

Resource: Bible Dictionary (Tyndale)

Aquifer Open Bible Dictionary

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Bible Dictionary (Tyndale)

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Sabachthani, Sabaoth, Sabbath, Sabbath Day's Journey, Sabbath Year, Sabbatical Year, Sabbath, Covert for the, Sabeans, Sabta, Sabtah, Sabteca, Sacar, Sachar, Sachia, Sachiah, Sackbut, Sackcloth, Sacrifice, Sadducees, Sadoc, Saffron, Sage, Sailors, Saints, Sakia, Sakkuth, Sala, Salah, Salamis, Salathiel, Salcah, Salchah, Salecah, Salem, Salim, Sallai, Sallu, Salma, Salmon (Person), Salmon (Place), Salmone, Salome, Salt Sea, Salt, City of, Salt, Covenant of, Saltwort, Salu, Salvation, Samaria, Samaritans, Samgar-Nebo, Samlah, Samos, Samothrace, Samson, Samuel (Person), Samuel, Books of First and Second, Sanballat, Sanctification, Sanctuary, Sand Lizard, Sandalwood, Sanhedrin, Sansannah, Saph, Saphir, Sapphira, Sapphire, Sara, Sarah, Sarai, Saraph, Sardine Stone, Sardis, Sardite, Sardius, Sardonyx, Sarepta, Sargon, Sarid, Saron, Sarsechim, Sarsekim, Saruch, Satan, Saton, Satrap, Satyr, Saul, Savior, Scab, Scall, Scapegoat, Scarlet, Scepter, Sceva, School, Schoolmaster, Scops Owl, Scorpion, Scourge, Screech Owl, Scribe, Scripture, Scriptures, Scroll, Scrolls, Dead Sea, Scurvy, Scythopolis, Sea, Sea Monster, Sea of Chinnereth, Sea of Chinneroth, Sea of Galilee, Sea of Glass, Sea of Kinnereth, Sea of Reeds, Sea of the Arabah, Sea of the Arabah, Sea of Tiberias, Sea, Dead, Sea, Molten, Sea, Red, Sea, the Great, Seagull, Seah, Seal, Seasons, Seba, Sebam, Sebat, Secacah, Sechu, Second Adam, Second Book of Esdras, Second Coming of Christ, Second Death, the, Second Jewish Revolt, Second Letter to the Thessalonians, Second Temple, Period of the, Secu, Secundus, Seer, Segub, Seir (Person), Seir (Place), Seirah, Sela, Sela-Hammahlekoth, Selah, Seled, Seleucia, Sem, Semachiah, Semakiah, Semei, Semein, Senaah, Seneh, Senir, Sennacherib, Senuah, Seorim, Sephar, Sepharad, Sepharvaim, Sepharvites, Septuagint, Sepulcher, Serah, Seraiah, Seraph, Seraphim, Sered, Seredite, Sergius Paulus, Sermon on the Mount, Serpent, Serpent, Bronze, Serpent's Stone, Serug, Servant, Servant of the Lord, Servitor, Seth, Sethur, Seven, Seven Last Sayings of Jesus, Sex, Sexuality, Sexual Immorality, Shaalabbin, Shaalbim, Shaalbon, Shaalim, Shaaph, Shaaraim, Shaashgaz, Shabbethai, Shachia, Shaddai, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, Shagee, Shaharaim, Shahazumah, Shalim, Shalisha, Shalishah, Shallecheth, Shalleketh, Gate of, Shallum, Shallun, Shalmal, Shalman, Shalmaneser, Shama, Shamariah, Shamed, Shamer, Shamgar, Shamhuth, Shamir (Person), Shamir (Place), Shamlai, Shamma, Shammah, Shammai, Shammoth, Shammua, Shamsherai, Shapham, Shaphan, Shaphat, Shapher, Shaphir, Sharai, Sharaim, Sharar, Sharezer, Sharon, Sharonite, Sharuhem, Shashai, Shashak, Shaul, Shaulite, Shaveh Kiriathaim, Shaveh, Valley of, Shavsha, Sheal, Shealtiel, Shear-Jashub, Sheariah, Shearing House, Sheba (Person), Sheba (Place), Sheba, Queen of, Shebah, Shebam, Shebaniah, Shebarim, Shebat, Sheber, Shebna, Shebuel, Shecaniah, Shechaniah, Shechem (Person), Shechem (Place), Shechem, Tower of, Shechemite, Shedeur, Sheep, Sheep Gate, Sheerah, Shehariah, Shekel, Shekinah, Shelah, Shelah, Pool of, Shelanite, Shelemiah, Sheleph, Shelesh, Shelomi, Shelomith, Shelomoth, Shelters, Festival of, Shelumiel, Shem, Shema (Person), Shema (Place), Shema, the, Shemaah, Shemaiah, Shemariah, Shemeber, Shemed, Shemer, Shemida, Shemidah, Shemidaite, Sheminith, Shemiramoath, Shemuel, Shen, Shenazar, Shenazzar, Shenir, Sheol, Shepham, Shephathiah, Shephathiah, Shephelah, Shepherd, Shepherd of Hermas, Shephi, Shepho, Shephupham, Shephuphan, Sherah, Sherebiah, Sheresh, Sheshach, Sheshai, Sheshan, Sheshbazzar, Sheth, Shethar, Shethar-Bozenai, Shethar-Boznai, Sheva, Shewbread, Shibah, Shibboleth, Shibmah, Shicron, Shield, Shield Bearer, Shiggaion, Shigionoth, Shihor, Shihor-Libnath, Shikkeron, Shilhi, Shilhim, Shillem, Shillemite, Shiloah, Shiloh, Shiloni, Shilonite, Shilshah, Shimea, Shimeah, Shimeam, Shimeath, Shimeathite, Shimei, Shimeite, Shimeon, Shimhi, Shimi, Shimate, Shimma, Shimon, Shimrath, Shimri, Shimrith, Shimron (Person), Shimron (Place), Shimron-Meron, Shimronite, Shimshai, Shinab, Shinar, Shion, Shiphi, Shiphmite, Shiphrah, Shiptan, Ships and Shipping, Shisha, Shishak, Shitrai, Shittah Tree, Shittim (Place), Shittim Wood, Shiza, Shoa, Shobab, Shobach, Shobai, Shobal, Shobek, Shobi, Shocho, Shochoh, Shoco, Shoham, Shomer, Shophach, Shophar, Shoshannim, Shoshannim-Eduth, Showbread, Shrub, Shua, Shuah, Shual (Person), Shual (Place), Shubael, Shuhah, Shuham, Shuhamite, Shuhite, Shulammit, Shumathite, Shunammite, Shunem, Shuni, Shunite, Shupham, Shuphamite, Shuphim, Shur, Shushan, Shushan Eduth, Shuthelah, Shuthelahite, Sia, Siaha, Sibbecai, Sibbechai, Sibboleth, Sibmah, Sibraim, Sibylline Oracles, Sicheu, Sickle, Sickness, Siddim Valley, Sidon (Person), Sidon (Place), Sidonian, Siege, Sign, Signet, Sihon, Sihor, Sikkuth, Silas, Silk, Silla, Siloah, Siloam Inscription, Siloam Tunnel, Siloam, Pool of, Siloam, Tower of, Silvanus, Silver, Silversmith, Simeon (Person), Simeon, Tribe of, Simeonite, Simon, Simon Maccabeus, Simon Magus, Simon Magus, Simon of Cyrene, Simon Peter, Simon the Canaanite, Simon the Cananaean, Simon the Zealot, Simon Zelotes, Simri, Sin, Sin (Place), Sin Desert, Sin Offering, Sin unto Death, Sin, Man of, Sina, Sinai, Singer, Sinite, Sinlessness of Christ, Sion, Siphmoth, Sippai, Sirah, Sirion, Sisamai, Sisera, Sismai,

Sister, Sistrum, Sithri, Sitnah, Sivan, Six Hundred Sixty-Six, Skull Hill, Skull, Place of the, Slander, Slave, Slavery, Slavonic Acts of Peter, Sleep, Slime, Slimepits, Sling, Slinger, Smith, Smyrna, Snail, Snake, Snare, So, Soap, Socho, Sochoh, Soco (Person), Soco (Place), Socoh, Sodi, Sodom and Gomorrah, Sodom, Sea of, Sodom, Vine of, Sojourner, Soldier, Solomon (Person), Solomon, Pools of, Solomon, Song of, Solomon's Porch, Son, Son of God, Son of Man, Song, Song of Ascents, Song of Ascents, Song of Degrees, Song of Deborah, Song of Moses, Song of Solomon, Song of Songs, Song of the Three Young Men, Sons and Daughters of God, Sons of the Prophets, Sons of Thunder, Soothsayer, Sop, Sopater, Sophereth, Sorcery, Sore, Sorek, Valley of, Sorghum, Sosipater, Sosthenes, Sostratus, Sotai, Soul, Sowing, Spain, Span, Sparrow, Spear, Spearman, Spelt, Spice, Spicery, Spider, Spinner, Spinning, Spirit, Spirit of God, Spirit of Jesus Christ, Spirit of Man, Spirits, Spirits in Prison, Spirits, Discerning of, Spirits, Unclean, Spiritual Gifts, Spirituality, Sponge, Spring Rains, Latter Rain, Sprinkling of Blood, Stachys, Stacte, Stadium, Stag, Stallion, Star, Star in the East, Stater, Stealing, Steer, Stephanas, Stephen, Stocks, Stoicism, Stoics, Stone of Zoheleth, Stonecutter, Stones, Precious, Stoning, Stony Arabia, Storax Tree, Stork, Straight Street, Stranger, Strangling, Stringed Instrument, Strong Drink, Stumbling Block, Stylus, Suah, Sucathite, Succoth, Succoth-Benoth, Suchathite, Suffering, Suffering Servant, Suicide, Sukkiim, Sukkiims, Sukkites, Sulfur, Sumer, Sumerians, Sun, Sunday, Sundial, Suph, Suphah, Supper, Lord's, Supplication, Sur Gate, Surgery, Susa, Susanchite, Susanna, Susanna and the Elders, Susi, Swaddling Clothes, Swallow, Swan, Swearing, Sweet Bay Tree, Bay Laurel, Sweet Storax, Swift, Swine, Sword, Sycamine, Sycamore, Sychar, Sychem, Syene, Symeon, Synagogue, Synoptic Gospels, Synoptic Problem, Syntyche, Syracuse, Syria, Syrians, Syrophenicia, Syrtis

Sabachthani

One of the final words Jesus spoke during his crucifixion ([Matthew 27:46](#); [Mark 15:34](#)). It is an Aramaic word. The entire phrase "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani" is translated "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" This expression is also the opening question of Psalm 22.

See Eli, Eli, Lema Sabachthani.

Sabaoth

Hebrew word meaning "hosts" or "army," as in the expression "Lord of hosts." See God, Names of.

Sabbath

Derivation of a Hebrew word that means "cease" or "desist." The Sabbath was a day (from Friday evening until Saturday evening in Jesus' time) when all ordinary work stopped. The Scriptures relate that God gave his people the Sabbath as an opportunity to serve him and as a reminder of two great truths in the Bible—Creation and redemption.

In the Old Testament

The relationship between Creation and the Sabbath is first expressed in [Genesis 2:2-3](#). God "ceased" his

work in Creation after six days and then "blessed" the seventh day and "declared it holy." In the fourth commandment ([Ex 20:8-11](#)), God's "blessing" and "setting aside" of the seventh day after Creation (the words used are the same as those in Genesis) form the basis of his demand that people should observe the seventh day as a day of Sabbath rest.

The idea of God resting from his work is a startling one. It comes across even more vividly in [Exodus 31:17](#), where the Lord tells Moses how he was refreshed by his day of rest. This picture of the Creator as a manual laborer is one the Bible often paints. No doubt it is presented in vividly human terms in Exodus to reinforce the fundamental Sabbath lesson that people must follow the pattern their Creator has set for them. One day's rest in seven is a necessity for individuals, families, households, and even animals ([Ex 20:10](#)).

The Sabbath's setting in the biblical account of Creation implies that it is one of those OT standards that are meant for all people and not just for Israel. The inclusion of the Sabbath law in the Ten Commandments underlines this important truth. The Decalogue occupied a special place in OT law. Alone of all God's instructions, it was spoken by his audible voice ([Ex 20:1](#)), written by his finger ([31:18](#)), and placed in the tabernacle ark at the heart of Israel's worship ([25:16](#)). The NT, too, confirms the strong impression that the Decalogue as a whole embodies principles that are permanently valid for all people in all places at all times. Whether or not Sunday is recognized as the Christian Sabbath, one is obliged to accept the central principle of this biblical teaching as far as

the Sabbath is concerned. God's instructions require people to observe a regular weekly break from work.

Significantly, the second main strand of the Bible's Sabbath teaching—that of redemption—also features in a list of the Ten Commandments. The Sabbath law (already noted in [Ex 20:8-11](#)) reappears in [Deuteronomy 5:12-15](#), but here a different reason is attached to its observance: "Remember that you were once slaves in Egypt and that the Lord your God brought you out with amazing power and mighty deeds. That is why the Lord your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day" (v [15](#), nlt).

The differences between these two accounts of the fourth commandment are important. The first ([Ex 20](#)) is addressed, *through* Israel, to all people as created beings. The second ([Dt 5](#)) is directed *to* Israel as God's redeemed people. So the Sabbath is God's signpost, pointing not only to his goodness toward all people as their Creator but also to his mercy toward his chosen people as their Redeemer.

There is one other significant point in Deuteronomy's version of the Sabbath commandment that must not be missed. The prohibition of all work on the Sabbath day is followed by an explanatory note—"On that day no one in your household may do any kind of work. This includes you, your sons and daughters, your male and female servants, your oxen and donkeys and other livestock, and any foreigners living among you. All your male and female servants must rest as you do" ([Dt 5:14](#), nlt). Practical concern for others is a feature of all the OT's covenant teaching. So God's loving concern for Israel in her Egyptian slavery must be matched by the Israelite family's loving concern for those who served them. The Sabbath offered an ideal outlet for the practical expression of that concern. Jesus was especially keen to rescue this humanitarian side of Sabbath observance from the mass of callous regulations that threatened to suffocate it in his day (see, e.g., [Mk 3:1-5](#)).

The OT's provision for a "sabbatical year" develops this humanitarian theme further (see [Ex 23:10-12](#); [Lv 25:1-7](#); [Dt 15:1-11](#); also the regulations for the "year of jubilee" in [Lv 25:8-55](#)). Every seventh year the land was to lie fallow and be uncultivated ([Lv 25:4](#)). It needed a regular rest just as much as the people it sustained. The primary purpose of this law was benevolent: "But you, your male and female slaves, your hired servants, and any

foreigners who live with you may eat the produce that grows naturally during the Sabbath year. And your livestock and the wild animals will also be allowed to eat of the land's bounty" (vv [6-7](#), nlt). [Deuteronomy 15:1-11](#) extends the same humanitarian principle into the world of commerce. The sabbatical year must see the canceling of all debts within God's redeemed community. For the tight-fisted who might be tempted to refuse a loan if the sabbatical year was imminent, the law added a warning and a promise: "Do not be mean-spirited and refuse someone a loan because the year of release is close at hand. If you refuse to make the loan and the needy person cries out to the Lord, you will be considered guilty of sin. Give freely without begrudging it, and the Lord your God will bless you in everything you do" ([Dt 15:9-10](#), nlt).

Observing the sabbatical year was obviously a great test of the people's obedience to God and of their willingness to depend on him for their livelihood. Sometimes the temptation to turn a blind eye was too strong. But history testifies to Israel's courage in observing the letter of this law on many occasions, despite threats of invasion and famine. Both Alexander the Great and the Romans excused Jews from paying taxes every seventh year in recognition of the depth of their religious convictions.

Returning from the seventh year to the seventh day, the OT law codes go to considerable lengths to buttress the Sabbath ban on work by defining what may and may not be done by God's people on the Sabbath day. The prohibitions were not meant to rule out activity of any kind. Their aim was to stop regular, everyday work, because if God had set aside the Sabbath ([Ex 20:11](#)), the most obvious way of profaning it was to treat it just like any other day. Rules were spelled out in specific terms that the farmer ([34:21](#)), the salesman ([Jer 17:27](#)), and even the housewife ([Ex 35:2-3](#)) would understand.

The details may seem trivial, but obedience to the Sabbath law was seen as the main test of the people's allegiance to the Lord. It was made quite clear that willful disobedience was a capital offense ([Ex 35:2](#)), and the fate of the person found gathering wood in defiance of Sabbath regulations showed that this was no idle threat ([Nm 15:32-36](#)).

Hemmed in by so many rules and regulations (and with the death penalty overhanging all), the Sabbath easily could have become a day of fear—a day when the people were more afraid of committing an offense than worshiping the Lord

and enjoying a weekly rest. But the Sabbath was intended to be a blessing, not a burden. Above everything else, it was a weekly sign that the Lord loved his people and wanted to draw them into an ever-closer relationship with himself. Those who valued that relationship enjoyed the Sabbath, calling it a delight ([Is 58:13-14](#)). Nowhere does the OT express its sheer joy in Sabbath worship more exuberantly than in [Psalm 92](#), which has the title “A Song for the Sabbath.”

The later prophets, were, however, far from blind to the darker side of human nature. They knew that a great deal of Sabbath observance was a sham. Many people treated the Sabbath day more as holiday than holy day, an opportunity for self-indulgence rather than delighting in the Lord ([Is 58:13](#)). Some greedy tradesmen found its restrictions an annoying irritant ([Am 8:5](#)).

As God’s spokesman, the prophets did not shrink from exposing such neglect and abuse ([Ez 22:26](#)). Those who go through the motions of Sabbath worship with unrepentant hearts nauseate the Lord, Isaiah said ([Is 1:10-15](#)). As a symptom of rebellion against God, Jerusalem’s Sabbath breaking will bring destruction on the city, thunders Jeremiah ([Jer 17:27](#)). The Lord has been very forbearing with his people, warned Ezekiel, but prolonged neglect of his Sabbath makes judgment a certainty ([Ez 20:12-24](#)).

When the ax of judgment fell (in the exile to Babylon, 586 BC), the surviving remnant of the nation took the lesson to heart. Sabbath keeping was one of the few distinctive marks faithful Jews could retain in a foreign land, so it assumed extra significance. At the prompting of prophets like Ezekiel, who set out rules for Sabbath worship in the rebuilt temple at Jerusalem ([Ez 44:24](#); [45:17](#); [46:3](#)), and under the leadership of men like Nehemiah, the returning exiles were more careful than their predecessors in observing the Sabbath day ([Neh 10:31](#); [13:15-22](#)).

In the New Testament

Prior to the first century, some Jews in Palestine developed several rules for promoting the observance of the Sabbath. Two tractates of the Mishnah are devoted exclusively to these Sabbath rules and regulations. Their main purpose is to define work (one tractate does so under 39 headings) in an attempt to show every Israelite what is and is not permitted on the Sabbath. Unfortunately, this led to such hairsplitting complexities and evasions that ecclesiastical

lawyers often differed among themselves in their interpretations, with the inevitable result that the main purpose of the Sabbath became lost beneath a mass of legalistic detail. The rabbis themselves were aware of how much they were adding to the straightforward teaching of the OT. As one of them put it, “The rules about the sabbath . . . are as mountains hanging by a hair, for Scripture is scanty and the rules many.”

Jesus had many confrontations with the Jewish religious leaders over Sabbath observances. From their perspective, Jesus was a Sabbath breaker and therefore a lawbreaker. Jesus, however, never saw himself as a Sabbath breaker. He went to synagogue regularly on the Sabbath day ([Lk 4:16](#)). He read the lesson, preached, and taught ([Mk 1:21](#); [Lk 13:10](#)). He clearly accepted the principle that the Sabbath was an appropriate day for worship.

His point of collision with the Pharisees was the point at which their tradition departed from biblical teaching. He made this clear when he defended his disciples by appealing to Scripture, after they had been accused of breaking Sabbath tradition by walking through grainfields and breaking off heads of wheat (which fell into the category of “harvesting,” according to the Pharisees; [Mk 2:23-26](#)). He followed this up with a remark that took his hearers straight back to God’s Creation purpose for the Sabbath: “The Sabbath was made to benefit people, and not people to benefit the Sabbath” ([Mk 2:27](#), nlt).

Rabbinic tradition had exalted the institution above the people it was meant to serve. By making it an end in itself, the Pharisees had effectively robbed the Sabbath of one of its main purposes. Jesus’ words must have sounded uncomfortably familiar in his opponents’ ears. A famous rabbi had once said, “The Sabbath is given over to you, but you are not given over to the Sabbath.”

More than anything else, Jesus’ Sabbath healings put him on a collision course with rabbinic restrictions. The OT does not forbid cures on the Sabbath day, but the rabbis labeled all healing as work, which must always be avoided on the Sabbath unless life was at risk. Jesus fearlessly exposed the callousness and absurd inconsistencies to which this attitude led. How, he asked, could it be right to circumcise a baby or lead an animal to water on the Sabbath day (which tradition allowed) but wrong to heal a chronically handicapped woman and a crippled man, even if their lives were not in immediate danger ([Lk 13:10-17](#); [Jn 7:21-24](#))? The Sabbath, he taught,

was a particularly appropriate day for acts of mercy ([Mk 3:4-5](#)).

Jesus, the man from heaven, claimed that he was Lord of the Sabbath ([Mk 2:28](#); cf. [Mt 12:5-8](#)). Just as God kept working, despite his Creation rest, to sustain the world in his mercy, so Jesus would continue to teach and to heal on the Sabbath day ([Jn 5:2-17](#)). But one day his redemptive work would be complete, and then the Sabbath's purpose as a sign of redemption would be accomplished.

Living on the other side of Jesus' death and resurrection, Paul was quick to grasp the significance of both for Sabbath observance. He did not go so far as to ban all observance of the Jewish Sabbath. Indeed, he attended many Sabbath synagogue services himself in his evangelistic travels (see, e.g., [Acts 13:14-16](#)). Jewish Christians who insisted on keeping up their Sabbath practices were free to do so, provided they respected the opinions of those who differed ([Rom 14:5-6, 13](#)). But any suggestion that observing the Jewish calendar was necessary for salvation must be resisted ([Gal 4:8-11](#)). For Paul considered the Sabbath to be a shadow, while Christ himself is the reality of that shadow ([Col 2:17](#)).

Finally, it is the writer of the Letter to the Hebrews who explains how the twin biblical "sabbath themes" of creation and redemption find their joint fulfillment in Christ. He did so by linking together the ideas of God's rest after Creation and his redemptive act in bringing Israel to her "rest" in Canaan, and by showing how both relate to the present and future rest that Christians can and do enjoy in Jesus ([Heb 4:1-11](#)).

God intends all his people to share his rest—that is, his promise ([Heb 4:1](#)). He showed this intention clearly when he brought Israel to the Promised Land, but that did not mark the complete fulfillment of his promise. The full, complete rest still waiting for the people of God is in heaven. Christ has already entered there. He is resting from his work, just as God did after the Creation. And because of his redeeming work, he invites all those who believe in him to share that same "sabbath rest" now ([v 9](#)).

See also Lord's Day, The; Sabbath Day's Journey; Commandments, The Ten.

Sabbath Day's Journey

A rule from Jewish tradition that limited how far people could travel on the Sabbath day. The command against working on the Sabbath was understood to include not traveling long distances ([Exodus 16:27-30](#)). A person was allowed to travel 2,000 cubits, which is about half a mile or 900 meters, but no farther (see [Joshua 3:4](#)).

This distance was decided based on two biblical references:

- the space between the ark and the people following it ([Joshua 3:4](#)), or
- from the pasturelands to the Levitical cities ([Numbers 35:4-5](#)).

The idea was that a person should not go farther than necessary to worship or to take care of animals.

The only place the Bible directly mentions this practice is in [Acts 1:12](#), which describes the distance from the Mount of Olives to Jerusalem as "a Sabbath day's journey." According to Josephus (a Jewish historian), this distance was between 914 to 1,097 meters (1,000 to 1,200 yards).

The rabbis (Jewish teachers) created ways to at least double this allowed distance. One method was to establish a temporary home 2,000 cubits away by carrying enough food for two meals. They would eat one meal and bury one meal in the ground to mark a temporary dwelling place. Another method was to look at a spot 2,000 cubits away and consider it their legal home for the Sabbath. They could also treat their entire town as their home and calculate the Sabbath day's journey starting from the edge of the village.

See also Sabbath.

Sabbath Year, Sabbatical Year

Last year of the seven-year cycle established for keeping time in the Mosaic law. *See* Calendars, Ancient and Modern.

Sabbath, Covert for the

Covered place in the court of the temple reserved for the king who stood there with his attendants on

a Sabbath or feast day ([2 Kgs 16:18](#), kjv; nlt “canopy”).

Sabeans

Inhabitants of Sheba (Saba), a country in southwest Arabia. The Sabeans were noted as men of stature ([Is 45:14](#)) and for their murder and theft of Job’s servants and property ([Jb 1:15](#)).

See also Sheba (Place) #2.

Sabta, Sabtah

One of Cush’s five sons and a descendant of Noah through Ham’s line ([Gn 10:7](#); [1 Chr 1:9](#)). Sabtah presumably settled along the southern coast of Arabia, where several cities bear his name.

Sabteca

One of Cush’s five sons and a descendant of Noah through Ham’s line ([Gn 10:7](#); [1 Chr 1:9](#)). Sabteca settled in Arabia.

Sacar, Sachar

1. A Hararite and father of Ahiam. Sacar was one of the mighty men of King David ([1 Chronicles 11:35](#)). In another account of this same event, Sachar is called “Sharar the Hararite” ([2 Samuel 23:33](#)).
2. A Korahite and one of the eight sons of Obed-edom. [1 Chronicles 26:4](#) lists Sachar and his brothers among the families of gatekeepers.

Sachia, Sachiah

NASB and nkjv, respectively, for Sakia (nlt, niv). *See* Sakia.

Sackbut

A triangular-shaped harp in [Daniel 3:5–15](#). This is also called a trigon, but sackbut is the King James Version translation. *See* Musical Instruments (Sabcha).

Sackcloth

Sackcloth was a rough material, often made from goat hair, used primarily as a symbol of mourning. Some prophets and captives also wore it.

Sackcloth was usually dark and coarse ([Isaiah 50:3](#); [Revelation 6:12](#)). There are two main views about its shape.

1. Sackcloth was a rectangular garment, sewn on the sides and one end, with openings for the head and arms. This shape is similar to the grain sacks used by Joseph’s brothers ([Genesis 42:25–27, 35](#)) and the sacks used by the Gibeonites ([Joshua 9:4](#); compare [Leviticus 11:32](#)).
2. Sackcloth was more like a small loincloth. Hebrew practices support this. They include girding the loins with sackcloth ([2 Samuel 3:31](#); [Isaiah 15:3](#); [22:12](#); [Jeremiah 4:8](#)) and the placing of sackcloth on the loins ([Genesis 37:34](#); [1 Kings 20:31](#); [Jeremiah 48:37](#)), though more than one type of garment could have been made from sackcloth.

Sackcloth was mainly associated with mourning ([Genesis 37:34](#); [1 Kings 21:27](#); [Lamentations 2:10](#)). It was worn during national ([2 Kings 6:30](#); [Nehemiah 9:1](#); [Isaiah 37:1](#); [Jonah 3:8](#)) as well as personal crises constituted times for the wearing of sackcloth. It was worn by:

- Kings ([1 Kings 21:27](#); [2 Kings 6:30](#))
- Priests ([Joel 1:13](#))
- Elders ([Lamentations 2:10](#))
- Prophets ([Isaiah 20:2](#); [Zechariah 13:4](#))
- Cattle ([Jonah 3:8](#))

It was worn by those who were repenting ([Nehemiah 9:1](#); [Jeremiah 6:26](#); compare [Matthew](#)

[11:21](#)). This practice was not limited to Israel ([Isaiah 15:3](#); [Jeremiah 49:3](#); [Ezekiel 27:31](#); [Jonah 3:5](#)).

It has been suggested that the rough texture of sackcloth was uncomfortable and used to punish the wearer. However, there is no evidence to support this idea.

See also Burial, Burial Customs; Mourning.

Sacrifice

See Atonement; Offerings and Sacrifices.

Sadducees

The Sadducees were a Jewish religious group mentioned 14 times in the New Testament. They are not mentioned in the Old Testament.

The History of the Sadducees

Scholars have suggested several different explanations for how the Sadducees got their name:

1. Some link it to the Hebrew word for "righteous" (*saddik*). This is unlikely because the word would have changed from *i* to *u*. There is also no evidence that they claimed to be the "righteous ones."
2. The name is associated with Zadok (sometimes written *Saddouk* in Greek), a priest during David's time ([2 Samuel 8:17](#); [15:24-29](#)). Zadok anointed Solomon ([1 Kings 1:32-39](#)). He became chief priest during Solomon's reign ([2:35](#)). He was said to be a descendant of Eleazar, Aaron's son ([1 Chronicles 6:3-8](#)). Zadokite priests (priests from Zadok's family line) managed temple duties until the Babylonians exiled them to Babylon. The prophet Ezekiel describes a vision of a restored temple and worship system ([Ezekiel 40-48](#)). Zadokite priests were again chosen as "Levitical priests" in this restored temple ([44:15-16](#); [48:11-12](#)).

After the exile to Babylon, Joshua (Jeshua), son of Jehozadak, served as high priest ([Haggai 1:1](#)). Joshua was from the family line of Zadok through Jehozadak ([1 Chronicles 6:8-15](#)). The importance of the Zadokite priesthood is emphasized in early second-century BC writings. But we do not know if the Sadducees supported the Zadokite priesthood. Also, the double *d* in the word is not easily explained by this theory of Sadducean origins.
3. A later rabbinic tradition suggests that the Sadducees got their name from another Zadok who lived in the second century BC. This view has little support.
4. The British New Testament scholar T. W. Manson suggested that their name connects with the Greek word *sundikoi*, meaning "members of the council." This term designates the Sadducees as councilors under the Hasmonean rulers.

The first historical mention of the Sadducees is during the time of Jonathan Maccabeus, who led the Jewish fight against the Seleucids from 160 to 143 BC. Josephus, in his work *Antiquities* (13.5.9), noted that they were a group at this time. When John

Hyrcanus led the Jewish state from 135 to 104 BC, there was conflict between the Pharisees and the Sadducees (*Antiquities* 13.10.6). It is possible that the Sadducees supported the Zadokite priesthood or claimed that the Jerusalem priesthood of their time was of Zadokite origin, but this is unclear.

Josephus states that the Sadducees had the support of the wealthy, while the Pharisees were popular among common people. During the reign of Salome Alexandra from 76 to 67 BC, the Pharisees gained power. However, when Judea became a Roman province and Roman governors began changing high priests, most high priests came from noble Sadducean families. These families, able to cooperate with the Romans, held power and influence. As tensions grew between the Jews and Romans, the Sadducees' influence waned. After the Romans captured Jerusalem in AD 70, the Sadducees disappeared from history.

The Sadducees In the New Testament

In the Gospel story, they first appeared with the Pharisees at John's baptism. He called them "brood of vipers" and urged them to show repentance in their actions ([Matthew 3:7-10](#)). Later, the Sadducees joined some Pharisees to test Jesus by asking for a sign from heaven ([Matthew 16:1](#)). Jesus warned his disciples to be cautious of the Sadducees ([Matthew 16:6, 11-12](#)).

A significant difference appears between the Pharisees and Sadducees in [Matthew 22:23-33](#) (see also [Mark 12:18-27](#); [Luke 20:27-38](#)). The Sadducees, like others, wanted to embarrass Jesus with their questions. They asked a question meant to trap or confuse Jesus to show their doubts about the resurrection of the dead (people being brought back to life after they die).

The Sadducees are described as those who say there is no resurrection after death. They mentioned a woman who had seven brothers as her husbands, one after another. They asked, "whose wife will she be of the seven?" They implied that such a problem made the resurrection impossible. Jesus responded by pointing out the error in their view, caused by their ignorance of the Scriptures and God's power.

In the early days of the church in Jerusalem, the priests, the captain of the temple police, and the Sadducees became upset because the disciples were talking about the resurrection of the dead ([Acts 4:1-2](#)). The Sadducees seemed to lead the opposition against the apostles and their teachings.

Later, the high priest and Sadducees decided to arrest the apostles and put them in prison ([Acts 5:17](#)). The only other mention of them in the New Testament is in [Acts 23:6-8](#), during Paul's trial before the Sanhedrin (the Jewish council). On that occasion, Paul intentionally spoke about his belief in the resurrection to create a division between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, who did not believe in resurrection.

These New Testament passages reveal the main beliefs of the Sadducees, their importance among high priestly families, and their differences from the Pharisees.

The Sadducees in Other Writings

Josephus, a Jewish historian from the late first century AD, provides additional insights about the Sadducees beyond what is in the New Testament. He noted that unlike the Pharisees and Essenes, the Sadducees did not believe in God's control over events. They believed that our actions, whether good or bad, determine what happens to us (*Antiquities* 13.5.9; *War* 2.8.14). Josephus also mentioned that the Sadducees rejected the idea that the soul lives forever, and the concept of rewards and punishments in the afterlife (*War* 2.8.14). They believed that "souls die with the bodies" (*Antiquities* 18.1.4).

Early Christian writers like Hippolytus, Origen, and Jerome stated that the Sadducees accepted only the Pentateuch and not other Old Testament books. However, it seems they were not entirely against other Old Testament books. They likely opposed the additional legal rules introduced by the Pharisees, insisting that only the Old Testament law was mandatory. In their views on angels and life after death, they saw the Pharisees as people who introduced new ideas and themselves as people who preferred old ways.

The Mishnah, a collection of rabbinic teachings written in the second century AD, is another main source of knowledge about the Sadducees. The Sadducees opposed many detailed rules that the Pharisees wanted to impose on the people (*Parah* 3.3.7). The Mishnah also shows that the Sadducees were more likely to compromise with non-Jewish customs than other Jewish groups (*Niddah* 4.2).

See Essenes; Judaism; Pharisees.

Sadoc

The King James Version form of Zadok, an ancestor of Christ, in [Matthew 1:14](#).

See Zadok #9.

Saffron

Saffron, referred to in [Song of Songs 4:14](#), comes from several species of *Crocus*, especially the blue-flowered saffron crocus (*Crocus sativus*). This plant is native to Greece and Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey).

The commercial product consists of the stigma and upper portions of the style, which are parts of the flower's reproductive system. These parts are collected shortly after the flower opens. It takes at least 4,000 stigmas to make just one ounce of saffron. After being gathered, the stigmas are dried in the sun, pounded, and made into small cakes. Saffron is used mainly as a yellow dye and also as a food coloring for curries and stews.

Another completely different dye-producing plant is (*Carthamus tinctorius*), called carthamine, bastard saffron, or safflower. It is a member of the thistle family. Its red flower parts yield a dye used extensively for coloring silk, in cooking, and for mixing with genuine saffron. It is an annual spiny plant that grows 1.4 meters (3 to 4.5 feet) tall and is native to Syria and Egypt. In Egypt, the grave clothes of mummies were dyed with this material. It is quite possible that this plant may also have been the saffron mentioned in the Bible.

Sage

The sage is a plant that grows 0.9 meter (3 feet) tall and naturally grows in Palestine. The Judean sage grows in the mountains and hills of Palestine. Its stems are four-angled, stiff, and rough. The plant grows from Syria south through Nazareth, Hebron, Tiberius, Samaria, and Judea.

This plant is the origin of the design for the seven-branched lampstand described in [Exodus 37:17-18](#), which is known as the menorah, the traditional Jewish symbol. When the flower cluster of the plant is pressed flat, it has almost exactly the same shape and form as the seven-branched candlestick. It has a central spike with three pairs of side branches that each bend upward and inward in a symmetrical pattern.

On each branch of the plant's flower cluster are circles of buds that perhaps gave the idea for the "knops" (in the King James Version) or "knobs" on the biblical golden candlesticks.

Sailors

Men who are trained in sailing ships at sea. The people of Israel did not generally sail on the ocean. Most sailors and fishers in Israel operated on the Sea of Galilee and the Jordan River. Scripture mentions large ships occasionally ([Genesis 49:13](#); [Judges 5:17](#)). Solomon had a fleet of ships at Ezion-geber on the Gulf of Aqaba ([1 Kings 9:26-28](#); [2 Chronicles 8:17-18](#); [9:21](#)). Jehoshaphat also had a fleet at Ezion-geber ([1 Kings 22:48](#); [2 Chronicles 20:35-37](#)).

The New Testament frequently mentions ships and sailors. Many fishing boats operated in Galilee ([Matthew 14:22](#); [Mark 1:19](#); [3:9](#); [Luke 5:2](#); [John 6:19](#), [22-24](#); [21:8](#)). Paul traveled to Rome on a large ship ([Acts 27:6-44](#)). Shipmen or sailors are mentioned in [Acts 27:27, 30](#). The term "mariner" (King James Version) refers to a sailor ([Ezekiel 27:9, 27-29](#); [Jonah 1:5](#)).

See also Travel.

Saints

A saint is a person who believes in Jesus and belongs to God. The word "saint" means "holy one" or "someone set apart for God."

The Old Testament believers were called to be "holy," or set apart for God ([Exodus 22:31](#); [Leviticus 11:44](#)). In the New Testament, "saints" became the apostle Paul's favorite name for Christians ([Romans 1:7](#); [8:27](#); [12:13](#); [15:25-26, 31](#); [16:2, 15](#); plus 31 other places in Paul's letters). The name is also used 14 times in the book of Revelation. Other New Testament writers used it sometimes ([Hebrews 6:10](#); [13:24](#); [Jude 1:3](#)).

Being called a saint means that Christians should live holy lives ([Hebrews 12:10](#); [Revelation 22:11](#)). God has chosen them to be his special people, like priests who serve him. They should live differently from people who do not follow God ([1 Peter 1:15-16](#); [2:5, 9](#)). More than that, they are the people of the coming age, who will rule with God over the earth and angels.

Sakia

Son of Shaharaim and Hodesh from Benjamin's tribe ([1 Chr 8:10](#)).

Sakkuth

Sakkuth is the name of a Babylonian god similar to Saturn, worshiped in Mesopotamia ([Amos 5:26](#)). Some think the name may come from the Hebrew word *sukkah*, meaning "shrine" or "tabernacle," where an idol could be placed.

See Kaiwan.

Sala

1. An alternate name for Salmon, Boaz's father, in [Luke 3:32](#).
See Salmon (Person).
2. The King James Version spelling of Shelah, Eber's father, in [Luke 3:35](#).
See Shelah #1.

Salah

KJV form of Shelah, Eber's father, in [Genesis 10:24](#) and [11:12-15](#). See Shelah #1.

Salamis

Seaport on the eastern shore of Cyprus where Barnabas and Saul landed near the beginning of their first missionary journey. They proclaimed the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews in this town ([Acts 13:5](#)). Tradition states that the city was 1,000 years old when the missionaries arrived, having been founded by Teucer after his return from the Trojan war.

For centuries, it was a major seaport, shipping copper, timber, ceramics, and agricultural products to Europe, Africa, and Asia. The Ptolemies encouraged Jews to settle there, which is why Barnabas and Saul found Jewish synagogues there. Barnabas's tomb is at nearby Ali Barnaba monastery (discovered in AD 477).

After the partial destruction of the city by Hadrian in AD 116 and further damage by earthquakes in AD 332 and 342, it was rebuilt by the Byzantine

emperor Constantius II (AD 336–361). Prior to AD 332, Salamis had the largest Jewish community on the island. Afterward, it apparently contained the largest Christian community, as it became the metropolitan see of the island.

After the destruction of the city by the Saracens in AD 647, the harbor silted up and the site was abandoned. During the centuries of Ottoman dominance, the harbor was replaced by the port of Famagusta.

Salathiel

The King James Version alternate spelling of Shealtiel, King Jehoiachin's son, in [1 Chronicles 3:17](#), [Matthew 1:12](#), and [Luke 3:27](#).

See Shealtiel.

Salcah, Salchah, Salecah

City or district that formed the northeastern extremity of the Amorite kingdom of Og in Bashan, east of the Jordan River. Salecah (variously spelled Salcah and Salchah in the kjv) was located near the city of Edrei ([Jos 12:5](#)). The Israelites gained possession of this city when they defeated Og ([Dt 3:10](#)). Later, Salecah was included in the land received by Gad's tribe for an inheritance ([Jos 13:11](#); [1 Chr 5:11](#)). The city is identifiable with the modern town of Salkhad.

Salem

City from which the priest-king Melchizedek came ([Gn 14:18](#); [Ps 76:2](#); [Heb 7:1-2](#)). Salem is believed to be an ancient name of Jerusalem. See Jerusalem.

Salim

Location near Aenon on the west side of the Jordan River. Aenon was known for its many springs and was used by John as a place for baptism ([Jn 3:23](#)). Its location is not certain. Some scholars agree with Eusebius (an early church father) that its location was about seven miles (11.3 kilometers) south of Scythopolis (Beth-shan) in the Decapolis region. Others suggest it was the Salim east of Nablus near Shechem in Samaria, or perhaps the Wadi Saleim, six miles (9.7 kilometers) northeast of Jerusalem.

Sallai

1. One of 928 Benjaminites who lived in the city of Jerusalem during the postexilic period ([Neh 11:8](#)).
2. Levitical household in the postexilic period during the days of Joiakim, the high priest ([Neh 12:20](#); nlt "Sallu"); perhaps the same as Sallu in [Nehemiah 12:7](#). See Sallu #2.

Sallu

1. Son of Meshullam and a Benjaminite, who resided in the city of Jerusalem during the postexilic period ([1 Chr 9:7](#); [Neh 11:7](#)).
2. Levitical priest who returned to Jerusalem with Zerubbabel following the Babylonian captivity ([Neh 12:7](#)). The Sallai mentioned in some translations of [Nehemiah 12:20](#) is thought to be a variant spelling of Sallu.

Salma

1. Hur's son of Caleb's family. He is considered the founding father of Bethlehem ([1 Chr 2:51, 54](#)).
2. An alternate spelling for "Salmon" in [1 Chronicles 2:11](#). See Salmon (Person).

Salmon (Person)

Nahshon's son and an ancestor of David from the tribe of Judah ([1 Chronicles 2:11](#)). Salmon fathered Boaz by Rahab ([Ruth 4:20-21](#)) and is listed in Matthew's family list as a family member of Jesus Christ ([Matthew 1:4-5](#)). In the Greek, his name is spelled Sala in Luke's genealogy ([Luke 3:32](#)).

See also Genealogy of Jesus Christ.

Salmon (Place)

KJV spelling of Zalmon, a mountain in Bashan, in [Psalm 68:14](#). See Zalmon (Place).

Salmone

A promontory (a high point of land extending into the sea) on the east side of Crete. The apostle Paul's ship sailed near this location during his journey to Rome ([Acts 27:7](#)).

Salome

The name Salome comes from the Hebrew greeting *shalom*, which means peace. The style of the name with the added letter "e" at the end is Greek.

1. A woman called Salome was a follower of Jesus. She may have been Mary's sister and the mother of James and John. In [Mark 15:40](#), the evangelist describes the women who stood at the foot of the cross. Three women are named: Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the lesser and of Joses, and Salome. Mark later describes the women who arrived at the tomb at dawn. Mark recounts that Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome had brought spices to anoint the body y ([Mark 16:1](#)). Matthew speaks of two women named Mary, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee, who could have been Salome ([Matthew 27:56](#)). John speaks of four women:
 2. Mary the mother of Jesus;
 3. Mary the wife of Clopas;
 4. Mary Magdalene; and
 5. Mary's sister (not named mentioned by name in [John 19:25](#)).

If Mary's sister was Salome, she and the mother of the sons of Zebedee were likely the same person. This would make James and John, the sons of Zebedee, cousins to Jesus.

1. Daughter of Herodias, from her first marriage to Herod Philip. Neither [Matthew 14:6](#) or [Mark 6:22](#) mention her by name, but according to tradition, Salome is the girl who pleased Herod with her dancing. As a reward, Herod promised her on oath anything she asked for up to half his kingdom. Prompted by her mother, she demanded the head of John the Baptist.

Salt Sea

See Dead Sea.

Salt, City of

See City of Salt.

Salt, Covenant of

See Covenant of Salt.

Saltwort

Family of bushy shrubs, of which numerous species can be found along the coasts of the Mediterranean Sea. See Plants (Mallow).

Salu

A man from the tribe of Simeon and the father of Zimri. His son Zimri was the head of his father's household. Zimri was killed by Phinehas ([Numbers 25:14](#)).

Salvation

God's way of providing people deliverance from sin and death. Scripture reveals God but it also reveals his plan to save the human race. In that sense, salvation is a major theme in both the OT and NT.

In the Old Testament

The concept of salvation is represented by various terms and situations in both Testaments. Among several Hebrew words that mean "deliver" or "save," the Hebrew verb *yasha'* and derivatives are most frequently translated by English versions as "save" or "salvation." Frequency in the English Bible depends upon the version considered. For example, in the OT "salvation" is found 74 times in the nlt, 80 times in the niv, 90 times in the rsv, 111 times in the nasb, and 119 times in the kjv. Salvation is not used as a technical term in the OT and is ascribed to both individuals and God. Leaders like Samson ([Jgs 13:5](#)) or David ([2 Sm 8:6](#)) are used of the Lord to bring deliverance to God's people.

Israel's concept of salvation was rooted in the historical experience of the exodus. This momentous occasion was an opportunity to witness the salvation of the Lord ([Ex 14:13](#)) firsthand. Poets ([Ps 106:8](#)) and prophets ([Is 43:3](#); [Hos 13:4](#)) later reiterated God's salvation when recalling the exodus experience. Israel's understanding of salvation was worked out in historical instances like Sennacherib's attack on Jerusalem in 701 BC, when the Lord declared that he would save the city for his name's sake ([2 Kgs 19:34](#); cf. [18:30, 35](#)). Israel's opportunity to see God's salvation through various leaders and situations corroborated this understanding of God as the God of salvation.

Israel's response to God's deliverance was primarily praise, as evidenced so often in the psalms ([Pss 3:8](#); [9:14](#); [21:1](#)) and earlier poetic passages ([Ex 15:2](#); [1 Sm 2:1](#)). In addition, they directed petitions and pleas for help to the Lord for his salvation—whether from enemies ([Pss 35:3](#); [38:22](#)), sickness ([69:29](#)), or battle ([140:7](#); [144:10–11](#))—and in faith expected his deliverance ([35:9](#); [65:5](#)).

The prophets emphasized the eschatological (end-time) aspect of salvation. God's ability to save was revealed by his great works in the past, which thus promoted the anticipation of his work of deliverance in the future. This future hope was for the nation of Israel ([Is 45:17](#)) but anticipated universal deliverance ([49:6](#)). The prophets looked forward to deliverance and return from exile in Babylon ([Is 49:25–26](#); [Jer 46:27](#)), yet they also spoke of an abiding future salvation ([Is 45:17](#); [51:6–8](#)). The messianic hope is indicated in passages that speak of an individual who will bring God's salvation. Isaiah speaks of the Servant who

brings salvation to the ends of the earth ([49:6](#)), while Jeremiah writes of deliverance by God's righteous Branch ([Jer 23:5-6](#)). The mention of the king who brings salvation in [Zechariah 9:9](#) reflects this messianic theme and is applied to Jesus Christ in [Matthew 21:4-5](#).

In the New Testament

In classical Greek the verb *sozo* ("to save") and noun *soteria* ("salvation") are used for the concept of "rescue," "deliverance" or "salvation," and even "well-being" or "health." The Septuagint most frequently uses *sozo* to render the Hebrew *yasha'* ("to save"), and the NT primarily employs *sozo* and its derivatives for the idea of salvation.

These Greek terms are generally used theologically in the NT, but examples of nontheological usage occur. In [Acts 27](#), these words refer to the threat and deliverance of the soldiers, sailors, and prisoners from shipwreck (vv [20, 31](#)), as well as their well-being (v [34](#)).

In the Gospels "salvation" is clearly connected with the OT concept of salvation; it is applied to the coming of Christ in Zechariah's prophecy ([Lk 1:69, 71](#); cf. [Pss 106:10; 132:17](#)) and in Simeon's hymn of praise ([Lk 2:30](#)). While *soteria* does not occur frequently in the Gospels, the concept of salvation is implied in Jesus' statement about entrance into the kingdom of God ([Mt 19:24-26](#)) and his miracles of healing ([Lk 17:19; 18:42](#)).

The NT teaches that salvation has its source in Jesus Christ ([2 Tm 2:10; Heb 5:9](#)), who is the "author" and mediator of salvation ([Heb 2:10; 7:25](#)). Salvation is God's work ([1 Thes 5:9](#)) and is offered by his grace ([Eph 2:8-9](#)). The message of salvation is contained in the Scriptures ([2 Tm 3:15](#)) and is carried by those who proclaim the word of truth ([Eph 1:13](#)). The appropriate response is repentance ([2 Cor 7:10](#)) and faith ([2 Tm 3:15; 1 Pt 1:9](#)). This was the preaching of the early church as it proclaimed the Savior Jesus ([Acts 4:12; 13:23-26; 16:30-31](#)). Paul especially proclaimed the universality of God's offer of salvation ([Rom 1:16; Ti 2:11](#)). His desire was for Jews to be saved ([Rom 10:1](#)), though he primarily preached the message of salvation to the Gentiles ([11:11-13](#)).

Within the Scriptures there are many other terms associated with the concept of salvation. The new birth speaks of being made alive in Christ ("born again," [Jn 3:3](#)). Justification envisions one's legal standing before God, while redemption speaks more of the means of salvation—the payment of a

price to bring one back to God. Reconciliation speaks of a change in relationship and propitiation, which evokes the OT sacrificial system and points to the turning away of God's wrath. These terms and others share some common ground with the biblical concept of salvation, but all point to the person and work of Jesus Christ the Savior.

See also Justification, Justified; Reconciliation; Redeemer, Redemption; Savior.

Samaria

Capital of the northern kingdom of Israel, identified with the hill on which the village of Sebastieh is located.

The hill was purchased by King Omri from Shemer, the clan who had occupied it. He built his new capital there ([1 Kgs 16:24](#)). A village was evidently there, dating at least from the 10th or perhaps the 11th century BC. It became the center of the revived kingdom and enjoyed the new prestige of the Omride dynasty. But it was also subject to siege. Ben-hadad of Syria (Aram-Damascus) came up against it with an alliance of 32 kings ([1 Kgs 20](#)), but the Israelites succeeded in driving them off. During the reign of Ahab's son Joram, Ben-hadad came again ([2 Kgs 6:24-7:20](#)) and almost conquered the city with a lengthy siege.

After a series of wars and the coup d'état by Jehu, which resulted in the slaughter of the priests of Baal in Samaria ([2 Kgs 10:18-28](#)), the city returned to the worship of Yahweh under Jehu's descendants. Nevertheless, the Asherah cult remained in Samaria under Jehoahaz ([13:6](#)). Syria continued to have the upper hand militarily (v [7](#)).

