canonical books in the third division. It is difficult to assign a late date to a book of the third division only because of its inclusion in that division. The early church father Jerome indicated that Lamentations was once on the same scroll with Jeremiah.

Date

If the book of Lamentations was written by Jeremiah, the time of writing would be shortly after the fall of Jerusalem (586 BC). It is extremely difficult to imagine an author living in later times writing such a poignant lament over Jerusalem's fall. The vivid descriptions of the suffering endured by the inhabitants of Jerusalem support the position that the book was written by an eyewitness to the events.

Background

After many months of siege by the Babylonian armies, Jerusalem fell, and the final deportation of the people of Judah took place. Extrabiblical confirmation of the devastation caused by the Babylonian invasion may be found in the Lachish letters, which record the message from a soldier in the field who indicates that he is watching for the signals of Lachish but cannot see the signals of Azekah (cf. [Jer 34:7](#)).

The time preceding Jerusalem's fall was one of internal strife and political intrigue. Jeremiah counseled surrender, while the chauvinistic leaders of Jerusalem tried to encourage the Judahites to fight on against the Babylonian onslaught. The role of Jeremiah in those final events was a tenuous one. His life was threatened, and he suffered numerous imprisonments.

The fall of Jerusalem meant more than ignominious defeat and exile. While these would have been hard to bear, the theological emergency brought about by the event would have been the most difficult thing for believing Jews to comprehend. The fall of the city in which God chose to reveal himself would have signaled the end of God's promises. The OT

clearly set forth a glorious future for Jerusalem. It was to be the center of the messianic kingdom in the end time ([Mi 4](#)). The destruction of the city would cause many to question the veracity of God's Word. The laments in this book are not only for the suffering that accompanied the fall of the city but also for the deep spiritual questions posed by its demise.

Structure

Each poem has a distinct symmetrical pattern. The first ([Lam 1](#)) is an elaborate acrostic composed of three-line segments. There are 22 segments, each beginning with a different letter of the Hebrew alphabet, proceeding in order from the first to the last. The second poem (ch [2](#)) is similar except for a transposition of two Hebrew letters. The third poem (ch [3](#)) is also composed of three-line segments, but each line begins with a different letter of the Hebrew alphabet, rather than only the first line of each segment as in the first two poems. The same Hebrew letters are transposed. The fourth poem (ch [4](#)) is an acrostic composed of two-line segments. The first line of each segment begins with the appropriate Hebrew letter. The last poem (ch [5](#)) is not an acrostic, but it contains the same number of letters as the Hebrew alphabet.

The reason for this complex structure is unknown. It has been suggested that it is a device to aid memorization. Another suggestion is that the Hebrews may have seen the alphabet as representing the concept of totality or completeness. This idea derives from the fact that the Hebrew alphabet represented numbers as well as letters. This concept of totality may be reflected in the reference to the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet in [Revelation 1:8](#): "I am the Alpha and the Omega." It is quite possible that the expression of lamentation in the structure of the Hebrew alphabet could have represented the full range of sorrow felt by the author as he pondered the fall of the city of Jerusalem.

Purpose and Theological Teaching

A major purpose of the book of Lamentations was to give expression to the deep grief that Jeremiah felt as a result of Jerusalem's catastrophe. By writing the book, he expressed the grief of all the Jews of his time and gave them a vehicle that would give vent to their sorrow.

The book does not contain only lamentation, however, for it expresses hope and comfort as well. Thus another of its purposes was to lift the hearts

of the people and point them to God, the source of all comfort. One of the greatest expressions of hope in the book is found in [3:22–23](#): “The unfailing love of the Lord never ends! By his mercies we have been kept from complete destruction. Great is his faithfulness; his mercies begin afresh each day” (nlt).

Perhaps the most important purpose of the book was to explain the theological reason for the catastrophe. The book places the reason for Jerusalem’s fall in clear focus and demonstrates what can be learned about God from this. The reason given for Jerusalem’s demise is the sin of the people ([1:8–9, 14](#); [4:13](#)). The fall of the city is a vivid illustration of God’s justice in not overlooking sin even in those who are his own ([1:18](#)). It demonstrates the fact that God may seem like an enemy to his people when they are disobedient ([2:5–7](#)). It shows that the catastrophe was not outside the purposes of God (v [17](#)) and vividly describes the results that can come from willful disobedience. But God is envisioned as a God of mercy and faithfulness as well. Even though Jeremiah saw his beloved homeland crumbling about him, there remained one great element of stability: God’s loyalty to his promises. Jeremiah knew that this was not the end, for he trusted in the steadfast love of the Lord and learned to wait quietly for God to act in his time ([3:22–27](#)).

Content

The first chapter is a lamentation over the captivity of the citizens of Jerusalem and the resultant desolation of the city.

The author alludes to [Deuteronomy 28:64–65](#) at the beginning of the first lamentation ([Lam 1:3](#)). In that passage Moses warned the people that their disobedience to God would result in their dispersion among the nations, with no resting place. [Lamentations 1:3](#) says that this warning has been realized.

The cause of Israel’s misfortune was their sin ([1:8a](#)). This is a remarkable example of the results of disobedience to God. The dire results of sin permeate this first lamentation in a series of pictures of deep pathos (vv [11–12, 16–17](#)). In the midst of this suffering Israel confesses that God was in the right (v [18](#)). The righteousness of God involves his acting in integrity. He punishes sin even in his own people.

The first lamentation ends with a prayer in which the people cry out for God’s judgment on their

enemies ([1:21–22](#)). Such imprecations are the OT believer’s way of expressing his longing for an end to evil as it was personified in the godless nations.

The second lamentation also concerns the destruction of Jerusalem but places more emphasis on God’s judgment. The tone is more strident than in the previous lamentation. Throughout the passage words expressing anger appear ([2:1–3, 6–7](#)). It is as though the terrible wrath of God evident in the destruction of the city is still vivid in the mind of the writer.

The author lays the blame for God’s anger squarely on the false prophets ([2:14](#)); but he does not exempt the people from guilt, as is clear from other passages (e.g., [1:5, 8](#)). It was the false prophets of the time who failed to warn the people of the results of their sin ([2:14](#)). Because of this, destruction came, and the writer can give no comfort to the people (v [13](#)).

The second lamentation begins with a reference to God’s footstool ([2:1](#)), probably referring to the ark of the covenant ([1 Chr 28:2](#)). The ark was the focal point of God’s revelation of himself. This verse reflects the theological emergency of the time; the writer laments the fact that God has not remembered his “footstool.” Even the holy ark, which marked God’s presence with his people, has not prevented God from destroying Jerusalem.

The same thought is expressed in verses [6–7](#), where the traditional aspects of Israelite worship, as well as the sanctuary, are seen as having been destroyed by God. This important truth demonstrates the viewpoint of the whole book, which sees God as the direct cause of the misfortune.

The third lamentation is very personal. At its conclusion, sorrow and complaint pass into a prayer of assurance ([3:61–66](#)). In the first 18 verses of this chapter, the writer describes how the Lord has afflicted him. He refers to God in the third person, not addressing him as Lord until he speaks the words of verse [18](#). Only after he has poured out his grief in this fashion can he speak the name of the Lord. This poignant grief suddenly changes to an expression of joy. He can affirm the covenant faithfulness of the Lord, and in the midst of the deepening sorrow, he sees God’s mercies as new every morning (vv [22–24](#)). The chapter closes with a sudden burst of assurance (vv [58–66](#)), in which the writer affirms his belief that God will vindicate him before his enemies. Only after he meditates on the nature of God’s loving-kindness (vv [22–27](#)) can

he speak these words. The desperate isolation and separation from God expressed in verses [1-17](#) give way as he affirms God's goodness. Assurance comes as he reflects on the nature and goodness of God.

The fourth lamentation emphasizes the fact that the judgment was well deserved. The author describes the various classes of the population ([4:1-16](#)) and indicates how each has been affected by Jerusalem's downfall. Verses [12-20](#) affirm that the judgment of God is a direct consequence of sin. This lamentation also becomes a joyous statement of hope (vv [21-22](#)), as the writer affirms that God will punish Israel's enemies. Israel's sin will be forgiven, and the guilt of "the daughter of Edom" will be punished. The "daughter of Edom" undoubtedly stands for all the enemy nations. (Edom is used in [Isaiah 63:1](#) in the same fashion.) This salvation of the nation of Judah will not take place until their guilt is atoned for. It occurs when God conquers the godless nations. This conquest of the nations is an event that takes place in the end time, according to numerous OT and NT passages. It represents the manifestation of God's total sovereignty over his creation.

The last chapter is a poignant prayer in which the author describes their sufferings and asks God to restore the fortunes of the people. It begins with a request to God, asking him to consider all that has befallen the people ([5:1-18](#)). Part of the ignominy of the captive Jews is that "slaves" rule over them (v [8](#)). This is an apparent reference to the Babylonian captors, who themselves were subject to despotic rule for many decades. The author's perspective changes in verse [19](#), where he affirms that the Lord reigns forever. While Jerusalem, the earthly dwelling place of the Lord, has come to an end, the Lord's throne endures forever. Because his throne is everlasting, the author asks, "Why do you continue to forget us? Why have you forsaken us for so long? Restore us, O Lord, and bring us back to you again! Give us back the joys we once had! Or have you utterly rejected us? Are you angry with us still?" ([5:20-22](#), nlt). The question is based on the belief that because God's reign is eternal, he cannot utterly forsake his people. He will restore his kingdom.

The book of Lamentations is neglected by many Christians. It deserves to be studied more. Its powerful statement concerning the blessings that may come from tragedy is a relevant message in any age, and it is one of the most powerful illustrations of the results of sin to be found in the

OT. Its theology is clear and precise, painting a brilliant picture of God's faithfulness against the dark background of the collapse of the city of Zion.

See also Jeremiah (Person) #1; Jeremiah, Book of.

Lamp, Lampstand

Israelite lamps developed from those in general use among the Canaanites in the second millennium BC. Their shape was similar to a shell or saucer with a lip. Lamps of stone, metal, and shells were used, although the majority were made of pottery. A multitude of clay lamps, fashioned in a variety of designs, have been excavated in Palestine.

The clay bowl was fashioned first, and the rim was folded over to help contain the oil. A spout was pinched in place at one end, into which the wick would be placed. When the clay had dried, the lamp would be fired to a dull brown shade. Gradually a style with an increasingly sharply pinched lip was developed. The wick was generally made of flax ([Is 42:3](#), kJV), although an old piece of linen cloth was sometimes used. Salt could be added to the wick for a brighter flame, and frequently extra wicks were used. This led to the development of multispouted lamps like those found at Tell Datha from 1200 BC.

Olive oil provided the most common form of lamp fuel ([Ex 27:20](#)), and the average lamp could hold enough oil to burn through the night. Despite this, the housewife would have to get up several times to tend the wick and keep her precious lamp lit ([Prv 31:18](#)). Tongs were used for extinguishing the flame of a lamp in the tabernacle or temple ([Ex 25:38; 37:23](#); [Nm 4:9; 1 Kgs 7:49](#); [Is 6:6](#)). Since candles were not known in biblical times, the translation in the kJV is incorrect.

The saucer lamp, which would have spilled easily, was not suitable for night travel, so a torch was probably used for that purpose ([Jgs 7:16-20](#)). In addition, the wick of the open saucer lamp could easily have blown out at night.

Lamps were commonly found in burials along with food offerings. Because the lamp's flame was associated with life, lamps were frequently placed in tombs as a symbol of life being rekindled.

Although a more elaborate cup-and-saucer style of lamp was developed in which the flame came from the central area, the saucer lamp remained the most popular. The earliest Hellenistic lamp found

in Palestine dates from 630 BC and already shows indications of the later covered model. During the sixth and fifth centuries BC, a flat-bottomed, saucer-style lamp was developed.

In the third century BC the more elaborate wheel-made, covered Greek style took precedence. These lamps were often simple in design, rounded, with a central hole for the oil and one in the small spout for the wick.

In the second century BC the wheel-made lamp was replaced by a molded ceramic lamp of finer design with a larger spout. Imported Egyptian lamps of this type have been found in southern Palestine. Multispouted lamps were probably used on festive occasions. From the same period comes the Hellenistic-influenced bronze lamp of a seated figure holding out a saucer lamp in his hands. At the end of the Hellenistic age the form of lamps deteriorated as the spouts became thick and squat.

Small, round wheel-made lamps of simple design were prevalent in the time of Christ; this would be the type of lamp used by the woman searching the house for her gold coin ([Lk 15:8](#)). With wicks trimmed, the lamps of the foolish virgins would probably have lasted approximately five hours, from dark until about midnight ([Mt 25:1-12](#)).

Jewish lamps were part of the religious symbolism of the home, probably dating back to the prohibition against lighting a fire on the Sabbath ([Ex 35:3](#)). References to light abound in Scripture. We read of the eye as a lamp ([Mt 6:22-23](#); [Lk 11:33-36](#)) and of Christ as the Light of the World ([In 8:12](#)). We are warned to pay attention to teaching as to a light shining in the dark ([Prv 6:23](#); [2 Pt 1:19](#)). Both God and the spirit of man are symbolized as lamps ([2 Sm 22:29](#); [Prv 20:27](#)), while in [Proverbs 13:9](#) “lamp” is synonymous with the essence of life itself. Lamps, with or without stands, were also part of the Jewish ritual of death, mourning, and burial.

The tabernacle housed an ornate golden lampstand, or menorah. On either side three branches came out from the main central stem, and seven lamps could be lighted in the flower-shaped holders. The menorah from the Jerusalem temple is represented in relief on the Arch of Titus in Rome. This particular seven-branched lampstand resembles the ten that were part of the furnishings of Solomon’s temple.

The seven-branched lampstand has been a particular symbol of the Jewish faith from the time

of its earliest appearance on a coin in the reign of Antigonus (40-37 BC) up to the present day.

See also Menorah.

Lance

Long, spearlike weapon. *See Armor and Weapons (Javelin and Spear).*

Land

The relationship of humans to the land is a prominent theme in the OT. In Genesis the earth with its dry land was created as a place for humans to dwell in fellowship with God. Humans were given the task of subduing the earth and ruling over the animal creation to satisfy their own needs and to bring glory to the Creator. Subsequent to humanity’s fall into sin they suffered alienation not only from God and their fellow human beings but also from the land on which they lived. They were driven from the Garden of Eden, and the earth became cursed. They were forced to toil and sweat in order to subdue the earth and provide for their own subsistence because the harvest was choked by thorns and thistles.

After murdering his brother, Cain receives an individual intensification of the land curse as punishment. He is told that the earth will not yield its produce for him even with hard labor, forcing him to wander from one place to another. With no permanent homeland, Cain is denied the enjoyment of rest and prosperity. Because of sin, the important human aspiration for a sense of place is refused to Cain ([Gn 4:12](#)).

After the Flood, which was God’s judgment on an exceedingly wicked human race, humans again provoked God’s wrath; the construction of the Tower of Babel exalts human might apart from God. God intervenes to confuse the people’s language and “scatter them abroad upon the face of the earth” ([11:9](#)). [Genesis 1-11](#) is thus characterized by a sequence of narratives describing land loss with its attendant deprivations as a consequence of sin and rebellion against God.

Land and the Abrahamic Covenant

In the time of Abraham, God intervened in human affairs to provide a special homeland for a select group of people who are set apart unto himself. It

is here that the Promised Land theme is introduced in Scripture. God said to Abraham, “Leave your country, your relatives, and your father’s house, and go to the land that I will show you. I will cause you to become the father of a great nation” ([Gn 12:1-2](#), nlt). This promise to Abraham is enlarged upon in [Genesis 12:7; 13:14-18; 15:7-21; 17:7-8](#). Abraham is told that the land of Canaan is to be the “everlasting possession” of his descendants ([17:8](#)).

The OT narrative then traces Abraham’s line of descent through Isaac and Jacob, and tells of the migration of Jacob’s family to Egypt, where during approximately four centuries they became a great and numerous people. During this period, the promise of possession of the land of Canaan is reiterated ([Gn 28:15; 35:11-12; 46:3-4; 50:24](#)) and held before Abraham’s descendants as an integral feature of God’s covenantal promises.

Land and the Mosaic Covenant

When God called Moses to lead the Israelites out of Egypt, he associated Moses’ task with the fulfillment of the promises to the patriarchs: “I have remembered my covenant with them. . . . I will make you my own special people, and I will be your God. . . . I will bring you into the land I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It will be your very own property” ([Ex 6:5-8](#), nlt). Israel is to be delivered from Egypt for two reasons: first, in order to be established as God’s covenant people at Mt Sinai, and second, in order to possess the land promised to their fathers. It is of utmost significance, however, that with the establishment of the Mosaic covenant the continued possession of the land is made dependent on obedience. Should Israel violate the covenantal obligations, it will bring upon itself the covenant curses, the most severe of which is banishment from the Promised Land ([Lv 26:32-33](#)). This does not mean that God will abandon his people and the land totally or forever, because God also promises that when the people repent, “then I will remember my covenant with Jacob . . . and I will remember the land” ([Lv 26:42](#), nlt).

During the reign of King David, the promise of land received at least a provisional fulfillment. Although it is true that initial fulfillment occurred when Joshua entered the land, at that time the territory did not extend to the borders promised Abraham ([Gn 15:18](#)) and much of the land that was occupied still contained pockets of resistance by the former inhabitants ([Jos 13:1-6; Jgs 1](#)). It was not until the

time of David that the land was fully possessed as originally promised ([2 Sm 8; 1 Kgs 4:21, 24](#)).

The responsibility of the king to observe the law, and the connection between covenantal obedience and possession of the land is again made clear when Solomon dedicates the temple ([1 Kgs 9:4-9](#)). Disobedience will bring not only expulsion from the land but also the destruction of the temple.

The subsequent history of the divided-kingdom era is for the most part a history of covenant abrogation, by the people as well as the kings. The Lord sent repeated warnings through the prophets that such disobedience could only lead to expulsion from the land. But their message fell on deaf ears ([Is 6:11-12; Am 5:27; 7:17; Hos 9:17](#)). The kings repeatedly proved themselves to be unworthy of the office.

As the people persisted in their evil way, Jeremiah announced that Nebuchadnezzar was to be the Lord’s agent to drive them from the land ([Jer 21:2; 22:25; 25:8-9; 27:6; 28:14; 29:21](#)). However, Jeremiah and other prophets also looked beyond the exile to a future restoration and return to the land ([Jer 32:6-25](#)). Historically, this was accomplished under the rule of Cyrus the Great of Persia (538 BC) and is described in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah.

A difficulty of interpretation arises in finding an adequate fulfillment of certain prophecies of the return (cf. [Ez 37; Am 9:14-15](#)), which envision great prosperity and permanent possession of the land under the rule of a Davidic king. The intertestamental period does not seem to be a suitable fulfillment for these predictions.

Land and the New Covenant

In the NT the land theme is much less prominent and seems mostly to be given a spiritual symbolism. The writer of Hebrews suggests that Abraham understood the land promise as something that pointed beyond a merely geographical fulfillment to a higher and far more satisfying heavenly home. Realizing the imperfection and transitory nature of all that this world offers, Abraham looked beyond the temporal fulfillment of the land promise for a city whose builder and maker is God ([Heb 11:10](#)), and he sought a “better country, that is, a heavenly one” (v 16). In the NT it appears that Israel’s land promise and entrance into Canaan is to be understood as typifying something of the future heavenly rest awaiting God’s people ([Heb 3-4](#)). Perhaps this

explains the OT stress on the connection between Israel's living in obedience to God's law and their possession of the land. When the Israelites do not typify a condition of holiness, they disqualify themselves from typifying a condition of blessedness, and thus are either denied access to or driven from the land. The NT indicates that it is God's purpose to prepare an eternal homeland for his people where the rule of the divine King is direct and just, where all things are subject to his will, where death and sin are abolished, and where the needs of his people are completely satisfied ([Heb 11:13–16](#); [Rv 21](#)).

The OT land promises have been viewed by some as having only typical significance. In the light of Christ's incarnation any statement of Scripture concerning a future for the land is to be interpreted as fulfilled in a spiritual sense in the church. The church is now the new Israel and heir of the OT promises. Because God's kingdom is now a spiritual reality, it is considered a misunderstanding of the OT to expect yet future fulfillments of the OT prophecies of Israel's return to the land and an establishment of a period of peace and prosperity under the rule of Christ, the Son of David (cf. [Is 2:1–5](#); [11:6–11](#); [Ez 37](#); [Am 9:14–15](#)). To abide in Christ is considered an adequate fulfillment of the physical and geographical promises of the OT economy.

Others, while not denying typical significance for these OT realities, would suggest that the land promises are still operative in the physical and geographical categories in which they were given. It is pointed out that Paul argues in [Romans 9–11](#) that there is yet a future for national Israel. In spite of Israel's history of disobedience, climaxing in the rejection of the Messiah, the election and calling of God is irrevocable, and Israel is yet to be reingrafted in the olive tree from which it had previously been cut off. Luke says that Jerusalem will be trodden down by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled ([Lk 21:24](#)), indicating that there is to be a future time when Jerusalem will again be possessed by the Jewish nation. This does not necessarily mean that one must view the present state of Israel as the direct fulfillment of the OT promises of return to the land. The OT indicates that the return will be occasioned by belief ([Dt 30:1–16](#)). The present return is in unbelief. At the same time, the remarkable preservation of the Jewish people over the centuries and the recent reestablishment of the nation are perhaps to be understood as

anticipations or signs of a future and more complete realization of the OT land promises.

Landmark

Inscribed stone that denoted a boundary of fields, districts, or nations ([Gn 31:51–52](#)). In most Near Eastern countries the removal of a landmark was a serious crime; in Israel it was a violation of the law of Moses ([Dt 19:14](#); [27:17](#)). Removing landmarks (nlt "boundary markers") could be represented as changing ancient customs and laws ([Prv 22:28](#); [23:10](#); cf. [Jb 24:2](#)).

See also Inscriptions.

Laodicea, Laodiceans

Laodicea was the largest of three cities in a wide valley between mountains in the region of Phrygia. The city stood where the Lycus Valley met the Meander River. The people who lived in Laodicea were called Laodiceans. The western gate of the city was called the Ephesian Gate. From there, travelers could head west toward Ephesus. The eastern gate was called the Syrian Gate. From there, a major road went east to Antioch. Other roads from Antioch led to the Euphrates Valley, Damascus, and the far eastern deserts, reaching as far as the Gobi region.

Water Supply and Weakness

Laodicea was not built on a strong natural hill or mountain. The small hill where the city stood had some defenses, but it was not very safe. The city's biggest weakness was its water supply. Water came through an aqueduct (a human-made water channel) from springs about 9.7 kilometers (6 miles) away, near Hierapolis. Parts of this aqueduct still exist today. The water pipes are now partly blocked by thick white calcium deposits. Because the water source was so easy to attack, the city could not survive a long siege. Even though the aqueduct was buried underground, it was not a well-kept secret.

Laodicea Under Roman Rule

When the Roman Empire brought peace to the region, Laodicea no longer served as a border city. It became a rich and important trade center. The Roman leader Cicero traveled through Laodicea in 51 BC on his way to govern Cilicia. He was able to

cash money orders in the city. This shows that Laodicea was already a wealthy place with a strong banking system, more important than nearby Colossae.

One product was a glossy black wool. This wool came from a special kind of long-haired black sheep. These sheep were raised in the area until the 19th century. The wool helped support a large cloth-making business in both Laodicea and Colossae. Some Laodicean clothing was listed in a price-control law from the Roman ruler Diocletian around AD 300. A copy of this law was found in a nearby city called Aphrodisias.

Medicine

Laodicea had a medical school. Some of its doctors were so well known that their names were printed on coins during the time of the Roman ruler Augustus (around the first century AD). The medical school likely created a well-known eye powder called "Phrygian powder." This remedy was famous in the ancient world. It may have been made from dried mud taken from the hot springs at nearby Hierapolis. When mixed with water, the powder became a soft clay (called a poultice) used to treat eye infections and swelling.

Laodicea in the Book of Revelation

The book of Revelation uses strong words to speak against the church in Laodicea:

"You say, 'I am rich; I have grown wealthy and need nothing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked. I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined by fire so that you may become rich, white garments so that you may be clothed and your shameful nakedness not exposed, and salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see" ([Revelation 3:17–18](#)).

This message reflects things Laodicea was known for. The city was rich. It sold black wool clothing across the Roman world. It had a medical school that made a famous eye ointment.

But the writer of Revelation says that even with all these things, the people were still poor, blind, and naked in a spiritual way.

See also Revelation, Book of.

Lapis Lazuli

Semiprecious stone (silicate) known for its rich blue color. See Minerals and Metals; Stones, Precious.

Lappidoth

Husband of Deborah the prophetess ([Jgs 4:4](#)).

Lapwing

KJV translation for hoopoe, an unclean bird according to the Law, in [Leviticus 11:19](#) and [Deuteronomy 14:18](#). See Birds (Hoopoe).

Lasciviousness

Lasciviousness is a strong and uncontrolled desire for sensual pleasure. Modern Bible translations commonly use the words "licentiousness," "debauchery," or "sensuality" instead. Lasciviousness occurs when the pursuit of pleasure goes to the extreme of completely disregarding the dignity of other people and the environment.

The Bible gives several examples of this kind of behavior:

- The people of Sodom and Gomorrah lived in ways that went against God's laws ([2 Peter 2:7](#)).
- Some false teachers told people they could do whatever they wanted. But these teachers themselves were controlled by their own wrong desires ([2 Peter 2:2, 18–19](#); compare [Jude 4](#)).
- Some non-Jewish people (gentiles) strongly desired to do all kinds of wrong things ([Ephesians 4:19](#)).

In his letters, Paul often wrote about people who could not control their sexual desires ("debauchery" in [Romans 13:13](#); [2 Corinthians 12:21](#); [Galatians 5:19](#)). This is also likely what Jesus was talking about in [Mark 7:22](#).

Lasea

A seaport city on the island of Crete. It was located about 8 kilometers (five miles) east of Fair Havens. The ship of the apostle Paul passed Lasea on its way to Italy ([Acts 27:8](#)).

We do not know much about Lasea. It is probably in ruins near Fair Havens. It may be the same as the Lasos mentioned by Pliny the Elder in his *Natural History* (4.12.59). Pliny says Lasea was famous in the ancient world. Its region contained 100 cities and it was one of most important ports of Crete.

Lasha

A place-name, otherwise unknown. An ancient description uses this name to refer to the southern boundary of the territory occupied by the Canaanites ([Genesis 10:19](#)). This passage associates Lasha with other cities near the southern end of the Dead Sea.

Lasharon

Town in Canaan conquered by Joshua ([Jos 12:18](#)). Another early manuscript reads "the king of Aphek in Sharon," perhaps indicating that Lasharon was not the name of a town but part of a phrase distinguishing this city from the other Apheks mentioned in the Bible.

Last Days

An expression used in the Bible to describe the final period of the world as we know it. In the Old Testament, the last days are seen as the time when the Messiah's promises will come true (see [Isaiah 2:2](#); [Micah 4:1](#)). In the New Testament, the writers believe they are already living in the last days, which they see as the era of the gospel. For example, Peter explains that the events on the Day of Pentecost fulfill the prophecy from [Joel 2:28](#): "In the last days, God says, I will pour out My Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on My menservants and maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy." ([Acts 2:17-18](#)). The writer of the letter to the Hebrews says, "On many past occasions and in many different ways, God spoke to our fathers through the prophets. But in

these last days He has spoken to us by His Son" ([Hebrews 1:1-2](#)).

The last days are a time of great blessing. The world can now freely access the benefits of salvation. They come from the perfect life, death, resurrection, and glorification of Jesus Christ. Now, unbelievers can repent and turn to God. Believers must spread the gospel worldwide.

The phrase "last days" suggests that this period will last for some time. This understanding is confirmed by the fact that this final age has already continued for many centuries. However, from the perspective of eternity, it is a brief period. In every generation, the end of this final age is always seen as coming soon, so much so that John refers to it as "the last hour." The presence of antichrists (those opposed to Christ) even within the early church is a sign of this. John says, "It is the last hour; and just as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have appeared. This is how we know it is the last hour" ([1 John 2:18](#)). The end of these last days is always near, and it will certainly come one day. This is why Christ urges us to be watchful. We do not know the day or hour of his glorious return. It will end these last days ([Matthew 24:44; 25:13](#)).

This idea naturally leads to the teaching that the last days will culminate in "the Day." The last days will end with the last day. The use of "day" in the singular form in the New Testament corresponds to the concept of the "Day of the Lord" in the Old Testament. It is a terrifying day of judgment for the unrepentant. But, it promises salvation for God's people (see, for example, [Isaiah 2:12-22](#); [Ezekiel 13:5](#); [Joel 1:15; 2:1, 11](#); [Amos 5:18-24](#); [Zephaniah 1:7, 14](#)). The climax of these last days, and thus of all history, will be "the day of the Lord," which will come upon the world suddenly ([1 Thessalonians 5:2](#)). This final day will be the day of the last judgment for those who have rejected the gospel. It will also be the day when our fallen world is purified and the created order is restored. In the new heaven and new earth, all of God's purposes in creation will be fulfilled. When our redemption is complete, we will be like our Redeemer. Then, we will enjoy his eternal glory ([Romans 8:19-25](#); [1 John 3:2](#); [Revelation 21:1-8](#)).

The apostle Paul reminds Christians. On the last day, "the Day," their lives will be revealed. What they have done will be known. This does not affect the security of their salvation in Christ. Instead, it determines whether they will meet him with confidence or with shame at his coming (see [1 John](#)

[2:28](#). Paul writes, "His workmanship will be evident, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will prove the quality of each man's work. If what he has built survives, he will receive a reward." ([1 Corinthians 3:13-15](#)).

The last of the last days will end. Then, Christ's kingdom will begin. God will be all in all ([1 Corinthians 15:28](#); [Philippians 3:20-21](#)). The last day is also a day of triumph and resurrection. Christ has promised to raise everyone who believes in him ([John 6:39-44, 54](#)). The last days are like night when compared to the glory that will be revealed at Christ's return, so the end of these last days will also be the beginning of God's unending day (see [Romans 13:11-12](#)). Knowing that we are in the last days and that the last day is approaching should greatly impact how we live our lives today (see [2 Peter 3:11-14](#)).

In summary, the last days are the days of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. They prepare us for the last day. It will be the final judgment of unbelievers. For believers, it will be the beginning of eternal glory. For Christ's faithful followers, these are days of joy and blessing. But we still await a full redemption. They are days of trial and suffering for the church, but God has assured us of his Spirit in our hearts. This Spirit is a hint of the taste of the full banquet to come. It is a down payment that promises full payment in the future ([Romans 8:23](#); [2 Corinthians 1:22](#); [5:5](#); [Ephesians 1:14](#)). Meanwhile, we can be confident with the apostle Paul that the sufferings of these last days are not worth comparing to the glory that will be revealed to us ([Romans 8:18](#)). These days are also a time of responsibility and opportunity. Christians have the responsibility to proclaim the gospel throughout the world ([Matthew 28:19-20](#); [Acts 1:8](#)), and God commands all people everywhere to repent ([Acts 17:30](#)).

See also Day of the Lord; Second Coming of Christ.

Last Judgment

The Last Judgment is the final time when God will judge everyone who has ever lived.

The Day of the Lord in the Old Testament

Many prophets in the Old Testament wrote about this time. They called it "the Day of the Lord." They said God would defeat all evil nations and set up his

kingdom in Zion, his holy city ([Isaiah 4:2](#); [11:10](#); [Jeremiah 50:3-32](#); [Joel 2:1-3](#); [3:9-16](#); [Amos 5:18-20](#); [9:11](#); [Zephaniah 1:7-18](#)).

Jesus as the Judge in the New Testament

The writers of the New Testament also wrote about this judgment. They explained it through what Jesus taught and did. God has chosen Jesus to be the judge of everyone, both those who are alive and those who have died ([Acts 10:42](#); [17:31](#)). Everyone (both those who believe in Jesus and those who do not) will stand before Jesus's judgment seat. He will judge them based on how they lived their lives ([2 Corinthians 5:10](#); compare [Romans 14:10](#)).

God's Standards for Judgment

God will judge people based on how they have lived. People who are faithful to God's covenant (agreement) with them will live, but those who turn away from God will die. The prophet Habakkuk says that a good person is someone who remains faithful to God ([Habakkuk 2:4](#)). The New Testament writers say that God will judge people by looking at whether their actions pleased him ([2 Corinthians 5:10](#); [Revelation 20:12](#)).

But the New Testament also tells us that no one has fully met God's standards. Everyone has done wrong things ("all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God," [Romans 3:9, 23](#)). However, at the final judgment, the most important question is not whether someone has done wrong things. Instead, the question is whether God has forgiven them.

Believers and Unbelievers on the Day of Judgment

The New Testament ([Romans 3:21-28](#); [5:1-21](#)) describes this forgiveness as being made right with God (justification) and having a restored relationship with him (reconciliation). People can receive this forgiveness because Jesus died and came back to life. His perfect life and death make it possible for everyone to be forgiven and have eternal life ([Romans 5:18](#)).

People who trust in Jesus will not be condemned ([John 3:16-18](#)). They can enter the day of judgment without fear ([1 John 4:17](#)). Their names are written in a special book, called the Lamb's Book of Life ([Revelation 21:27](#)). But people who do not believe in Jesus will stand before him alone when they are judged. Jesus will judge them based on what they have done, which is recorded in his books ([Revelation 20:11-12](#)).

See also Day of the Lord; Eschatology; Judgment; Judgment Seat; Last Days; Wrath of God.

Last Supper

See Lord's Supper, The.

Last Times

See Last Days.