During the eighth century, the balance changed in Israel's favor ([2 Kgs 13:14-25](#)), and under Jeroboam II, Samaria enjoyed great prosperity ([2 Kgs 14:23-28; Am 3:10, 15; 4:1; 6:1, 4-6](#)). In the late eighth century, the internal strife in Israel left the kingdom open to subjection by the Assyrians ([2 Kgs 15](#)). Finally, after Galilee, Transjordan, and perhaps the coastal plain were already detached, Samaria fell to Sargon II ([18:9-12](#)). During the ensuing decades, foreign exiles were transported there.

In the Persian period (sixth through fourth centuries BC), Samaria was the center of an administrative district governed by a dynasty of rulers whose names included several Sanballats (see [Neh 2:10ff.](#)), usually every other generation.

The resultant Samaritan people considered themselves part of Israel but were rejected by the Judeans ([Ezr 4:1–3](#)). They were consulted, however, by the Jews of Elephantine when help was needed to rebuild the temple in Egypt.

When Alexander the Great came to the Levant in 331 BC, the Samaritans at first carried his favor (Josephus, *Antiquities* 11.8.4), but later they murdered his governor. Their leaders evidently took refuge in the Wadi Dalieh cave, where they were trapped with their personal documents (papyri) and suffocated.

Samaria was taken in 108–107 BC (*Antiquities* 13.10.2; *War* 1.2.7) by John Hyrcanus, who destroyed the city. It was rebuilt by Pompey and further restored by Gabinius. King Herod changed the name of the city to Sebaste in honor of Caesar Augustus (Sebastos) and built a large temple to him there. At Sebaste, Herod entertained Agrippa, killed his wife Mariamne, and strangled his sons. During the first Jewish war, the Sebastenes went over to the Romans.

See also Samaritans.

Samaritans

Schismatic group from the Jews. The group resided north of Judea and south of Galilee in hostile tension with its Jewish neighbors. Jesus' attitude toward this despised group radically contrasted with contemporary sentiment.

Preview

- Origins of the Sect
- Relations between the Samaritans and the Jews
- Samaritan Beliefs
- Jesus and the Samaritans
- Samaria in the Mission of the Early Church

Origins of the Sect

It is difficult to determine precisely when the Samaritan sect arose and when the final break with Judaism occurred. The OT conception of the origin of the Samaritan sect is that they stemmed from repopulated foreign peoples whose worship of God was only a veneer for underlying idolatry. According to [2 Kings 17](#), the Samaritan sect arose from the exchange of peoples following Israel's defeat by Assyria in 722 BC. Removing the

Israelites from the land, the king of Assyria repopulated the area with conquered peoples from Babylon, Cuthah, and various other nations.

The Samaritans offer a vastly different interpretation of their origin. They claim descent from the Jewish tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh (see [Jn 4:12](#)) and hold that the exile of Israelites in 722 BC by Assyria was neither full-scale nor permanent. To account for the mutual hostility that developed between their group and the Jews, the Samaritan version holds that the Jews were guilty of apostasy, setting up heretical sanctuaries during the time of Eli, rather than staying with the only holy place on Mt Gerizim. The Samaritans therefore considered themselves true Israelites in descent and worship.

From Assyrian records of this period, an exchange of population is in fact affirmed for the northern kingdom, but apparently a total deportation was not carried out (see [2 Chr 34:9](#)). This would suggest that there were two elements in the land: first, the native Israelite remnant not exiled; and second, the foreign exiles who were gradually won over to the faith of the native residents, although syncretism no doubt existed during the early period of assimilation.

Relations between the Samaritans and the Jews

The history of relations between the Samaritans—situated on the north around Mt Gerizim (their holy mountain), Shechem, and Samaria—and Jewish populations in Judea and then later in Galilee is one of fluctuating tensions. The ancient tension between the northern and southern kingdoms was revived with the return of exiles to Jerusalem under the Persian ruler Cyrus's edict (c. 538 BC). The entire southern area was at the time being governed from Samaria in the north by Sanballat, a native ruler of Palestine under Persian authority. The return of exiles to Jerusalem, particularly with their intentions of rebuilding the Jerusalem temple, posed an obvious political threat to his leadership in the north ([Ezr 4:7–24](#); [Neh 4:1–9](#)).

Opposition was at first politically motivated but became religious when sometime later, possibly in the fifth century BC, a rival temple was erected on Mt Gerizim. An example of Jewish hostility toward the Samaritans about this time comes from [Ecclesiasticus 50:25–26](#) (written approximately 200 BC), where the Samaritans are placed below the Edomites and Philistines in esteem and are termed a “foolish people” (cf. Test. Levi 7:2).

Jewish disregard for the Samaritans was increased by the Samaritans' lack of resistance to Antiochus Epiphanes' campaign (c. 167 BC) to promote Hellenistic worship in the area. While part of the Jewish community resisted the transforming of the Jerusalem temple to a temple for Zeus ([1 Macc 1:62-64](#)) and eventually followed the Maccabees in revolt ([1 Macc 2:42-43](#)), sources suggest that the Samaritans did not (see [1 Macc 6:2](#)).

Poor relations came to a climax during the brief period of Jewish independence under the Hasmoneans, when the Jewish ruler, John Hyrcanus, marched against Shechem, conquering and destroying the Samaritan temple on Mt Gerizim (c. 128 BC).

Under Herod the Great, Samaria's fortunes improved, although animosity still continued between the Samaritans and Jews in Judea and Galilee. Holding the Jerusalem temple to be a false cultic center, and excluded from the inner courts by the Jerusalem authorities, a group of Samaritans desecrated the Jerusalem temple in approximately AD 6 by spreading human bones within the temple porches and sanctuary during Passover. Hostility toward Galilean Jews traveling through Samaria on the way to Jerusalem for various feasts was also not uncommon ([Lk 9:51-53](#)).

This animosity continued in Jesus' day. Both groups excluded the other from their respective cultic centers, the Jerusalem temple and the Samaritan temple on Mt Gerizim. The Samaritans, for example, were forbidden access to the inner courts of the temple, and any offering they might give was considered as if it were from a Gentile. Thus, although probably more accurately defined as "schismatics," it appears Samaritans were in practice treated as Gentiles. All marriage between the groups was therefore forbidden, and social relations were greatly restricted ([Jn 4:9](#)). With such proscribed separation, it is not surprising that any interaction between the two groups was strained. The mere term Samaritan was one of contempt on the lips of Jews ([8:48](#)), and among some scribes it possibly would not even be uttered (see the apparent circumlocution in [Lk 10:37](#)). The disciples' reaction to the Samaritan refusal of lodging ([9:51-55](#)) is a good example of the animosity felt by Jews for Samaritans at the time.

Although there is less evidence for similar attitudes from the Samaritan side, we can assume they existed. It is probable to speculate, therefore, that the Samaritan shunning of hospitality in [Luke](#)

[9:51-55](#) was not uncommon toward other Jews whose "face was set toward Jerusalem."

Samaritan Beliefs

The main beliefs of the Samaritans demonstrate both the close affinities with and obvious divergences from mainstream Judaism. They held in common with Judaism a strong monotheistic faith in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. In contrast, however, there was an elevating of Mt Gerizim in the north as the only holy place for sacrifice, based on several divergent passages in Deuteronomy and Exodus in the Samaritan text. Mt Gerizim came to be identified with the site of Abel's first altar ([Gn 4:4](#)), the site of Noah's sacrifice after the Flood ([8:20](#)), the meeting place of Abraham and Melchizedek ([14:18](#)), the site of Isaac's intended sacrifice (ch [22](#)), and many other associations.

The Samaritans held only the first five biblical books (Pentateuch) to be inspired and based their dogma and practice exclusively on these books. Such a narrow canon not only determined the direction of Samaritan theology but further separated them from contemporary Jewish thought. Moses, for example, was more highly exalted by the Samaritans than by the Jews. He was considered not only the chief prophet but also, in later thought, was described as the choicest of men, preexisting from Creation, interceding with God for Israel, and being to man "the light of the world." The messianic hope of Samaritan theology also reflects this narrow canon. A Messiah from the house of David could not be anticipated, as no evidence for such could be found in the Pentateuch. Rather, the Samaritans awaited a "prophet like Moses" based on [Deuteronomy 18:15-18](#). This anticipated prophet was also designated the "Taheb," the Restorer, for he would in the last days restore proper cultic worship on Mt Gerizim and bring the worship of the heathen to that site.

It is clear, therefore, that it was primarily the claim of supremacy for Mt Gerizim that separated this group theologically and culturally from their Jewish neighbors.

Jesus and the Samaritans

The common Jewish perspective on Samaritans as being nearly Gentile was evidently held to some extent by Jesus as well. Jesus refers to the Samaritan leper as "this foreigner" ([Lk 17:18](#)) and prohibits his disciples, during their commissioning, from taking the message of the kingdom to either the Samaritans or the Gentiles ([Mt 10:5](#)).

Yet the overwhelming evidence in the Gospels is that Jesus' attitude toward the Samaritans differed radically from that of his Jewish contemporaries. When his disciples display the usual Jewish animosity in asking to have the "fire of judgment" rain down upon the inhospitable Samaritans, Jesus "rebuked them" ([Lk 9:55](#)). Moreover, he did not refuse to heal the Samaritan leper but honored him as the only one of the ten who remembered to give glory to God ([17:11-19](#)). So also in the parable of the Good Samaritan ([10:30-37](#)) Jesus clearly breaks through the traditional prejudices in portraying the despised Samaritan, not the respected Jewish priest or Levite, as the true neighbor to the man in need. Here as elsewhere, Jesus, in confronting his audience with God's demand, breaks through traditional definitions of "righteous" and "outcast."

[John 4:4-43](#) records not only the fascinating exchange between Jesus and the Samaritan woman but also Jesus' subsequent two-day stay in the town of Sychar, a Samaritan city. Here we see Jesus not only risking ritual uncleanness by contact with the Samaritan woman at the well (vv [7-9](#)) but also offering the gift of salvation to her (v [10](#)) and the entire Samaritan town (vv [39-41](#)). Through Jesus' knowledge of her marital life (vv [16-18](#)), the woman concludes he must be a "prophet." Remembering that the Samaritans were expecting a "prophet like Moses" in the last days, it is possible that the woman was wondering if Jesus was their long-awaited prophetic Messiah (vv [19, 25-26](#)). Jesus not only breaks through the rigid animosity of Jews toward Samaritans by doing the unthinkable in staying with this despised people, but he also accepts their faith in him as "Messiah" (v [26](#)) and "Savior of the world" (v [42](#)). Here, as with his association with the outcasts of Jewish society, Jesus redefines righteousness not according to descent or religious practice but according to faith in himself. In so doing, he shatters the racial and cultural distinctions of his day and lays the foundation for the gospel's subsequent spread to the entire gentile world.

Samaria in the Mission of the Early Church

In the great commission given prior to his ascension, Jesus told his disciples to take the gospel to Samaria ([Acts 1:8](#)). The missionary activity of the early church did indeed include this region. When, following the martyrdom of Stephen, many Christians were forced to leave Jerusalem ([8:1](#)), one such Christian, Philip, spread the gospel in the city of Samaria (v [5](#)). The response was so great to

the miracles performed that Peter and John (representing the apostles in Jerusalem) were sent to investigate and to confirm the presence of the Holy Spirit among them. Evidence from the second century AD suggests, however, that Christianity did not gain a strong foothold among the Samaritans. For the most part, the Samaritans retained their own religion. A small remnant of the Samaritan sect continues to exist to this day, living near Mt Gerizim (Shechem) and in various cities in Israel.

See also Bible, Manuscripts and Text of the (Old Testament); Samaria.

Samgar-Nebo

Babylonian prince who took part with Nebuchadnezzar and the Chaldean army in conquering Jerusalem after a three-year siege from 588-586 BC ([Jer 39:3](#)).

Samlah

King of the Edomites from the town of Masrekah. Samlah came to power before any king ruled in Israel ([Gn 36:36-37](#); [1 Chr 1:47-48](#)).

Samos

Samos is a small Greek island in the Aegean Sea. It is near the coast of Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey) close to a piece of land called Trogyllium. The island sits southwest of the city of Ephesus and northwest of the city of Miletus. During the time when the apostle Paul lived, Samos was a wealthy trading center. The Roman Empire allowed Samos to govern itself rather than controlling it directly.

When Paul wanted to avoid going to Ephesus, he stopped his ship near Samos during his journey to Jerusalem at the end of his third missionary journey. The Bible mentions Paul's stop at Samos between his visits to Kios and Miletus ([Acts 20:15](#)).

Samothrace

Island in the northeastern part of the Aegean Sea off the coast of the Roman province of Thrace. It was named Samothrace, or "Samos of Thrace," to distinguish it from the other Samos (cf. [Acts 20:15](#)), which was also in the Aegean Sea but a little

southwest of Ephesus. Samothrace was about halfway between Troas and Neapolis, the seaport of Philippi.

This island was the stopping place for the apostle Paul on his way from Troas to Neapolis on his second missionary journey ([Acts 16:11](#)). It is not clear whether Paul landed on the island or whether his boat only anchored off its coast before sailing for Neapolis the next day. The usual anchorage was on the north side of the island, since boats were thereby protected from the southeast wind. Apparently, Paul's voyage from Troas to Neapolis via Samothrace was made with a fair wind behind the boat because it took two days. Returning, it took five days (see [20:6](#)).

Samothrace is a mountainous island, with its central peak the highest point in the northern part of the Aegean, second in height only to Mt Athos on the mainland. The island has always been, in clear weather, an ancient landmark for sailors sailing between Troas and Neapolis. It is about 20 miles (32.2 kilometers) in circumference.

Samson

The son of Manoah, from Dan's tribe. Samson's mother's name is not given in the Bible. She had been unable to have children, but the angel of the Lord announced to her that she would have a son. He was to be as dedicated as a Nazirite all his life. This meant he was not to drink wine or strong drink, not to eat anything ceremonially unclean, and not to allow a razor to touch his head ([Numbers 6:1-6](#)). She was also told that he would begin to deliver Israel from the Philistines, who had ruled over Israel for 40 years ([Judges 13:1-5](#)).

Samson's Birth and Early Life

She reported this to her husband, Manoah, and Manoah prayed about this angelic visit (verse [8](#)). The angel of the Lord appeared again and gave instructions about the child who was to be born. Manoah made a burnt offering, and the angel of the Lord went up to heaven in the smoke. Manoah feared that they would die, for he now realized that they had seen God (verse [22](#)). The child was born and the Lord blessed him as he grew. The Spirit of the Lord moved upon him in Mahaneh-dan (verse [25](#)).

Samson's Marriage

Samson went to Timnah and saw a Philistine woman whom he wished to marry. The Lord was seeking an opportunity against the Philistines. In Samson's case, these occasions came through Philistine women. When Samson and his parents went to Timnah to arrange the marriage, a lion came out of the vineyards. Samson, upon whom the Spirit of the Lord came mightily, tore the lion in half. Later he found that a swarm of bees had made honey in the carcass of the lion ([Judges 14:2-9](#)).

Samson made a feast at Timnah, as was the custom. He told the Philistine men a riddle that involved the lion and the honey. They made a wager on the riddle and the Philistines convinced Samson's new wife to learn the answer and share the information with them. When they came up with the answer, Samson knew what had happened. He went out and killed 30 Philistine men to pay for his bet ([Judges 14:19](#)). Samson went home, and his father-in-law gave Samson's wife to Samson's best man.

When Samson returned to see his wife, he was not allowed to visit her. In revenge, Samson took 300 foxes and tied them in pairs tail to tail. He fixed a torch to each pair and turned them loose in the grainfields of the Philistines so that the harvested grain bundles and growing crops were burned. Consequently, the Philistines came and burned his wife and her father. In revenge, Samson went out and slaughtered many of them ([Judges 15:1-8](#)).

More Conflict with the Philistines

The Philistines then came against Judah. The people of Judah bound Samson with new ropes to turn him over to the Philistines. When they came to Lehi, where the Philistines were camped, the Spirit of the Lord came on him mightily. Samson snapped the ropes, seized the jawbone of a donkey, and killed 1,000 Philistines. Being very thirsty, he cried to the Lord, so God opened a spring of water at Lehi ([Judges 15:9-20](#)).

Samson's weakness for Philistine women continued to create trouble for both him and the Philistines. He went down to Gaza, where he became involved with a prostitute ([Judges 16:1](#)). The men of the city learned that he was there and plotted to kill him at dawn. Samson got up at midnight and walked off with the doors, posts, and bar of the city gate and put them on top of the hill before Hebron.

Samson and Delilah

Then he found Delilah, from the valley of Sorek. The Philistines enlisted her by bribery to find out the source of his strength ([Judges 16:4-5](#)). She kept pestering him, so he told her that if they bound him with seven fresh bowstrings he would be as weak as other men. She bound him and cried, "The Philistines are upon you." He easily broke the bowstrings.

In response to her continued questions, he kept lying to her about the secret of his strength. In succession, she bound him with new ropes and seven locks of his hair woven together and attached to a loom. Finally, she wore him down and he told her the truth. If someone shaved his head and broke his Nazirite vow, his strength would be gone. While Samson slept with his head on her knees, she called a barber, who shaved off his hair. This time when she cried, "The Philistines are upon you," the Philistines seized him, gouged out his eyes, and took him to Gaza (verse [21](#)).

At Gaza, Samson was bound with bronze chains and forced to labor at a mill, during which time his hair began to grow again. The Philistines celebrated a great festival at the temple of their god, Dagon. They celebrated their victory over Samson and asked that he be brought in so they could mock him. Some 3,000 people watched while Samson entertained them. At his request, Samson was placed between the two pillars supporting the temple. He asked the Lord for strength and pushed against the pillars so that the entire building collapsed. Samson died with the Philistines as he had requested, but he killed more Philistines in this final act than he had before ([Judges 16:1-30](#)).

Samson's family came to retrieve his body, and they buried him between Zorah and Eshtaol in the tomb of his father, Manoah. He had served as "judge," or leader, of Israel for 20 years ([Judges 16:31](#)).

See also Israel, History of; Judges, Book of.

Samuel (Person)

Last of the judges, his name means "name of God" or "his name is El" (El is the name of the God of strength and power). The play on words in [1 Samuel 1:20](#) (cf. [Ex 2:10](#)) is not intended to be an explanation of the meaning of Samuel's name; Hannah's words recall only her prayer and the circumstances surrounding her son's birth.

Personal History

Samuel's parents were a devout couple who went annually to the sanctuary at Shiloh ([1 Sm 1:3](#)). His father, Elkanah, was a Levite ([1 Chr 6:26](#)) and a resident in Ramah, territory of Ephraim. His mother, Hannah, was unable to bear children early in their marriage. Elkanah had a second wife, Peninnah.

On a visit to Shiloh, Hannah prayed in the sanctuary ([1 Sm 1:6-11](#)), vowing that, if the Lord would give her a son, she would dedicate him as a Nazirite ([Nm 6:1-21](#)) to God's service for life. The Lord heard Hannah's prayer and granted her request. She had no other children until after Samuel's dedication.

When Samuel was presented to Eli and began his service in the sanctuary, he bowed before the Lord and "worshiped the Lord there" ([1 Sm 1:28](#)). Three ingredients—a feeling of worth, a knowledge of his parents' love (cf. [2:19](#)), and a sense of purpose—laid the foundation of his personality and his future accomplishments.

Further proof of Samuel's valuable early training is evidenced in [1 Samuel 2](#). Eli's sons had followed the licentious practices of the pagan religions about them. Eli was old, indulgent, and powerless to restrain them. Samuel neither developed irreverence for Eli nor followed his sons in the path of evil. God determined to judge Eli and his house for their sins. When God announced his purpose to Samuel, Samuel responded with reverence and respect. His personal and spiritual growth indicated that he had been marked out as a future prophet of the Lord.

When everyone did what was right in his or her own eyes (cf. [Jgs 17:6](#); [21:25](#)), God allowed an adjacent nation to serve as his instrument to chasten his people, until a judge arose to deliver them. When the Philistines again invaded the land ([1 Sm 4-6](#)), the Israelites mustered their army at Ebenezer, only to be defeated. Believing that the ark of the covenant would guarantee success, they sent to Shiloh for it. The next day the Israelites were again defeated and the ark captured. When this news reached Eli, he fell from his stool and died.

Twenty years elapsed before Samuel's name is mentioned again ([1 Sm 7:2-3](#)). Evidently, following the destruction of Shiloh (cf. [Jer 7:12-14](#); [26:6, 9](#); [Ps 78:60](#)), he lived in Ramah and went on annual preaching missions that included Bethel, Gilgal, and Mizpah, "judging" the people in these places (cf. [Dt 16:18-22](#); [17:8-13](#)). Samuel probably also

founded “schools of the prophets” during this period. Schools were established at Bethel ([1 Sm 10:5](#); [2 Kgs 2:3](#)), Gilgal ([2 Kgs 4:38](#)), Ramah ([1 Sm 19:20](#)), and elsewhere ([2 Kgs 2:5](#)), perhaps as a natural outgrowth of Samuel’s ministry.

After a 20-year ministry, Samuel thought it timely to move toward spiritual and national unification. He convened a meeting at Mizpah ([1 Sm 7](#)). There, with a symbolic rite expressive of deep humiliation and in keeping with the libations of a treaty, the Israelites poured out water on the ground, fasted, and prayed.

The Philistines mistook the nature of the convocation and decided to attack the defenseless worshipers, who entreated Samuel to pray for them. He offered a sacrifice and the Lord sent a violent thunderstorm, causing the invaders to flee in panic. The pursuing Israelites won a significant victory at Ebenezer ([1 Sm 7:12](#)).

In Samuel’s declining years, the elders rejected his leadership in favor of a king ([1 Sm 8](#)). Following earnest prayer, he received new direction from the Lord, acceded to their request, and later anointed Saul prince over God’s people. Samuel then summoned the Israelites to Mizpah, where God’s choice was made official, and Saul was hailed as king. Following Saul’s victory over Nahash (ch [11](#)), Samuel at Gilgal confirmed Saul’s kingship. Thereafter, Samuel retired to Ramah to train men to carry on his ministry.

Samuel twice had to reprove Saul, first for impatience and disobedience ([1 Sm 13:5–14](#)), and then for disobeying the express command of the Lord ([15:20–23](#)), who rejected him as king. Samuel was then sent to the home of Jesse in Bethlehem, where he anointed David as the chosen one of the Lord ([16:1–13](#)).

In [1 Samuel 25:1](#) is a brief account of Samuel’s passing, when all Israel gathered together and mourned for him. He was buried in Ramah. The only subsequent mention of Samuel is in [1 Samuel 28](#). Summoned by the witch of Endor at Saul’s request, Samuel announced that on the following day Saul and his sons would die in battle (vv [4–19](#)).

Character

Samuel overcame many problems through piety, perseverance, and dedication to the service of the Lord. His overriding concern was for the good of his people. Wise and courageous, he boldly rebuked king, elders, and people when necessary, always from the sure ground of the revealed will of God.

While Samuel served as judge and priest, he was preeminently a prophet. Through his ministry the spiritual life of the Israelites improved. In inaugurating the monarchy, he led the people from tribal disunity to national solidarity. He appointed gatekeepers to the tent of meeting ([1 Chr 9:17–26](#)), organized observance of the Passover so memorably that it was still spoken about in Josiah’s day ([2 Chr 35:18](#)), put into writing how a king and his kingdom should be ([1 Sm 10:25](#)), and penned “The Chronicles of Samuel the Seer” ([1 Chr 29:29](#)).

Samuel well deserves a place among the great men of faith ([Heb 11:32](#)). He was the last of the judges ([1 Sm 7:6, 15–17](#)) and the first of the prophets ([1 Sm 3:20](#); [Acts 3:24](#); [13:20](#)).

See also Samuel, Books of First and Second.

Samuel, Books of First and Second

Preview

- Name
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Name

First and Second Samuel derive their names from the individual whom God used to establish kingship in Israel. Samuel is the most prominent figure in the early narratives of 1 Samuel. His key role in leading the nation of Israel through the transition from the period of the judges to that of the monarchy warrants the use of his name as the title for the book.

These books, however, have not always been so designated, nor was the material originally divided into two books. As far as is known, the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the OT dating from the third century BC) translators were the first to separate the material of Samuel into two books (they made a similar division in the material of Kings). The Hebrew original of these books was written, as is characteristic of Hebrew, with symbols only for consonants and none for vowels. When translated into Greek, it was necessary to use symbols for both vowels and consonants, thus greatly lengthening the manuscript. Presumably the practical consideration of the length of the scroll was the cause for dividing the material of

both Samuel and Kings into two books (scrolls) instead of retaining just one. The Septuagint translators, recognizing the continuity of content and emphasis in Samuel and Kings, designated what is now known as 1 and 2 Samuel as “The First and Second Books of Kingdoms” and then designated what now is known as 1 and 2 Kings as “The Third and Fourth Books of Kingdoms.” The Latin Vulgate (the Latin translation of the Bible prepared by Jerome in the late fourth century AD) slightly modified the Septuagint titles to “First, Second, Third, and Fourth Kings.” These titles were utilized all through the Middle Ages and were modified into our present titles by the Protestant Reformers in the 16th century AD in agreement with Jewish rabbinic tradition. The Reformers, however, retained the division into two books, and this has been followed in modern English versions.

Author and Date

Even though Samuel is prominent in the early part of the book, and the book bears his name in our English versions, it is clear that he is not the author of the entirety of 1 and 2 Samuel. Samuel’s death is recorded in [1 Samuel 25:1](#), prior to the time of the accession of David to the throne in place of Saul. Who wrote the material of 1 and 2 Samuel if it was not Samuel? On the basis of the statement in [1 Chronicles 29:29](#), it has been suggested by some that Samuel composed the early narratives of the book and that his work was later supplemented by the writings of the prophets Nathan and Gad. Others have suggested one of David’s contemporaries, such as Ahimaaz ([2 Sm 15:27, 36; 17:17](#)), Hushai ([2 Sm 15:32; 16:16](#)), or Zabud ([1 Kgs 4:5](#)). Presumably, these men would have had access to the writings of Samuel, Nathan, and Gad, as well as to other sources (see [2 Sm 1:18](#)) pertaining to the life and reigns of Saul and David. Who the real author was, however, cannot be determined from available evidence. Whoever it was, it is clear that he lived after the death of Solomon and the division of the kingdom in 930 BC (see references to “Israel in Judah” in [1 Sm 11:8; 17:52; 18:16; 2 Sm 5:5; 24:1-9](#); and “kings of Judah” in [1 Sm 27:6](#)). Thus, 1 and 2 Samuel was published in its final form sometime after 930 BC.

Purpose and Theological Teaching

The theme binding together the narratives of 1 and 2 Samuel pertains to the relationship between kingship and the covenant. Kingship as requested by the people was a denial of the covenant; kingship as instituted by Samuel was compatible

with the covenant; kingship as practiced by Saul failed to correspond to the covenantal idea; and kingship as practiced by David was an imperfect but true representation of the ideal of the covenantal king.

It has often been pointed out that there is ambivalence in the description of the establishment of kingship in Israel ([1 Sm 8-12](#)), because in some places it seems to be suggested that kingship is improper for Israel, while in other places it seems to be suggested that kingship was God’s will for his people. Resolution to this tension is provided in [1 Samuel 12](#), when Samuel inaugurates Saul as Israel’s first king in the context of a covenant renewal ceremony by which Israel renews its allegiance to the Lord. Here it becomes clear that kingship in itself was not wrong for Israel; God desired Israel to have a king. But kingship of the type Israel desired (“like the other nations”) and for the reasons she wanted a king (to give a sense of national security and lead her to victory in battle) involved a denial of the Lord as her ultimate sovereign. Samuel defined the role of the king in Israel and presented Saul to the people in a ceremony in which they renewed their allegiance to the Lord. The monarchy in Israel was first established in a form that was compatible with the covenant. The king in Israel, as every other citizen of the nation, was to be subject to the law of the Lord and to the word of the prophet. From this perspective, the author depicts the reign of Saul as failing to correspond to the covenantal requirements, while the reign of David, although imperfect, reflected the covenantal ideal.

There are at least two other important themes recorded in 1 and 2 Samuel. The first of these is that David conquers and acquires the land promised to Abraham. It is in the time of David that Israel’s borders are extended from Egypt to the Euphrates, as had been promised. A second event of major significance for the remainder of the Bible is David’s selection of Jerusalem to be the political and religious center of Israel.

Content

Samuel ([1 Sm 1-7](#))

Samuel’s Youth ([1 Sm 1-3](#))

God granted the request of Hannah for a son after a long period of barrenness. She named her son Samuel (a wordplay on the Hebrew expression “heard of God”) and dedicated him to the service of the Lord—with Eli the priest at the tabernacle in

Shiloh. Hannah's beautiful song of praise to God, who hears and answers prayer ([2:1-10](#)), exalts the sovereignty of God and prophetically anticipates not only the establishment of kingship in Israel but ultimately the highest fulfillment of the royal office in Christ himself (v [10](#)). The evil practices of the sons of the priest Eli are described in verses [11-26](#). These men not only used their office for personal gain (vv [12-17](#)) but also committed immoral acts with the women serving at the entrance to the tabernacle (v [22](#)). Although Eli rebuked his sons (vv [22-25](#)), his warnings were too little too late. It was in this lax environment that Samuel grew up (vv [18-21, 26](#)).

In [1 Samuel 2:27-36](#), an unnamed prophet pronounced judgment on Eli and his priestly line. The prediction of the imminent death of Hophni and Phinehas, Eli's sons, was fulfilled when the Philistines took the ark and destroyed the tabernacle at Shiloh ([4:11](#); [Jer 7:14](#)). In [1 Samuel 3:1-4:1](#), Samuel is called to be a prophet, and he too is given a message of judgment for the house of Eli ([3:11-14](#)). As the reliability of Samuel's words are attested, it is recognized by the people that he was a true prophet of the Lord ([3:19-4:1](#)).

The Loss and Return of the Ark ([1 Sm 4-6](#))

In a battle with the Philistines, the prophecy of [2:27-36](#) and [3:11-14](#) was partially fulfilled. The Israelites were defeated, the ark was taken, and Hophni and Phinehas were killed. Upon hearing the report of these calamities, Eli also died ([4:17-18](#)). The Philistines placed the ark of the Lord in the temple of their god Dagon in Ashdod ([5:1-2](#)). However, when the idol of Dagon broke in pieces and fell before the ark and a plague broke out in Ashdod, the ark was moved to Gath. When the plague broke out in Gath, it was moved to Ekron. When the plague erupted in Ekron, the Philistines were compelled to return the ark to Israel—as a test, it was placed on a cart pulled by two nursing cows. These cows, going against their motherly instincts, left their penned-up calves and headed for the Israelite border and the town of Beth-shemesh ([6:1-21](#)). By this the Lord demonstrated that the victory over the Israelites and the capture of the ark could not be attributed to the Philistines' god Dagon.

The Defeat of the Philistines ([1 Sm 7](#))

Twenty years went by. Samuel assured the people of deliverance from Philistine oppression if they would confess their sin and turn from the worship of Baals and Ashtaroths. He called for a national

assembly at Mizpah to renew allegiance to the Lord. While the Israelites were assembled, the Philistines attacked and the Lord gave the Israelites a miraculous victory, thereby demonstrating that obedience to covenant obligations would ensure national security (see [Ex 23:22](#); [Dt 20:1-4](#)).

Kingship Established in Israel ([1 Sm 8-12](#))

The People Request a King ([1 Sm 8:1-22](#))

When Samuel was an old man, the elders of the nation approached him and requested that he give them a king. Samuel immediately perceived that their request was tantamount to a rejection of the Lord, who was their King, for the people desired a king "like the other nations"—as a symbol of national unity and military security. Nevertheless, the Lord told Samuel to give the people a king. At the same time, however, he told Samuel to warn the people concerning what having a king "like the nations" would mean. The warning, descriptive of the practices of contemporary Canaanite kings, fell on deaf ears; the people persisted in their desire for a king.

Samuel Privately Anoints Saul ([1 Sm 9:1-10:16](#))

The narrative of Saul's search for the lost donkeys of his father and his encounter with Samuel in the process of his search is given to explain how Samuel and Saul first met, and how the Lord indicated to Samuel who the person was that he was to anoint as Israel's first king ([9:16-17](#)). After Samuel privately anointed Saul ([10:1](#)), he was given three signs to confirm that his new calling came from the Lord.

Saul Publicly Chosen by Lot at Mizpah ([1 Sm 10:17-27](#))

After the private designation and anointing of Saul to be king ([9:1-10:16](#)), Samuel convened a national assembly at Mizpah to make the Lord's choice known to the people ([10:20-24](#)) and to define the king's task (v [25](#)). Again, at this assembly, Samuel emphasized that the people had rejected the Lord in requesting a king because they sought a king for the wrong reasons and failed to recognize the Lord's past faithfulness in delivering them from their enemies. But again it was clear that the time for kingship in Israel had come and it was the Lord's desire to give the people a king. Samuel's explanation of the "regulations of the kingship" was an important step in resolving the tension between, on the one hand, Israel's sin in desiring a king, and on the other, the Lord's intent to give them a king.

This document, which was preserved at the tabernacle, probably contained an enlarged version of the “law of the king” in [Deuteronomy 17:14–20](#) and spelled out regulations governing the role of the king in Israel for the benefit of both the king and the people. This document undoubtedly distinguished Israelite kingship from that of the kings of the surrounding nations.

Saul Leads Israel to Victory over the Ammonites ([1 Sm 11:1–13](#))

When Nahash, king of the Ammonites, attacked Jabesh-gilead, a town east of the Jordan in the territory of Manasseh, Saul left his farmwork to lead a volunteer army in support of the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead. The victory over the Ammonites under Saul’s leadership placed another seal of divine approval on his selection to be king. Saul attributed the victory to the Lord rather than to his own military strategies.

Saul Inaugurated as King ([1 Sm 11:14–12:25](#))

The victory at Jabesh-gilead prompted Samuel to call for a national assembly at Gilgal to renew the kingdom and make Saul king ([11:14–15](#)). At the Gilgal assembly, Samuel led the people in confessing the sin of their initial request for a king and in renewing their allegiance to the Lord. In the context of this covenant renewal ceremony, Saul was formally inaugurated in his office as king. By inaugurating Saul in this manner, Samuel effectively provided for covenantal continuity in the transition from the period of the judges to that of the monarchy.

Saul Rejected as King ([1 Sm 13–15](#))

Saul’s Disobedience ([1 Sm 13:1–22](#))

When Saul was threatened with an imminent attack from the Philistines, he gathered troops at Gilgal and awaited Samuel, as he had been instructed ([10:8](#); [13:8](#)). When it appeared that Samuel would not come within the prearranged time, Saul became impatient and offered a sacrifice himself ([13:9](#)). Just as the sacrifice was completed, Samuel appeared and rebuked Saul for not keeping the commandment of the Lord. In disobeying Samuel’s previous instructions, Saul had violated a fundamental requirement of his office. He was seriously mistaken in thinking he could strengthen Israel’s hand against the Philistines by sacrifice to the Lord when this was done in violation of the Lord’s specific command. Samuel told Saul that because of his disobedience his dynasty would not endure (v [14](#)).

Jonathan’s Victory ([1 Sm 13:23–14:52](#))

Saul’s son Jonathan and Jonathan’s armor bearer skillfully and courageously attacked a Philistine outpost, killing about 20 men ([14:8–14](#)). The Lord used this defeat, along with an earthquake, to bring panic to the entire Philistine force. In the meantime, Saul sought divine guidance on whether to join the fray with his own forces. When the Lord’s answer did not come immediately, Saul concluded that waiting for the Lord’s word might jeopardize his military advantage. Here again he demonstrated that he trusted more in his own insight than in waiting upon the Lord. Saul further damaged his own stature in the eyes of his troops by pronouncing a foolish curse on any who would eat food before the battle was won. This nearly cost Jonathan his life; he was spared only because of the intervention of the troops in his defense.

Saul Rejected as King ([1 Sm 15:1–35](#))

Saul was commanded by the Lord through Samuel to attack the Amalekites and totally destroy them, sparing neither human nor animal life. The Amalekites had previously attempted to destroy Israel shortly after their exodus from Egypt while journeying to Sinai ([Ex 17:8–16](#)). Saul disobeyed the Lord in sparing the best of the animals for sacrifice and in sparing Agag, the Amalekite king. The Lord sent Samuel again to rebuke Saul for his disobedience. Samuel charged Saul with rebellion against the Lord and told him that, because he had rejected the word of the Lord, the Lord had rejected him as king.

Saul and David ([1 Sm 16:1–2 Sm 1:27](#))

Samuel Anoints David ([1 Sm 16:1–13](#))

The Lord instructed Samuel to go to the house of Jesse in Bethlehem to anoint one of his sons to be king in place of Saul. By divine leading, Jesse’s youngest son, David, was shown to be the one whom the Lord had chosen. When Samuel anointed him as king, the Spirit of the Lord came upon him with power.

David in the Service of Saul ([1 Sm 16:14–17:58](#))

When Saul became plagued by an evil spirit, his attendants sought a harpist whose music would soothe him. David was the one chosen for this purpose. The position at the court, however, was not permanent, and David divided his time between the court and his home duties. In due time, the Philistines, led by the giant Goliath, encamped against the Israelites. Goliath challenged any

Israelite who dared to meet him in individual combat. No Israelite ventured to accept his challenge until David, who was visiting the camp of the Israelite forces to bring food to his brothers, heard the challenge and responded in the strength and power of the Lord. The Lord gave David a great victory because he acknowledged that “the battle is the Lord’s” ([17:47](#), rsv).

Saul’s Hatred toward David ([1 Sm 18:1–19:24](#))

In the aftermath of David’s victory over Goliath, Saul’s son Jonathan pledged loyalty to David in a covenant of friendship. As David achieved further successes in leading Israel’s armies, and as his public acclaim grew, Saul began to fear that David was a threat to his throne ([18:14–16, 28–30](#)). Saul, hating David, made several attempts to kill him ([18:17, 25; 19:1, 10](#)). David was finally forced to flee and sought refuge with Samuel at Ramah. When Saul and three of his messengers went to Ramah to arrest David, they were so overcome by the Spirit of God that they were incapable of fulfilling their mission.

David and Jonathan ([1 Sm 20:1–42](#))

David’s absence from the royal table at the new moon festival provoked Saul to again threaten David’s life. Jonathan met with David at a prearranged place to inform him of the danger and say good-bye. Jonathan and David again pledged themselves to mutual loyalty and kindness. In the encounter it is clear that both men knew that David, not Jonathan, would be the successor to Saul on the throne of Israel.

David at Nob ([1 Sm 21:1–9](#))

David went to the priest Ahimelech at Nob and, indicating he was on a secret mission for Saul, asked for bread and for the sword of Goliath, both of which were given to him. One of Saul’s servants, Doeg the Edomite, who was at Nob, observed the transaction.

David at Gath ([1 Sm 21:10–15](#))

David then went into Philistine territory to King Achish at Gath. When his identity was discovered, he feigned insanity in order to escape.

David at Adullam ([1 Sm 22:1–5](#))

From Gath David went to the cave of Adullam where he was joined by about 400 supporters. He took his parents to Moab for their own protection and then returned to the Forest of Hereth in Judah.

Saul Kills the Priests at Nob ([1 Sm 22:6–23](#))

Doeg the Edomite reported to Saul that Ahimelech the priest had given assistance to David. At Saul’s command Doeg massacred all the priests at Nob except Abiathar, who escaped with the ephod and joined David.

David at Keilah ([1 Sm 23:1–13](#))

David and his men delivered the citizens of Keilah from Philistine raiders but were forced to leave the city when it was apparent that its unthankful inhabitants were prepared to hand David over to Saul.

David in the Desert of Ziph ([1 Sm 23:14–29](#))

While David was in the desert of Ziph, he was encouraged by a visit from Jonathan, who again pledged to him his loyalty. Although the Ziphites promised to aid Saul in capturing David, a Philistine attack forced Saul to abandon his attempt to apprehend him.

David Spares Saul’s Life ([1 Sm 24:1–22](#))

While hiding deep in a cave at En-gedi, David was unexpectedly provided the opportunity to take Saul’s life when Saul relieved himself at the entrance to the cave. Nevertheless, because Saul was “the anointed of the Lord,” David spared his life and shamed him into confessing his own wickedness. David did this by showing Saul a piece of his robe that he had cut off while Saul was in the entrance to the cave.

David, Nabal, and Abigail ([1 Sm 25:1–44](#))

David was badly mistreated by a shepherd named Nabal. David was deterred, however, from foolishly taking the man’s life by the discerning words of Nabal’s wife, Abigail. Shortly after this incident, Nabal died and David took Abigail as his wife.

David Spares Saul’s Life a Second Time ([1 Sm 26:1–25](#))

For a second time, the Ziphites joined Saul in attempting to capture David. While Saul and his men were sleeping, David and Abishai crept into their camp and took Saul’s spear and water jug. On the next day, David was again able to demonstrate to Saul that he did not seek to steal the kingship from his hands.

David among the Philistines ([1 Sm 27:1–12](#))

David eventually became weary of hiding from Saul in Israelite territory; in a time of discouragement, he went again to Philistia to seek refuge beyond Saul’s reach. Ingratiating himself with Achish, a

Philistine ruler, he was given the town of Ziklag as a place for himself and his men to reside. From Ziklag, David raided various tribes inhabiting the area south of Philistia, but deceived Achish into thinking he was raiding the territory of Judah.

Saul and the Medium of Endor ([1 Sm 28:1-25](#))

The Philistines again gathered an army to fight Israel, and Saul, terrified and seemingly anticipating an imminent defeat, vainly sought for some word from the Lord concerning the outcome of the battle. When this was denied, he went in disguise to a medium at Endor and requested her to bring up to him the spirit of Samuel. Saul was told by this spirit that Israel would be defeated and that he and his sons would die in the upcoming battle.

The Philistines Mistrust David ([1 Sm 29:1-11](#))

Although Achish desired David to join the Philistine army in its battle with Israel, the other Philistine commanders mistrusted him and forced Achish to send David and his men back to Ziklag. This turn of events rescued David from a serious dilemma created by his apparent friendship with Achish.

David Defeats the Amalekites ([1 Sm 30:1-31](#))

Upon returning to Ziklag, David discovered that in his absence the city had been raided and burned by the Amalekites and that their wives, children, and cattle had been taken captive. After inquiring of the Lord through Abiathar the priest, David and his men went in pursuit of the Amalekites and recovered all they had taken and more. He divided the plunder among his troops and sent gifts from it to various towns in Judah.

The Death of Saul and His Sons ([1 Sm 31:1—2 Sm 1:27](#))

As had been predicted, the battle with the Philistines ended in a disastrous defeat for Israel, in which Saul took his own life after being seriously wounded. Jonathan and two other sons of Saul were killed. David mourned for Saul and Jonathan and exalted their memory in his tribute to them recorded in [2 Samuel 1:19-27](#).

David ([2 Sm 2-24](#))

David Anointed King over Judah ([2 Sm 2:1-7](#))

Subsequent to Saul's death, the Lord instructed David to go to Hebron, where the tribe of Judah anointed him as their king.

David, Ishbosheth, and Abner ([2 Sm 2:8-4:12](#))

Although David became king over Judah, the remaining tribes—under the influence of Abner, commander of Saul's army—recognized Ishbosheth as Saul's successor ([2:8-10](#)). Ishbosheth was a son of Saul who had survived the battle with the Philistines. Conflict quickly broke out between the men of David, led by Joab, and the men of Ishbosheth, led by Abner. In this conflict Asahel, Joab's brother, was slain by Abner. As David grew stronger and Ishbosheth weaker, Abner shifted his allegiance from Ishbosheth to David ([3:1-21](#)). Joab, however, avenged the blood of his brother Asahel by murdering Abner under the pretense of negotiating with him. Although David detested this act, mourned for Abner, and cursed Joab, the crime was not punished until early in the reign of Solomon (see [1 Kgs 2:5-6, 29-34](#)). Shortly afterward, Ishbosheth was killed by two soldiers, who brought his head to David at Hebron, expecting to be rewarded ([2 Sm 4:1-8](#)). David, however, had them both put to death. The only male survivor of Saul's line was the crippled son of Jonathan named Mephibosheth.

David King over All Israel ([2 Sm 5](#))

After Ishbosheth's death, David was made king over all the tribes at Hebron. One of David's first acts as king was to capture the fortress of Zion from the Jebusites. David established Zion as his capital and built a palace there for his residence.

The Ark Brought to Jerusalem ([2 Sm 6](#))

Recognizing the importance of the ark as a symbol of God's presence with his people, David determined that it should be brought to Jerusalem from the obscurity of the house of Abinadab in Kiriath-jearim, where it had remained throughout the entirety of Saul's reign. Violation of prescriptions for handling the ark led to the death of Uzzah, one of Abinadab's sons, and delayed the ark's conveyance to Jerusalem for three months. In a second attempt David led a joyful procession into the city of Jerusalem, where the ark was placed in a tent that had been prepared for it.

David, Nathan, and the Temple ([2 Sm 7](#))

It soon became David's desire to build a temple to house the ark and provide a center for Israel's worship of the Lord. The Lord told David through Nathan the prophet that he was not to build the Lord a house (temple) but that the Lord would build him a house (a dynasty) that would endure forever. Here the line of the promised seed is narrowed to the house of David within the tribe of Judah. This promise finds its fulfillment in the birth

of Jesus, who was the “son of David, the son of Abraham” (see [Mt 1:1](#)). It would be the task of Solomon, David’s son, to construct the temple ([2 Sm 7:13](#)).

David’s Victories ([2 Sm 8](#))

David was able to defeat numerous surrounding peoples, to extend Israel’s borders, and to establish a time of prosperity and rest for the nation.

David and Mephibosheth ([2 Sm 9](#))

Remembering his covenant with Jonathan (see [1 Sm 18:1-3](#); [20:13-16, 42](#)), David inquired concerning survivors of the house of Saul to whom he could show kindness. When Mephibosheth was sought out, David brought him to the court to enjoy the honor of eating at the king’s table.

David and Bathsheba ([2 Sm 10-12](#))

During a war with the Ammonites, David committed adultery with the wife of one of his soldiers, Uriah the Hittite. When Bathsheba became pregnant, David attempted to get Uriah to sleep with her. When this failed, David arranged for Uriah’s certain death in battle. These sinful acts provoked God’s wrath ([2 Sm 12:10-12](#)) and David experienced the bitter fruits of his misconduct during the remainder of his life.

Amnon, Absalom, and Tamar ([2 Sm 13](#))

David’s oldest son, Amnon, feigned sickness in order to arrange for his half sister, Tamar, to care for him. When Tamar refused Amnon’s sexual advances to her, he raped her. This incident enraged Tamar’s full brother Absalom, who determined to avenge his sister by killing Amnon. Absalom waited two years and then arranged for the murder of Amnon during the festivities of the time of sheepshearing. He then fled to Geshur, a small city-state in Syria, where his maternal grandfather was king.

David and Absalom ([2 Sm 14-19](#))

Absalom remained in exile for three years until Joab arranged for his return by securing a renunciation of blood revenge from David ([14:1-27](#)). Upon Absalom’s return, however, David refused to see him for two years, until they were finally reconciled. In this whole episode David sidestepped the issues of repentance and justice and took no effective disciplinary action. In the meantime Absalom conspired to take the throne from David his father by attempting to discredit his administration of justice, and by seeking to win the favor of the people and members of David’s court.

After four years, Absalom proclaimed himself king in Hebron and gathered sufficient military strength to force his father to flee from Jerusalem (ch [15](#)). Failure to immediately pursue David led to the defeat of Absalom’s forces and to Absalom’s own death at the hand of Joab, David’s commander. David mourned for his son Absalom ([19:1-8](#)), but he was able to return to Jerusalem and to reestablish his government. David disciplined Joab for killing Absalom by replacing him as commander of his troops with Amasa.

Rebellion of Sheba ([2 Sm 20](#))

In the unsettled conditions immediately after David’s return to Jerusalem, another abortive revolt was attempted by Sheba of the tribe of Benjamin. Joab, in defiance of David’s disciplinary action, killed Amasa, pursued Sheba, and crushed his revolt.

David and the Gibeonites ([2 Sm 21:1-14](#))

At some unspecified time during David’s reign, the land suffered a three-year famine. It was revealed to David by the Lord that the famine was due to Saul’s violation of an Israelite treaty with the Gibeonites (see [Jos 9:15, 18-27](#)). This offense was atoned for by giving seven descendants of Saul to the Gibeonites for execution.

David and the Philistines ([2 Sm 21:15-22](#))

In this pericope four episodes of heroic accomplishments by David’s mighty men against the Philistines are recounted.

David’s Song of Praise ([2 Sm 22](#))

In a beautiful song of praise, David described his deliverance from his enemies and the help with which the Lord sustained him. The same song occurs with minor variations in [Psalm 18](#).

David’s Last Words ([2 Sm 23:1-7](#))

In a brief statement, David acknowledges the work of God’s Spirit in enabling him to speak God’s word, and proclaims his confidence in the realization of the Lord’s promise to him and his dynasty.

David’s Mighty Men ([2 Sm 23:8-39](#))

This pericope contains a list of 37 of David’s warriors and a description of some of their accomplishments.

The Census and David’s Punishment ([2 Sm 24:1-25](#))

David’s decision to take a census of his fighting men reflected an improper trust in military-political

organization and power. The Lord judged him by sending a plague on the land that killed many people. At the word of the Lord through Gad the prophet, David built an altar on the threshing floor of Araunah, which was later to become the site of the temple (see [2 Chr 3:1](#)). The Lord responded to David's sacrifices and prayers on behalf of the people; the plague was stopped.

See also David; Samuel (Person); Saul #2.

Sanballat

Leading political official of Samaria residing at Beth-horon in Ephraim. In a letter from Elephantine of Egypt, Sanballat was named as the governor of Samaria in 407 BC. Sanballat, along with Tobiah the Ammonite and Geshem the Arab, were adversaries of Nehemiah. They tried to prevent him from rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem during the postexilic period ([Neh 2:10, 19; 4:1, 7; 6:1-14; 13:28](#)). The Judean province probably had been included under Samaritan rule since its defeat by Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar in 586 BC. Nehemiah's determination to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem was in essence an assertion of Judean independence from Sanballat and Samaritan control.

Sanctification

Sanctification means "being made holy, or purified." It describes how Christians become more like God throughout their lives. Most theologians prefer to use it in a narrow sense to distinguish it from related terms, such as "regeneration," "justification," and "glorification."

What Is Sanctification?

The New Hampshire Baptist Confession (1833) explains sanctification this way:

"We believe that Sanctification is the process by which, according to the will of God, we are made partakers of his holiness; that it is a progressive work; that it is begun in regeneration; and that it is carried on in the hearts of believers by the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, the Sealer and Comforter, in the continual use of the appointed means—especially the Word of God, self-examination, self-denial, watchfulness, and prayer." (Article X)

This definition helps us to distinguish sanctification from regeneration and glorification:

- Regeneration is when someone first becomes a Christian. Regeneration refers to the beginning of salvation.
- Sanctification is when God helps Christians become more like Jesus. Sanctification refers to the middle of salvation.
- Glorification is when God completes his work in Christians. Glorification refers to the end of salvation.

Differences Between Sanctification and Justification

The difference between sanctification and justification is important but can be hard to understand. Here are the key differences:

1. "Justification," like "regeneration," refers mostly to the beginning of the Christian experience. Sanctification emphasizes the progress of the process of salvation.
2. Justification refers to God functioning as a judge. God removes all of the guilt of the believers at once and counts them as legally righteous. Sanctification, like regeneration and glorification, emphasizes the transforming power of the Holy Spirit upon the character of God's children.

The difference between justification and sanctification became very important during the Reformation (a time of major change in the Christian church that began in AD 1517). The Roman Catholic Church, in the opinion of the Reformers, confused justification and sanctification. The Roman Catholic Church insisted that justification "is not remission [or forgiveness] of sins merely, but also the sanctification and renewal of the inward man" (Decrees of the Council of Trent, Sixth Session, 1547, ch. VII). In contrast, the Reformers emphasized that justification and sanctification could not be separated. But, they must be distinguished.

Calvin argued these two elements of God's saving act cannot be torn into parts any more than Christ can be torn. Calvin said, "Whomever, therefore, God

receives into grace, on them he at the same time bestows [gives] the spirit of adoption, by whose power he remakes them to his own image. But if the brightness of the sun cannot be separated from its heat, shall we therefore say that the earth is warmed by its light, or lighted by its heat?" (*Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3:11.6). Justification is a one-time statement of God as Judge. Sanctification is a process of change in the character of the person justified.

The New Hampshire Baptist Confession says that in sanctification, "we are made partakers of his holiness." What does this mean? A detailed study of what the Bible has to say about sanctification is not possible here since practically the whole of Scripture addresses this issue in one way or another. One central theme in that teaching, however, must be emphasized: "Be holy, because I am holy" ([Leviticus 11:45](#); [1 Peter 1:16](#); compare [Matthew 5:48](#)).

According to the Westminster Shorter Catechism, written in 1647, by sanctification, "we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God" (Question 34; see [Colossians 3:10](#)). Nothing can be more important to our view of sanctification than this truth. The standard of holiness is complete obedience to Christ's image ([Romans 8:29](#)). Anything less than that is a lowering of the scriptural standard and, thus a weakening of the belief. The definition above hints that Christ is more than our pattern. He provides his holiness for those united with him—he is our sanctification ([1 Corinthians 1:30](#)).

Initial Sanctification

The Bible shows that sanctification happens gradually over time. The apostle Paul says that Christians who "reflect the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into His image with intensifying glory" ([2 Corinthians 3:18](#); see also [Romans 12:1-2](#); [Philippians 3:14](#); [Hebrews 6:1](#); [2 Peter 3:18](#)). Moreover, the many commands found in Scripture imply that the Christian experiences growth.

At the same time, a number of sayings in Scripture show that sanctification is given to the believer at the same time as regeneration. For example, Paul often refers to Christians as "saints" or "holy ones" such as in [Romans 1:7](#) and [Ephesians 1:1](#). This language suggests that sanctification is already something believers have. Paul specifically says that the Christians in the church at Corinth are "sanctified in Christ" ([1 Corinthians 1:2](#)). He even connects sanctification with washing (which could

represent regeneration) and with justification ([6:11](#)). It is as though all three elements take place at the same time. Paul says that Christians have died to sin ([Romans 6:2](#)). He uses death as a picture to explain that:

- Death is final
- Death cannot be reversed
- When something dies, it is completely changed

By using this picture of death, Paul teaches that:

- God breaks sin's power over Christians
- This break with sin happens when someone becomes a Christian
- This change is complete and permanent

These passages do not teach perfect obedience for every Christian upon conversion. Such an interpretation would bring us into conflict with the clear teaching of Scripture as a whole. Furthermore, one should note that the Corinthian "saints" were spiritually immature ([1 Corinthians 3:1-3](#); [6:8](#); [11:17-22](#)).

How should these passages be interpreted? Some writers have suggested that Paul is speaking of "potential" sanctification. He is saying although our relationship with sin has not been actually destroyed, God has given us what we need for that to take place. This explanation has some truth in it. But it does not fully explain how strongly Paul talks about Christians being free from sin's power.

Another way to understand these passages is called "positional" sanctification. According to this view, Paul is speaking in judicial terms regarding our status before God. We can see this legal idea in [Romans 6:7](#) where Paul uses the word "freed" in the sense of being "justified." If that is all that is said, then it suggests that [Romans 6](#) simply restates the doctrine of justification. This is doubtful. A better view is that Paul's teaching contains the judge relationship and an experience reference.

Progressive Sanctification

How Christians Have Understood Sanctification Through History

All Christian groups recognize the need to become changed by the mind being made new ([Romans](#)

[12:2](#)). But Christians disagree about how this change happens. The Protestant Reformers, generally speaking, held to what some call a “pessimistic” or “doubting” view of personal sanctification. This perspective is described in the Westminster Confession of Faith (1647). It states that sanctification “is imperfect in this life; there abideth still some remnants of corruption in every part, whence ariseth a continual and irreconcilable war” within the believer (XIII.ii). Although the statement makes the overcoming power of the Spirit important, some Christians believe that its basic idea confuses the need and possibility of a spiritual victory.

John Wesley, who lived from 1703 to 1791, is often seen as responding to traditional Calvinistic and Lutheran views on sanctification. Influenced by the Pietistic movement of his time, Wesley emphasized the experiential aspects of Christianity and developed the idea that “entire sanctification” can be achieved in this life, although he was not always consistent in his teachings.

In the 19th century, many Christians became interested in the idea of perfection, though not in an absolute sense. Some believed perfection came from completely removing sin, while others thought it was about achieving spiritual victory over the sin that still exists in a believer’s heart. This latter view is central to the Victorious Life movement (also called the High Life movement, or Keswickianism). This movement began in the early 1900s. Theologian Benjamin B. Warfield, who lived from 1851 to 1921, criticized these various perfectionist groups. While the debate has continued, it is not as intense as it once was.

The Balance of Divine Grace and Human Effort in Spiritual Growth

Much of the controversy surrounding sanctification centers on the human role in the process. While all Christians agree that holiness is impossible without God’s help, defining how that truth influences individual action is challenging. In the Roman Catholic tradition, there is significant emphasis on the cleansing power of baptism and the merit of good works, which raises questions about whether the importance of divine grace is overlooked. On the other end of the spectrum are some proponents of the Victorious Life Movement, who emphasize the idea of “let go and let God.” Although this slogan can be valuable when used appropriately, it can sometimes imply that

believers should be completely passive in their sanctification.

[Philippians 2:12–13](#) is the most important verse on this topic. Paul contrasts the command to work out one’s own salvation with the declaration that it is God who provides the spiritual strength needed for this task. It can be tempting to focus only on the first part of this statement, ignoring the importance of the second. Instead, one might focus on Paul’s emphasis on divine grace where personal responsibility is overlooked. However, the apostle seems to have intentionally maintained a careful balance between these two truths.

Sanctification requires discipline, concentration, and effort. This is clear by the many commands of Scripture. Some important commands are those where the Christian life is described with such ideas as running and fighting ([1 Corinthians 9:24–27](#); [Ephesians 6:10–17](#)).

However, Christians must always resist the temptation to think they can sanctify themselves, believing that spiritual power comes from within and that they can rely only on their own strength. This creates a challenging tension, much like the paradox of prayer: “Why pray when God, who knows our needs and who is all-wise and powerful, will always do what is best anyway?”

Perhaps the true “secret” of holiness lies in learning to maintain this balance: fully relying on God as the true agent in sanctification while also faithfully fulfilling one’s personal responsibility.

See also Holiness; Justification, Justified.

Sanctuary

A sanctuary is a holy place where God meets with people. This word translates two Hebrew words, *kodesh* and *mikdash*. Both of these words come from the verb meaning “to be clean” or “to be holy.” The term appears about 60 times in Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers when describing the building, moving, and first use of the tabernacle. In Deuteronomy, places of revelation, sacrifice, and worship are mentioned but not called “sanctuary.” The term appears over 60 times in Ezekiel, Daniel, and other writings from after the exile in Babylon. This is because the sanctuary was very important in the life of Israel during and after their exile.

A sanctuary refers to the place where God appeared or lived as shown by the presence of the

ark of the covenant. The ark of the covenant was a sacred chest or box that played a central role in ancient Israelite worship. It was the most holy object. It was a wooden chest covered with gold that contained the stone tablets with the Ten Commandments, a pot of manna, and Aaron's rod. The ark had a special cover called the "mercy seat" where God's presence was believed to rest. At the sanctuary, God's people gathered to offer sacrifices and hear the reading and teaching of God's laws and commandments. They also gathered there for worship and prayer, and to celebrate major religious feasts.

The early fathers of Israel (the patriarchs) had places of worship but no actual sanctuary ([Genesis 26:24-25](#); [28:16-22](#)). The first mention of sanctuary describes it as a symbol of God living among his people and ruling over them from within it ([Exodus 15:17](#)). The tabernacle, which was moved from place to place, served as the central sanctuary until Solomon built the temple in Jerusalem. It is very important to understand that God's people were to have only one central sanctuary ([Deuteronomy 12:4-7](#); [16:5-8](#)).

The New Testament refers to the Old Testament sanctuary as pointing ahead to God's eternal dwelling with and among his people ([Hebrews 8:5-6](#); [9:1-14](#)).

See also Tabernacle; Temple.

Sand Lizard

See Animals (Lizard).

Sandalwood

See Plants (Almug).

Sanhedrin

Supreme judicial council (nlt "high council") of Judaism with 71 members, located in Jerusalem. It figures prominently in the Passion narratives of the Gospels as the body that tried Jesus, and it appears again in Acts as the judicial court that investigated and persecuted the growing Christian church.

History

The history of the Sanhedrin is difficult to reconstruct. Jewish tradition recorded in the Mishnah views it as originating with Moses and his council of 70, but this is doubtful (Mishnah tractate *Sanhedrin* 1:6; cf. [Nm 11:16](#)). These were probably informal gatherings of tribal elders ([1 Kgs 8:1](#); [2 Kgs 23:1](#)). The likely origin of the Sanhedrin is to be found in the postexilic period, when those who reorganized Israel without a king made the ancient ruling families the basis of authority. The legislative assembly that emerged was a union of the nobility of the land and the priestly aristocracy (see [Ezr 5:5](#); [Neh 2:16](#)). The influence of this council increased due to the relative freedom enjoyed under the Persians.

The advent of Hellenism in Israel in the fourth century BC affirmed this government. Hellenistic cities commonly possessed democratic assemblies and a council. Jerusalem hosted an aristocratic council that was given its appropriate Greek title, Gerousia. This council is first noted by Josephus, who records the decree of Antiochus III after his seizure of Jerusalem (*Antiquities* 12.3.3). Yet even though the political climate shifted drastically, the council still remained in force. Judas Maccabeus expelled the old line of elders and installed another hereditary rulership stemming from the Hasmonean families. Thus the Gerousia continued as a council of the nobility. But in the first century BC, as the tensions between Sadducees and Pharisees were pulling apart the fabric of Judaism, the council underwent a transformation. From the time of Alexandra (76–67 BC), scribes of Pharisee persuasion entered the council. Thereafter, the Gerousia was a mixture: aristocratic nobility on the one hand (both lay and priestly) and the popular Pharisees on the other.

The Romans left the council intact but more carefully defined the limits of its jurisdiction. As Judaism lost its self-government, the council lost much legislative and political power. Rome appointed the true powers of the land. For instance, Herod the Great began his rule in severe conflict with the old aristocracy, and in the end executed most of the Sanhedrin members (*Antiquities* 14.9.4). The prefects appointed the high priests and, as a symbol of control, from AD 6 to 36 they kept the priests' vestments in the Antonia fortress.

The name Sanhedrin (Greek, sunedrion, from sun, "together," and hedra, "seat") occurs for the first time in the reign of Herod the Great (*Antiquities* 14.9.3–5). This is the term used throughout the NT

(22 times), along with “the elders” ([Lk 22:66](#); [Acts 22:5](#)) and “gerousia” ([Acts 5:21](#)). The Mishnah provides still more titles: The Great Tribunal (*Sanhedrin* 11:2), the Great Sanhedrin (*Sanhedrin* 1:6), and the Sanhedrin of the 71 (*Shebuoth* 2:2).

After the great war of AD 70, when the final vestiges of Jewish autonomy were destroyed by Rome, the Sanhedrin reconvened in Jamnia. Its power, however, was only theoretical (addressing religious issues primarily), and the Romans gave it little consideration.

Character

Little is known about the procedure for admission into the Sanhedrin, but because the council had aristocratic roots (and was not truly democratic), appointments were probably made from among the priests, leading scribes, and lay nobility. The Mishnah stipulates that the sole test of membership was rabbinic learning along with true Israelite descent (*Sanhedrin* 4:4). The council had 71 members (*Sanhedrin* 1:6) divided into the following three categories: the high priests, the elders, and the scribes.

The High Priests

Usually from Sadducean backgrounds, these were the most powerful men of the Sanhedrin. Some scholars believe that they comprised an executive council of ten wealthy and distinguished citizens, on the pattern of several Greek and Roman cities. Tiberias in Galilee, for instance, was ruled by such a board, and Josephus refers to them as a body of “the ten foremost men” (*Antiquities* 20.8.11; cf. [Acts 4:6](#)). One was the captain of the temple, who supervised temple proceedings and was commander of the temple guard ([Acts 5:24–26](#)). Others served as treasurers who controlled the wages of priests and workers and monitored the vast amount of money coming through the temple. Income came from sacrifices and market taxes; the payroll included as many as 18,000 men during Herod’s reconstruction of the temple. There was a president of the Sanhedrin who also headed this council and was called “the high priest” (*Antiquities* 20.10.5). In the NT he is a leading figure: Caiaphas ruled in Jesus’ day ([Mt 26:3](#)), and Ananias in Paul’s day ([Acts 23:2](#)). In [Luke 3:2](#) and [Acts 4:6](#), Annas is termed a high priest, but his title is emeritus, since his reign ended in AD 15.

The Elders

This was a major category and represented the priestly and financial aristocracy in Judea. Distinguished laymen, such as Joseph of Arimathea ([Mk 15:43](#)), shared the conservative views of the Sadducees and gave the assembly the diversity of a modern parliament.

The Scribes

These were the most recent members of the Sanhedrin. Mostly Pharisees, they were professional lawyers trained in theology, jurisprudence, and philosophy. They were organized in guilds and often followed celebrated teachers. One famous Sanhedrin scribe, Gamaliel, appears in the NT ([Acts 5:34](#)) and was the rabbinic scholar who instructed Paul ([22:3](#)).

In Jesus’ Day

The domain of the Sanhedrin was formally restricted to Judea, but there was a de facto influence that affected Galilee and even Damascus (cf. [Acts 9:2](#); [22:5](#)). The council was chiefly concerned to arbitrate matters of Jewish law when disagreements arose (*Sanhedrin* 11:2). In all cases, its decision was final. It prosecuted charges of blasphemy, as in the cases of Jesus ([Mt 26:65](#)) and Stephen ([Acts 6:12–14](#)), and participated in criminal justice as well.

It is still not known if the Sanhedrin had the power of capital punishment. Philo seems to indicate that violations to the temple could be prosecuted in the Roman period (*Legatio to Gaius*, 39). This may explain the deaths of Stephen ([Acts 7:58–60](#)) and James (*Antiquities* 20.9.1). At any rate, Gentiles caught trespassing in the temple precincts were warned about an automatic death penalty. But the NT and the Talmud disagree with this. In the trial of Jesus, the authorities are compelled to involve Pilate who alone can put Jesus to death ([Jn 18:31](#)). According to the Talmud, the Sanhedrin lost this privilege “forty years before the destruction of the temple” (*Sanhedrin* I 18a, 34; VII 24b).

Judicial Procedure

Despite the serious irregularities of Jesus’ trial, the formal procedures of Sanhedrin law describe a court that was fair and exceedingly concerned about the miscarriage of justice. Unfortunately, the procedural notes in the Mishnah only address guidelines for lesser courts (Sanhedrins with 23 members), but it can be reasonably conjectured

that similar rules applied to the Great Sanhedrin of 71. In sections four and five of the Mishnah tractate *Sanhedrin*, these guidelines are carefully set forth.

The Sanhedrin sat in semicircular rows so that members could view one another. Two clerks sat at either end, taking notes and recording votes. Facing the assembly sat three rows of students, who were usually disciples of leading scribes. The accused stood in the middle facing the elders. He was required to show abject humility: he was dressed in a black robe as if in mourning and wore his hair disheveled (*Antiquities* 14.9.4). After questioning, he was dismissed and deliberations were private.

The procedures for capital cases illustrate the concern for fairness. The defense would be heard first and then the accusations. An elder who had spoken for the defense could not then speak against the accused. Students could speak only for but never against the accused (but in noncapital cases they could do either). Members stood to vote, beginning with the youngest. Acquittal required a simple majority, but condemnation demanded a majority of two.

In noncapital cases, the trial was heard during the daytime and the verdict could be given at night. In capital cases, both trial and verdict were during the day and thus open to more public scrutiny. In noncapital cases, any verdict could be reached the same day. In capital cases, the verdict of guilt (which was immediately followed by execution) had to be postponed one day because its consequences were irreversible. Hence, these trials were not to be held on the eve of the Sabbath or a festival day (*Sanhedrin* 4:1).

The trial of Jesus as recorded in the Gospels shows many departures from the usual pattern of Sanhedrin justice. It seems clear that a miscarriage of justice was evidenced in Jesus' arrest, interrogation, and death.

See also Courts and Trials; Jerusalem Council.

Sansannah

One of 29 cities at the southern extremity of the land inherited by the sons of Judah ([Jos 15:31](#)). It is possibly the same city as Hazar-susah mentioned in a parallel description of the territory allotted to Simeon within Judah's inheritance ([19:5](#)).

Saph

A descendant of the giants, who was killed by Sibbecai the Hushathite (one of David's warriors). Sibbecai killed Saph at Gad in a battle between Israel and Philistia ([2 Samuel 21:18](#)). Another name for Saph was Sippai ([1 Chronicles 20:4](#)).

Saphir

KJV spelling of Shaphir, a place mentioned in [Micah 1:11](#). *See* Shaphir.

Sapphira

A member of the Jerusalem church and wife of Ananias ([Acts 5:1](#)).

See Ananias #1.

Sapphire

See Stones, Precious #21.

Sara

KJV rendering of Sarah, Abraham's wife, in [Hebrews 11:11](#) and [1 Peter 3:6](#). *See* Sarah #1.

Sarah

Sarah

Sarah

1. The wife of Abraham. Sarah's name was originally Sarai ([Genesis 11:29](#)). God changed her name to Sarah (which means "princess") when God promised that she would have a son and become the mother of nations and kings ([17:15-16](#)). Sarah was both the wife and the half-sister of Abraham ([20:12](#)). Sarah went with Abraham in his journey from Ur of the Chaldees to Haran and eventually into the land of Canaan ([Genesis 11:31; 12:5](#)). For many years, she could not have children. When God promised Abraham that he would make of him a great nation (in [12:2](#)) and that the land of Canaan would be given to his seed (verse [7](#)), Sarah remained unable to have children. After 10 years, Sarah continued without children (compare [Genesis 12:4; 16:16](#)). So she gave her Egyptian slave, Hagar, to Abraham as a concubine. Hagar had a son named Ishmael ([16:3-4](#)). God promised that a nation would come from Ishmael ([17:20](#)). But God said that Ishmael was not the child he had promised. Sarah herself was to be the mother of this child, even though she laughed when the birth was predicted. The fulfillment of this prediction took place with the birth of Isaac ([21:2-3](#)). Sarah was 90 years old, 25 years after God first promised Abraham would have children ([17:17; 21:5](#)). When Abraham and Sarah first arrived in Canaan, they had to travel to Egypt because there was not enough food in Canaan. Abraham told the Egyptians that Sarah was only his sister, not his wife. Because Sarah was very beautiful, Pharaoh (the king of Egypt) took her into his palace ([Genesis 12:11-15](#)). The Egyptians treated Abraham well instead of killing him. God protected Sarah and Abraham's marriage by sending plagues on Pharaoh's household until

he released Sarah.

A similar event happened in Gerar, where King Abimelech took Sarah into his household (chapter [20](#)). Again, God protected Sarah and kept her as the mother of the promised child. God made sure there would be no doubt that Isaac was Abraham and Sarah's son. Isaac was born soon after this event ([21:1-5](#)). This was about a year after God had promised his birth ([17:21](#); [18:10-14](#)). Sarah died at the age of 127. She was buried in the cave at Machpelah, which Abraham had purchased from Ephron the Hittite (chapter [23](#)).

Apart from the book of Genesis, Sarah is referred to in the Old Testament only in [Isaiah 51:2](#). The New Testament mentions her in [Romans 4:19](#), [9:9](#), [Hebrews 11:11](#), [1 Peter 3:6](#), and [Galatians 4:21-31](#), although in the Galatians text, she is not mentioned by name.

See also Abraham; Barrenness.

2. The King James Version spelling of Serah, Asher's daughter, in [Numbers 26:46](#). *See* Serah.
3. The heroine (main female character) of the book of Tobit. Sarah's prayer of anguish was heard by God, who sent the angel Raphael as a matchmaker to arrange her marriage to Tobias ([Tobit 6:9 and following](#)). Sarah had been tormented by a demon, who had caused the death of her previous seven husbands. Tobias exorcised the demon using a recipe of fish heart and liver that was given to him by the angel Raphael ([8:2](#)). Tobit and his wife, Anna, died in Nineveh. After this, Tobias and Sarah, and their children returned to Sarah's family in Ecbatana ([14:12 and following](#)).

Sarai

Original name for Sarah, Abraham's wife ([Gn 11:29](#)). *See* Sarah #1.

Saraph

Shelah's son from Judah's tribe. Saraph ruled in Moab and later returned to Lehem. "Lehem" may refer either to his own countrymen or to a geographical location. The reading of the Hebrew text is unclear ([1 Chr 4:22](#)).

Sardine Stone

KJV form of carnelian in [Revelation 4:3](#). *See* Stones, Precious #22.

Sardis

Important city in the Roman province of Asia, once the capital of the ancient kingdom of Lydia. It lay astride great highways linking it to the coastal regions to the west and to eastern Asia Minor. It was a cultural, religious, and commercial center. Under King Croesus (c. 560-547 BC), its wealth became legendary. In his day gold and silver coinage came into use. The geography and topography of Sardis were advantageous. The Pactolus River lay on its eastern side and flowed eventually into the Hermus River. The broad ridge of Mt Tmolus, springing from the central plateau, dominates the Hermus Valley to its north, and a series of steep spurs jut out into the plain, offering strongholds. Sardis lay on one of these. The site of Sardis proper lay 1,500 feet (457.2 meters) above the plain and assumed a position of great importance from the earliest days of the Lydian kingdom (13th century BC), although it was occupied in earlier times; the lower city spread to the valley floor. The king lived in the great acropolis, which became a place of refuge in time of war.

In 334 BC the city surrendered to Alexander the Great, who left a garrison on the acropolis. Following Alexander's death, Sardis changed hands several times. It was controlled first by Antigonos, then by the Seleucid rulers, and then by Pergamum, which had broken away from the Seleucids. When Antiochus III (231-187 BC) sought to restore the city to his rule, the lower city was burned (216 BC)

and the citadel entered (214 BC). After the defeat of Antiochus III by Pergamum and the Romans, Sardis was placed under Pergamum's jurisdiction until 133 BC. Later it became a Roman administrative center and, although enjoying considerable prosperity during the first three centuries AD, it never again held the prominence of earlier centuries. It was overlooked in AD 26 when the cities of Asia Minor vied with one another for the honor of building a second temple for the Caesar cult. A great earthquake destroyed the city in AD 17, and Emperor Tiberius assisted in its rebuilding on the valley floor.

Christianity took root here before the end of the first century and later included a bishopric. The NT letter to "the angel of the church in Sardis" ([Rv 1:11](#); [3:1-6](#)) gives insight into the condition of the church at that time. After the Arab invasion of AD 716, the city declined. Today the small village of Sart preserves its name.

Extensive excavations in recent years have identified many Roman public buildings: a theater, a temple of Artemis, a gymnasium, and an impressive late-Jewish synagogue, suggesting that it became an important center for the Jewish Diaspora.

Sardite

The King James Version form of Seredite, a member of the family of Sered ([Numbers 26:26](#)).

See Sered, Seredite.

Sardius

The King James Version form of ruby in [Ezekiel 28:13](#).

See Stones, Precious #22.

Sardonyx

KJV form of onyx in [Revelation 21:20](#). *See* Stones, Precious #23.

Sarepta

The King James Version form of Zarephath, a Phoenician town, in [Luke 4:26](#).

See Zarephath.

Sargon

Assyrian monarch from 722–705 BC, whose military campaigns are historically well documented. Excavations have revealed his palace at what was probably Nineveh as well as an incomplete palace at Khorsabad. Sargon II bore the name of an illustrious conqueror who lived and fought some 1,500 years earlier (Sargon I of Agade). His true identity has not been easily discerned. Previous generations, thinking that his name was an "alias," incorrectly identified him as Shalmaneser V (727–722 BC), Sennacherib (705–681 BC), or Esar-haddon (699–681 BC).

The only place in the Bible where Sargon is specifically mentioned is [Isaiah 20:1](#). Despite warnings of the prophet Isaiah against placing any trust in Egypt ([Is 10:9](#)), Judah was moving contrary to her best interests by considering just such an alliance. But in 713 BC the Philistine city of Ashdod rebelled against Assyria, thereby instigating a campaign by the forces of Sargon against this strategically important metropolis. A man named Yamani sought to secure support from Egypt, Ethiopia, and even Judah in mounting an effective coalition against the might of Sargon. However, in 711 BC Ashdod was subjugated by Sargon's army under his delegated official, "the Tartan" ([Is 20:1](#), kjv).

Sargon finished the task of conquering Samaria, begun by his predecessor, Shalmaneser V. Apparently, Shalmaneser V had besieged the northern kingdom of Israel for three years ([2 Kgs 17:5-6](#)) and had virtually completed that campaign when he died. While other military victories earmark the public life of Sargon, many of his battles were indecisive. A large part of his reign was spent suppressing rebellions and handling major domestic problems. He was finally killed on the battlefield in a remote area known as Tabal. Sargon's son, Sennacherib, succeeded him in 705 BC.

See also Assyria, Assyrians.

Sarid

Town located in the region of Zebulun near its southern border, situated between Maralah to the west and Kisloth-tabor to the east ([Jos 19:10, 12](#)).

Some suggest that this town is the same as Tell Shadud, a town near the valley of Jezreel.

Saron

The King James Version spelling of Sharon, the large coastal plain in northern Palestine ([Acts 9:35](#)).

See Sharon #1.

Sarsechim, Sarsekim

Personal name or title of an official who participated with Nebuchadnezzar and the Chaldean army in conquering Jerusalem (see [Jer 39:3](#), nlt mg). Some modern translations read "Nebo-sarsekim."

Saruch

The King James Version spelling of Serug, an ancestor of Jesus, in [Luke 3:35](#).

See Serug.

Satan

A spirit being who opposes God. Satan seeks to stop God's plans and lead his people into rebellion.

Satan in the Old Testament

Satan is not mentioned often in the Old Testament. In early parts of the Old Testament, he appears as an angel in heaven who brings charges against people before God ([Job 1:6-12](#); [2:1-7](#); [Zechariah 3:1-2](#)). Referred to as "the satan" or "the accuser," there is no indication that the angel is evil.

The concept of Satan as a tempter appears late in the Old Testament. In [1 Chronicles 21:1](#), the story of [2 Samuel 24:1](#) is retold with Satan, who is named for the first time and pictured as an evil figure. The Old Testament has no concept of Satan but provides the foundation for the later doctrine. Some interpret "Lucifer" in [Isaiah 14:12](#) as referring to Satan, but it actually refers to the king of Babylon.

Development of Satan in Jewish Thought

Between the time of the Old and New Testaments, Jewish writers developed new ideas about Satan. They also gave him other names like Belial, Mastema, and Sammael. These writings present three main views of Satan.

Satan as the Accuser

In the first view, Satan appears much like he does in the Old Testament. He tempts people to do wrong things. He also stands in heaven before God and accuses people of their sins. These writings also show Satan trying to stop God's plan to save people (Jubilees 11:5; 17:16; Assumption of Moses 17; 1 Enoch 40:7).

Satan as the Evil Leader

The second view comes from ancient writings called the Dead Sea Scrolls. These scrolls describe Satan (called Belial) as the leader of evil forces who attacks good people. This idea may have been influenced by Persian religion (Zoroastrianism), which believed in an evil god. However, the Dead Sea Scrolls are clear that there is only one true God. They teach that God created both Belial and the Prince of Light (a good spiritual being) The Prince of Light will win in the end because God is on his side.

New Stories About Satan

The third view adds Satan to stories where he was not mentioned before. For example:

- These writings say Satan desired Eve and caused humans to first sin against God ([Wisdom of Solomon 2:24](#))
- They say Satan controls the angels who sinned, as described in [Genesis 6:1-4](#) (Jubilees 10:5-8; 19:28)
- Some writings describe Satan himself as an angel who turned against God (2 Enoch 29:4)

Satan in the New Testament

In the New Testament, Satan is fully developed and given many names:

- Satan (Hebrew for “accuser”)
- Devil (the Greek translation of Satan)
- Belial
- Beelzebul
- the Adversary
- the Dragon
- the Enemy
- the Serpent
- the Tester
- the Wicked One

He is seen as:

- the ruler of a host of angels ([Matthew 25:41](#))
- the controller of the world ([Luke 4:6](#); [Acts 26:18](#); [2 Corinthians 4:4](#))
- the controller of all non-Christians ([Mark 4:15](#); [John 8:44](#); [Acts 13:10](#); [Colossians 1:13](#))

Satan is the enemy of God and wants to separate all people from God. He is an especially dangerous enemy of Christians ([Luke 8:33](#); [1 Corinthians 7:5](#); [1 Peter 5:8](#)), who have to resist him and not be tricked by his tricks ([2 Corinthians 2:11](#); [Ephesians 6:11](#); [James 4:7](#)).

Satan carries out his evil plans by:

- tempting people ([John 13:2](#); [Acts 5:3](#))
- hindering God’s workers ([1 Thessalonians 2:18](#))
- accusing Christians before God ([Revelations 12:10](#))
- controlling the evil persons who resist the gospel ([2 Thessalonians 2:9](#); [Revelation 2:9, 13](#); [13:2](#)).

The New Testament teaches us that Satan has always been evil ([1 John 3:8](#)). But Jesus changed everything. Through Jesus’s work, Satan was bound and thrown out of heaven ([Luke 10:18](#); [Revelation 12](#)). Despite being a dangerous enemy, Christians have powerful weapons—prayer, faith, and the effectiveness of Jesus’s blood. Satan can still cause physical illness if allowed by God ([2](#)

[Corinthians 12:7](#)). God may use Satan to punish people who have done wrong ([1 Corinthians 5:5](#); [1 Timothy 1:20](#)). Satan will always be under God’s control, who will eventually destroy him ([Romans 16:20](#); [Revelation 20:10](#)).

See also Angel; Demon; Demon-possession; Lucifer.

Saton

The Greek word in [Matthew 13:33](#) for a dry measure. It is equal to the Old Testament *seah*, about one peck (8.8 liters). The plural is *sata*.

See Weights and Measures.

Satrap

A governor who held legal authority over a number of provinces within the king’s territory. This official represented the king in civil and military matters. He kept the king in power over the entire empire. Satraps were listed among the high-ranking officers of the Babylonian and Persian empires ([Ezra 8:36](#); [Esther 3:12](#); [9:3](#); [Daniel 6:1–7](#)).

Satyr

Creature of uncertain identification, possibly referring to a demon, a goat, or a deity that resembles a goat. *See* Animals (Goat).

Saul

Name meaning “asked,” with the implication being “asked of God.” A name with a usage extending far back into prebiblical times, it is attested in third-millennium texts from Tell Mardikh in Syria (ancient Ebla) and appears also to have been used in the second millennium in the city of Ugarit on the coast of Syria.

In addition to the conventional spelling, it is sometimes spelled Shaul in older English versions. Apart from King Saul, the most famous bearer of the name, one other person called Saul (Shaul) is referred to in the OT, though little is known about him (*see* Shaul).

1. Saul, king of Edom, is mentioned in an ancient list of kings who ruled Edom (in Transjordan) in pre-Israelite times ([Gn 36:37–38](#); [1 Chr 1:48–49](#)). He is

described as coming from “Rehoboth on the river,” the “river” perhaps referring to a small river in the vicinity of Edom.

2. Saul, the first king of Israel, is the best known and documented person with his name in the OT. He was a member of the tribe of Benjamin, one of the smallest of the Israelite tribes, whose territory was located just north of the Canaanite city of Jerusalem. His father was Kish, son of Abiel. Saul was born in Gibeah, a small town just a few miles north of Jerusalem in the hill country, and apart from his travels and military expeditions, Gibeah was Saul’s hometown for his entire life. He was a married man with one wife, Ahinoam, and five children—three sons and two daughters ([1 Sm 14:49–50](#)). His best-known son, Jonathan, later served him in a senior military capacity; three of Saul’s sons died with him in battle ([31:2](#)). Of his two daughters, the best-known is Michal, the younger daughter, who married David.

Saul the Soldier

Saul lived during a critical period in the history of the Israelite tribes. Though the dates cannot be determined with any certainty, he lived during the latter half of the 11th century BC and probably ruled as king from about 1020 to 1000 BC. Before he became king, the Israelite tribes were on the verge of military collapse. The Philistines, a powerful military people, had settled along the Mediterranean coast; they were well established on the coast and planned to move eastward and take control of Palestine as a whole. In order to do this, they first had to eliminate the Israelites, who were settled in the hill country on the west of the Jordan and also in Transjordan. The absence of any strong and permanent military authority among the Israelites meant that the Philistines were a grave military threat to the continued existence of Israel.

The immediate crisis, which was to contribute to Saul’s rise to power, was a crushing defeat of the Israelite army by the Philistines at Ebenezer, in the vicinity of Aphek ([1 Sm 4:1ff](#)). The victory gave the Philistines more or less complete control of Israelite territories lying to the west of the Jordan; they attempted to maintain that control by establishing military garrisons throughout the country they had captured. Israel, weakened by the Philistine defeat, became vulnerable to enemies on other borders. The nation of Ammon, situated to the east of the Israelites’ land in Transjordan, attacked and laid siege to the town of Jabesh ([11:1](#)). Saul, summoning an army of volunteers, delivered

the inhabitants of Jabesh and defeated the Ammonites (v [11](#)). It was after this event that Saul became king. He had already been anointed a prince or leader among the people by Samuel; after his military success at Jabesh, he assumed the office formally at the sanctuary in Gilgal (v [15](#)).

The defeat of the Ammonites provided a significant boost to Israelite morale, but it did not change the military crisis and threat posed by the Philistines. Indeed, the location of Saul’s appointment to kingship is significant. Gilgal, in the Jordan Valley near Jericho, was chosen partly because the earlier shrine of Shiloh was held by the Philistines. Gilgal was in one of the few areas remaining outside Philistine control. Hence, if Saul’s kingship was to mean anything, he had to address the Philistine problem immediately; if he did not, there would be no Israel to rule.

Saul acted promptly. Although the precise historical details are difficult to reconstruct, a general view of Saul’s anti-Philistine campaign is provided in the biblical text. He attacked garrisons at Gibeah and, later, at Micmash, about four miles (6.4 kilometers) northeast of Gibeah ([1 Sm 13:16ff](#)). He had great success at Micmash, thanks in part to the military aid of his son Jonathan. The Philistines were routed and retreated from that portion of the hill country ([14:15–23](#)). Saul established his military base in his hometown, Gibeah, and built a citadel there.

In the years that followed this initial campaign against the Philistines, Saul was constantly engaged in other military activities. He continued to fight with enemies on his eastern borders, particularly Ammon and Moab, to the east of the Dead Sea ([1 Sm 14:47](#)). He engaged in a major campaign on the southern border with the old enemies of the Israelites, the Amalekites ([15:7](#)); in this, too, he was successful. And throughout all this, he had to keep constant watch on Philistine activity on his western border.

Saul was faced with an extraordinarily difficult task as military commander. His home ground had the advantage of being reasonably easy to protect, for most of it was mountainous countryside. But he was surrounded on all four sides by enemies who wanted his land, he had inadequate weapons (Philistines controlled the supply of iron), he had no large standing army, he had inadequate communication systems, and he did not have the wholehearted support of all the Israelites. For several years he was relatively successful against

almost impossible odds, but eventually his military genius failed.

The Philistines assembled a large army in the vicinity of Aphek ([1 Sm 29:1](#)), but instead of attacking Saul's mountain territory directly, the army moved northward and then began to penetrate Israelite territory at a weak point in the vicinity of Jezreel (v [11](#)). Saul attempted to gather an adequate military force to meet the Philistine threat, but he was unable to do so. With inadequate preparation and insufficient forces, he prepared for battle at Mt Gilboa ([31:1](#)); he should never have entered that battle, for it could not have been won. His sons were killed on the battlefield, and Saul, rather than fall into the hands of the Philistines, committed suicide (vv [2-6](#)).

From a military perspective, Saul had become king at a time of crisis; he had averted disaster and gained some respite for his country. But the battle in which he died was a disaster for Israel; the country he left behind after his death was in worse straits than it had been on his assumption of power.

Saul the King

If Saul had a difficult task as Israel's military commander, he had an even more difficult task as Israel's king. Before Saul's time, there had been no king in Israel. The absence of any form of monarchy in Israel was largely a religious matter. God was the one and only true King of Israel; he was the one who reigned ([Ex 15:18](#)). Consequently, although there had been single, powerful rulers in Israel's earlier history (Moses, Joshua, and certain judges), nobody had assumed the title or office of king, for it was thought that that would undermine the central position of God as King. However, provision had been made for the rise of kingship in the law ([Dt 19:14-20](#)); for more on kingship in Israel, *see* King, Kingship.

It was sheer necessity that brought a monarchy to Israel, a necessity created by the constant military threat of the Philistines. A brief external threat could have been met by a temporary ruler, a judge. But a permanent and serious threat to Israel's existence could not be thwarted by such temporary measures. If Israel was to survive as a nation (and it very nearly did not), it needed a central military government with recognized authority over the various tribes that constituted the nation of Israel. Thus the kingdom was established and Saul became the first king, facing incredible difficulties.

Since there had never been a kingdom before in Israel, there were no precedents. What were his

responsibilities? Primarily, they were military, for that was why the monarchy had been established. In this area, Saul was successful in the early years of his reign. But apart from his military responsibilities, King Saul faced an enormously difficult task. Given the nature of Hebrew theology, it was inevitable that many Israelites were opposed to the idea of kingship from the beginning. Indeed, Samuel, who was instrumental in the initial anointing of Saul and then in the formal coronation, appears to have been ambiguous in his attitudes toward the kingship ([1 Sm 8:6](#)), and later toward Saul himself ([15:23](#)). Furthermore, nobody had specified precisely what it was that the leader could do. He was a soldier—that much was clear. But did he also have religious responsibilities? Though the judgment of history upon Saul is often harsh, it is wise to recall the difficulty of the task he undertook. The military problems alone would have been more than sufficient for most great men; Saul also had to fashion the new role as king. In practical matters, Saul's leadership was modest and praiseworthy. He sought none of the pomp and splendor of many Eastern kings. He had a small court, located in his military stronghold of Gibeah; there is little evidence that it was characterized by great wealth. For practical purposes, he had no standing army; he had only a few men close to him, in particular his son Jonathan and his general Abner. He also sought out young men of promise, like David. Saul's court was rustic and feudal in comparison to the later splendor of David and Solomon. But Saul, as national leader, ran into difficulties with Samuel, who had appointed him and had influenced Israel prior to his kingship. While the responsibility for the trouble may lie primarily with Saul, Samuel himself does not appear to have been particularly supportive and helpful. On one occasion, Saul was roundly criticized and condemned by Samuel for assuming the priestly role of offering sacrifices in the absence of Samuel at Gilgal ([1 Sm 13:8-15](#)). The judgment was no doubt deserved, though one can perceive Saul's dilemma. Did the king have a priestly role or not? This issue had not been made clear. Furthermore, Saul was at the time in a state of crisis; he had waited seven days for Samuel to turn up, and as each day passed, his army was reduced by deserters. So Saul acted. Perhaps he may not be excused, but his actions may easily be understood, and the incident itself is indicative of the difficulty of being a nation's first king. Again, after the Amalekite war, Saul was subject to divine condemnation through Samuel.

Saul was Israel's first king but not its greatest. Yet no criticism of Saul's leadership should be so harsh as to ignore his strengths. He faced extraordinary difficulties and for a while was successful. Few other men could have done what he did. Ultimately, he died in failure, yet his achievements might have been better remembered if he had been succeeded by any other leader than David. David's gifts and competence were so magnificent and unusual that Saul's modest achievements paled and only his failures are remembered.

Saul the Man

The writers of the OT have presented the story of Saul in a fascinating manner. While some OT characters remain shadowy figures, Saul stands out, with all his strengths and weaknesses, as a fully human figure. He was, in many ways, a great man, but there were also flaws in his personality that emerged more and more in the later years of his life. Born of a wealthy father, Saul is described as being tall and handsome ([1 Sm 9:1-2](#)). He was a man of immense courage, and part of his military success was rooted in his fearlessness. In his early years as king, Saul is portrayed as a man whose basic instincts were generous; he was kind and loyal to his friends and did not easily carry a grudge or hatred toward those who opposed him ([11:12-13](#)). But the real strength of Saul, in his early days, was in his relationship to God. For all his natural gifts and abilities, Saul became king as a result of divine appointment ([10:1](#)) and because the "Spirit of the Lord" came upon him (v [6](#)).

In his later life, a change came over Saul that transformed him into a tragic, pitiable person. The many incidents in Saul's relationship to the young David provide insight into the transformation. Once a friend, then perceived as an enemy, David became the object of Saul's unfounded suspicions and irrational jealousy. Saul's periods of sanity became punctuated by periods of depression and paranoia. The paranoia affected his rational thought. Instead of warring against the invading Philistines, his energy was diverted toward the pursuit of David. The biblical writers describe this change as "the departure of the Spirit of God from Saul" and "an evil spirit from the Lord tormenting him" ([1 Sm 16:14](#)). Many modern writers have interpreted this as the onset of a form of mental illness, perhaps manic-depression, the alternation between active and lucid periods, followed by intense depression and paranoia. But there is a certain danger in psychoanalyzing the figures of ancient history, principally because the literary

sources are rarely adequate to the task. The biblical writers indicated a theological basis for the change in Saul: the Spirit of God had departed from him. From a simple human perspective, the man was not equal to the enormity of the task before him. Overcome by its complexity, and lagging in the faith of the one who appointed him to such awesome responsibility, Saul ended his days in tragedy.

See also David.

3. Saul, mentioned in the NT, whose name was changed to Paul ([Acts 13:9](#)). *See* Paul, The Apostle.

Savior

A savior is someone who rescues or delivers people from danger. In the Bible, this word is most often used for God and Jesus Christ. Understanding Jesus as Savior is very important for understanding the Bible's message.

Savior in the Old Testament

Versions of the English Bible use "savior" in the Old Testament to translate various forms of the Hebrew word *yasha'*. This word means "to save," "to deliver," or "to rescue." Most frequently it is used to translate the participle of the verb, *moshia'*, meaning "the one who saves." Used in this way, "savior" is found 13 or 14 times in the Old Testament, depending upon the version.

The basic idea of a savior as someone who rescues is shown in [Deuteronomy 22:27](#). This law talks about a situation where no one is near to help in a time of need. *Moshia'* is also used for individuals:

- Both Othniel and Ehud are called “deliverers” ([Judges 3:9, 15](#)).
- [Nehemiah 9:27](#) speaks of the judges collectively as deliverers sent by God.
- [Second Kings 13:5](#) says that God gave Israel a savior to rescue them from their enemies (the Arameans). Some have identified this deliverer with King Jeroboam II of Judah. Others think the deliverer is a foreign king, quite often Zakir of Hamath. However, the text does not clearly say who this savior might have been. The point of the text is that God sent this deliverer for his people.

But most often in the Old Testament, God himself is called Israel's savior. Even when other people are called saviors, it is clear that God sent them. Israel knew God was their savior and said this in songs of praise ([Psalms 17:7](#); [106:1-12](#)) and cries for help ([Jer 14:8](#)). David said this of God: “My stronghold, my refuge, and my Savior” ([2 Samuel 22:3](#)). Quite often the psalmists refer to the Lord as their “help” or “salvation” ([Psalms 27:9](#); [38:22](#); [42:5](#), [11](#); [65:5](#); [68:19](#); [79:9](#); [85:4](#); [89:26](#)).

The greatest example of God saving Israel was when he rescued them from Egypt (the exodus). The psalmist, remembering Israel's sin of making a golden calf, proclaims, “They forgot God their Savior, who did great things in Egypt” ([Psalm 106:21](#); compare [Isaiah 63:11](#); [Hosea 13:4-6](#)).

In Isaiah, “savior” is often used as a title for God. The term is used to emphasize his uniqueness. It shows that God alone is the savior, not foreign gods or idols, God says, “I, yes I, am the LORD, and there is no Savior but Me. I alone decreed and saved and proclaimed—I, and not some foreign god among you” ([Isaiah 43:11-12](#)). Isaiah also says that God would show himself as savior by blessing and restoring Israel in the future ([49:26](#); [60:16](#)). The Old Testament does not directly call the Messiah (God's chosen leader) a “savior,” but passages like [Zechariah 9:9](#) suggest that the Messiah would be a deliverer.

Savior in Other Writings

Some books not included in most Bibles (apocryphal books) use the term “savior” for God. They give God grand titles like “everlasting Savior” ([Baruch 4:22](#)) or “the eternal Savior of Israel” ([3](#)

[Maccabees 7:16](#)). These titles show that people saw God as the one who could save Israel.

In Greek writings, the word for “savior” (*soter*) is used for both gods and humans. For example, the writer Herodotus once called the Athenians the “saviors” of Greece (*Persian Wars* 7.139.5). In the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament) *soter* is used to translate various forms of the Hebrew *yasha'*, which means “to save.”

Savior in the New Testament

Soter occurs 24 times in the New Testament and is only applied to God and Jesus Christ. It is used for God 8 times and for Christ 16 times. Out of the 24 NT occurrences of *soter*, ten are in the Letters and five in 2 Peter.

We can see how the New Testament depends on the Old Testament in [Luke 1:47](#), where Mary praises God as Savior in her song. Jesus's name (which is Greek for Joshua) means “the Lord is salvation.” He was given this name because he would be the Savior ([Matthew 1:21](#)). As the Savior, Jesus completes God's plan for a promised deliverer ([Acts 13:23](#); [Ti 3:4](#)). He provides redemption for humanity ([Titus 2:13-14](#)). And, he is the hope of the believer ([Philippians 3:20-21](#)).

The word “savior” means someone who rescues people from danger and brings them to safety. Jesus has rescued the believer from sin and death, giving them eternal life ([2 Timothy 1:10](#)). Jesus never refers to himself as Savior (*soter*), but:

- Angels announced him as Savior at his birth ([Luke 2:11](#)).
- Those who heard his words called him Savior ([Jn 4:42](#)).
- The early church proclaimed him as Savior ([Acts 5:31](#); [13:23](#)).

Salvation is central to the mission of Jesus ([Luke 19:10](#)). Paul teaches that Christ is the Savior of the church in the present ([Ephesians 5:23](#)). Christ is also the Savior of the church in the future ([Phil 3:20](#)). Savior, as a title, is applied to God in the Pastoral Letters and clearly represents God as Savior of all persons ([1 Timothy 2:3](#); [4:10](#)). The Pastoral Letters also clearly designate Jesus as Savior ([2 Timothy 1:10](#); [Titus 3:6](#)). In some instances, the Pastoral Letters also declare that he is God the Savior ([Titus 2:13](#); [3:4-6](#)).

Savior is used as a title for Jesus Christ throughout 2 Peter (for example, [2 Peter 2:20](#)). John, in his first letter, uses it to describe Jesus as the Savior sent by the Father to save the world ([1 John 4:14](#)).

See also Salvation.

Scab

A hard, dry covering that forms over a sore as it heals.

See Sore.

Scall

A scall is a term used in the King James Version of the Bible for a certain type of skin condition. It refers to a scaly or crusty skin eruption or rash mentioned in [Leviticus 13:30–37](#) and [14:54](#).

See Sore.

Scapegoat

The scapegoat was a goat used in a special ceremony on the Day of Atonement. During this important religious day, the high priest would symbolically place the sins of all the Israelite people on this goat. Then the goat would be sent away into the wilderness, symbolically carrying away the people's sins ([Leviticus 16](#)).

See Atonement, Day of.

Scarlet

See Color.

Scepter

A scepter is a special staff that kings and rulers used to show their power. It was typically a long stick with decorative designs at the top. Kings would hold these scepters during important ceremonies to show they were in charge. Sometimes, a shorter version of the scepter was used as a weapon in battle, which also symbolized a ruler's military strength.

In the Bible, the scepter appears in many stories as a symbol of royal authority and military power.

Examples of the scepter as a symbol of royal authority include:

- When Jacob blessed his sons, he said Judah's descendants would have royal authority ([Genesis 49:10](#); see also [Psalm 45:6](#) and [Hebrews 1:8](#)).
- The prophet Amos refers to the royal authority of the kings of Syria and Philistia ([Amos 1:5, 8](#)).
- The prophet Zechariah refers to the royal authority of Egypt ([Zechariah 10:11](#)).
- King Ahasuerus (also called Xerxes) held out a scepter (a symbol of his royal authority) to Esther ([Esther 4:11](#); [5:2](#); [8:4](#)).

Examples of the scepter as a symbol of military power include:

- The book of Numbers talks about a scepter that would belong to God's chosen king (the Messiah) who was promised to come in the future ([Numbers 24:17](#)).
- The prophet Isaiah talks about how God would break Babylon's scepter ([Isaiah 14:5](#)). God would destroy the power that Babylon used to control and harm other nations.
- The prophet Ezekiel used the image of a scepter to explain how Israel had lost its power and could not get it back ([Ezekiel 19:11, 14](#)).

Sceva

The father of seven sons. He was a Jewish chief priest in Ephesus when the apostle Paul visited on his third missionary journey. The sons of Sceva tried to copy Paul by driving out evil spirits in the name of Jesus. However, their attempts at exorcism failed because their authority was not recognized.