Latin

One of the primary languages of the Greco-Roman world.

Latin was widespread because of the spread of Rome's power and the consequences of the official relations with the people under its control. This led to a considerable Latin contribution to *koine* (common) Greek. From the start of the Roman influence in Greece, Roman politics and commerce contributed an increasing number of Latin words to Greek.

Latin Words in the New Testament

Traces of Latin in the New Testament are not surprising. The Latin influence on New Testament Greek has left its mark mainly upon vocabulary, in the transliterated words and literally translated phrases. Latin was one of the three languages in which the inscription on the cross was written ([Luke 23:38](#), only in the King James Version; [John 19:20](#)). Only in these two passages does the term "Latin" occur in the New Testament.

Latin was the language of Roman law and court procedure. Greek might be allowed, but only by favor of the court. This explains why the superscription was written in Latin as well as Greek and Aramaic. Every educated Roman would understand Greek, but Latin was used as the official and military, and legal, language.

This is reflected in the New Testament where Latin judicial and military terms occur, along with the names of coins, articles of apparel, utensils, and so on. For example, Latin words are used for:

- farthing,
- denarius,
- centurion,
- colony,
- guard or watch,
- legion,
- towel,
- parchment,
- palace,
- assassin,
- napkin, and
- superscription.

In addition, over 40 Latin names of persons, titles, and places occur in the New Testament. Agrippa, Claudius, Caesar, Felix, and Cornelius are some of the more familiar names. [Romans 16](#) reveals that Latin proper names were common among Christians.

Except for proper names, Mark's Gospel uses more Latin words than any other New Testament document. This is to be expected if the Gospel were indeed written in Rome, but this is not established. The occurrence of many Latin words in this shortest of the four Gospels is not necessarily evidence that Mark wrote it in Rome. They are usually terms that the Roman government would make familiar in all parts of the empire. Also, Latinisms found in Mark's Gospel are found in the other three Gospels. For example, Matthew uses Latin words for mile, tribute, guard or watch, and to take counsel. Because of the similarities in Latin and Greek grammar, the influence of the former upon the grammar of the latter is more difficult to trace.

Latin and the Early Church

For more than 100 years after Jesus's followers started the Christian church, Greek was more important than Latin for Christians. This was helpful because many people in different places spoke a common form of Greek. As a result, the early Christian church could use one version of the Bible that everyone could understand: the Greek translation of the Old Testament. To freedmen and slaves, Latin was a foreign and largely unknown language. This explains why the earliest traces of a

Latin translation of any part of the Scriptures are relatively late.

See also Bible, Versions of the (Ancient).

Latter Days

See Last Days.

Laughter

Expression of a variety of emotions. Laughter can express overjoyed happiness when circumstances change for the better, as for the Jews in returning from exile ([Ps 126:2](#)). Such joy is sincerely but facilely offered to Job by one of his comforters ([Jb 8:21](#)). Laughter can be good-humored and friendly, to encourage others ([29:24](#)). There is "a time to cry and a time to laugh" ([Eccl 3:4](#)), but the Preacher had his doubts: life is no laughing matter, and sorrow can be a better teacher ([2:2; 7:3](#)). Yet it is good to be able not to take certain things seriously. The well-prepared housewife "laughs with no fear of the future" ([Prv 31:25](#)). Job is promised that war and famine would be nothing to worry about ([Jb 5:22](#); cf. [Hb 1:9](#)).

Laughter can be a negative, derisive thing. We can laugh at people and laugh them to scorn. This element comes very much to the fore in the OT. Job and Jeremiah complain of being laughingstocks ([Jb 12:4; Jer 20:7](#)). The nation complains that their enemies laugh at their distress ([Ps 80:6](#); cf. [2 Chr 30:10](#)). Sometimes there is every justification. In [Psalm 52:6](#) the righteous are promised the last laugh, at the expense of the wicked unbeliever who thinks that he can leave God out of his life. In [Proverbs 1:26](#), personified Wisdom warns that she will laugh at the calamity of those who refuse to take her advice: it will serve them right. In this sense laughter is ascribed to God three times in the Psalter. He laughs at the nations plotting against his anointed King ([Ps 2:4](#)). He laughs at wicked people, knowing they are heading for disaster ([37:13](#)). He is invited to laugh at the psalmist's enemies ([59:8](#)). This divine laughter is a way of expressing that the truth will eventually prevail.

Laughter has a special place in the Abraham narratives. It is used in connection with the name of his son Isaac, which means "He laughs" or "May [God] smile [upon him]." Hebrew stories like to bring out the meaning of words, and so the human reaction to the birth of Isaac, the channel of God's

patriarchal promises, is described in terms of laughter. It is theologically important because it tends to be contrasted with faith. In [Genesis 17:17](#) laughter is Abraham's incredulous response to God's unrealistic promise of a son, in view of Sarah's elderliness. In [Genesis 18:12](#) Sarah cannot smother her laughter as she eavesdrops—it seems so absurd that she will become pregnant in her 90s. But finally in [Genesis 21:6](#), when the impossible becomes true, Sarah's laughter is a mark of God-given joy.

Laver

A laver is a large basin filled with water that the priests used to wash their hands and feet before entering the Holy Place and before serving at the altar ([Exodus 30:17-21](#)). In Solomon's temple, a large laver called the "molten sea" was between the altar of burnt offerings in the courtyard and the inner temple's entrance ([1 Kings 7:23](#)). The laver was the large basin and the pedestal it sat on ([Exodus 30:18](#)). It was made of bronze or brass, melted and shaped from mirrors of highly polished metal given by Israelite women ([Exodus 38:8](#)).

In Solomon's temple, in addition to the molten sea, there were ten smaller lavers, five on each the north and south sides of the sanctuary ([1 Kings 7:38-39](#)). Each held 40 baths (1,211.2-1,665.4 liters, or 320-440 gallons), one-fiftieth the capacity of the large laver. The priests used the molten sea for their ritual washing. The ten lavers were for the sacrifices ([2 Chronicles 4:6](#)). Later, King Ahaz, for religious or financial reasons, severed the lavers and the sea from their bases. He placed them on a stone pediment ([2 Kings 16:17](#)). The prophet Jeremiah, during King Jehoiakim's reign, predicted that the molten sea and the bases would be carried into Babylon ([Jeremiah 27:19-22](#)). This indeed happened, as recorded in [Jeremiah 52:17](#). The text does not mention what happened to the ten small lavers. They were perhaps already melted down and sold.

In Ezekiel's description of the future temple, there is no mention of a laver or molten sea ([Ezekiel 40-42](#)). However, the apostle John in [Revelation 4:6](#) and [15:2](#) mentions a "sea of glass." This "sea of glass" might be similar to or bring to mind Solomon's molten sea.

See also Bronze Sea.

Law of Moses

The Law of Moses refers to the religious, moral, and social rules that God gave to the Israelite people through Moses. These laws can be found in several books of the Old Testament: Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.

The Law of Moses covered many aspects of life for the ancient Israelites. It included:

1. The Ten Commandments, a list of ten instructions for living and worshiping God ([Exodus 20:1-17](#)).
2. Instructions about religious ceremonies and sacrifices, including how to worship God and seek forgiveness for sins ([Leviticus 1-7](#)).
3. Rules for daily life, including guidelines about food, cleanliness, relationships, and business dealings ([Leviticus 11-15; 19](#)).
4. Moral guidelines about how to treat others and live honestly ([Leviticus 19](#)).
5. Laws for community leaders, including instructions for priests, judges, and other leaders ([Deuteronomy 16-18](#)).

The Law helped the Israelites understand how to live as God's people. It showed them what was right and wrong, and how to make things right when they failed. Jesus later said he came not to end the Law but to fulfill it ([Matthew 5:17](#)).

See Covenant; Deuteronomy, Book of; Exodus, Book of; Leviticus, Book of; Moses.

Lawless One

Name Paul used for the Antichrist ([2 Thes 2:8-9](#)).
See Antichrist.

Lawyer

Term used primarily by Luke in his Gospel in reference to those learned in the law of Moses. *See* Scribe.

Laying on of Hands

See Hand.

Lazarus

1. Lazarus the beggar. In one of Jesus's well-known parables ([Luke 16:19-31](#)), he compared the earthly lives of a beggar named Lazarus and a rich man who is not named. The rich man is often called "Dives" in English, a name that comes from the Latin word for "rich." The rich man enjoyed a life of luxury but ignored Lazarus, a blind beggar with sores, who lay at his gate. Jesus said that when Lazarus died, he went to be with Abraham, while Dives suffered eternal torment.

Sometimes people have misunderstood this parable as condemning wealth. However, it is actually a warning against enjoying wealth without caring for the poor. The parable teaches that the choices we make in this life affect our eternal destiny.

In no other parable did Jesus give a character a specific name. Because of this, some Bible scholars believe that Jesus might have been telling a true story. However, the name "Lazarus" might have been chosen for its meaning, as it refers to someone "whom God helped." In the Middle Ages, people honored the beggar Lazarus as the patron saint of those suffering from leprosy. Hospitals for lepers were called "lazar-houses."

2. Lazarus of Bethany. Jesus performed one of his most amazing miracles when he brought Lazarus of Bethany back to life four days after he had died. Lazarus lived with his two sisters, Mary and Martha. They were among Jesus's closest friends ([John 11:3–5, 36](#)). Jesus visited their home several times, and it became his place to stay during his final week on earth ([Matthew 21:17; Luke 10:38–42; John 11:1–12:11](#)). Lazarus was present at a banquet held in Jesus's honor, where Mary anointed Jesus's feet with expensive perfume ([John 12:1–3](#)). The raising of Lazarus is the most detailed of Jesus's miracles in the Gospel of John. It had three important results:

3. Many Jews in the area around Jerusalem believed in Jesus ([John 11:45](#)) and later welcomed him into the city ([John 12:17–18](#))
4. The Jewish leaders, who had already rejected Jesus, decided that he must be put to death ([John 11:53](#))
5. These leaders also planned to kill Lazarus ([John 12:10–11](#))

This miracle not only showed Jesus's power over death but also prepared the way for his own resurrection.

Lead

Heavy, soft, blue-gray metal. *See Minerals and Metals.*

Leah

Leah was the daughter of Laban and the older sister of Rachel.

She became the wife of Jacob, who had deceived his father Isaac into giving him the blessing meant for Esau ([Genesis 27:5–40](#)). To escape Esau's anger and find a wife ([Genesis 27:46–28:2](#)), Jacob went to

his uncle Laban in Mesopotamia ([Genesis 27:43; 28:2](#)). He fell in love with Rachel, Laban's younger daughter, and agreed to work for Laban for seven years to marry her ([Genesis 29:17–18](#)).

When the wedding came, Laban tricked Jacob by giving him Leah, the older daughter, instead of Rachel ([Genesis 29:21–25](#)). Laban justified this by saying that the older daughter must be married first ([Genesis 29:26](#)). Leah was described as having "weak-eyed," while Rachel was "shapely and beautiful" ([Genesis 29:17](#)).

Jacob worked for another seven years to marry Rachel, whom he loved deeply ([Genesis 29:20](#)). Leah, who was not favored as Rachel was, had six sons and a daughter before Rachel had any children ([Genesis 29:31–30:22](#)):

1. Reuben
2. Simeon
3. Levi
4. Judah
5. Issachar
6. Zebulun
7. Dinah

Rachel's inability to have children was a significant sorrow for her, and she even traded mandrakes, a plant believed to ensure conception, with Leah to try to conceive ([Genesis 30:14–17](#)).

Leah's sons became important in Israel's history. Her son Levi became the ancestor of the priests, and her son Judah was the ancestor of the royal line from which Jesus Christ descended ([Genesis 3:15; 12:2–3; 2 Samuel 7:16; Matthew 1:1](#)).

See also Jacob #1.

Leather

Leather is animal skin that has been treated to make it strong and flexible, widely used in biblical times for clothing, containers, household items, and as a writing material.

How Did Humans Use Leather in Biblical Times?

Humans used animal hide as clothing in early times ([Genesis 3:21](#)). Prophets' clothing was made from animal skins and became a means of identifying them ([2 Kings 1:8; Zechariah 13:4](#)). The Greek Old

Testament describes Elijah's mantle as sheepskin ([1 Kings 19:13, 19](#); [2 Kings 2:8, 13–14](#)). Animal skins were also used to make shoes, girdles, and other articles of clothing ([Leviticus 13:48](#); [Ezekiel 16:10](#); [Matthew 3:4](#)).

Some household utensils were made of leather. The most common was the container for holding liquids, such as milk ([Judges 4:19](#)), wine ([Mark 2:22](#)), and water ([Genesis 21:14](#)). Oil extracted from olives was also stored in skins. Oil was a staple required for cooking, toiletry, medicinal purposes, and as fuel for lamps.

Leather was likely used for beds, chairs, and other household articles. There is no reference to leather being used to make tents, but animal skins were employed in the construction of the tabernacle ([Exodus 25:5](#); [Numbers 4:8](#)). Clearly, the references are to tanned skins. Their use would provide waterproof covering in that case.

The Bible is silent about the use of leather for making armor or weapons. However, it would be a natural choice for defensive and offensive weapons. Helmets and shields for defense, slings for offense, and quivers to hold arrows. [2 Samuel 1:21](#) and [Isaiah 21:5](#) refer to rubbing oil into the surface of shields, presumably to keep them from becoming brittle and useless. This suggests the shields were made of leather.

A painting in the tomb of an Egyptian nobleman from about 1900 BC shows an example of how leather might have been used in Old Testament times. In the painting the men wear sandals and the women wear boots. One man wears a leather water bottle strapped to his back. Another man, an archer, carries a quiver on his back. The asses are carrying two pairs of goatskin bellows.

Leather as a Writing Material

Leather was used extensively as writing material. Early on, this was primarily the practice in Egypt. Parchment, also derived from animal hides, has a very ancient history in Egypt. The difference between leather and parchment is that leather is processed by tanning. Parchment is produced by treating the skins with solutions of lime, salt, or dyes. People would then scrape off the hair on one side and the flesh on the other. The skins would be stretched and dried in a frame. Finally, the dried skins were rubbed with a pumice stone to produce smooth surfaces on both sides.

The use of prepared skins for writing material was known before 2000 BC in Egypt. According to Pliny,

the term "parchment" was not used until about 160 BC in other areas.

No leather documents have been recovered from Assyria or Babylonia. Leather was probably used much less extensively there than elsewhere in the ancient East. Middle East literary allusions point to the use of leather there at a later period. The term "parchment" is not found before the Persian period. The phrase "written on parchment" does not occur before the early years of the Seleucids (312–64 BC). Even then papyrus was the chief writing material.

Vellum is another leather product. Vellum is fine parchment made from calf, kid, lamb, or antelope skins. In Rome, from the first century BC through the second century AD, vellum was in restricted use. Not until the third and fourth centuries did vellum prevail. The celebrated Codex Vaticanus and the Codex Sinaiticus were produced around this time. The whole Bible now could be gathered into a single codex, which was in the form of a modern book with folded sheets. Before this, a set of from 30 to 40 rolls of papyrus would be required for the Bible. Vellum also allowed for the palimpsest. This technique allowed reuse of the surface. Original writing could be erased and written upon again.

In the Old Testament, leather or skins are not mentioned in connection with writing. [Psalm 40:7](#), [Jeremiah 36](#), and [Ezekiel 2:9–3:3](#) mention books in roll form, but these were probably papyrus.

Josephus recorded the earliest reference to Jews using parchment or leather as writing material at the end of the first century AD. However, the recent discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls showed that Jews used parchment as early as 100 BC. The Talmud requires the Law to be written on skins of clean animals. This regulation still stands for books used in the synagogue. It is not certain that this points to an ancient tradition.

Some of the Dead Sea Scrolls were written on leather. The great scroll of Isaiah was written about 100 BC. It is made of 17 sheets sewn together into a length of almost 7 meters (23 feet). The autographs of the New Testament were probably written on papyrus. John wrote his second letter on papyrus ([2 John 1:12](#)) within the last quarter of the first century.

How Was Leather Made? What Did People Think About Making Leather?

Tanning is the process of treating animal skins with various substances to turn them into leather, making the skins more durable and resistant to decay. Tanning is not mentioned in the Old Testament, but it is implied in [Exodus 25:5](#) and [Leviticus 13:48](#). The possible use of skins of unclean animals and the constant contact with dead bodies made tanning an unclean trade. Tanning was forbidden in the city. However, the preparation of skins for parchment was considered an honorable calling.

See also Letter Writing, Ancient; Writing.

Leaven

Leaven is any substance that produces fermentation when added to the dough. Fermentation helps the bread rise. Leaven or yeast can mean two things:

1. Dough that already has leaven in it. This dough was mixed with flour so the leaven could spread through all of it before baking.
2. Dough that has grown bigger because of the leaven.

In the past, Hebrew people used a piece of dough with yeast in it to make more leavened dough. Much later, they started using the remains from wine-making as yeast.

Use in Ancient Israel

The ancient Israelites often ate bread with yeast ([Hosea 7:4](#)). But when they remembered the Passover, they were not allowed to eat or keep bread with yeast in their homes ([Exodus 13:7](#)). This yearly event helped people remember their quick exodus from Egypt when God's order left no time to make bread with yeast. The people had to carry their mixing bowls and dough. They used these to make flat bread without yeast to eat on their journey ([Exodus 12:34-39](#); [Deuteronomy 16:3](#)).

Rules About Leaven in Worship

Maybe because yeast made things break down and go bad, it was not used in offerings given to God on the altar ([Exodus 23:18](#); [34:25](#)). It was also not

allowed in grain offerings ([Leviticus 2:11](#); [6:17](#)). The Bible does not tell us if the special bread in the temple, the showbread or bread of the Presence had yeast. The writer Josephus says it did not (*Antiquities* 3.6.6).

There were two times when yeast was allowed. Bread with yeast could be used in offerings eaten by priests or others. It could be part of the peace offering ([Leviticus 7:13](#)). It was given at the Feast of Weeks because it was like the normal food God gave his people ([23:17](#)). The Feast of Weeks is also known as Pentecost.

Changes in Using Leaven

The slow action of the yeast was a problem when the Hebrews became farmers, especially during the busy harvest time. So, bread without yeast became more common for everyday baking. Unleavened dough, therefore, became increasingly common for ordinary baking.

This was also because people started to think yeast stood for things going bad, like other foods that ferment. This idea kept yeast out of offerings to God, who was seen as perfect and holy. Plutarch writes about a common belief. "Now leaven is itself the offspring of corruption and corrupts the mass of dough with which it has been mixed." The apostle Paul quotes a similar saying in [1 Corinthians 5:6](#) and [Galatians 5:9](#).

Leaven as a Symbol

The important thing about yeast is its power, which means good or bad things. Usually, but not always, yeast was a symbol of bad things in Jewish thought. Jesus used yeast to mean the wrong teachings of some religious groups like the Pharisees and Sadducees ([Matthew 16:6, 11-12](#)) and Herod ([Mark 8:15](#)). He also said the yeast of the Pharisees was acting or pretending to be what they were not ([Luke 12:1](#); compare [Matthew 23:28](#)).

Paul uses the same idea for moral wrongdoing. He warns that "a little yeast affects all the dough." Paul tells his readers to remove the old yeast, which means the parts of their old lives. They are to live as Christians with the "bread without yeast made of honesty and truth" ([1 Corinthians 5:6-8](#)).

It is also true, that Jesus uses the idea of how yeast affects dough in a good way. He gave his followers a short but easy-to-remember story ([Matthew 13:33](#); [Luke 13:20-21](#)). In this story, yeast shows how the kingdom of God grows and spreads in the world.

See also Bread; Feasts and Festivals of Israel; Food and Food Preparation; Unleavened Bread.

Lebana, Lebah

Head of a family who returned to Jerusalem with Zerubbabel following the exile ([Ezr 2:45](#); [Neh 7:48](#)).

Lebanon

Region mentioned only in the OT, although its towns, including Tyre and Sidon, are named in the NT. The name Lebanon generally refers to the double range of mountains that commences near Tyre and runs northeast following the Mediterranean coast. The two Lebanon ranges are parallel to one another, Lebanon to the west and Anti-Lebanon to the east. The name Lebanon is derived from the Hebrew root l-b-n, meaning "white," which may reflect either the white limestone of the mountains or the snow that lay on the mountains for six months of the year ([Jer 18:14](#)).

Geography

At the southern end the Lebanon ranges are a direct continuation of the hills of northern Galilee, with Mt Hermon (Sirion, Senir) very prominent in the Anti-Lebanon range, rising to 9,230 feet (2,813.3 meters). The two ranges are divided by a broad valley, the valley of Lebanon ([Jos 11:17](#)) or "the entrance of Hamath" ([Nm 34:8](#)), the modern Beqa'a.

In the south the Lebanon range is separated from the Galilee hills by a deep east-west gorge through which the Litani River flows, entering the Mediterranean just north of Tyre. In its upper courses it follows the Beqa'a Valley in a northeasterly direction almost to Baalbek. The Lebanon ridge, about 100 miles (160.9 kilometers) long, stretches north to the east-west valley of the Nahr el-Kebir and is marked by a series of peaks. In the south are Gebel Rihan, Tomat, and Gebel Niha (ranging from 5,350 feet to nearly 6,230 feet, or 1,636.7 to 1,898.9 meters, high) east of Sidon. In the center lie Gebel Baruk, Gebel Kuneiyiseh, and Gebel Sunnin (7,220 feet, 6,890 feet, and 8,530 feet high, or 2,200.7 meters, 2,100.1 meters, and 2,599.9 meters high, respectively) east of Beirut. Further north, to the east of Tripoli, lies Qurnet es-

Sauda, which reaches 9,840 feet (2,999.2 meters), and Qurnet Aruba, about 7,320 feet (2,231.1 meters) high.

These high mountains trap the rain coming from the Mediterranean, providing both the mountain areas and the coastal strip below with good rainfall; beyond the mountains, the rainfall drops. It is along the coastal strip between the mountains and the sea that the Phoenicians flourished and towns like Tyre, Zarephath, Sidon, Berytus (Beirut), Byblos (Gebal), and Tripoli were established. The coastal area has a number of headlands that are extensions of the mountain range. The coastal road had to be cut around or through these spurs. A good example is the headland of Nahr el-Kelb, a little to the north of Beirut.

On the east side of the Lebanon range is the Beqa'a Valley. The Orontes River rises in the north of this valley and flows north to enter the Mediterranean north of ancient Ugarit. This whole valley region was known in classical literature as Coele-syria (Hollow Syria). It was the "breadbasket" of the Romans.

To the east of the Beqa'a Valley is the Anti-Lebanon range, in which the Barada River rises and flows east toward the fertile oasis of Damascus. Mt Hermon, in the southern part of the range, was known as Sirion by the Phoenicians and Senir by the Amorites ([Dt 3:9](#)).

Resources

Lebanon was famous in antiquity for its rich forests of fir and cedar. The coastal areas, the Beqa'a Valley, and the lower slopes of the mountains were suitable for olive trees, fruit trees, and vineyards, as well as some grain crops. One important product came from the sea: a mollusk of the gastropoda class from which a red or purple dye was obtained. The name "Phoenician" derived from the Greek phoinos, red-purple. Wool dyed purple was available in Ugarit about 1500 BC. The Phoenicians had a monopoly on this industry for centuries. The people of Israel, who used a great deal of purple dye in their tabernacle furnishings ([Ex 26](#)) and the garments of their priests ([Ex 28:4-6; 39:1, 28-29](#)), probably obtained the dye from the Phoenicians.

King Solomon had significant trading relations with Phoenicia. To build the temple in Jerusalem, cedar and fir were obtained from Hiram I of Tyre ([1 Kgs 5:6, 9, 14; 7:2; 10:17, 21](#); [2 Chr 2:8, 16](#)). Solomon paid for this timber in wheat and olive oil

([1 Kgs 5:11](#)). The trees were floated down by sea to a point in Solomon's domain and transported from there to Jerusalem. Cedar and fir trees from Lebanon and Anti-Lebanon provided ships for Tyre ([Ez 27:5](#)), sacred barges and furniture for Egypt, and timber for building the second temple in Jerusalem ([Ezr 3:7](#)).

From the ports of Lebanon, the Phoenicians traded with many lands. They mastered the art of shipbuilding, and their ships were used in peace and in war. A vivid picture of the trading activities of traders from Tyre, Sidon, Gebal, and Arvad is given in [Ezekiel 27](#), where the extent and nature of their trade is given in considerable detail.

History

The area became of interest to the Egyptians during the fourth dynasty (c. 2600 BC) when Pharaoh Snofru acquired 40 shiploads of cedar from Lebanon. Byblos fell under Egyptian influence during the 12th dynasty (c. 1980–1800 BC) and Egyptians gave golden ornaments in exchange for cedar. During the 18th dynasty (c. 1552–1306 BC), Egypt conquered Syria, and the records speak regularly of cedar being taken as tribute. Later an envoy of Ramses XI named Wenamun paid dearly for the cedar (c. 1100 BC).

When Egyptian power waned, the Assyrians controlled the area and took vast quantities of cedar as tribute from the days of Tiglath-pileser I (c. 1100 BC) onward. Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian nation likewise controlled Lebanon and took away large quantities of cedar to build temples and palaces. The spoiling of Lebanon's forests was spoken of by Isaiah ([Is 14:8](#)) and Habakkuk ([Hb 2:17](#)). In later centuries Lebanon passed successively under the domination of Persians, Greeks, and Romans.

In NT times the towns of Tyre and Sidon are generally coupled together ([Mt 15:21](#); [Mk 3:8](#); [7:24](#), [31](#); [Lk 6:17](#); [10:13-14](#); [Acts 12:20](#)), though sometimes they are referred to alone ([Acts 21:3](#), [7](#)). A Greek woman who was a Syro-Phoenician is referred to in [Mark 7:26](#). Jesus preached in these areas during his ministry. In biblical poetry the tall cedars of Lebanon were a symbol of majesty and strength ([Jgs 9:15](#); [2 Kgs 14:9](#); [Pss 92:12](#); [104:16](#); [Is 35:2](#); [60:13](#)). They were also a symbol of earthly pride that would be broken before the wrath of God one day ([Ps 29:5](#); [Is 2:13](#); [10:34](#); [Jer 22:6](#); [Ez 31:3](#)).

Lebaoth

Town in the Negev of Judah ([Jos 15:32](#)) occupied by the tribe of Simeon under the name Beth-lebaoth ([19:6](#)). The parallel list of Simeonite towns has Beth-biri in this place ([1 Chr 4:31](#)). The element beth, "house of," is undoubtedly original, denoting a place of worship of the goddess of the lions (lebaoth); Beth-biri might be another place or just a textual variant typical of the list in 1 Chronicles.

Lebbaeus

An alternate name in the King James Version given to Thaddaeus, one of the 12 disciples, in [Matthew 10:3](#). Most versions do not include the name, which comes from a textual variant followed by the King James Version's translators.

See Thaddaeus, The Apostle.

Lebo-Hamath

Town on the Orontes River below Riblah; perhaps the correct reading for the phrase "entrance of Hamath" in numerous OT passages ([Nm 34:8](#); [1 Kgs 8:65](#); [2 Kgs 14:25](#); [Ez 47:15](#)). *See Hamath #1.*

Lebonah

Town located between Shiloh and Shechem ([Jgs 21:19](#)). It is usually identified with modern Lubban, about three miles (4.8 kilometers) northwest of Shiloh.

Lecah

Either a person, descendant of the Judahite Er, or an otherwise unknown place in Judah settled by Er, depending on one's understanding of "father" ([1 Chr 4:21](#)).

Leech

Blood-sucking, segmented worm, mentioned only in [Proverbs 30:15](#). *See Animals.*

Leek

A garden herb related to onions and garlic ([Numbers 11:5](#)). Leeks (*Allium porrum*) have long, straight leaves that form a cylindrical bunch. The edible part is the white stem or stalk that grows underground.

The bulb of the leek is different from that of the onion and garlic because it is slender, cylindrical, and more than 15.2 centimeters (six inches) long. The flavor is similar to the onion but stronger. People eat the leaves as a relish or cook them in soups. They cut the bulbs into small pieces and use them as seasoning for meat.

See Onion.

Lees

Thick substance, or dregs, that forms at the bottom of a wine container as fermentation takes place.

The term appears in three different situations in the OT, each apparently representing a particular phase of fermentation. [Isaiah 25:6](#) refers to wine at its best ("well-aged," nlt) after a proper fermentation: strong, clear, and filtered. "Wines on the lees" in context refers to the blessings of peace and plenty that God's people will enjoy in the age to come. [Jeremiah 48:11](#) and [Zephaniah 1:12](#) refer to wine that is overfermented, having become syrupy in appearance and weak and bland in taste. Figuratively, the term applies to the Jews and Moabites about to receive impending judgment for having allowed themselves to be lulled into an ungodly indolent and indifferent life style. [Psalm 75:8](#) uses "dregs" to refer to the bitter sediments and grounds left after the wine has been poured out, which the ungodly will be forced to consume.

Legion

A legion was a large unit of the Roman army. In New Testament times, the regular size of the legion was 6,000 men. In addition to these men, some 120 cavalry were added.

Because it was a large body of men, the word "legion" came to represent a generally large number. It is used this way four times in the New Testament. In the story about the demon-possessed man in the country of the Gerasenes, Jesus asked the man, "What is your name?" The man replied, "My name is Legion, for we are many"

([Mark 5:9, 15](#); [Luke 8:30](#)) [Matthew 12:45](#) and [Luke 8:2](#) speak of a number of demons possessing a single individual.

Another use of the word is found in [Matthew 26:53](#). At the time of Jesus's arrest, one of those with him drew his sword to defend Jesus. Jesus spoke against such action saying, "Are you not aware that I can call on My Father, and He will at once put at My disposal more than twelve legions of angels?" He spoke of the large number of angels that could be called to help him.

The word "legion" is never used in the New Testament in its military sense. It is used for either the spiritual powers of evil that oppose men ([Ephesians 6:12](#)) or the spiritual powers that can be called to their aid ([Hebrews 1:14](#)).

See also Warfare.

Lehabim, Lehabites

One of several people groups associated with Egypt ([Genesis 10:13](#); [1 Chronicles 1:11](#)). The Lehabim may be an unidentified people near Egypt. Many scholars hold, probably correctly, that they are identical with the Lubim (Libyans). The Lubim are often seen in the Bible as fighting in alliance with Egypt ([Daniel 11:43](#); [Nahum 3:9](#)). Sometimes Egypt and this group allied against Israel, as in the time of Rehoboam and Asa (([2 Chronicles 12:3](#); [16:8](#))).

Lehi

Place in Judah where the Philistines assembled to capture Samson ([Jgs 15:9](#)). The place was evidently in the hills, and after Samson's victory (using a jawbone of an ass for a weapon), it was called "the height of the jawbone" ("Jawbone Hill," nlt), that is, Ramath-lehi (v [17](#)). It was apparently near a spring in a crater or depression (v [19](#)). An adjacent cliff was called Etam (v [11](#)). Other than somewhere in the hills behind Beth-shemesh, there is no hint of where to locate (Ramath-) Lehi.

Lemuel

King credited with writing [Proverbs 31:1-9](#). In these verses he sets forth teachings given him by his mother on good government, sexual relations, and wine. Although he has been identified with

Solomon, most modern interpreters reject this identification.

Lentil

The lentil plant mentioned in [Genesis 25:29–34](#), [2 Samuel 17:27–29](#), [23:11](#), and [Ezekiel 4:9](#) is a small, upright annual plant that looks similar to vetch (a climbing plant with purple, pink, or white flowers that belongs to the pea family). It has thin stems and leaves with tendrils (small, curling parts that help the plant climb or hold onto things).

The plant produces small white flowers with violet stripes. Its seeds grow in flat pods that look similar to pea pods. These seeds are the lentils that people eat.

See Food and Food Preparation.

Leopard

A leopard (*Panthera pardus tulliana*) is a large, spotted wild cat that lives in both rocky and forested areas, known for its hunting skills. It is the most common of all the large wildcats. In rocky areas, it lives in caves. In forested regions, it lives in thick vegetation. In Old Testament times, many lived in the vicinity of Mount Hermon ([Song of Solomon 4:8](#)).

Leopards are smaller than tigers. A leopard can grow up to 1.5 meters (five feet) long with a tail of about 0.8 meters (30 inches). Its body is more proportionate than the tiger's. Leopards ambush their prey silently. They often hide near villages or watering holes, waiting for long periods. The leopard is a quick runner ([Habakkuk 1:8](#)), climber, and is very graceful in general. Its color is yellowish speckled with black spots ([Jeremiah 13:23](#)). Daniel and John saw visions in which leopards were symbols of world powers ([Daniel 7:6](#); [Revelation 13:2](#)).

The leopard is a cautious and clever animal. It is powerful and fierce ([Jeremiah 5:6](#); [Hosea 13:7](#); compare [Isaiah 11:6](#)). The leopard is dangerous to both pets and people. Its spotted coat helps it blend into its surroundings. This makes it almost impossible to see in the changing light and shadows of forests. The Israelites feared leopards because they attacked their sheep and goats. Place names like Nimrah, Beth-nimrah, and Nimrim suggest that leopards lived nearby. These places,

along with a region northeast of the Dead Sea, reflect this connection. Remarkably, leopards have survived in Israel and Palestine into the 20th century. A few still roam near Mount Tabor and Mount Carmel.

Leper, Leprosy

A leper is someone with leprosy. Leprosy is a long-lasting infectious disease caused by a bacteria called "Mycobacterium leprae." This is similar to the bacteria that cause tuberculosis. The disease affects the skin, soft parts inside the mouth and nose, and nerves in the arms and legs. The skin often has lighter-colored areas but rarely becomes completely white. People often cannot feel touch or temperature in these lighter areas. The skin gets thicker and forms bumps, making the face look like a lion.