So, the evil spirits attacked and hurt these sons of Sceva who had tried to rebuke them ([Acts 19:14](#)).

School

A school is a place where people learn from teachers.

See Education.

Schoolmaster

This is the term used in the King James Version for "guardian" in [Galatians 3:24–25](#). A schoolmaster is a person who teaches students, similar to a teacher or tutor (as in the New American Standard Bible). In the context of the Bible, the term refers to a figure who guides and instructs students, helping them understand and follow the rules until they are ready to learn on their own. This idea symbolizes how the law served to prepare people for the coming of Jesus. *See Custodian.*

Scops Owl

The scops owl (*Otus scops*) is a small owl with two horn-shaped tufts of feathers on its head. These look like little ears or horns. It often sits in a leaning position and moves by hopping or dancing, which can look like a goat.

During nesting time, the male makes a moaning sound at night. Its other calls are high, whistling sounds that can be heard far away.

The scops owl eats insects, mice, and other small animals. When there are many mice or locusts, large groups of scops owls sometimes appear and help reduce the number of pests. These owls may attack people who come too close to their nests.

The scops owl is found in many parts of Europe, Asia, and Africa. In some cultures, people see this owl as a symbol of wisdom.

Owl and the Word "Lilith"

The Hebrew word for "night creature" in [Isaiah 34:14](#) is *lilith*. Some older translations call this a "screech owl," but others translate it as "night monster" (New American Standard Bible) or "night hag" (Revised Standard Version). In Jewish stories, Lilith was said to be a demon or witch who lived in

the desert and harmed children at night. Most Bible scholars believe Isaiah used this story as a picture of a lonely, cursed place. He was not saying Lilith was a real being.

The word "screech owl" may not clearly show the meaning Isaiah intended, especially for readers in different cultures.

See also Birds; Owl; Screech Owl.

Scorpion

A scorpion is a small animal with a curved tail and a stinger, often found in dry places. Scorpions are arthropods (insects with protective skin) of the same group as spiders (arachnids). Israel and Palestine are home to 12 scorpion species, mostly yellow ones. These yellow scorpions measure 7.6 to 12.7 centimeters (three to five) long. The rock scorpion, however, is thicker and longer, measuring 12.7 to 17.8 centimeters (five to seven inches).

Scorpions are slow-moving creatures. During the day, they hide under stones. They are active at night, hunting insects and spiders. Their tails end in a poisonous sting, fatal to most prey and very painful to humans ([Revelation 9:3, 5, 10](#); compare [1 Kings 12:11, 14](#)). Scorpions were used as a symbol of Ezekiel's evil countrymen and Satan's demons ([Ezekiel 2:6](#); [Luke 10:19](#)). The scorpion was common in the Sinai Desert ([Deuteronomy 8:15](#)).

A scorpion has six to eight eyes. It has eight legs like a spider and two claws for catching prey. Its diet mainly includes locusts and beetles. Often, the female eats the male after mating. Scorpions lay eggs that hatch quickly. They prefer warm climates and often enter homes at night, hiding in beds, blankets, shoes, and clothes.

See also Animals.

Scourge

See Criminal Law and Punishment.

Screech Owl

The name "screech owl" is sometimes used for different kinds of owls that make loud, harsh calls.

In the Bible, this may refer to owls like the barn owl or the scops owl, which are known for their piercing cries at night.

See Barn Owl, White Owl; Scops Owl.

Scribe

Reference in early Old Testament times to people whose job was to write down information. After the Babylonian exile, scribes were a class of scholars who taught, copied, and interpreted the Jewish law for the people. They appear in the Gospels primarily as opponents of Jesus.

Scribes Before the Babylonian Exile

The ability to read and write was not common in ancient Israel. Professionals were needed in the various aspects of public life. This appears to be the earliest biblical understanding of the term “scribe” and has no particular religious meaning. Scribes were employed to keep accounts or put in writing

- legal information ([Jeremiah 32:12](#)),
- military data ([2 Chronicles 26:11](#)),
- other public documents ([Judges 8:14](#); [Isaiah 50:1](#)), or
- personal correspondence ([Jeremiah 36:18](#)).

Scribes were essential to royal administration. A chief scribe often functioned as

- a court recorder ([1 Kings 4:3](#); [2 Chronicles 24:11](#)),
- an adviser ([2 Samuel 8:16–17](#); [2 Kings 18:18](#); [22:12](#); [1 Chronicles 27:32](#); [Isaiah 36:3](#)), and
- as a financial overseer ([2 Kings 22:3–4](#)).

Scribes were associated with the priesthood as well by keeping records for the temple ([1 Chronicles 24:6](#); [2 Chronicles 34:13–15](#)).

Scribes After the Babylonian Exile

After the Jewish people returned from exile, Judaism was restored under Ezra and Nehemiah. The term “scribe” began to refer more specifically to those who gathered together, studied, and

interpreted the Torah (Jewish law). Scribes became a separate occupation of teachers who were able to preserve accurately the law of Moses and interpret it for the Jewish people. At the beginning of this period, Ezra appears as the ideal “scribe, an expert in the commandments and statutes of the LORD” ([Ezra 7:11](#)).

The book of Sirach describes the scribe as one who is able to deeply understand the hidden meanings of texts ([Sirach 39:2–3](#)). This understanding is a result of his diligent study of the Law, the Prophets, and Writings ([38:24](#) and the following verses; [39:1](#)). Therefore, a scribe is able to serve as judge and counsel for the people and the state ([38:33](#); [39:4–8](#)). Because of his invaluable place in a society governed by the Torah, the scribe is worthy of praise and great respect throughout the generations ([39:9](#)). By the second century BC, the scribes were a rather distinct class in Jewish society. From this time forward, they became closely linked with the rise of the Pharisees, and most scribes were affiliated with them (see the close connection in the New Testament: [Matthew 5:20](#); [12:38](#); [15:1](#); [Mark 7:5](#); [Luke 6:7](#)).

Training and Status

At first, scribes were trained within priestly families which shared the same occupation. Being part of one of these families guaranteed what job they would have ([1 Chronicles 2:55](#)). Later, the training became available to people from all social classes. By the time of Jesus, there were many influential scribes from families of non-priests. Training began at an early age under the personal supervision of a teacher, or rabbi. The rabbi taught all aspects of Jewish law and its interpretation.

Since the written law of Moses could not directly address the conditions after the exile, the scribe’s skills became a significant contribution. The “oral law” that they established was considered equal to the written Jewish law. Thus it was equally binding for those desiring to please God (see [Mark 7:6–13](#)). Because of their expertise, scribes participated in the Sanhedrin, the council of elders that acted as the highest court in Israel. The scribes were the only members outside the highest social class of high priests and elders to be represented in this Jewish supreme court ([Matthew 26:57](#); [Mark 14:43, 53](#); [Luke 22:66](#); [Acts 23:9](#)).

The scribes were greatly respected within the Jewish community. They were the authoritative instructors of the Jewish law both within the temple ([Luke 2:46](#)) and within the various

synagogues of Judea and Galilee ([5:17](#)). They were also important members of the Sanhedrin. They wore special robes ([Mark 12:38](#)) with memorial fringes at the bottom and phylacteries, or “prayer boxes,” hanging from the arms ([Matthew 23:5](#)). Such clothing made their presence obvious and caused the common people to rise or bow when they passed ([Mark 12:38](#)). They were respectfully called “rabbi” or “master” ([Matthew 23:7](#)) and were given the place of honor during worship and social affairs ([Matthew 23:2](#); [Mark 12:39](#); [Luke 20:46](#)).

The Scribes in Jesus’s Day

During Jesus’s ministry, the scribes mainly appeared as those paying extremely close attention to the demands of the Jewish law. Luke refers to the scribes as “men of the Law”, thereby describing to his gentile (or non-Jewish) listeners and readers the scribes’ chief function as interpreters of the Jewish law. Often scribes were critical of Jesus. They accused him of violating the Jewish law on many occasions:

- when he forgave sins ([Matthew 9:1–3](#); [Luke 5:17–26](#))
- when they believed that he did not observe the Sabbath day appropriately, both through work ([Luke 6:1–2](#)) and healing (verses [6–11](#))
- when they noticed he was not following their ceremonial washings ([Mark 7:2–5](#)) and ignoring their practice of fasting ([Luke 5:33–39](#))

Not surprisingly, they especially disapproved of Jesus’s practice of spending time with the unclean (ritually impure) and outcasts of Jewish society ([Mark 2:16–17](#); [Luke 15:1–2](#)). They frequently tried to trick Jesus with questions about the Jewish law ([Mark 7:5](#); [12:28, 35](#); [Luke 11:53](#); [John 8:3–4](#)). They demanded that Jesus make his identity clear ([Matthew 12:38](#)) and reveal the source of his authority to perform miracles ([Mark 3:22](#); [Luke 20:1–4](#)). Even though a small number of them did accept Jesus ([Matthew 8:19](#); [13:52](#); [Mark 12:32](#); [John 3:1–2](#)), they usually were hostile toward him. It was also due to his rising popularity among the people, which posed a threat to their own authority ([Matthew 7:29](#)) and to the safety of the city ([Matthew 21:15](#); [Mark 11:18](#)).

Another major contributing factor to their opposition to Jesus was how he exposed their hypocrisy and corruption. Jesus openly accused them of seeking public recognition ([Matthew 23:5–7](#); [Mark 12:38–39](#); [Luke 11:43](#)). They outwardly appeared to be correct and holy, but were corrupt in their hearts ([Matthew 23:25–28](#); [Luke 11:39–41](#)). That is, they seemed to follow all the rules but they were not sincere.

Jesus also attacked the principle of the oral Jewish law taught by the scribes, declaring that it was a “heavy burden” that the scribes themselves did not even follow ([Matthew 23:2–4, 13–22](#); [Luke 11:46](#)). They emphasized minor points of the Jewish law, yet were also guilty of ignoring the more important concerns of justice, mercy, and faith ([Matthew 23:23–24](#); [Mark 12:40](#); [Luke 11:42](#)). They regarded themselves as the descendants of the Old Testament prophets, but Jesus told them that they would have killed the prophets if they had lived in their day ([Matthew 23:29–36](#); [Luke 20:9–19](#)).

Thus, it is not surprising that the scribes were eager to arrest Jesus ([Mark 14:1](#); [Luke 11:53](#)). His interpretation of the Jewish law threatened their position and authority within the community. The scribes joined with their usual opponents (the Jewish priests) to plot Jesus’s arrest ([Mark 14:43](#)). When Jesus appeared before them and the rest of the Sanhedrin, they participated in constructing a case against him that could result in his death ([Matthew 26:57–66](#)). When taking Jesus before Herod, they stood by and shouted their accusations with the others ([Luke 23:10](#)). Finally, they participated with other members of the Sanhedrin in mocking Jesus on the cross ([Matthew 27:41–43](#)). Before the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70, the scribes continued to work with the Sanhedrin to oppose the early Christian church. They also helped get Stephen killed because of his faith ([Acts 6:12–14](#)).

See also Judaism; Pharisees; Writer.

Scripture, Scriptures

The holy writings of Judaism and Christianity. Jews recognize 39 books as comprising their Scriptures. Christians recognize these same Jewish writings—categorized as Torah (Law), Prophets, and Writings—as Scripture, along with the four Gospels, 21 Epistles, the book of Acts, and Revelation. Some Christians also recognize the Apocrypha and/or Deuterocanonical books as

Scripture. *See* Bible, Canon of the; Bible, Manuscripts and Text of the (New Testament); Bible, Manuscripts and Text of the (Old Testament).

Scroll

Roll of papyrus, leather, or parchment used as a writing document. *See* Writing.

Scrolls, Dead Sea

See Bible, Manuscripts and Text of the (Old Testament).

Scurvy

Term used three times in the Bible ([Lv 21:20](#) and [22:22](#), kjv; [Dt 28:27](#), nlt). In none of the instances does it refer to the modern disease by the same name, which results from severe vitamin C deficiency. In the Leviticus passages, "scurvy" is found in the sequence "scurvy or scabbed." This phrase is translated "oozing sores or scabs on his skin" in the nlt. *See* Disease; Medicine and Medical Practice.

Scythopolis

The Greek name for Beth-shan in [2 Maccabees 12:29](#). *See* Beth-shan, Beth-shean; Decapolis.

Sea

A great body of salty water covering much of the earth.

The seas are mentioned in the very beginning of the Bible. In the beginning all was shapeless, empty, and dark ([Genesis 1:1-2](#)). "And the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters." Then God spoke and out of the chaos came order. The voice of the Lord is powerful over all the waters of chaos, as [Psalm 29](#) celebrates.

God's Power Over the Sea

From the account of Creation in [Genesis 1](#), two things stand out:

1. The sea, like everything else on earth and in heaven, was created by God.
2. By the word of God division was made between sea and land.

The Bible expresses God's power over the sea in a number of ways:

- [Psalms 33:7](#) speaks of how "He made the oceans, pouring them into his vast reservoirs."
- [Job 38:8-11](#) The Lord's words to Job describe God's power over the limits of sea and land: "Who shut in the sea with doors, when it burst forth from the womb; ... and prescribed bounds for it, and set bars and doors, and said, 'Thus far shall you come, and no farther, and here shall your proud waves be stayed?'"
- God's control over the waters of the sea is described when the Bible says that God "trampled the waves of the sea" ([Job 9:8](#)).
- In his life on earth, Jesus walked on the sea ([Mark 6:48](#)).
- Jesus also stilled the storm, so that the disciples in awe and wonder asked, "Who then is this, that even wind and sea obey him?" ([Mark 4:41](#)).

The Sea in Hebrew Culture

The Hebrew people had a healthy respect for the sea and its power. They did not control the coastline for much of their history, possibly because of the lack of safe harbors. It is only in the time of Solomon that they had a fleet (group of ships) of their own ([1 Kings 9:26](#)). The restless sea was to them a picture of the wicked ([Isaiah 57:20](#)). "Breakers rolling upon a beach" ([Isaiah 17:13](#)) or "the roaring of the sea" ([5:30](#)) reminded them of powerful, harmful forces. In [Daniel 7:3](#) and [Revelation 13:1](#), powers hostile to God are pictured as beasts coming up out of the sea.

Yet God controls the seas. He is able to rescue those who trust in him "out of many waters" ([Psalms 18:16](#)). He is able to protect those who go out into the seas ([107:23-31](#)). It was always remembered that God had made a way in the sea for his people

to pass when they came out of Egypt ([Exodus 15:19](#)). Psalmists ([Psalms 74:13](#); [77:16](#); [78:13](#); [106:9](#)) and prophets alike (for example [Isaiah 43:16–17](#)) recalled this.

See Dead Sea; Mediterranean Sea; Red Sea; Sea of Galilee.

Sea Monster

KJV rendering of “jackal” in [Lamentations 4:3](#). See Animals (Dragon, Jackal).

Sea of Chinnereth, Sea of Chinneroth

Early names for the Sea of Galilee. See Sea of Galilee.

Sea of Galilee

A large body of water in Palestine. It has had many names in its history. In the Old Testament, the Sea of Galilee was known as:

- the Sea of Chinnereth,
- Chinneroth ([Joshua 12:3](#)), or
- Kinnereth ([Numbers 34:11](#)).

It was named for a nearby town called Chinnereth ([Joshua 19:35](#)).

Later, the name was changed to Lake of Gennesaret. The city of Gennesaret was located on the site of Chinnereth or Tell Ureime ([Luke 5:1](#); [1 Maccabees 11:67](#)). The most familiar name, the Sea of Galilee, was because of its connection with the province of Galilee to the west ([Matthew 4:18](#)).

It was also sometimes called the Sea of Tiberias ([John 6:1, 23](#); [21:1](#)) because the town of Tiberias was located on its southwestern shore. In about AD 26, Herod Antipas, son of Herod the Great, built the town near the warm springs of Hamath by the sea and named it for the emperor Tiberias. In the Gospels “the sea” usually means the Sea of Galilee. Its modern Hebrew name is Yam Kinneret.

Where Is the Sea of Galilee?

The sea is in the lower section of the Jordan Valley about 96.5 kilometers (60 miles) north of Jerusalem, located in a range of mountains. The mountains of Upper Galilee are northwest of the

lake. The mountains rise to a height of 1,219.2 meters (4,000 feet) above sea level. The mountains on the east and west reach lower elevations, about 609.6 meters (2,000 feet). On the west, south, and east is the Decapolis, a group of influential city-states founded during a period of Greek settlement.

At the northwest corner of the lake, the mountain wall flattens into the rich plain of Gennesaret. On the east at 609.6 meters (2,000 feet) above sea level, it gives way to the fertile El Batihah (a marshy plain) in the northeast, where the Jordan enters the sea. At the time of the New Testament, the Sea of Galilee was surrounded by the towns of Capernaum, Bethsaida, Korazin, Magdala, Tiberias, and others.

The sea is a major part of the Jordan River. The Jordan River feeds it with water from the snow-covered Mount Hermon (over 2,743.2 meters, or 9,000 feet, above sea level) and the Lebanon mountains. In its 104.6-kilometer (65-mile) course from the Sea of Galilee to the Dead Sea, the Jordan River drops 179.8 meters (590 feet), an average of about 1.7 meters per kilometer (or nine feet per mile).

What Is the Sea of Galilee Like?

The lake is about 20.9 kilometers or 13 miles long and 9.7 kilometers or 6 miles wide. It is 12.1 kilometers (7.5 miles) at its broadest point opposite Magdala. Its elevation is almost 213.4 meters (700 feet) below the Mediterranean Sea. Its greatest depth is 60.9 meters (200 feet). Its shape resembles a harp (a musical instrument with strings stretched over a triangular frame). Some scholars think the name Chinnereth comes from a Hebrew word meaning “harp.”

The climate is semi-tropical. Because of this climate, and the sulphur springs at Tiberias, the lake became a resort site for healing. The rich fish population made fishing an important industry ([Matthew 4:18–22](#); [Mark 1:16–20](#); [Luke 5:9–11](#)). Sudden and violent storms, caused by the meeting of warm and cold air, are common ([Matthew 8:23–27](#); [Mark 4:35–41](#); [Luke 8:22–25](#)).

Why Is the Sea of Galilee Important?

Most of the events of Jesus’s life took place in Galilee, most especially around Gennesaret, a densely populated area of Palestine. Jesus may have lived in Capernaum ([Matthew 4:13](#)). He performed many miracles in this area ([11:23](#)).

Because the area on the west of the lake was a health resort, Jesus found many sick people there and healed them ([Mark 1:32-34](#); [6:53-56](#)). Other important events in the area included:

- the Sermon on the Mount, traditionally near Capernaum ([Matthew 5:1 and following](#); compare [8:1, 5](#))
- the drowning of the swine in the region of the Gadarenes ([Matthew 8:28-34](#))
- the curse on Korazin ([Matthew 11:21](#))
- the calming of the sea ([Matthew 8:23-27](#); [Mark 4:35-41](#); [Luke 8:22-24](#))
- Jesus walking on the water ([Matthew 14:22-23](#); [Mark 6:45-51](#); [John 6:16-21](#))

See also Galilee; Palestine.

Sea of Glass

A body of water in the vision of heaven described by John in the book of Revelation ([Rv 4:6](#)). It appears again later, in a different vision ([15:2](#)), and is perhaps connected with other "sea" references in the same book ([13:1](#); [21:1](#)). It probably depicts the vast expanse before God's throne. The crystal clearness of this sea may symbolize that everything is translucent and revealed in the presence of God.

Sea of Kinnereth

Early name for the Sea of Galilee. *See* Sea of Galilee.

Sea of Reeds

Hebrew designation for the body of water crossed by the Israelites during the exodus from Egypt. *See* Exodus, The; Red Sea.

Sea of the Arabah

An alternate name for the Dead Sea. This body of water is called "the Sea of Arabah" because it is located within the area of the land of Israel called

Arabah ([Deuteronomy 3:17](#); [4:49](#); [Joshua 3:16](#); [12:3](#); [2 Kings 14:25](#)).

See Dead Sea.

Sea of the Arabah

Alternate name for the Dead Sea ([Dt 3:17](#); [2 Kgs 14:25](#)). *See* Dead Sea.

Sea of Tiberias

Alternate name for the Sea of Galilee ([Jn 6:1](#); [21:1](#)). *See* Sea of Galilee.

Sea, Dead

See Dead Sea.

Sea, Molten

Alternate name for the laver in King Solomon's temple ([1 Kgs 7:23](#)). *See* Bronze Sea; Laver; Tabernacle; Temple.

Sea, Red

See Red Sea.

Sea, the Great

See Mediterranean Sea.

Seagull

A seagull is a strong seabird that often eats food it finds rather than hunts (family Laridae).

Several kinds of gulls live along the seacoast of the Holy Land. They usually have gray backs, white heads and undersides, and black wing tips. Their thin bills curve downward at the tip.

Seagulls can be 20 to 76 centimeters (8 to 30 inches) long. Many kinds travel far during migration. They are excellent fliers and can swim easily because of their webbed feet. Their calls sound like a loud scream or squawk.

In nesting season, many gulls gather together to make nests on cliffs, trees, or any place they find. Both the male and female sit on the eggs and care for the chicks.

Because gulls will eat almost anything, they are listed as ritually unclean birds ([Leviticus 11:16](#); [Deuteronomy 14:15](#)). In some Bible translations, the term “sea mew” is used for a common European gull. Some scholars think these verses may refer instead to an owl or a cuckoo.

See also Birds; Cuckoo, Cuckoo.

Seah

A unit of dry measure mentioned twice in the Bible ([Genesis 18:6](#); [1 Kings 18:32](#)).

See Weights and Measures.

Seal

Small engraved object widely used in the ancient Near East to produce an image in soft clay.

Origin

The exact origin of seals cannot be determined. The first seal probably developed from the amulet, whose purpose was to give protection to its wearer or to ward off evil. At one time a seal was believed to have some kind of magical protective power that would bring a curse or harm to the unauthorized person who dared to break it to obtain the contents it protected. Primitive seals were little more than tiny clay spools scratched with twigs to produce simple designs or figures. Glyptic art (the technical name for engraving or carving of seals on gems) flourished in the ancient Near East from the fourth millennium BC to the end of the Persian period in the fourth century BC.

Types of Seals

Stamp Seals

Seals were produced in many shapes and sizes, the earliest being the stamp seal, a flat engraved gem or bead that produced a copy of itself when pressed against soft clay. It was superseded about 3000 BC in Mesopotamia by the cylinder seal and began to be used again only at the end of the eighth century BC; by Hellenistic times it had replaced the cylinder seal altogether.

Cylinder Seals

The cylinder seal first appeared in Mesopotamia before 3000 BC and became the most widely used kind of seal until the middle of the first millennium BC. Its use in Egypt is evidence of early Mesopotamian cultural influence upon Egypt; however, it was soon replaced there by the scarab (beetle-shaped) seal, which was better adapted for sealing papyrus documents. Symbols or designs were carved on the outside of the cylinder, which left their imprint when the seal was rolled over the wet clay. Some of the earliest symbols used were geometric designs or representations of some magical symbol. Later seals depicted everything from mythology (deities seated conversing with each other, receiving worshipers in audience, riding in a boat or chariot, or fighting an enemy) to scenes from everyday life (hunting, marrying, banqueting, feeding animals, fighting wild beasts, offering sacrifices to the deity, warring, leading prisoners away) and representations of animals, flowers, and birds. Writing (e.g., the owner’s name or a declaration of loyalty to a god or king) began to appear on seals in the third millennium BC. Because of the great number and variety of seals that have been found, they are invaluable for what they reveal about ancient peoples—how they dressed, their hairstyles, furniture, utensils, and religious beliefs.

Seals were so widely used and have been unearthed in such quantity in the ancient Near East that they can be dated within a century or two of their origin, though sometimes it is difficult to determine the exact period or country of origin. Herodotus observed that every Babylonian gentleman “carries a seal and a walking stick” (Book I, 195). The seal was suspended by a cord about the neck or the wrist or attached to some part of the owner’s clothing (cf. [Gn 38:18](#); [41:42](#); [Sg 8:6](#); [Jer 22:24](#)). Graves have been found with cylinders tied to the wrists of the skeletons.

Another type of seal was the jar handle seal. Cloth was placed over the neck of a bottle, soft clay was smeared on top of the binding cord, and then the seal was pressed into the wet clay. The unbroken seal showed that the merchandise had not been opened before delivery. In Judea the seal was impressed on jar handles as evidence of ownership. Some jar handle stamps were probably trademarks of pottery factories; some bear private names (perhaps the owner of the factory). The so-called royal jar handle stamps contain either a four-winged or two-winged symbol and a short

inscription consisting of two lines. The line above reads “belonging to the king,” and the lower line contains the name of a city, probably where the jar was made.

Uses

Functional Uses

Since their first creation as amulets, seals continued to serve as signals of protection. An unbroken seal proved that the contents had not been tampered with, whether on a document, a granary door, or a wine jar. The lions’ den into which Daniel was cast was sealed with the king’s signet and those of his nobles ([Dn 6:17](#)). Jesus’ tomb was secured by sealing the stone ([Mt 27:66](#)). The seal also served as a mark of ownership or as a trademark (e.g., placed on pottery before firing). It was also used to validate documents (letters, bills of sale, government documents, etc.). Jezebel wrote letters in her husband’s name and sealed them with his seal, thus bringing about the death of Naboth ([1 Kgs 21:8–13](#)). Jeremiah sealed a deed of purchase when he bought a kinsman’s land ([Jer 32:10–14](#)). An edict with the Persian king’s seal could not be revoked ([Est 8:8](#)).

Symbolic Use

Symbolic use of the seal is found both in nonbiblical and biblical literature. A Babylonian prayer says, “Like a seal may my sins be torn away.” The OT says, “Seal the teaching among my disciples” ([Is 8:16](#), rsv). Zerubbabel was told he would become God’s signet ring ([Hg 2:23](#)). The earth took shape like clay pressed by a signet ring ([Jb 38:14](#)).

The word is used symbolically in the NT to designate God’s personal ownership. For example, the Scriptures say that God’s seal is on Jesus, his Son ([Jn 3:33](#); [6:27](#)). This means that Jesus bears God’s personal name; Jesus is God’s personal expression. The Scriptures also say that the Holy Spirit seals the believers ([2 Cor 1:22](#); [Eph 1:13](#); [4:30](#)). This means that the Spirit is God’s mark of ownership on the believers, and it means that the Spirit protects and preserves the believers throughout their lives.

See also Archaeology and the Bible; Inscriptions.

Seasons

See Calendars, Ancient and Modern.

Seba

A Semitic people descended from Cush ([Genesis 10:7](#); [1 Chronicles 1:9](#); [Isaiah 43:3](#)). Semitic people are ancient groups from the Middle East and North Africa, known for their shared languages (such as Hebrew, Aramaic, or Arabic) and cultural traditions. It is possible Seba could be the same as the people of Sheba.

See Sheba (Person) #2.

Sebam

Another name for Sebam. Sibmah was a city in the territory of Reuben ([Numbers 32:38](#) and [Joshua 13:19](#)).

See Sibmah.

Sebat

KJV spelling of Shebat, the Hebrew month extending from about mid-January to about mid-February, in [Zechariah 1:7](#). *See* Calendars, Ancient and Modern.

Secacah

One of six cities situated in the wilderness region immediately west of the Dead Sea in the valley of Achor and included in the territory allotted to Judah, mentioned between Middin and Nibshan ([Jos 15:61](#)). Its location is perhaps three miles (4.8 kilometers) southwest of Khirbet Qumran at the modern town of Khirbet es-Samrah.

Sechu

KJV spelling of Secu in [1 Samuel 19:22](#). *See* Secu.

Second Adam

See Adam, The Second.

Second Book of Esdras

The Second Book of Esdras is a religious text that combines Jewish and Christian writings. Some church traditions include this book in their canon (the official list of books included in the Bible).

Preview

- Who Wrote the Second Book of Esdras?
- When Was the Second Book of Esdras Written?
- What Is the Background of the Second Book of Esdras?
- What Was the Second Book of Esdras Written? What Does It Teach About God?

Who Wrote the Second Book of Esdras?

The main part of 2 Esdras (chapters [3-14](#)) was likely written by a Palestinian Jew. Two additional sections (chapters [1-2](#) and [15-16](#)) were added after by unknown Christian authors. Some scholars argue it was written in Hebrew. But all versions of the text that exist today are in fragments in Greek or Coptic.

Full versions of the text exist in:

- Syriac
- Ethiopic
- Arabic
- Armenian
- Georgian
- Latin

When Was the Second Book of Esdras Written?

Most scholars date the Jewish sections of the book to around AD 95–100. Chapters [1](#) and [2](#) may have been written around AD 200. Chapters [15](#) and [16](#) were likely written between AD 120 to 300. These chapters seem to talk about the harsh treatment (persecution) of Christians, which was happening during this time.

What Is the Background of the Second Book of Esdras?

Second Esdras is an apocalypse. An apocalypse is a genre used by Jewish and Christian writers, often written during periods of persecution. Apocalypses share certain features:

- They discuss God's ultimate purpose in history.
- They use highly descriptive and symbolic language.

Apocalypses were popular between 200 BC and AD 350. These were periods of great persecution:

- Jewish people were persecuted in the Maccabean period (about 167 to 63 BC).
- Jewish Zealots (who strongly opposed Roman rule) were persecuted in Rome.
- Christians were persecuted in the Roman Empire.

Jewish apocalypses often discuss the destiny of Israel or Judaism. In 2 Esdras 14, Ezra receives a series of visions that reveal the "sacred books" would be restored to him. These books include 24 Old Testament books and 70 rare apocalypses. This suggests that apocalyptic literature was popular.

At the time, Jewish people believed that prophecy could no longer happen. So, the author wrote as if Ezra, a person from long ago, was speaking these revelations.

The Jewish core of the book (chapters [3-14](#)) was titled "Ezra the Prophet" or "The Apocalypse of Ezra." It became known as 4 Esdras in the Latin Vulgate Bible (a Latin translation by Jerome in AD 404). In the Septuagint (an ancient Greek translation of the Old Testament), it is known as 3 Esdras. In Protestant versions, the book is called 2 Esdras. The Christian additions to the book were sometimes circulated separated as 5 Esdras, and chapters [15](#) and [16](#) were titled 6 Esdras. The "Confession of Ezra" was also circulated separately, adding to the confusion ([2 Esdras 8:20-36](#)).

Why Was the Second Book of Esdras Written? What Does It Teach About God?

Second Esdras was written in AD 70 after the Romans destroyed Jerusalem and the temple. The book tries to give hope to the Jewish people.

The Jewish portion of the book asks deep theological questions:

- Why did God allow the faithful to suffer under non-Jewish rule?
- Why does God allow humans to have evil in their hearts?
- When God gave his law, why did he not remove the desire to do evil so people could keep the law?
- Why are humans given understanding but denied answers to these questions?

No final answers are given, and Ezra is reminded that God's ways are unknowable. These problems will be solved in the end times. In the end times:

- God's justice will manifest in a 400-year rule by the Messiah.
- The dead will be resurrected.
- The dead will be judged.
- There will be eternal rewards in heaven or punishments in hell.

Ezra is assured of his salvation and the salvation of the righteous.

Second Esdras is considered one of the best Jewish apocalypses. An apocalypse is a genre of writing that reveals hidden knowledge about the end of the world, divine judgment, or God's ultimate plan. Second Esdras became popular for three main reasons:

1. It showed a deep understanding of people's questions about God and faith.
2. It boldly explored these questions in new and sometimes challenging ways.
3. It claimed to reveal what would happen in the future.

In its fourth vision, a mourning woman is transformed into the heavenly Jerusalem. This symbolizes the coming redemption of Zion.

In the fifth vision, Ezra sees an eagle with 12 wings and three heads. This was a symbol for three Roman emperors:

- Vespasian (emperor of Rome from 69 to 79),
- Titus (emperor of Rome from 79 to 81), and
- Domitian (emperor of Rome from 81 to 96).

This eagle is linked to the fourth beast in the book of Daniel ([Daniel 7](#)). Ezra sees a lion destroy the eagle, symbolizing the Messiah's destruction of Roman rule.

In the sixth vision, a man rises from the sea and is attacked by "an innumerable multitude." The man destroyed the multitude, symbolizing the Messiah's victories.

In the last vision, Ezra dictates the contents of 94 sacred books to five scribes and prepares for his ascension (going up) into heaven.

Chapters [15](#) and [16](#) warn non-believing nations of a coming judgment for their unbelief. These chapters also give comfort to God's people who are suffering persecution.

Second Coming of Christ

The return of Jesus Christ to earth to complete the work of salvation.

Terms Used

The doctrine is expressed by verbs such as "come," "descend," "appear," and "is revealed" with Christ as the subject (e.g., "I will come again," [Jn 14:3](#); "the Lord himself will descend," [1 Thes 4:16](#); "when he appears," [1 Jn 2:28](#); [3:2](#); "the day when the Son of man is revealed," [Lk 17:30](#); "when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven," [2 Thes 1:7](#)). It is expressed also by a variety of nouns, principally by "coming" (which is the regular translation of the Greek word *parousia*, meaning "presence," "visit," "arrival," "advent," especially of a royal or distinguished person) but also by "appearing" (as in [2 Tm 4:8](#); [Ti 2:13](#)), "revealing," or "revelation" ([1 Cor 1:7](#)). These different verbs and nouns point to the same event but highlight different aspects of it, especially the manifestation of God's glory in Christ when he comes. The time of this event is repeatedly referred to as "the Day," sometimes absolutely (as in [Rom 13:12](#); [1 Cor 3:13](#); [Heb 10:25](#)), more often with a qualification, such as "the day of Christ" ([Phil 1:10](#); [2:16](#)), "the day of the Lord" ([1 Thes 5:2](#); [2 Thes 2:2](#)),

“the day of the Lord Jesus” ([1 Cor 5:5](#); [2 Cor 1:14](#)), “the day of Jesus Christ” ([Phil 1:6](#)), and “the day of our Lord Jesus Christ” ([1 Cor 1:8](#)). When such expressions are used, there is often some reference to the judgment to be passed at the coming of Christ: his day is “the day of judgment” ([1 Jn 4:17](#)) or “the day of wrath” ([Rom 2:5](#)). For the people of God, however, it is “the day of redemption” ([Eph 4:30](#)).

The Proclamation of the New Testament

That the second coming of Christ was an essential element in the gospel as preached in the apostolic age is clear from many NT writings (quoted below from the rsv).

The origin of the Second Coming is found in the teachings of Jesus before his death. Speaking of himself as the Son of Man, Jesus said, “The day when the Son of man is revealed” ([Lk 17:30](#)) he will come “in clouds with great power and glory” ([Mk 13:26](#)). This language is derived from the OT, especially from Daniel’s vision in which “one like a son of man” is brought “with the clouds of heaven” to receive everlasting dominion from the Ancient of Days ([Dn 7:13–14](#)). A cloud or clouds regularly enveloped the divine glory in the OT (as in [Ex 40:34](#); [1 Kgs 8:10–11](#)); their mention in connection with the coming of the Son of Man indicates that, when he comes, the glory of God will be manifested in him. Jesus’ last reference to his second coming came at his trial before the Jewish authorities when, asked by the high priest to say whether or not he was “the Christ, the Son of the Blessed,” he replied, “I am; and you will see the Son of man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven” ([Mk 14:61–62](#)).

After the Gospels, the rest of the NT affirms the eventuality of Christ’s second coming. The record of Acts begins with the angels’ assurance at the ascension of Christ that “this Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven” ([Acts 1:11](#)). The summaries of apostolic addresses that the book contains make repeated references to Jesus as “the one ordained by God to be judge of the living and the dead” ([10:42](#); cf. [17:31](#)).

Writing to his converts in Thessalonica (c. AD 51) a few weeks after they first heard and believed the gospel, Paul reminds them how they had “turned to God from idols, to serve a living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come” ([1 Thes 1:9–10](#)). Here Jesus’

expected deliverance of his people from end-time judgment is put on the same plane as his historical resurrection; the Christian way of life embraces both serving God and waiting for Christ. This note of waiting for Christ is repeated and amplified several times in this short letter. A few years later Paul uses similar language when writing to his converts in Corinth (cf. [Acts 18:1–18](#)): “You are not lacking in any spiritual gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ” ([1 Cor 1:7](#)). And in what may have been his last letter he speaks of “the crown of righteousness” that the Lord will award him “on that Day, and not only to me,” he adds, “but also to all who have loved his appearing” ([2 Tm 4:8](#)). To love his appearing and to wait for him are two different ways of expressing the same attitude.

The writer to the Hebrews encourages his readers with the assurance that in a little while “the coming one shall come and shall not tarry” ([Heb 10:37](#)). James says that “the coming of the Lord is at hand” ([Jas 5:8](#)). Peter speaks of the time “when the chief Shepherd is manifested” ([1 Pt 5:4](#)). The Revelation to John ends with the risen Lord’s promise, “Surely I am coming soon,” and the church’s response, “Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!” ([Rv 22:20](#)).

The Second Coming and the Resurrection

In 1 Thessalonians, written not more than 20 years after the death and resurrection of Christ, his coming again is presented by way of comfort and encouragement to those whose Christian friends had died. Paul had been compelled to leave Thessalonica before he had time to give his converts there as much teaching as they required, and when some of their number died shortly after his departure, their friends wondered if they would suffer some serious disadvantage at the Second Coming, in contrast to those who would still be alive to greet the returning Lord. No, says Paul, “those who have fallen asleep” will suffer no disadvantage. On the contrary, the first thing to happen when “the Lord himself will descend from heaven” is that “the dead in Christ will rise.” Only after that will those who survive until then be caught away to join them and be forever “with the Lord” ([1 Thes 4:15–17](#)). Fuller information on the same subject is given in 1 Corinthians, written about five years later. There the resurrection of believers is the full harvest that was inaugurated by the resurrection of Christ: “Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ” ([1 Cor 15:23](#)). An additional revelation is imparted: not only will each believer who has died be raised

in a “spiritual body” (v [44](#)) but also those who are still alive will be “changed” so as to have bodies suitable for life in resurrection. For dead and living believers alike, Paul proclaimed that “as we have borne the image of the man of dust [i.e., Adam; cf. [Gn 2:7](#)], we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven [i.e., the risen Christ]” ([1 Cor 15:49](#)). To the same effect, Paul writes (a few years later still) in [Philippians 3:20–21](#) that from heaven “we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will change our lowly body to be like his glorious body.” A deeper unveiling of what this will involve is made in [Romans 8:18–23](#), where the resurrection of the people of Christ is the catalyst for the liberation and glorious renewal of all creation.

The Second Coming and Judgment

The association of judgment with the Second Coming arises in Jesus’ teaching in the Gospels. The association is equally plain in the epistles of the NT. Paul, in particular, put the subject on a personal level. He forbade premature judgment of fellow Christians: “Do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes” ([1 Cor 4:5](#)). The Lord will conduct an investigation that will bring to light the hidden motives of the heart. Paul knew that his own apostolic work would be assessed on “the day of Christ” ([Phil 2:16](#); [1 Thes 2:19](#)). Elsewhere, Paul urges his converts to bear in mind that they, with himself, must appear before the divine tribunal, variously called “the judgment seat of God” (where “each of us shall give account of himself,” [Rom 14:10–12](#)) or “the judgment seat of Christ” (where each will “receive good or evil, according to what he has done in the body,” [2 Cor 5:10](#)). It seems clear that this judgment is to take place at the second coming of Christ, who will then “judge the living and the dead” ([2 Tm 4:1](#)). Because Paul was writing to Christians, he tended to concentrate on the judgment or assessment that the believers would experience at the Lord’s return. But he also made it plain that the same coming would bring judgment to those who opposed the Christian faith ([2 Thes 1:6–10](#)). This is made explicit in [Acts 17:31](#), where Paul told the Athenians that God “has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed.”

See also Day of the Lord; Eschatology; Judgment; Judgment Seat; Last Days; Rapture; Resurrection; Revelation, Book of; Tribulation.

Second Death, the

See Death, The Second.

Second Jewish Revolt

A Jewish rebellion named after its leader, Bar-Kokhba. It lasted from AD 131 to 135. There were two reasons for the revolt:

1. The emperor Hadrian made circumcision a crime punishable by death.
2. He decided to rebuild Jerusalem and erect a shrine to Zeus on the ruins of the temple site. This enraged the Jewish people.

Bar-Kokhba's name means “son of a star.” He was believed to be the “star [that] will come forth from Jacob” ([Numbers 24:17](#)). Many Jews proclaimed Bar-Kokhba the Messiah (a savior or chosen leader that many Jews were waiting for). Bar-Kokhba used surprise attacks to fight the Romans. This kind of fighting led to huge losses for both Jews and Romans. A Roman general named Julius Severus finally defeated the Jewish resistance.

Hadrian rebuilt Jerusalem and renamed it Aelia Capitolina. He resettled it with gentiles and forbade Jews from entering it or they would be killed.

See also Bar-Kochba, Bar-Kokba.

Second Letter to the Thessalonians

The second letter of the apostle Paul to the church at Thessalonica. It is part of the New Testament.

Overview

- Who Wrote the Second Letter to the Thessalonians?
- When and Where Was the Letter Written? Who Was It Written To?
- Why Was the Letter Written?
- What Is the Message of the Letter?

Who Wrote the Second Letter to the Thessalonians?

Both this letter and 1 Thessalonians begin with the names of Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy. Likewise,

both letters often use the plural pronouns “we” and “us” but also the singular “I” (for example, [2 Thessalonians 2:5](#)). At the end of the letter, Paul writes a special note: “This greeting is in my own hand—Paul. This is my mark in every letter; it is the way I write” ([3:17](#)).

Some scholars have wondered if Paul actually wrote this letter. This is mostly because 2 Thessalonians talks about future events differently than 1 Thessalonians. However, if someone other than Paul wrote this letter, they would have been creating a fake letter. This would not make sense because of what Paul wrote in [2 Thessalonians 3:17](#). The early Christian church always believed that Paul wrote both letters to the Thessalonians.

When and Where Was the Second Letter to the Thessalonians Written? Who Was It Written To?

In the first verse, as in 1 Thessalonians, Paul addresses the letter “to the church of the Thessalonians.” Unlike 1 Thessalonians, this letter does not tell us where Paul and his friends were when they wrote it, or when they wrote it.

Because there are differences between the teachings of this letter and the teachings of 1 Thessalonians, scholars have different ideas about when and where this letter was written.

1. Some scholars think Paul wrote 2 Thessalonians much later than 1 Thessalonians. This is unlikely because both Silas and Timothy were still with Paul.
2. Some scholars think Paul wrote 2 Thessalonians earlier than 1 Thessalonians. But [2 Thessalonians 2:15](#) mentions a letter that was already sent to Thessalonica. The early Church from the second century would have called this 2 Thessalonians.

3. Some scholars think Paul wrote 2 Thessalonians to Jewish Christians in Thessalonica and 1 Thessalonians to non-Jewish (gentile) Christians. But this is most unlikely because the apostle cared about the unity of all Christians in one place (for example, [1 Corinthians 1–3](#)). He cared very much about the unity of Jewish and non-Jewish Christians (see [Ephesians 2:11–22](#)).
4. Some scholars think Paul wrote 2 Thessalonians to Christians in a different place (perhaps Berea or Philippi) and later the Christians in Thessalonica received it. However, there is no evidence that Paul sent this letter anywhere except to Thessalonica.

When Paul wrote 2 Thessalonians, he was working with the same friends who helped him write 1 Thessalonians ([2 Thessalonians 1:1](#)). This tells us that Paul probably wrote 2 Thessalonians not long after writing 1 Thessalonians. He wrote this letter because he heard about new problems the Christians in Thessalonica were experiencing, and he wanted to help them.

Why Was the Second Letter to the Thessalonians Written?

The apostle Paul had three main concerns when he wrote this letter:

1. As in all his letters, Paul wanted to encourage the believers to “stand firm and cling to the traditions we taught you” ([2 Thessalonians 2:15](#)). He was thankful to God because he saw how their faith was growing ([1:3](#); [2:13](#)). The Thessalonian believers showed their faith through their love for each other and by staying faithful even when people were treating them badly ([1:4](#)). Paul told them that God would make everything right when he judges the world. Their job was to live in a way that brought honor to Jesus. Then, when Jesus returns, he will be honored through the lives of his faithful people (verses [5–12](#)).

2. Paul needed to correct some wrong teaching. Some people were saying that the Day of the Lord (the time when Jesus will return) had already happened. They even claimed Paul had taught this ([2 Thessalonians 2:2](#)). Paul explained that certain things needed to happen before Jesus returns. He said that evil would become very strong through someone called “the man of lawlessness” or “the son of destruction.” This person will:
 - reject true worship of God,
 - show amazing signs and miracles to trick people, and
 - claim to be God.

At the present time, there is a power that restrains him.

Paul explained that something was holding this evil back for now. But at the right time, this evil person will appear. Then Jesus will return and defeat this enemy completely ([2 Thessalonians 2:1–12](#)). This teaching is similar to what Jesus said in the Gospels about false messiahs (the Antichrist or antichrists) who would try to trick people with miracles ([Matthew 24:5, 23–26](#); [Mark 13:5–6, 20–23](#)).

In 1 Thessalonians, Paul had emphasized that no one knows when Jesus will return, so believers should always be ready. In 2 Thessalonians, Paul explained what must happen before Jesus returns. Jesus himself taught both of these ideas when he talked about the future ([Matthew 24](#); [Mark 13](#); [Luke 21](#)).

1. Paul needed to address a problem in the church: some people had stopped working. He had mentioned this issue in his first letter to the Thessalonians ([1 Thessalonians 4:11](#); [5:14](#))., but now it had become worse. Paul reminded them that when he and his friends were in Thessalonica, they worked to earn money for their food instead of depending on the people they were teaching about Jesus. Paul gave them a clear rule: “If anyone is unwilling to work, he shall not eat” ([2 Thessalonians 3:10](#)).

What Is the Message of the Second Letter to the Thessalonians?

Thanksgiving for Their Christian Lives ([1:3–4](#))

Paul thanked God because he saw how the Thessalonian believers were growing stronger in their faith. They were showing more love to each other and staying faithful even when people were making them suffer.

God's Future Judgment ([1:5–10](#))

The Christians in Thessalonica were suffering at this time. Paul explained that God would judge fairly in the future. When Jesus returns “with His mighty angels,” he will punish those who reject God and refuse his message of salvation offered in the gospel. These people will “suffer the penalty of eternal destruction.” But God's people will see Jesus's glory when he returns, and this will show that their faith and suffering was not meaningless.

Prayer For the Glory of Christ ([1:11–12](#))

Paul prayed that the Thessalonian Christians would live in a way that matched their calling as believers. He asked God to help them do the good things they wanted to do. Through God's kindness, Paul hoped that Jesus would be glorified (or honored) through their lives.

Events Before the Second Coming ([2:1–12](#))

In this section, Paul deals with the false teaching that the Day of the Lord (also called the Second Coming) had already happened. Before this event, “the man of lawlessness” must be revealed. Another name for this person is “the Antichrist.” The New Testament also speaks of “antichrists” and “the spirit of antichrist” ([1 John 2:18](#); [4:3](#)). Paul said, “it [the Day of the Lord] will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness—the son of destruction—is revealed” ([2 Thessalonians 2:3](#)).

Right now, something is holding back “the mystery of lawlessness” in the world ([2 Thessalonians 2:6–7](#)). But in the future, just before Jesus returns, this restraint will be removed and evil will become very strong. This evil person will use fake miracles and wonders to trick many people (verse [9](#)). When Jesus returns, he will defeat this evil and judge those who loved doing wrong instead of following the truth.

Thanksgiving, Encouragement, and Prayer ([2:13-3:5](#))

After explaining about evil's power, Paul thanked God for how the Holy Spirit was working in the Thessalonian believers' lives. He encouraged them to keep following what he had taught them, both in person and through his letters. Paul prayed that God, who gives comfort and hope, would make them strong in doing and saying good things.

Paul also asked for their prayers. He wanted God to help his message spread and protect him from evil people. He reminded the believers that God is faithful. Paul prayed that as they continued following his teachings, God would guide them to understand his love better and help them endure like Jesus did.

Warning Against Idleness ([3:6-15](#))

Paul wrote strongly against believers being lazy. He had taught this before and had shown it by his own example. Christians should "begin working quietly," "to earn their own living," and "not grow weary in well-doing" ([2 Thessalonians 3:12-13](#)). He told them not to spend time with people who refused to follow this teaching. However, they should correct these people as fellow believers ("brothers"), not treat them as enemies.

Conclusion ([3:16-18](#))

Paul ends 2 Thessalonians with a prayer for grace and peace. He wrote the final words himself with his own hand ([2 Thessalonians 3:17](#)). This probably means someone else probably wrote down the rest of the letter as Paul spoke it (compare [1 Corinthians 16:21](#); [Colossians 4:18](#)).

See also Eschatology; Paul, The Apostle; Second Coming of Christ; Thessalonians, First Letter to the; Thessalonica.

Second Temple, Period of the

Time interval from the dedication of the rebuilt Jerusalem temple in 516 BC to its destruction by the Romans in AD 70. *See* Judaism.

Secu

Town or topographical landmark where Saul stopped to ask the whereabouts of Samuel and David, located between Gibeah and Ramah. It was

especially noted for its large well—a natural place to go for information ([1 Sm 19:22](#)).

Secundus

A Christian from Thessalonica. He was a traveling companion of Aristarchus. Secundus accompanied Paul on his third missionary journey through Macedonia and Greece. Then he waited for Paul at Troas in Asia Minor ([Acts 20:4-6](#)). It is not known whether Secundus remained at Troas or went with Paul on his final trip to Jerusalem.

Seer

See Prophecy; Prophet, Prophetess.

Segub

1. Youngest son of Hiel the Bethelite. Hiel rebuilt Jericho during the reign of King Ahab of Israel. His violation of Joshua's curse against anyone rebuilding the city ([Jos 6:26](#)) cost him his oldest and youngest sons. Segub was killed as a result of the rebuilding of the city gates ([1 Kgs 16:34](#)).

2. Son borne to Hezron by the daughter of Makir, the father of Gilead. Segub was the father of Jair ([1 Chr 2:21-22](#)).

Seir (Person)

Father of seven sons and a descendant of Abraham through the family line of Esau. First Seir was a Horite tribe living in the land of Edom. The nation that descended from Seir was first expelled by the descendants of Esau. But later they intermarried with them. This may be why the ancestry of Abraham includes Seir and his descendants ([Genesis 36:20-21](#); [1 Chronicles 1:38](#)).

Seir (Place)

1. Mountain range of Edom extending from the Dead Sea southward to the Gulf of Aqaba. Mt Seir was bordered by the great valley of Arabah on the west and by desert on the east. Seir is the modern Jebel esh-Shera.

Seir was formerly inhabited by the Horites, whose defeat to King Kedorlaomer is recorded in [Genesis 14:4-6](#). The Horites were later dispossessed from this region by Esau ([Dt 2:12](#)); however, a remnant of Horite chiefs was listed among the descendants of Esau living in Seir ([Gn 36:20-30](#)). As this area was given by the Lord as an inheritance to Esau ([Jos 24:4](#)), the Israelites were warned not to provoke the sons of Esau to war as they passed through Seir on their wilderness travels ([Dt 2:1-8](#)). During Israel's occupation of Palestine, they were drawn into a number of battles against the people of Seir. A band of Simeonites destroyed the Amalekites dwelling in Seir and resettled it with their own people ([1 Chr 4:42](#)). Jehoshaphat, king of Judah (872-848 BC), gained an incredible victory over the allied armies of Ammon, Moab, and Seir ([2 Chr 20:10-23](#)). King Amaziah of Judah (796-767 BC) routed an army from Seir in the valley of Salt ([25:11-14](#)). And finally, the prophet Ezekiel pronounced a curse of destruction on the inhabitants of Seir for their antagonism against Israel ([Ez 35:1-15](#)).

See also Edom, Edomites.

2. Place defining part of the northern boundary of the land assigned to Judah's tribe ([Jos 15:10](#)). It was positioned west of Kiriath-jearim and northeast of Beth-shemesh. Mt Seir is perhaps the ridge on which the modern town of Saris is built.

Seirah

Place where Ehud sought refuge after murdering Eglon, the king of Moab, and from where he summoned Israel to war against the Moabites ([Jgs 3:26](#)).

Sela

1. Unidentified site on the border of the Amorites ([Jgs 1:36](#)).
2. Edomite stronghold ([2 Kgs 14:7](#)). On this site the Nabatean city of Petra was built. *See* Petra.
3. Unidentified place mentioned in Isaiah's prophecy against Moab ([Is 16:1](#)).

Sela-Hammahlekoth

Cliff in the wilderness of Maon, meaning "the Rock of Escape." Saul, in his desire to kill David, attempted to catch him in the steep-ravined mountains of Judah, where David had fled. Saul's attentions were diverted by a Philistine raid, thus enabling David to escape ([1 Sm 23:28](#), nlt mg). The wadi el-Malaqi, about eight miles (12.9 kilometers) northeast of Maon, is a suggested location for this cliff.

Selah

Musical notation, perhaps designating a pause in performance, occurring over 70 times in psalm texts and in [Habakkuk 3:3, 9, 13](#). *See* Music; Psalms, Book of.

Seled

Nadab's son from Judah's tribe ([1 Chr 2:30](#)).

Seleucia

A name given to several ancient cities in the Near East. These cities were all founded by Seleucus I Nicator, who ruled from 312 to 281 BC.

The most important Seleucia is in Syria. This Seleucia served as the port city of Antioch, located on the northeast corner of the Mediterranean. It stands eight kilometers (5 miles) north of the mouth of the Orontes River and 24 kilometers (15 miles) from Antioch.

Seleucus I built this city in 301 BC and made it very strong with walls and defenses to protect his capital city from attacks from the west. Over time, different rulers fought for control of Seleucia. The Seleucid rulers of Syria and the Ptolemies of Egypt had many battles to control the city ([Daniel 11:7-9](#); [1 Maccabees 11:8-19](#)). In 109 BC, after the Seleucid rulers broke free from Egyptian control, they made Seleucia an independent city with the right to make its own money.

When the Romans came to this region, their leader Pompey declared Seleucia a "free city." However, he ended the power of the Seleucid rulers and created the Roman province of Syria. Seleucia became an important entry port to the eastern

regions. The Romans improved both the natural harbor and the city's defenses.

In New Testament times, Seleucia remained a free city. It was home to Rome's navy ships in Syria. Barnabas, Saul, and John Mark sailed from here on their first missionary journey and returned to Antioch via Seleucia ([Acts 13:4–5](#); [14:26](#)). Later, on Paul's second missionary journey, Paul and his companions again set out from Seleucia ([15:39–41](#)). The city was beautiful, with many public buildings. It had a temple and an amphitheater (an open-air theater) that was cut into the side of a cliff.

Sem

The King James Version spelling of Shem, Noah's son, in [Luke 3:36](#).

See Shem.

Semachiah, Semakiah

Korahite Levite, Shemaiah's son and a gatekeeper in the temple ([1 Chr 26:7](#)).

Semei, Semein

A descendant of Josech and an ancestor of Jesus Christ ([Luke 3:26](#)).

See Ancestry of Jesus Christ.

Senaah

Father of a family of Israelites who returned with Zerubbabel to Palestine following the exile ([Ezr 2:35](#); [Neh 7:38](#)). They helped Nehemiah rebuild part of the Jerusalem wall ([Neh 3:3](#); Hassenaah is an alternate spelling for Senaah). Hassenuah is a possible variant for Senaah ([1 Chr 9:7](#); [Neh 11:9](#), where kjv reads "Senuah").

See also Hassenuah.

Seneh

Name of one of the two rocky crags at a pass across the Wadi es-Suweinit over which Jonathan and his armor bearer crossed in their skirmish against the Philistines. The crag opposite Seneh was called

Bozez and faced the town of Micmash to the north. Seneh was visible to the town of Geba to the south ([1 Sm 14:4–5](#)).

Senir

An Amorite name for Mount Hermon in [Deuteronomy 3:9](#) and [Song of Songs 4:8](#).

See Hermon, Mount.

Sennacherib

King of the Assyrian Empire from 705 to 681 BC. His name, meaning "son has replaced brothers," may refer to a specific family situation by means of which he, a younger son of Sargon II, came to succeed his father. Before the death of his father, Sennacherib acted as military governor of the northern provinces of the Assyrian Empire. He was successful in quelling unrest in those areas. When Sargon II was assassinated in 705 BC, Sennacherib lost no time in claiming the throne.

As king of Assyria, he was a bold administrator. He was soon known to be a just and tolerant man, for thus the biblical account speaks of him. Extrabiblical sources indicate that, while he was conducting military campaigns, he also developed a strong rule at home and, employing slave labor acquired through his military victories, he did much building in Nineveh, his capital city. Many of the decorations of his palace, as well as inscriptions he prepared, are housed in museums today.

Shortly after Sennacherib became king, he was confronted by rebellion in the eastern and western provinces. It is at this point that the biblical record refers to Sennacherib. Judah was a vassal state of Assyria. It is likely that Merodach-baladan in Babylon and Hezekiah, king of Judah, joined in this insurrection ([2 Kgs 18:7–8](#)).

Sennacherib was ready for the challenge from Babylon and Palestine. In 703 BC he first led his forces to Kish near Babylon, where he defeated Merodach-baladan's army and then captured the city of Babylon itself. Turning west in 701 BC, Sennacherib led his armies against the Palestinian alliance headed by Hezekiah. He captured the cities of Tyre and Sidon and then continued his campaign southward. Several of the Philistine cities submitted before the Assyrian onslaught, but Ashkelon, Beth-dagon, and Joppa resisted and were

captured and plundered. The leaders of the city of Ekron were put to death by being skinned alive because they had delivered up their pro-Assyrian king to Hezekiah. Sennacherib then turned to Judah. He besieged the Judean city of Lachish and captured 46 other towns, taking 200,150 Jewish captives. Hezekiah began to realize his desperate situation as Sennacherib's military victories came one after the other, so he sent tribute to Sennacherib at Lachish. The tribute amounted to 300 talents of silver and 30 talents of gold ([2 Kgs 18:13-16](#)). From his camp at Lachish, Sennacherib sent envoys to Jerusalem to demoralize the city inhabitants. In their effort to convince Jerusalem that it should surrender, the Assyrians referred to Hezekiah's removal of altars and places of worship. This act was considered an affront to the God the Judeans worshiped and on whom they relied for victory; he would not aid a people led by an idol-breaking king such as Hezekiah.

While Sennacherib was threatening Jerusalem, Tirhakah, the Ethiopian king of Egypt, led his army to Libnah. Sennacherib was able to defeat this Egyptian force. He then turned his full attention to Jerusalem again ([2 Kgs 19:15-19](#)). Isaiah was sent by God to inform Hezekiah that the mocking Sennacherib would be humbled and Jerusalem would be spared for David's sake. The Lord's word was fulfilled. Sennacherib's plans to take Jerusalem by siege had to be abandoned when 185,000 of his troops died of a miraculous plague.

Sennacherib returned to Nineveh, the capital city of Assyria. He was murdered in the temple of Nisroch by Adrammelech and Sharezer, two of his sons. A third son, Esarhaddon, succeeded him upon the throne of Assyria.

See also Assyria, Assyrians.

Senuah

KJV form of Hassenuah in [Nehemiah 11:9](#). *See* Hassenuah.

Seorim

Levite and head of the fourth of 24 divisions of priests formed during David's reign ([1 Chr 24:8](#)).

Sephar

A geographical landmark. It defines one of the boundaries of the territory settled by the sons of Joktan ([Genesis 10:30](#)). There is no doubt it is in southern Arabia. Sephar is most often identified with one of two towns bearing the Arabic name Zafar. One is the seaport town in the Hadhramaut province of central Yemen. The other is the site in southern Yemen, once the capital of the Himyarites.

Sepharad

Place of exile for the Jews of Jerusalem ([Ob 1:20](#), nlt mg). Its location is not certain; however, good evidence is available to support Sardis, the capital of Lydia, in Asia Minor as the place of captivity. Other less feasible suggestions are Saparda in eastern Assyria, where Sargon transported Jews, and Spain, as mentioned in the Targum of Jonathan.

Sepharvaim, Sepharvites

One of five cities and its inhabitants who were transported to Samaria after the fall of Israel to Sargon II, king of Assyria, in 722 BC ([2 Kgs 17:24](#)). The Sepharvites were remembered for their abominable practice of offering their children as burnt sacrifices to their gods Adrammelech and Anammelech. In a taunting message to King Hezekiah of Judah (715-686 BC), King Sennacherib of Assyria (705-681 BC) warned that as the gods and kings of Sepharvaim were not able to prevent her fall to the Assyrians, so too it would be with Jerusalem and Hezekiah's God ([2 Kgs 18:34](#); [Is 36:19](#); [37:13](#)). The location of Sepharvaim is uncertain. It is probably identifiable with the Syrian city of Sibraim near Damascus ([Ez 47:16](#)).

Septuagint

See Bible, Versions of the (Ancient); Bible, Canon of the.

Sepulcher

See Burial, Burial Customs.

Serah

A daughter of the patriarch Asher ([Genesis 46:17](#); [Numbers 26:46](#); [1 Chronicles 7:30](#)).

Seraiah

1. The royal secretary of King David ([2 Samuel 8:17](#)). He is also called Sheva in [2 Samuel 20:25](#), Shisha in [1 Kings 4:3](#), and Shavsha in [1 Chronicles 18:16](#).
2. The chief priest in Jerusalem when the Babylonians destroyed the city in 586 BC. Nebuzaradan, the captain of the Babylonian guard, took Seraiah to King Nebuchadnezzar at Riblah. There, Nebuchadnezzar ordered Seraiah to be put to death ([2 Kings 25:18](#); [Jeremiah 52:24](#)). According to [1 Chronicles 6:14](#), Seraiah was the son of Azariah and the father of Jehozadak. He belonged to the tribe of Levi, coming from the family line of Aaron, Israel's first chief priest.
3. The son of Tanhumeth from Netophah. He was one of the leaders of the Judean army. After Babylon defeated Judah, Seraiah and other army leaders came to Gedaliah, whom Nebuchadnezzar had appointed governor. They asked Gedaliah to help them make peace with Nebuchadnezzar ([2 Kings 25:23](#); [Jeremiah 40:8](#)).
4. A man from the tribe of Judah. He was the son of Kenaz, the brother of Othniel, and the father of Joab ([1 Chronicles 4:13-14](#)).
5. A Simeonite, the son of Asiel. He was the father of Joshibiah ([1 Chronicles 4:35](#)).
6. One of the men who returned with Zerubbabel to Judah following the Israelite exile ([Ezra 2:2](#)). [Nehemiah 7:7](#) calls him Azariah. See Azariah #23.
7. The father of Ezra the scribe. Ezra returned to Jerusalem during the rule of King Artaxerxes I of Persia (464–424 BC; [Ezra 7:1](#)). He may be the same man as #2 above. This would make Jehozadak the brother of Ezra.
8. One of the priests who set his seal on the covenant of Ezra ([Nehemiah 10:2](#)).
9. The son of Hilkiah and a priest living in Jerusalem during the era after the Israelite return from exile ([Nehemiah 11:11](#)). [1 Chronicles 9:11](#) calls him Azariah. See Azariah #10.
10. One of the leaders of the priests who returned with Zerubbabel and Jeshua to Judah after the Israelite exile ([Nehemiah 12:1](#)). Meraiah was leader of his house in the next generation. He may be the same man as #6 above.
11. The son of Azriel. King Jehoiakim of Judah (who ruled from 609 to 598 BC) ordered him to capture Baruch and Jeremiah. He was sent along with two other men, Jerahmeel and Shelemiah, but they did not succeed ([Jeremiah 36:26](#)).
12. The son of Neriah. He was an official who traveled with King Zedekiah of Judah (who ruled from 597 to 586 BC) to Babylon. The prophet Jeremiah gave Seraiah a message against Babylon, which Seraiah was to deliver there ([Jeremiah 51:59-61](#)).

Seraph, Seraphim

Angelic beings mentioned only twice in the Bible, both occurring in the same chapter of Isaiah ([Is 6:2, 6](#)). The word seraphim is plural in number, but it is impossible to say from Isaiah's vision just how many he saw. The prophet spoke of them as though they were quite familiar spiritual beings, which seems a little curious since they are not mentioned elsewhere.

Isaiah described each seraph as having six wings: two shielded the face, two covered the feet, and the

remaining pair enabled the seraph to fly. The most that can be said from the available evidence is that they were exalted spiritual entities who were occupied constantly in the praise and worship of God. Most probably the seraphim were an order of celestial beings comparable in nature to the cherubim and engaged in a somewhat similar form of service around the divine throne.

See also Angel; Cherub, Cherubim.

Sered, Seredite

One of Zebulun's sons ([Gn 46:14](#)) and the father of the Seredite family ([Nm 26:26](#)).

Sergius Paulus

Sergius Paulus was the proconsul (a Roman governor) of Cyprus. In [Acts 13:7](#), Luke describes him as a "man of intelligence." Paul and Barnabas visited the city of Paphos in Cyprus during their first missionary journey. Paphos was where Sergius Paulus lived and worked. While they were there, they met a Jewish false prophet and sorcerer named Bar-Jesus (also called Elymas), who tried hard to stop the proconsul from hearing the gospel message.

Paul rebuked Elymas and cursed him with blindness. When Sergius Paulus saw what had happened, he believed the gospel message of Paul. This made him the first recorded person to become a Christian during Paul's first missionary journey.

It is at this point in the Bible that we see the name Saul change to Paul. Origen (an early Christian scholar) and many others since his time have thought that Paul changed his name to honor this important convert.

Sermon on the Mount

See Beatitudes, The; Jesus Christ, Teachings of.

Serpent

A snake or sea monster. Various words are used in the Bible for serpents or snakes. Serpents, or snakes, are reptiles known for their ability to bite and inject venom. Specific types of snakes

mentioned include the adder ([Isaiah 11:8](#)) and the viper ([Acts 28:3](#)). The term "serpent" can also describe a monstrous sea serpent found in [Job 26:13](#), [Isaiah 27:1](#), and [Amos 9:3](#).

In [Genesis 3:1](#), the serpent tempts Adam and Eve. It is "more crafty than any beast of the field that the LORD God had made." As a result, the serpent is cursed: "On your belly will you go, and dust you will eat, all the days of your life." ([Genesis 3:14](#)). [Second Corinthians 11:3](#) says the serpent deceived Eve with its cunning. [Revelation 12:9](#) calls the serpent: "that ancient serpent called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world" (see also [Revelation 12:14-15](#) and [20:2](#)).

Biblical references to serpents or snakes often use them figuratively. They represent the ability to harm with venom (for example, [Genesis 49:17](#); [Ecclesiastes 10:8, 11](#); [Isaiah 14:29](#); [Amos 5:19](#); [Revelation 9:19](#)). In [Psalm 58:4-5](#), wicked people are compared to snakes. [Psalm 140:3](#) describes people's tongues as sharp as serpents and their lips as poisonous as vipers. [Proverbs 23:32](#) likens strong drink to a serpent's bite, saying it "bites like a snake and stings like a viper." [Jeremiah 8:17](#) describes enemies of Israel as "vipers that cannot be charmed, and they will bite you."

Positively, serpents are noted for their wisdom. Jesus advises his disciples, "Be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves" ([Matthew 10:16](#)). However, the primary image of the serpent is negative. It symbolizes deceit. Jesus calls the scribes and Pharisees, "You snakes! You brood of vipers!" ([Matthew 23:33](#)). John the Baptist also refers to the Pharisees and Sadducees as "You brood of vipers!" ([Matthew 3:7](#)).

See Animals.

Serpent, Bronze

See Bronze Serpent, Bronze Snake.

Serpent's Stone

Place where Adonijah, the son of David, sacrificed sheep and oxen and attempted to secretly set himself up as king ([1 Kgs 1:9](#), nlt mg). The serpent's stone was located near En-rogel, a spring in the Kidron Valley located just south of Jerusalem. Some suggest that this stone was named for the large stone conduits nearby that emptied into the pool of

Siloam, for a steep rock formation, or perhaps for a cultic shrine with the serpent used as its emblem. The Stone of Zoheleth is the English equivalent for the Hebrew term.

Serug

Reu's son from the family line of Shem ([Genesis 11:20-23](#)). He is a forefather of Abraham and an ancestor of Jesus Christ ([Luke 3:35](#); "Saruch" in the King James Version).

See Ancestry of Jesus Christ.

Servant

A person under obligation to serve a master, who in turn would provide a measure of protection. Some servants were slaves under legal bondage. Others were servants voluntarily. It is not always possible to distinguish between "servant," "slave," "bondman," and "bondwoman." Several words in both Hebrew and Greek have been translated as "servant," although newer translations sometimes prefer other words.

The Hebrew word for "lad," "youth," or "boy" often means servant ([Exodus 33:11](#); [Numbers 22:22](#); [2 Kings 4:12](#)). A word meaning "free-born servant" referred to the servants of the Lord, like the Levites ([Ezra 8:17](#); [Isaiah 61:6](#); [Ezra 44:11](#)) or priests ([Exodus 28:35](#); [Joel 1:9](#); [2:17](#)). Sometimes ministers of the king are called servants ([1 Chronicles 27:1](#); [Proverbs 29:12](#)), as are angels who minister before the Lord ([Psalms 103:21](#); [104:4](#)). The hired servant or hireling was also considered a free person ([Exodus 12:45](#); [Job 7:1](#); [Malachi 3:5](#)).

The most common Hebrew term, occurring nearly 800 times in the Old Testament, stands for a slave held in bondage ([Genesis 9:25](#); [12:16](#); [Exodus 20:17](#); [Deuteronomy 5:15](#); [15:17](#)). Yet the same word is used for people of noble rank, such as ministers and advisers to the king ([2 Kings 22:12](#); [2 Chronicles 34:20](#); [Nehemiah 2:10](#)) or a servant of God ([Genesis 24:14](#); [Numbers 12:7](#); [Joshua 1:7](#); [2 Kings 21:8](#)), in such expressions as "Moses my servant" [or also David, Isaiah, Israel, Job, and so on]. One of the noblest expressions is "the servant of Yahweh [the Lord]" ([Deuteronomy 34:5](#); [Joshua 1:13](#); [8:31-33](#); [Isaiah 49:1-6](#); [50:4-9](#); [52:13-53:12](#)). The proper name Obadiah means "servant of Yahweh."

The New Testament variously defines servant as a hired servant or hireling ([Mark 1:20](#); [Luke 15:17-19](#); [John 10:12-14](#)), more widely as a slave ([Matthew 8:9](#); [10:24-25](#); [13:27-28](#); [Mark 10:44](#); [12:2-4](#); [Luke 7:2-3, 8-10](#); [John 4:51](#); [8:34](#); [13:16](#); [Ephesians 6:5](#); [Colossians 1:7](#)), and also as a domestic servant ([Luke 16:13](#)).

See also Slave, Slavery.

Servant of the Lord

A title applied to a variety of persons in the Bible. The basic term, "servant," covers a range of meanings. Used some 800 times in the Old Testament alone, "servant" refers to:

- a slave,
- an officer close to the king, or
- the chosen leader of God's people.

Servants of the Lord in the Old Testament

[Isaiah 41:8-9](#) defines this highest servanthood as something granted by God's grace. "But you, O Israel, My servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, descendant of Abraham My friend—I brought you from the ends of the earth and called you from its farthest corners. I said, 'You are My servant.' " This title applies to heroes of faith and action:

- to the patriarchs ([Genesis 26:24](#); [Ezekiel 28:25](#); [37:25](#))
- to Moses ([Exodus 14:31](#); [1 Kings 8:53, 56](#))
- to David ([2 Samuel 7:26-29](#); [Jeremiah 33:21-26](#); [Ezekiel 37:24](#)) and his descendants (as Hezekiah, Eliakim, Zerubbabel—[Haggai 2:23](#))
- to the prophets ([2 Kings 10:10](#); [14:25](#))
- to other faithful Israelites, such as Joshua and Caleb ([Numbers 14:24](#); [Joshua 24:29](#); [Judges 2:8](#))

Prophets other than Isaiah use this term, but only Zechariah joins him in giving a messianic prediction to this name. [Zechariah 3:8](#) says, "Hear now, O high priest Joshua, you and your companions seated before you, who are indeed a sign. For behold, I am going to bring My servant, the Branch." Some would see Zerubbabel as the person

meant here (compare [Zechariah 6:12](#)). Isaiah uses "Branch" as a special term for the promised savior, the Messiah, in Isaiah ([Isaiah 11:1](#)). Jeremiah also uses "Branch" to refer to the Messiah ([Jeremiah 33:15](#)).

The Servant of the Lord as the Messiah

"The servant of the Lord," in biblical usage, points to the Messiah and alludes to Isaiah's central message. Isaiah and others use "servant" with a range of meanings. Isaiah composed some passages known as the Servant Songs. These distinctive sections of his book are unique in content. They cannot be taken out of context without interrupting the flow of prophecy. Isaiah's focus is on the future Messiah-servant. The New Testament references to Isaiah are united in a messianic understanding of Isaiah's servant. The New Testament frequently applies this understanding to Jesus Christ.

The idea of Jesus as a servant is very important in the book of Acts ([Acts 3:13, 26; 4:27, 30](#)). It is also important in the book of 1 Peter. These parts of the New Testament often describe Jesus using words that remind us of the "servant of the Lord" we read about in the Old Testament. Scholars call this way of understanding Jesus a "servant Christology." There are also many references to the messianic servant in the Gospels. Jesus quotes [Isaiah 53](#) only in [Luke 22:37](#), but he seems to be referring to it in [Mark 10:45, 14:24](#), and possibly [9:12](#).

Peter emphasizes the idea that Jesus's suffering had a special purpose. He teaches that Jesus suffered to save people from their sins and bring them back to God ([1 Peter 2:21–25; 3:18](#)). He seems to emphasize the theme of [Isaiah 53](#) as a summary of Old Testament prophecy ([1:11](#)). Old Testament prophecy points to "the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow." Paul includes these elements ([1 Corinthians 15:3; Philippians 2:6–11](#); compare [Romans 4:25; 5:19; 2 Corinthians 5:21](#)). John's "Lamb of God" title references both [Isaiah 53:7](#) and the sacrificial system.

See also Christology; Isaiah, Book of.

Servitor

A servitor is a servant. This word appears in the King James Version of the Bible in [2 Kings 4:43](#).

Seth

The third son of Adam and Eve. He replaced Abel, whom Cain murdered ([Genesis 4:25](#)). Seth appears as the firstborn son of Adam in the family lists of [Genesis 5:3–8, 1 Chronicles 1:1](#) ("Sheth" in the King James Version), and [Luke 3:38](#). It was through Seth's line that Jesus was born. Seth was the father of Enosh and lived 912 years.

See also Ancestry of Jesus Christ.

Sethur

An Asherite and a son of Michael. He was one of the 12 spies sent by Moses to explore the land of Canaan ([Numbers 13:13](#)).

Seven

See Numbers and Numerology.

Seven Last Sayings of Jesus

Recorded words of Jesus between the time he was crucified and the time he died. These seven sentences (quoted below from the kjv) are not found in any one Gospel. Instead, the first two and the seventh occur only in Luke; the third, fifth, and sixth, only in John; and the fourth, in both Matthew and Mark. The order is traditional; because no Gospel records them all, it is uncertain in which order they really came. Also unknown is whether Jesus said other things from the cross or whether the seven sayings are summaries of longer statements. But considering the trauma of crucifixion, it would not be surprising if this were all he said.

1. "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" ([Lk 23:34](#)).

This is the only one of the seven last words whose genuineness is questioned, for several of the best Greek manuscripts do not contain it. Even if an element of doubt exists (the evidence is fairly evenly balanced), it certainly fits what is known of Jesus and his love, whether or not Luke originally recorded it. Just a few verses before, Jesus showed more concern for others than for himself ([Lk 19:41; 22:50–51; 23:28](#)). Jesus lived his own teaching and prayed for those who were torturing him ([Lk 6:27–28](#))—no greater impulse for mankind to go and do

likewise could be given. Certainly the soldiers and Jewish leaders were not totally unaware of what they were doing (cf. [Acts 3:17](#)), but in that they did not know the real import of their action, they were ignorant. For Christians, the request “Father, forgive” is more important than the reason, as Stephen recognized when he paraphrased it at his own martyrdom ([Acts 7:60](#)). In the end, forgiveness demands no reason; it is grace.

2. “Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise” ([Lk 23:43](#)).

Luke does not record this statement to teach about the abode of the dead but to express the response of the Lord to faith. One criminal quite understandably joins with the jeering crowd and gets only silence ([Lk 23:40](#)), but the other quite remarkably recognizes not only the innocence of Jesus but also that the cross was only a prelude to the kingdom (vv [40–42](#)). Jesus promised the man that he would be with him in paradise. Here again is grace, asked for and received.

3. “Woman, behold thy son! . . . Behold thy mother!” ([Jn 19:26–27](#)).

John pictures Jesus as fully in control of the situation. At this point that control is apparent, as he calmly cares for his mother instead of focusing on his own suffering. Mary was also suffering as the “sword” pierced her heart ([Lk 2:35](#)). Jesus, now much more her Lord than her son, remembers his natural as well as his spiritual relationships. It is not known why Jesus’ brothers were not around to care for Mary, or why they missed the Passover festival. It also is unknown why the beloved disciple was chosen, but perhaps the choice fell on him because he was there at Calvary and he was trustworthy.

4. “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” ([Mt 27:46](#); [Mk 15:34](#)).

It is now hours later than the first three words, deep in the darkness that covered Calvary for the last three hours. Suddenly Jesus cried out the first words of [Psalm 22](#). Mark recorded them in Jesus’ native language, Aramaic, while Matthew changed them to Hebrew. The meaning of the cry (called the cry of dereliction) has been variously explained as an expression of human feeling, a statement of disappointment that God did not deliver him, an expression of separation from God because he was bearing sin, or a citation of the whole psalm with its triumphal ending being intended. Although the full depth of this cry is a mystery known only to Jesus and his Father, it is probable that, because the

psalm is a cry to God for vindication, Jesus is here asking for that. He cries to God to show that he is truly God’s chosen one. The petition is answered in that God raised his Son from the dead three days later.

5. “I thirst” ([Jn 19:28](#)).

At the beginning of the crucifixion, Jesus was offered a drugged wine as a soporific to deaden the pain of crucifixion. He refused it ([Mt 27:34](#); [Mk 15:23](#)). Now, severely dehydrated, Jesus accepts the soldiers’ sour wine ([Jn 19:29](#)), which would sharpen his senses for his final cry. He needed it, for he had been hanging there six hours. Perhaps at no place in the life of Jesus do we see his full humanity quite so clearly as here. John saw this action as a fulfillment of [Psalm 22:15](#) (and perhaps [Ps 69:21](#)).

6. “It is finished” ([Jn 19:30](#)).

John completes the crucifixion account with this simple statement (a single word in Greek). The sentence naturally reveals relief and satisfaction that the pain and agony are over, that death will soon release him, but John’s context gives the word a deeper meaning. According to John, Jesus was in control of the whole crucifixion. He said that no one could take his life from him—he would lay it down of his own accord ([Jn 10:18](#); [19:10–11](#)). So here, knowing that he had totally completed the will of the Father, he voluntarily laid his life down. What is finished, then, is not simply his dying, nor his life per se, nor the work of redemption, but the total reason for his being in the world. The last act of obedience has been accomplished; the last scripture has been fulfilled. Jesus proclaims his life “finished” and exits from the stage until the resurrection begins a new act.

7. “Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit” ([Lk 23:46](#)).

Luke has a different picture of the end than John and the other Evangelists. Matthew and Mark report only “a great cry” after the cry of dereliction, ending on a dark note. John ends with the completed work. Luke, who reports no feeling of forsakenness, ends by telling us the great cry was a quotation of [Psalm 31:5](#) (cf. Stephen in [Acts 7:59](#)). The quotation is prefaced by “Father,” the familiar *Abba*, a form of address to God characteristic of Jesus. His relationship to God is unbroken to the end. Jesus is not leaping into the dark or fighting against the unknown but placing himself in death into the hands of the same Father he had served in life.

See also Crucifixion; Eli, Eli, Lema Sabachthani.

Sex, Sexuality

The Bible's Positive View of Sex and Sexuality

Unlike some religions and philosophies, the Bible views human sexuality positively. According to the Old Testament, God made people as sexual beings. Being male or female is part of what it means to be made in the image of God ([Genesis 1:26–28](#)). So, sexuality is an important part of who a person is, not just what they do.

The Old Testament shows that nothing is embarrassing about the differences between male and female bodies ([Genesis 2:25](#)). There is also nothing shameful about sexual activity ([Proverbs 5:18–19](#); [Ecclesiastes 9:9](#)). In particular, the Song of Songs is a beautiful poem about love. It speaks about physical passion and should not be understood as only about spirituality.

Paul is also positive in the books of 1 Corinthians and 1 Timothy. Sexual immorality was common in both Corinth and Ephesus, where these letters were sent. In response, some Christians were choosing to abstain from all sex. Marriage was being forbidden ([1 Timothy 4:3](#)). Married couples stopped having sex. They believed this would make them more spiritually mature (compare [1 Corinthians 7:5](#)).

Paul rejected these ideas. Appealing to Genesis, he reminded them to be thankful for God's gifts ([1 Timothy 4:3–5](#)). Paul wrote that husbands and wives should satisfy each other's sexual needs ([1 Corinthians 7:3–4](#)).

God made sex for procreation ([Genesis 1:28](#)). But sex also strengthens relationships. [Genesis 2](#) describes how God made woman to provide companionship for man ([2:18–24](#)). Human sexuality is more than just physical intercourse. Being male or female is a way God helps us make all sorts of relationships, including some not normally thought of as sexual at all.

The Impact of Sin on Human Sexuality

The Bible acknowledges the negative side of human nature. After describing the goodness of sex in God's perfect plan, Genesis explains how sex, like everything else, was spoiled by sin:

- Nudity became embarrassing and scary
- Men and women viewed each other as sexual objects instead of as people ([Genesis 3:7–10](#))
- Trust and tenderness were replaced by betrayal and harshness

This is the root of discrimination and abuse that motivate modern feminist protests. Procreation was also spoiled as it became painful and distressing.

This is the context for the Bible's ban on sex outside of marriage. It prohibits adultery ([Exodus 20:14](#)). It also prohibits any kind of sex outside of marriage ([1 Corinthians 6:18](#); [1 Thessalonians 4:3](#)). The Bible does not often explain why certain actions are forbidden. But, when it does provide reasons for banning extramarital relationships, these reasons are very informative. It does not focus on the consequences, like disease or unwanted pregnancies, or on the intentions behind the actions.

All sex outside of marriage is wrong because the body is not meant for sexual immorality and those who commit sexual sins harm their own bodies ([1 Corinthians 6:13, 18](#)). Sexual intercourse is a special way of communicating physically that God designed to show and confirm the unique, lifelong relationship between a man and a woman, which the Bible calls "marriage."

The Bible prohibits homosexuality ([Leviticus 18:22](#); [Romans 1:26–27](#); [1 Corinthians 6:9–10](#); [1 Timothy 1:9–10](#)). The only explanation for this prohibition is found in [Romans 1:24–27](#). These verses suggest that God turned away from people who turned away from him by worshiping created things instead of the Creator. They abandoned God and gave in to their own sinful desires, including homosexuality. In this view, homosexuality is seen as going against the natural order God established for men and women to create life.

Overcoming Sexual Temptation

The Bible offers practical advice for dealing with sexual temptation: avoid it. For example, when Joseph was tempted by another man's wife, he ran away, leaving his cloak behind ([Genesis 39:12](#)). Paul tells his Christian readers to follow Joseph's good example ([1 Corinthians 6:18](#); [2 Timothy 2:22](#)). This recognizes the strong desire for sex that

many human beings experience, but it is not meant to be hopeless. Paul taught that the Holy Spirit gives believers the strength to overcome sexual temptation. He knew Christians who used the Spirit's power to gain self-control and overcome their most difficult habits ([1 Corinthians 6:9-11](#); [Galatians 5:22-23](#); [2 Timothy 1:7](#)).

The Future of Human Sexuality

The New Testament hints that God will end human sexuality just as he began it. Jesus taught that there will be no marriage in heaven ([Matthew 22:30](#)). This is an unexpected but appropriate conclusion to the Bible's teachings on sex and sexuality. When there is no more death, the need for procreation will end. And when relationships are perfectly loving, there will not be a need for sex to strengthen them. Thus, both of God's main purposes for human sexuality will be fully realized in eternity.

See also Divorce; Family Life and Relations; Man; Marriage, Marriage Customs; Virgin; Woman.

Sexual Immorality

Sexual wrongdoing. Some older Bible translations (like the King James Version) use the word "fornication," while many modern translations use the term "sexual immorality." Both terms are used in the Bible to mean several different things.

What Is Sexual Immorality?

Sexual immorality refers to any type of prohibited sexual intercourse. This means any sexual activity that happens outside of marriage between a husband and wife. For example, in [1 Corinthians 5:1](#), "sexual immorality" is used to talk about a sin that the church was allowing: a man was living with his stepmother as if she were his wife.

In a list of serious sins in [Romans 1:29](#), Paul includes "depravity," meaning all kinds of wrong sexual acts. In 1 Corinthians, Paul uses "sexual immorality" to mean all kinds of wrong sexual acts ([6:13, 18](#)). In [1 Corinthians 7:2](#), Paul shows there are many different types of sexual sins. He used this as a reason why people in Corinth should marry and have proper sexual relationships with their spouses. One type of sexual sin included in this general meaning is when a married person has sex with someone who is not their spouse.

"Fornication" or "sexual immorality" can also mean the wrong sexual acts between unmarried people.

We can see this meaning when the Bible lists it separately from adultery (sex between a married person and someone who is not their spouse). For example, when Jesus listed the sins that come from a person's heart, he included both of these wrong acts ([Matthew 15:19](#); [Mark 7:21](#)). Similarly, when Paul listed people who will not enter God's kingdom, he mentioned both groups - the sexually immoral and those who break their marriage promises by having sexual intercourse with others ([1 Corinthians 6:9](#), King James Version).

Adultery

"Sexual immorality" in [Matthew 5:32](#) and [19:9](#) is usually taken by biblical students today to refer specifically to adultery. The translation of *porneia* is about understanding rather than just changing words. Experts disagree about whether Jesus's exception for divorce is about sexual immorality in a general or specific sense. He might have meant only sex outside marriage, or he might have been including it with other sexual sins.

Sexual Immorality as a Symbol

Sexual immorality is often used as a symbol in both the Old Testament and New Testament. Starting with descriptions of Israel and the church as God's wife or the bride, turning away from God and worshipping false gods are described as adultery (see [Jeremiah 2](#)). [Ezekiel 16](#) uses unfaithfulness to marriage as a symbol of Jerusalem's bad relationship with God. Jerusalem had become an "unfaithful wife" to him.

The first three chapters of Hosea use the relationship of the prophet Hosea and his unfaithful wife, Gomer. Their relationship is used as an example of how Israel had become guilty of adultery against its "husband," God, by following other gods. In the book of Revelation, the symbolic use of "immorality" and "passionate immorality" is attributed to Babylon the great, the mother of prostitutes ([Revelation 14:8](#); [17:2-4](#); [18:3](#); [19:2](#)).

See also Adultery.

Shaalabbin, Shaalbim, Shaalbon

An Amorite city known by three names. Joshua assigned this city to the tribe of Dan as part of their inheritance in the promised land. Shaalabbin stood between Ir-shemesh and Aijalon ([Joshua 19:42](#)).

The Danites were not able to defeat the Amorites who lived there, so they could not take control of the city. When the tribe of Joseph became stronger, the Ephraimites (who were part of Joseph's tribe) conquered Shaalbim. They then forced the Amorites who lived there to work for them ([Judges 1:35](#)).

In later times, during King Solomon's rule, Shaalbim became part of Solomon's second administrative district. This district also included the cities of Makaz, Beth-shemesh, and Elon-beth-hanan ([1 Kings 4:9](#)).

One of King David's famous warriors, known as one of "the thirty mighty men," came from this area. His name was Eliahba the Shaalbonite ([2 Samuel 23:32](#); [1 Chronicles 11:33](#)).

Shaalim

Region within the land of Ephraim or Benjamin where Saul searched for his father's donkeys ([1 Sm 9:4](#)).

Shaaph

1. Jahdai's sixth son, included in the genealogy of Caleb, Jerahmeel's brother ([1 Chr 2:47](#)).

2. Son of Caleb by his concubine; the brother of Jerahmeel; the father of Madmannah ([1 Chr 2:49](#)).

Shaaraim

1. One of 14 cities in the lowland region of the territory allotted to Judah's tribe for an inheritance, listed between Azekah and Adithaim ([Jos 15:36](#)). Shaaraim was in the direction in which the Philistines tried to escape from the pursuing Israelites following David's slaying of Goliath ([1 Sm 17:52](#)).

2. One of 14 cities where the sons of Shimei, a descendant of Simeon, lived until David's reign ([1 Chr 4:31](#)). It is possibly the same city as Sharuhem ([Jos 19:6](#)), mentioned in a parallel passage, and Shilhim, located in the southern portion of Judah near Edom's border ([15:32](#)).

Shaashgaz

A eunuch of King Ahasuerus, in charge of the concubines ([Esther 2:14](#)).

Shabbethai

1. Levite who opposed Ezra's suggestion that the sons of Israel should divorce the foreign women they had married upon returning to Palestine from exile ([Ezr 10:15](#)). He explained the law to the people at Ezra's reading ([Neh 8:7](#)).

2. One of the chiefs of the Levites who oversaw the outside work of the sanctuary during the postexilic period ([Neh 11:16](#)). He is perhaps identical with #1 above.

Shachia

KJV for Sakia. *See* Sakia.

Shaddai

Part of the Hebrew name El Shaddai for God, meaning "God Almighty" ([Ps 68:14](#)). *See* God, Names of.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego

The Babylonian names of three young Hebrew men taken to Babylon as prisoners by King Nebuchadnezzar in 605 BC ([2 Kings 24:1](#); [Daniel 1:1-4](#)). They might have been from a royal family ([2 Kings 20:18](#); [Isaiah 39:7](#)). The Babylonians thought having them as hostages would make the king of Judah, Jehoiakim, behave.

Nebuchadnezzar wanted to fill his court with intelligent and handsome men who would become useful subjects for his kingdom. He determined that some of the Judean hostages would be trained. Daniel and his three friends were chosen.

Their original Hebrew names exalted Yahweh, but they were changed to Babylonian names that might have honored a Babylonian god.

Their original Hebrew names were:

- Hananiah, which means "The Lord is gracious"
- Mishael, which means "Who is what God is"
- Azariah, which means "The Lord has helped"

Nebuchadnezzar changed their names to Babylonian names:

- Shadrach, which could mean "Command of Aku" (Aku was the Sumerian moon god)
- Meshach, which could mean "Who is what Aku is"
- Abednego, which could mean "Servant of Nabu" (Nabu was the Babylonian god of wisdom)

Their friend Daniel's name was also changed from "My judge is God" to Belteshazzar. Belteshazzar means "Bel protects" (Bel was the chief Babylonian god).

Nebuchadnezzar chose these young men to learn the Babylonian language and knowledge. They studied for three years, learning:

- Aramaic, Akkadian, and Sumerian languages
- Cuneiform writing (writing using wedge-shaped marks)
- Possibly astronomy, math, history, and farming

The king provided food for the students. But Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego, and Daniel refused to eat it. They thought the food had been offered to false gods, so it was not proper for Jews to eat (compare [Exodus 34:15](#); [Leviticus 17:10-14](#)). The chief eunuch was worried that the king would be upset if the boys looked underfed, so he spoke to Daniel. They asked to eat only vegetables for ten days. After ten days, they looked healthier than the other students, so they were allowed to continue their vegetable diet.

When they finished their studies, these four young men were smarter and more capable than all the other students. The Bible says God gave them this knowledge and skill.

Later, they became part of the "wise men of Babylon" ([Daniel 2:12-49](#)). When other wise men could not explain the king's dream, Nebuchadnezzar wanted to kill all the wise men. Daniel asked the king for time, and God showed Daniel the dream and its meaning in a vision. This saved their lives.

Another time, Nebuchadnezzar made a huge golden statue and ordered everyone to bow down to it ([Daniel 3](#)). Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused. They said they trusted God, even if it meant being thrown into a fiery furnace. The king had the furnace made extremely hot and threw them in. But God protected them. He sent an angel to keep them safe in the fire.

When Nebuchadnezzar saw this miracle, he had to admit that the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego was more powerful than his own kingdom and power.

See also Daniel, Book of; Daniel, Additions to (Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Young Men).

Shagee

A person from Harar and the father of Jonathan ([2 Samuel 23:33](#); [1 Chronicles 11:34](#)). His son Jonathan was one of King David's mighty men.

Shaharaim

Benjaminite living in Moab, father of nine sons, who divorced two of his three wives ([1 Chr 8:8](#)).

Shahazumah

Town situated between Tabor and Beth-shemesh on the border of the land allotted to Issachar's tribe for an inheritance ([Jos 19:22](#)).

Shalim

KJV for Shaalim. *See* Shaalim.

Shalisha, Shalishah

One of the regions (mentioned between the hill country of Ephraim and the district of Shaalim) through which Saul traveled in search of his father's lost donkeys ([1 Sm 9:4](#)).

Shallecheth, Shalleketh, Gate of

Gate located on the western side of the temple, which was guarded by Shuppim and Hosah ([1 Chr 26:16](#), nlt mg).

Shallum

1. Son of Jabesh and Israel's 16th king (752 BC). In a conspiracy against King Zechariah, Shallum murdered the monarch at Ibleam and declared himself ruler of Israel during the 39th year of King Uzziah's (Azariah's) reign in Judah (792–740 BC). However, in like manner, he was killed at the hands of Gadi after ruling for only one month ([2 Kgs 15:10–15](#)). See Chronology of the Bible (Old Testament); Israel, History of.

2. Son of Tikvah (alternately spelled Tokhath, see [2 Chr 34:22](#)), who was keeper of the wardrobe and the husband of Huldah the prophetess, living in Jerusalem during the days of King Josiah (640–609 BC; [2 Kgs 22:14](#)).

3. Sismai's son and the father of Jekamiah from Judah's tribe ([1 Chr 2:40–41](#)).

4. Alternate name for Jehoahaz, the youngest of King Josiah's four sons and later Judah's 17th king, in [1 Chronicles 3:15](#) and [Jeremiah 22:11](#). See Jehoahaz #2.

5. Shaul's son, Simeon's grandson, and the father of Mibsam ([1 Chr 4:25](#)).

6. Alternate name for Meshullam, Zadok's son and Ezra's forefather, in [1 Chronicles 6:12–13](#) and [Ezra 7:2](#). See Meshullam #7.

7. Alternate name for Shillem, the youngest of Naphtali's four sons, in [1 Chronicles 7:13](#). See Shillem, Shillemite.

8. Alternate name for Meshullam, Kore's son and chief of the gatekeepers ([1 Chr 9:17–19, 31](#); [Ezra 2:42](#); [Neh 7:45](#)). See Meshullam #20.

9. Ephraimite and the father of Jehizkiah ([2 Chr 28:12](#)).

10. One of the Levitical gatekeepers who was encouraged by Ezra to divorce his foreign wife during the postexilic era ([Ezra 10:24](#)).

11. One of the descendants of Binnui who was encouraged by Ezra to divorce his foreign wife ([Ezra 10:42](#)).

12. Hallohesh's son and a ruler of Jerusalem who, along with his daughters, repaired the section of city wall next to the Tower of the Ovens ([Neh 3:12](#)).

13. Col-hozeh's son and ruler of the Mizpah district, who rebuilt the Fountain Gate and the wall of the pool of Shelah of the king's garden ([Neh 3:15](#)).

14. Uncle of Hanamel and Jeremiah, who sold to the latter his field at Anathoth during King Zedekiah's reign (597–586 BC; [Jer 32:7](#)). He is perhaps identifiable with #2 above.

15. Maaseiah's father. Maaseiah, keeper of the threshold, owned a chamber in the sanctuary during Jehoiakim's reign (609–598 BC; [Jer 35:4](#), kjv; cf. [52:24](#)).

Shallun

kjv and niv spelling of Shallum, Col-hozeh's son, in [Nehemiah 3:15](#). See Shallum #13.

Shalmal

Alternate rendering of Shamlai in [Ezra 2:46](#) and [Nehemiah 7:48](#). See Shamlai.

Shalman

Unknown conqueror whose brutal destruction of Beth-arbel was descriptive of Israel's approaching judgment ([Hos 10:14](#)). Several suggestions as to the identification of Shalman are the following: Salamanu, the king of Moab who paid tribute to Tiglath-pileser of Assyria; one of the Shalmaneser kings of Assyria; and Shalmah, a north Arabian tribe that invaded the Negev.

Shalmaneser

Name of several Assyrian rulers, two of whom had direct contact with the people of Israel. However, only Shalmaneser V is known by name in the Bible.

1. Shalmaneser I (1274–1245 BC), the first king of this name, was active in the days when Israel was emerging as a significant group in Palestine. He had no direct contact with Israel.

2. Shalmaneser II (1030–1019 BC) was roughly contemporary with King Saul, but he had no contact with Israel.

3. Shalmaneser III (859–824 BC) had the first significant contact with Israel. This ruler made frequent raids into the lands west of Assyria during his reign. In his annals he left accounts of his exploits and gave lists of small kingdoms he overwhelmed. Another significant entry in the annals of Shalmaneser III is his reference to a campaign against Syria in 841 BC in which he claimed to have defeated Hazael of Damascus ([1 Kgs 19:15–18](#)). He did not capture Damascus but moved farther west to the region of Lebanon, where he received tribute from “Jehu, son of Omri.” The black obelisk on which he recorded these events portrays Jehu, the king of Israel (842–814 BC), on his knees submitting to Shalmaneser while Israelites carry booty to the king. This event is not mentioned in the Bible.

4. Shalmaneser IV (782–772 BC) had no contact with Israel. He ruled Assyria during a period of decline. His successor Tiglath-pileser III (745–727 BC) was an exceedingly vigorous and able ruler who conducted campaigns in Syria and farther west from 743 BC onward and made several contacts with Israel ([2 Kgs 15:17–29](#)).

5. Shalmaneser V (727–722 BC) was able to bring Hoshea, the last king of Israel (732–723 BC), under his control ([2 Kgs 17:3](#)). Hoshea failed to pay his annual tribute in his seventh regnal year and was visited by Shalmaneser V, who placed Samaria, the capital of Israel, under siege. The king of Egypt was implicated in this treachery in some way, for he gave encouragement to Hoshea in his rebellious intentions. The siege of Samaria lasted for three years, and in Hoshea’s ninth year the city fell. The biblical record seems to attribute the fall of the city to Shalmaneser. Unfortunately, there are no extant records for the reign of Shalmaneser V, and the capture of Samaria was claimed by Shalmaneser’s son Sargon II (721–705 BC) in his own annals as an important event in his accession year.

See also Assyria, Assyrians; Black Obelisk.

Shama

One of the mighty men of David’s army, son of Hotham the Aroerite and the brother of Jeiel ([1 Chr 11:44](#)).

Shamariah

KJV spelling of Shemariah, King Rehoboam’s son, in [2 Chronicles 11:19](#). *See* Shemariah #2.

Shamed

KJV spelling of Shemed, one of El-paal’s sons, in [1 Chronicles 8:12](#). *See* Shemed.

Shamer

1. KJV spelling of Shemer, Bani’s son, in [1 Chronicles 6:46](#). *See* Shemer #2.

2. KJV spelling of Shemer, Heber’s son, in [1 Chronicles 7:34](#). *See* Shemer #3.

Shamgar

Son of Anath from Beth-anath; a judge of Israel. Two brief references in the OT ([Jgs 3:31](#); [5:6](#)) tell us little of the man except for his one major exploit: the killing of 600 Philistines with an oxgoad. How such a feat was performed is not recorded. The oxgoad could have had a sharpened metal tip and may have been used as a spear. The timing of the reference indicates that his deeds took place early in the period of Philistine settlement in Canaan. [Judges 5:6](#) would place him prior to the battle of Kishon (c. 1125 BC).

See also Judges, Book of.

Shamhuth

Alternate form of Shammah the Izrahite in [1 Chronicles 27:8](#). *See* Shammah #4.

Shamir (Person)

Micah’s son from Levi’s tribe ([1 Chr 24:24](#)).

Shamir (Place)

1. One of the 11 towns in the hill country allotted to Judah. First in the list of towns, Shamir is followed by Jattir ([Jos 15:48](#)). Its location is perhaps at el-Bireh, about 12 miles (19.3 kilometers) southwest of Hebron.
2. Town where Tola the judge lived and was later buried. Shamir was in the land of Ephraim ([Jgs 10:1-2](#)).

Shamlai

Father of a family of temple servants returning to the land of Canaan with Zerubbabel after the Babylonian captivity; alternately spelled Shalmal in [Ezra 2:46](#) and [Nehemiah 7:48](#).

Shamma

Zophah's son from Asher's tribe ([1 Chr 7:37](#)).

Shammah

1. One of the four sons of Reuel. Reuel was the son of Esau. Shammah became a chief in the land of Edom ([Genesis 36:13, 17](#); [1 Chronicles 1:37](#)).
2. The third of Jesse's eight sons and the brother of King David ([1 Samuel 16:9; 17:13](#)). Shammah was the father of Jonathan and Jonadab ([2 Samuel 21:20-21; 13:3ff.](#)). The Bible also calls him by other names, including Shimea ([1 Chronicles 2:13; 20:7](#)), Shimeah ([2 Samuel 13:3](#)), and Shimei ([21:21](#)).
3. The son of Agee the Hararite. He was one of David's greatest warriors. He became famous for standing alone against the Philistines at a place called Lehi ([2 Samuel 23:11-12](#)).