Nerve damage can cause paralysis or loss of feeling in the hands, legs, or face. This can lead to injuries the person does not notice. The eyes, ears, and nose are often affected too. There is a treatment that works, but it takes a long time. Sometimes, the disease stops on its own. It spreads through contact with someone who has it. Children catch it more easily than adults, but it usually does not spread easily to other people.

We do not know much about leprosy in ancient times. Some old writings from Egypt, Babylon, and India might mention it, but experts are not sure. This makes it hard to understand what "leprosy" means in the Old Testament.

Leprosy in the Old Testament

[Leviticus 13](#) and [14](#) talk about what they call "leprosy." However, the disease described there does not seem to be the same as what we call leprosy today. If a priest today used those rules, he would say many people with leprosy were unclean, but also many people with other skin problems. The disease we call leprosy (or Hansen's disease) does not fit the description given in Leviticus. The white hairs mentioned often in these verses are not typical of leprosy and can happen with many skin diseases. Leprosy does not usually make the skin completely white or affect the scalp. It takes longer than 7–14 days to see changes in leprosy.

If these verses are about modern leprosy, it is strange that they do not mention its most obvious signs. Leprosy bacteria cannot grow on clothes or

in the house. Biblical “leprosy” is not the same as modern leprosy. New Bible versions do not use the word “leprosy” in [Leviticus 13](#) and [14](#). Instead, they use phrases like “contagious skin disease” and “infectious skin disease.”

Leprosy in the New Testament

The New Testament does not describe the disease it calls leprosy, so we cannot be sure if it is the same as modern leprosy. People back then knew about modern leprosy, but they probably could not always tell it apart from other skin problems. The Greek word for “leprosy” in the New Testament basically means “scaly.” Greeks used it for skin conditions that look like psoriasis. They called leprosy by the word we translate as “elephantiasis,” a word not found in the New Testament.

This confusion about the word “leprosy” continued even into the Middle Ages. This makes it hard for historians to track the spread of the disease. When we read that Jesus healed lepers in the New Testament, we only know he healed long-lasting skin conditions that were considered unclean.

Jesus treated people with leprosy very differently from the religious teachers of his time. One teacher would not eat an egg bought on a street where someone with leprosy lived. Another threw stones at lepers to keep them away. In contrast, Jesus touched a man with leprosy, showing he could overcome the uncleanness that leprosy represented ([Matthew 8:3](#); [Mark 1:41-42](#); [Luke 5:12-13](#)).

See also Medicine and Medical Practice; Plague.

Leshem

Alternate name for Laish, the early name for the city of Dan, in [Joshua 19:47](#) (nlt mg). See Dan (Place) #1.

Lethech

Dry measure equaling about two to three measures. See Weights and Measures.

Letter of Aristeas

This ancient story explains the relationship between Judaism and Hellenism (Greek culture) in Egypt. It tells how the Hebrew Scriptures were translated into Greek, a version known as the Septuagint. The author, Aristeas, claims to be a court attendant in Alexandria under Ptolemy Philadelphus II, who ruled from 283 to 247 BC. Aristeas says he wrote this letter to describe how the translation was made. Although estimates of the date of the Letter of Aristeas range from 200 BC to AD 50, it was probably written toward the end of the second century BC.

King Ptolemy wanted to build a great library that would include all important writings. Because of this project, he became interested in Jewish law. Aristeas asked the king to free and pay all the Jewish slaves in Egypt. The king agreed and sent a request to the high priest in Jerusalem to choose skilled translators to translate the Law from Hebrew into Greek.

The story provides a detailed description of gifts sent to Eleazar, the high priest, with special focus on a fancy table. Aristeas then describes the temple, the priests, the high priest's clothing, and the temple's defense system. He adds a short description of the land of Palestine and the regions around it.

Before the translators left for Alexandria, Eleazar gave them advice and defended the Jewish law from a philosophical point of view. When the seventy-two translators (six from each tribe) arrived in Alexandria, King Ptolemy welcomed them with a large banquet that lasted seven days. Over the seven nights of celebration, the king asked specific questions to the translators. Each translator gave a wise answer. The story records every question and answer along with the translator's name.

The translators finished their work on the island of Pharos in seventy-two days. The Jews in Alexandria and the king praised their translation. The translators then returned home with many gifts.

In the final section, the author claims he saw these events himself and insists that his report is true. Modern scholars do not believe this claim. The story includes many legendary details, and even ancient readers recognized that it was not completely historical. Aristeas used the description of the translation process as a way to defend Judaism to the non-Jewish world. He combined religious liberalism with faithfulness to basic

Jewish beliefs to argue that Jews should be respected and allowed to live freely. Although many details in the Letter of Aristeas are uncertain, the main story of how the Septuagint translation was made is believable.

See the discussion of the Septuagint in Versions of the Bible (Ancient); see also Apocrypha.

Letter of Egnostos

This is a Gnostic work discovered near Nag Hammadi in Egypt. The Letter of Egnostos is a letter written in Coptic from a teacher to a student. The author's name and the date of writing are unknown.

The Letter of Egnostos is an early example of non-Christian Gnostic writing. The author of The Wisdom of Jesus Christ (a Christian Gnostic work) may have based his work on the Letter of Egnostos. seeks to explain the existence of an unseen spiritual world. It also emphasizes God's distance from humanity.

See also Apocrypha.

Letter of Jeremiah

The Letter of Jeremiah is a book that some churches accept as part of the Bible, but Protestant churches do not. It was written in Hebrew or Aramaic by an unknown Jewish author. The original version no longer exists. Today we have a Greek translation of the Letter of Jeremiah in the Septuagint (a Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible). Scholars think it was written between 300 and 100 BC.

The Letter of Jeremiah argues against worshiping idols (statues of false gods). It claims to be written by Jeremiah to the Jewish exiles in Babylon, but this is unlikely. Instead, it was likely written by a devoted Jew for other Jews who lived outside of Israel and were tempted to worship idols. The author says, "So take care not to become at all like the foreigners. . . . But say in your heart, 'It is thou, O Lord, whom we must worship'" (verses 5–6).

The letter makes fun of idols made by craftsmen. It says idols:

- Become dull or damaged
- Can be burned up in a fire
- Collect dust
- Get blackened by smoke in temples
- Become resting places for animals
- Cannot speak or protect themselves
- Cannot see the lamps in temples
- Cannot receive sacrifices or help their followers

Since the idols are fake, they cannot provide for people's needs and cannot give authority to kings. The Letter of Jeremiah ends by comparing an idol's protection to:

- a scarecrow in a cucumber field,
- a thornbush in a garden, or
- a corpse thrown into the dark (verses 70–71).

In the Latin Vulgate, the Letter of Jeremiah was printed as chapter [6](#) of the book of Baruch. *See also Baruch, Book of.*

Letter of Lentulus

This letter claims to have been written by a man named Lentulus, who is said to have lived before Pontius Pilate. It presents itself as a report to the Roman Senate. In the letter, Lentulus describes Jesus in great detail. He writes that Jesus was "tall and handsome, with a face that inspires reverence, love, and fear. His hair is dark, shiny, curly, and parted in the middle, and his face has a delicate redness."

Many scholars doubt that this letter is genuine. It was likely written long after the time of Jesus and is not considered a reliable historical source.

See also Apocrypha.

Letter to Philemon

The shortest letter the apostle Paul wrote while he was in prison.

Preview

- Who Wrote the Letter to Philemon?
- Where Was the Letter to Philemon Written?
- Who Was the Letter to Philemon Written To?
- What Is the Background of the Letter to Philemon?
- Why Was the Letter to Philemon Written?
- What Does the Letter to Philemon Teach?

Who Wrote the Letter to Philemon?

The apostle Paul identifies himself as the author of this letter. This is consistent with his custom and his contemporary standards for a letter in the first century AD. He says that he was a prisoner at the time of writing because of his witness to Jesus Christ ([Philemon 1:9–10, 13, 23](#)).

Where Did the Letter to Philemon Come From?

It is difficult to know where Paul was in prison when he wrote this letter. There are three possible places: Caesarea, Ephesus, or Rome. Based on the information in this letter and in the letter to the Colossians, it was probably either Ephesus or Rome ([Colossians 4:7–14](#); compare [Philemon 1:23–24](#)).

The fact that Mark and Luke were with Paul when he wrote suggests he was in Rome ([Philemon 1:24](#)). Yet, Ephesus was quite close to Colosse, where Philemon lived (about 100 miles, or 160.9 kilometers, away). The announcement of the upcoming visit to Colossae in verse [22](#) suggests Ephesus was where Paul was confined. The book of Acts does not directly say that Paul was in prison in Ephesus. However, it does tell us that many people opposed Paul's work there ([Acts 20:19](#)). Paul himself wrote about facing great troubles in Ephesus which might mean he spent time in prison ([1 Corinthians 15:32](#); [2 Corinthians 1:8–10](#)).

Who Was the Letter to Philemon Written To?

People often think this letter was just a private note from Paul to Philemon. Philemon was Paul's friend and a follower of Jesus who had become a Christian through Paul's teaching. He was a church leader in Colosse and owned slaves. But this letter was actually written to many people.

Paul mentions Philemon and Apphia, who was probably Philemon's wife. Paul also mentions Archippus and the Christian congregation that met

in Philemon's home ([Philemon 1:1–2](#)). Paul also included greetings from several important church leaders: Epaphras, Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke (verses [23–24](#)).

Paul mentioned all these people for a reason. He wanted Philemon to understand that his response to Paul's request would affect the whole church community, not just himself. When it comes to relationships between Christians, these matters concern everyone in the church. They cannot be treated as private issues because they affect the well-being of the entire church community ([Matthew 18:15–20](#)).

The letter shows that Paul and Philemon loved each other like brothers. The apostle calls Philemon his "beloved co-worker" ([Philemon 1:1](#)). He praises Philemon's work in spreading the good news about Jesus (verses [5–7](#)). Paul asks Philemon to help him because of their love for each other (verse [9](#)) and their partnership in serving God (verse [17](#)). He kindly reminds Philemon that Paul was the one who led him to believe in Jesus (verse [19](#)). Paul also says he trusts that Philemon will do what he asks and even more than that (verse [21](#)).

What Is the Background of the Letter to Philemon?

Paul wrote this letter about another person named Onesimus, who was Philemon's slave who had run away. Onesimus had done something wrong, though the letter does not tell us what it was ([Philemon 1:18](#)). After running away, he went to a big city and tried to hide among the many different groups of poor people living there.

Through God's guidance, Onesimus met Paul, though we do not know exactly how. Paul helped him become a Christian (verse 10). Onesimus became very dear to Paul (verse [12](#)). Onesimus helped him share the good news about Jesus. Paul would have liked to keep Onesimus with him as a trusted friend and brother in Christ (verse [13](#); [Colossians 4:9](#)).

Paul could have kept Onesimus with him as a helper, and Philemon would have had to agree to this decision ([Philemon 1:13–14](#)). However, Paul saw this situation as a chance to help Philemon think about how his Christian faith should change his view of slavery. Paul wanted Philemon to free Onesimus and treat him as a brother. And this would not only be in a spiritual sense ("in the Lord"). He also wanted Philemon to free Onesimus by law ("in the flesh," verse [16](#)).

We know that Philemon agreed to Paul's request and freed Onesimus because this letter still exists today. If Philemon had refused Paul's request, he might have destroyed the letter to hide the evidence that he had refused to do what Paul asked.

There is an interesting addition to this story. Historical records tell us about an older church leader (called a bishop) named Onesimus who led the church at Ephesus in the early part of the second century. We learn about him in a letter written by Bishop Ignatius to the Ephesians.

This bishop might have been the same Onesimus who was once Philemon's slave. This idea comes from the way Ignatius uses the name "Onesimus" in his letter. He makes the same word play that Paul used in verses [11](#) and [20](#). (The Greek name "Onesimus" means "useful" or "beneficial".) If this is true, it is possible that the former slave Onesimus was the person who gathered Paul's letters together. These letters later became part of the New Testament, including the letter to Philemon.

Why Was the Letter to Philemon Written?

Paul wrote this letter to Philemon to show how slavery conflicts with Christian beliefs, and to convince Philemon to free Onesimus. The letter does not suggest that Paul was worried about Onesimus being punished, even though Roman law was very harsh toward slaves who ran away. Instead, Paul's main concern was that Philemon should not make Onesimus be a slave again. Paul wanted Philemon to accept Onesimus as a full member of his family and treat him with the same respect he would show to Paul himself ([Philemon 1:17, 21](#)).

What Does the Letter to Philemon Teach?

This short letter teaches us many things. Here are three important lessons:

First, the letter shows how the good news about Jesus challenges the sinful practices in society, including slavery. Jesus taught that his followers should not own or control other people. In the Christian community, leaders should serve others rather than just give orders ([Mark 10:42-45](#)). This meant that social status no longer mattered among Christians. The Bible teaches that in Christ, it doesn't matter if someone is a slave or free—all are equal in him ([Galatians 3:28](#)).

The Bible gave specific instructions about slavery:

- Enslaved Christians should take opportunities to become free ([1 Corinthians 7:21](#)).
- Free Christians should avoid becoming slaves ([1 Corinthians 7:23; Galatians 5:1](#)).
- Christian slave owners should serve their slaves ([Ephesians 6:9](#)).
- All Christians were to be servants to one another ([Galatians 5:13](#)).
- So, Philemon was to receive Onesimus “no longer as a slave” ([Philemon 1:16](#)).

Second, following Jesus means we cannot simply keep things as they are. However, it also means we should not try to change society through violence. Instead of fighting against others, Christians should show God's power to change things by serving others. Paul told Onesimus to demonstrate a theology of liberation (a way of understanding how God brings freedom) by going back to Philemon willingly. By doing this, Onesimus would let the Holy Spirit work to completely change their relationship. When we try to force change using harmful methods, we prevent God from helping and end up causing more suffering.

Finally, this letter shows us an excellent example of wise church leadership. Philemon and Onesimus needed someone to help solve their problem—someone Philemon respected and who could speak up for Onesimus. Paul used several careful methods to convince Philemon:

- He praised Philemon for the good things he had done (verses [4-7](#)).
- He mentioned his own suffering for teaching about Jesus (verse [9](#)).
- He trusted Philemon to make the right choice freely ([Philemon 1:4](#)).
- He reminded Philemon that they were close friends (verses [17, 20](#)).
- He offered to pay for any losses Philemon had experienced (verse [18](#)).
- He reminded Philemon that he owed his Christian faith to Paul (verse [19](#)).
- He told Philemon he was planning to visit, which might have made Philemon feel uncomfortable if he refused Paul's request (verse [22](#)).

Paul's approach was both personal and caring. He was friendly but also showed how strongly he felt about this. He balanced being firm with being tactful. This shows how true Christian leaders should work, by persuading and requesting rather than by forcing people to obey.

The Letter to Philemon is one of the shortest books in the Bible. Yet it shows us something very important: through Jesus Christ, all people have equal worth and dignity, no matter who they are or what position they have in society. The letter also teaches Christians both why and how they should work to make society better.

See also Paul, The Apostle; Philemon (Person).

Letter to the Galatians

Paul's letter to the Galatians is one of the most important letters in the New Testament. It teaches us a lot about Paul's personality and teachings. Many people have called it the foundational message of Christian freedom.

Preview

- Who Wrote the Letter to the Galatians?
- Where Was the Letter to the Galatians Sent? Who Was It Written For?
- Why Was the Letter to the Galatians Written? What Does It Teach About God?

- What Is the Message of the Letter to the Galatians?

Who Wrote the Letter to the Galatians?

The apostle Paul wrote this letter ([Galatians 1:1](#)). He shares some important details about his life before becoming a follower of Jesus. He talks about his earlier life as a devoted Jew ([Galatians 1:13](#)).

Paul's strong Jewish background is important for understanding what he writes in this letter. He used to be so committed to his Jewish faith that he actively attacked the early Christian church. He tells the Galatians about this because his Jewish traditions had been very important to him. He had believed that fighting against the church was the right thing to do.

Paul's deep devotion to Judaism makes his change to Christianity even more remarkable. He believed that God had given him a special message (a revelation) that gave him the authority to write this letter.

In this letter, Paul talks about two important parts of how he became a Christian. First, he realized that God had a plan for his life even before he was born ([Galatians 1:15](#)). Though Paul does not explain this in detail, he often spoke about God's kindness. He no longer believed that he needed to earn God's approval through his own good works.

The second important part was understanding that God had chosen him to be a preacher at the same time he became a Christian. When Paul preached to the Galatians, he did so with God's authority because he knew God had given him this task. The church leaders (the apostles and elders) did not decide that Paul should preach the good news about Jesus. This was God's plan.

Paul was also sure that his message came from God, not from himself. He had received this message directly from Jesus Christ ([Galatians 1:12](#)).

Paul took great care to show that God had chosen him as a messenger ([Galatians 1:1](#)). He knew God had called him not only to preach but also to be an apostle (or messenger) with the same authority as Jesus's followers in Jerusalem. He may sound like he is defending himself, but this was because of specific problems among the Galatians that made him write this letter.

In this letter, Paul shares something about his life that he does not mention anywhere else. After becoming a Christian, he went to a place called Arabia ([Galatians 1:17](#)). Paul does not tell us what

he did there, but he probably spent time thinking deeply about his new beliefs.

The book of Acts tells us that when Paul returned to the city of Damascus, he strongly showed people that Jesus was the Messiah, God's chosen leader ([Acts 9:22](#)). Paul also mentions that he traveled in the regions of Syria and Cilicia ([Galatians 1:21](#)). This happened before his first journey as a missionary.

Where Was the Letter to the Galatians Sent? When Was It Written?

Before we can figure out when this letter was written, we need to understand where Paul sent it.

Where Was the Letter to the Galatians Sent?

Paul wrote his letter to the Galatians, but scholars debate about exactly where these people lived. This is because the word "Galatia" was used in two different ways.

In one way, Galatia meant a large area called a province. This province stretched from a region called Pamphylia in the south to a place called Pontus near the northern coast. In another way, "Galatia" only meant the northern part of this area, where people from a place called Gaul had settled long ago. These settlers gave their name to the region.

So when Paul uses the word "Galatia," it could mean either the northern region only or the whole province. Scholars have two main ideas about this:

1. The North Galatian Theory: This suggests Paul was writing to churches in the northern region.
2. The South Galatian Theory: This suggests Paul was writing to churches he started in southern Galatia during his first journey as a missionary.

This might seem like a small detail, but it is actually important. Knowing where Paul sent his letter helps us understand when he wrote it and why he wrote it.

Until the beginning of the 20th century, people thought Paul was writing to people who lived in northern Galatia. This made sense for several reasons. The northern area had been called Galatia for a long time. The name came from people called Galatians who lived there. Only much later, in 25

BC, did the Romans make a larger area into a province and also call it Galatia.

Many scholars think that people living in the southern part of the province probably would not have liked being called "Galatians." In those days, when people heard the name "Galatians," they usually thought of the people living in the north.

Luke, who wrote the book of Acts, usually described places by their geographical regions rather than their political areas. For example, he calls the cities of Lystra and Derbe part of Lycaonia, not part of Galatia.

Because of this pattern, when Luke mentions Phrygia and Galatia in [Acts 16:6](#) and [18:23](#), he probably means Paul traveled through the northern area. This northern region had three main cities: Ancyra, Tavium, and Pessinus. This suggests that Paul likely started churches in these northern cities.

However, some scholars disagree with the North Galatian view. They point out that while Luke describes places by their regions, Paul usually uses official Roman province names when talking about groups of churches. For instance, Paul refers to:

- The "churches of Christ in Judea" ([Galatians 1:22](#))
- The "churches of Asia" ([1 Corinthians 16:19](#))
- He also mentions believers in Macedonia and Achaia several times (for example, [2 Corinthians 8:1; 9:2; 1 Thessalonians 4:10; 1 Corinthians 16:15; 2 Corinthians 1:1](#); as well as [Romans 15:26; 2 Corinthians 9:2; 1 Thessalonians 1:7](#))

Since this seems to be Paul's usual way of writing, these scholars think his letter to the Galatians was meant for all the churches in the Roman province of Galatia, not just those in the northern region.

People who support the South Galatian view have two main arguments. First, they say that people in southern Galatia would not have minded being called Galatians because there was no other name to call them.

Second, they point to something Paul wrote in his letter. He says he first preached to the Galatians when he was sick ([Galatians 4:13](#)). Looking at a map shows this is an important clue. The road to

northern Galatia went through mountains and would have been very difficult for someone who was sick. But the journey to southern Galatia would have been much shorter and easier. This suggests Paul probably went south rather than north when he was sick.

There are two more reasons that support the South Galatian Theory. First, [Acts 20:4](#) lists people who traveled with Paul to Jerusalem. Many scholars think these people were chosen by their churches to help deliver money to the poor churches in Judea. The list includes Gaius and Timothy, who were from southern Galatia, but no one from northern Galatia. However, this argument would be stronger if Acts specifically mentioned this collection of money.

Second, Paul mentions a man named Barnabas three times in his letter ([Galatians 2:1, 9, 13](#)). This suggests the Galatians knew who Barnabas was. According to the book of Acts, Barnabas only traveled with Paul during his first missionary journey, which went through southern Galatia.

While both views make good points, the evidence seems to support the South Galatian Theory more strongly than the North Galatian Theory.

When Was the Letter to the Galatians Written?

According to the North Galatian Theory, Paul wrote this letter around AD 56, during his third journey as a missionary. This was after the events described in [Acts 18:23](#). He might have written it while he was in the city of Ephesus or shortly after leaving there.

The South Galatian Theory gives us different possibilities for when Paul wrote the letter. He could have written it any time after his first journey as a missionary when he started churches in southern Galatia. This includes the time during his third journey.

However, there are clues in the letter that suggest it might have been written much earlier. In fact, this could be one of the first letters Paul ever wrote.

It is hard to determine when Paul wrote this letter because of differences between what Paul says and what the book of Acts says about visits to Jerusalem. In [Galatians 1-2](#), Paul mentions two visits to Jerusalem ([1:18; 2:1](#)). But Acts talks about three visits ([Acts 9:26; 11:29-30; 15:2](#)).

Many people think Paul's second visit ([Galatians 2:1](#)) was the same visit described in [Acts 15](#). This

would mean Paul was giving his own account of what happened at an important meeting called the Council of Jerusalem. There are several reasons to support this idea:

- Both accounts mention Barnabas.
- Both discuss whether non-Jewish (gentile) believers needed to be circumcised.
- Both show Paul and Barnabas reporting to the leaders in Jerusalem.

However, there are some problems with this view:

- Paul's words in [Galatians 2:1](#) suggest this was his second visit to Jerusalem, but in [Acts 15](#) it was his third visit. Some explain this by saying that during his second visit ([Acts 11:30](#)), Paul and Barnabas only gave money to the church elders and did not meet with the apostles.
- In [Galatians 2](#), Paul only talks about meeting with three main leaders in Jerusalem. He does not mention a meeting with the whole church, which [Acts 15](#) describes. Some suggest that Paul and Barnabas might have had a private meeting with these leaders before the bigger church meeting in AD 50.
- Paul does not mention the rules that the Jerusalem church made for non-Jewish believers ([Acts 15:20](#)). Instead, he only mentions their agreement to help the poor ([Galatians 2:10](#)).
- Paul writes about arguing with Peter about fellowship between Jewish and non-Jewish believers ([Galatians 2:11-14](#)) after describing their agreement in Jerusalem. This is puzzling because it shows Peter acting against what they had agreed to. Perhaps Peter agreed that non-Jews did not need to be circumcised but was unsure about eating with them.

Some scholars have a different idea about what happened. They think that when Paul and Barnabas brought money to Jerusalem, they also had private

meetings with the leading apostles. This might have happened during the time described in [Acts 11:29-30](#).

At this time, there was strong opposition to the apostles. [Acts 12:1](#) tells us that James was killed and Peter was put in prison. This might explain why Paul and Barnabas met with the leaders privately instead of with the whole church.

This explanation helps us understand two things:

1. Paul does not mention the church's decision because this meeting happened before the big meeting in Jerusalem (called the Jerusalem Council).
2. Peter later acted differently in Antioch about mixing with non-Jewish believers because the whole church had not yet discussed and decided what to do about this issue.

If this view is correct, Paul might have written his letter to the Galatians before AD 50, making it his earliest letter.

However, there are three problems with this idea:

- When [Acts 11:30](#) talks about Paul and Barnabas's visit to Jerusalem, it does not mention any meetings with the apostles.
- Paul says he and Barnabas took a man named Titus with them ([Galatians 2:1](#)), but Acts does not mention Titus at all during this visit.
- Paul talks about preaching to non-Jewish people ([Galatians 2:2](#)). This suggests he wrote the letter after his first journey as a missionary. The only way this could be earlier is if he was talking about his work in Antioch, where both Jewish and non-Jewish believers worshiped together.

It is hard to know which view is correct. When Paul mentions waiting 14 years ([Galatians 2:1](#)), this suggests he wrote the letter later. But when we look at what Paul writes about in this letter compared to what was decided at the Jerusalem Council in AD 50, it seems he might have written it earlier.

Why Was the Letter to the Galatians Written? What Does It Teach About God?

The churches in Galatia were having serious problems. A group of people was causing trouble by saying that non-Jewish believers must be circumcised (undergo a Jewish religious ceremony) to be saved. These troublemakers were Jewish Christians (called Judaizers) who thought non-Jewish people could only be saved if they followed Jewish customs.

These same people were also attacking Paul's authority as an apostle of Jesus. They claimed that the apostles in Jerusalem were more important than Paul and supported their views. This is why Paul took the situation so seriously. They were challenging the basic message about Jesus (the gospel) that he had taught. His letter shows how concerned he was about this problem.

How we interpret this letter depends on when Paul wrote it. If Paul wrote the letter before the Jerusalem Council, the church had not yet decided what to do about circumcision ([Acts 15](#)). This would mean the problem in Galatia was the first major argument about this issue.

However, if Paul had written the letter after the Jerusalem Council, the South Galatian churches would have already received the council's decisions ([Acts 16:4](#)). But they still listened to Jewish Christians who had stricter rules than what the apostles in Jerusalem had decided. If he was writing to churches in northern Galatia, we do not know if they had heard about the church's decision.

Paul wrote this letter with two main goals:

1. To show that he was a true apostle of Jesus with genuine authority
2. To defend his message about Jesus as the true message (the gospel)

In his letter, Paul teaches some important ideas about God. His main message warns against thinking that people must follow strict religious rules to be saved (called legalism). This was not just a problem for the Galatian churches. It is important anywhere people think they must follow certain rules to be accepted by God.

Paul explained why this thinking was wrong. If non-Jewish people had to be circumcised to become Christians, this would mean two problems:

1. It would make a physical ceremony necessary for salvation.

2. It would force people to follow all of the Jewish laws.

Paul taught that people are made right with God through faith (or justification by faith), not by following religious rules (or justification by works of the law). Throughout his letter, he emphasizes that salvation comes through God's grace, not through human effort.

Even though Paul argued against following religious rules to be saved, he did not say people could do whatever they wanted. He taught that there is a middle way between strict rule-following and having no guidelines at all.

Jesus gives believers freedom, but Paul warns that this freedom should not be used as an excuse to do wrong things ([Galatians 5:13](#)). In fact, Paul sets very high standards for how Christians should live. He uses himself as an example, saying that his old self has died (he has been "crucified with Christ") and now he lives for Christ ([Galatians 2:20](#)).

So this letter teaches two important things:

1. How Christians can be truly free
2. How Christians should use that freedom to live good lives

What Is the Message of the Letter to the Galatians?

Introduction ([1:1-5](#))

Paul begins this letter differently from his other letters. Usually, he starts his letters by thanking God and giving a short greeting. But in this letter, he skips the thanks and makes the greeting longer. Right from the start, he strongly emphasizes that God chose him to be his apostle. (An apostle is someone who was chosen and sent by Jesus to be his special messenger and representative.)

The Opponents ([1:6-10](#))

Paul is surprised that the Galatians have so quickly started listening to people who are changing the gospel (the good news about Jesus). He strongly warns against anyone who teaches a different message.

A Defense of His Apostleship ([1:11-2:14](#))

Paul defends his position in several steps:

1. He explains that his teaching comes directly from God, not from any person. This shows two important things:

- God chose him as an apostle.
- God approved his message about Jesus.

1. Paul wants to make it clear that his authority does not depend on other people. But he also shows that he teaches the same things as the other apostles ([Galatians 1:11-12](#)).
2. Then Paul talks about how his life changed. He describes how he went from being a very devoted Jewish person to someone who preaches the good news about Jesus. This helps show that God was the one who called him to this work ([Galatians 1:13-17](#)).

Paul then describes two important meetings he had with the apostles in Jerusalem. At these meetings, they welcomed him as a fellow apostle. This showed they all agreed with each other.

They made a plan together:

- Paul would teach non-Jewish people about Jesus.
- Peter would teach Jewish people.
- Everyone agreed that Paul was a true apostle of Jesus.
- They all promised to help poor people since Christians are responsible for doing so ([1:18-2:10](#)).

Paul gives a real example to show his authority as an apostle. He tells about a time when he publicly corrected Peter. Peter had changed his behavior because he was afraid of some people who came from James in Jerusalem. These people belonged to a group that insisted on following Jewish customs (called "the circumcision" or "the circumcision group"). When Paul challenged Peter about this, it led into the main teachings of his letter ([Galatians 2:11-14](#)).

A Defense of the Gospel ([2:15-4:31](#))

Paul introduces the issue of justification by works of the law and shows how it is different than

justification by faith. Paul says people must choose between Jesus (being made right with God by faith) and the law (being made right by works of the law; [Galatians 2:15-21](#)).

Paul wants to show that faith in Jesus is better than following Jewish laws to be saved. He reminds the Galatians that they became Christians through God's Spirit, not by following rules. He is confused about why they now want to go back to strictly following the law, which he says comes from human effort (the "flesh") rather than God's Spirit ([Galatians 3:1-5](#)).

Paul then talks about Abraham. He talks about Abraham because his opponents were saying that only people who were Abraham's descendants could be saved and that circumcision was the necessary sign of belonging to God's covenant family.

But Paul explains something important. Even Abraham himself was made right with God through faith, not by following the law ([Galatians 3:6-9](#)).

Paul explains that following the law can only bring a curse because no one can obey it perfectly. Then, he teaches how Jesus has become a curse for us. Because of this, Paul says that through Jesus we can receive the blessings God promised to Abraham ([Galatians 3:10-14](#)).

Paul knows some people might argue against his teaching about Abraham. They might say he should not use God's promise to Abraham to argue against following the law. But Paul explains that God made this promise to Abraham 400 years before He gave the law. Therefore, the later law cannot cancel God's earlier promise ([Galatians 3:15-18](#)).

Next, Paul explains why God gave the law in the first place. He says the law had two important purposes:

1. To show people that they needed God's help
2. To show that following the law alone cannot give spiritual life

Paul compares the law to a guardian (or tutor) who takes care of a child. In ancient times, wealthy families would have someone watch over their children until they were old enough to be independent. Paul uses this example to explain how the law worked before Jesus came ([Galatians 3:19-29](#)).

Paul compares two different situations:

1. Being like a child under a guardian's control
2. Being like a grown child with full rights in the family

He explains that God's Spirit helps believers have a close relationship with God, allowing them to call Him "Abba" (which means "Father" in Aramaic). This kind of close relationship was not possible just by following the law ([Galatians 4:1-7](#)).

After making his main points, Paul makes a personal appeal to the Galatians. First, he reminds them of their past:

- Before becoming Christians, they were like slaves to the law.
- Now they are going back to that same kind of slavery by trying to follow Jewish religious festivals. Paul is very sad about this change.

Then, he reminds them about their relationship:

- When they first became Christians, they loved and respected Paul.
- Now their attitude toward him has changed. This deeply troubles Paul ([Galatians 4:8-20](#)).

Finally, Paul uses a story from the Bible to make his point clearer. He talks about Abraham's two sons, Isaac and Ishmael. He uses their story as an example to show the difference between:

- Isaac, whose mother was Sarah, a free woman (Paul uses him as an example of being free children of God)
- Ishmael, whose mother was Hagar, a slave (Paul uses him as an example of being slaves to the law)

This example supports what Paul has been saying about freedom versus slavery to rules ([Galatians 4:21-31](#)).

Practical Advice ([5:1-6:10](#))

After explaining his main teachings, Paul tells the Galatians how they should live as people who are free in Christ:

- Do not give up freedom by agreeing to be circumcised and follow Jewish laws ([Galatians 5:1–6](#)).
- Be careful of people who are teaching wrong things ([Galatians 5:7–12](#)).
- Replace strict rule-following with love. God's Spirit helps people avoid doing wrong things and helps develop good qualities in their lives ([Galatians 5:13–26](#)).
- Live with care for others. Help people who are experiencing troubles. Be especially helpful to other Christians. Look for ways to do good for everyone ([Galatians 6:1–10](#)).

Conclusion ([6:11–18](#))

Paul writes the final part of the letter himself. He makes one last contrast between:

- His own focus on taking pride only in Jesus's death on the cross ("boasting in the cross")
- His opponents' focus on taking pride in following the law and religious ceremonies ("boasting in the flesh")

Unlike his other letters, Paul does not end with any greetings. Instead, he simply asks that no one should trouble him anymore about these matters.

See also Galatia; Judaizers; Law, Biblical Concept of; Paul, The Apostle.

Letter to the Romans

The sixth book in the New Testament. It is the longest letter by the apostle Paul in the Bible.