4. One of the 30 brave soldiers who served under David. He is listed between Elhanan and Elikam ([2 Samuel 23:24-25](#)). In [1 Chronicles 11:27](#), his name is written as Shammoth (which may be a plural form of Shammah). In [27:8](#), he may be the same person called Shamhuth the Irahite, a leader of one division of David's army.
5. A man from Harar. He was one of David's mighty men. He is listed between Jonathan and Ahiam ([2 Samuel 23:33](#)).

Shammai

1. Onam's son, brother of Jada and the father of Nadab and Abishur from Judah's tribe ([1 Chr 2:28, 32](#)).
2. Rekem's son and the father of Maon from Caleb's house ([1 Chr 2:44-45](#)).
3. Mered's son by Bithiah, Pharaoh's daughter, and a descendant of Caleb ([1 Chr 4:17-18](#)).
4. Prominent rabbi whose life spanned the period 50 BC to AD 30. His name is most frequently coupled with that of his equally famous contemporary, Hillel, who was president of the Sanhedrin while Shammai was vice-president. Shammai had the reputation for being strict and rigid in his application of the law and severely literal in his interpretation of the Scriptures, while Hillel was more liberal and humane in applying the law and more imaginative in the use of the Scriptures. Shammai was renowned for his hatred of Roman domination and tried to forbid Jewish people from buying food or drink from Gentiles.

Two schools of interpretation followed these two contemporaries—"the house of Shammai" and "the house of Hillel"—continuing to the time of the compilation of the Mishnah, though the house of Hillel seems to have gradually gained ascendancy over the house of Shammai. The debates and conversations between the two rabbis or the two schools are recorded in the Mishnah and the Talmud, pertaining to such matters as offerings, priestly dues, tithes, Levitical cleanness and uncleanness, the observance of the Sabbath, marriage and divorce.

See also Hillel; Judaism; Pharisees; Talmud.

Shammoth

The plural form of Shammah the Harodite in [2 Samuel 23:25](#); [1 Chronicles 11:27](#).

See Shammah #4.

Shammua

1. A man from the tribe of Reuben. He was the son of Zaccur and one of the 12 spies that Moses sent to explore the land of Canaan ([Numbers 13:4](#)).
2. Another name for Shimea, who was one of the sons of King David ([2 Samuel 5:14](#) and [1 Chronicles 14:4](#)). See Shimea #2.
3. Another name for Shemaiah, who was the son of Galal ([Nehemiah 11:17](#)). See Shemaiah #6.
4. A leader of a family who returned to Jerusalem with Zerubbabel. This was after the people of Israel were taken to Babylon and later allowed to return home ([Nehemiah 12:18](#)).

Shamsheraï

Jeroham's son and a chief in Benjamin's tribe ([1 Chr 8:26](#)).

Shapham

Leader in Gad's tribe ([1 Chr 5:12](#)). He is believed to have lived in Bashan and served during the days of Jotham, king of Judah (v [17](#)).

Shaphan

1. Son of Azaliah and the father of Ahikam, Elasa, and Gemariah. He and his household favored Josiah's reforms, supported the prophet Jeremiah, and complied with Babylonian hegemony.

Shaphan served as the royal secretary to Josiah, king of Judah (640–609 BC). He read the Book of

the Law to the king after it was found by the high priest Hilkiah in the sanctuary of Jerusalem. Later, Josiah sent him with a small delegation to hear the words of the prophetess Huldah ([2 Kgs 22:3–14](#); [2 Chr 34:8–28](#)).

Shaphan's sons were mentioned among the political leaders of Judah during the days of its desolation by Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon (605–586 BC). Ahikam assisted with the repair of the sanctuary and protected Jeremiah from the men who sought his death during the reign of King Jehoiakim (609–598 BC; [2 Kgs 22:12](#); [Jer 26:24](#)). Elasa delivered a message from King Zedekiah of Judah (597–586 BC) to Nebuchadnezzar in Babylon ([Jer 29:3](#)). Gemariah was the prince of Judah from whose chamber Baruch read the scroll of Jeremiah to the people ([36:10–12](#)).

Shaphan was the grandfather of Micaiah ([Jer 36:11–13](#)) and Gedaliah. Gedaliah was appointed governor of Judah by Nebuchadnezzar ([2 Kgs 25:22](#); [Jer 40:5–11](#)) and ordered to protect Jeremiah ([Jer 39:14](#)). Gedaliah was later murdered by a mob led by Ishmael ([41:2](#)).

2. Father of Jaazaniah and, in Ezekiel's vision, a leader of idolatrous practices in Israel ([Ez 8:11](#)).

Shaphat

1. A Simeonite and a son of Hori. One of the 12 spies sent by Moses to explore the land of Canaan ([Numbers 13:5](#)).
2. The father of the prophet Elisha from the town of Abel-meholah ([1 Kings 19:16, 19](#); [2 Kings 3:11](#); [6:31](#)).
3. The youngest of the six sons of Shemaiah from the tribe of Judah and a descendant of King David ([1 Chronicles 3:22](#)).
4. A Gadite chief in Bashan, a region west of the Jordan River ([1 Chronicles 5:12](#)).
5. A son of Adlai and a member of the staff of King David. Shaphat was in charge of David's cattle in the valleys ([1 Chronicles 27:29](#)).

Shapher

The King James Version form of Shepherd. Shapher is the name of an uncertain mountain in [Numbers 33:23-24](#).

See Shepherd, Mount.

Shaphir

One of the towns spoken against by Micah the prophet ([Mi 1:11](#)). Its exact location is not certain. Eusebius (a fourth-century church historian) suggested that it was a village positioned between the cities of Eleutheropolis and Ashkelon, placing Shaphir in Philistine territory. If this is correct, perhaps Shaphir is identifiable with one of three villages known as es-Suwafir near the city of Ashdod. Another possible site is Khirbet el-Kom, situated west of Hebron in the hill country of Judah.

Sharai

One of Binnui's sons who was encouraged by Ezra to divorce his foreign wife during the postexilic era ([Ezr 10:40](#)).

Sharaim

KJV spelling of Shaaraim, a city in Judah's territory, in [Joshua 15:36](#). See Shaaraim #1.

Sharar

Another name for Sachar, the father of Ahiram ([2 Samuel 23:33](#)).

See Sacar, Sachar #1.

Sharezer

1. One of the sons of Sennacherib, the king of Assyria. In 681 BC he, along with his brother Adrammelech, killed Sennacherib while he was praying in the house of Nisroch ([2 Kgs 19:37](#); [Is 37:38](#)).

2. One who was sent from Bethel to inquire of the priests and prophets as to whether or not the mourning and feasting in commemoration of the

destruction of the temple should be confined to the fifth month of that year. Since the temple was nearing its restoration, there was some question about the commemoration on the part of the populace at Bethel ([Zec 7:2-3](#)).

Sharon

1. A section of the plain on the Mediterranean coast of Israel. It runs from the city of Joppa in the south to the Crocodile River in the north. This river marks the border between Sharon and the plain of Dor. The Sharon Plain is the largest of the northern coastal plains. It is 80 kilometers (50 miles) from north to south and 16.1 kilometers (10 miles) wide. Its shore is straight and consists of beach and cliffs. There are no natural harbors along the coast, so the plain had no large trading ports. The Via Maris, a major north-south trading route, ran along the eastern edge of the plain. Five streams (also called "wadis") cross the Sharon Plain:

- Nahal Tanninim (Crocodile River)
- Nahal Hadera
- Nahal Alexander
- Nahal Poleg
- Nahal Yarqon

These streams carry water from the Samaritan hills to the Mediterranean Sea. In the past, these streams created large swamps. These swamps were dangerous because they contained mosquitoes that spread malaria, a serious disease. The plain also has hills made of sand that rise up to 54.9 meters (180 feet) above sea level in its central area. In biblical times, oak trees covered the higher parts of Sharon.

The combination of swamps, sand hills, and forests made it very difficult for people to travel through this area. Joshua gave this land to the tribe of Manasseh ([Joshua 17](#)). But, Israel did not fully control it until King David's time ([1 Chronicles](#)

[27:29](#)). Even then, they only used it as grazing land for their animals.

In the book of Isaiah, the Sharon plain is described as being as fertile and beautiful as the regions of Carmel and Lebanon ([Isaiah 33:9](#); [35:2](#)). These were all areas known for their rich soil and abundant plant life. When Isaiah writes about God's future renewal of the land, he mentions that the Sharon plain will be a place where flocks of animals can graze ([Isaiah 65:10](#)).

The "rose of Sharon" mentioned in [Song of Solomon 2:1](#) might have been one of several red flowers that grow in the plain. This beautiful flower stands in contrast to the thick, thorny plants that were common in the area.

1. A place that may be the same as the town of Lasharon mentioned in [Joshua 12:18](#). See Lasharon.
2. An area east of the Jordan called "the pasturelands of Sharon" in [1 Chronicles 5:16](#).

Sharonite

Designation for Shitrai, a royal steward in charge of David's flocks in the plain of Sharon ([1 Chr 27:29](#)).

Sharuhen

Alternate name for Shaaraim, a city in Simeon's territory, in [Joshua 19:6](#). See Shaaraim #2.

Shashai

Binnui's son, who was encouraged by Ezra to divorce his foreign wife during the postexilic era ([Ezr 10:40](#)).

Shashak

Benjaminite, Elpaal's son and the father of 11 sons ([1 Chr 8:14, 25](#)).

Shaul

1. An alternate name for Saul, an Edomite king, in [Genesis 36:37-38](#) and [1 Chronicles 1:48-49](#). See Saul #1.
2. The son of Simeon by a Canaanite woman ([Genesis 46:10](#); [Exodus 6:15](#); [1 Chronicles 4:24](#)). He was the leader of the Shaulite family ([Numbers 26:13](#)).
3. Uzziah's son ([1 Chronicles 6:24](#)). He was a Kohathite from the tribe of Levi.

Shaulite

Any descendant of Shaul from the tribe of Simeon ([Numbers 26:13](#)).

See Shaul #2.

Shaveh Kiriathaim

Plain east of the Dead Sea near the city of Kiriathaim and occupied by the people of Emim. The Emimites in Shaveh Kiriathaim are listed with a number of other tribes and nations that King Kedorlaomer and his allies defeated ([Gn 14:5](#); nlt, "Kiriathaim"). This plain was later inherited by the sons of Reuben.

Shaveh, Valley of

Alternate name for the King's Valley near Jerusalem in [Genesis 14:17](#). See King's Valley.

Shavsha

Alternate name for Seraiah, the secretary to King David, in [1 Chronicles 18:16](#) (see nlt mg). See Seraiah #1.

Sheal

One of Bani's sons who was told by Ezra to divorce his foreign wife ([Ezr 10:29](#)).

Shealtiel

The son of King Jeconiah (also called Jehoiachin) of Judah and the father of Zerubbabel. Zerubbabel led the Jews back to Palestine and there ruled as governor of Judah during the postexilic period ([Ezra 3:2](#); [5:2](#); [Nehemiah 12:1](#); [Haggai 1:1, 12-14](#)). In the family lists of Jesus Christ, Shealtiel is mentioned as the son of Jeconiah ([Matthew 1:12](#)) and as the son of Neri ([Luke 3:27](#)). In [1 Chronicles 3:17-19](#), Shealtiel appears to be the grandfather or perhaps the uncle of Zerubbabel. One likely solution is that Shealtiel was Neri's son and Jeconiah's heir. At Shealtiel's death, Zerubbabel was next in line for the throne.

Shear-Jashub

Isaiah's son whose name, meaning "a remnant shall return," symbolized the prophecy that, although Israel and Judah would be destroyed, a remnant would be saved and later return ([Is 7:3](#)).

Sheariah

One of Azel's six sons, a descendant of Jonathan, son of King Saul, from Benjamin's tribe ([1 Chr 8:38](#); [9:44](#)).

Shearing House

KJV translation for Beth-eked, a place on the road between Jezreel and Samaria, in [2 Kings 10:12-14](#). See Beth-eked.

Sheba (Person)

1. A son of Raamah. His brother was Dedan. They were descendants of Noah's son Ham ([Genesis 10:7](#); [1 Chronicles 1:9](#)).
2. One of the 13 sons of Joktan. He was a descendant of Noah's son Shem ([Genesis 10:28](#); [1 Chronicles 1:22](#)).
3. A son of Jokshan. Jokshan was the son of Abraham and Keturah. Sheba's brother was also named Dedan ([Genesis 25:3](#); [1 Chronicles 1:32](#)).

4. A man from the tribe of Benjamin. His father was Bicri. After Absalom died, Sheba led the people of Israel to rebel against King David. David sent Joab to stop the revolt. Joab's army defeated Sheba, and the people of Abel-beth-maacah killed Sheba by cutting off his head ([2 Samuel 20:1-22](#)).
5. A leader from the tribe of Gad. He lived in the land of Bashan. He was listed as a leader during the time of King Jotham of Judah (750-732 BC) and King Jeroboam II of Israel (793-753 BC); see [1 Chronicles 5:13, 16-17](#).

Sheba (Place)

1. One of 14 cities listed in [Joshua 19:2](#) that were assigned to Simeon's tribe within the southern portion of Judah's inheritance. Since the verse says there were 13 cities, not 14, it is possible that "Shebe" was repeated in the list as a shortened form of "Beersheba," as many translations indicate. The LXX, however, names this town Shema (cf. [Jos 15:26](#)).

2. Territory located in southwestern Arabia known also as the kingdom of Saba (Hebrew Seba'). The Sabaeans were of Semitic descent and were governed by a priest-king in the royal city of Ma'rib.

They were a merchant people holding trade relations with Israel and other countries as far east as India. Rich in spices, precious stones, and agricultural commodities, the people of Sheba (Saba) established a network of overland and sea routes to trade their wares ([Ps 72:10, 15](#); [Is 60:6](#); [Jer 6:20](#); [Ez 27:22-23](#)). Numerous inscriptions have been found, attesting to the Sabeian civilization in southern Arabia and their travels.

During the Solomonic era (970-930 BC), the queen of Sheba traveled to Jerusalem to see Solomon's riches and to test his wisdom with riddles. Solomon exceeded her expectations on both counts ([1 Kgs 10:1-13](#); [2 Chr 9:1-12](#)).

Sheba, Queen of

See Sheba (Place) #2.

Shebah

KJV rendering of Shibah, a well near Beersheba, in [Genesis 26:33](#). See Shibah.

Shebam

The King James Version spelling of Sebam, a city in the territory of Reuben ([Numbers 32:3](#)).

See Sebam.

Shebaniah

1. One of the seven priests assigned to blow a trumpet before the ark of God in the procession led by David, when the ark was moved to Jerusalem ([1 Chr 15:24](#)).
2. One of the Levites who led the people in worship when Ezra read the law ([Neh 9:4–5](#)).
3. Head of a priestly family who set his seal on the covenant of Ezra ([Neh 10:4](#); [12:14](#)) and perhaps the same person as Shecaniah in [Nehemiah 12:3](#). See Shecaniah, Shechaniah #9.
4. Another Levite who set his seal on the covenant of Ezra ([Neh 10:12](#)).

Shebarim

Location between Ai and Jericho to which the men of Ai pursued the fleeing Israelites. This region was evidently situated near the place of descent from the hill country to the lowlands ([Jos 7:5](#), see nlt mg). Shebarim means “breaches” or “ruins” and might possibly refer to the rough, rocky conditions that would characterize the region at the top of a steep mountain slope. Its location is unknown.

Shebat

Shebat is one of the months in the Jewish calendar. On our modern calendar, it usually occurs during parts of January and February ([Zechariah 1:7](#)).

See Calendars, Ancient and Modern.

Sheber

Caleb’s son by his concubine Maacah ([1 Chr 2:48](#)).

Shebna

Eighth-century official of the kingdom of Judah. The name Shebna is Aramaic in form and has been interpreted to mean “return, please [O Lord],” relating it to either a fuller spelling (Shebaniah) or to a Semitic root meaning “youthful.” Because of the Aramaic spelling, some have argued that Shebna was of foreign birth. The appearance of the name, however, on several contemporary Palestinian inscriptions (e.g., from Lachish) may make such a view unnecessary.

Two major passages mention Shebna by name: [Isaiah 22:15–25](#) and [2 Kings 18:17–19:7](#). The unlikelihood of two men with the same name, both holding high-ranking positions in the Judahite government in the same general time period, has caused most scholars to argue that the two passages in Isaiah and 2 Kings refer to a single individual.

Because of his arrogance in building an ostentatious tomb for himself, and because of excessive pride in his position and importance, Shebna was denounced by the prophet Isaiah. In fact, the prophet even predicted that Shebna would go into exile and die in a foreign country ([Is 22:18](#)). The events described in [2 Kings 18:17–19:7](#) (cf. the parallel account in [Is 37](#)) are clearly traceable to the year 701 BC and the invasion of Sennacherib. If the Shebna described in this story is the same person denounced by Isaiah in the passage just discussed, as seems likely, the date of the prophetic denouncement must be placed sometime earlier than 701.

In 701 the Assyrian ruler Sennacherib captured virtually all of the cities of Judah and clearly had his heart set on the capture of Jerusalem. King Hezekiah of Judah sent three official representatives to negotiate with the invading Assyrians. At this time, Eliakim was titled “the one who is in charge of the [king’s] household” ([2 Kgs 18:18](#)) and Shebna held the rank of sopher, an important position, probably equal to that of a secretary of state.

Shebuel

1. Gershon's son and Moses' grandson from Levi's tribe ([1 Chr 23:15-16](#)); father of Jehdeiah ([24:20](#), "Shubael"). He was the chief officer in charge of the treasuries ([26:24](#)).
2. Levite, Heman's son and a musician in the tabernacle ([1 Chr 25:4, 20](#), "Shubael").

Shecaniah, Shechaniah

1. Descendant of David through the line of Zerubbabel living in postexilic Palestine ([1 Chr 3:21-22](#)).
2. Levite and the head of the 10th of 24 divisions of priests formed during the reign of David ([1 Chr 24:11](#)).
3. One of six priests serving under Kore during the reign of King Hezekiah of Judah (715–686 BC). Shecaniah assisted with the distribution of the temple offerings among his fellow priests living in the priestly cities ([2 Chr 31:15](#)).
4. Father of Hattush, who returned with Ezra to Judah following the Babylonian captivity during the reign of King Artaxerxes I of Persia (464–424 BC; [Ezr 8:3](#)).
5. Son of Jahaziel who returned with Ezra to Judah during the reign of King Artaxerxes I of Persia ([Ezr 8:5](#)).
6. Son of Jehiel in the house of Elam, who urged Ezra to command the sons of Israel to divorce the foreign women they had married ([Ezr 10:2](#)).
7. Father of Shemaiah. Shemaiah, the keeper of the East Gate, helped Nehemiah rebuild a section of the Jerusalem wall ([Neh 3:29](#)).
8. Father-in-law of Tobiah the Ammonite and the son of Arah ([Neh 6:18](#)).
9. Head of a priestly family who returned to Judah with Zerubbabel following the exile ([Neh 12:3](#)). Shecaniah is perhaps identical with Shebaniah in verse [14](#). See Shebaniah #3.

Shechem (Person)

1. Son of Hamor the Hivite. He raped Dinah, the daughter of Jacob, and was later killed along with his father and all the males of his town by Simeon and Levi ([Gn 34](#); [Jos 24:32](#)).

2. One of Gilead's six sons, a descendant of Joseph through Manasseh's line, and the founder of the Shechemite family ([Nm 26:31](#); [Jos 17:2](#)).
3. One of Shemida's four sons from Manasseh's tribe ([1 Chr 7:19](#)).

Shechem (Place)

Town in the center of western Palestine, near the watershed that separates the waters that flow to the Jordan from those that descend to the Mediterranean. The site is 40 miles (64.4 kilometers) north of Jerusalem at the eastern entrance to the pass between Mt Ebal and Mt Gerizim. The ancient town stood on the lower southeastern slope or shoulder of Mt Ebal, hence the meaning of the name (Shechem = shoulder). Samaria, later capital of Israel, was about eight miles (12.9 kilometers) northwest. Although strategically located—the town controlled all roads through the central hill country of Palestine—it was without natural defenses and required extensive fortifications.

Biblical References

Shechem first appears in the Bible as the initial campsite of Abram after he entered Canaan from Mesopotamia. There God promised him the land of Canaan, and there Abram built his first altar in the land ([Gn 12:6-7](#)). After Jacob's 20-year sojourn in northern Mesopotamia at Paddan-aram, he returned to Shechem and bought a piece of land. By this time, the place was already a walled city with a gate ([34:20, 24](#)). After the defilement of their sister Dinah, Simeon and Levi massacred Shechem's male population in revenge. Years later, when the patriarchal family was living in the Hebron area, Joseph went to Shechem to look for his brothers ([37:12-14](#)).

After the Conquest, the ceremony of antiphonal blessing and cursing on Mt Gerizim and Mt Ebal, respectively, was fulfilled in the vicinity of Shechem ([Jos 8:30-35](#)). In the division and settlement of the land, Shechem became one of the cities of refuge ([20:7](#); [21:21](#)) and one of the 48 Levitical cities ([21:21](#)). There Joshua delivered his farewell address ([24:1, 25](#)), and the bones of Joseph were buried on the land Jacob had bought there (v [32](#)).

During the unsettled days of the judges, Gideon's son Abimelech set himself up as king of Israel there,

at first with the support of the inhabitants. But a later revolt against him resulted in destruction of the city ([Jgs 9:1-7, 23-57](#)). Rehoboam was crowned there just before the split of the kingdom ([1 Kgs 12:1](#)), and Jeroboam, first king of the northern kingdom, rebuilt the city and made it the first capital of the kingdom.

History

Excavations reveal that the earliest settlement at the site dates back to the fourth millennium BC, but the first significant settlement occurred during the first half of the second millennium and was the work of Amorites or Hyksos. The Hyksos surrounded the city with an immense sloping embankment about 80 feet (24.4 meters) wide and 20 feet (6.1 meters) high, upon which they built a brick wall. There was a two-entry gate on the east side and a three-entry gate on the northwest side. On the acropolis they built what has been interpreted as a fortress temple, which was rebuilt several times and finally destroyed by the Egyptians in about 1550 BC.

About a century later, the Canaanites rebuilt Shechem on a smaller scale. A new fortress temple was built on the ruins of the old one and measured 53 feet (16.2 meters) wide and 41 feet (12.5 meters) deep, with an entrance on the long side. It had three sacred standing stones next to an altar in the open court. This temple is believed to be the house of Baal-berith destroyed by Abimelech about 1150 BC ([Jgs 9:3-4, 46](#)), and its sacred area was never rebuilt. Before that, however, there is no archaeological evidence of destruction for some 300 years, confirming the biblical indication that the Hebrews did not take the city at the time of the Conquest and that the inhabitants lived peaceably among the Hebrews.

Evidently, Solomon rebuilt Shechem as a provincial capital, but it suffered great destruction late in the 10th century, probably at the hands of Shishak of Egypt when he invaded Palestine in 926 BC ([1 Kgs 14:25](#)). Shortly thereafter, Jeroboam I refortified the city and made it the capital of the kingdom of Israel. Either he or a successor built a government warehouse on the ruins of the temple. Israelite Shechem met its end at the hands of the Assyrian king Shalmaneser V in 724 BC, just before the destruction of Samaria, and the town was virtually uninhabited for about 400 years.

In the fourth century, Alexander the Great established a camp on the site for his soldiers, and subsequently the Samaritans moved from Samaria

and settled there. They built their temple on Mt Gerizim. John Hyrcanus probably destroyed Shechem for the last time in 128 BC. His violent opposition to the Samaritans involved destruction of their temple on Mt Gerizim and of Samaria at the same time.

Shechem, Tower of

Fortress erected on the acropolis of Shechem, housing the temple of Baal-berith and situated inside the city walls. The city of Shechem was located in the hill country of the tribe of Ephraim near Mt Gerizim.

The tower of Shechem served as the citadel to which the leaders of Shechem fled from the onslaught of Abimelech. They sought refuge in the inner chamber of the temple of Baal-berith. Abimelech, however, set the upper parts of the inner chamber on fire, killing all the men and women housed within ([Jgs 9:46-49](#)).

The remnants of the tower of Shechem have been found within the ancient town of Shechem at Tell Bala'ta, a short distance northeast of modern Nablus in central Palestine. Modern excavations show that the tower of Shechem was used as a temple and a fortress.

Shechemite

Any descendant of Shechem, who was the son of Gilead from the tribe of Manasseh ([Numbers 26:31](#)).

See Shechem (Person) #2.

Shedeur

The father of Elizur. Elizur was an important leader from the tribe of Reuben. Moses asked Elizur to help count all the men who could serve in the army ([Numbers 1:5](#); [2:10](#); [10:18](#)). Elizur also represented his tribe during the special ceremony to dedicate the altar ([7:30-35](#)).

Sheep

Sheep are animals that people keep for their wool, milk, and meat. They appear in the Bible more than

700 times. The Bible uses different words for sheep depending on their age and gender:

- A lamb is a young sheep.
- A ewe is a female sheep.
- A ram is a male sheep.

Sheep in Daily Life

People who raised animals depended on their sheep for survival. They provided food, milk, wool, hides, and bones. Sheep were also used in trade and sacrifices. Ancient sheep herding was vast. For instance, Mesha, the king of Moab, paid a tribute of 100,000 lambs and the wool from 100,000 rams each year ([2 Kings 3:4](#)). The Israelites took 250,000 sheep from the Hagrites ([1 Chronicles 5:21](#)).

Sheep shearing was often done for festivals ([2 Samuel 13:23](#)). The sheep was pinned down, its legs tied, then calmly trimmed ([Isaiah 53:7](#)). However, sheep for burnt offerings remained untrimmed. Nothing could be spared from a sacrifice to the Lord.

Wool needed to be prepared before becoming clothing. First, it was washed, sometimes on the sheep. Then, it was carded and possibly weighed. Spinning wool was women's work ([Proverbs 31:19](#)). However, weaving it into cloth on a loom was mainly done by men.

Types of Sheep

The Bible tells us that Abel kept sheep ([Genesis 4:2](#)). The first tamed sheep was probably the argali (*Ovis ammon*). It is a type of urial (*Ovis vignei*), a mountain species still found in Turkestan and Mongolia. By 2000 BCE, five different types of these mountain sheep had spread to the Middle East.

The sheep in Israel was the broad-tailed sheep (*Ovis orientalis vignei* or *laticaudata*). Its tail weighs 4.5 to 6.8 kilograms (ten to 15 pounds) and was considered a special food. Because of this, God asked for the tail as part of a sacrifice ([Exodus 29:22-25](#)).

In broad-tailed sheep, only the ram has horns. However, in other sheep types from the lands of Israel and Palestine, ewes also have horns. These horns are five to eight centimeters (two to three inches) wide and function as fierce weapons. Rams' horns could be used as trumpets or as containers for oil ([Joshua 6:4](#); [1 Samuel 16:1](#)).

Sheep look similar to goats, but they have some different features:

- Their foreheads are lower.
- Their horns curve in a spiral pattern with lines across them.
- They have wool instead of hair.
- They do not have the beard that goats have.

Most sheep have white wool ([Psalm 147:16](#); [Isaiah 1:18](#); [Daniel 7:9](#); [Revelation 1:14](#)).

Sheep as Food

In biblical times, sheep meat was a luxury. King Solomon needed 100 sheep daily for his table ([1 Kings 4:23](#)). Common people ate lamb or mutton only at festivals. They typically chose a young ram, as ewes were vital for the herd's future. They boiled the meat in large pots. Sheep's milk contains a lot of fat and nutrients. In biblical times, people often let it curdle before drinking. It is possible some Israelites kept lambs as pets ([2 Samuel 12:3-4](#)).

To protect the flock from predators at night, the shepherd built a fold. Near villages, he constructed folds and hired watchmen to assist. Meanwhile, in the story of Jesus's birth, the shepherds were in the fields ([Luke 2:8](#)). They likely set up a simple tent with goat-hair blankets across sapling supports. In the lands of Israel and Palestine, water was scarce. So it was very important for shepherds to find water for their flocks ([Genesis 13:8-11](#)).

Wild mountain sheep, such as varieties of *Ovis orientalis*, live in the Mediterranean region ([Deuteronomy 14:5](#)). The passage in Deuteronomy might refer to *Ovis traelaphus*, a sheep about one and a half meters (five feet) tall with long, curved horns. Another possibility is the Barbary sheep that live in small flocks in rugged mountain areas in Barbary, Egypt, and Mount Sinai.

Sheep as Symbols

The sheep is also used as a symbol in Scripture. The ram symbolized the strength of Persia in Daniel's vision ([Daniel 8:3](#)). It is the nature of sheep to be:

- Gentle and submissive ([Isaiah 53:7](#); [Jeremiah 11:19](#))
- Defenseless ([Micah 5:8](#); [Matthew 10:16](#))
- In constant need of guidance and care ([Numbers 27:17](#); [Matthew 9:36](#))

These qualities are important for believers in Christ. Because of this, the New Testament often compares believers to sheep and Jesus to a shepherd ([Mark 6:34](#); [John 10:1-30](#); [Romans 8:35-37](#); [Hebrews 13:20-21](#); [1 Peter 2:25](#)). The resurrected Christ told the apostle Peter to “feed my lambs” and “shepherd my sheep” ([John 21:15-17](#)).

See also Offerings and Sacrifices.

Sheep Gate

Jerusalem gate repaired by Eliashib and the priests under Nehemiah’s supervision during the postexilic era ([Neh 3:1, 32](#); [12:39](#)). It was positioned east of the Fish Gate by the Tower of the Hundred, near the pool of Bethesda (Bethsaida) and a short distance from the modern St Stephen’s Gate. In [John 5:2](#) the kjv translates it “Sheep Market” and the neb, “Sheep-Pool.”

Sheerah

Sheerah was the daughter or granddaughter of Ephraim. Her children built Lower and Upper Beth-horon and Uzzen-sheerah ([1 Chronicles 7:24](#)). Uzzen-sheerah is named after Sheerah.

Shehariah

Jehoram’s son and a chief of Benjamin’s tribe in Jerusalem after the exile ([1 Chr 8:26](#)).

Shekel

Weight, and later also a coin. See Coins; Weights and Measures.

Shekinah

A word that means “the one who dwells” or “that which dwells.” *Shekinah* is a Hebrew word written in English letters (transliteration). This term became part of Christian teaching through ancient Jewish writings called the “Targums” and rabbinic texts. These texts used *shekinah* to describe how God, who exists beyond our world, is also present within it.

Shekinah in the Old Testament

The word “*shekinah*” itself does not appear in the Bible, but the idea comes from many places in the Old Testament where God lives among his people ([Genesis 9:27](#); [Exodus 25:8](#); [29:45-46](#); [Numbers 5:3](#); [1 Kings 6:13](#); [Psalms 68:16-18](#); [74:2](#); [Isaiah 8:18](#); [Ezekiel 43:7-9](#); [Joel 3:17, 21](#); [Zechariah 2:10-11](#)). These passages show that while God lives in heaven, he also lives on earth with his people.

People also use the term “*shekinah glory*” to describe how God showed himself visibly to the Israelites. It was a visible manifestation of God as a pillar of fire and smoke. This presence was seen:

- at Sinai ([Exodus 19:16-18](#)),
- in the wilderness ([Exodus 40:34-38](#)), and
- in the temple ([1 Kings 6:13](#); [8:10-13](#); [2 Chronicles 6:1-2](#)).

Shekinah in the New Testament

The New Testament also talks about God’s presence among people, even though it does not use the word *shekinah*. In the New Testament, when God is present, there is often light and glory ([Luke 2:9](#); [9:29](#); [Acts 9:3-6](#); [22:6-11](#); [26:12-16](#); [2 Peter 1:16-18](#)).

The Gospel of John especially focuses on glory and on God living with people. It tells us that when Jesus (called “the Word”) became human, he lived among people who saw his glory ([John 1:14](#)). The Spirit of God remained on him ([John 1:32](#)) and would be with his followers forever ([John 14:16](#)). He would abide in those who abide in Jesus ([John 15:4-10](#)). John wrote about these same ideas in his letters, too. He often talked about how believers live in Christ and how Christ lives in them ([1 John 2:6, 14, 24, 27-28](#); [3:6, 14-15, 24](#); [2 John 1:9](#)).

Paul also identifies Jesus as the *shekinah* of God. All of God’s essence and nature lives fully in Jesus in

physical form ([Colossians 1:19](#); [2:9](#)). When Christ lives in his church, this makes his followers into God's people ([Colossians 1:15–23](#)). Paul described his message as "the gospel of the glory of Christ." He explained that God made his light shine to help people understand "the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" ([2 Corinthians 4:4–6](#)).

Finally, book of Hebrews says that Jesus is "the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of His nature" ([Hebrews 1:3](#)).

See Glory; Pillar of Fire and Cloud; Theophany.

Shelah

1. Arphaxad's son and the father of Eber ([Genesis 10:24](#); [11:12–15](#); [1 Chronicles 1:18](#)). Shelah is listed in Luke's list of Jesus's ancestors as the son of Cainan the son of Arphaxad ([Luke 3:35](#)).
See Ancestry of Jesus Christ.
2. Judah's third son by Bathshua, a Canaanite woman. He was born at Kezib, a small town in Judah ([Genesis 38:5](#); [1 Chronicles 2:3](#)). Shelah founded the Shelanite family ([Numbers 26:20](#)). "Shelanite" should possibly be read instead of "Shilonite" in [Nehemiah 11:5](#); [1 Chronicles 9:5](#).

Shelah, Pool of

Reservoir in the King's Garden in Jerusalem ([Neh 3:15](#)). *See* Siloam, Pool of.

Shelanite

Any descendant of Shelah, son of Judah ([Numbers 26:20](#)).

See Shelah #2.

Shelemiah

1. Korahite from the tribe of Levi and a gatekeeper who was chosen by lot to guard the east gate of the

sanctuary during David's reign ([1 Chr 26:14](#)); also named Meshelemiah (vv [1–2](#)). *See* Meshelemiah.

2–3. Two of Binnui's sons, who were encouraged to divorce their foreign wives during Ezra's postexilic reforms in Israel ([Ezr 10:39–41](#)).

4. Father of Hananiah. Hananiah repaired a section of the Jerusalem wall under Nehemiah ([Neh 3:30](#)).

5. Priest and one of the three men appointed by Nehemiah as the treasurers of the temple in Jerusalem. Their task was to oversee the distribution of the tithes among their fellow priests ([Neh 13:13](#)).

6. Son of Cush, the father of Nethaniah, and a forefather of Jehudi ([Jer 36:14](#)).

7. Son of Abdeel who, with Jerahmeel and Seraiah, was commanded by King Jehoiakim of Judah (609–598 BC) to seize Baruch and Jeremiah ([Jer 36:26](#)).

8. Father of Jehucal ([Jer 37:3](#)), alternately spelled Jucal in [38:1](#) (nlt mg).

9. Son of Hananiah and the father of Irijah. Irijah arrested Jeremiah for apparently deserting to the Babylonians ([Jer 37:13](#)).

Sheleph

Joktan's son and the founder of an Arabian tribe living in Yemen ([Gn 10:26](#); [1 Chr 1:20](#)).

Shelesh

Helem's son and a chief of Asher's tribe ([1 Chr 7:35](#)).

Shelomi

The father of Ahihud. Ahihud represented the tribe of Asher when the land of Canaan was being divided among the ten tribes of Israel that lived west of the Jordan River ([Numbers 34:27](#)).

Shelomith

1. A daughter and the mother of a man from the tribe of Dan who blasphemed (spoke against) the name of the Lord. Then the Israelites stoned him to death ([Leviticus 24:11-16](#)).
2. A sister of Meshullam and Hananiah. All of them were descendants of King David ([1 Chronicles 3:19](#)).
3. The King James Version spelling of Shelomoth, son of Shimei in [1 Chronicles 23:9](#).
See Shelomoth #1.
4. Another spelling of Shelomoth, son Izhar in [1 Chronicles 23:18](#).
See Shelomoth #2.
5. The King James Version spelling of Shelomoth, son of Zicri in [1 Chronicles 26:25-28](#).
See Shelomoth #3.
6. A son of Rehoboam and Maachah ([2 Chronicles 11:20](#)).
7. One of the companions of Ezra ([Ezra 8:10](#)).

Shelomoth

1. Gershonite Levite and one of Shimei's sons serving in the sanctuary during David's reign ([1 Chr 23:9](#)).
2. Levite and priest from the family of Izhar during David's reign ([1 Chr 23:18](#), "Shelomith"; [24:22](#)).
3. Zicri's son, who was in charge of the royal treasuries during David's reign ([1 Chr 26:25-28](#)).

Shelters, Festival of

Alternate name for the Festival of Tabernacles. See Feasts and Festivals of Israel.

Shelumiel

Shelumiel was a Simeonite (a person from the tribe of Simeon). He was the son of Zurishaddai and one

of the leaders who helped Moses count the people of Israel in the wilderness ([Numbers 1:6](#); [2:12](#); [7:36](#), [41](#); [10:19](#)). According to the book of Judith, which is not in the Hebrew Bible but is accepted by some Christian groups, Shelumiel is an ancestor of Judith ([Judith 8:1](#), where his name is spelled Salamiel and his father's name is spelled Sarasadai).

Shem

The eldest son of Noah ([Genesis 5:32](#); [6:10](#); [7:13](#); [9:18](#), [23](#), [26-27](#); [11:10](#); [1 Chronicles 1:4](#), [17-27](#); [Luke 3:36](#)) and the ancestor of the Semitic peoples ([Genesis 10:1](#), [21-31](#)). Shem lived 600 years ([Genesis 11:10-11](#)). His name in Hebrew means "name," possibly suggesting that Noah believed Shem's name would become significant.

After the great Flood, Shem and his brother Japheth found their father, Noah, drunk. Their other brother, Ham, had dishonored him. Shem and Japheth acted respectfully toward Noah ([Genesis 9:20-29](#)). Because of their actions, Noah later cursed Canaan, Ham's son, and blessed both Shem and Japheth.

[Genesis 11:10-27](#) shows the family line of the promised seed (descendant). This descendant was foretold in [Genesis 3:15](#) and [5:1-32](#) to crush Satan. It goes through Shem to Abraham, then through Judah and David to Christ (compare [Luke 3:36](#)). The blessing Noah gave to Shem shows that his line would carry the promise of the seed from [Genesis 3:15](#). This is the first time in the Bible that God is called the God of a specific person or group. Noah had said that Canaan's people would serve Shem's people. This came true when the Israelites, who were Shem's descendants, took control of Canaan's land (compare [1 Kings 9:20-21](#)).

Noah also said that Japheth's descendants would grow in number and live among Shem's people ([Genesis 9:27](#)). This likely means that Japheth's descendants would grow in number. Over time, they would benefit from Shem's blessings. Some scholars believe this prophecy was fulfilled when, in the New Testament, the gentiles were invited to share in the gospel's blessings and the church's founding.

In the "table of nations" recorded in [Genesis 10](#), five descendants of Shem are listed:

1. Elam

2. Asshur
3. Arphaxad
4. Lud
5. Aram

Receiving particular emphasis among these descendants is Eber from the line of Arphaxad, whose line is traced to Abraham in [Genesis 11:16–27](#).

See also Abraham; Ancestry of Jesus Christ; Nations; Noah #1.

Shema (Person)

1. Judahite, Hebron's son and a descendant of Caleb ([1 Chr 2:43–44](#)).
2. Reubenite and Joel's son ([1 Chr 5:8](#)). He is perhaps identifiable with Shemaiah or Shimei in [1 Chronicles 5:4](#).
3. Benjaminite and head of a family in Aijalon, who helped defeat the inhabitants of Gath ([1 Chr 8:13](#)).
4. Levite who explained to the people passages from the law read by Ezra ([Neh 8:4](#)).

Shema (Place)

One of the 29 cities located near the border of Edom in the southern extremity of the land inherited by Judah, mentioned between the cities of Amam and Moladah ([Jos 15:26](#)). In the parallel list at [Joshua 19:2](#), Sheba (the LXX has "Shema") was one of 13 cities assigned to Simeon's tribe within the southern portion of Judah's inheritance. See Sheba #1.

Shema, the

The declaration "Hear, O Israel, Yahweh our God is one Yahweh" ([Deuteronomy 6:4](#)). The name, Shema, comes from the first Hebrew word of the verse, *shema*, "hear." [Deuteronomy 6:4–9](#) contains all of this essential biblical truth. While several translations of verse [4](#) are grammatically correct, Jesus's words in [Mark 12:29](#) match the above translation best. Religious Jews pray the Shema three times a day as a devotion. No Sabbath worship occurs in the synagogue without it.

The Shema contains a key doctrinal truth and an obligation. The Shema demands that the hearers respond with their total being to this important revelation.

Regarding the nature of God, the word "one" (*echad*) means a compound unity, not an absolute singular. The medieval Jewish theologian Maimonides argued that God was *yachid* (an absolute singular). But, the Old Testament does not use this word to describe God. The word "*echad*" first occurs in [Genesis 2:24](#), where a man and woman are made one (*echad*) in marriage. This is how Jesus could quote [Deuteronomy 6:4](#) without denying his own deity.

See also Deuteronomy, Book of.

Shemaah

Father of Ahiezer and Joash, two bowmen who joined David at Ziklag ([1 Chr 12:3](#)).

Shemaiah

1. Prophet during the reign of Rehoboam, king of Judah (930–913 BC). He warned the king not to go to war against Jeroboam and the ten northern tribes of Israel ([1 Kgs 12:22–24](#); [2 Chr 11:2–4](#)). Five years later he spoke words of comfort to a repentant Rehoboam and people of Judah ([2 Chr 12:5–7](#)). Shemaiah chronicled the life of Rehoboam in a book that has since been lost.

2. Son of Shecaniah, the father of six sons and a descendant of David through Rehoboam's line ([1 Chr 3:22](#)).

3. Simeonite, father of Shimri and an ancestor of Jehu ([1 Chr 4:37](#)).

4. Reubenite and a son of Joel ([1 Chr 5:4](#)).

5. Levite and the son of Hasshub, who returned to Jerusalem after the exile ([1 Chr 9:14](#)). He was made a leader in the work of the temple during the days of Nehemiah ([Neh 11:15](#)).

6. Son of Galal and the father of Obadiah, a Levite who returned to Jerusalem following the Babylonian captivity ([1 Chr 9:16](#)); called Shammua in [Nehemiah 11:17](#).

7. Levite and the leader of his father's house. Shemaiah was summoned by David to help carry

the ark from Obed-edom's house to Jerusalem ([1 Chr 15:8-11](#)).

8. Son of Nethanel and the Levitical scribe who recorded the 24 divisions of the priests during David's reign in Israel (1000-961 BC; [1 Chr 24:6](#)).

9. Oldest of Obed-edom's eight sons and the father of sons who served as the gatekeepers of the south gate and storehouse of the sanctuary during David's reign ([1 Chr 26:4-7](#)).

10. One of the Levites sent by King Jehoshaphat of Judah (872-848 BC) to teach the law in the cities of Judah ([2 Chr 17:8-9](#)).

11. Son of Jeduthun and Uzziel's brother, who was among the Levites chosen by King Hezekiah of Judah (715-686 BC) to cleanse the house of the Lord ([2 Chr 29:14-15](#)).

12. One of the Levites assisting Kore with the distribution of the offerings among his fellow priests living in the priestly cities of Judah during the days of King Hezekiah ([2 Chr 31:15](#)).

13. One of the Levitical leaders who generously gave animals to the Levites for the celebration of the Passover feast during King Josiah's reign (640-609 BC; [2 Chr 35:9](#)).

14. Son of Adonikam, who returned with Ezra to Judah after the exile during the reign of King Artaxerxes I of Persia (464-424 BC; [Ezr 8:13](#)).

15. One of the Jewish leaders whom Ezra sent to Iddo at Casiphia to gather Levites and temple servants for the caravan of Jews returning to Palestine from Babylon ([Ezr 8:16-17](#)).

16. Priest and one of Harim's five sons who was encouraged by Ezra to divorce his foreign wife during the postexilic era ([Ezr 10:21](#)).

17. Son of another Harim who was encouraged by Ezra to divorce his foreign wife ([Ezr 10:31](#)).

18. Son of Shecaniah and the keeper of the East Gate who repaired a section of the Jerusalem wall under Nehemiah's direction ([Neh 3:29](#)).

19. Son of Delaiah and a false prophet hired by Tobiah and Sanballat to frighten Nehemiah and hinder him from rebuilding the Jerusalem wall ([Neh 6:10-13](#)).

20. One of the priests who set his seal on the covenant of Ezra ([Neh 10:8](#)).

21. One of the leaders of the priests who returned with Zerubbabel and Jeshua to Judah after the exile ([Neh 12:6](#)).

22. One of the princes of Judah who participated in the dedication of the Jerusalem wall during the postexilic period ([Neh 12:34](#)).

23. Son of Mattaniah, grandfather of Zechariah, and a descendant of Asaph. Zechariah was one of the priests who played a trumpet at the dedication of the Jerusalem wall ([Neh 12:35](#)).

24-25. Two priestly musicians who performed at the dedication of the Jerusalem wall ([Neh 12:36, 42](#)).

26. Father of Uriah the prophet from Kiriath-jearim. Like Jeremiah, his contemporary, Uriah spoke words of doom against Jerusalem and Judah during the reign of King Jehoiakim of Judah (609-598 BC), who deplored Uriah's message and eventually had him killed ([Jer 26:20-21](#)).

27. Nehelamite and a Jew deported to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar, from where he opposed Jeremiah. He sent letters to the priests in Jerusalem that criticized Jeremiah for predicting a long captivity for Judah. Jeremiah exposed Shemaiah as a false prophet and foretold that he and his descendants would not live to see the return to Palestine ([Jer 29:24-32](#)).

28. Father of Delaiah, a prince of Judah during the reign of King Jehoiakim ([Jer 36:12](#)).

29. A kinsman of Tobit ([Tb 5:14](#)); also spelled Shememiah.

Shemariah

1. Warrior from the tribe of Benjamin who joined David at Ziklag in his struggle against King Saul. Shemariah was one of David's ambidextrous archers and slingers ([1 Chr 12:5](#)).

2. One of Rehoboam's sons ([2 Chr 11:19](#); kjv "Shamariah").

3. Harim's son, who obeyed Ezra's exhortation to divorce his foreign wife after the exile ([Ezr 10:32](#)).

4. Binnui's son, who obeyed Ezra's exhortation to divorce his foreign wife ([Ezr 10:41](#)).

Shemeber

King of Zebaiim, who joined a confederacy with four other kings in rebellion against Kedorlaomer and his allies. Abraham rescued Lot from captivity

after Shemeber, along with Sodom and Gomorrah, was defeated ([Gn 14:2](#)).

Shemed

Elpaal's son and a descendant of Benjamin through Shoharaim's line. Shemed rebuilt the towns of Ono and Lod after the Babylonian exile ([1 Chr 8:12](#)).

Shemer

1. Owner of the hill of Samaria, which Omri, king of Israel, bought as the site of his new capital city and named after Shemer ([1 Kgs 16:24](#)).
2. Merarite Levite, Mahli's son and the father of Bani; he was a temple singer during David's reign ([1 Chr 6:46](#)).
3. Asherite, Heber's son and a leader among his people ([1 Chr 7:34](#)).

Shemida, Shemidah, Shemidaite

Shemida was the father of the family group called the Shemidaite ([Numbers 26:32](#)). This clan was part of the tribe of Manasseh ([Joshua 17:2](#); [1 Chronicles 7:19](#)). Shemidah is an alternate spelling of Shemida.

Sheminith

Obscure Hebrew term, meaning "the eighth," in [1 Chronicles 15:21](#) and the superscriptions of [Psalms 6](#) and [12](#) (see rsv and nlt mg), whose function as a musical cue or instrument is uncertain. *See Music*.

Shemiramoth

1. One of the Levites whom David commanded to play the harp when the ark of God was brought from the house of Obed-edom to Jerusalem ([1 Chr 15:18-22](#)), and who retained a permanent position under Asaph as one of the ministers of the ark ([16:4-5](#)).
2. Levite commissioned by Jehoshaphat to teach the law "through all the cities of Judah" ([2 Chr 17:8](#)).

Shemuel

1. A son of Ammihud and the representative of the tribe of Simeon. This was in the division of the land of Canaan among the 10 tribes of Israel west of the Jordan ([Numbers 34:20](#)).
2. The King James Version translation of Samuel, son of Elkanah ([1 Chronicles 6:33-34](#)). *See Samuel (Person)*.
3. A son of Tola and leader in the tribe of Issachar ([1 Chronicles 7:2](#)).

Shen

Alternate form of Jeshanah, a town near which the prophet Samuel set up the Ebenezer stone, in [1 Samuel 7:12](#). *See Jeshanah*.

Shenazar, Shenazzar

Fourth son of Jeconiah (Jehoiachin), captive king of Judah ([1 Chr 3:18](#)).

Shenir

Another spelling of Senir in the King James Version. It is the Amorite name for Mount Hermon, in [Deuteronomy 3:9](#) and [Song of Songs 4:8](#).

See Hermon, Mount.

Sheol

Hebrew term for the place of the dead. In ordinary usage it means "ravine," "chasm," "underworld," or "world of the dead." In the OT it is the place where the dead have their abode, a hollow space underneath the earth where the dead are gathered in. Synonyms for Sheol are "pit," "death," and "destruction" (Abaddon). Sheol is a place of shadows and utter silence. Here all existence is in suspense, yet it is not a nonplace, but rather a place where life is no more. It is described as the Land of Forgetfulness. Those who dwell there cannot praise God ([Ps 88:10-12](#)). In Revelation it is called the "bottomless pit" presided over by Abaddon, the prince of the pit ([Rv 9:11](#)).

It is not, however, a place where God is entirely absent; there can be no escape from God even in Sheol ([Ps 139:8](#)). This omnipresence of God is graphically described in Job: “Sheol is naked before God, and Abaddon has no covering” ([Jb 26:6](#), rsv). A similar thought is expressed in Proverbs: “Sheol and Abaddon lie open before the Lord, how much more the hearts of men!” ([Prv 15:11](#), rsv). In both texts Sheol and Abaddon are used interchangeably. Abaddon means literally “destruction,” but in Revelation it is used as a personal name.

In the Bible, death is not a natural occurrence. It violates the principle of life, which is a gift from God. Sheol is therefore not only a place of rest but also of punishment. Korah and his associates who instigated rebellion against Moses were swallowed up by the open pit and perished in Sheol ([Nm 16:30-33](#)). Fear of death is natural to man; Sheol therefore serves as a symbol of the journey without return ([Ps 39:12-13](#)). King Hezekiah of Judah laments on his sickbed: “In the noontide of my days I must depart; I am consigned to the gates of Sheol for the rest of my years” ([Is 38:10](#), rsv).

Sheol, as conceived in the OT, differs from the later doctrine of hell or Hades in that it is the place where all the dead are gathered indiscriminately, both the good and the bad, the saints and the sinners. To die means to be joined to those who have gone before. When a Jew dies, he is “gathered unto his people” (cf. [Gn 25:8, 17](#); [35:29](#); [49:29](#)). Beyond Sheol there seemed to be no hope (cf. [Eccl 9:10](#)). The utter despondency of death is expressed pathetically in the book of Job: “I go whence I shall not return, to the land of gloom and deep darkness, the land of gloom and chaos, where light is as darkness” ([Jb 10:21-22](#), rsv). Yet this is not Job’s last word. He also knows of the power of God, which reaches beyond the grave: “For I know that my Redeemer lives . . . ; and after my skin has been thus destroyed, then from my flesh I shall see God” ([19:25-26](#), rsv).

The idea that the dead abide in the underworld persists in the OT. The incident in the case of Saul with the medium of Endor ([1 Sm 28:11](#)) is a good illustration. Samuel is brought “up out of the earth” to be consulted by the king at a time of crisis. Such necromancy was strictly prohibited both by the law of Moses ([Dt 18:9-11](#)) and by the king himself (cf. [1 Sm 28:3, 9](#)). Apparently, those in the underworld, though separated from the living, were thought to be familiar with the affairs of men.

Sheol is roughly equivalent to the Greek word often found in the NT, *hades*, as that which also describes the place of the dead.

See also Dead, Place of the; Death; Hades; Hell; Intermediate State.

Shepham

One of the places used by Moses to establish the eastern border of the promised land. It was located between Hazar-enan, which marked the northeastern corner of the land, and Riblah ([Numbers 34:10-11](#)).

Shephathiah

Alternate KJV spelling of Shephathiah, Meshullam’s father, in [1 Chronicles 9:8](#). *See* Shephathiah #2.

Shephathiah

1. One of six sons born to King David during his seven-year rule at Hebron. The mother of Shephathiah was Abital, one of the wives of David ([2 Samuel 3:4](#); [1 Chronicles 3:3](#)).
2. A Benjaminite and the father of Meshullam. Meshullam was one of those who returned to Jerusalem after the Babylonian captivity of Israel ([1 Chronicles 9:8](#)).
3. A Haruphite from the tribe of Benjamin. He was one of the mighty men who came to support King David at Ziklag ([1 Chronicles 12:5](#)).
4. A son of Maacah and chief officer of the Simeonites during the rule of King David ([1 Chronicles 27:16](#)).
5. One of the seven sons of King Jehoshaphat of Judah, who ruled from 872 to 848 BC. He was the brother of Jehoram who became sole ruler after his father died ([2 Chronicles 21:1-2](#)). He ruled from 853 to 841 BC.

6. An ancestor of 372 descendants who returned with Zerubbabel to Judah following the Israelite exile ([Ezra 2:4](#); [Nehemiah 7:9](#)). Later, 81 members of the house of Shephatiah accompanied Ezra back to Palestine during the rule of King Artaxerxes I of Persia, from 464 to 424 BC ([Ezra 8:8](#)).
7. The founder of a household of servants of King Solomon. He returned with Zerubbabel to Judah after the Babylonian captivity of Israel ([Ezra 2:57](#); [Nehemiah 7:59](#)).
8. A descendant of Perez and an ancestor of a Judahite family. They lived in Jerusalem during the period after the Israelite return from exile ([Nehemiah 11:4](#)).
9. A son of Mattan and a prince of Judah during the rule of King Zedekiah, from 597 to 586 BC. He became angry with the prophet Jeremiah, who was warning that Jerusalem would soon be destroyed. He, along with Gedaliah, Jucal, and Pashhur, tried to put him to death. With King Zedekiah's permission, they put Jeremiah into a deep pit called a cistern, hoping he would die there ([Jeremiah 38:1](#)).

Shephelah

Lowlands or foothills of Judah (see nlt mg, [Isa 15:33](#); [1 Chr 27:28](#)).

Shepherd

One who took complete care of a flock of sheep. His task was to find grass and water for the sheep, to protect them from wild animals ([Amos 3:12](#)), to look for and restore those that strayed ([Ezekiel 34:8](#); [Matthew 18:12](#)), to lead the flock out of the fold each day, and to return the flock to the fold at the close of the day ([John 10:2-4](#)).

The figure of the shepherd and his sheep is important in the New Testament. Jesus is the Good Shepherd who gives his life for the sheep ([Matthew 18:10-14](#); [Mark 6:34](#); [John 10](#); [Hebrew 13:20](#)). The

analogy of the shepherd and the flock finds rich expression in [Psalm 23](#), [Ezekiel 34](#), and [John 10](#). God was the Shepherd of Israel ([Genesis 49:24](#); [Psalms 23:1](#); [80:1](#); [Isaiah 40:11](#)). When unfaithful shepherds failed Israel, God intervened and appointed his servant David as a faithful shepherd over them ([Ezekiel 34:11-16, 23-24](#)).

The New Testament imagery comes from an Old Testament and Palestinian background. In the Jewish economy, the shepherd who tended a flock of sheep or goats held a responsible position. Great flocks had to be moved from place to place. They also needed to be guarded from wild animals and robbers. Because of the fundamental role of shepherding in the ancient world, the word "shepherd" became a common term for a ruler. The kings of Assyria, Babylon, and Egypt were often referred to as shepherds who protected their people. This imagery formed the background for the Old Testament, where the same usage is found. God is pictured as the shepherd of Israel, concerned for every aspect of his people's welfare. Rulers and leaders of the people are often referred to as shepherds ([Numbers 27:17](#); [1 Kings 22:17](#); [Jeremiah 10:21](#); [12:10](#); [22:22](#); [23:1-2](#)).

By the time of Jeremiah, "shepherd" began to be used as a title for the coming Messiah. God himself would provide for his flock ([Jeremiah 23:3](#); [31:10](#); [Ezekiel 34:11-22](#)) and promised to provide faithful shepherds who showed concern for his people ([Jeremiah 3:15](#); [23:4](#)). He explicitly promised that he would be their God and would set the messianic Son of David as shepherd over them ([Ezekiel 34:23-24](#)). In the New Testament, Jesus referred to himself as the promised messianic Shepherd ([Matthew 10:16](#); [25:32](#); [Mark 14:27](#); [John 10:1-30](#); compare [Hebrews 13:20](#); [1 Peter 2:25](#)).

[Ephesians 4:11](#) speaks of leaders of the church as shepherds or pastors. This usage continued in the early church and down until the present day. Paul said they are special people given to the church by God to care for God's people as a shepherd does his sheep, leading and teaching them in the ways of God. Peter also spoke of the leaders as shepherds. He encouraged them to remain faithful shepherds until the time that the Chief Shepherd, Jesus Christ, appeared ([1 Peter 5:1-4](#)).

Shepherd of Hermas

A book written by a man named Hermas in the early days of Christianity.

Who Was Hermas?

Not much is known of Hermas except the details he includes of himself in his work called "The Shepherd." In his story, Hermas says he was first a slave who later became free. After gaining his freedom, he got married and started a business. He lost most of what he had, and his children left their faith. Later, his family came back together.

Hermas indicates that he knew Clement, the first-century bishop of Rome. When we read the story itself, we cannot tell if Hermas is telling a true story about his life or if he made it up. Different ancient writers say different things about who Hermas was. In the third century, Origen thought Hermas was the individual Paul mentioned in [Romans 16:14](#). Other early writings, including the second-century Muratorian Canon, describe Hermas as the brother of Pius. He led the church in Rome around 150 AD. Most scholars today think this second idea is correct. Irenaeus, bishop of Lyons, wrote the first recorded reference to *The Shepherd* in AD 185.

What Is Shepherd of Hermas About?

In *The Shepherd* Hermas describes a series of visions about Christian life and morality. Hermas tells the story as both the main character and the person telling the story. The story is set in Rome and is divided into three parts:

- five visions,
- twelve mandates, and
- ten stories that teach lessons (or similitudes).

The Visions

The visions use picture stories to teach about right and wrong. They show things like a tower being built and a woman who grows younger over time. The visions begin with Hermas meeting a beautiful woman named Rhoda, who had once owned him as a slave. In the second vision, Rhoda appears as an old woman who represents the church. Each time she appears, she looks younger. These visions show the church growing and becoming stronger. The visions also show how suffering makes the church pure and how God will judge people.

It is in the fifth vision, while Hermas is in his own house, that he no longer sees the church. Instead, Hermas sees a bright, glowing man who appears dressed like a shepherd. The man has been sent to live with Hermas to teach him until his death. The

man is "the Shepherd, the angel of repentance" who gives Hermas 12 mandates and 10 similitudes, which form the remaining sections of the work.

The Mandates

The twelve commands talk about how Christians should live. They teach about:

- Being humble
- Being pure
- Telling the truth
- Being patient
- Being simple
- Being respectful
- Being cheerful

The commands also teach about staying pure and turning away from wrong things. They describe two different paths people can take: the path that leads to life and the path that leads to death. The Didache and other early Christian writings also describe these two paths.

The Similitudes

These ten teaching stories explain how Christians can live good lives. They talk about many topics, including:

- Christians living in the world as strangers,
- the rich and the poor,
- the sinners and the righteous,
- blossoming and withered trees,
- the purpose of the commandments,
- fasting, and
- punishment.

The stories also teach using picture stories about tree branches, a tower, young women, and mountains.

The tenth similitude is not a parable but a concluding chapter that summarizes the work of the Shepherd. Here, Hermas summarizes the focus of the book: "I, too, sir, declare to every person the mighty works of the Lord; for I hope that all who have sinned in the past, if they hear these things, will gladly repent and recover life."

Throughout the early church, leaders gave Hermas's book high respect. Eusebius of Caesarea noted that The Shepherd was read widely in the early church. Some important leaders, such as Irenaeus and Clement of Alexandria, even considered it canonical Scripture. For Athanasius, the work was not Scripture, but it did offer, like the Didache, help for Christian learners.

Because of its simplicity and candor, some have compared Hermas's work with Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*. The Shepherd serves as a valuable index to Christian ethics and moral instruction in Christianity's earliest decades.

Hermas's work exists in some Greek manuscripts and many medieval Latin translations. Printed editions of the book began to appear in the early 1500s.

See also Hermas #2.

Shephi, Shepho

One of Shobal's five sons and a descendant of Seir the Horite. Shepho is listed in the genealogy of Abraham through Esau's contact with the nation ([Gn 36:23](#)); his name is alternately spelled Shephi ([1 Chr 1:40](#); see nlt mg).

Shephupham

Benjamin's fourth son (called "Muppim" in [Gen 46:21](#)) and the father of the Shuphamite family ([Nm 26:39](#); see nlt mg). In the corresponding genealogy of Benjamin ([1 Chr 7:12](#)) he is called Shuppim, appearing as Benjamin's great-grandson. *See* Shuppim #1.

See also Shephuphan.

Shephuphan

Bela's son from Benjamin's tribe. Bela was the firstborn of Benjamin's sons ([1 Chr 8:5](#)). The exact position of Shephuphan in Benjamin's genealogy is unclear, and he is perhaps identifiable with Shephupham ([1 Chr 7:12](#)).

Sherah

Another way of spelling the name Sheerah.

See Sheerah.

Sherebiah

1. Levite, a descendant of Mahli. Sherebiah, described as a man of understanding, was sent as a priest for the temple at Jerusalem following the exile ([Ezr 8:18](#); [Neh 12:8](#)). During the return journey, he was one of 12 chief priests appointed to guard the silver, gold, and vessels presented for temple use ([Ezr 8:24](#)).

2. One who helped the people understand the law read by Ezra ([Neh 8:7](#)), and among the Levites who stood on the stairs leading the praise service ([9:4-5](#)).

3. One of the leaders of the Levites who led the songs of praise and thanksgiving ([Neh 12:24](#)).

It is possible that the above references refer to the same person.

Sheresh

Makir's son and the brother of Peresh from Manasseh's tribe ([1 Chr 7:16](#)).

Sheshach

Term that is probably a cryptic name for "Babel" (Babylon) found in [Jeremiah 25:26](#) and [51:41](#) (nlt mg).

Sheshai

Sheshai was a descendant of Anak. Sheshai lived in the city of Hebron when the 12 Israelite spies explored the land of Canaan ([Numbers 13:22](#)). Later, the Israelites defeated Sheshai and took over his land ([Joshua 15:14](#); [Judges 1:10](#)).

Sheshan

Descendant of Judah through Jerahmeel, whose family line is traced in [1 Chronicles 2:25-41](#) to Elishama, evidently a contemporary of the writer. In verse [31](#) Sheshan's son Ahlai is named, but verse [34](#) says that Sheshan had no sons. Perhaps two men

of the same name are denoted here, or Ahlai may be identical with Attai, Sheshan's grandson.

Sheshbazzar

A Jewish leader who served as governor of Judah under Cyrus the Great, king of Persia. When Cyrus became king, he ordered that the temple in Jerusalem should be rebuilt ([Ezra 1:1-4](#); compare [6:1-5](#)). He chose Sheshbazzar to be governor of Judah ([Ezra 5:14](#)). Cyrus gave him the gold and silver vessels that Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple when he took control of Jerusalem ([1:7-9](#)). Sheshbazzar fulfilled this commission and took the vessels to Jerusalem with the returning exiles (verse [9](#)). He helped to begin the restoration of the temple ([5:16](#)).

Sheshbazzar appears in the Bible only four times, all in the book of Ezra ([1:8-9](#); [5:14-16](#)). For many years, it scholars thought that Sheshbazzar was another name for Zerubbabel, another Jewish leader. Both men were from the royal family of Judah. The Bible calls Sheshbazzar "the prince of Judah," which might mean he was next in line to be king.

The Bible does not tell us his family history, but he might appear in the Bible under a different name, either Zerubbabel or Shenazzar ([1 Chronicles 3:18-19](#)). In the record of people who returned to Jerusalem, Sheshbazzar's name does not appear. The name of Zerubbabel is at the beginning of this list. This is where we would expect Sheshbazzar's name to be. Both were governors of Judah.

Zerubbabel is associated with laying the foundation of the temple ([Ezra 3:8-11](#)). But in [Ezra 5:16](#), that work is attributed to Sheshbazzar, which agrees with chapter [1](#).

The name "Sheshbazzar" only appears when the text discusses dealings with Persian officials. For example, chapter [1](#) tells of his work with Cyrus. In chapter [5](#), his name appears in a letter written by Tattenai, a Persian official. This suggests the Persians knew him as Sheshbazzar, while the Jewish people called him Zerubbabel. Both names come from the Akkadian language. This is different from cases where Babylonians gave new names to Jewish captives, like in [Daniel 1:7](#).

Sheth

1. A reference to the sons of Moab, who caused trouble and war for the Israelites ([Numbers 24:17](#)).
2. The King James version spelling of Seth, the third son Adam ([1 Chronicles 1:1](#)).
See Seth.

Shethar

One of King Ahasuerus's seven counselors. When Queen Vashti opposed the king's command, Shethar advised the king to remove her as queen and seek a new queen, as an example of discipline in the home ([Esther 1:14](#)).

Shethar-Bozenai, Shethar-Boznai

Persian official in a province west of the Euphrates River, who joined with Tattenai and his colleagues in writing a letter to Darius Hystaspes, king of Persia, protesting the rebuilding of the temple and walls of Jerusalem under Zerubbabel ([Ezr 5:3, 6](#)). Darius warned them not to interfere with Zerubbabel's work, and they obeyed him ([Ezr 6:6, 13](#)).

Sheva

1. A scribe or personal secretary of King David ([2 Samuel 20:25](#)). He is called by different names in other parts of the Bible.
See Seraiah #1.
2. A son of Caleb in the family of Hezron from the tribe of Judah and the father of Macbena and Gibeon ([1 Chronicles 2:49](#)).

Shewbread

KJV rendering of showbread. *See Bread of the Presence.*

Shibah

Name of the fourth well dug by Isaac's servants, so named for the covenant made between Isaac and Abimelech, king of Gerar. The city at the location of the well was called Beersheba ([Gn 26:33](#), nlt mg).

Shibboleth

Term used by Jephthah to detect the Ephraimites at the banks of the Jordan River ([Jgs 12:6](#)). After the battle, many Ephraimites tried to escape by crossing the Jordan and returning to their own land. When each of them came to the river, he was asked by one of Jephthah's soldiers to say "shibboleth." An Ephraimite could not pronounce the word with the same accent as Jephthah's men and was thus discovered and immediately killed.

The exact problem in pronunciation is not known. Two possibilities exist. First, the Ephraimites had no sound comparable to "sh." Thus, they pronounced "sh" as "s" ("shibboleth" becoming "sibboleth"). Second, the Gileadites pronounced "sh" as "th," a sound which was unknown to the Ephraimites, who pronounced it as "s." Thus, "shibboleth" was pronounced "thibboleth" by the Gileadites and "sibboleth" by the Ephraimites.

Shibmah

The King James Version form of Sibmah. Sibmah is an alternate name for Sebam. Sebam was a city in the territory of Reuben ([Numbers 32:38](#)).

See Sebam.

Shicron

KJV form of Shikkeron, a city in Judah's tribe, in [Joshua 15:11](#). *See* Shikkeron.

Shield, Shield Bearer

Protective armor and the soldier or servant who carried the shield and weapons of a warrior. *See* Armor and Weapons.

Shiggaion, Shigionoth

Hebrew words in the titles of [Psalm 7](#) and [Habakkuk 3](#), respectively, perhaps denoting a hymn, a psalm of distress, or a psalm accompanied with instruments. *See* Music.

Shihor

Body of water in Egypt. The name is Egyptian and is given as a boundary of the land to be possessed by the Hebrews ([Jos 13:3](#)). [First Chronicles 13:5](#) refers to Shihor as the southwestern limit of Israelite settlement in the time of David. Isaiah speaks of grain from the region of Shihor as a source of income for the city of Sidon ([Is 23:3](#)). Jeremiah describes Shihor as "the waters of the Nile" ([Jer 2:18](#)). Some believe that the Shihor was the easternmost branch of the Nile Delta. Others identify the Shihor with the Wadi el-Arish, 90 miles (144.8 kilometers) east of the Suez Canal. Still others identify it with the Brook (or River) of Egypt, a body of water whose precise location cannot be determined with certainty.

See also Brook of Egypt; Nile River.

Shihor-Libnath

Place defining the southern boundary of Asher's tribe ([Jos 19:26](#)). Some have identified it with the Nahal Tanninim (Crocodile River), which flows into the Mediterranean Sea.

Shikkeron

Town near the Mediterranean Sea on the northern border of the land allotted to Judah's tribe for an inheritance, mentioned between Ekron and Mt Baalah ([Jos 15:11](#)). Its locality is uncertain, though perhaps identifiable with Tell el-Ful.

Shilhi

The grandfather of King Jehoshaphat of Judah ([1 Kings 22:42](#); [2 Chronicles 20:31](#)).

Shilhim

Alternate name for Shaaraim, a town in southern Judah, in [Joshua 15:32](#). See Shaaraim #2.

Shillem, Shillemite

Fourth son of Naphtali ([Gn 46:24](#)), and father of the Shillemites ([Nm 26:49](#)); alternately called Shallum in [1 Chronicles 7:13](#).

Shiloah

The name of a water channel or aqueduct in Jerusalem ([Isaiah 8:6](#)). It is the same place as the Pool of Siloam mentioned elsewhere in the Bible.

See Siloam, Pool of.

Shiloh

Town identified with Tell Seilun, located 10 miles (16.1 kilometers) northeast of Bethel, 12 miles (19.3 kilometers) southeast of Shechem, and 3 miles (4.8 kilometers) east of the road between Shechem and Jerusalem, precisely fitting the description of its location in [Judges 21:19](#). In addition to the continuity of the name of the site and its fitting the biblical requirements for location, excavation results agree with the history of Shiloh as far as it is known from the Bible and confirm the identification.

The town is not mentioned in any prebiblical sources. Excavations show that Shiloh flourished as a fortified town in the early second millennium.

The site was abandoned and resettled in the early Israelite period. The Bible provides no information as to how the site passed into Israelite hands. Joshua established the tabernacle there ([Jos 18:1](#)), and Shiloh became the center of religious life during the period of the judges. There Joshua cast lots to apportion the inheritance of land to seven of the tribes ([18:1–19:51](#)) and to designate the Levitical cities ([21:1–42](#)). A dispute regarding an altar erected by the two and a half tribes that settled in Transjordan was settled at Shiloh ([22:9–34](#)). Some Benjaminites abducted women from there during a religious festival ([Jgs 21](#)). Elkanah and Hannah often traveled to the tabernacle at Shiloh, where Hannah vowed to give her child to the service of the Lord ([1 Sm 1:3, 9, 24](#)). The sons

of Eli who ministered there had dishonored their office and were rejected, so the Lord appeared to Samuel ([1 Sm 2:14; 3:21](#)). When the ark was taken from Shiloh to a battle with the Philistines, news of its loss to the Philistines reached Eli and brought about his death ([1 Sm 4:1–18](#)). The ark was never returned to Shiloh; the psalmist records that God had “abandoned the tabernacle of Shiloh, the tent he had set up among men” ([Ps 78:60](#), niv).

The town of Shiloh would presumably have suffered some destruction at the time of the fall of the northern kingdom in 722 BC. The sudden scarcity of ceramic remains in the Iron III period suggests that the site was largely abandoned around 600 BC. After the destruction of the temple in 586 BC, people came from Shiloh to offer sacrifices in Jerusalem ([Jer 41:5](#)). Shilonites were possibly also among the first returnees from the Babylonian captivity ([1 Chr 9:5](#)). The site was resettled around 300 BC and flourished through the Roman period. It is mentioned by Eusebius and Jerome and in Talmudic sources. It lost much of its importance after the Islamic conquests.

Shiloni

See Shilonite #2.

Shilonite

1. Inhabitant of Shiloh, the hometown of Ahijah the prophet ([1 Kgs 11:29; 12:15; 15:29; 2 Chr 9:29; 10:15](#)). See Shiloh.

2. Hometown of the forefather of a family of exiles who returned to Jerusalem following the Babylonian captivity ([1 Chr 9:5; Neh 11:5](#)). This place is probably the same as #1 above. However, “Shilonite” should possibly be “Shelanite”; the niv and nlt read “Shelah” in [Nehemiah 11:5](#) (kiv “Shiloni”). See Shelah #2.

Shilshah

Zophah’s son and a chief of Asher’s tribe ([1 Chr 7:37](#)).

Shimea

1. Another name for Shammah, the third son of Jesse. Shimea was the brother of King David ([1 Chronicles 2:13](#) and [20:7](#)).
See Shammah #2.
2. A son of King David who was born to him by Bathsheba during the time David ruled in Jerusalem ([1 Chronicles 3:5](#)). [2 Samuel 5:14](#) and [1 Chronicles 14:4](#) call him Shammua.
3. A son of Uzzah, the father of Haggiah and a descendant of Levi through the family line of Merari ([1 Chronicles 6:30](#)).
4. A Levite from the family line of Gershon, son of Michael, the father of Berekiah, and the grandfather of Asaph. King David chose Asaph, along with Heman and Ethan, to lead the musicians in front of the sanctuary ([1 Chronicles 6:39](#)).

Shimeah

1. Another name for Shammah, brother of King David ([2 Samuel 13:3, 32](#)).
See Shammah #2.
2. A son of Mikloth and the grandson of Jeiel from the tribe of Benjamin ([1 Chronicles 8:32](#)). In [1 Chronicles 9:38](#), Shimeah is called Shimeam.

Shimeam

Alternate spelling of Shimeah, Mikloth's son, in [1 Chronicles 9:38](#). See Shimeah #2.

Shimeath

Ammonitess mother ([2 Chr 24:26](#)) or perhaps father ([2 Kgs 12:21](#)) of one of the royal servants who conspired against and murdered King Jehoash of Judah (835–796 BC).

Shimeathite

One of three families of scribes living at Jabez in Judah. They were perhaps Kenites and descendants of Hammath ([1 Chr 2:55](#)). Their history is not certain. The Shimeathites may be identified with one of the nomadic Kenite tribes that settled with the Amalekites in southern Palestine during Saul's reign in Israel (1020–1000 BC).

Shimei

1. The son of Gershon, the grandson of Levi, and the brother of Libni ([Exodus 6:17](#); [Numbers 3:18](#); [1 Chronicles 6:17](#)). He was the father of four sons and the founder of the Shimeite family ([Numbers 3:21](#); [1 Chronicles 23:7, 10](#); [Zechariah 12:13](#)).
2. A Benjaminite, and the son of Gera from the house of Saul. He met King David at the village of Bahurim during the king's journey from Jerusalem to Mahanaim. Here Shimei severely criticized David, cursing him for the ruin of Saul's house ([2 Samuel 16:5–13](#)). Later, Shimei repented of his shameful behavior, asked for David's forgiveness, and was pardoned by the king ([2 Samuel 19:16–23](#)). After David's death, King Solomon ordered Shimei to stay in Jerusalem and never to leave the city for any reason. Shimei did not listen to the order and was killed ([1 Kings 2:8, 36–44](#)).
3. The brother of David and the father of Jonathan ([2 Samuel 21:21](#)). He is called Shammah in [1 Samuel 16:9](#).
See Shammah #2.
4. One of David's court officials who did not support Adonijah's attempt to make himself king ([1 Kings 1:8](#)).
5. A Benjaminite, the son of Ela and one of King Solomon's officials who managed the royal household ([1 Kings 4:18](#)). He may be the same as #4 above.

6. A Judahite, the son of Pedaiiah, the brother of Zerubbabel, and a descendant of David through Solomon's line ([1 Chronicles 3:19](#)).
7. A Simeonite, the son of Zaccur and the father of 16 sons and six daughters ([1 Chronicles 4:26-27](#)).
8. A reubenite, the son of Gog and the father of Micah ([1 Chronicles 5:4](#)).
9. The son of Libni, the father of Uzzah, and a descendant of Levi through Merari's line ([1 Chronicles 6:29](#)).
10. A Gershonite Levite, the son of Jahath, the father of Zimmah, and an ancestor of Asaph who served as a leader of the musicians in the sanctuary during David's reign ([1 Chronicles 6:42](#)).
11. A Benjaminite, the father of nine sons and a head of his father's house ([1 Chronicles 8:21](#)). He is called Shema in [1 Chronicles 8:3](#).
See Shema (Person) #3.
12. A Gershonite Levite, and the father of three sons in the house of Ladan ([1 Chronicles 23:9](#)).
13. The son of Jeduthun and the leader of the tenth of 24 divisions of musicians trained for service in the sanctuary during David's reign ([1 Chronicles 25:3, 17](#)).
14. A Ramathite, and a member of King David's staff who had charge of David's vineyards ([1 Chronicles 27:27](#)).
15. The son of Heman, the brother of Jehuel, and one of the Levites chosen to cleanse the house of the Lord during King Hezekiah's reign in 715 to 686 BC ([2 Chronicles 29:14](#)).
16. A Levite, and the brother of Conaniah chosen by King Hezekiah of Judah to manage the administration of the temple gifts in Jerusalem ([2 Chronicles 31:12-13](#)).
17. A Levite who was encouraged by Ezra to divorce his foreign wife during the time after the exile ([Ezra 10:23](#)).
18. A son of Hashum who was encouraged by Ezra to divorce his foreign wife during the time after the exile ([Ezra 10:33](#)).
19. A son of Binnui who was encouraged by Ezra to divorce his foreign wife during the time after the exile ([Ezra 10:38](#)).
20. The son of Kish and grandfather of Mordecai ([Esther 2:5](#)).

Shimeite

A family of Levites founded by Shimei, a descendant of Gershon ([Numbers 3:21](#); [Zechariah 12:13](#)).

See Shimei #1.

Shimeon

Harim's fifth son, who was encouraged by Ezra to divorce his foreign wife whom he had married during the postexilic era ([Ezra 10:31](#)).

Shimhi

KJV form of Shimei, an alternate name for Shema, in [1 Chronicles 8:21](#). *See Shema (Person) #3.*

Shimi

The King James Version spelling of Shimei, Gershon's son, in [Exodus 6:17](#).

See Shimei #1.

Shimite

KJV spelling of Shimeite. *See Shimeite.*

Shimma

KJV spelling of Shimea, an alternate name for Shammah, Jesse's son, in [1 Chronicles 2:13](#). *See* Shammah #2.

Shimon

Head of a Judahite family ([1 Chr 4:20](#)).

Shimrath

Shimei's son from Benjamin's tribe ([1 Chr 8:21](#)).

Shimri

1. Simeonite, Shemaiah's son and the father of Jedaiah ([1 Chr 4:37](#)).
2. Father of Jediahel (and perhaps Joha), two of David's mighty men ([1 Chr 11:45](#)).
3. Merarite Levite, Hosah's son and a temple gatekeeper during David's reign ([1 Chr 26:10](#)).
4. Levite, of the family of Elizaphan, who assisted in Hezekiah's temple reforms ([2 Chr 29:13](#)).

Shimrith

Moabitess mother of Jehozabad, a royal servant, who along with Zabad conspired against and murdered King Joash of Judah ([2 Chr 24:26](#), nlt mg). She is alternately called Shomer in [2 Kings 12:21](#); Shimrith is the feminine form of Shomer. *See* Shomer #1.

Shimron (Person)

Issachar's fourth son ([Gn 46:13](#); [1 Chr 7:1](#)) and the founder of the Shimronite family ([Nm 26:24](#)).

Shimron (Place)

Canaanite town whose king joined the confederacy of King Jabin of Hazor in unsuccessful resistance to the Israelites under Joshua ([Jos 11:1](#)). Its site is uncertain, though it was in Zebulun's territory ([19:15–16](#)).

Shimron-Meron

Canaanite city destroyed by Joshua on his northern military campaign in Palestine. The king of Shimron-meron was one of 31 kings defeated by Joshua ([Jos 12:20](#)). This king was perhaps one of the northern kings summoned by Jabin, king of Hazor, to combine forces in an attempt to defeat Joshua ([11:1](#)). In all probability, Shimron-meron was one of the 12 cities included in the territory allotted to Zebulun for an inheritance ([19:15](#)).

Shimronite

The Shimronites were a family group that came from Shimron, who was a son of Issachar ([Numbers 26:24](#)).

See Shimron (Person).

Shimshai

Persian government official whose territory included Palestine. With another official (Rehum), he wrote a letter to Artaxerxes opposing the rebuilding of the temple by the Jews returned from exile ([Ezr 4:8–9](#)). He succeeded in halting the rebuilding project.

Shinab

King of Admah, who joined an alliance with four neighboring rulers against King Kedorlaomer. Kedorlaomer defeated this confederation of kings in the valley of Siddim—the southern region of the Dead Sea ([Gn 14:2](#)).

Shinar

Shinar was a region in ancient Babylonia (modern-day southern Iraq). Shinar is the name for a district of Babylonia mentioned only in the Bible.

The area stretched from where Baghdad is now located to the Persian Gulf. This region included two important ancient territories: Sumer in the south and Akkad in the north. Later, people called this entire area Babylonia ([Daniel 1:2](#), *see* marginal note).

Several important ancient cities were located in Shinar, including Erech, Akkad, and Babel (also called Babylon). These cities were part of the kingdom ruled by Nimrod, who was the son of Cush ([Genesis 10:10](#)). [Genesis 11:2](#) also mentions Shinar in connection with the Tower of Babel.

The Bible also tells us about Amraphel, who was a king of Shinar. He fought in a war against Abraham and the people who lived east of the Jordan River ([Genesis 14:1, 9](#)).

Later in the Bible, Shinar becomes important during the time when the Israelites were forced to leave their homeland. The Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar took his captured people to Shinar ([Daniel 1:2](#)). The prophets also mentioned Shinar when they spoke about God's future rescue of Israel ([Isaiah 11:11](#); compare [Zechariah 5:11](#)).

See also Babylon, Babylonia.

Shion

One of 16 cities in the territory allotted to Issachar's tribe for an inheritance, mentioned between Hapharaim and Anaharath ([Jos 19:19](#)).

Shiphi

Ziza's father and a prince in Simeon's tribe ([1 Chr 4:37](#)).

Shiphmite

Designation for Zabdi ([1 Chr 27:27](#)). *See* Zabdi #3.

Shiphrah

One of two Hebrew midwives who refused to kill Hebrew male babies at Pharaoh's command ([Exodus 1:15](#)).

Shiptan

The father of Kemuel. Kemuel was a leader from the tribe of Ephraim. Moses chose Kemuel to help divide the promised land among the ten tribes of Israel that lived west of the Jordan River ([Numbers 34:24](#)).

Ships and Shipping

See Travel.

Shisha

Another name for Seraiah in [1 Kings 4:3](#). Seraiah was King David's scribe.

See Seraiah #1.

Shishak

Egyptian pharaoh, descendant of a powerful family of Libyan chieftains, and founder of Egypt's 22d dynasty. His Egyptian name was Sheshonk. He was a contemporary of Solomon, Jeroboam, and Rehoboam. His years as ruler are variously given as 940–915 BC or 935–914 BC.

During Solomon's reign, he afforded asylum to Jeroboam, Solomon's servant and subsequent adversary, who escaped to Egypt to avoid being killed by his lord, against whom he had rebelled ([1 Kgs 11:40](#)). Since Jeroboam was to set up the northern kingdom after Solomon's death—an event used by God to punish his people for Solomon's sin—Shishak's readiness to harbor the fugitive rebel played a part in God's design to bring about his purposes.

God used Shishak a second time to further his plans. When Judah under Rehoboam became sinful and engaged in idolatrous practices, allowing male shrine prostitutes to operate in the land (a practice not to be equated with the phenomenon of homosexuality as presently known), God used Shishak's invasion of Palestine to punish his people. This invasion took place in the fifth year of Rehoboam's reign ([1 Kgs 14:25](#); cf. [2 Chr 12:2–9](#)). A great number of Judean towns were taken, but God spared Jerusalem from being captured, when the princes and the king showed repentance and humbled themselves ([2 Chr 12:7](#)). However, Shishak showed his mastery by plundering both the temple and royal palace in Jerusalem and by carrying off the gold shields that Solomon had made. Although the biblical account focuses on Shishak's invasion of the Judean area only, extrabiblical data indicate that he also invaded the territory of Jeroboam, to whom he had previously given refuge.

See also Egypt, Egyptian; Israel, History of; Jeroboam; Rehoboam; Solomon (Person).

Shitrai

David's chief shepherd in charge of his flocks in Sharon ([1 Chr 27:29](#)).

Shittah Tree

KJV rendering of acacia, a common desert tree, in [Isaiah 41:19](#). See Plants (Acacia).

Shittim (Place)

A site on the Moab plains. The Israelites camped there after defeating Sihon and Og ([Numbers 21:21-35](#)) and before crossing the Jordan ([Numbers 25:1](#)). According to [Numbers 33:49](#), this camp was near the Jordan River. The campsite spread from Beth-jeshimoth to Abel-shittim. Abel-shittim seems to be the full name of the place, while Shittim is the more common, shorter name.

At Shittim, Balak, who ruled Moab, wanted to prevent the Israelites from entering Canaan. He paid Balaam to speak curses against them ([Numbers 22-24](#)). Later, following Balaam's advice, the Israelite men had sexual relations with women from Midian and Moab ([Numbers 25:1-5](#); compare [31:15-16](#)). The Israelites turned away from God to worship false gods through these sexual acts. This made God angry, and he sent a deadly disease among the people at Peor ([Numbers 25:1-18](#); compare [1 Corinthians 10:6-8](#)).

At Shittim, Moses and Eleazar counted all the people in each tribe. Here also, Joshua was chosen in front of everyone to be the next leader after Moses ([Numbers 27:18-22](#)). Joshua then sent two men from Shittim to secretly look at the city of Jericho ([Joshua 2:1](#)). After this, the Israelites left Shittim and went to the Jordan River, getting ready to cross it ([Joshua 3:1](#)).

The name Shittim appears in only two other places in the Bible outside of the first six books: the books of Joel and Micah. In [Joel 3:18](#), the prophet talks about the "valley of Shittim," which is also called the "Valley of Acacias." This is not talking about a real place. Instead, it is a picture of how God will make dry, empty land good for growing plants when he brings his people back in the final days.

In [Micah 6:5](#), God tells the people to remember their journey from Shittim to Gilgal. This refers to when the Israelites crossed the Jordan River, and God's covenant promise to give them their own land. Micah then talks about the many ways God had helped his people.

Shittim Wood

KJV rendering of acacia wood. See Plants (Acacia).

Shiza

Reubenite and the father of Adina, one of David's select warriors ([1 Chr 11:42](#)).

Shoa

Assyrian people listed with the Babylonians, Chaldeans, and other Assyrian tribes, who were used by the Lord to punish Judah ([Ez 23:23](#)).

Shobab

1. The second of the four sons of King David by his wife Bathsheba ([2 Samuel 5:14](#); [1 Chronicles 3:5](#); [14:4](#)).
2. The son of Caleb by his wife Azubah ([1 Chronicles 2:18](#)).

Shobach

The commander of the army of Hadadezer, king of Zobah. He led the combined Ammonite-Syrian forces in a battle against Israel. King David's army defeated Shobach's forces completely, killing Shobach himself. This decisive victory broke the Ammonite-Syrian alliance. As a result, the kingdoms that had been under Hadadezer's control became subject to David instead ([2 Samuel 10:16-18](#)). He is also called Shophach in [1 Chronicles 19:16-18](#).

Shobai

Ancestor of a group of people who returned to Jerusalem with Zerubbabel after the Babylonian exile ([Ezr 2:42](#); [Neh 7:45](#)).

Shobal

1. One of the seven sons of Seir the Horite in Edom ([Gn 36:20](#); [1 Chr 1:38](#)). Shobal became the father of five sons ([Gn 36:23](#); [1 Chr 1:40](#)) and a chief among the Horites ([Gn 36:29](#)).

2. Hur's son, the father of Haroeh, and the founder of the families of Kiriath-jearim ([1 Chr 2:50-52](#)).

3. One of Judah's five sons and the father of Reiah ([1 Chr 4:1-2](#)); perhaps the same as #2 above.

Shobek

Leader who signed Ezra's covenant of faithfulness to God during the postexilic era ([Neh 10:24](#)).

Shobi

An Ammonite prince, a son of King Nahash. Shobi, together with Makir of Lo-debar and Barzillai of Rogelim, generously provided King David with food and supplies at Mahanaim ([2 Samuel 17:27](#)).

Shocho, Shochoh, Shoco

KJV variant spellings of the city listed in [Jos 15:35](#); [1 Sm 17:1](#); [2 Chr 11:7](#); [28:18](#). See Soco (Place), Socoh #1.

Shoham

Merarite Levite, and Jaaziah's son in David's reign ([1 Chr 24:27](#)).

Shomer

1. Father ([2 Kgs 12:21](#)), or perhaps the Moabite mother ([2 Chr 24:26](#)), of Jehozabad, a royal servant, who, with Jozacar, conspired against and murdered Joash, king of Judah. Shimrith is the feminine form of Shomer. See Shimrith.

2. Alternate name for Shemer, Heber's son, in [1 Chronicles 7:34](#). See Shemer #3.

Shophach

Alternate form of Shobach in [1 Chronicles 19:16-18](#) (nlt mg). See Shobach.

Shophar

Primitive musical instrument made from an animal's horn. See Musical Instruments.

Shoshannim, Shoshannim-Eduth

Hebrew word and phrase in the superscriptions of [Psalms 45, 69](#) and [80](#) (kiv), translated "according to Lilies" (rsv; see also nlt); perhaps a familiar ancient melody to which the psalms were performed. See Music.

Showbread

Bread that was kept in the Holy Place of the temple ([2 Chr 2:4](#)). See Bread of the Presence.

Shrub

A small bush with woody stems, usually smaller than a tree.

See Plants.

Shua

1. Canaanite whose daughter Judah married. She bore Judah three sons: Er, Onan, and Shelah ([Gn 38:2-5, 12](#)). See Bathshua #1.

2. Asherite, Heber's daughter and the sister of Japhlet, Shomer, and Hotham ([1 Chr 7:32](#)).

Shuah

1. One of six sons borne to Abraham by Keturah ([Gn 25:2](#); [1 Chr 1:32](#)). He was perhaps the forefather of

the Shuhite Arab tribe that dwelt near the land of Uz ([Jb 2:11](#)).

2. KJV spelling of Shua, Judah's father-in-law, in [Genesis 38:2, 12](#). See Shua #1.

3. KJV spelling of Shuhah, Kelub's brother, in [1 Chronicles 4:11](#). See Shuhah.

Shual (Person)

Zophah's son and a leader in Asher's tribe ([1 Chr 7:36](#)).

Shual (Place)

Region that included the town of Ophrah and was perhaps situated in the territory of Benjamin and Ephraim ([1 Sm 13:17](#)). Shual was located to the north of Micmash.

Shubael

1. Alternate form of Shebuel, Gershon's son, in [1 Chronicles 24:20](#). See Shebuel #1.

2. Alternate form of Shebuel, Heman's son, in [1 Chronicles 25:20](#). See Shebuel #2.

Shuhah

Kelub's brother from Judah's tribe ([1 Chr 4:11](#)).

Shuham, Shuhamite

Another name for Hushim, the son of Dan. Shuhamites are his descendants ([Numbers 26:42-43](#)).

See Hushim #1.

Shuhite

Arab tribe, apparently descended from Shuah, the son of Abraham by Keturah. They were located near the land of Uz. Bildad, one of the three friends of Job, is identified as a Shuhite ([Jb 2:11](#); [8:1](#); [18:1](#); [25:1](#); [42:9](#)).

Shulammite

The name or title of Solomon's lover in his love poem ([Song of Solomon 6:13](#)). We do not know exactly who she was. Some people think she came from a small city called Shunem in ancient Israel. Her name, "Shunammite," sounds a lot like Solomon's name in Hebrew, which might be why she is called Shulammite instead of Shunammite.

Shunem was a city in the land of Issachar near Mount Gilboa ([1 Samuel 28:4](#)). The city was famous for one story about a beautiful young woman named Abishag. She was called from Shunem to take care of King David in his later years ([1 Kings 1:1-4, 15](#); [2:17-22](#)). Some people think Abishag might be the same woman as the Shulammite in Solomon's love poem.

See also Shunem.

Shumathite

Family of Judah, descended from Shobal of Kiriath-jearim. Shobal was the son of Hur from Caleb's line ([1 Chr 2:53](#)).

Shunammite

A resident of Shunem, the hometown of Abishag ([1 Kings 1:3, 15](#)).

See Shunem.

Shunem

Village of Issachar's tribe ([Jos 19:18](#)) strategically located in the Jezreel Valley. Shunem (modern Sulem) is about three and a half miles (5.6 kilometers) north of Jezreel, situated on the outer hills of Mt Moreh. Both Shunem and Jezreel guard the eastern approach to the Jezreel Valley from Beth-shan through the valley of Harod. This strategic location explains the appearance of Shunem on city lists of various foreign invaders: the lists of Thutmose III (15th century BC); the Amarna Letters (15th century BC), which mention it in conjunction with Megiddo; and the tenth-century BC record at Karnak of the Egyptian Shishak, who listed Shunem's importance.

The Philistines used Shunem to launch their siege of the Israelite forces at Jezreel ([1 Sm 28-31](#)).

Because Shunem was on a well-used route, Elijah frequented the town and even resided there ([2 Kgs 4:8](#)). Later, Elijah raised a woman's son from death (vv [32–37](#)). During the latter years of the reign of David, a beautiful woman from Shunem named Abishag was summoned to care for the ailing king ([1 Kgs 1:3, 15](#)). After David's death, Abishag appears in the story of the rivalry between Adonijah (David's eldest son) and Solomon. Adonijah requests Abishag for his own, once Solomon gains the throne, but the king views his brother's interest as presumption—and a possible attempt at his throne ([2:13–25](#)).

See also Abishag; Shulammite.

Shuni, Shunite

Third of Gad's seven sons ([Gn 46:16](#)) and the family he founded ([Nm 26:15](#)).

Shupham, Shuphamite

Shupham was a son of Benjamin and the ancestor of the Shuphamite family. Shupham is the King James Version spelling of Shephupham in [Numbers 26:39](#).

See Shephupham.

Shuppin

1. Son of Ir and a great-grandson of Benjamin ([1 Chr 7:12](#)). Shuppin is perhaps a shortened form of Shephupham (Shupham), mentioned in [Numbers 26:39](#) as the son of Benjamin. It could also be an alternate spelling for Muppin ([Gen 46:21](#)). *See* Shephupham.

2. Levite gatekeeper, who, with Hosah, watched the gate of Shallecheth on the western side of Jerusalem ([1 Chr 26:16](#)).

Shur

The wilderness region located in the Sinai Peninsula east of Egypt's Nile Delta and west of the Negev. In ancient times, a caravan route passed through this region from Egypt to Palestine. Abraham lived for a time between Shur and Kadesh ([Genesis 20:1](#)). Ishmaelites also lived in the area

([Genesis 25:18](#)). After crossing the Red Sea, Moses led Israel on a three-day journey through this dry land ([Exodus 15:22](#)). King Saul of Israel conquered the Amalekites near Shur ([1 Samuel 15:7](#)). Later, David defeated the Geshurites, Girzites, and Amalekites here ([1 Samuel 27:8](#)). [Numbers 33:8](#) calls the area the wilderness of Etham.

See also Sina, Sinai; Wilderness Wanderings.

Shushan

KJV form of Susa, the Persian capital. *See* Susa.

Shushan Eduth

Hebrew phrase in the superscription of [Psalm 60](#), translated "To [the tune] of 'The Lily of the Covenant' " (niv), perhaps a familiar ancient melody to which the psalm was performed. *See* Music.

Shuthelah

1. A son of Ephraim, the brother of Beker and Tahan, and the father of Eran and Bered. He founded the Shuthelahite family and was an ancestor of Joshua the son of Nun ([Numbers 26:35](#); [1 Chronicles 7:20, 27](#)).
2. A son of Zabad from the tribe of Ephraim ([1 Chronicles 7:21](#)).

Shuthelahite

Any descendant of Shuthelah, son of Ephraim ([Numbers 26:35](#)).

See Shuthelah #1.

Sia, Siaha

Ancestor of a group of temple assistants who returned to Jerusalem with Zerubbabel following the exile ([Neh 7:47](#), nlt mg); spelled Siaha in [Ezra 2:44](#).

Sibbecai, Sibbechai

A Zerahite from the town of Hushah. He was one of the mighty men of King David ([1 Chronicles 11:29; 20:4; 27:11](#)). [2 Samuel 21:18](#) credits him with killing the giant Saph when Israel fought Philistia at Gob. In [2 Samuel 23:27](#) he is called Mebunnai, probably a later incorrect reading of the original.

Sibboleth

Spelling of the Gileadite password as mispronounced by the Ephraimites ([Jgs 12:6](#)). See Shibboleth.

Sibmah

A city located in the pasture lands of the region across the Jordan River (Transjordan). The sons of Gad and Reuben wanted this land ([Numbers 32:3](#)). God gave this area to the tribe of Reuben ([Joshua 13:19](#)). Later, the Moabites took the city from Reuben. Sibmah was famous for its vineyards ([Isaiah 16:8-9; Jeremiah 48:32](#)). "Sebam" is another name for "Sibmah" in the Hebrew text (compare [Numbers 32:38; Joshua 13:19; Isaiah 16:8-9; Jeremiah 48:32](#)).

Sibraim

A geographical landmark between Damascus and Hamath. Sibraim marked the northern boundary of Israel ([Ezekiel 47:16](#)).

Sibylline Oracles

The Sibylline Oracles are a group of writings that claim to give divine messages about the future. The collection originally contained 15 books, but only 12 have survived in late Greek manuscripts. The Sibylline Oracles are called *pseudepigraphal* because unknown authors wrote them using the name of an ancient prophetess called a *sibyl*. A sibyl was a woman in the ancient world believed to speak divine messages or prophecies from the gods. It warns about an upcoming disaster. Some Jews used this type of writing to help spread their beliefs among non-Jews.

The earliest Sibylline writings appeared during the Maccabean period (about 165 BC). Other authors added new sections over time. The collection likely continued to grow until just after the destruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem (around AD 76). Many scholars think the books were written in Alexandria, Egypt.

The writers emphasize that God is one and rules over everything. Pagan gods, they say, have no real power. One passage states:

"But God is one, most exalted of all, who has made the heaven, the sun, the stars and the moon. ... He has constituted man as the Divinely appointed ruler of all. You men ... be ashamed of making gods" (book 2). God controls the history of the nations.

The Sibylline authors believed that God controls the history of all nations.

The oracles tell the story of ten generations, from the Assyrian kingdom to the destruction of the second temple and a great earthquake (book 4.47 and following). The third book also contains a section on the devastation and troubles to be experienced before the great judgment. In this judgment, a *Messiah* (God's chosen one) brings an age of peace and blessing:

"He will raise up his kingdom for all ages over men. For nothing but peace shall come upon the land of the good" (lines 767, 780).

Those who are faithful to God will live again:

"But all who are godly shall live again on earth, when God gives breath and life and grace to them the godly" (book 4.187-190).

But the ungodly will be punished:

The ungodly will be thrown into hell, "And all who have sinned with deeds of impiety a heap of earth shall cover again, and murky Tartarus and the black recesses of hell" (lines 183-186).

The authors of the Sibylline Oracles wanted to show that the Jewish faith was reasonable and true. They chose the form of the sibyl to present their message. This style was introduced by the Greeks and valued by the Romans. Their writings focus on the God of Israel and strongly oppose the worship of false gods. At the same time, they belong to the apocalyptic tradition, which reveals God's hidden secrets about the past and the future. By using the voice of the sibyl as a divine oracle, the writers shared their message about God with the non-Jewish world.

See also Apocrypha.

Sichem

KJV form of Shechem in [Genesis 12:6](#). See Shechem (Place).

Sickle

See Agriculture (Harvesting).

Sickness

See Disease; Medicine and Medical Practice; Plague.

Siddim Valley

Location of the battle between four kings from Mesopotamia and five allied kings living near the Dead Sea ([Gn 14:3, 8–10](#)). The precise location of the battle in the vicinity of the Dead Sea has proved impossible to determine; one is left with conjectures. The valley is described as being full of tar pits ([Gn 14:10](#)). This description suits the areas adjacent to the Salt or Dead Sea.

The account in Genesis describes an important military campaign believed to have occurred in the middle Bronze Age (c. 1900 BC), which would place it at the time of Abraham. The kings mentioned in the coalition from the East are unknown, since the alleged link of Amraphel with Hammurabi is now considered untenable. These four allies came south from Damascus and conquered a series of cities, including Karnaim, Ham, and the Horites in Mt Seir, as far south as the Gulf of Elat. They then turned northwest to Kadesh-barnea and from there northeast toward the Dead Sea. This seems to be the locality where they met resistance from the coalition of the kings of Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboiim, and Zoar ([Gn 14:2–9](#)) south of the Dead Sea.