Preview

- Who Wrote the Letter to the Romans?
- When and Where Was the Letter to the Romans Written? Who Was It Written To?
- What Is the Background of the Letter?
- Who Were the People Receiving the Letter?
- Why Was the Letter to the Romans Written?
- What Does the Letter to the Romans Teach About God?
- What Is the Message of the Letter to the Romans?

Who Wrote the Letter?

The apostle Paul wrote this letter, as we can see from his use of "I" throughout it ([Romans 1:5, 10](#), and other verses). The letter begins with "Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle." Though Paul spoke the words, a man named Tertius wrote them down ([16:22](#)). Scholars of all viewpoints agree that Paul wrote this letter. In fact, Romans appears first in almost every ancient list of Paul's letters.

Who Was the Letter Written For? From Where Was the Letter Written?

Paul sent this letter to the Christians in Rome ([Romans 1:7](#)). He wrote it while he was in the city of Corinth. We know this because he mentions Erastus, who was Corinth's city treasurer ([16:23](#)). There is an inscription (a writing carved in the stone pavement) next to the large theater in Corinth. The inscription states that Erastus, the city treasurer, placed it there, in appreciation for his election. It seems that Erastus remained in Corinth because it was his home ([2 Timothy 4:20](#)).

Also, when Paul wrote this letter, he was staying with a man named Gaius ([Romans 16:23](#)). This was likely the same Gaius who lived in Corinth ([1 Corinthians 1:14](#)). A woman named Phoebe probably carried the letter to Rome. She was a deaconess who served in the church at Cenchrea, which was Corinth's eastern port ([Romans 16:1](#)).

When Was the Letter Written?

We can determine when Paul wrote this letter by examining what he says in it, such as references to people, events, and his travels. In [Romans 15:23–28](#), Paul indicates that he was about to visit Jerusalem. He was taking money that the churches in Macedonia and Achaia had collected for the poor Christians there. After this, he planned to visit Rome on his way to Spain ([15:23–28](#)). He took this money with him from Corinth at the end of his third three-month visit to that city ([Acts 20:2, 23; 24:17](#)).

Some people traveled with Paul from Corinth at this time. The book of Acts lists their names ([20:4](#)). Four of these people were with Paul when he wrote this letter: Timothy, Sosipater, Gaius, and Erastus ([Romans 16:21, 23](#)). Paul visited Jerusalem around AD 57–58. So, Paul wrote this letter around that same time.

What Is the Background of the Letter?

During his second missionary journey, Paul visited Corinth and started a church there. He stayed in the city for 18 months ([Acts 18:1, 11](#)). He arrived at the same time as Priscilla and Aquila, who had recently come from Rome. After Paul had been in Corinth for 18 months, he was brought before the new proconsul (governor) Gallio ([Acts 18:12](#)). We know when this happened because archaeologists found an inscription about Gallio at Delphi that shows he became governor in the spring of AD 51. This means Paul must have arrived in Corinth in the winter of AD 49.

After leaving Corinth, Paul went back to Antioch to report on his work. Then he began his final journey to collect money from the non-Jewish (gentile) churches for the poor in Jerusalem ([Romans 15:25–29](#)). He had planned this collection earlier ([1 Corinthians 16:1](#); [2 Corinthians 9:5](#)). Paul had to return to Corinth because of ongoing problems there ([1 Corinthians 1:11; 7:1](#); [Acts 20:3](#)). This is when he wrote the letter to the Romans. The last two chapters show that Paul planned to take the money to Jerusalem soon, and then travel to Rome ([Romans 15:23–24](#)).

He wrote this letter to tell the Romans he was coming, so they could help him continue his journey to Spain ([Romans 15:24, 28](#)). Unlike most other churches, Paul did not start the churches in Rome or Colossae. This is why his letter does not mention any specific problems among the Roman Christians.

Who Were the People Receiving the Letter?

The church in Rome had both Jewish and non-Jewish Christians. The church probably started when some Jewish believers who were in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost became Christians ([Acts 2:10](#)). They were among the 3,000 people who believed in Jesus that day. Some of these new believers likely took the good news about Jesus back to Rome. Some of the Christians Paul greets in his letter may have been following Jesus for many years. They might have been among the first people to become Christians. Until Paul arrived, the Roman church probably grew through its own members sharing their faith, with occasional help from visiting teachers.

The good news about Jesus had clearly spread to gentiles, since there were non-Jewish believers in the Roman church. We can see this from what Paul says throughout his letter. In fact, Paul writes to them as if most of the church members were gentiles ([Romans 1:13, 15; 15:15–16](#)). Many of these non-Jewish members were probably “God-fearing” non-Jewish people who followed Jewish religious practices but had not fully converted to Judaism (like Cornelius in [Acts 10:2](#)).

Why Was the Letter Written?

This is Paul's most detailed and passionate letter. It reads like both a careful teaching document and a personal, heartfelt letter. The main message throughout is that both Jews and gentiles have failed to live up to God's standards and need to be saved ([Romans 3:21–31](#)). God has shown his way of making people right with him to everyone—not just to Jewish people. This is because God is the God of all people, since there is only one God ([3:29](#)). He makes Jewish people right with himself through Jesus's death on the cross. He does the same for non-Jewish people, keeping his promise to Abraham (verse [30](#)). Both groups can receive God's blessing through their faith ([5:2](#)). This good news is for Jewish people first, and also for Greeks (which Paul uses to mean all non-Jewish people; [1:16](#)).

What Does the Letter Teach About God?

Once a person believes in Jesus, that person is justified before God ([Romans 1–3](#)). This means that God accepts them as right with him. This new relationship with God gives believers a new life through Jesus and makes them part of God's people (chapters [4–8](#)). These chapters are the most complex part of the letter. They explain deep truths

about God's endless kindness, his supreme love, and his mysterious plans for people.

After this, Paul speaks about how non-Jewish people are becoming part of God's family. He explains that even though many Jews did not believe in Jesus, some remained faithful. He says that one day, all of God's true people (both Jews and gentiles) will be united as one church on earth ([Romans 9–11](#)).

In the next sections, Paul explains how these teachings should change how Christians live and work together (chapters [12–15](#)). The letter ends with Paul's personal greetings to various Christians in Rome (chapter [16](#)).

What Is the Message of the Letter?

Overview

[Romans 1:17](#) states the main message of the first eight chapters: "The righteous will live by faith." Paul quotes these words from [Habakkuk 2:4](#) to show that being made right with God through faith was always part of God's plan. It was taught by the Old Testament prophets. What was new in Paul's teaching was that gentiles could become part of God's family alongside Jewish people by believing in Jesus ([Ephesians 3:5–6](#)). Some Jewish Christians said that gentiles had to convert to Judaism first to be accepted by God ([Acts 15:1](#)). But Paul explained in Ephesians that God's plan was to accept both groups through their faith in Jesus ([Ephesians 3:6](#)).

The first part of the letter explains how people are made right with God through faith. The first three chapters show that both Jews and gentiles have sinned, and that Jesus's work of saving people applies to both groups ([Romans 3:21–22](#)). Chapter [4](#) shows that Abraham is the spiritual father of all who believe in God—both Jewish and non-Jewish people.

Then in chapters [5–8](#), Paul explains how people who have been made right with God should live by faith. Anyone (whether Jew or gentile) who accepts what God did through Jesus's death on the cross will be free from:

- The wrath of God (chapter [5](#))
- The power of sin (chapter [6](#))
- The binding power of the law (chapter [7](#))
- The power of death (chapter [8](#))

In [Romans 9–11](#), Paul discusses the nation of Israel "according to the flesh" (physical Jews) in relation to the future purpose of God. He concludes that God has not rejected his people who came from Abraham's family line ([11:1–2](#)). Using the picture of a tree, Paul explains that God can bring them back into his family if they accept Jesus as their promised savior (verse [23](#)).

In the final chapters ([12–16](#)), Paul explains how the teachings from the first 11 chapters should affect how Christians live each day. He ends by reminding readers how important it is that gentiles have come to God through his ministry (chapter [15](#)).

In Detail

In the first chapter, Paul argues that pagan gentiles were rebelling against God. God had revealed his wrath against their evil ways ([Romans 1:18](#)). God had given them enough evidence of his existence through the natural world. But they still chose to worship many gods and idols instead, which led to immoral behavior (verses [20–23](#)). Three times, Paul says that "God gave them over in the desires of their hearts" (verse [24](#)). This included:

- "dishonorable passions" (verse [26](#)),
- "a depraved mind" (verse [28](#)), and
- doing "what ought not to be done" (verse [28](#)).

This means that God allowed their sins to continue as an act of divine judgment ([3:25](#)). He did not punish their lack of understanding about him ([Acts 17:30](#)). He did not stop them from worshiping false gods ([7:42](#)).

The Jewish people were not much better. They had received God's law through Moses, which showed God's will for their nation, but they had not obeyed it ([Romans 2:17–29](#)). Even the gentiles, who do not have the law, sometimes do by nature what the law requires. They show that the law is "written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts either accusing or defending them" (verses [14–15](#)). For a Jew, obeying the law was not enough. They had to obey because

they truly wanted to, not just because it was required (verse [29](#)).

Some gentiles respected God and followed the main teachings of his laws. They became examples that showed how wrong it was when Jewish people did not obey ([Romans 2:14, 27](#)). Even though God's chosen people failed to be faithful, this did not stop God from keeping his promise to Abraham ([3:3](#)). The Jewish people had many advantages over non-Jewish people, but this did not help them because both groups had surrendered to sin (verses [1, 9](#)). The situation now was that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (verse [23](#)).

So, God sent Jesus to redeem the world from its sins ([Romans 3:21–31](#)). God has revealed his righteousness apart from the law through "faith in Jesus Christ" (verse [22](#)). Bible scholars and translators have two different ways of understanding this phrase:

1. "Faith in Jesus Christ" (also called the objective genitive view): This view understands the phrase to mean our faith, with Christ as the object of that faith. It means we are saved by believing in Jesus and what he has done for us. Most English Bible translations use this understanding.
2. "Faith of Jesus Christ" (also called the subjective genitive view): This view sees the phrase as referring to Jesus's own faithfulness to God. It means Jesus was faithful in following God's plan and carrying out his mission, even to the point of death on the cross. Under this view, we are saved through Christ's faithful obedience to God.

Many scholars today think both meanings might be intended, showing how Jesus's faithfulness and our faith work together in God's plan of salvation. Both views agree that "faith of Christ" or "faith in Christ" is available to everyone, both Jews and non-Jews, based on their trust in God.

The law is "holy, righteous, and good" ([7:12](#)). But, this righteousness was not available only through obeying the commandments of the law. This would make God only the God of the Jews, since God gave the law specifically to the Jewish people ([3:29](#)).

But God is also the God of the gentiles. He makes everyone right with himself through Jesus Christ. According to the Greek text of [Romans 3:22](#), this righteousness comes to "all who are faithful" or "continue in the faith." So, the righteousness of God comes through faith in (or the faithfulness of) Jesus Christ (verses [3, 22](#)). It provides the basis of salvation for everyone who believes ([5:9](#)).

Several times in [chapter 4](#), Paul emphasizes that Abraham was the father of the Jews and of the gentiles ([Romans 4:11–12, 16–18](#)). God promised Abraham that through his descendants, all nations (gentiles) would be blessed. Abraham was justified by faith, and this promise extends to all who share the same faith (both Jews and gentiles). The faithfulness of Jesus Christ made this possible, and it is for all who believe and remain faithful (verse [11](#)).

Paul explained an important truth about God's plan. He taught that when people trust in Jesus Christ, they are made right with God. This is called justification. Christians have understood justification in three main ways:

- Some understand justification as God declaring believers righteous through faith in Christ. According to this view, justification is a legal declaration. Christ's righteousness is imputed (credited) to believers
- Some understand justification as God making people truly righteous through his grace, which transforms their lives. According to this view, justification includes both God's declaration and an inner transformation through grace and good works. Righteousness is infused (poured into) believers, especially through baptism and the other sacraments (means of grace), which enable this transformative process.
- Some understand justification as part of the larger process of salvation, where believers are united with God in a deep, transformative way. In this view, justification is not just a legal declaration or internal transformation but a full participation in God's divine life (called theosis). Believers are gradually transformed into the likeness of God, experiencing a deep, ongoing union with him.

All agree that through Jesus, believers are saved from God's judgment against sin and find peace with God ([Romans 5:1, 9](#)).

Sin entered the world through the first sin and death came to all people (verse [12](#)). Yet, justification came through the second Adam, Jesus. He gives salvation to those who are faithful and receive the abundance of his grace (verses [16-18](#)).

The law was not meant to save the Jew. "It was added because of transgressions" ([Galatians 3:19](#)). It served to make all types of people more aware of sin. "The law came in so that the trespass would increase" ([Romans 5:20](#)). Sin used the law to deceive and destroy those who tried to obey it ([7:11](#)).

Paul had known what it was to covet (wanting things that belong to others) before he knew the law. When he turned 12 or 13 years old, he became responsible for following the law and its requirements. The command that said "do not

covet" showed Paul how much the law required of him, and this understanding brought him great distress ([7:11](#)). Once people knew what the law required, they were fully responsible for obeying it. Sin became even more serious because now it meant breaking God's law that people knew about.

This situation made people need God's grace even more. As the Bible says, "where sin increased, grace increased all the more" ([Romans 5:20](#)). Some argued that they should "continue in sin so that grace may increase." But this idea completely misunderstands what it means to be free from God's anger, free from the law, free from sin, and free from death ([6:1](#)).

Paul explains that people who have been made right with God and saved from sin by Jesus have died to sin's power. Sin can no longer control them like a master controls a slave (verses [2, 6](#)). The main point is that sin and Satan cannot rule over people who believe in Jesus (verses [9, 14](#)). Sin cannot be their master (verse [12](#)). Sin cannot make them its slaves (verses [17, 20](#)).

People who are right with God are free from three things:

- They are free from God's judgment against sin.
- They are free from the demands of the law.
- They are free from the control of sin.

Through Jesus's faithful obedience, God freed these people from death. God promises to give new life to their physical bodies through his Holy Spirit ([Romans 8:2, 11](#)). If people live according to their selfish desires ("according to the flesh"), they will face death. But if they let the Holy Spirit guide their lives, they will experience true freedom and life (verses [6-13](#)). Not even death will be able to separate them from the love of God in Jesus Christ (verse [38-39](#)). The Holy Spirit guides them and helps them when they are weak. Both the Holy Spirit and Jesus intercede for them (verses [14, 26, 34](#)).

Paul does not discuss how to apply these theological principles until [Romans 12](#). In chapters [9-11](#), he explains how and why the Jews rejected Jesus the Messiah (God's chosen one). How could the Jewish people reject Jesus when God had worked so closely with them for so long? They had a special relationship with God that was different

from all other people on earth. Paul explores this difficult question in chapters [9-11](#).

Paul gives four reasons why the Jews rejected Jesus the Messiah:

1. God chose Israel on purpose, knowing what would happen in the future. These were physical descendants of Israel who enjoyed all the special relationships to God that a chosen people could experience:
 - They were God's children.
 - They experienced God's glory.
 - They received God's covenants (special agreements).
 - They received God's law.
 - They learned how to worship God.
 - They received God's promises.
 - They came from the patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob).
 - They were the people from whom Jesus came ([Romans 9:1-5](#)).

God had chosen them like he had chosen Jacob over Esau before either was born. This was like how God made Pharaoh stubborn ("hardened" his heart), or how a potter shapes clay into whatever kind of pot he wants to make ([9:6-26](#)).

God did not choose them because of anything they had done or not done. He chose them because he had a special purpose for them.

This does not mean God was unjust. He needed to show his power through the Jewish people so that everyone on earth would know about him. God chose Israel to serve his purposes, just as he had chosen Pharaoh, Jacob, and Moses. These people were saved because they had faith in God ([Hebrews 11](#)).

1. Israel rejected Jesus the Messiah and his gospel. Paul argues that this follows a pattern that appears again and again throughout history ([Romans 9:30-10:21](#)). The Jewish people tried to be right with God by following rules instead of having faith in him. Because of this, they did not recognize the righteousness that comes through faith. They based their righteousness on the law and so they "stumbled over" their own Messiah ([9:30-33](#)). They rejected Jesus as Messiah and misunderstood how people are made right with God.
2. He says that some Jewish people (a small group called a "remnant") have already believed the good news about Jesus ([Romans 11:1-16, 26](#)). This shows that one day, many more Jewish people will also believe. Even though Paul says God has rejected Israel for now, this rejection is not permanent or final. Paul uses a picture of an olive tree to explain this. He says God has broken Israel off from the tree of Abraham's promise for a time. But God has not completely rejected his people. The remnant who believed got what they were looking for, but the others were made stubborn for a while. God did this so they would become jealous when they saw non-Jewish people being welcomed into God's kingdom. This means that Israel's separation from God does not have to last forever.

3. Paul says God used Israel's rejection of Jesus to bring good things. When the Jewish people rejected Jesus, this opened the way for non-Jewish people (gentiles) to become part of God's family. Paul says that if many Jewish people later accept Jesus, it would be as amazing as seeing dead people come back to life! He explains this idea through the rest of the chapter ([Romans 11:17–36](#)).

Paul warns the gentiles not to be proud about this. The Jewish people stumbled so that the gentiles could be included in God's plan (verses [17–19](#)). Israel did not "stumble so as to fall beyond recovery" (verse [11](#)). Their "fall" was a blessing to gentiles and was a part of God's plan. Paul uses the picture of an olive tree again. He says God broke off the Jewish people from the tree because they did not believe. But God can put them back on the tree if they start believing in Jesus.

In [Romans 12–16](#), Paul explains how Christians should live based on all he has taught before. Paul begins by saying, "Therefore I urge you..." ([12:1](#)). He then lists many Christian virtues and responsibilities. Paul often gives this kind of advice in his letters. He wants to help new believers understand how to live as Christians, whether they came from a Jewish or non-Jewish background.

[Romans 13](#) focuses on how Christians in Rome should relate to government officials. Paul teaches that God establishes civil government, and Christians should recognize civil government has a right to exist even if those who are in power are corrupt. These officials serve God by punishing those who do wrong ([13:4](#)).

In chapter [14](#), Paul addresses how Christians should treat each other when they disagree about certain practices, like eating certain foods. He teaches that:

- Christians who feel free to do these things (because of their freedom in Christ) should not pressure others to act against their own conscience.
- Christians who avoid these things should not judge those who do them.
- Everyone should show love and respect to each other, which shows they are true followers of Jesus.

In chapter [15](#), Paul shares his travel plans and explains his special role. He sees himself as a priestly minister serving the gentiles. He plans to take money collected from gentile churches to Jerusalem as a special offering to God, showing how the gentiles have become believers.

Chapter [16](#) closes in the typical way with greetings and recommendations from different individuals. He mentions 27 people by name, showing his deep connection with the Roman church community.

See also Paul, The Apostle.

Letter Writing, Ancient

a written message sent from one person to another. In ancient times, letters were especially important when kings and officials needed to send commands or reports.

Examples of Ancient Letters

There are letters from Arad-Nana, the royal physician, to his master Ashurbanipal. These letters are about the king's back pain and a young prince's eye trouble. The famous Amarna letters are reports and appeals from princes in Palestine. They were disturbed by the weakness of Pharaoh Akhnaton's foreign policy in the area. There is an interesting letter from Tutankhamen's widow to a Hittite king on the subject of a marriage arrangement.

Letters in the Old Testament

There are a few examples of letters in the Old Testament:

- David's deadly letter to Joab about Uriah ([2 Samuel 11:14-15](#)),
- Jezebel's equally evil letter over Ahab's forged signature to the elders of Jezreel ([1 Kings 21:8-9](#)), and
- the Syrian king's letter to the king of Israel about Naaman's leprosy ([2 Kings 5:5-7](#)).

All these are reported in the Old Testament record without the customary greetings and the polite forms of address.

We can read what seem to be complete letters in Ezra chapters [4:11-23](#); [5:7-17](#); [7:11-26](#). We also find complete letters in Nehemiah chapters [6:5-7](#), and the book of Jeremiah. However, many other letters in the Bible are shortened versions that only give us the main points ([Nehemiah 2:8](#); [Esther 9:20-31](#)).

Other Ancient Letters

Many official letters written on ancient Egyptian paper (called papyrus) have been found. These letters are similar to the letters mentioned in the Old Testament. Emperor Claudius wrote a letter in AD 42 to the people of Alexandria about problems with the Jewish community there. Around AD 100, an Egyptian governor wrote a letter to everyone in his area about counting all the people. This helps us understand the time when Jesus was born because a similar counting of people caused Mary and Joseph to travel to Bethlehem.

The letters of Cicero tell us about an important time in Rome's history. Cicero describes how Rome changed from being ruled by a group of leaders (called senators) to being ruled by emperors. Pliny was a Roman governor in a place called Bithynia around AD 100. His letters help us understand how Romans lived during this time. They also tell us about the first times the Roman government came into conflict with the early Christian church.

Ancient letters help us understand common life and the ordinary occupations of people in Greco-Roman times and the early Christian centuries. This is similar to the information we learn from the documents of the New Testament. It provides background, illustration, comment, and sometimes direct historical evidence.

One important set of letters comes from Bar Kokhba, who led the Jewish people in a fight against Rome from AD 132 to 135. People found these

letters hidden in a cave near the Dead Sea. In one letter he orders, "Whatever Elisha says, do." Another orders the arrest of Tahnun ben Ishmael and the confiscation of his wheat. Another calls for punishment of some who had repaired their homes in defiance of some scorched-earth policy.

Letter Writing in the Time of Paul

Paul carefully followed the way people wrote letters in his time. His letters usually had these parts in this order:

1. A greeting at the beginning
2. Words of thanks and prayer for the people he was writing to
3. His main message
4. Greetings to friends
5. A final prayer at the end

Here is a letter from around AD 150 that shows this same style of writing::

"Ammonous to her sweetest father, greeting. When I received your letter and recognized that by the will of the gods you were preserved, I rejoiced greatly. And as at the same time an opportunity here presented itself, I am writing you this letter being anxious to pay my respects. Attend as quickly as possible to the matters that are pressing. Whatever the little one asks shall be done. If the bearer of this letter hands over a small basket to you, it is I who sent it. All your friends greet you by name. Celer greets you and all who are with him. I pray for your health."

Paul wrote about many different things in his letters. Sometimes he gently corrected the Christians in Corinth when they were too proud. Sometimes he strongly warned people who were teaching wrong things about God. He wrote about simple things too, like news about his friends, books he needed, and a warm coat he had left behind in the city of Troas

New Testament Letters

The New Testament contains many letters that teach people about God. This style of writing teaching letters began with ancient Greek teachers like Plato and Aristotle. However, the New Testament writers address themselves:

- to groups or communities (Romans, Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, Ephesians, Colossians, Thessalonians, Hebrews),
- to the church at large (the letters of Peter, Jude, James, and John's first epistle), or
- to individuals or a specific Christian community.

The apostolic letter recorded in [Acts 15](#) may have inspired this practice. [Revelation 2](#) and [3](#) are genuine letters to seven churches on John's Asian circuit.

See also Lachish Letters; Writing.

Letters of Christ and Abgarus

This apocryphal work includes two short letters. One letter claims to be written by the Syrian king Abgar (also known as Abgarus). The other claims to be a reply from Jesus.

According to early church historian Eusebius, he found these letters in the royal archives at Edessa and translated them from Syrian into Greek. He also included a story about the works of the apostle Thaddaeus.

In the legend, King Abgar was suffering from a serious disease. When he heard about the miracles of Jesus, he sent a messenger with a letter asking Jesus to come and heal him. He also offered Jesus a safe place to stay, away from the danger he faced in Jerusalem.

Jesus sends a letter in reply, in which he refuses the offer to take refuge but promises that after his ascension, he will grant Abgar's request by sending a disciple to him. (Later, the letter in the story was changed to an oral response in order to make the story agree with the tradition that Jesus left no writings.) Later, the apostle Thaddaeus went to Edessa, healed Abgar, and the royal household became followers of Christ.

A later version of the story appears in a writing called the *Doctrina Addaei* (written around AD 400). In that version, the reply from Jesus is spoken rather than written, and Abgar's messenger brings back a painted portrait of Jesus instead of a letter. The portrait was displayed in the king's palace.

The legend is similar to the one in the Greek Acts of Thaddaeus from the fifth or sixth century AD. However, in the Acts, Ananias (Abgar's messenger) returns with a face cloth that has a miraculous printing of Christ's face on it.

See also Apocrypha.

Lettuce

A leafy green vegetable that people commonly eat in salads. While not specifically named in the Bible, many scholars believe that lettuce (*Lactuca sativa*) may have been one of the "bitter herbs" mentioned in [Exodus 12:8](#) and [Numbers 9:11](#). These bitter herbs were to be eaten with the Passover meal as a reminder of the Israelites' suffering in Egypt.

See Bitter Herbs.

Letushim, Letushites

Tribe founded by the second of Dedan's three sons, a descendant of Abraham and Keturah through Jokshan's line ([Gn 25:3](#)). Some suggest that the tribe eventually settled in northern Arabia.

Leummim, Leummites

Tribe founded by the third of Dedan's three sons, a descendant of Abraham and Keturah through Jokshan's line ([Gn 25:3](#)). The tribe probably settled in northern Arabia.

Levi (Person)

1. Jacob's third son by Leah ([Genesis 29:34](#)). We do not know exactly what his name means. Levi was involved in a violent event in Shechem. When Shechem the Hivite attacked Levi's sister Dinah, Levi and his brother, Simeon, killed all the men in the city to get revenge. Jacob did not approve of what they did. Before he died, Jacob said that Levi's children and their children would be spread out among all the tribes of Israel as punishment ([Genesis 49:5-7](#)). Levi had three sons: Gershon (also called Gershom), Kohath, and Merari. Their families became the tribe of Levi. Moses, Aaron, and Miriam were from Kohath's family line ([Exodus 6:16](#)). When the people made a golden calf to worship at Mount Horeb, the Levites stayed loyal to God. Because of this, God gave them a special role: they would serve in and around the sacred tent (called the tabernacle) and later in the temple ([Exodus 32](#)). See also Levi, Tribe of.
2. A tax collector in the city of Capernaum ([Mark 2:14](#)). He was one of the 12 disciples and was also known by the name Matthew ([Mark 2:14; Luke 5:27](#); compare [Matthew 9:9](#)). See Matthew (Person).
3. The son of Melki and ancestor of Jesus ([Luke 3:24](#)). See Genealogy of Jesus Christ.
4. The son of Simeon and ancestor of Jesus ([Luke 3:30](#)). See Genealogy of Jesus Christ.

Leviathan

Great sea monster or large aquatic reptile ([Jb 3:8; Pss 74:14; 104:26; Is 27:1](#)). See Animals.

Levirate Marriage

Israelite custom in which a man, upon the death of his brother, marries his brother's widow and raises up children for his brother. See Marriage, Marriage Customs.

Levites

The Levites were the descendants of Levi, one of the twelve sons of Jacob. God set them apart to serve in religious duties for Israel. While all priests came from the tribe of Levi, not all Levites were priests. The Levites assisted the priests (who were descendants of Aaron) with duties in the tabernacle and later in the temple. Unlike other tribes, the Levites did not receive a large territory in the promised land but were given cities scattered throughout Israel, along with pasturelands. This arrangement allowed them to serve all the people of Israel in religious matters.

See Levi (Person) #1; Levi, Tribe of; Priests and Levites.

Levitical Cities

Special areas set aside for the tribe of Levi in place of a regular territorial inheritance ([Nm 18:20-24; 26:62; Dt 10:9; 18:1-2; Jos 18:7](#)). The Levites were allotted 48 cities, including the six cities of refuge ([Nm 35:6-7](#)). Each town and a limited zone around it was for the Levites (vv 3-5); their property enjoyed a special status with regard to the laws of redemption ([Lv 25:32-34](#)).

Two lists of the Levitical cities are given ([Jos 21; 1 Chr 6:54-81](#)). Thirteen towns were for the priests ([Jos 21:4](#)), including the six cities of refuge. In spite of some variation between the two lists, it seems clear that they go back to one original. The distribution of the Levitical towns tells much about their purpose. They were distributed among the 12 tribes but not usually placed at the tribal centers. Those in Judah and Simeon were actually in the southern hill country, the area where the satellite clans of the Calebites and the Kenizzites had settled. Those in Benjamin were grouped along the southern half of that tribe's inheritance, the part later attached to Judah; the family of Saul was located there. Levitical towns were placed in border areas where garrisons were required—for example, on the eastern desert fringes in Reuben and facing Philistia in Dan. Other key territories

were in the plains where Asher, Manasseh, and other Galilean tribes had originally failed to conquer the Canaanite cities ([Jgs 1:27, 31](#)). Thus, the Levites were assigned places where the special task of controlling strategic areas was necessary. Many of the towns were not taken during the initial conquest and only came under Israelite control in the reign of David.

Though the Levites were not the exclusive residents of any one city (they shared them with other Israelites), they were posted there for specific duties. They tended to the work of the Lord and the service of the king ([1 Chr 26:30-32](#)). Collecting tithes ([Nm 18:21; Dt 14:28](#)), handling legal and judicial matters ([1 Chr 26:29; 2 Chr 17:8; 19:8-10](#)), military garrison duties ([1 Chr 26:1-19](#)), and managing the storehouses (v [22](#)) were all Levitical responsibilities. Though they served by rotation in the capital ([27:1](#)), they also had similar duties the year round in their home districts ([26:29-32](#)). Their loyalty to the house of David caused them to lose their status in the northern kingdom, so most of them joined Judah when the kingdom was split ([2 Chr 11:13-14](#)).

See also Cities of Refuge.

Leviticus, Book of

Third book of the OT, largely concerned with the duties of the Levitical priests.

Preview

- Author
- Date
- Background
- Purpose and Theology
- Content

Author

A traditional alternative title of Leviticus is the Third Book of Moses, which gives proper credit to the man who most deserves to be called its author. For though the book never says that Moses wrote down any of the material, it repeatedly states that God revealed the contents of Leviticus to Moses. It may be that Leviticus was not put into writing as soon as it was revealed, but there is little to commend the common critical view that it was composed nearly a thousand years after Moses. The spelling and grammar of Leviticus was, like

other books of the OT, revised from time to time to make it understandable to later generations of Jewish readers, but that does not mean the essential content of the book was modified.

Date

God revealed some of the laws in Leviticus by speaking to Moses from the tent of meeting, or tabernacle ([Lv 1:1](#)). Other laws were revealed on Mt Sinai ([26:46](#)). Such statements show that Moses learned the contents of Leviticus after the tabernacle had been built but before the Israelites left Mt Sinai. This fits in with [Exodus 40:17](#), which says that the tabernacle was erected exactly a year after the Israelites left Egypt. They then spent another month at Sinai, during which time the laws in Leviticus were given to Moses. Then one month later ([Nm 1:1](#)) Moses was commanded to prepare the people to leave Sinai to conquer the Promised Land of Canaan.

It is difficult to give an exact date for the Israelite exodus from Egypt. Dates at the end of the 15th century BC or early in the 13th century are put forward by different scholars. Whichever view is adopted, the origin of Leviticus must be one year later than the exodus. But certainty about the absolute date of Leviticus is unimportant so long as the religious setting of the book is understood.

Background

About 400 years before the exodus, God promised Abraham that his descendants would be very numerous and live in the land of Canaan. The family of Abraham multiplied, but as a result of famine they had to go and live in Egypt. Afraid of the Israelites, the rulers of Egypt turned them into slaves.

The book of Exodus tells how God, acting through Moses, brought the Israelites out of Egypt in a miraculous way. Moses led them to Mt Sinai, where God appeared in fire and smoke on the top of the mountain. Moses went up the mountain, and there God gave him the Ten Commandments and explained various laws. Through these acts God showed that he had chosen the nation of Israel to be his special holy people, different from all the other nations because they would show God's character through their behavior (cf. [Ex 19:5-6](#)).

God's revelation at Sinai was unique and unrepeatable. But he disclosed to Moses that he wanted to live among the people of Israel permanently. They were told to build a portable

royal palace that would be suitable for the divine King of kings. The building of this portable palace, traditionally called the tabernacle, is described in [Exodus 35-40](#). When it was completed, the fire and cloud that had been seen on Mt Sinai appeared over the tabernacle as a sign that God was now dwelling in it ([Ex 40:34-38](#)).

Exodus also tells how Moses was told to appoint his brother, Aaron, and Aaron's sons to serve in the tabernacle as priests ([Ex 28-29](#)). Unfortunately, before the Israelites even began to build the tabernacle, they made a golden calf under Aaron's leadership and started to worship it instead. The people were spared only as a result of Moses' prayers. The book of Exodus therefore leaves the reader in suspense. The tabernacle has been built, but no one knows how to worship God in it. Though Aaron and his family are alive, we are left wondering whether they will still be allowed to lead the worship of God after the idolatry of the golden calf. The book of Leviticus answers this question.

Purpose and Theology

The Ten Commandments explain briefly and simply how God expects his people to behave. The first four commandments explain our duty toward our neighbor. The book of Leviticus follows a similar scheme. Chapters [1-17](#) show how God wanted Israel to worship him, while chapters [18-27](#) are mainly concerned with how people should behave toward each other. Whereas the Ten Commandments are general and can be applied quite easily to every society, the book of Leviticus is much more detailed and specifically geared to the special circumstances of ancient Israel. If modern readers are to profit from reading Leviticus, they must look behind the specific regulations to the underlying religious principles that do not change—in other words, to the theology of Leviticus.

Four themes are very important in the theology of Leviticus: (1) the presence of God, (2) holiness, (3) sacrifice, and (4) the Sinai covenant.

The Presence of God

God is always present with Israel in a real way. Sometimes his presence becomes visible in fire and smoke. But even when there is no miraculous sign, God is present. He is especially near when people worship him and offer sacrifice. The many animal sacrifices mentioned in the book are all brought to the Lord. When the animals are burnt, God is

pleased with the smell ([1:9](#)). The priests who offer the sacrifices must be especially careful since they come closer to God than other people do. If they are careless in their duties and break God's commands, they may die ([10:1-2](#)).

God is present not just in worship but in all the ordinary duties of life. The recurring refrain of the later chapters, "I, the Lord, am your God" ([18:2](#); [19:3](#)), reminds the Israelites that every aspect of their life—religion (chs [21-24](#)), sex (chs [18, 20](#)), and relations with neighbors (chs [19, 25](#))—matters to God. The behavior of every Israelite must mirror that of God himself ([20:7](#)). The fear of God should prompt persons to help the blind, the deaf, the elderly, and the poor. Though such people may have no redress against unfair treatment, God cares about what happens to them ([19:14, 32](#); [25:17, 36, 43](#)).

Holiness

"You must be holy because I am holy" ([11:44-45](#); [19:2](#); [20:26](#)) could be termed the motto of Leviticus. "Holy," "clean," and "unclean" are common words in this book. God is the supremely holy person in the Bible, and holiness is the distinctive feature of his character. But earthly creatures can become holy too. To become holy, a person must be chosen by God and undergo the correct ceremony. Thus, at Sinai all Israel became a holy nation ([Ex 19:6](#)). [Leviticus 8-9](#) explains how Aaron and his sons were ordained priests. This made them more holy than ordinary Israelites and therefore able to approach God and offer sacrifice.

Before anyone could become holy, they had to be "clean." Cleanliness in Leviticus means more than just being free of dirt, though this idea is included. It means being free of any abnormality. Whenever a person appears to fall short of perfection, he is described as "unclean." Thus, the worst uncleanness is death, the very opposite of perfect life. But bleeding and other discharges and patchy skin diseases can make someone unclean. Animals that move in peculiar ways or have strange habits are also called unclean ([Lv 11-15](#)).

Holiness and its opposite, uncleanness, can describe behavior as well as outward appearance. To be holy means to obey God and to act like God. Chapters [18-25](#) explain what holiness means in daily living. It means avoiding illicit sexual relations, caring for the poor, being honest, being fair, and loving your neighbor as yourself. This sort of behavior made Israel different from other

peoples. Through their holiness the whole nation was supposed to demonstrate what God was like.

Sacrifice

In practice, unfortunately, the nation and the individuals within it rarely lived up to these ideals of holiness. Even if one did not commit a grievous sin, he or she was always liable to become unclean through contact with someone else, touching a dead animal, or in some other way. To maintain contact with a holy God, Israel's sins and uncleanness had to be removed. This is what the sacrifices were for. They brought the forgiveness of sins and cleansing from uncleanness. Because sin affects relations between God and humans in various ways, Leviticus provides four different types of offerings to cover the different cases ([Lv 1-6](#)), and explains which sacrifices must be offered on which occasions (chs [7-17](#)). All these rituals served to underline the seriousness of sin and helped preserve peace and fellowship between God and humanity.

The Sinai Covenant

All the laws contained in Leviticus form part of the Sinai covenant. They fill out and apply the principles of the Ten Commandments to the specific circumstances of ancient Israel. But they are more than a set of detailed rules, because they were given as part of the covenant. Three things have to be remembered about this covenant. First, the covenant created a personal relationship. The Lord became Israel's king, and Israel became his special treasure set apart from the other nations of the world. Second, the covenant was based on God's grace. He had made a promise to Abraham and, in saving the people from Egyptian slavery, he demonstrated his faithfulness to his promise and his love for Israel. Israel, in turn, was to show its gratitude for salvation by keeping the law. In no way did keeping the law earn them salvation. The law was given to a redeemed people. Finally, there were promises and threats built into the covenant ([Lv 26](#)). When the nation keeps the law, God promises they will enjoy good harvests, victory over their enemies, and God walking among them as he did in Eden. But if they reject God's laws, terrible calamities will befall them: drought, famine, defeat, and even expulsion from the land God had promised to give them. These covenant curses form the background to the prophets' warnings in later times.

Content

Kinds of Sacrifices ([1-7](#))

These chapters explain how the different kinds of sacrifices were to be offered. Most of these sacrifices also formed part of the regular worship in the tabernacle and later in the temple. But these chapters are concerned with personal offerings made when someone had sinned or made a vow or recovered from an illness. They explain what the offerer must do and what the priest must do, which parts of the animal must be burned, which parts may be eaten by the priest, and what is to be done with the blood of the animal.

First, the offerer brought the animal into the outer court of the tabernacle. In the presence of the priest he put his hand on the head of the animal and explained why he was bringing the sacrifice. Then the worshiper killed the animal and chopped it up. The priest then took over. He caught the blood as it ran out of the dying animal and splashed it over the altar, and burned at least some of the animal on the great altar in the court of the tabernacle. These acts were performed with all the animal sacrifices.

The special feature of the burnt offering ([Lv 1](#)) was that the whole animal, which had to be unblemished, was burned on the altar. All that the priest received was the skin. This was the most common sacrifice and was offered on many different occasions. In giving the whole animal to God in the sacrifice, the worshiper dedicated himself or herself totally to God's service. "Lay your hand on its head so the Lord will accept it as your substitute, thus making atonement for you" ([1:4](#), nlt).

Chapter [2](#) deals with the grain offering that always accompanied the burnt offering, but which could also be offered alone. Only part of this offering was burned; the rest was given to the priests to eat. The sacrifices formed an important part of their income.

The peace (fellowship) offering's special feature was that it was the only sacrifice where the offerer was allowed to eat part of the meat ([Lv 3](#)). Since in the earliest period Israelites were not permitted to kill animals except for sacrifice (ch [17](#)), every meal that included meat had to be preceded by a peace offering. [Leviticus 7:11-18](#) mentions three occasions that might prompt a peace-offering "thanksgiving": when someone had something to praise God for or some sin to acknowledge; a vow promising a sacrifice if God would help one out of a

difficulty; and a voluntary offering, made just because the person felt like it.

Despite its name, the sin offering ([Lv 4](#)) was not the only offering dealing with sin. The other sacrifices also made the forgiveness of sin possible. The special significance of this sacrifice is emphasized by its unusual ritual. Instead of the blood being splashed over the altar, as in the other sacrifices, it was carefully smeared over the horns (corners) of the large altar in the courtyard ([4:30](#)) or over the small altar inside the holy place ([v 18](#)); once a year the blood was sprinkled over the ark in the Holy of Holies ([16:14](#)). Sin makes these different parts of the tabernacle unclean, unfit for the presence of God. And if God is not present in the tabernacle, worship has no point. The blood acts as a spiritual disinfectant, making the tabernacle clean and holy again. The sin offering was required whenever a person inadvertently broke one of the commandments or had suffered from a discharge or skin disease that made him or her unclean for a week or more (chs [12, 15](#)).

The guilt offering ([5:14–6:7](#)) was for more serious offenses, such as stealing holy property or deliberately using God's name in a false oath. Such an offense was seen as robbing God. Therefore, a ram had to be offered as a sort of repayment. Whereas the poor person could offer just a bird for the other sacrifices, a ram was always required for a guilt offering.

Chapters [6:8–7:38](#) contain various other regulations about sacrifice, mainly specifying how much of each sacrifice the priests may eat and how much must be burned. One important rule for those who weren't priests was that they were not to eat any fat or blood or eat sacrificial meat when they were unclean. If they did, they could be cut off from Israel ([7:21–27](#)).

Beginnings of the Priesthood ([8–10](#))

Though Leviticus looks like a law book, because it contains so many regulations, it is really a history book describing the events that occurred about a year after the exodus. These chapters remind us of the true character of the book, for they tell how Moses ordained Aaron and his sons to be priests and how they offered their first sacrifices.

Awed by the complexity of the ordination rituals, the modern reader may miss the marvel that Aaron should have been appointed high priest. For it was Aaron who had presided over the making of the golden calf and encouraged its worship ([Ex 32](#)).

Had not Moses interceded for Israel, the whole nation would have been destroyed in the wilderness. Here the gracious forgiveness of God is most clear. Aaron, the chief sinner, is appointed chief mediator between God and the people. In the NT the career of Peter parallels Aaron's in some respect.

The greatness of the high priesthood is symbolized by the richly decorated robes Aaron wore. He and his sons were anointed with oil, and then Moses offered the three most common sacrifices on their behalf. They were confined to the court of the tabernacle for a week, and it seems likely that some of the rituals were repeated each day. By this means they were set apart from the rest of the people and entirely consecrated to their holy office.

By the eighth day the process was complete. Now Aaron and his sons could offer sacrifice. This time, Moses only told them what to do; he did not offer sacrifices himself. Chapter [9](#) concludes by telling that, after they had offered the sacrifices for themselves and the people, fire came out of the tabernacle to burn up the offerings, thereby displaying God's approval of their actions.

After this, [10:1–2](#) presents an unexpected turn of events: "Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu put coals of fire in their incense burners and sprinkled incense over it. In this way, they disobeyed the Lord by burning before him a different kind of fire than he had commanded. So fire blazed forth from the Lord's presence and burned them up, and they died there before the Lord" (nlt). We do not know exactly what is meant by unholy fire. What is important is that the priests did something that God had not commanded them. The priests were supposed to set an example of total obedience to God's word: this is the essence of holiness. Instead, they decided to follow their own plans and the consequences were dire.

"Aaron was silent" ([10:3](#)). He was warned not even to mourn his sons' deaths, lest he be suspected of condoning their sin ([vv 6–7](#)). Yet, despite his sons' actions, Aaron and his surviving sons were confirmed as priests. They were reminded that their job was "to distinguish between what is holy and what is ordinary, what is ceremonially unclean and what is clean. And you must teach the Israelites all the laws that the Lord has given through Moses" ([vv 10–11](#), nlt). The chapter closes on another note of grace. Although the priests made a mistake in offering one of the sin offerings, God would overlook it on this occasion.

Cleanness and Uncleanness ([11-16](#))

Distinguishing between the unclean and the clean is the theme of chapters [11-15](#), which prepare for the great Day of Atonement ceremonies of chapter [16](#). These are designed to cleanse the tabernacle from the uncleannesses of the people of Israel, thereby ensuring that God would continue to dwell among them ([16:16, 19](#)).

Chapter [11](#) discusses unclean animals, that is, animals that may not be eaten. Land animals are dealt with first, then fish and birds, and finally various miscellaneous creatures such as locusts and reptiles. To be clean, a land animal must have cloven hooves and chew the cud; that covers sheep and cattle but excludes pigs and camels. Fish must have fins and scales to be edible; without them, they count as unclean. Birds are clean unless they are birds of prey or scavengers that eat carrion. Insects that resemble birds in having wings and two large legs to hop with—for example, locusts—are clean. Other flying insects are unclean. All squirming creatures that dart hither and thither, such as lizards, are unclean.

The reasons for declaring some animals clean and others unclean has long been a great puzzle. One suggestion is that the unclean animals were used in sacrifice by pagan worshipers or were thought to represent pagan deities. Certainly some unclean animals were used in pagan worship, but so were some clean ones, and that fact makes this explanation unsatisfactory. A second possibility is that the rules were hygienic: the clean animals were safe to eat whereas the unclean were not. There may be some truth in this explanation, but it is not completely adequate, for some clean animals can be harmful while some unclean ones are all right to eat.

Unclean animals could not be eaten, but there was no harm in touching them. Israelites could ride camels, for example. However, all dead animals, unless killed for sacrifice, were unclean. Anyone who touched the carcass of a dead creature became unclean himself and therefore could not enter the tabernacle that day ([11:39-40](#)).

The following chapters deal with other conditions that make people unclean. Chapter [12](#) states that childbirth, or more precisely the bloody discharge that follows childbirth, makes a woman unclean. In OT theology death is the ultimate uncleanness, and conditions that are abnormal or threaten to lead to death are also unclean. When the discharge has ceased, after a fixed period the mother must bring

a burnt offering and a sin offering to atone for any sin she may have committed, and to purify the tabernacle that may have been polluted through her uncleanness.

Chapters [13-14](#) deal with the uncleanness caused by skin diseases. Detailed regulations are given to distinguish between different diseases so that the priests can decide whether people are unclean or not. If they are unclean, they must live outside the camp until their skin heals. Traditionally the unclean skin disease has been called leprosy. But this is unlikely to be correct, since leprosy was unknown in the Middle East in OT times. Rather, it was any disease that led to the skin peeling off in patches, such as psoriasis. This explains why the disease might spontaneously get better.

If the disease did retreat sufficiently, the sufferer could call the priest, and if the priest was satisfied with the cure, the sufferer could be readmitted to the community after following the rituals prescribed in chapter [14](#). This also explains what is to be done if patches of mold are found in pieces of cloth or house walls.

Chapter [15](#) explains how men can become unclean through discharges from their sexual organs, due to gonorrhea or sexual intercourse, while women become unclean through menstruation or a long-term discharge. Part of the purpose of these regulations is to prevent the sacred prostitution that was common in the ancient world. Since sexual intercourse made people unclean, they could not go to worship immediately afterward. Further, the uncleanness of menstruation should have discouraged men from being overfamiliar with unmarried girls.

The broad scope of these uncleanness regulations meant that nearly every Israelite would be unclean at some time in his or her life. This uncleanness could contaminate God's dwelling place, the tabernacle, making it impossible for God to continue to live there. To avert this catastrophe, a Day of Atonement was held once a year. This is the most solemn day in the Jewish calendar, and the ceremonies for it are described in detail in [Leviticus 16](#).

There are three acts on the Day of Atonement that are described in this chapter. There was first the special sin offering offered by the high priest, in the course of which the outer altar of burnt offering, the incense altar inside the Holy Place, and finally the ark itself in the Holy of Holies were sprinkled with blood to purify each part of the tabernacle.

This was the one occasion in the year when the high priest entered the presence of God in the Holy of Holies, and elaborate precautions were taken to screen the high priest from God's holiness ([16:2-4, 11-17](#)). There was another public act that pictured the sins of Israel being taken away. A goat was chosen by lot. Then the high priest placed his hands on its head and recited over it the nation's sin. This goat was then led away and driven into a solitary place; in later times it was pushed over a precipice. These actions pictured Israel's sins being carried away, so that they could not disturb the peace between God and his people. The third important feature of the Day of Atonement was public prayer and fasting. This showed that sin could not be eliminated without effort, but only through a complete change of heart by every person in Israel.

Rules for Daily Life ([17-25](#))

Whereas the opening chapters of Leviticus are entirely concerned with the Godward side of religion, the later chapters are more concerned with practical religious duties toward other persons. However, chapter [17](#) repeats some of the rules about sacrifice and makes one new one: that all sacrifice must be offered in the tabernacle courtyard. This was to prevent people from secretly worshiping heathen gods.

Chapters [18](#) and [20](#) spell out the rules governing sexual relations in ancient Israel. Chapter [19](#) gives further examples of what holiness means in everyday life. Positively, it means helping the poor by leaving some grain behind in the fields at harvesttime ([19:9-10](#)); paying people promptly (v [13](#)); avoiding gossip (v [16](#)); honoring the elderly, helping the immigrant, and being honest in business ([vv 32-36](#)). But holiness goes beyond deeds and words. It should transform thoughts: "Never seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone, but love your neighbor as yourself" (v [18](#), nlt).

Chapters [21](#) and [22](#) discuss how the holy men of Israel, the priests, are to demonstrate their holiness in their lives. First, they must avoid approaching dead bodies unless the dead are very close relatives. Second, they must marry women of known moral uprightness. Third, deformed priests—for example, a blind or lame priest—may never offer sacrifices. Here the principle is plain that men who represent God must reflect the perfection of God in normal, healthy bodies. However, those who are temporarily unclean,

through skin disease or a discharge, may resume their duties as soon as their uncleanness is cured.

Chapter [23](#) lists the main holy days and the sacrifices that had to be offered on each one. Chapter [24](#) deals with the lamp and special bread kept within the tabernacle. A case of blasphemy that occurred in the wilderness is mentioned. Because the man actually used the sacred name of God in a curse, he was sentenced to death.

Chapter [25](#) deals with the jubilee year. In every society people fall into debt. Today the effects of debt are somewhat cushioned by state welfare payments and bank overdrafts, but ancient societies did not have such aid available. People in debt had to sell off their family land, on which they depended for their living, or in more serious situations, they could sell themselves into slavery. Once impoverished in this way, it was exceedingly difficult ever to recover one's land or one's freedom. But this law in Leviticus provided an escape. Every 50 years was a jubilee. In this year every slave was released from bondage, and everyone who had sold his land was given it back free. Thus, everyone who fell into debt was given a chance to make a fresh start. Though this law was primarily designed to help the poor, it also served to prevent the accumulation of too much wealth in the hands of a few rich men.

Blessings, Curses, and Vows ([26-27](#))

Chapter [26](#) contains the blessings and curses that traditionally concluded a covenant. Israel is promised great material and spiritual prosperity if she keeps the law but is warned that tragedy will befall if she is disobedient.

Chapter [27](#) is an appendix dealing with vows and other gifts made to God. When a person promises to give something to God, it becomes holy and cannot be retracted unless a suitable payment is made instead. This chapter sets out the rules about such dedications.

See also Aaron; Moses; Offerings and Sacrifices; Priests and Levites; Tabernacle; Temple.

Libation

Ritual of pouring a liquid such as oil or wine upon the ground as a sacrifice. *See Offerings and Sacrifices.*

Libertines

A libertine was a freed slave of Jewish background. The only reference to libertines in the New Testament is in [Acts 6:9](#) (King James Version). Most modern Bible versions translate this Latin term as "freedmen" or "freed slaves" (New Living Translation) because it refers to their legal status, not a geographical location.

Libertines appear with groups from various parts of the empire. This could mean that the Libertines were a group from the region of Liberatum in North Africa. At that time, this region was under Roman jurisdiction. Yet, a more probable understanding is that the people who met in the synagogue of the Libertines were Jews who were former slaves. Philo, a Hellenistic Jew of Alexandria, writes about Jews who Pompey captured during his conquests, then brought them to Rome in 63 BC. He sold them as slaves but later they became free. When released, these Jews settled in various parts of the empire: Cyrene, Alexandria, Cilicia, and Asia.

According to [Acts 6:9](#), these Greek-speaking Jews worshiped in a synagogue of their own in Jerusalem. They could not speak the Aramaic of their Palestinian countrymen. In 1913, R. Weill found an inscription in Jerusalem relating to a certain Theodosius, son of Vettinos. The inscription refers to a synagogue that fits the description of [Acts 6:9](#).

The early church needed to discuss its faith with the Libertines of this synagogue. Stephen was a Christian earlier appointed as a deacon to deal with problems developing in the Greek-speaking element of the church ([Acts 6:1-6](#)). He appears as the skilled defender of faith in Jesus Christ when debating with the synagogue of the Libertines.

See also Freedmen.

Libnah

- One of the locations where the Israelites camped during the wilderness journey. It was between Rimmon-perez and Rissah ([Numbers 33:20-21](#)).

See Wilderness Wanderings.

- A Canaanite city-state in southern Palestine. Under the leadership of Joshua, Israel conquered and destroyed Libnah ([Joshua 10:29-31](#); [12:15](#)). It was in the territory of Judah ([15:42](#)). Later, the Levites received it as an inheritance ([Joshua 21:13](#); [1 Chronicles 6:57](#)).

The Bible mentions three later events connected to Libnah:

- During the reign of King Jehoram of Judah, Libnah rebelled against him around the same time that Edom also rebelled. Judah brought them under control ([2 Kings 8:22](#); [2 Chronicles 21:10](#)).
- After King Sennacherib of Assyria captured the city of Lachish, he attacked Libnah ([2 Kings 19:8](#); [Isaiah 37:8](#)). Earlier Isaiah had affirmed to King Hezekiah there would be a rumor. This would cause the invading king to interrupt his military campaign against Judah and return to his own land. While Sennacherib was surrounding and attacking Libnah, the prophecy of Isaiah came true ([2 Kings 19:7-8](#)).
- The mother of Jehoahaz and Zedekiah, two of last kings of Judah, was from Libnah ([2 Kings 23:31](#); [24:18](#); [Jeremiah 52:1](#)).

Libni

- Gershon's son, the grandson of Levi, and Shime'i's brother ([Exodus 6:17](#); [Numbers 3:18](#); [1 Chronicles 6:17, 20](#)). He was the father of three sons and the founder of the Libnite family ([Numbers 3:21](#)). Libni is also called Ladan in [1 Chronicles 23:7-9](#) and [26:21](#).

2. Mahli's son, the father of Shimei, and a descendant of Levi through Merari's line ([1 Chronicles 6:29](#)).

Libnite

Any descendant of Libni. He was a son of Gershon from the tribe of Levi ([Numbers 3:21; 26:58](#)).

See Libni #1.

Libya, Libyans

A country and its residents to the west of Egypt. In ancient Hebrew texts, three different words were used to describe Libya and its people. These words can be confusing to understand today for two reasons. First, some of the ancient texts are unclear. Second, writers from long ago often used the word "Libya" when talking about any part of Africa that was not Egypt.

From the 12th century BC, Libyans served in the armies of Egypt and Ethiopia ([2 Chronicles 12:3; 16:8; Nahum 3:9](#)). One of their most famous leaders was Shishak, who came from Libya. He later became a powerful ruler who invaded other lands.

The prophet Ezekiel said Libya would be defeated along with other nations ([Ezekiel 30:5](#)). The book of Daniel also mentions that the Libyans were among the people who were conquered ([Daniel 11:43](#)). The book of Isaiah briefly mentions the Libyans, calling them by their Hebrew name "Pul" ([Isaiah 66:19](#)).

A man named Simon, who was from a city called Cyrene in Libya, was forced by Roman soldiers to carry Jesus's cross on the day Jesus was crucified ([Matthew 27:32; Mark 15:21; Luke 23:26](#)). Cyrene is in eastern Libya. Later, when the Holy Spirit came to Jesus's followers at Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost, people from Libya were among the large crowd that gathered there. ([Acts 2:10](#)).

Lice

The King James Version translation for some sort of small insects, probably gnats. These insects were the third plague in Egypt ([Exodus 8:16–18](#)).

See Animals (Gnat).

Licentiousness

A lack of moral restraint, especially in sexual behavior.

See Lasciviousness.

Life

According to the Bible, all life comes from God the Father. God gives life through his Son Jesus, who helped create everything and saves people. Jesus offers true life to all people ([John 6:57](#)).

The Living Father

God the Father is above all else "the living God" ([Jeremiah 10:10; John 5:26](#)). God is alive and active. God is the source of all life ([1 Timothy 6:13](#)). God is the one who breathed life into humans at creation and sustains them ([Job 34:14–15](#)). God gives life ([Genesis 17:16](#)). God alone takes it away ([Genesis 3:22–24; 6:3; Psalm 104:29; Luke 12:20](#)).

Movement is the sign of life. The Bible tells us that both humans and animals have the breath of life from God. When Jesus gave life back to a dead person, the person began to breathe and move again ([Luke 8:55](#)). In the original Hebrew language of the Bible, [Genesis 1:24](#) and [6:17](#) tell us that God gave this same breath of life to animals too. So, all nature has the life that comes from God ([Acts 17:24–28](#)).

Because of this, life is sacred. But, life is as temporary as grass, clouds, dew, and shadow ([1 Chronicles 29:15; Job 7:6, 9; James 4:13–16; 1 Peter 1:24](#)). A long life is desirable ([Genesis 35:29](#)). Any life is better than death and of infinite value ([Ecclesiastes 9:4–6; Matthew 6:25; 16:26](#)).

The ancient Israelites believed that after death, people went to a place called Sheol. They thought that in Sheol, people existed without feeling anything, without hope, and without God's help ([Psalm 88:3–12](#)).

Life becomes better when:

- people love and obey God ([Deuteronomy 30:15–20](#); [1 Peter 3:8–12](#)),
- God helps people in difficult times ([Isaiah 38:16](#)), and
- God blesses his people ([Matthew 5:3–12](#)).

Christ as Life

The Greek word for “life” is *zoe*. In classical Greek, it means life in general. This meaning is used occasionally in the New Testament ([Acts 17:25](#); [James 4:14](#); [Revelation 16:3](#)). In most instances, *zoe* refers to a divine, eternal life—the life of God ([Ephesians 4:18](#)). This life is in Christ, and he made it available to all who believe in him.

Humans are born with a natural life—called *psuche* in Greek. *Psuche* can be translated as “soul,” “personality,” or “life.” Humans are not born with eternal life. This life can be received only by believing in Jesus Christ, who has eternal life (*zoe*).

Jesus showed his power to give life in many ways. People saw this power when he spoke with authority and when he touched people to heal them ([Matthew 9:18](#); [Mark 1:27, 41–42](#); [5:27–29](#)). He is “the Author of life” ([Acts 3:15](#)). He shows people how to find true life ([Matthew 7:14](#); [25:46](#); [Mark 8:35–37](#); [9:42–47](#)).

Jesus demonstrated his power by bringing dead people back to life. After he rose from the dead, he was “a life-giving Spirit,” with the power of “an indestructible life” ([Romans 8:2](#); [1 Corinthians 15:45](#); [Hebrews 7:16](#)). So, Jesus is our life ([Colossians 3:4](#)). With him we find “newness of life” ([Romans 6:4](#)). We are new creations now living for him and not for ourselves ([2 Corinthians 5:15–17](#)).

John emphasizes that Christ is the source of this new life ([John 3:14–16](#); [5:21](#)). People who trust in Jesus become God’s children ([1:12](#); [3:3, 5](#)). When people know God and Jesus, they begin experiencing this new life right now ([John 5:24](#); [17:3](#); [1 John 5:11–12](#)). They have already received life that lasts forever ([John 10:28](#); [11:26](#)).

This new life brings many good things:

- It is full and rich ([John 10:10](#))
- It brings understanding ([John 8:12](#))
- It brings freedom and contentment ([John 10:9](#))
- It helps people overcome sin ([Romans 6:6–14](#))
- It brings peace and joy ([Romans 5:1–11](#))
- It is like having an endless supply of fresh water ([John 4:13–14](#); [7:37–38](#))
- It never ends ([John 5:24](#); [1 Corinthians 15:51–57](#)).

All this is possible because from the beginning, all that came to be was alive with his life ([John 1:4](#)). God the Father gives life to the world through Jesus, who is also the source of life and can give it to anyone he chooses ([John 5:26](#)). He is “the resurrection and the life” ([John 11:25](#); [14:6](#)). Jesus shows it by restoring life to paralyzed limbs, raising the dead, and conquering death by coming back to life ([John 5:5–9](#); [11:43](#); [20](#)). People remain in death only if they “refuse to come” to Jesus and “have life” ([John 5:40](#); compare [1 John 3:14](#)).

See also Eternal Life.

Life Everlasting

See Eternal Life.

Life of Adam and Eve

The Life of Adam and Eve is a group of ancient stories that tell what happened to Adam and Eve after they were sent out of the garden of Eden. These stories are not part of the Bible. They survive in several forms, the most complete being the Apocalypse of Moses in Greek and the *Vita Adae et Eva* in Latin. Related versions also appear in Armenian, Slavonic, and other languages.

Most scholars believe the original work was written in Hebrew during the late first century BC or early first century AD. The book is Jewish in origin, but later additions by Christians gave it a more Christian character in some versions.

The Latin Version

In the Latin tradition, Adam and Eve spend seven days without food after they leave the garden of Eden. Eve feels deep sorrow for her part in their sin and begs Adam to kill her. Adam refuses and instead suggests that they show repentance. In some manuscripts, Adam stands in the Jordan River for 40 days while Eve stands in the Tigris River for 37 days (in other manuscripts the rivers are reversed).

While Eve is in the water, Satan appears as an angel of light and deceives her again. He tells her that God has accepted her repentance, but this is a lie. In some versions, Satan also explains that he rebelled against God because he refused to bow before a creature made from dust.

Later, the archangel Michael gives Adam seeds so he can grow food. Eve dreams that Cain will kill Abel. In some manuscripts, Adam and Eve separate their sons to prevent conflict, but Abel is still killed. God then gives them another son, Seth.

When Adam is about to die, he tells his family the story of the temptation and fall. Seth and Eve go to the gate of Paradise to ask for healing for Adam. On their way, a serpent bites Seth. The archangel Michael appears and tells them that Adam must die. Angels bury Adam, and Eve dies soon after. Before her death, she tells Seth to write down their story on stone and clay so it will survive both flood and fire. She also asks him to mourn for six days but not on the Sabbath.

The Greek Version

The Greek version is similar to the Latin one but includes additional details. It gives a longer account of the temptation and fall of Eve and describes Adam's death and burial in greater detail. In this version, Adam's body is taken up to the third heaven, where God promises his resurrection. The earth at first refuses to receive Abel's body until God commands it to do so.

The Greek version was likely influenced by both Jewish and early Christian thought. Later Latin manuscripts included parts of this Greek account, blending the two traditions.

Related Versions

Besides the Greek Apocalypse of Moses and the Latin *Vita Adae et Eva*, several other versions of the Life of Adam and Eve survive in ancient languages. These include:

- Armenian Penitence of Adam: closely related to the Greek text but with unique expansions.
- Slavonic Life of Adam and Eve: a translation influenced by both Greek and Latin sources.
- Georgian Book of Adam: an independent rendering that preserves distinctive details about Adam's death and burial.
- Coptic and Syriac fragments: shorter versions that show early Christian transmission in Egypt and Syria.

Together, these witnesses demonstrate the wide reach of the story throughout Jewish and Christian communities from the eastern Mediterranean to Eastern Europe.

Themes and Influence

These stories explore what life was like outside the garden of Eden. They discuss the beginnings of sin and death, the meaning of repentance (turning back to God), the role of angels as messengers, and the problem of human suffering. Ideas and images from the Life of Adam and Eve writings appear again in later Jewish and Christian works. These include interests in angels and the early history of the world. The stories also shaped how later writers retold the story of Adam, Eve, and the fall.

See also Apocrypha.

Life of John the Baptist

The author of this legendary story claims to be Serapion, a bishop who lived in the fourth century AD. It tells about the early life of John the Baptist, especially the death of his mother, Elizabeth.

According to the story, Elizabeth died on the same day as Herod the Great. This happened while the young Jesus was still in Egypt after his parents had taken him there. John, who was also a small boy, did not know how to bury his mother. The clouds bring Jesus, Mary, and Salome, who wash the body. Michael and Gabriel dig the grave and bring the souls of Zacharias and Simeon. After that, John grows up in the desert where angels take care of him. After they had helped John, the clouds lifted

Jesus and Mary to bring them to Nazareth, where they lived.

See also Apocrypha; John the Baptist.

Life of the Virgin

There are several stories about the early life of the Virgin Mary. Most of them come from ancient Coptic (Egyptian Christian) writings. These stories tell how Mary was born to Joachim (also called Cleopas) and Anna. The couple had been mocked by others because they could not have children. One day, they saw a vision of a white dove, and soon after that, Mary was born.

In some stories, Mary's parents dedicated her to the Lord, and she was later placed under the care of a man named Joseph. While she was weaving cloth for the temple veil, angels often visited and cared for her.

The stories also describe the angel Gabriel's announcement that Mary would give birth to Jesus. This part of the story is told in great detail, including how Joseph searched for a midwife named Salome to help with the birth. Later accounts tell of tender scenes between Mary and the young Jesus.

Some versions confuse Mary, the mother of Jesus, with other women named Mary mentioned in the Gospels.

See also Apocrypha; Coptic Lives of the Virgin.

Life, Book of

See Book of Life.

Light

The illumination that makes sight possible.

Light in the Old Testament

Light is a concept with many meanings in the Old Testament. It often refers to ordinary, physical light, but it also symbolizes spiritual truth. The first thing God created was light ([Genesis 1:3](#)). He also created the sun, moon, and stars to give light ([Genesis 1:16](#)). Sometimes, the Bible personifies light. For example, Job describes it as if it lives in a place no one can reach ([Job 38:19](#); compare with

verse [24](#)). The Israelites also used man-made light in the tabernacle ([Exodus 25:37](#)).

Light is a symbol of what is good, uplifting, or connected to important people—especially God. The preacher in Ecclesiastes says, "Light is sweet" ([Ecclesiastes 11:7](#)). During the plagues in Egypt, while the Egyptians were in total darkness, the Israelites had light ([Exodus 10:23](#)). When the Israelites left Egypt, God led them with a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night ([Exodus 13:21](#)). The pillar of fire gave them light while their enemies were in darkness ([Exodus 14:20](#)). Even when they sinned, Israel remembered that God did not abandon them. The pillar of fire remained to guide them ([Nehemiah 9:19](#); compare [Nehemiah 9:12](#); [Psalms 78:14](#); [105:39](#)).

In the Old Testament, light often represents God's blessing. Job said, "He reveals the deep things of darkness and brings deep shadows into light" ([Job 12:22](#)). When Job was in trouble, he remembered the times when God lit the way for him, and he felt safe ([Job 29:2-3](#)). Job's friend Eliphaz also said that if Job followed his advice, "light will shine on your ways" ([Job 22:28](#)). The psalmist also saw it as a blessing when God lit his lamp ([Psalms 18:28](#); [118:27](#); compare [97:11](#); [112:4](#)).

Light is closely connected to God. The Bible even says that God is light: "The Lord will be your everlasting light" ([Isaiah 60:19-20](#)). The psalmist rejoiced, saying, "The LORD is my light and my salvation" ([Psalm 27:1](#)). God is described as being clothed with light ([Psalm 104:2](#)), and light lives with Him ([Daniel 2:22](#)). For God, darkness and light are the same; neither can hide anything from Him ([Psalm 139:12](#)). The prophet Micah also described God as light and as someone who brings His servants into the light ([Micah 7:8-9](#)), showing that God brings blessing and victory to His people.

God's blessing is often described as the "light of His presence." In [Psalm 4:6](#), the psalmist says, "Shine the light of Your face upon us, O LORD." This expression of light refers to God's favor. In [Psalm 44:3](#), it is God's light, His right hand, and His love that bring victory to His people. Those who walk in God's light are blessed ([Psalm 89:15](#)), but this light also exposes hidden sins ([Psalm 90:8](#)). No one can hide from God's watchful eye, but His light mainly represents the blessing that comes from His presence. On one occasion, Job used the phrase to describe favor from others ([Job 29:24](#)). The light God gives His servants allows them to share His blessing with others ([Isaiah 42:6](#); [49:6](#)).

God's justice is also linked to light. He says, "My justice will become a light to the nation" ([Isaiah 51:4](#)). In this context, God's light is powerful, like a consuming fire. Light is also connected to good behavior, as seen in Proverbs: "The path of the righteous is like the first gleam of dawn" ([Proverbs 4:18](#)).

The absence of light is used as a symbol of disaster. Some people "grope in the darkness without light" ([Job 12:25](#)). Job's friend Bildad believed that the light of the wicked would be put out as punishment ([Job 18:5-17](#)). After the destruction of Jerusalem by Babylon, the people mourned, saying, "He has driven me away and made me walk in darkness instead of light" ([Lamentations 3:2](#)).

Light in the New Testament

In the New Testament, references to light are often symbolic. For example, when Saul of Tarsus encountered "a light from heaven" on the road to Damascus ([Acts 9:3](#); compare [22:6-11](#); [26:13](#)), it is unclear if this was ordinary light or something else. Similarly, when Peter was in prison, "a light shone in his cell" ([Acts 12:7](#)). The heavenly city does not need physical light because "the Lord God will shine on them" ([Revelation 22:5](#); compare [21:11, 23-24](#)).

The connection between God and light is a common theme in the New Testament. The apostle John wrote, "God is light, and in Him there is no darkness at all" ([1 John 1:5](#)). James called God "the Father of the heavenly lights" ([James 1:17](#)). God is also described as living in light that no person can approach ([1 Timothy 6:16](#); see also [1 John 1:7](#)). Jesus said, "I am the light of the world" ([John 8:12](#); see also [9:5](#)), and "I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in Me should remain in darkness" ([John 12:46](#)). He was the light himself, according to the apostle John ([John 1:1-10](#)) John the Baptist came to testify about this light to lead people to faith ([John 1:7-8](#)). Those who receive the light receive the right to become children of God ([John 1:9-12](#)). Sometimes, light is used to represent the revelation of people finding the knowledge of God and his salvation ([Matthew 4:16](#); [Luke 2:32](#); [Acts 13:47](#); [26:18](#)).

John wrote that the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it ([John 1:5](#); compare [1 John 2:8](#)). He also "The Light has come into the world, but men loved the darkness rather than the Light because their deeds were evil" ([John 3:19](#)). People who do wrong avoid the light, but those who do good come to the light ([John 3:20-](#)

[21](#)). When John describes the raising of Lazarus, Jesus says that men stumble at night because they have no light ([John 11:10](#)). Jesus says that men do not have light "in" them, showing that the light is spiritual ([John 8:12](#)).

Believers are described as "children of light" ([John 12:36](#), see also [Luke 16:8](#)). Their lives are shaped by their connection to the light. Paul also wrote that Christians are "children of light and children of the day" ([1 Thessalonians 5:5](#)). In the first letter of John, Christians are urged to "walk in the light" ([1 John 1:7](#)), meaning they should live lives of goodness and truth.

Jesus told His followers, "You are the light of the world" ([Matthew 5:14](#)). This statement means that Christians should reflect God's light by living godly lives. When Jesus is called the light of the world, it means he can save the world and reveal the truth. When believers are called the light of the world, it is not because they can save the world but because they show the world the way to salvation. Jesus instructed them to let their light shine through their good deeds so that people would praise God ([Matthew 5:16](#)). Christians must make full use of the light they have. If they ignore it and live in darkness, they are worse off because they know the truth and have chosen to turn away from it ([Matthew 6:23](#); [Luke 11:35](#)).

The metaphor of light is not easy to accept by modern people. The Bible teaches that Christ's light has lighted up all Christians. If they ignore the light and live like they are still in the darkness, then they will remain in deep darkness. They are worse than others because they know what light is and what it can mean to them and have turned away from it.

See also Darkness.

Lightning

The flashing of light. Lightning in the Bible often shows God's presence. It appears at important moments, such as:

- When God comes to Mount Sinai to give Moses the Ten Commandments ([Exodus 19:16](#))
- When describing Jesus's return ([Matthew 24:27](#))
- In visions of God ([Ezekiel 1:14](#); [Daniel 10:6](#))

The book of Revelation often uses lightning as a symbol. This book mainly aims to give a vision of God ([Revelation 4:5; 8:5; 16:18](#)).

Lightning can represent different aspects of God:

1. God's judgment against enemies ([2 Samuel 22:15](#); [Revelation 16:18](#))
2. God's power and rule over all creation ([Psalm 135:7](#))

In the book of Job, God mentions lightning to show Job how great creation is. This helps Job understand how small he is compared to God and creation ([Job 38:35](#); compare [Psalm 77:16–18](#)).

Lign Aloes

The King James Version translation for "aloes" in [Numbers 24:6](#).

See Plants (Aloe).

Ligure

The King James Version translation for jacinth in [Exodus 28:19](#) and [39:12](#).

See Stones, Precious.

Likhi

Shemida's son from Manasseh's tribe ([1 Chr 7:19](#)).

Lilith

Hebrew for the night creature referred to in [Isaiah 34:14](#). According to Hebrew mythology, Lilith was Adam's first wife, who was replaced by Eve; subsequently, Lilith became a female demon.

Lily

A plant with large, colorful, trumpet-shaped flowers. The lily is one of the most well-known plants mentioned in the Bible. But, scholars disagree about exactly which plants the Bible means when it talks about lilies. It is likely that several different kinds of plants (perhaps five or six) are called "lilies" in the King James Version of the Bible.

Most experts believe that the "lily of the field" mentioned in [Matthew 6:28](#), is the Palestine anemone or wind flower, *Anemone coronaria*. Jesus said these lilies were more beautiful than King Solomon in all his glory. These flowers grow abundantly throughout Israel and the surrounding areas. They are most commonly scarlet (red) or yellow. The Palestine anemone can also be blue, purple, rose, or white. The flower can grow up to 7 centimeters (two and three-quarter inches) across.

Another possibility is the Palestinian chamomile, *Anthemis palaeastina*, a common white flower that looks like a daisy. When the chamomile dries up, people gather it like dry grass and throw it into the furnace to burn.

Some scholars suggest the "lily" might be *Lilium chalcedonicum*, the scarlet or Martagon lily. The description in Song of Songs [5:13](#) ("his lips are like lilies") would fit this plant better than the Palestine anemone. This verse seems to describe a rare plant of exceptional beauty. The scarlet lily is rare in Israel and the surrounding areas. Some plant experts doubt that it grows there at all.

See also Water Lily.

Lily-Work

Design of a lily or lotus used on ancient pillars, inspired by the large water lily found along the Nile. It appeared at the vestibule of Solomon's temple ([1 Kgs 7:19–22](#)), around the brim of the basin (v [26](#)), and in numerous artistic creations of the Assyrians, Persians, and other Near Eastern peoples.

See also Bronze Sea; Laver.

Lime

White substance (calcium oxide) obtained by applying heat to materials containing calcium

carbonate, such as limestone or shells. *See Minerals and Metals.*

Linen

Cloth made from flax. *See Cloth and Cloth Manufacturing.*

Lintel (Top of a Doorframe)

A lintel is a horizontal beam placed above a doorway. It sits on top of the vertical supports called "doorposts." Some Bible translations use the term "lintel" while many modern translations often use more familiar terms like "top of the doorframe."

In [Exodus 12](#), the Israelites must prepare for the tenth plague, death, and for the first Passover. After killing a lamb, the people were to take the blood and "put it on the sides and tops of the doorframes of the houses" ([Exodus 12:7](#)).

[First Kings 6:31](#) describes Solomon's building of the temple. The King James Version says, "He made doors of olive tree: the lintel and side posts were a fifth part of the wall." The meaning of this verse in the Hebrew is a little difficult to determine. The New American Standard Bible translates it as "the lintel and five-sided doorposts." The New English Bible replaces the word "lintel" with "pilasters." The Berean Standard Bible translates it as "doors of olive wood with five-sided doorposts." It is possible that the top of the doorway was slanted, formed by beams leaning toward each other (like an arch) instead of one horizontal beam.

In [Amos 9:1](#) the King James Version has "lintel," whereas the Revised Standard Version has "capital." The Berean Standard Bible simply has "tops of the pillars." The Hebrew word here seems to mean the top part of a column. The same is true in [Zephaniah 2:14](#), where the King James Version has "lintels" and the Berean Standard Bible has "atop her pillars."

See Architecture.

Linus

A Christian at Rome who joined Paul in sending greetings to Timothy ([2 Timothy 4:21](#)). Two writers in the early church, Irenaeus of Lyons and

Eusebius of Caesarea, wrote that the apostles Peter and Paul chose Linus to be the bishop (church leader) of Rome. Eusebius identified him with the Linus that Paul refers to at the end of 2 Timothy. He said that he served for 12 years as bishop. Other early church documents, including the *Apostolic Constitutions*, also say that this Linus was the one Paul mentioned in his letter.

Lion

The lion a large cat with golden-brown fur that eats meat. Its scientific name is *Panthera leo*. It mainly hunts hooved mammals, jumping to catch its prey. Historically, lions lived in Africa, Europe, and the holy land. In ancient times, African and Persian lions shared territories in the Middle East. The lion found in the holy land was the Asiatic or Persian lion (*Panthera leo persica*).

The males have heavy manes that stop at the shoulders but cover much of the chest. The Persian lion cannot climb and mainly hunts at night, returning to its lair or a thicket by day ([Jeremiah 4:7; 25:38; Nahum 2:11-12](#)). This lion is about 1.5 meters (5 feet) long with a tail 0.8 meters (30 inches) or so long. Its shoulders may as tall as 0.9 meters (35 inches). It is one of the smallest of the lion breeds.

Behavior and Hunting Habits of Lions

Lions often live in pairs or groups called prides. They prefer open areas but also inhabit subtropical regions, like the Jordan River valley in Palestine. Typically, lions hunt at dusk. They kill small prey with a paw strike and larger animals by biting the throat. Lions rarely stay in one place for more than a few days. At seven years old, a lion is at its peak, weighing between 181 and 272 kilograms (400 to 600 pounds).

Lions do not usually attack humans. But, like other big cats, lions sometimes eat people ([1 Kings 13:24-28; 20:36; 2 Kings 17:25-26; Psalm 57:4; Daniel 6:7-27](#)). Typically, lions attack only when hungry or to defend themselves. However, a young lion that bites humans might become a threat if it enjoys the taste of human flesh. Meanwhile, an old lion that can no longer hunt well may attack humans because they are easier to catch.

A lion usually roars only on a full stomach after eating its prey ([Psalm 22:13; Ezekiel 22:25; Amos 3:4](#)). Its roar still frightens people ([Amos 3:8; 1](#)

[Peter 5:8](#)). The Bible describes the lion as brave ([2 Samuel 17:10](#); [Proverbs 28:1](#)). The lion is also destructive ([Psalm 7:2](#); [Jeremiah 2:30](#); [Hosea 5:14](#); [Micah 5:8](#)). Lions often attack and kill sheep and other farm animals ([Amos 3:12](#)).

Lions once roamed widely in Palestine, especially in biblical times. Hebrew has over seven words for lions and their cubs. The Old Testament mentions lions about 130 times, more than any other wild animal. However, lions became rare by the New Testament era. They vanished from Palestine shortly after 1300 AD. Yet, they lingered in Mesopotamia until the late 19th century.

Lions as Symbols

Lions were an important part of political and religious symbolism in the Near East ([1 Kings 10:19–20](#)). In Assyria and Babylonia the lion was regarded as a royal beast ([Daniel 7:4](#)). Eastern monarchs kept lion pits as execution sites ([Ezekiel 19:1–9](#); [Daniel 6:7–16](#)). Animals were caught in hidden nets or pits. To the Jews, the lion was the strongest animal ([Proverbs 30:29–31](#)). So, it was a symbol of leadership ([Genesis 49:9–10](#); [Numbers 24:9](#)). "Lion" eventually became a title for Jesus Christ ([Revelation 5:5](#)). It was the symbol of Judah's tribe. King Solomon used it to decorate his house and the temple.

Lion of the Tribe of Judah

A title of the Messiah (God's chosen leader) that appears only in [Revelation 5:5](#): "The Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed." This is a reference to the promise of [Genesis 49:9–10](#), "Judah is a young lion. . . . The scepter will not depart from Judah."

The expression summarizes the Old Testament hope that the Messiah would conquer and deliver his people from every form of spiritual, political, and social evil (compare [2 Esdras 11:37](#); [12:31](#)). The Old Testament often uses the lion as a symbol of power and the ability to defeat their enemies ([Job 10:16](#); [Psalm 10:9](#); [Ezekiel 1:10](#); [Daniel 7:1–4](#)).

The author of Revelation says that all Christians believe that Christ will defeat all the powers of evil. However, unlike the Old Testament hope, Christ will not come as a conquering Lion of military power but as the Lamb, who suffers and is sacrificed for the sins of his people ([Revelation 5:6](#)).

Litter

A large couch used for carrying officials ([Song of Solomon 3:7–10](#); [Isaiah 66:20](#)). It is also translated as "carriage" or "palanquin."

See Travel.

Little Owl

The little owl (*Athene noctua glaux*) is the smallest owl that hunts at night. It mostly eats insects but sometimes catches small birds. It is the most common owl in the Holy Land.

The little owl often lives in quiet places like ruins, rocks, thickets (bushy areas), and around tombs. Some people think it might be the owl mentioned in [Psalm 102:6](#).

Its call sounds like a person moaning or crying in pain. People in the past saw the little owl as wise, especially because it often sits still and stares into the distance. The ancient Greeks linked this owl with the goddess Athena.

Some Bible translations mention the little owl by name in the lists of unclean birds ([Leviticus 11:17](#); [Deuteronomy 14:16](#)).

See also Birds; Owl.

Liver

A large organ in the abdomen that performs many functions necessary for life. The writer of Proverbs knew how important the liver was for life when he wrote that an arrow wound to the liver would cause death ([Proverbs 7:23](#)). In the Bible, the liver is most often mentioned when describing animal sacrifices ([Exodus 29:13, 22](#); [Leviticus 3:4, 10, 15](#)).

In ancient Babylon, sheep liver was sometimes used for fortune-telling. Each tiny detail of the liver was examined for omens. Archaeologists have recovered bronze and baked-clay models of sheep livers. They date to the 16th century BC. Evidently this is the use of the liver made by the king of Babylon in [Ezekiel 21:21](#). This use of the sheep liver was popular until the Greeks. It rivaled astrology for many centuries.

Lizard

Small reptile with scaly skin, four legs, and a long tail. *See Animals.*

Lo-Ammi

Symbolic name, meaning “Not My People” ([Hos 1:9](#)), given by the prophet Hosea to his son. *See Ammi.*

Lo-debar

Another name for Debir, the Gadite city in [2 Samuel 9:4](#) and [Amos 6:13](#).

See Debir (Place) #2.

Lo-Ruhamah

Symbolic name, meaning “Not pitied” ([Hos 1:6–8](#)), given by the prophet Hosea to his daughter, indicating God’s rejection of Israel. *See Ruhamah.*

Loan

Money lent at interest. *See Money; Banker, Banking.*

Locusts

Various insects known especially for their swarming, mass migration, and tremendous destruction of vegetation. *See Animals.*

Lod

City on the coastal plain of Palestine. The modern city, called Ludd, is located 10 miles (16.1 kilometers) southeast of Tel Aviv. The name of the city first occurs in a list of Canaanite towns that goes back to 1465 BC, to the reign of the Egyptian pharaoh Thutmose III, who supplied the list. The founder of the city is said to have been Shemed, a Benjaminite ([1 Chr 8:12](#)). It is included in a list of places that were resettled by returning exiles from Babylon ([Ezr 2:33](#); [Neh 7:37](#)), and is included in the list of Benjaminite settlements ([Neh 11:35](#)). The

history of the city can be traced continuously from Maccabean times, through the Roman period, including the first and second Jewish wars against the Romans, to the Byzantine and Crusader periods, through to modern times.

In the NT era Jewish sources emphasize the importance of the city, at that time named Lydda. It had a large market and was noted for the raising of cattle. Textile, dyeing, and pottery industries flourished there. And it was the seat of a Sanhedrin; famous Talmudic scholars taught there. This, then, was the kind of bustling, flourishing community that existed when Peter visited the city and ministered to its Christians ([Acts 9:32–35](#)).

Log

A liquid measure mentioned only in [Leviticus 14](#). The log was equal to one-twelfth of a bath or 236.6 milliliters (one-half pint).

See Weights and Measures.

Logia

A term used for many of Jesus’s sayings. These sayings were collected and later employed by the gospel writers. *See Jesus Christ, Life and Teachings of.*

Logos

English transliteration of a Greek term for “word.” The term is significant because in John’s writings it refers to Jesus. The prologue of John’s Gospel ([Jn 1:1, 14](#)) and the beginning of 1 John ([1 Jn 1:1](#)) use logos to show how Jesus can be God and yet be an expression of God in the world. The divine Word took on human form and became a historical personage. Logos is also the title of Christ in the vision of his divine glory ([Rv 19:13](#)). Writers outside the NT, such as Philo of Alexandria, used the term but with a different meaning.

See also John, Gospel of; Word, Word of God.

Loins

A region of the body from the chest to the lower hip.

The King James Version uses the expression "out of his loins" refers to someone's descendants ([Genesis 35:11; 46:26; Exodus 1:5; 1 Kings 8:19](#)). The term "loins" in this context refers to the reproductive area of the male body. In most cases, it means physical features. Sometimes, the term "loins" refers to emotion, power, or strength (see [Nahum 2:1](#)).

In ancient times, Hebrew people and others in the Middle East would tie their long robes around their waists before walking long distances ([Exodus 12:11; 1 Kings 18:46; 2 Kings 9:1](#)). This made it easier to walk or run. In the New Testament, when someone is described as having their clothes tied around their waist, it means they were ready for action or battle ([Luke 12:35](#)). The Bible also uses this image as a symbol. When it talks about "girding the loins," it means to be prepared and in control of yourself ([Ephesians 6:14; 1 Peter 1:13](#)).

Lois

The grandmother of Timothy ([2 Timothy 1:5](#)). Her family, including Timothy's mother, Eunice, lived at Lystra ([Acts 16:1](#)). Lois was a committed Jew. She appears to have converted to Christianity during Paul's first missionary trip (chapter [14](#)). Paul comments that Timothy shared the faith of his grandmother and mother.

Longsuffering

The term "longsuffering" describes a person's ability to remain patient and endure difficulties for a long time without becoming angry or upset. The word appears four times in the Old Testament ([Exodus 34:6; Numbers 14:18; Psalm 86:15; Jeremiah 15:15](#)). The New Testament uses this word 13 times. Modern Bible translations often use words like "patience," "endurance," or "forbearance" instead.

The Bible most often uses this term to describe God's character ([Romans 2:4](#)). A holy God must punish sin. Yet his loving nature delays that punishment. God gives people time to turn away from their sins (repent) and come back to him ([1 Timothy 1:16; 1 Peter 3:20](#)). Longsuffering is also a Christian virtue, a "fruit of the Spirit" ([Galatians 5:22](#)). Christians should show this same kind of patience in how they treat one another.

Loom

Frame or machine for weaving. See Cloth and Cloth Manufacturing.

Lord

"Lord" in English is used to translate the Hebrew word *'adonai* or of the Greek *kurios*. The Hebrew YHWH is usually translated "Lord"; See Yahweh (YHWH).

God's rule and authority as Lord is based on his creation and ownership of everything and everyone ([Psalm 24:1-2](#)). The Bible emphasizes God's complete power over nature by calling him the Lord over:

- earthquakes, wind, fire ([1 Kings 19:10-14](#));
- stars ([Isaiah 40:26](#));
- beasts and sea monsters ([Job 40-41](#)); and
- primeval chaos ([Psalms 74:12-14; 89:8-10](#)).

The later prophets taught that God is Lord or King of history because he guides the actions of people and nations ([1 Kings 19:15-18; Isaiah 10:5-9; Amos 9:7](#)). They also said he is the Lord of universal morality ([Ez 25:32; Am 1:3-2:16](#)). But he is especially the Lord of Israel. His expressed will is their civil and religious law and requires complete obedience ([Exodus 20:2](#)).

For Israel, God's power was a comfort when they were oppressed. It also gave them hope for the future. They believed in a triumphant Day of the Lord that would right its wrongs, punish those who oppressed them, and restore its glory ([Isaiah 2:2-4, 11-12; 34:8; Ezekiel 30:1-5; Joel 2:31-3:1](#)).

In the Septuagint (the ancient Greek translation of the Old Testament), the usual word for "Lord/lord/master" is *kurios*. In the Greek New Testament, *kurios* is also used for:

- masters, husbands, and rulers ([Matthew 25:11](#); [Luke 14:21](#); [Acts 25:26](#); [1 Peter 3:6](#))
- God ([Matthew 11:25](#); [Hebrews 8:2](#)); and
- pagan gods ([1 Corinthians 8:5](#)).

When used for Jesus, *kurios* can mean:

- a common title of respect (like "sir," [Matthew 8:2](#); [15:25](#));
- a title expressing faith, reverence, and worship ([Matthew 3:3](#); [Luke 7:13](#); [Acts 5:14](#); [9:10](#); [1 Corinthians 6:13-14](#); [Hebrews 2:3](#); [James 5:7](#))

It appears in phrases like:

- "the Lord Jesus"
- "the Lord's Day"
- "the Lord's Table"
- "the Spirit of the Lord" (who is also "Lord," [2 Corinthians 3:17](#)),
- "in the Lord"
- "from the Lord"
- "light in the Lord"
- "boast in the Lord"

Sometimes it is not clear whether God or Christ is intended ([Acts 9:31](#); [2 Cor 8:21](#)). The title is attributed to Jesus himself in [John 13:13-14](#). In [John 20:28](#), Jesus accepts the title "My Lord and my God!"

In the first Christian sermon, Peter makes Jesus's lordship central to salvation ([Acts 2:21](#)). It seems that publicly saying "Jesus is Lord" was the main way to express Christian faith. It was also the basis for membership in the early church ([Acts 16:31](#); [Romans 10:9](#); [1 Corinthians 12:3](#); [Philippians 2:11](#)). However, this could become just a formal statement rather than sincere belief. That's why there are warnings in [Matthew 7:21](#) and [Luke 6:46](#).

From the beginning, calling Jesus "Lord" had deep meaning:

1. In common usage, "lord" reflected the slave system and implied the absolute power exercised by the master over the purchased slave. So Paul confidently explains the moral implications of Christian redemption ([1 Corinthians 6:19-20](#); [7:22-23](#)).
2. To Jewish minds, the title had royal and authoritative meanings related to the Messiah ([Luke 20:41-44](#)). This offended both Jews and Romans.
3. Politically, "Lord" was a title claimed by Caesar. So it is significant that Jesus is called "King of kings and Lord of lords" during the time of Domitian, when Caesar worship was required ([Revelation 17:14](#); [19:16](#)).

For Greek-speaking Jews living outside of Israel who were familiar with the Septuagint, and for gentiles who used the title "Lord" for their many gods, calling Jesus "Lord" was seen as blasphemy. This was especially offensive when it was linked to titles like "Son of God," as well as acts of prayer, praise, complete devotion, and hope ([1 Corinthians 8:5-6](#); [Philippians 2:9-11](#); [1 Thessalonians 4:14-17](#)). For all these reasons, showing deep respect to Jesus was not only spiritually important but also brought serious and immediate danger.

See also Christology; God, Being and Attributes of; God, Names of.

Lord of Hosts

Old Testament name for God found mostly in the prophets. The hosts are the heavenly powers and angels that act at the Lord's command. *See* God, Names of.

Lord's Prayer, the

Pattern for prayer Jesus gave his followers to use. There are two versions of the Lord's Prayer ([Mt 6:9-13](#); [Lk 11:2-4](#)). The former is included in the Sermon on the Mount; the latter is Jesus' response to a disciple's request that he teach them to pray. There are considerable differences between the two versions.

Some scholars devote a good deal of attention to the question of which is the earlier of the two. Generally speaking, they conclude that in most points Luke's is the earlier form. This is largely because it is shorter, and there is no reason why someone should leave out anything in a prayer as short as this, whereas it is easy to see why additions might be made. These scholars usually hold that in some of the wording Matthew is likely to have retained the earlier form.

This approach, however, does not take into account the fact that Jesus seems to have regarded the prayer as a pattern, not as a formula. In Matthew he introduces it with the words "Pray then like this." If the prayer was seriously meant as a model, it is unlikely that it would be recited only once. On the contrary, it is to be expected that Jesus would have used it on a number of occasions. And if he seriously meant people to pray "in this way" (and not invariably in these words), then variations in the wording are to be expected.

Some recent writers regard the whole prayer as eschatological—that is, concerned with the end of the world. They take the petition "Thy kingdom come" as central and understand all the other petitions to refer in one way or another to the coming kingdom. The prayer about hallowing the name is then seen as a prayer for the destruction of God's enemies who do not revere his holiness; the line about the bread becomes a petition for the messianic banquet; and so on. But this is to take the words in an unnatural sense. Christians are, of course, always living in the "last days," and there is no reason why they should not see an application of Jesus' words to the eschatological situation. It seems much more probable, however, that we should understand the prayer with reference to the help we need in our daily lives.

Our Father which art in heaven,

Hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come.

Thy will be done in earth,

as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our debts,

as we forgive our debtors.

And lead us not into temptation,

but deliver us from evil:

For thine is the kingdom,
and the power,
and the glory, for ever.
Amen.

The first person singular pronoun is not used anywhere in the prayer. We say, "Our Father, . . . give us. . ." This prayer is meant for a community. It may profitably be used by an individual, but it is not meant as an aid to private devotion. It is a prayer to be said by God's people; it is the prayer of the Christian family.

In Matthew the opening words are "Our Father in heaven," whereas Luke has simply "Father." Those who pray like this are members of a family, and they look to God as the head of the family, one who is bound to them by ties of love. Matthew's "in heaven" brings out something of his dignity, and this is seen also in the petition "Hallowed [Honored] be thy name" (identical in the two). In antiquity "the name" meant far more than it does to us. In some way it summed up the whole person. Thus this petition is more than a prayer that people will use the name of God reverently rather than blasphemously (though that is important and is included). It looks for people to have a reverent attitude to all that God stands for. They should have a proper humility before God, being ready to honor him as he is in all his holiness.

"Thy kingdom come" is the petition that most of all looks for the eschatological activity of God. Christians have always longed for the day when God will overthrow the kingdoms of this earth and when all will become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ ([Rv 11:15](#)). This is included in the meaning of the petition. But there is another sense in which the kingdom is a present reality, a kingdom that is now in human hearts and lives. This aspect of the kingdom is brought out in the words added in Matthew's version, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven" ([Mt 6:10](#)). The servant of God looks for the rule of God to become actual in more and more lives.

In the petition about bread Jesus is concerned with the material necessities of daily life. Jesus' followers are, it is true, not to be anxious about the things they need to eat and to wear ([Mt 6:25](#)). But Jesus also taught that they should constantly look to God for such needs to be supplied (vv [32-33](#)). The view that the messianic banquet is in mind does not reckon with the fact that the banquet is regarded as a feast, while it is bread, not some

festive food, that is mentioned here. The big problem in this petition is the meaning of the word usually translated "daily." It is an exceedingly rare word, and many scholars think that it was coined by Christians. Since it is impossible to establish meaning from the way it is used, discussions center on its derivation. It could mean any number of things: "daily," "for today," "for the coming day," "for tomorrow," or "necessary." The traditional understanding, "daily," seems most probable. But however we translate it, the prayer is for the simple and present necessities of life. Jesus was counseling his followers to pray for necessities, not luxuries, and for what is needed now, not a great store for many days to come. By confining the petition to present needs, Jesus taught a day-by-day dependence on God.

The petition about forgiveness differs slightly in the two accounts. In Matthew it is "Forgive us our debts," while Luke has "Forgive us our sins." Without question it is the forgiveness of sins that is in mind, but the Matthean form sees sin as an indebtedness. We owe it to God to live uprightly. He has provided all we need to do this. So when we sin, we become debtors. The sinner has failed to fulfill his obligations, what he "owes." Matthew goes on to say, "as we also have forgiven our debtors," and Luke, "for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us." The tense in Matthew indicates that the person praying is not only ready to forgive but has already forgiven those who have sinned against him; in Luke, that he habitually forgives. Further, he does so in the case of every debtor.

In neither form of the prayer is it implied that human forgiveness earns God's forgiveness. The NT makes it clear that God forgives on account of his mercy, shown in Christ's dying for us on the cross. Nothing we do can merit forgiveness. There is also the thought that those who seek forgiveness should show a forgiving spirit. How can we claim the forgiveness of our sins if we do not forgive others who sin against us?

There is dispute as to the precise meaning of the petition traditionally translated "lead us not into temptation." Some favor a rendering like that of the neb, "do not bring us to the test." The word usually understood as "temptation" does sometimes mean a proving or a testing. But it is the kind of testing that the evil one engages in, testing with a view to failure. It is thus the normal word to be used when temptation is in mind. If the whole prayer is to be understood eschatologically, then "do not bring us to the test" is no doubt the way this petition should

be taken. The great testing time that comes with the upsurge of evil in the last days is something from which every Christian naturally shrinks, and the prayer would give expression to this. But it is much more likely that the prayer refers to life here and now. Even so, it may mean "severe trial," and some scholars favor this. They think that Jesus was counseling his followers to pray for a quiet life in which they would not meet serious misfortune. But a prayer to be delivered from temptation is much more likely. Christians know their weakness and readiness to sin, so pray that they may be kept from the temptation to go astray. It is true that God does not tempt people ([Jas 1:13](#)). But it is also true that it is important for the believer to avoid evil. One should not see how close to sinning one can come without actually doing it, but one should keep as far away from it as possible (cf., e.g., [1 Cor 6:18; 10:14](#)).

Matthew adds, "but deliver us from evil" (as do some manuscripts of Luke). This is a further development of the prayer just offered. There is uncertainty as to whether the last word means "evil" generally or "the evil one." Either meaning is possible. Christians pray that they may not be tempted, and this leads naturally to the thought either that they may not become the prey of evil or that they may be free from the domination of the devil. It is the general thrust of Jesus' teaching that should decide the point, not the precise language used here.

This is where the prayer ends in Luke and in the oldest manuscripts of Matthew. Few would doubt that here is where the prayer ended in the teaching of our Lord. But many manuscripts, some of them fairly old, add the familiar words, "for thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory for ever." This is the kind of doxology that is often found in prayers in antiquity, both Jewish (cf. [1 Chr 29:11](#)) and Christian. The early Christians used the Lord's Prayer in worship services and doubtless found this a splendid way to end it. In time, what was so acceptable in worship found its way into some of the manuscripts. We may well continue to end the prayer in this way. It is good to remind ourselves that all ultimate sovereignty, power, and glory belong to God forever. But we should not see this as part of the prayer Jesus taught his followers to use.

See also Prayer; Sermon on the Mount; Worship.

Lord's Supper, the

The supper Jesus shared with his disciples a few hours before he was arrested and taken to his trial and death (thus often called "The Last Supper"); the ceremony of partaking of the bread and wine that Christians have come to call the Lord's Supper ([1 Cor 11:20](#)), the breaking of bread ([Acts 2:42, 46; 20:7](#)), Holy Communion (from the expression of [1 Cor 10:16](#)), the Eucharist (the Greek word for "thanksgiving," see [Mk 14:23](#)), or the Mass. The apostle Paul speaks of handing on what he had "received from the Lord" concerning the institution of this supper "on the night when he was betrayed." Like Luke, Paul gives the Lord's command to his disciples: "Do this in remembrance of me" ([1 Cor 11:24-25](#)). According to [Acts 2](#), the early Christians from the beginning of the life of the church met regularly for "the breaking of bread."

Preview

- The Accounts of the Institution
- The Time of the Institution
- Words and Actions of the Institution
- The Practice of the Early Church
- Paul's Teaching

The Accounts of the Institution

The institution of the Lord's Supper is recorded in [Matthew 26:26-30](#); [Mark 14:22-26](#); and [Luke 22:14-20](#). John's Gospel (ch [13](#)) tells of the Last Supper Jesus shared with his disciples, of his washing the disciples' feet and the teaching associated with that, but does not mention his institution of Communion. Many see the Lord's Supper reflected in the teaching of [John 6](#), following the miracle of the feeding of the 5,000 and Jesus' speaking of himself as "the bread of life," but this is open to question. [First Corinthians 11:23-26](#) gives Paul's version of the institution, which he speaks of as "receiving" and "delivering" to the Corinthian Christians.

In [Luke 22:17-18](#) Jesus is said to have passed the cup to the disciples with the words "Take this, and divide it among yourselves" before taking the bread and giving it to them. In most early manuscripts there is then a second cup after the giving of the bread. This difference of Luke from the other Gospels and from Paul has been variously explained, but whether there are two cups of wine at the supper or a different order in the giving of the bread and the wine, it makes no essential

difference to the fact and the meaning of the institution.

The Time of the Institution

All of the narratives—the three Gospels and [1 Corinthians](#)—speak of the Last Supper when the Eucharist was instituted as taking place a few hours before Jesus' arrest. All four Gospels tell, in this context, of Jesus' words to his disciples, about Judas's betrayal, and about Jesus telling Peter that he would deny his Master. Matthew ([Mt 26:17-20](#)), Mark ([Mk 14:12-17](#)), and Luke ([Lk 22:7-14](#)) all say clearly that this Last Supper was prepared by the disciples and kept by Jesus with them as a Passover meal. John speaks of it as happening "before the feast of the Passover" and then says that at the time of the trial of Jesus before Pilate the Jewish leaders "did not enter the praetorium, so that they might not be defiled, but might eat the passover" ([Jn 13:1; 18:28](#), rsv).

Various explanations of this difference between John and the other Gospels have been suggested, such as that different groups of the Jews kept the Passover at different times, that the meal in the upper room was not strictly a Passover but a fellowship meal at the Passover season, or that Jesus deliberately chose for his own special reasons to celebrate the Passover before the normal time. [Luke 22:15](#) gives his words, "I have earnestly desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer" (rsv). However the differences between the Gospels may be explained, and whenever the gathering around the table took place, it is clear that the Last Supper had the significance of a Passover meal.

Thus, there is an inevitable similarity between the celebration of the Passover as a feast of the old covenant and the Lord's Supper as a feast of the new. The former looks back with thankful remembrance to the people's redemption and liberation from Egypt by the act of God, associated with the sacrifice of the Passover lamb. The latter looks back with thankful remembrance to redemption by the act of God through the sacrifice of Christ. The apostle Paul links the two: "Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed" ([1Cor 5:7](#), niv).

Words and Actions of the Institution

The association of the Last Supper with the Passover points to the importance of the OT background for our understanding of the meaning of the Lord's Supper. This OT background is equally

important in understanding the words and actions of Jesus in the upper room.

"This is my body."

The actions of Jesus in taking the bread are described similarly in Matthew ([Mt 26:26](#)), Mark ([Mk 14:22](#)), Luke ([Lk 22:19](#)), and 1 Corinthians ([1 Cor 11:23-24](#)). Jesus took the bread, gave thanks to God ("blessing" has the same meaning in the biblical context), and broke it. It is noteworthy that the same three actions are described in the records of the feeding of the 5,000 and of the 4,000 ([Mk 6:41; 8:6](#)). What he said, according to all four accounts of the Last Supper, was "This is my body." Christians in Catholic, Orthodox, and various Protestant traditions have differed in their understanding of the precise meaning of those words. What is clear is that in the taking of the bread there is the realization of Jesus' giving himself, his body to be broken on the cross, his life offered that we, in and through him, might have life. [First Corinthians 11:24](#) gives the words as "This is my body which is for you," and some early manuscripts have "broken for you."

"Do this in remembrance of me."

This specific instruction is found only in [Luke 22:19](#) and [1 Corinthians 11:24](#). Some have argued that the absence of the words in the other Gospel records indicates that it was not the explicit intention of the Lord that what he did at the Last Supper was to be repeated as a Christian sacrament. Yet all the Gospels were written when the breaking of bread had been a regular practice in the life of the church for years. Matthew and Mark, therefore, may have thought it unnecessary to express Jesus' intention with those words. They were taken for granted.

It must also be said that these words have been interpreted differently in various Christian traditions. Many Protestant Christians have understood them to mean that in the Holy Communion we are to recall with great thankfulness that Christ loved us and gave himself to die for us. In the Roman Catholic Church the word "remembrance" has been understood as a memorial before God, a representing of the sacrifice of Christ before the Father. "This do" has been interpreted as meaning "offer this," and even in the second century Christian writers spoke of the Eucharist as a "sacrifice." Protestant Christians generally have felt the danger of this way of speaking; it can detract from, or even deny, the

biblical understanding of the sacrifice of Christ having been offered once and for all, sufficiently atoning for the sins of the world (cf. [Heb 7:27; 9:12](#)). It must be said, however, that many Roman Catholic statements today stress the sufficiency and completeness of Christ's sacrifice on the cross; and many Protestant scholars, while not wishing to introduce a sacrificial understanding of the Lord's Supper, stress that "remembrance" is more than simply calling to mind a past action. In biblical thinking "remembrance" often involves a realization and appropriation in the present of what has been done or what has proved true in the past (see [Pss 98:3; 106:45; 112:6; Eccl 12:1; Is 57:11](#)).

"This is my blood of the [new] covenant."

Jesus took the cup of wine, gave thanks, and handed it to his disciples for them all to drink. In essence the four accounts of the institution agree. Matthew ([Mt 26:28](#)) and Mark ([Mk 14:24](#)) give the words of Jesus as "This is my blood of the [new] covenant." [Luke 22:20](#) has "This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood," and [1 Corinthians 11:25](#) is similar to this. This refers back to the ritual of making a covenant with the offering of sacrifice, as the covenant between God and Israel after the exodus ([Ex 24:1-8](#)). Implied also is that the prophetic hope of the new covenant ([Jer 31:31-34](#)) was fulfilled in Jesus, as [Hebrews 8-9](#) describes.

"Poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins."

The meaning of the death of Jesus as a sacrifice is linked with the understanding of the Passover and of the covenant. It is also linked with what [Isaiah 53](#) says of the suffering Servant making himself "an offering for sin" ([Is 53:10](#)). [Luke 22:37](#) includes among the words of Jesus in the upper room the statement, "This scripture must be fulfilled in me, 'And he was reckoned with transgressors.' " That verse, [Isaiah 53:12](#), also says, "he poured out his soul to death" and "he bore the sin of many." [Mark 14:24](#) appears to allude to these Scriptures when Jesus speaks of his blood "poured out for many," and [Matthew 26:28](#) adds "for the forgiveness of sins."

Expectation for the Future

All four accounts of the Last Supper associate, though in different ways, an expectation for the future with the institution of the Eucharist. In [Mark](#)

[14:25](#) it comes in the words of Jesus, “Truly, I say to you, I shall not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God” (rsv). In [Matthew 26:29](#) that future drinking of the fruit of the vine is said to be “with you in my Father’s kingdom.” In [Luke 22:18](#) there are similar words, and two verses earlier the statement about fulfilling the Passover “in the kingdom of God.” All of these can be understood as the ultimate realization of another hope that both OT and later Jewish apocalyptic writings set forward: the messianic banquet, the feast on the mountain of the Lord of which [Isaiah 25:6](#) speaks. In [1 Corinthians 11:26](#) that future hope is quite explicitly that of Christ’s second coming; for, says the apostle, “As often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes” (rsv).

The Practice of the Early Church

In [Acts 2:42](#), after the record of what happened at Pentecost, it says “they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers” (rsv). Further, “day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they partook of food with glad and generous hearts” ([Acts 2:46](#), rsv). Two questions are raised about these words and the practice that lay behind them. Do they simply mean that the Christians shared fellowship meals together? [Acts 2:46](#) seems to speak of breaking bread and partaking of food as two separate actions. Moreover, [Acts 20:7](#) in speaking of Christians at Troas “on the first day of the week . . . gathered together to break bread” seems clearly to allude to a Christian service and not just a meal. From [1 Corinthians 10](#) and perhaps from the reference to “love feasts” in [Jude 12](#), we may reasonably deduce that a meal in Christian fellowship and the celebration of the Lord’s Supper often took place together. A second question is whether the earliest “breaking of bread,” as in the Jerusalem church, may have been a different rite from that with the bread and wine, the former recalling the fellowship of the disciples with the risen Lord, the latter especially recalling his sacrificial death. There is no direct evidence to support such a view. The Lord’s Supper to which the Gospels bear witness involved the breaking of bread and the sharing of the cup in remembrance of the blood of Christ “poured out for many.” We may assume, too, that the tradition that the apostle Paul received, followed, and passed on to others went back to his earliest years as a Christian and so involved the breaking of the bread and the sharing

of the cup in remembrance of Christ, and thus proclaiming the Lord’s death until his return.

Paul’s Teaching

In Paul’s teaching, as in the Gospels, the Lord’s Supper clearly involves the backward look in thankful remembrance for the sacrifice of Christ offered once for all for the sins of the world, the realization of the Lord being with his people in the present, and the look forward in hope. Other aspects of teaching relating to the Eucharist are brought out in [1 Corinthians 10-11](#). The teaching arises from practical aspects of the situation in the Corinthian church; the need to be aware of the danger of turning back in any way to the worship of idols; and the potential divisions in the Christian fellowship, including that between rich and poor.

Fellowship with Christ

To partake of the bread and to drink of the cup is spoken of as having part with Christ, as sharing in sacrificial meals would mean partaking at “the table of demons” ([1 Cor 10:21](#)). “The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?” (v 16, rsv). “Participation” is the translation of the Greek word koinonia, so often rendered “fellowship” in NT passages. When the Lord’s Supper was celebrated, there must often have been a recalling not only of the Last Supper on the night before Jesus died, but also of his presence with his disciples on the first Easter and his making himself known to them in the breaking of the bread ([Lk 24:30-35](#)). They continued to experience that fellowship with him.

Feeding on Christ

Of the two Christian sacraments, baptism has a once-for-all nature, while Holy Communion is repeated. The life of Christ has been offered for sins once for all on the cross, and we find life in turning to him—baptism signifies that. At the same time that life is also offered to us constantly for the nourishing of our spiritual lives day by day—of this regular feeding on Christ the Eucharist speaks. [First Corinthians 10:3-4](#) speaks of “supernatural food” and “supernatural drink” and finds in the events at the sea and in the wilderness in the days of Moses foreshadowings of what Christians find in Christ. Christ said, “I am the bread of life,” and “My flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed”; thus what we have in John’s Gospel ([Jn 6:35, 55](#),

rsv) is close to what Paul implies about the Lord's Supper expressing the truth of Christians spiritually feeding on Christ.

Lot

Abraham's nephew and the ancestor of both the Moabites and the Ammonites. Like Abraham, he was born in Ur. After Lot's father died, his grandfather Terah took care of him. He traveled with Terah and his uncle Abram to Haran ([Genesis 11:27–32](#)). When Terah died, Lot joined Abram on the journey to Canaan and later to Egypt before returning to Canaan.

By the time they returned, Lot and Abram had too many animals to live in the same area. Abram was kind and let Lot choose first where he wanted to live. Lot chose the Jordan Valley because it had good land for growing plants. The valley was beautiful like the "garden of the LORD" before God's judgment came upon the region ([Genesis 13:10](#)). Lot moved to the city of Sodom and began to take part in the evil things happening there.

While Lot lived in Sodom, four kings from Mesopotamia defeated the kings of five nearby towns, including Sodom. They likely ruled small city-states. The kings captured Lot, his family, and his possessions. Upon hearing this, Abram led a group to rescue Lot. He defeated the invading kings and recovered the captives and loot at Hobah, north of Damascus ([Genesis 14](#)).

Later, two angels visited Lot in Sodom to urge him to leave the city before its destruction. Sodom's evil behavior was clear when the townspeople tried to assault the visitors. When Lot offered to let the townspeople harm his daughters instead, it showed that living among evil people had changed him. Lot did not want to leave Sodom at first. His future sons-in-law refused to come with him. His wife looked back at the city as they were leaving, and God turned her into a pillar of salt ([Genesis 19](#)).

What happened next is very troubling. Lot's daughters thought they would never find husbands. So, they got their father drunk and slept with him. Each daughter had a son. One son was named Moab, and the other was named Ben-Ammi. These sons grew up to start two different groups of people, the Moabites and the Ammonites. These groups later became enemies of Israel ([Genesis 19:30–38](#)).

Even though Lot made many mistakes, the New Testament calls him a "righteous man" ([2 Peter 2:7–9](#)). This means that because Lot trusted in God, God accepted him. Some people question whether Lot's story and the destruction of Sodom really happened. But Jesus himself said these events were true ([Luke 17:28–29](#)).

See also Sodom and Gomorrah.

Lotan

Seir's eldest son ([Gn 36:20](#)) and a chief of the native Horite inhabitants of Edom (vv [22](#), [29](#)). Lotan had two sons, Hori and Homam ([1 Chr 1:38–39](#)).

Lots, Casting of

A practice common in the Old Testament, but it became less common in the New Testament before Pentecost. After Pentecost, the Bible does not mention this practice.

Uses of Casting Lots

People used lots for many reasons:

1. Choosing the scapegoat ([Leviticus 16:8–10](#))
2. Dividing land among tribes ([Numbers 26:55–56](#); [Joshua 14:2](#); [Judges 1:3](#))
3. Deciding who should move or go to war ([Judges 20:9](#); [Nehemiah 11:1](#))
4. Assigning duties to priests ([1 Chronicles 24:5–19](#); [Nehemiah 10:34](#))
5. Finding out who did something wrong ([Joshua 7:14–18](#); compare [Proverbs 18:18](#))

People used lots for important decisions when wisdom or the Bible did not give enough guidance. Casting lots was fair and unbiased. People believed God directed the lots ([Proverbs 16:33](#)).

The Bible does not explain exactly how people cast lots. The method seemed to change based on the situation ([Leviticus 16:8](#); [Numbers 26:55–56](#); [Judges 20:9](#)).

God never said casting lots was wrong. Sometimes, he even told people to do it ([Leviticus 16:8](#); [Proverbs 18:18](#); [Isaiah 34:17](#)). [Proverbs 16:33](#) says

God decides the result of the lot. So, people thought the lot showed God's will.

In the New Testament, soldiers cast lots for Jesus's clothes ([Matthew 27:35](#)). The disciples used lots to choose Matthias as a new apostle to replace Judas ([Acts 1:26](#)).

After the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost, the Bible does not mention casting lots anymore. Some experts think the church did not need lots because the Holy Spirit guided their decisions.

See also Urim and Thummim.

Lotus Bush, Lotus Tree

A lotus bush or tree (*Zizyphus lotus*) is a shrub or low tree that grows to a height of about 1.5 meters (5 feet). It has smooth, zigzag branches that are whitish in color. The "lotus plants" in [Job 40:21–22](#) may refer to the lotus bush.

Other scholars believe that the plants in Job refer to large-leaved trees such as the plane tree, *Platanus orientalis*, or the oleander, *Nerium oleander*. This idea is based on the belief that the animal described in [Job 40](#) is the hippopotamus. These scholars think it is unlikely that a hippopotamus would live under a lotus bush or even be found in places where this shrub grows. They consider the plane tree or the oleander to be more likely choices.

Love

Prominent virtue in Christian theology and ethics. It is therefore important to understand clearly this exceedingly important term.

In the Old Testament

Sexual love (*ahabah* and *dod*) is spoken of in the stories of Adam and Eve and of Jacob and Rachel, as well as in the Song of Songs. A higher form of love, involving loyalty, steadfastness, and kindness, is expressed by the Hebrew word *hesed*, which is sometimes rendered "loyalty" ([2 Sm 22:26](#), rsv), but more often "steadfast love" or "loving-kindness."

The connotation of this significant word is clear in [Hosea 2:19–20](#): "I will make you my wife forever, showing you righteousness and justice, unfailing love and compassion. I will be faithful to you and make you mine, and you will finally know me as

Lord" (nlt); in [Job 6:14–15](#), where kindness is compared with treachery; and in [1 Samuel 20:8](#), which speaks of covenanted kindness. This unshakable, steadfast love of God is contrasted with the unpredictable, capricious moods of heathen deities. *Hesed* is not an emotional response to beauty, merit, or kindness but rather a moral attitude dedicated to another's good, whether or not that other is lovable, worthy, or responsive (see [Dt 7:7–9](#)).

This enduring loyalty, rooted in an unwavering purpose of good, could be stern, determined to discipline a wayward people, as several prophets warned. But God's love does not change. Through exile and failure it persisted with infinite patience, neither condoning evil nor abandoning the evildoers. It has within it kindness, tenderness, and compassion ([Pss 86:15](#); [103:1–18](#); [136](#); [Hos 11:1–4](#)), but its chief characteristic is an accepted moral obligation for another's welfare.

Nevertheless, response was expected. The Law enjoined wholehearted love and gratitude for God's choosing and redeeming of Israel ([Dt 6:20–25](#)). This was to be shown in worship and especially in humane treatment of the poor, the defenseless, the resident alien, slaves, widows, and all suffering oppression and cruelty. Hosea similarly expected steadfast love among people to result from the steadfast love of God toward people ([Hos 6:6](#); [7:1–7](#); [10:12–13](#)).

Love for God and for "your neighbor as yourself" ([Lv 19:18](#)) are thus linked in Israel's law and prophecy. While much love of another kind lies within the OT, these are the major points: God's loving initiative, the moral quality of love, and the close relationship between love for God with loving others.

In the New Testament

Of the Greek words available to describe love, *eros* (sexual love) does not occur in the NT. *Phileo*, connoting natural affection, occurs some 25 times, with *philadelphia* (brotherly love) five times, and *philia* (friendship) only in [James 4:4](#). *Storge*, connoting natural affection between relatives, appears occasionally in compounds. By far the most frequent word is *agape*, generally assumed to mean moral goodwill that proceeds from esteem, principle, or duty rather than attraction of charm. *Agape* is very similar in meaning to *hesed* in that both denote dedication. *Agape* specifically means to love the undeserving, despite disappointment and rejection. The difference between *agapao* and

phileo is difficult to sustain in all passages. Agape is especially appropriate for divine love. Agape was long believed to be a Christian coinage, but pagan occurrences have recently been claimed. The verb agapao was frequent in the Greek OT. Though agape has more to do with moral principle than with inclination or liking, it never means the cold religious kindness shown from duty alone, as scriptural examples abundantly prove.

In the Synoptic Gospels

In a sinful and suffering world, Jesus' divine love showed itself supremely in compassion and healing for the distressed and in redemptive concern for the alienated and the self-despairing. Hence, the kingdom Christ proclaimed offered good news to the poor, captives, blind, and oppressed ([Mt 11:2–5](#); [Lk 4:18](#)), while the attitude of Jesus toward those ostracized, despised, or grieving over sin in some far country of the soul assured them of forgiveness and a welcome return to the Father's house ([Lk 15](#)). Such forgiveness was free, its only precondition being readiness to receive it in repentance and faith.

Moreover, the good news of divine love does impose its own obligation: to love God and to love others as God does ([Mt 5:44–48](#)). The first and greatest commandment in God's law is "You shall love the Lord your God. . . . And a second is like it, You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets" ([Mt 22:35–40](#), rsv; cf. [Lv 19:18](#); [Dt 6:5](#)).

The first commandment is not identical with, lost in, or only fulfilled through the second; it is separate and primary. What Jesus meant by loving God is indicated by his own habits of public worship, private prayer, and absolute obedience. Love for one's neighbor is nowhere defined but everywhere illustrated. In the parable of the good Samaritan, "neighbor" is shown to mean anyone near enough to help, and love involves whatever service the neighbor's situation demands. The parable of the sheep and goats shows love feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and the imprisoned. In the untiring example of Jesus, love heals, teaches, adapts instruction to the hearers by parable and symbolic language, defends those criticized or despised, pronounces forgiveness, comforts the bereaved, befriends the lonely. We are to love others as he has loved us and as we love ourselves. Such imaginative transfer of self-love does good without expecting return, never returns ill treatment, ensures unfailing

courtesy even to the lowliest, sustains thoughtful understanding that tempers judgment.

To Jesus, the outstanding sin was lovelessness, the willful omission of any possible good, passing by on the other side while others suffer, ignoring the destitute at one's gate, withholding forgiveness. Lovelessness was made worse by self-righteousness, censoriousness, the religious insensitivity that ignores another's distress to preserve some petty ritual regulation. In the end, obedience to or neglect of the law of love will determine everyone's eternal destiny ([Mt 25:31–46](#)).

In the Writings of Paul

The apostolic church quickly grasped the revolutionary principle that love is enough. Paul's declaration that love fulfills the whole law is almost a quotation from Jesus. His exposition of various commandments against adultery, killing, stealing, and coveting is summarized in loving, because love can do no wrong to a neighbor ([Rom 13:8–10](#)). [Ephesians 4:25–5:2](#) makes the same point another way: all bitterness, anger, lying, stealing, slander, and malice are to be replaced by tenderness, forgiveness, and kindness.

Love is, for Paul, "the law of Christ," supreme and sufficient ([Gal 5:14](#); [6:2](#)), and Paul neatly defines what alone "avails" in Christianity as "faith working through love" ([5:6](#)). He insists that the supreme manifestation of the Spirit that Christians should covet is "the more excellent way" of love ([1 Cor 12:27–13:13](#); cf. [Rom 5:5](#); [Gal 5:22](#)). Here, too, he contrasts love with five other expressions of religious zeal much prized at Corinth in order to show that each is profitless without love ([1 Cor 13:1–3](#)). He ends the chapter by comparing love with faith and hope, the other enduring elements of religious experience, and declares love to be the greatest.

Paul's description of love in action includes liberality, acts of mercy, and hospitality; avoidance of revenge; sympathy; rejoicing with others; sharing of weakness, shame, or need; restoring, supporting, and edifying others, giving them all honor, kindness, forgiveness, encouragement; restraining criticism, even of the divisive, overscrupulous "weaker brother"—the list is almost endless. More generally, love is revealed as a quality of activity, of thinking, and of suffering ([1 Cor 13:4–8](#)). In brief, love does no harm and omits no good; it is God's law.

According to Paul, God showed his love for us in that Christ died for us. Because of his great love, he made us alive in Christ; in that love we live, by it we conquer, and from it nothing shall separate us ([Rom 5:8; 8:32–39](#); [2 Cor 13:14](#); [Eph 2:4](#); [2 Thes 2:16](#); [Ti 3:4–5](#)). Our love reflects the love first “poured into our hearts” ([Rom 5:5](#)), and it is directed toward Christ ([1 Cor 7; 16:22](#); [Eph 6:24](#)) and toward others, whom we love for his sake.

In the Writings of John

What John later recalled, and reflected upon, forms the crown of biblical teaching about love. For John, love was the foundation of all that had happened—“God so loved the world” ([Jn 3:16; 16:27; 17:23](#)). This is how we know love at all: Christ laid down his life for us ([1 Jn 3:16](#)). The mutual love of Father, Son, and disciples must be the fundamental fact in Christianity because God himself is love ([4:8, 16](#)).

We know this by the Incarnation and by the cross ([1 Jn 4:9–10](#)). Thus we know and believe the love God has for us, and that love itself is divine (“of God”). It follows that “he who loves is born of God.” “He who does not love does not know God.” Such a person “is in the darkness,” “is not of God,” and “remains in death.” No one has ever seen God; nevertheless “if we love, . . . God abides in us” and we in God.

God’s love is thus prior and original; if we love at all, it is “because he first loved.” Our love is directed first toward God, and John is exceedingly searching in his tests of that Godward love. It demands that we “love not the world,” that we “keep his word [and] his commandments,” and that we love our Christian brothers and sisters. This commandment we received from Christ, “that he who loves God should love his brother also,” for “if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.” Twelve times John stressed the duty of mutual loyalty and love. Indeed, if one closes his heart against his brother or sister, “how does God’s love abide in him?”

This emphasis upon the mutual love of Christians has been held a serious limitation of the love Jesus required. “Your brother” appears to have supplanted “your neighbor.” In this respect the commandment given in the upper room ([Jn 13:34](#)) is “new” compared with that in [Matthew 22:39](#) (citing [Lv 19:18](#)), and the circumstances explain why. The night on which Jesus was betrayed was shadowed by the surrounding world’s hostility, the imminent crucifixion, and the defection of Judas. All the future depended upon the mutual loyalty of the

11 disciples, standing together under social pressure. By the time of John’s letter, new defections had rent the church. A perversion of the gospel called Gnosticism, essentially intellectualist, proud, “giving no heed to love” (Ignatius), had drawn away leaders and adherents ([1 Jn 2:19, 26](#)). Once again mutual loyalty was all-important, and John wrote expressly to consolidate and maintain the apostolic fellowship ([1 Jn 1:3](#)).

However, love for one’s fellow Christians does not exclude, but instead leads on to, a wider love (cf. [2 Pt 1:7](#)). John insists that God loved the whole world ([Jn 3:16; 1 Jn 2:2; 4:14](#)). Moreover, if love fails within the Christian fellowship, it certainly will not flourish beyond it but evaporate in mere words ([1 Jn 3:18](#)).

In countering the loveless conceit of Gnostic Christianity, John’s concern was with the basic commandment of love to God and people as at once the criterion and the consummation of true Christian life. He does not, therefore, detail the many-sided expressions of love. For description of love in action, his mind recalls Christ’s words about “keeping commandments” and “laying down life” in sacrifice ([Jn 15:10, 13; 1 Jn 3:16](#)), and he mentioned especially love’s noticing a brother’s need, and so sharing this world’s goods (v [17](#)). Terse as these expressions are, they contain the heart of Christian love. John’s forthright realism in testing all religious claims ensures that for him love could be no vague sentimentalism.

The Christian ideal can only be socially fulfilled within a disciple band, a divine kingdom, the Father’s family, the Christian fellowship. In Scripture, love is no abstract idea, conceived to provide a self-explanatory, self-motivating “norm” to resolve the problem in every moral situation. It is rooted in the divine nature, expressed in the coming and death of Christ, experienced in salvation, and so kindled within the saved. Thus it is central, essential, and indispensable to Christianity. For God is love.

See also God, Being and Attributes of; Grace; Mercy; Wrath of God.

Lubim

KJV form of Libyan, an inhabitant of Libya, in [2 Chronicles 12:3, 16:8](#), and [Nahum 3:9](#). See Libya, Libyans.

Lucas

KJV spelling of Luke in [Philemon 1:24](#). See Luke (Person).

Lucifer

A name or title from a Latin word meaning “light bearer.” This name was originally used to describe the planet Venus, which appears as a bright light in both evening and morning skies. Venus is the brightest object we can see in the sky after the sun and moon. Some people have also connected this name with the crescent moon or the planet Jupiter.

The Latin word *lucifer* comes from a Hebrew word found in [Isaiah 14:12](#): “How you have fallen from heaven, O day star, son of the dawn! You have been cut down to the ground, O destroyer of nations!” The Hebrew word means the “shining one.” It has similar words in Akkadian, Ugaritic, and Arabic. The Septuagint, Targum, and Vulgate translate it as “morning star.” This is appropriate, given the corresponding “son of the dawn.”

The Hebrew word was likely never meant to be a name. However, people began using it as a name for Satan when they interpreted this verse from Isaiah as referring to him. Two early Christian teachers, Tertullian and Origen, were among the first to make this connection. Later, the name Lucifer became even more commonly used for Satan after it appeared in John Milton’s famous poem *Paradise Lost*.

The event recorded in [Isaiah 14:12](#) may be an example of a story that was well-known when Isaiah was written. This was an ancient Canaanite story about the morning star, a being who tried to climb above the clouds to a special mountain. This mountain was where the gods were believed to meet in the far north. The morning star wanted to become the highest god and rule over everything. But his plan failed, and he was thrown down into the world of the dead.

Isaiah used this story to make a point about the king of Babylon, who is the main subject of chapters [13](#) and [14](#). Like the morning star in the story, the king of Babylon was very proud and wanted to be like a god. In [Isaiah 14:3–4](#), God promises to free his people from the cruel rule of Babylon. The people would then sing a song making fun of the king. Though the king tried to make himself great, he would be brought down. He and his children would disappear from the earth. While the Hebrew

people did not have myths in the same way other cultures did, they sometimes adapted stories from surrounding cultures to teach spiritual lessons.

Many believe that the expression in [Isaiah 14:12](#), along with its surrounding context, refers to Satan. They point to similarities with passages in [Luke 10:18](#) and [Revelation 12:7–10](#) as supporting this view. While these New Testament passages do talk about Satan’s fall from heaven, the passage in Isaiah is actually about the king of Babylon’s defeat.

However, while the New Testament does describe Satan’s fall, the context of the Isaiah passage refers to the defeated king of Babylon. This king had sought to place himself above God, and as a result, he is described as having fallen from heaven. His downfall is shown as certain to happen. Although Satan’s defeat is certain, he continues to oppose God’s people until the final judgment described in [Revelation 12–20](#). Then his fate will be determined, and his actions will come to an end. So, [Isaiah 14:12](#) is not speaking of Satan but rather of the proud king of Babylon, who will soon be humiliated.

See also Satan.

Lucius

1. A man from Cyrene (a city in North Africa) who is listed among the prophets and teachers in Antioch ([Acts 13:1](#)). He may have been among the Jewish Christians from Cyprus and Cyrene. These were the men who preached to the Gentiles in Antioch in the face of persecution ([11:19–21](#)). People have tried to identify him as Luke, the author of Acts, or as the Lucius mentioned in [Romans 16:21](#). But these attempts have been unsuccessful.

2. A Jewish Christian (compare [Romans 9:3](#)). He was one of the companions of the apostle Paul who sent greetings to those in Rome ([16:21](#)). The fact that this Lucius was Jewish makes it doubtful that he could be the same person as Luke, who wrote the Gospel of Luke and Acts. An early Christian writer named Origen suggested they were the same person. But Luke was most likely a gentile (non-Jewish), as shown in [Colossians 4:12-14](#).

Lud, Ludim, Ludites

Names occurring in the table of nations in [Genesis 10](#). Ludim is listed as the first son of Mizraim, and Lud is listed as the fourth son of Shem. On the basis of this, it is probably better to consider them as having different ethnic origins. Some, however, have suggested that both names refer to a people of Asia Minor, the Lydians, who are mentioned on Ashurbanipal's inscriptions as *Luddu*. There is little question that Lud, at least, is to be associated with Lydia. Josephus makes this identification (*Antiquities* 1.6.4.). In [Isaiah 66:19](#), it is listed among other nations of Asia Minor.

Lud is often mentioned in contexts that suggest the men were well known as good soldiers. According to [Jeremiah 46:9](#), they fought with the Egyptians against the Babylonians at the battle of Carchemish in 605 BC. In the lament over Tyre in [Ezekiel 27:10](#), they are listed among others who were mercenaries in the army of Tyre. Perhaps [Ezekiel 30:5](#) is another case of Lydians serving as mercenaries—this time in the Egyptian army. Such military aid to Egypt goes back to the Assyrian period when Gyges sent military aid to Psammetichus of Egypt against the Assyrians.

See also Lydia (Place).

Luhith

Moabite city mentioned in connection with the flight of the Moabites to Zoar ([Is 15:5](#)). Since it was also listed with Horonaim, it was perhaps situated between these two cities in the southeastern area around the Dead Sea.

Luke (Person)

A close friend and helper of the apostle Paul. He wrote the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts.

If we accept Luke, the friend of Paul, as the author of Luke-Acts, we can learn much about him from this two-part work. The introduction to the Gospel shows that Luke was not an eyewitness or someone who directly followed Jesus during his life. He explains that he did thorough research and wrote an organized account of Jesus's life.

What Makes Luke's Gospel Unique?

Luke wrote about some things that the other Gospel writers did not include in their books. One special thing about Luke's writing is that he wrote two connected books: the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts. Together, these books show how God's message spread from the Jewish people to people all over the world. This fulfilled what the prophet Isaiah had said would happen long ago.

Luke was especially interested in showing that God's message was for everyone, not just the Jewish people ([Luke 2:14; 24:47](#)). This is often referred to as Luke's universalism. In his Gospel, Luke often wrote about:

- Individual people and their stories
- People who were rejected by society
- Women and children
- Rich and poor people and their relationships
- The importance of prayer
- The work of God's Holy Spirit

These choices in what Luke wrote about help us understand what kind of person he was and how he understood the Christian faith. His writing is often filled with joy and praise to God.

What Do We Learn About Luke from the Book of Acts?

In the book of Acts, there are several sections where the author uses the word "we" instead of "he" or "they." This suggests that the author was there during these events. If Luke wrote Acts, as most early Christians believed, then we can trace his travels with Paul:

- First, Luke met Paul in the city of Philippi ([Acts 16:10-17](#)). Some people think Philippi might have been Luke's hometown.
- Later, when Paul came back to Philippi, Luke joined him again ([Acts 20:5-15](#)).
- Luke then traveled with Paul on his way to Jerusalem and stayed with Philip at Caesarea ([Acts 21:1-18](#)).
- Then, after Paul's two-year imprisonment in Caesarea, Luke sailed with him to Rome ([Acts 27:1-28:16](#)).

What Do We Learn About Luke from Paul's Letters?

We can learn more about Luke from Paul's letters ([Colossians 4:14](#); [2 Timothy 4:11](#); [Philemon 1:24](#)). [Colossians 4:11](#) and [14](#) seem to indicate that Luke was a gentile (non-Jewish) and a doctor. Luke's interest in healing and medical details supports the idea that he was a doctor. For example, he carefully describes several times when Jesus healed people:

- A woman with a high fever ([Luke 4:38](#))
- A man with a skin disease ([Luke 5:12](#))
- A woman who had been bleeding for many years ([Luke 8:43](#))

What Did Early Christian Writers Say About Luke?

Early Christian writers from the first few centuries also tell us more about Luke. They say he was a doctor who lived in the city of Antioch. According to these writers, Luke wrote his Gospel while in Achaia (a region in Greece) and lived to be 84 years old.

Luke, Gospel of

Third book of the NT; also the third of the synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke).

Preview

- Author

- Date, Origin, and Destination
- Background
- Purpose and Theological Teaching
- Content

Author

Tradition attributes the authorship of the Gospel to the esteemed companion of Paul, Luke the physician ([Col 4:14](#)). The Gospel does not identify its author by name, but he is apparently well known in the company of early believers. He had obviously been gathering information for his project for some time. In both Luke and Acts the recipient is identified as Theophilus.

The internal testimony of Acts for Lucan authorship must also be weighed, since there is a close relationship between the two books. In three extensive "we" passages the author reports his presence ([Acts 16:10-17](#); [20:5-21:18](#); [27:1-28:16](#)). These appear to be excerpts from a travel diary; the last of them places the author in Rome with the apostle Paul. We can, by the process of elimination, virtually establish Luke as the author.

Date, Origin, and Destination

The dating of Luke is debatable. Some argue for a date after AD 70, but this robs [Luke 21:20](#) of its predictive value. Others suggest a date prior to the death of Paul (AD 64). The latter would readily account for Acts concluding with his ministry in Rome while in prison.

The Gospel may have been written in Rome, but this is by no means certain. Asia Minor and Greece have also been suggested as possibilities. The *Monarchian Prologue to Luke* promotes the latter option, but its reliability is suspect. It was at Rome that Luke could have used the time profitably to put the finishing touches on the third Gospel.

Luke wrote to Theophilus. Theophilus ("beloved of God") is probably not, as some suggest, a generic term for all believers. He was a person apparently unfamiliar with the geography of Palestine, for Luke takes care to detail it from time to time. He has a much better grasp of the Greco-Roman world as a whole, for Luke predictably assumes his reader's familiarity with it. Luke also avoids terms that might prove puzzling to a gentile reader, such as "hosanna" in connection with Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem.

In all probability the third Gospel was composed in Rome while Paul awaited trial, on or before AD 64. It was dedicated to the “most excellent Theophilus” ([Lk 1:3](#)), as an appropriate custom of the time. He was a prominent Gentile who had become a believer. Luke wanted to instruct him (and others) more carefully in the faith.

Background

Jesus lived out his life within an area roughly 50 miles (80.5 kilometers) wide and 150 miles (241.4 kilometers) long, from Dan in the north to Beersheba in the south. Apart from Jerusalem, the places he is reported to have visited are not important to the secular history of the region. He was raised in the humble village of Nazareth and lived there until about 30 years of age. Capernaum became the center for his Galilean ministry. He passed through Samaria on occasion, and he ministered in Perea. He was betrayed and crucified in Jerusalem. He was raised in triumph on the third day.

Luke writes in retrospect. His perspective had shifted during the interim—geographically from Palestine to the Roman Empire, politically from Israel to Rome, socially from Jewish society to pagan, and religiously from the temple to the horizon of Christian mission. It is as if one era were superimposed on the other, so that the significance of the life and ministry of Jesus can be seen for the early church.

Purpose and Theological Teaching

Simeon beautifully expressed the redemptive theme of Luke’s Gospel when he held Jesus in his arms and exclaimed: “I have seen the Savior you have given to all people. He is a light to reveal God to the nations, and he is the glory of your people Israel!” ([Lk 2:30–32](#), nlt). He pointed to Jesus as the long-anticipated Savior, the hope of Gentiles and Jews alike.

Luke wove the work of the Holy Spirit into the life and ministry of Jesus. Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit ([Lk 1:35](#)); the Spirit descended on him at his baptism ([3:22](#)); he was led into the desert by the Spirit to be tempted ([4:2](#)); he was anointed by the Spirit for his ministry (v [18](#)). The Spirit is, as it were, in the background with regard to Jesus’ subsequent labors, but the relationship is understood even when it is not repeated.

Luke accented the experience of messianic joy. The angelic host announced Jesus’ birth with the words,

“Glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace on earth to all whom God favors” ([2:14](#), nlt). Then, as he was approaching Jerusalem, the multitude that accompanied him began to praise God, saying, “Bless the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in highest heaven!” ([19:38](#), nlt).

All this suggests that the redemptive theme in Luke is complex in character. It points to Jesus as the Christ. It invites the favorable response of Gentiles no less than Jews. It blends in the empowering of the Holy Spirit for Jesus’ ministry and that of his disciples. It emphasizes the joy that accompanies the publication of the gospel. These are simply variations on the one redemptive design of Luke.

Other concerns surface incidentally. Luke’s interest in historical accuracy is one of these. His apologetic burden is another. The critical place he gives to prayer is a third. The list could be extended.

Content

Prologue ([1:1–4](#))

The Gospel begins with a formal prologue. Luke sought to record in orderly fashion what others had handed down as a legacy of faith. He did so in order to establish the historical credentials of the faith and to assure his readers of their validity.

Nativity and Childhood of Jesus ([1:5–2:52](#))

None of the Gospels is a thoroughgoing biography of Jesus. But Luke took a special interest in historical incidents, first with regard to the nativity and childhood narratives. He recounted 10 episodes in all: the annunciation of John the Baptist’s birth as the forerunner of Christ; the announcement of Jesus’ birth to Mary; the visit of Mary to Elizabeth; the birth of John the Baptist; John the Baptist’s time in the wilderness; the birth of Jesus; the visit of the shepherds; the circumcision of Jesus; Jesus’ presentation in the temple; and the visit to the temple as a youth.

John the Baptist received considerable attention from the outset. Luke recorded that it was during the reign of Herod (Herod the Great, 37–4 BC) that Zechariah the priest was ministering in the temple. (Twenty-four platoons of priests served in this capacity for two separate weeks out of the year. The privilege of burning incense was determined by casting lots, and once the priest had done so, he was disqualified from repeating the act.) An angel of the Lord appeared to Zechariah as he was about

to burn incense, announcing that he and his wife, Elizabeth, would have a son, whose name should be John. He was to live as a Nazirite (see [Nm 6:1-4](#)) and prepare the way for the Messiah. When Zechariah was reluctant to believe (he and Elizabeth were of advanced age), the angel struck him dumb until the time of the promised birth.

We next hear of John in connection with Mary's visit to Elizabeth. The baby leaped within Elizabeth's womb as she heard Mary's greeting ([Lk 1:41](#)). Luke immediately followed this account with the birth of John the Baptist. Zechariah named the child as he had been directed, received back his speech, and proceeded to prophesy concerning the coming Messiah and the preparatory role his son would play. The child grew and became "strong in spirit," abiding in the wilderness until his public ministry began.

Luke told the nativity story from the perspective of Mary. The angel Gabriel visited her and announced that she would give birth to the Messiah ([1:26-38](#)). She would conceive miraculously by the Holy Spirit. Mary is portrayed as being devoutly submissive to the purposes of God.

The birth is said to have taken place when Quirinius was governor of Syria, and persons had to travel to their ancestral towns to register for a census. Mary gave birth in a Bethlehem stable. Angels announced the birth to shepherds, who left their flocks to observe the child. Mary treasured these events and continued to ponder their significance.

After Mary had observed her 40 days of ritual purification, she went with Joseph to the temple to present Jesus to the Lord ([2:21-40](#)). There Simeon and Anna, two elderly and devout persons, recognized the infant as the promised Messiah. Simeon concluded that Jesus would cause many in Israel to fall and rise, and would bring deep sorrow to the heart of Mary.

The nativity and childhood narratives close with Jesus' visit to the temple at age 12 to celebrate the Feast of the Passover. Joseph and Mary left Jesus behind in the temple, supposing that he was among relatives or friends. They retraced their steps and found him in the temple conversing with the rabbis—listening to them and amazing them with his own understanding. Luke concluded by saying that "Jesus grew both in height and in wisdom, and he was loved by God and by all who knew him" ([2:52](#), nlt).

Beginning of the Public Ministry ([3:1-4:30](#))

Luke then recorded those events related to the inauguration of Jesus' ministry. These include the ministry of John the Baptist, the baptism of Jesus, his genealogy, his temptation, and the public announcement in Nazareth. Luke dated the beginning of John the Baptist's ministry in no fewer than six ways: with the terms of office of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate, Herod Antipas, Philip, Lysanias, and Annas and Caiaphas. John came preaching a baptism of repentance in preparation for the coming of the Messiah. Multitudes came out into the wilderness to hear him and to be baptized by him.

Jesus also came to be baptized. (Luke does not record John's protest that Jesus ought rather to baptize him, or Jesus' insistence that it had to be done—apparently to identify with the people and anticipate his vicarious death on their behalf.) The baptism marked Jesus' entry into public ministry. Luke inserted what may be the genealogical record through Mary, consistent with his earlier efforts to narrate the events from her perspective.

The temptation of Jesus was a probationary test of his messianic ministry. The introduction to two of the temptations, "If you are the Son of God," was calculated to make him doubt the words heard at his baptism, "You are my Son" ([3:22; 4:3, 9](#)). Satan hoped to persuade Jesus to seek to fulfill his calling and yet avoid the cross. Each time Jesus parried the temptation with a quotation from Scripture.

Jesus returned to Galilee and to the synagogue in Nazareth. Here he announced his public ministry in words borrowed from the jubilee observance and associated with the messianic age ([4:18-19](#); cf. [Is 61:1-2](#)). They reflected both the religious focus and broad social implications of the ministry to come. The announcement especially held out hope to those who were downtrodden and ostracized by society. When those in attendance challenged his credentials, Jesus replied, "No prophet is accepted in his own hometown" ([Lk 4:24](#)). And when they would have cast him from the brow of a hill, he passed through their midst and went on his way.

The Galilean Ministry ([4:31-9:50](#))

Jesus moved the center of his activity to Capernaum. Luke records a variety of episodes associated with the Galilean ministry that follows. Approximately 30 instances are mentioned. About a third involve some extraordinary occurrence, such as healing, exorcism, raising from the dead, or

feeding a multitude. These were events associated with the messianic age.

However, it was Jesus' teaching that first seems to have caught the people's attention. He did not teach as the rabbis, by drawing upon traditional precedent, but he taught in the authority of his messianic office. Luke interlaced his narrative with a considerable amount of Jesus' teaching. There is a fairly extended section on the observance of the Sabbath ([6:1-11](#)). But it is less prominent than Jesus' sermon "on the plain," with its extended comments concerning blessings and woes, love for enemies, judging others, knowing one by his fruit, and wise and foolish builders ([6:12-49](#)). Jesus taught by way of parables, and Luke recorded those of the sower and lamp ([8:1-18](#)). In the former instance, the seed represents the word of God, and the soil the varying preparation to receive the Word. Thereby the disciples might better understand the mixed results of Jesus' ministry and their own. Others would be perplexed by the parables.

Luke described the calling of select disciples. He mentioned Peter, James, and John, and at a later point Levi ([5:1-11, 27-32](#)). The former were called from their fishing boats and the latter from his tax booth. All were summoned to follow Christ in his messianic ministry through the Galilean countryside. Later on, when there were 12 disciples, Jesus sent them out to preach the kingdom and heal the sick ([9:1-11](#)). No doubt many contributed to the extended ministry. Luke recorded certain women who traveled with them and "were contributing from their own resources to support Jesus and his disciples" ([8:3](#), nlt).

One senses a rising tide of enthusiasm with regard to the Galilean enterprise. It begins with Jesus alone, working in obscurity; it terminates with a faithful band of followers, multitudes hanging on his words, and his name circulated throughout the region. The section peaks with Peter's confession of Jesus as the Christ and the transfiguration of Jesus ([9:10-36](#)). The presence of Moses and Elijah represents the Law and Prophets as subordinate to the Messiah.

The scene shifts abruptly to the foot of the mount, where the disciples have been ineffective in delivering a demon-possessed boy. Here Jesus pointed out the need for spiritual resources to accomplish kingdom needs, and thereafter (in response to the disciples' argument over who would be greatest) an appeal to humility.

The Journey toward Jerusalem ([9:51-19:27](#))

Luke next reported Jesus' ministry on the way to Jerusalem. This has sometimes been called the Perea ministry, assuming that much of it took place across the Jordan in the district of Perea. It has also been graphically described as "the road to the cross." The number of incidents are roughly the same as those in the preceding section, although the text is about 25 percent longer.

Opposition is seen building at the outset. Jesus sent messengers ahead to prepare for his arrival at a Samaritan village. But the inhabitants would not welcome him, because he was on the way to Jerusalem. There was bad blood between the Jews and Samaritans. The latter had been settled in the land during the Assyrian occupation and brought with them foreign religious and social customs, resulting in a syncretism repugnant to the Jews. Certain disciples asked if Jesus would have them bring down fire from heaven on the village, but Jesus rebuked them. He evidenced a more conciliatory spirit.

Luke reintroduced the Samaritans in connection with a story Jesus tells ([10:25-37](#)). It seems that a man was attacked by thieves, who left him for dead. First a priest and then a Levite came along, each walking by on the opposite side of the road. Another passed that way and took pity on the injured stranger. He bound up his wounds and brought him to an inn where he could be cared for at the expense of his benefactor. Jesus added the detail that the man who stopped to help was a Samaritan. He alone understood that a neighbor is the one we befriend rather than the one who befriends us. (The Samaritans reappear once more in the account of 10 lepers who were healed, of whom only a Samaritan returned to give thanks—[17:11-19](#).)

The story of the good Samaritan suggests the opposition Jesus was encountering from the religious establishment centered in Jerusalem. Even as the crowds increased, Jesus observed: "The queen of Sheba will rise up against this generation on judgment day and condemn it, because she came from a distant land to hear the wisdom of Solomon. And now someone greater than Solomon is here—and you refuse to listen to him" ([11:31](#), nlt). So also will the men of Nineveh stand to condemn the present generation, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and now one greater than Jonah is here.

Jesus reserved the severest rebuke for those Pharisees who had come to contest his every move. Jesus and the Pharisees traveled in much the same circles. Some had been sympathetic to his message, but these seem to have been in the minority. Jesus pictured the Pharisees as meticulous legalists ([11:37-44](#)). Events were building to a climax. Jesus had prophesied his impending death and subsequent resurrection. His face was set toward Jerusalem. When some solicitous Pharisees warned him of Herod Antipas's plan to have him killed, he refused to be intimidated ([13:32-33](#)).

Parables abound in this section of the Gospel. They include those of the Good Samaritan, mustard seed, yeast, narrow door, invitation to a marriage feast, great banquet, tower builder, king who goes to war, lost sheep, lost coin, Prodigal Son, unjust steward, rich man and Lazarus, Pharisee and publican, and ten minas. These seem to fall into one of three categories, although perhaps not exclusively so. The one has to do with accepting sinners. (While Scripture reveals that we are all sinners, "sinners" in the synoptic Gospels refers to nonobservant Jews.) A classic instance is the story of the Prodigal Son ([15:11-32](#)).

The second category might be called kingdom parables. They suggest that while the kingdom begins in some relatively insignificant fashion, it will expand to incredible proportions. They also warn that not all that seems a part of the growth is a true extension of the kingdom. These emphases can be recognized by comparing the parables of the mustard seed, yeast, and narrow door ([13:18-30](#)).

The third category deals with stewardship. Jesus told one such parable as they neared Jerusalem ([19:11-27](#)). It involved a man of noble birth who went to a far country, leaving his servants with ten minas each (a mina was about a three-month wage for laborers). They were to invest the minas so that the man would have a good profit when he came back. Upon returning, the nobleman called his servants to get an accounting from them. Those who were found faithful in lesser things were given greater opportunity, but one who failed lost even that which he had been given.

There are some especially touching scenes in the Gospel narrative. One shows Jesus welcoming little children ([18:15-17](#)). Another describes a rich ruler who inquired of Jesus how he might obtain eternal life (vv [18-30](#)). Still another episode concerns a tax collector called Zacchaeus ([19:1-10](#)). These help us to gain a better appreciation of Jesus' diversified ministry.

Slowly but surely Jesus had worked his way to Jerusalem. He had met increasing opposition. The cross was just over the horizon. He ministered while time allowed.

Jesus' Death and Resurrection ([19:28-24:53](#))

Luke concluded his account with the Passion week. First is the Triumphal Entry of Christ ([19:28-44](#)). As those with Jesus came over the crest of the Mt of Olives, they began to praise God for all the miracles they had seen: "Bless the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in highest heaven!" ([19:38](#), nlt). The jubilation of the multitude stands in sharp contrast to Jesus' weeping over an unrepentant city and lamenting the destruction to be visited upon it.

Entering the temple area, Jesus began driving out those who were selling goods there. God's house should be a house of prayer, but—Jesus protests—they have made it a den of robbers. He continued to teach daily in the temple precincts, while the religious leaders plotted how to put him to death without inciting the anger of the people.

Luke recorded some of the interchange with the leaders and people (chs [20-21](#)). This includes a challenge to Jesus' authority, the parable of the wicked tenants, the question about paying taxes to Caesar, another question concerning the resurrection, Jesus' question about how to understand the Messiah's Davidic ancestry and lordship, warning against the scribes, comments on the widow's offering, and discourse on the end of the age. This broad range of topics is related to the messianic disputation in progress.

The problem as Luke represents it seems less an intellectual than a moral one. The religious establishment was determined to retain its privileged position at all costs. This Galilean rabbi was a serious threat that had to be eliminated. It was only a matter of waiting for the right opportunity. It appeared when Judas Iscariot offered to betray Jesus ([22:1-6](#)).

The Last Supper and the prayer vigil in Gethsemane intervene between the plot of the leaders and the arrest of Jesus ([22:7-46](#)). From the upper room Jesus and the disciples made their way across the Kidron Valley to the Mt of Olives. Here Jesus prayed in preparation for the crucifixion to follow. The disciples slept, being weary from the heavy demands of those days. Soon Judas appeared to point Jesus out, and the soldiers rushed him away to stand before the high priest. Peter denied Christ,

fearing for his own life. Jesus was condemned by the Sanhedrin. (Commentators debate whether this was a formal session of the council of Jewish elders.) He was sent to the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, then to Herod Antipas, and back again to Pilate. Pilate saw no reason for putting Jesus to death, but the multitude was stirred up by the Jewish leaders to demand his crucifixion. Pilate yielded to their pressure when alternatives seemed to escape him.

Jesus was led away to be crucified. Luke alone mentioned those who mourned him ([23:27](#)). Jesus warned them rather to mourn for themselves and their children. Here and hereafter we see Jesus' concern for others in the midst of his own agony: those crucifying him, the repentant criminal, and his mother, Mary.

Luke records a mixed response to the crucifixion. The people stood watching, as if immobilized by the rush of events. They may have felt helpless to intervene even if disposed to do so. Some of the religious leaders went so far as to mock Jesus; "He saved others, . . . let him save himself if he is really God's Chosen One, the Messiah" ([23:35](#), nlt). One hardened criminal joined in their derision; the other asked for clemency.

Darkness shrouded the scene. The curtain of the temple was torn, as if to suggest that access was being made available through the shed blood of Christ. Jesus commanded his spirit to the Father. He breathed his last. His body was laid in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea. Women went to prepare spices and perfumes for the interment, but they rested on the Sabbath in obedience to the commandment.

Early on the first day of the week the women approached the tomb, only to find the stone guarding its entrance rolled away and the body of Jesus missing. Suddenly two figures in gleaming array stood by them. They announced to the frightened women: "He isn't here! He has risen from the dead!" ([24:6](#), nlt). The women returned to report to the apostles. Peter ran to confirm their findings. He discovered the strips of linen laid out as they had been, but with the body absent. He wondered what had happened.

The same day two disciples were going to a village called Emmaus. They were discussing what had happened in Jerusalem when Jesus joined them. They were kept from recognizing him until later on when he broke bread with them. They hurriedly

returned to Jerusalem to reassure the fellowship that it was true that the Lord was risen.

While they were still talking, Jesus appeared in their midst. "Look at my hands. Look at my feet. You can see that it's really me. Touch me and make sure that I am not a ghost, because ghosts don't have bodies, as you see that I do!" ([24:39](#), nlt). Then he helped them understand the implications of what had happened: "Yes, it was written long ago that the Messiah must suffer and die and rise again from the dead on the third day. With my authority, take this message of repentance to all the nations, beginning in Jerusalem: 'There is forgiveness of sins for all who turn to me.' You are witnesses of all these things. And now I will send the Holy Spirit, just as my Father promised. But stay here in the city until the Holy Spirit comes and fills you with power from heaven" (vv [46-49](#), nlt).

Luke concludes his Gospel with an account of the ascension ([24:50-53](#)). It was as Jesus blessed them that he was lifted up before their eyes. They worshiped him as the ascended Lord and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. There they remained in the temple precinct, praising God and anticipating the coming of the Holy Spirit to empower them for witnessing to all the world.

See also Acts of the Apostles, Book of the; Jesus Christ, Life and Teachings of; Luke (Person); Synoptic Gospels.

Lute

Guitarlike musical instrument with strings stretched along a neck and over a sounding box, usually plucked or strummed. *See* Musical Instruments (Asor).

Luz

1. Original Canaanite name of the city of Bethel ([Gn 28:19](#); [35:6](#)). It was here that Jacob had a vision of God. In recognition of God's presence he called the place "the house of God" (beth-El). Jacob may not have been in the city itself, which might account for the seeming discrepancy in [Joshua 16:2](#). The phrase "from Bethel to Luz" in the description of the border of the land allotted to Joseph (Ephraim and Manasseh) seems to distinguish Bethel from Luz as though they were two different cities. Perhaps the solution is to be found in that originally the name Luz continued to be used of the city, while

at the same time the Israelites knew, through tradition, of the place where Jacob had named Bethel outside the city of Luz. According to [Joshua 16:2](#), then, Bethel would be an area lying east of the city of Luz. At the time of Conquest ([Jgs 1:22–25](#)), or subsequently, the Israelites changed the name of Luz to Bethel.

See also Bethel (Place), Bethelite #1.

2. Hittite city named after Luz in Palestine by one of its inhabitants who migrated to the Hittite region after the Israelites captured this city ([Jgs 1:26](#)).

Lycaonia

Region in the southern interior of the Roman province of Asia (also called Asia Minor), north of the Taurus Mountains. Prior to Roman occupation, it was bordered on the north by Galatia, on the south by Cilicia, on the east by Cappadocia, and on the west by Phrygia and Pisidia. Like many of its neighboring states, Lycaonia was ruled by the Seleucids after the conquest of Alexander the Great. When the Romans defeated the Seleucids in western Asia Minor (190 BC), Lycaonia was given to the Attalids of Pergamum. It remained under their control until 130 BC, when their king died and their kingdom was dissolved. The area was subsequently administered by the Romans, who attached the northern section of the Lycaonian territory to Galatia, the eastern section to Cappadocia, and the southern section to Cilicia. In AD 37 eastern Lycaonia gained independence from Cappadocia and was known as Lycaonia Antiochiana. By the time of Christ, Lycaonia had essentially been reduced to an ethnic area in southern Galatia and should be considered as such in all NT references.

The territory was situated on a high, barren plateau. The soil was generally of poor quality, though fertile areas existed in the south around the principal cities of Lystra and Derbe. Consequently, the primary occupations were the herding of sheep and goats, with some agriculture in the south. Lycaonia was bisected by a major trade route between Syria, Ephesus, and Rome.

It is debatable whether Iconium was a city of Lycaonia. Some scholars believe it was the capital and principal city. Others consider it a Phrygian city. The latter position seems to be supported in Acts, where Paul is said to flee Iconium for Lystra and Derbe, "cities of Lycaonia" ([Acts 14:6](#))—places

where the Lycaonian language was spoken (v [11](#)). It is likely that within the political territory of Galatia there were several ethnic areas and that Paul crossed an ethnic border in an attempt to find safety from the disgruntled Jews of Iconium.

The apostle Paul made three visits to Lycaonia. During his first missionary journey, the preaching of the gospel was very effective and many disciples were made ([Acts 14:21–22](#)). In fact, when Paul healed a crippled man in Lystra, the leaders of the pagan cult wished to worship him as a god (vv [11–18](#)). He visited the area again on his second missionary journey. It was here that he met Timothy and asked him to join his company ([16:1–5](#)). A final visit (during his third journey, where his purpose was to strengthen the believers) is indicated by [Acts 18:23](#).

Later Christian inscriptions indicate that by the end of the third century the region of Lycaonia possessed one of the most mature ecclesiastical systems in Asia Minor.

Lycia

Country located in the southwest part of the Roman province of Asia (commonly known as Asia Minor), bounded on the northwest by Caria, on the north by Phrygia and Pisidia, on the northeast by Pamphylia, and on the west, south, and east by the Mediterranean Sea. The geography of the region combines rugged mountainous terrain with fertile valleys formed by the descent of several small rivers to the sea. The mountainous regions produce olives, grapes, and timber, while the valleys are responsible for the production of the area's cultivated grains. At the mouths of the rivers are located the major seaports of the country. Two of these, Patara and Myra, are of interest to students of the NT.

Patara, located in southwest Lycia in the valley of the Xanthus River, was the seat of the oracle of Apollo. [Acts 21:1](#) mentions it as the port where Paul, at the conclusion of his third missionary journey, boarded a ship sailing for Phoenicia (some manuscripts include here an additional stop at Myra). Myra, located in southeast Lycia, is mentioned in [Acts 27:5–7](#) as the port where Paul and Julius, a Roman centurion, boarded an Alexandrian ship bound for Rome. When winds were from the west, it was the practice of Alexandrian grain ships headed for Italy to work north along the shore of Palestine and Syria and

west along the southern coast of Asia Minor. This would make the ports of Lycia natural places for ships to harbor in preparation for the final leg of the trip to Italy.

The history of the region is tied closely to that of Asia Minor. Among all the peoples of western Asia Minor, Lycia was alone able to withstand the onslaught of the kings of Lydia. However, in 546 BC it was forced to submit to Persian domination. With the invasion of Alexander the Great in 333 BC, Lycia came under the control of the Ptolemies (308–197 BC) and the Seleucids (197–189 BC). When the Romans defeated Antiochus III at Magnesia (189 BC), Lycia was given to Rhodes, an island off its western coast. Twenty years later Rome granted Lycia the status of an independent state. This status held until AD 43, when Emperor Claudius declared Lycia a Roman province. Under the provincial reorganization of Vespasian in AD 74, it was joined with Pamphylia.

[First Maccabees 15:23](#) gives evidence of a sizable Jewish community in Lycia around 139 BC. The NT provides no evidence of Christians in this area. However, a letter from Lycia written in AD 312 to Emperor Maxim in opposition to Christianity indicates the presence of Christians in this region in the early centuries of the church.

Lydda

A New Testament name for Lod, a town located southwest of Jerusalem in the Shephelah ([Acts 9:32–38](#)).

See Lod.

Lydia (Person)

Lydia was a non-Jewish woman who became a Christian after hearing Paul preach in the city of Philippi ([Acts 16:14, 40](#)). She was a businesswoman who sold expensive purple cloth. Lydia came from the city of Thyatira in the region of Lydia. This was in the western part of the Roman province of Asia (commonly known as Asia Minor).

Acts describes Lydia as “a worshiper of God” (or “God-fearer”). This indicates that she was a gentile attracted to Judaism. She converted to Christianity and Paul baptized her. Then Lydia invited Paul and Silas to stay at her home during their time in Philippi.

Lydia (Place)

Name designating a geographical area occurring in [Jeremiah 46:9](#), [Ezekiel 27:10](#), and [30:5](#) in the nlt. In other versions, it is listed as “Lud” (see nlt mg) or “Ludim.” But the identification of Lydia with Lud or Ludim in the OT is not certain. Jeremiah mentions Lud in connection with the North African countries of Put (Libya) and Ethiopia ([Ier 46:9](#)). Ezekiel mentions Lud in connection with Put and Persia ([Ez 27:10](#)), as well as Arabia ([30:5](#)). Josephus considered the Lydians to have been founded by Lud (*Antiquities* 1.6.4).

In any event, it appears that Lydia refers to a province in the western part of the Roman province of Asia (modern Turkey) bounded on the north by Mysia, on the east by Phrygia, on the south by Caria, and on the west by the Greek cities in Ionia. It is listed among the provinces taken by the conquering Romans from the Syrian king Antiochus the Great and given to Eumenes II, the king of Pergamum, after the battle of Magnesia in 190 BC.

The capital of Lydia, Sardis, was considerably inland, and the province never showed any significant maritime development. Herodotus referred to Lydia as a fertile land and to its abundance of silver (*Persian Wars* 5.49), while Tacitus spoke of the rich countries around Sardis (*Annals* 4.55). According to Herodotus, the Lydians “were the first nation to introduce the use of gold and silver coin, and the first who sold goods by retail” (*Persian Wars* 1.94).

By NT times, Lydia had become a part of the Roman province of Asia, having been given to Rome in 133 BC by the Pergamene king Attalus III. Five of the churches to which the book of Revelation was addressed were in Lydia (Ephesus, Smyrna, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea).

See also Lud, Ludim, Ludites.

Lye

Strong alkaline substance (probably potassium carbonate) used for cleaning purposes. *See Minerals and Metals.*

Lyre

Stringed instrument consisting of a body, crossbar, and sometimes a sounding box. See Musical Instruments (Kathros, Kinnor).

Lysanias

The tetrarch (Roman governor) of Abilene (the area west of Damascus) from AD 27 to 28. The Gospel of Luke mentions Lysanias as ruling at the beginning of John the Baptist's ministry ([Luke 3:1](#)). This is the only reference to him in the New Testament.

Josephus mentions a Lysanias who succeeded his father, Ptolemaeus, as the king of Chalcis. However, he was killed by Mark Antony in 36 BC. There is no other reference to any Lysanias in ancient writings. Also, this second Lysanias could not have lived during John the Baptist's time. So, some biblical scholars assume Luke was wrong in his timeline of events. In defense of Luke, some scholars say Josephus mentions "Abila of Lysanius." This was an area given to Agrippa II by Claudius in AD 53. But that reference may be to the Lysanias who ruled Chalcis 90 years earlier.

The strongest proof that Luke's account is correct comes from an ancient stone inscription found at Abila. This inscription records that someone named Nymphaeus, who had been a slave but was freed by Lysanias, dedicated a temple. The dedication was written, "for the salvation of the Lord Imperial and their whole household by Nymphaeus, a freedman of Lysanias the tetrarch."

The title "Lord Imperial" is important because it was only used for Emperor Tiberius and his mother Livia (who was the widow of the previous emperor, Augustus) when they ruled together. This helps us know when Lysanias ruled. It must have been between AD 14, when Tiberius became emperor, and AD 29, when Livia died.

This evidence shows that Luke's timeline is historically accurate.

Lysias

1. A Roman commander who wrote a letter to Felix about the apostle Paul ([Acts 23:26](#)).
See Claudius Lysias.

2. A high official during the rule of Antiochus IV Epiphanes. Around 166-165 BC, Antiochus went to fight the Parthians and left Lysias in charge of Syria ([1 Maccabees 3:31-37](#)). Lysias sent generals Ptolemy, Nicanor, and Gorgias to bring Judas Maccabeus under control in Judea. Then he himself led an attack on Judas.

At last, Antiochus Epiphanes signed and approved a peace treaty ([2 Maccabees 11](#)). The agreement ended the harsh laws against the Jews. After that, Judas cleaned the temple and started the daily sacrifices again. In 164 BC, Antiochus Epiphanes died. Lysias returned to Judea with the young king Antiochus V Eupator. They defeated Judas Maccabeus at Bethzacharia and began to attack Jerusalem. However, trouble in Antioch forced them to go back to Syria. There, in 162 BC, Demetrius I took power. He had both Lysias and Antiochus V put to death.

Lysimachus

1. According to the Additions to Esther, the son of Ptolemy of Jerusalem and translator of the book of Esther into Greek.
2. Menelaus appointed his brother Lysimachus to function as his deputy in the high priesthood. He himself had supplanted Jason as high priest. An evil man, Menelaus consented to acts of sacrilege by Lysimachus against the temple, including the theft of many gold vessels. The people reacted against Lysimachus, who then attempted to subdue them with 3,000 men. He failed. In the process the people, using stones and blocks of wood, routed Lysimachus and his men, killing Lysimachus near the treasury.

Lystra

A city located in the Lycaonia region within the Roman province of Galatia.

Lystra in the New Testament

The main stories about Lystra in the Bible come from the book of Acts, with one mention in [2 Timothy 3:11](#). During Paul's first missionary journey, he and Barnabas came to Lystra after facing opposition in the nearby city of Iconium. They went on to visit Derbe and the areas around these cities ([Acts 14:6](#)).

While in Lystra, Paul healed a man who could not walk (verse [8](#)). After seeing this miracle, the local people became very excited. They believed Barnabas was Zeus (the king of the Greek gods) and Paul was Hermes (the messenger of the Greek gods). They thought Paul was Hermes because he was the main speaker since Hermes was known for being a messenger who delivered words from the gods to people. (verses [9–21](#)). In some English Bible versions, Zeus and Hermes are called by their Latin names, Jupiter and Mercury.

Local Culture and Religion

Most people in Lystra belonged to a small group from the Anatolia region. They spoke their own local language, which researchers know about from ancient stone writings found in the area. People were still speaking this language as late as the sixth century AD. The old Anatolian village system continued in this market town, even after Romans took control of the city.

Zeus was considered the most powerful of all Greek gods, and Hermes was his son who served as a messenger between the gods and humans. The people of Lystra strongly believed in these gods. Archaeological discoveries support what Luke wrote in the book of Acts about this. Researchers have found an ancient stone with writing that talks about dedicating a statue of Hermes to Zeus. Another stone with writing about "Zeus before the town," which helps explain [Acts 14:13](#) where it mentions "the priest of Zeus, whose temple was just outside the city."

Location and Connections

Derbe and Lystra both belonged to the same political region. Iconium was located in another political region. The geography, commerce, and social life of Lystra was more like Iconium than Derbe. This was despite the political boundary separating them. It seems that the two towns communicated often. [Acts 16:1–2](#) links Lystra and Iconium as places where Timothy was well-known and respected.