Sidon (Person)

Canaan's firstborn son; Canaan was the son of Ham and grandson of Noah ([Gn 10:15, 19](#); [1 Chr 1:13](#)). Sidon founded a city (bearing his name) that set the

northern boundary of the land of Canaan and later played a dominant role in Palestinian history.

See also Sidon (Place), Sidonian.

Sidon (Place), Sidonian

A coastal city situated between Beirut and Tyre on the Phoenician coast, known as Zidon in the King James Version of the Bible.

Saida, the present town, is not a direct continuation of the ancient city. It is a development of post-Crusader times. The names Sidon and Sidonian appear 38 times in the Old Testament, and Sidon occurs 12 times in the New Testament.

The "table of nations" ([Genesis 10](#)) can date Byblos (Gebal, Jebeil), Tyre, and Sidon. It names Sidon as Canaan's firstborn son, and Canaan was a son of Ham. The territory of the Canaanites extended from Sidon to Gaza and east to the Cities of the Plain.

Sidon is 35.4 kilometers (22 miles) north of Tyre. They are often associated (for example, [Isaiah 23:1–2](#); [Jeremiah 47:4](#); [Matthew 11:21–22](#)). Both cities were very focused on trade and industry. Sidon was built on a headland that jutted into the sea toward the southwest. It had two harbors, the northern one having inner and outer ports. Sidon was also a center for the manufacture of the purple dye made from the Murex shellfish.

The Bible mentions Sidon several times in connection with the conquest of Palestine. Joshua defeated Jabin, king of Hazor, and pursued the enemy to "Great Sidon" ([Joshua 11:8](#)). Joshua also stated that the land of Israel included all of Lebanon, "even all the Sidonians" ([Joshua 13:4–6](#)). The tribal allotment of Asher extended as far north as "Sidon the Great" ([Joshua 19:28](#)). But Asher did not drive out the inhabitants of Sidon ([Judges 1:31](#)).

The gods of Sidon are among the foreign deities that Israel served ([Judges 10:6](#)); David's census included Sidon and Tyre ([2 Samuel 24:6–7](#)). During a famine in Ahab's time, the prophet Elijah was sent to a widow's home in Zarephath (Sarepta) in Sidon ([1 Kings 17:9](#); [Luke 4:25–26](#)). Sidon is referred to often by the Hebrew prophets ([Isaiah 23:2, 4, 12](#); [Jeremiah 25:22](#); [27:3](#); [47:4](#); [Ezekiel 27:8](#); [Joel 3:4](#); [Zechariah 9:2](#)).

In the New Testament, Jesus healed the daughter of a woman of that area ([Matthew 15:21–28](#)). People

came from as far away as Tyre and Sidon to hear Jesus and to be healed by him ([Luke 6:17](#)). On his voyage to Rome to appear before Caesar, the ship stopped first at Sidon. There, the centurion, Julius, allowed Paul to visit friends ashore ([Acts 27:3](#)).

Siege

See Warfare.

Sign

Word connoting a visible event intended to convey meaning beyond that which is normally perceived in the outward appearance of the event.

In the Old Testament

In a few instances in the OT, “sign” refers to the observances of heavenly bodies in an astrological sense ([Gn 1:14](#); [Jer 10:2](#)), or to the “signs and wonders” as marks of the miraculous actions of God within the history of the world ([Dt 4:34](#); [6:22](#); [Neh 9:10](#); [Ps 105:27](#); [Jer 32:20](#)). On other occasions, it is used as an insignia of the Mosaic covenant. Thus, the wearing of the law on the wrist and forehead and the keeping of the Sabbath are considered signs of the relationship between Israel and God ([Dt 6:8](#); [11:18](#); [Ez 20:12, 20](#)).

The most numerous and significant usages of “sign” appear in relation to the OT prophetic ministry. Beginning with Moses, signs are used to confirm that God has spoken to the prophet. Thus, when Moses received the message of deliverance that he was to bring to the children of Israel in Egypt and the pharaoh, he was given two signs: his staff was changed into a serpent and his hand was afflicted with leprosy ([Ex 4:1-8](#)).

Signs and wonders were also used by false prophets. After a sign had been given and had come to pass, the leaders of Israel were to examine the message of the prophet to see if it led the people away from the true worship of God. If it did, the prophet who had given the sign was to be put to death ([Dt 13:1-5](#)).

The character of the sign varies and often is miraculous. Some of the great miracles of the OT are prophetic signs—for example, the moving of the shadow back up the steps of Hezekiah’s palace to confirm Isaiah’s prediction that the king would recover from what was a mortal illness ([2 Kgs](#)

[20:8-9](#); [Is 38:21-22](#)). Often the sign is predictive only, and the people can know whether the prophet has spoken the truth by whether or not the event comes to pass—for example, the prophet’s foretelling the death of both of Eli’s sons on the same day ([1 Sm 2:34](#); see also [14:10](#); [2 Kgs 19:29](#); [Is 37:30](#)). Sometimes the sign was carefully timed, and the recipient was told that the appearance of the sign would show when to act to fulfill the prophetic message ([1 Sm 10:7-9](#)). At other times, the events predicted were acted out in the life of the prophet. These symbolic actions demonstrated the truth of the prophet’s message—for example, Isaiah’s nakedness for three years to demonstrate the fate of those who preached trust in Egypt’s power ([Is 20:3](#); see also [Ez 4:3](#)).

In the New Testament

The NT occurrences are much like those in the OT. There are references to heavenly signs that will occur as indications of the end of time, and those with special knowledge will understand that the end is drawing near ([Mt 24:3, 30](#); [Mk 13:4, 22](#); [Lk 21:11, 25-26](#)). These apocalyptic signs have no astrological connotations as in the OT. There is also mention of the sign as the seal of the covenant between God and Israel in reference to circumcision in [Romans 4:11](#).

As in the OT, the NT uses of signs are confirmations of the message given by God, and this message comes through the apostolic community to the church. Thus, there is great emphasis on the way God confirms the message of the apostles through their ability to perform signs and wonders ([Acts 2:43](#); [4:30](#); [5:12](#); [8:13](#); [14:3](#); [Rom 15:19](#); [Heb 2:4](#)).

In Matthew, Mark, and Luke, Jesus’ miracles are not called signs. Only in [Acts 2:22](#) does Peter proclaim that Jesus’ message was attested by signs he performed. Rather, Jesus’ miracles are seen as acts of divine power and mercy. When the Jews ask for a sign, they are consistently refused, with the promise that the only sign they will receive is the sign of Jonah ([Mt 12:38-39](#); [16:1](#); [Mk 8:11-12](#); [Lk 11:19, 30](#)), a sign that refers to the death and resurrection of the Christ. As Jonah was in the belly of the whale for three days and three nights, so will the Son of Man be in the heart of the earth for three days ([Mt 12:40](#)).

In the Gospel of John, however, the miracles of Jesus are seen in a strikingly different light and are considered signs. Beginning with the changing of water into wine ([Jn 2:1-11](#)), the miracles are called signs and are intended to lead those who see them

to faith (v [23](#)). Jesus even laments that the people will not believe unless they see signs ([4:48](#)). John's purpose in writing his Gospel is to present the signs of Jesus so that those who come to faith may do so through seeing these signs ([20:30](#)). The signs in the Gospel are expressly chosen because they lend themselves to the development of true faith.

In the Gospel of John, the miracles of Jesus confirm the teaching of Jesus. In the synoptic Gospels, the miracles are seen as acts of mercy and divine power. In John they are carefully selected to demonstrate what Jesus has to tell the world about himself. In this respect, they are a bit like the symbolic actions of Isaiah and Ezekiel in that the action of the speaker dramatizes the message. After Jesus feeds the 5,000 with the five loaves of bread and the two fishes, he announces in the synagogue at Capernaum, "I am the bread of life which came down from heaven" ([Jn 6:51](#)). He tells them not to labor for the bread of this world that perishes. In much the same way, the healing of the man born blind is bound up with Jesus' teaching that he is the light of the world ([9:5](#)). The resurrection of Lazarus prepares the way for Jesus to proclaim that he is the resurrection and the life ([11:25](#)). In John's Gospel the signs are not only a demonstration of divine power but also a revelation of Jesus' divine character. In addition to confirming his divine message, they also proclaim his personhood and mission.

See also Miracle.

Signet

A small seal, often on a ring, used to make an official mark on documents or objects.

See Seal.

Sihon

King of the Amorites who ruled in Heshbon, about 14 miles (22.5 kilometers) east of the north end of the Dead Sea. His defeat by Israel under Moses, together with that of Og, king of Bashan, is frequently mentioned in OT prose and poetry, in narrative and song ([Dt 1:4](#); [2:26-37](#); [4:46](#); [29:7](#); [31:4](#); [Jos 2:10](#); [9:10](#); [12:2-6](#); [13:10-12](#)). In the eyes of the sacred writers, this dual defeat is so significant that it can be ranked with the exodus as one of the singular manifestations of God's saving intervention on behalf of his people ([Pss 135:11](#);

[136:19-20](#)), and as evidence of his everlasting love for them. In the postexilic period this event is recalled in prayer as a pleading ground for God's continuing mercy to the returned exiles ([Neh 9:22](#)).

Before Israel's arrival in Transjordan, Sihon had conquered Moab's territory as far south as the Arnon River ([Nm 21:26](#)). This conquest gives rise to a piece of ancient poetry that is incorporated into sacred Scripture (vv [27-30](#)). Sihon's realm extends from the Arnon on the south to the Jabbok on the north, with the Jordan as its western boundary. It also includes the Jordan Valley as far as the Sea of Kinnereth ([Jos 12:2-3](#)), comprising part of the region known as Gilead. On the east it extends toward the desert and touches on Ammonite land.

Sihon's refusal to grant Israel passage through his domain is similar to that of Edom (cf. [Nm 21:23](#) with [20:20](#)). However, Sihon exhibits overt hostility toward Israel. Sihon was defeated and killed at Jahaz; his country was occupied by Israel. Subsequently, it was distributed to the tribes of Gad and Reuben (cf. [Nm 32:33-38](#); [Jos 13:10](#)).

Sihor

KJV form of Shihor, a body of water in northeast Egypt, in [Joshua 13:3](#), [Isaiah 23:3](#), and [Jeremiah 2:18](#) (nlt mg). *See* Shihor.

Sikkuth

Another way of spelling the name Sakkuth.

See Sakkuth.

Silas

Respected leader in the Jerusalem church, also called Silvanus ([2 Cor 1:19](#); [1 Thes 1:1](#); [2 Thes 1:1](#); [1 Pt 5:12](#)). "Silas" is most likely the Aramaic form of the Hebrew name "Saul," which when given a Latin form became *Silouanos* (Silvanus). Silas thus carried two names—a Latin and a shorter, Semitic name. The name was known in the Hellenistic era and appears in various inscriptions. Luke used the name Silas when he narrated the history of the Jerusalem church in Acts. Paul and Peter used the Roman name in their epistles.

Silas is introduced in [Acts 15:22](#) as a distinguished delegate who conveyed to Antioch the decree of the Jerusalem Council. Several manuscripts (of lesser quality than the best-attested ones) include [15:34](#); this added verse indicates that Silas remained in Antioch because shortly thereafter he joined Paul on his second missionary tour ([Acts 15:40](#)). His service as a prophet may be evident in [Acts 16:6](#), when the Spirit redirected the company through Asia. Silas's name appears eight times within the second tour ([Acts 16:19, 25, 29; 17:4, 10, 14–15; 18:5](#)), as he accompanied Paul through the hardships suffered at Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea. When Paul was safely ushered out of Macedonia by the Berean Christians ([17:14](#)), Silas remained behind with Timothy to oversee the work already begun in the region. Later in Corinth ([18:5](#)), Silas and Timothy rejoined Paul. Their report prompted Paul to correspond with the church at Thessalonica. This explains Silas's name in the prescript of both 1 and 2 Thessalonians.

It seems clear that Silas was well known to the Corinthians. Not only does he stay in the city with Paul for a year and a half ([Acts 18:11](#)), but it may be conjectured that he stayed behind in Corinth after the dispute before Gallio. Paul, on his final tour, wrote to Corinth from Ephesus and mentioned Silas again ([2 Cor 1:19](#)), reminding the Corinthians of the earlier ministry among them.

The subsequent history of Silas is obscure. Some believe Silas was a respected Christian scribe. Silas's involvement in 1 and 2 Thessalonians is often mentioned, pointing to Paul's sustained use of the first person plural. Some scholars find resemblances among 1 and 2 Thessalonians, the decree of [Acts 15](#), and 1 Peter, where Silas is mentioned as a scribe ([1 Pt 5:12](#)). This latter association with Peter is intriguing and has led to the speculation that Silas ultimately joined Peter and ministered in north Asia.

Silk

Fine, delicate thread extracted from the cocoon of the silkworm. Originating in China, silk may have been introduced into Palestine as early as Solomon's reign (970–930 BC), or perhaps not until the conquests of Alexander the Great (336–323 BC). A fine silken fabric was apparently included in the fashionable attire of Jerusalem ([Ez 16:10–13](#)). [Revelation 18:12](#) lists silk as a valuable trade commodity of Babylon (Rome).

See also Cloth and Cloth Manufacturing.

Silla

Geographical landmark defining the whereabouts of “the house of Millo,” the place of King Joash's murder ([2 Kgs 12:20](#)). Its exact location is unknown, though it was probably in the vicinity of Jerusalem.

Siloah

KJV rendering of Shelah, an alternate name for the pool of Siloam, in [Nehemiah 3:15](#). *See* Siloam, Pool of.

Siloam Inscription

A Hebrew inscription in the Siloam tunnel, which is also called Hezekiah's tunnel. It marked the progress of the tunnel as it was being built.

See Siloam, Pool of.

Siloam Tunnel

A tunnel built by Hezekiah at the time of the Assyrian invasion. It was used to bring water into Jerusalem. It is also known as Hezekiah's tunnel ([2 Kings 20:20; 2 Chronicles 32:2–4](#)).

See Siloam, Pool of.

Siloam, Pool of

A pool that is mentioned in [John 9](#). In this story, Jesus healed a blind man by putting clay on his eyes and telling him to wash in the pool. When the man washed in the pool, he could see.

The pool was at the end of a long underground tunnel called Hezekiah's Tunnel. King Hezekiah had this tunnel built around 700 BC when the Assyrian army threatened Jerusalem. The tunnel is S-shaped and is described in [2 Kings 20:20](#) and [2 Chronicles 32:2–4](#).

Archaeologists found writing on the tunnel wall. It was in ancient Hebrew and told how two groups of workers dug the tunnel. They started at opposite ends and met in the middle. This writing, called an

inscription, is now in a museum in Istanbul, Turkey. It says:

"When the tunnel was driven through... each man toward his fellow, and while there were still three cubits to be cut through—the voice of a man calling to his fellow... And when the tunnel was driven through, the quarrymen hewed, each toward his fellow, axe against axe; and the water flowed from the spring toward the reservoir for 1200 cubits, and the height of the rock above the heads of the quarrymen was 100 cubits." A cubit was about 18 inches or 45 centimeters.

The pool had an important purpose. It brought water inside the city walls so people in Jerusalem could get water even if enemies attacked the city. The water came from a spring called Gihon Spring (also called the King's Pool in [Nehemiah 2:14](#) and the pool of Shelah in [3:15](#)). This spring was the only natural source of water in Jerusalem. The water flowed through the tunnel to the pool, then through part of the city where people could use it. After that, it flowed down a valley and eventually to the Dead Sea. The pool of Siloam and its rugged terrain explains why Jerusalem has always been a strong city.

Today, the pool of Siloam is outside the old city of Jerusalem. It is about 50 feet (15.2 meters) long and 5 feet (1.5 meters) wide. You have to go down 16 steps from the street to get to it.

Long ago, there was a church built over the pool. It was called a Byzantine church because it was built during the Byzantine period of history. This church was destroyed in AD 614 when the Persians attacked Jerusalem.

See also Aqueduct.

Siloam, Tower of

A large building that collapsed, killing 18 people. Jesus compared those killed by the fallen tower to the rest of the people living in Jerusalem ([Luke 13:4–5](#)).

Nothing is known of this tower other than it was probably in Jerusalem. It might be the great tower built by Nehemiah on the wall of Ophel ([2 Chronicles 27:3](#); [Nehemiah 3:26–27](#)). It might also be one of the towers built on the wall of Jerusalem near the pool of Siloam.

See also Jerusalem.

Silvanus

Latin name for Silas, a companion of Paul and Peter ([2 Cor 1:19](#); [1 Thes 1:1](#); [2 Thes 1:1](#); [1 Pt 5:12](#)). *See* Silas.

Silver

See Coins; Minerals and Metals; Stones, Precious; Money; Banker, Banking.

Silversmith

A silversmith is a person who works with silver to make different objects. These skilled workers take raw silver ore, clean it to remove impurities, and then shape it into many useful items.

In the Bible, silversmiths produced musical instruments like trumpets ([Numbers 10:2](#)). They also made bases that supported the frame of the tabernacle ([Exodus 26:19–25](#)). They formed objects to use in the tabernacle and temple ([Numbers 7:13–85](#)).

Silversmiths fashioned ornaments for private use as well. Some also made religious statues for false worship ([Exodus 20:23](#); [Judges 17:4](#)). Demetrius was a silversmith at Ephesus. He made silver shrines for the goddess Artemis (also called Diana) ([Acts 19:24](#)). This profession was well known in New Testament times ([2 Timothy 2:20](#); [Revelation 9:20](#)).

Simeon (Person)

1. The second of the 12 sons of Jacob ([Genesis 35:23](#); [1 Chronicles 2:1](#)). He was the second son borne to him by Leah ([Genesis 29:33](#)). Simeon fathered six sons ([Exodus 6:15](#)). He settled his family in Egypt with Jacob and his brothers ([Exodus 1:2](#)). He was the founder of the Simeonites ([Numbers 26:12–14](#)). He also founded one of the 12 tribes of Israel ([Numbers 1:23](#)). He is remembered most for his revenge on the men of Shechem because of Dinah's rape ([Genesis 34:25](#)).
See also Simeon, Tribe of.
2. A pious Jew living in Jerusalem who was assured that he would not die before he saw the promised Messiah. The Holy Spirit led Simeon to the temple. There, he met Mary and Joseph. He held Jesus and prophesied about the Messiah's mission. ([Luke 2:25–35](#)).
3. An ancestor of Jesus in Luke's family list ([Luke 3:30](#)).
See Ancestry of Jesus Christ.
4. One of five prophets and teachers mentioned in [Acts 13:1](#) who was serving in the church of Antioch. Simeon was surnamed Niger and was perhaps from Africa. Symeon is a better reading of the Greek in this text.
5. A reference to Simon Peter in [Acts 15:14](#).
See Peter, The Apostle.

Simeon, Tribe of

One of the 12 tribes of Israel descended from Jacob's second son, Simeon. Because of Simeon's evil deed at Shechem, Jacob predicted that Simeon's descendants would be spread out among the other tribes of Israel ([Genesis 49:7](#)).

The Territory of the Tribe of Simeon

According to the book of Joshua, Simeon's inheritance was included in Judah's territory ([Joshua 19:1, 9](#)). [Judges 1:3](#) suggests a close relationship between the tribes of Simeon and Judah. The two tribes often worked together in their military campaigns during the conquest of Canaan. The Levitical towns, which were allocated to provide for the Levites, were also shared between Simeon and Judah ([Joshua 21:9–16](#)).

Their limited inheritance within Judah's borders continued when Simeon joined Judah when the kingdom of Israel split in two. Despite this, the Simeonites managed to maintain a distinct tribal identity for some time. This is evidenced by family lists preserved until the reign of Hezekiah, king of Judah ([1 Chronicles 4:24–42](#)).

During Hezekiah's reign, Simeonites expanded their territory by settling in the Arab areas of Seir ([1 Chronicles 4:24–43](#)). They may have also settled in the hill country of Ephraim ([2 Chronicles 15:9](#)). Although Simeon was Jacob's second-oldest son, the tribe of Simeon was never important. Unlike some other tribes, Simeon did not produce any notable judges, and it is conspicuously absent from the Song of Deborah (see [Judges 5](#)). According to [1 Chronicles 4:28–33](#), Simeon's tribe settled in the southernmost part of Canaan, a region known as the Negev. This area, although dry and rugged, was fertile enough in early summer due to yearly rainfall and persistent springs. The region became known as "the Negev of Judah," which serves to distinguish Simeon from non-Jews living in that area ([1 Samuel 27:10](#); [30:14](#); [2 Samuel 24:7](#)).

Intermarriage in the Tribe of Simeon

The family lists of Simeon reveal a lot of intermarriage with other Israelite tribes and with non-Israelites:

- Shaul, Simeon's son, was the son of a Canaanite woman ([Genesis 46:10](#); [Exodus 6:15](#)).
- Two of Simeon's sons share names with Ishmael's sons ([Genesis 25:13-14](#); [1 Chronicles 1:29-30](#); [4:25](#)).
- Jamin was a descendant of Ram ([Genesis 46:10](#); [Exodus 6:15](#); [1 Chronicles 2:27](#)).

The Tribe of Simeon in the New Testament

In the New Testament, the tribe of Simeon appears seventh in the list of the tribes who are sealed by God ([Revelation 7:7](#)).

Simeonite

A member of the tribe of Simeon ([Numbers 26:14](#); [Joshua 21:4](#)).

See Simeon (Person) #1; Simeon, Tribe of.

Simon

Greek form of a Hebrew and Aramaic name meaning "God has heard." Nine men in the New Testament had this name:

1. Son of Jona ([Matthew 16:17](#)) or John ([John 1:42](#)), Andrew's brother (verse [40](#)). He was given a second name directly by Jesus, who called him Cephas or Peter (both mean "rock," in Aramaic or Greek, verse [42](#)). A fisherman from Bethsaida ([Mark 1:16](#); [John 1:44](#)), Simon became an apostle of Jesus and author of two New Testament letters. See Peter, The Apostle.
2. Brother of Jesus, named with other brothers, James, Josés or Joseph, and Judas ([Matthew 13:55](#); [Mark 6:3](#)).
3. A leper who may have been cured by Jesus. Jesus and his disciples were eating at Simon's house in Bethany when a woman poured an alabaster flask of costly ointment on the Lord's head. The disciples objected against the waste of a luxury item that could have been sold to support the poor. But Jesus commended the act as a wonderful thing ([Matthew 26:6-13](#); [Mark 14:3-9](#)). From [John 12:1-8](#) it seems that Simon's house was also where Mary, Martha, and Lazarus lived. Their relationship to Simon is not specified.
4. A man from Cyrene, a district of North Africa. The Romans forced Simon to carry Jesus's cross ([Matthew 27:32](#); [Mark 15:21](#); [Luke 23:26](#)). He was the father of Alexander and Rufus ([Mark 15:21](#); compare [Romans 16:13](#)).
5. An apostle of Jesus who was called a Zealot ([Luke 6:15](#)). This Simon was possibly connected with political extremists who opposed Roman occupation. Or he might have been part of a number of Jewish groups noted for their zeal for the law. In [Matthew 10:4](#) and [Mark 3:18](#) he is designated the "Cananaean" (Revised Standard Version). This name is connected to the Aramaic word for "zealot." He is mentioned again in [Acts 1:13](#) as one of the 11 apostles in Jerusalem after Jesus's ascension. Otherwise, the New Testament is silent about him.

6. A pharisee whose treatment of Jesus prompted the parable of the two debtors ([Luke 7:36-50](#)). Simon invited Jesus to eat at his house but did not offer the common customs of welcome for guests. Simon disapproved of Jesus's acceptance of a "sinner" woman who interrupted the dinner. She wet Jesus's feet with her tears, dried them with her hair, and anointed them with ointment from an alabaster flask. Jesus's parable showed the woman's act of loving and repentant faith in contrast to Simon's unloving and self-righteous skepticism.
7. The father of Judas Iscariot, the disciple who betrayed Jesus in Gethsemane ([John 6:71](#); [13:2, 26](#)).
8. A magician (often called Simon Magus) from Samaria. Impressed by the signs and miracles performed by Philip, Simon Magus joined the crowd of baptized believers. He offered Peter and John money in exchange for the gift of the Holy Spirit. This request provoked Peter's rebuke ([Acts 8:9-24](#)). The old English word "simony" comes from this story. Simony refers to the sale or purchase of church positions or sacred things.
9. A tanner from Joppa. A tanner is someone who treats animal skins and hides to produce leather. Peter stayed at his house for many days ([Acts 9:43](#); [10:6, 17, 32](#)). On Simon's roof, Peter had the vision of a great sheet let down from heaven, containing animals and birds banned as food in Jewish law ([10:15](#)). Peter later recognized this vision as a preparation for preaching the gospel to the gentiles (verses [28-29](#)).

Simon Maccabeus

The second son of Mattathias was successor to his brother Jonathan. In 142 BC Simon (d. 135 BC)

negotiated a treaty with Syria by supporting Demetrius II against the plunderer Trypho. Under this treaty, Judea was recognized as politically independent. The Syrians were finally driven from the citadel at Jerusalem and "the yoke of the Gentiles was removed from Israel" ([1 Macc 13:41](#)). In 141 BC "the Jews and their priests decided that Simon should be their leader and high priest forever until a trustworthy prophet should arise" ([14:41](#)). These two offices were made hereditary in the Hasmonean family. Simon Maccabeus is considered perhaps the best leader of Israel in the postexilic period. Antiochus VII invaded Israel in 133 BC and was defeated by Simon's sons, Judas and John, at Modin. This was the single interruption in six years of prosperous rule. Simon and his sons were assassinated by his son-in-law and chief rival for power, Ptolemy son of Abub. John Hyrcanus (d. 104 BC), Simon's youngest son, escaped and succeeded to his father's position before Ptolemy could reach Jerusalem. John ruled from 134 to 104 BC.

Simon Magus

Simon Magus was a magician (someone who used magic) in the book of Acts ([Acts 8:9](#)).

See Simon #8.

Simon Magus

A sorcerer from Samaria who appeared to convert to Christianity after hearing Philip preach ([Acts 8:9-24](#)).

See Simon #8.

Simon of Cyrene

The man who was ordered to carry Jesus' cross on the road to Golgotha ([Matthew 27:32](#)).

See Simon #4.

Simon Peter

See Peter, The Apostle.

Simon the Canaanite

The King James Version translation for Simon the Zealot in [Matthew 10:4](#); [Mark 3:18](#). See Simon #5.

Simon the Cananaean

The Revised Standard Version translation for Simon the Zealot in [Matthew 10:4](#); [Mark 3:18](#). See Simon #5.

Simon the Zealot

One of Jesus's disciples ([Matthew 10:4](#); [Mark 3:18](#); [Luke 6:15](#); [Acts 1:13](#)). See Simon #5.

Simon Zelotes

The King James Version spelling for Simon the Zealot in [Luke 6:15](#); [Acts 1:13](#).

See Simon #5.

Simri

KJV spelling of Shimri, Hosah's son, in [1 Chronicles 26:10](#). See Shimri #3.

Sin

Evildoing that is not only against humanity, society, others, or oneself, but against God. The concept of God, therefore, gives to the idea of sin its many-sided meaning. Other gods, conceived of as capricious and characterless, exercised unlimited power in unbridled behavior; they engendered no such sense of sin as did Israel's one God, holy, righteous, and utterly good. This religious conception of wrongdoing with the terminology it created persists into the NT.

Terminology

Israel's God sets the ideal, the standard for human behavior. The most frequent biblical words for sin speak of violating that standard in some fashion. The Hebrew word *hata'* and Greek *hamartia* meant originally "to miss the mark, fail in duty" ([Rom 3:23](#)). As Lawgiver, God sets limits to man's freedom; another frequent term (Hebrew, *'abar*;

Greek, *parabasis*) describes sin as "transgression," "overstepping set limits." Similar terms are *pesha'* (Hebrew), meaning "rebellion," "transgression"; *'asham* (Hebrew) denotes "trespassing God's kingly prerogative," "incurring guilt"; *paraptoma* (Greek) denotes "a false step out of the appointed way," "trespass on forbidden ground." "Iniquity" often translates *'aon* (Hebrew, meaning "perverseness," "wrongness"), for which the nearest NT equivalent is *anomia* (Greek, "lawlessness") or *paranomia* (Greek, "lawbreaking").

In the Old Testament

Genesis traces sin to deliberate misuse of God-given freedom in disobedience of a single limiting prohibition. Ezekiel insists eloquently upon individual responsibility against traditional theories of corporate guilt ([Ez 18](#)). Following Jeremiah, he urges the need for a cleansed, renewed inner life if outward behavior is to be reformed; the divine law must become a motivating force within a person if sin is to be overcome ([Jer 31:29-34](#); [Ez 36:24-29](#)).

[Psalm 51](#) offers a keen analysis of the inner meaning of sin. By affirming "in sin did my mother conceive me," the psalmist confessed that his life had been sinful from the first. His whole personality needed "purging"; he was defiled. Ritual sacrifices offer no solution. Only a broken, contrite heart can prepare a sinner for God's cleansing. The only hope, the sole ground of appeal, lies in God's steadfast love and abundant mercy. In spite of its rigorous view of sin, the OT also contains gracious assurance of forgiveness ([Ps 103:8-14](#) [Is 1:18](#); [55:6-7](#)).

In Jesus' Teachings

Jesus' teachings on the subject of sin took up the gracious offer of divine forgiveness and renewal, not only proclaiming with authority, "Your sins are forgiven," but showing many acts of compassion and social recognition that he came to be the friend of sinners, calling them to repentance, restoring their hope and dignity ([Mt 9:1-13](#); [11:19](#); [Lk 15:19:1-10](#)).

Jesus said little about the origin of sin, except to trace it to the human heart and will ([Mt 6:22-23](#); [7:17-19](#); [18:7](#); [Mk 7:20-23](#)), but he significantly redefined sin's scope. Where the law could assess only people's actions, Jesus showed that anger, contempt, lust, hardness of heart, and deceitfulness are also sinful. He also spoke of sins of neglect, good

left undone, the barren tree, the unused talent, the priest ignoring the injured, and the love never shown ([Mt 25:41-46](#)). He especially condemns sins against love—unbrotherliness, implacable hostility, selfishness, insensitivity ([Lk 12:16-21; 16:19-31](#)). And he condemned self-righteousness and spiritual blindness ([Mt 23:16-26; Mk 3:22-30](#)). Jesus spoke of sin as sickness ([Mk 2:17](#)) and sometimes as folly ([Lk 12:20](#)). Nevertheless, Jesus declared that fallen humans can be cured with God's help ([7:36-50](#)).

In John's Writings

John's Gospel assumes sinful humanity's need, the sacrifice of Christ the Lamb to bear away the sin of the world, and the offer of light and life in Christ. The new note is an emphasis on sin that refuses to accept the salvation provided in Christ, by the love of God for the world—the refusal to believe. It is for loving darkness, rejecting light, and refusing to accept Christ the Savior that humans are judged already ([1 Jn 3:16-21](#)).

Against Gnosticism's claim that for advanced Christians sin does not matter, 1 John affirms 15 reasons why sin cannot be tolerated in the Christian life and emphasizes again that sin is both ignorance of the truth and lack of love ([1 Jn 3:3-10](#)). Yet God forgives those who confess their sins, while Christ atones for their sins and intercedes for them ([1:7-2:2](#)).

In Paul's Writings

Paul argued strongly, from observation and from Scripture, that all have sinned ([Rom 1-3](#)). To him, sin is a force, a power, a "law" ruling within people ([Rom 5:21; 7:23; 8:2; 1 Cor 15:56](#)), producing all kinds of evil behavior—the hardening of the conscience ([Rom 7:21-24](#)), alienation from God, and subjection to death ([Rom 5:10; 6:23; Eph 2:1-5, 12; Col 1:21](#)). Humans are helpless to reform themselves ([Rom 7:24](#)). Paul's explanation of this desperate, universal condition is variously interpreted. Some readers think that [Romans 5:12-21](#) says that Adam's sin is the source of all sin; others, that it is the "similitude" (kjv) of all sin. In any event, Paul essentially said that "every man is his own Adam," which means that each person is fully responsible for his or her sinful condition, even if the sinful nature was inherited from Adam.

The solution to sin, for Paul, lies in the believer's death with Christ—death to sin, self, the world. Concurrently, the new life of the invasive, effusive Spirit transforms one's life from within, making

each person a new creation by sanctifying the personality into the likeness of Christ ([Rom 3:21-26; 5:6-9; 6; 8:1-4, 28-29; 2 Cor 5:14-21](#)).

See also Flesh; Justification, Justified; Sanctification; Sin unto Death; Unpardonable Sin, The.

Sin (Place)

Sin is the Hebrew name for the Egyptian city of Pelusium. This city is mentioned in [Ezekiel 30:15-16](#).

See Pelusium.

Sin Desert

See Sin, Wilderness of.

Sin Offering

See Offerings and Sacrifices.

Sin unto Death

Sin mentioned in [1 John 5:16](#); in this verse John discourages prayer for those who sin in this way. Most likely, John was speaking of those who decisively turn their backs upon the truth, as well as those false teachers who deceive the church ([Heb 6:4-6; 2 Jn 1:7-9](#)).

See also Blasphemy; Sin.

Sin, Man of

KJV rendering of an inferior textual variant in the Textus Receptus in [2 Thessalonians 2:3](#). The correct reading is "man of lawlessness," an expression used by Paul of the Antichrist. *See* Antichrist.

Sina, Sinai

The mountain where God met Moses and gave him the Ten Commandments and the rest of the law. The name "Sinai" refers to:

- the mountain itself,
- the desert around it ([Leviticus 7:38](#)), and
- the entire Sinai Peninsula, between the two arms of the Red Sea—the Gulf of Suez and the Gulf of Aqaba (or Elath).

The name Sinai is probably related to the wilderness of Sin, and may be an alternate spelling (compare [Exodus 16:1](#); [17:1](#); [Numbers 33:11–12](#)). Sin was the name of an ancient moon god that people living in the desert worshiped. The mountain is also called Horeb, mostly in Deuteronomy (see also [1 Kings 8:9](#); [19:8](#); [2 Chronicles 5:10](#); [Psalm 106:19](#); [Malachi 4:4](#)).

The traditional location of Mount Sinai is among the mountains at the southern end of the Sinai Peninsula. Since the 4th century, Christians have honored Jebel Musa (which means "Mount Moses" in Arabic) as the place where God formed the families of Jacob into the nation of Israel. At the base of this 2,286-meter (7,500-foot) peak is St. Catherine's Monastery. It is a Greek Orthodox monastery that has remained there for over 1,500 years. Other possible sites for Mount Sinai include the nearby Jebel Katerina (which is 2,642.6 meters or 8,670 feet high) and Jebel Serbal (which is 2,072.6 meters or 6,800 feet high). Some scholars suggest a northern location near Kadesh-barnea. Others argue for a volcanic mountain across the gulf to the east in ancient Midian or Arabia ([Exodus 3:1](#); [Galatians 4:25](#)).

Most references to Sinai appear in the books of Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers. Sinai is referenced 13 times in Exodus, 5 times in Leviticus, and 12 times in Numbers. These books describe the giving of the law and the two-year camp of the Israelites on the plains next to the mountain. [Exodus 19](#) and [34](#) are especially full of references because these chapters describe the meetings between Moses and God (Yahweh) when the law was given.

In both the Old Testament and the New Testament, Sinai represents the place where God came down to meet his people. Sinai was remembered as the location of that important meeting in:

- the blessing of Moses ([Deuteronomy 33:2](#)),
- the song of Deborah ([Judges 5:5](#)),
- [Psalm 68](#) (verses [8](#), [17](#)),
- the confession of the Levites in the time of Nehemiah ([Nehemiah 9:13](#)), and
- the speech of Stephen ([Acts 7:30, 38](#)).

In [Galatians 4:21–26](#), the apostle Paul explains an allegory in which Mount Sinai represents the old covenant, slavery, and the present city of Jerusalem.

See Paran; Shur; Sin, Wilderness of; Commandments, The Ten; Wilderness Wanderings; Zin, Wilderness of.

Singer

The professional singer was important in temple worship. David first organized singers for worship in the tabernacle ([1 Chr 9:33](#); [15:16, 19, 27](#)). Later, they ministered in Solomon's temple ([2 Chr 5:12–13](#)) and for other kings ([20:21](#); [23:13](#); [35:15](#)). After the exile, the singers were again active ([Ezr 2:41, 70](#); [Neh 7:1, 44, 73](#); [10:28, 39](#)). They sang psalms for temple worship ([Pss 68:25](#); [87:7](#)). Some were appointed "chief singers" ([Hb 3:19](#)). The sons of Asaph were prominent among them.

See also Music.

Sinite

Canaanite tribe, possibly located in northern Lebanon, whose ancestry is traced to Canaan, Ham's son ([Gn 10:17](#); [1 Chr 1:15](#)).

Sinlessness of Christ

The Bible teaches that Jesus Christ never sinned. He is perfect in every way as God's Son. His human nature was completely holy. His human nature is holy, without any sin.

What Does the Bible Teach About the Sinlessness of Christ?

The Bible clearly states that Jesus was without sin. Paul states that Christ “knew no sin” ([2 Corinthians 5:21](#)). Peter says “He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in His mouth” ([1 Peter 2:22](#)). He calls him “righteous” ([3:18](#)).

The writer to the Hebrews says that Christ is “holy, innocent, undefiled, set apart from sinners” ([Hebrews 7:26](#)). James speaks of him as “the righteous” ([James 5:6](#)). John says that “in Him there is no sin” ([1 John 3:5](#)). In the Gospels and in the preaching of the apostles, Jesus is repeatedly witnessed to as the Holy Son of God, the Holy One of God, the Holy and Righteous One ([Luke 1:35](#); [John 6:69](#); [Acts 3:14](#)).

Jesus himself asked his opponents, “Which of you can prove Me guilty of sin?” ([John 8:46](#)). Throughout his life, Jesus lived with the full knowledge that he was holy and without sin. Many references and inferences are made stating that he is without sin. He kept the entire law in every detail and in each respect ([Romans 10:4](#); [Hebrews 4:15](#)). Pilate’s wife regarded Jesus as a righteous man ([Matthew 27:19](#)). Pilate himself spoke of him as an innocent man ([Matthew 27:24](#)). Even Judas realized that he himself had sinned by “betraying innocent blood” ([Matthew 27:4](#)).

What Does It Mean for Christ to Be Sinless?

Christ's sinlessness means more than just the fact that he never sinned. There is also an important question about whether Jesus could have sinned at all. Was it possible for Jesus to sin? This question is known as the impeccability of Christ, which means Christ was unable to sin. The opposite view is peccability. This teaching says that Jesus could have sinned, even though he chose not to. Both views raise important questions:

- If Jesus could not sin, how could he truly be tempted? The Bible tells us about many times when Jesus faced temptation.
- If Jesus could have sinned (even though he did not), would this mean God could sin? This is a problem because Jesus is fully God's Son.

Some people say Jesus could have sinned as a human but not as God. This is wrong because Jesus's human and divine natures cannot be

separated. Jesus cannot act as only human or only God. He is always both at the same time. This was part of the error of the ancient Nestorian heretics. Everything Jesus does, he does as both fully God and fully human.

Being tempted and being unable to sin can both be true at the same time. This is hard for us to understand because we are sinners and know what it is like to do wrong. Jesus's experience was unique. His temptations in the wilderness and throughout his life were real, even though it was impossible for him to actually sin ([Luke 22:28, 39–46](#)).

Here is an example to help explain this: Think of a fortress that cannot be captured as long as its defenses stay strong. Even though the fortress cannot be defeated, enemies can still attack it fiercely. In a similar way, Jesus faced real temptations but could not be defeated by them because he is God's Holy Son."

His temptations were real. Therefore, “we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who was tempted in every way that we are, yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need” ([Hebrews 4:15–16](#)).

Sion

1. KJV designation for Mt Hermon in [Deuteronomy 4:48](#). See Hermon, Mount.
2. KJV form of Zion in [Psalm 65:1](#) and in the NT. See Zion.

Siphmoth

Town in southern Judah to which David gave part of the spoils of his victory over the Amalekites because its residents had aided him in his flight from Saul ([1 Sm 30:28](#)).

Sippai

Alternate form of Saph, a descendant of the giants, in [1 Chronicles 20:4](#) (nlt mg). See Saph.

Sirah

A well or cistern where Joab's messengers stopped Abner as he was returning from pledging his loyalty to David in Hebron ([2 Samuel 3:26](#)). This place is probably the same as the modern 'Ain Sarah. It is located about 2.4 kilometers (one and a half miles) northwest of Hebron.

Sirion

Sidonian name for Mt Hermon ([Dt 3:9](#); [4:48](#); [Ps 29:6](#); [Jer 18:14](#)). *See* Hermon, Mount.

Sisamai

KJV form of Sismai. *See* Sismai.

Sisera

1. Commander of the army of Jabin, king of Canaan. Sisera resided in Harosheth-haggoyim, from where he attacked northern Israel for 20 years. His army, strengthened by 900 iron chariots, was routed at the swollen river of Kishon near Megiddo under the leadership of Barak and Deborah. Having fled the battlefield, Sisera was killed by the hand of Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, in the hill country overlooking the Jordan Valley ([Jgs 4](#); [1 Sm 12:9](#)). The events of this battle were remembered in the Song of Deborah ([Jgs 5:19-30](#)) and [Psalm 83:9](#).

See also Judges, Book of.

2. Forefather of a family of temple servants who returned with Zerubbabel to Palestine following the Babylonian captivity ([Ezr 2:53](#); [Neh 7:55](#)).

Sismai

Eleasah's son and the father of Shallum; a Judahite from the house of Hezron and Jerahmeel's line ([1 Chr 2:40](#)).

Sister

See Family Life and Relations.

Sistrum

An ancient percussion instrument. A sistrum had a thin metal frame with many metal rods or loops that made jingling sounds when shaken. In [2 Samuel 6:5](#), this instrument is translated as "castanets" in the New Living Translation.

See Musical Instruments (Mena anim; Shalishim).

Sithri

A Kohathite Levite and Uzziel's third son. Sithri was the cousin of Aaron and Moses ([Exodus 6:22](#)).

Sitnah

A well dug by the servants of the patriarch Isaac in the region of Gerar. It received its name (meaning "enmity") from a dispute. This happened between the servants of Isaac and the herdsmen of the region. Its location might have been near Rehoboth ([Genesis 26:21-22](#); *see* New Living Translation marginal reading).

Sivan

Sivan is the name of a month in the Jewish calendar. The word likely came from the Babylonian language ([Esther 8:9](#)). This month usually occurs during parts of May and June in the modern calendar.

See Calendars, Ancient and Modern.

Six Hundred Sixty-Six

Number of the beast of the earth envisioned in the book of Revelation ([Rv 13:18](#)). *See* Antichrist; Mark of God, Mark of the Beast.

Skull Hill

See Skull, Place of the.

Skull, Place of the

The place in Jerusalem where Jesus was crucified ([Matthew 27:33](#); [Mark 15:22](#); [John 19:17](#)).

Golgotha is the Greek spelling of the Aramaic word for "skull." *See* Golgotha.

Slander

The utterance of false charges or accusations that defame another person's reputation; when directed toward God, such accusations are considered blasphemy. *See* Blasphemy.

Slave, Slavery

A slave was a person who was owned as property by another person. Slavery was the system that created this relationship between slave owners and slaves.

In ancient times, slavery was common throughout the Near East, though these societies did not depend on slavery for their economy. By the time of the Roman Empire, when the early Christians lived, slavery had become very widespread. One out of every two people was a slave.

How Did People Become Slaves?

From at least 3000 BC, most slaves were people who had been captured during wars ([Genesis 14:21](#); [Numbers 31:9](#); [Deuteronomy 20:14](#); [Judges 5:30](#); [1 Samuel 4:9](#); [2 Kings 5:2](#); [2 Chronicles 28:8](#)). These captives would become the property of those who captured them.

People could buy slaves locally from other slave owners. They could also buy them from foreign merchants who traveled around selling slaves, along with cloth, bronze items, and other goods ([Joel 3:4-8](#)). This is how Joseph's brothers sold him to traveling merchants (called Ishmaelites or Midianites), who then sold him to an Egyptian ([Genesis 37:36](#); [39:1](#)).

Debt was the main reason many families became slaves. If someone could not pay what they owed, their entire family could be forced to become slaves ([2 Kings 4:1](#); [Nehemiah 5:5-8](#)). Section 117 of the law code of Hammurabi (an ancient set of laws) said a family could not be kept as slaves for more than three years. The Hebrew law allowed slave owners to keep people for up to six years ([Deuteronomy 15:18](#)).

Some people chose to become slaves to escape extreme poverty and hunger ([Leviticus 25:47-48](#)).

This was called voluntary slavery and was common in ancient times.

It was a crime to kidnap and sell a person into slavery. The brothers of Joseph were guilty of this crime ([Genesis 37:27-28](#)). Both the law code of Hammurabi (Section 14) and the law of Moses (see [Exodus 21:11](#); [Deuteronomy 24:7](#)) said people who committed this crime should be put to death.

Life as a Slave

In Sumerian society (one of the earliest civilizations), slaves had certain rights. They could borrow money and do business. A slave usually cost less than a strong donkey, which meant slaves could sometimes save enough money to buy their freedom.

Most slaves worked hard on farms or in homes doing difficult daily tasks. However, some skilled slaves were given important jobs managing their owner's household.

The laws said slaves should be freed after a certain time, but owners did not always follow these rules. Under Hebrew law, a Hebrew person who became a slave by choice would be freed in the next jubilee year (a special year that came every 50 years). The law said that no Hebrew was supposed to remain a slave for their whole life ([Exodus 21:2](#); [Leviticus 25:10-13](#); [Deuteronomy 15:12-14](#)).

The Israelites created laws to protect slaves from cruel treatment by their owners or overseers. If an owner injured a slave permanently, the law required that the slave be set free ([Exodus 21:26-27](#)). Hebrew slaves were not common in Israelite households. When they did work in homes, they often worked in the fields alongside their owners. Many household slaves had better living conditions than the poorest free people, who often faced hunger and extreme poverty.

Slavery in Greek and Roman Times

During Greek and Roman times, the number of slaves grew very large. Household slaves (those who worked in people's homes) were usually treated better than other slaves. Many became trusted servants and close advisors to their owners. Some slaves were even allowed to start businesses, which brought money to both themselves and their owners.

Special Cases of Slavery

Ancient records from the cities of Ur and Nuzi, along with the book of Genesis, show that when a wife could not have children, her female slave might have children for her husband ([Genesis 16:2-4](#)). According to the law, a Hebrew master could agree to marry a young female slave. He could also have his own son marry her. Or he could make her his concubine (a woman who lived with a man but had fewer rights than a wife). If later he rejected her, or if he did not fulfill his agreement, she would be released from slavery ([Exodus 21:7-11](#)).

The government required conquered people to perform forced labor ([2 Samuel 12:31](#); [1 Kings 9:15, 21-23](#)). Even the Israelites themselves had to do forced labor in Lebanon ([1 Kings 5:13-18](#)). Some captured people, like the Midianites and Gibeonites, were made to work at the temple ([Numbers 31:28-30, 47](#); [Joshua 9:23-25](#)). This practice continued through the time of Kings David and Solomon ([Ezra 2:58](#); [8:20](#)). Foreign slaves helped repair the walls of Jerusalem ([Nehemiah 3:26, 31](#)).

Slavery in the New Testament

The New Testament indicates a shift in attitude toward slavery. The status of a slave became more like that of a servant. Slavery was becoming less common. Jesus and the apostles did not directly oppose slavery, but they gave instructions about it. They told slaves and servants to serve their masters faithfully. They also told masters to treat their slaves with kindness and fairness ([Ephesians 6:9](#); [Colossians 4:1](#); [1 Timothy 6:2](#); [Philemon 1:16](#)). Paul never preached against slavery. But, he wrote a letter to try and free one slave named Onesimus. This is why Paul wrote the letter to Philemon (see the discussion on this in Letter to Philemon).

See also Bond, Bondage; Liberty.

Slavonic Acts of Peter

This is an account of Peter's later travels and his death in Rome that has only survived in the Slavonic language. In this story, a child (later revealed to be Jesus) tells the apostle Peter to go to Rome. The angel Michael is the captain of the ship taking them there. After arriving, Peter asks the child to catch fish, and he catches 12,000 in one hour. The child is then sold to a Roman nobleman,

Aravistus, for 50 pieces of gold. The child amazes his teachers by silencing them.

Later, Aravistus and his entire household see angels and are baptized. Emperor Nero arrests Peter, but the child rebukes him. Many people who had died are brought back to life, but the child sends them back to their graves to wait for the final resurrection by Michael. Peter is nailed to a cross upside down. When the child reveals that he is Jesus, the nails fall from Peter's body. Before dying, Peter prays for God to forgive the people who killed him.

Stories like this one are examples of later apocryphal writings about early Christian leaders. These stories often include imaginary "acts" or adventures of the apostles and their encounters with Christ.

See also Apocrypha; Peter, the Apostle.

Sleep

The natural state of rest for the body and mind. In the Bible, sleep can mean three things:

1. physical rest
2. moral or spiritual inactivity
3. death

Sleep as Physical Rest

The sleep that the human body needs is seen as a precious gift of God ([Psalms 4:8](#); [127:2](#)). Sleep may be withheld, as God chooses and to serve his purposes ([Esther 6:1](#); [Daniel 6:18](#)). God may also, give people deep sleep ([Genesis 2:21](#); [15:12](#); [1 Samuel 26:12](#)). When a person is sleeping, God may make his will known in dreams or visions (for example, [Genesis 28:11-16](#); [Job 4:13-17](#); [Mt 1:20-24](#)).

The book of Proverbs warns against a lack of discipline of life shown in too much love of sleep. For example, one proverb says, "Do not love sleep, or you will grow poor; open your eyes, and you will have plenty of food." ([Proverbs 20:13](#); see also [6:9-11](#); [10:5](#); [24:32-34](#)).

Sleep as Moral or Spiritual Inactivity

In a symbolic way, sleep is used to mean laziness, carelessness, or inactivity. [Isaiah 56:10](#) speaks of those who failed in their responsibility as leaders of God's people: "They are dreamers lying around,

loving to slumber." In the New Testament, those who are the Lord's servants are called to be alert, so that when their Master comes he will not find them sleeping ([Mark 13:35-37](#); see also [Matthew 25:1-13](#); [26:40-46](#)). The challenge to be spiritually alert comes occurs in the New Testament letters:

- "Wake up, O sleeper, rise up from the dead, and Christ will shine on you." ([Ephesians 5:14](#)).
- "So then, let us not sleep as the others do, but let us remain awake and sober." ([1 Thessalonians 5:6](#)).

Sleep as Death

The Bible often speaks of death as sleep. Commonly in the Old Testament, when a person dies, he is said to go to sleep with his fathers (for example, [Deuteronomy 31:16](#); [2 Samuel 7:12](#)).

Jesus spoke of death as sleep ([Matthew 9:24](#); [John 11:11](#)). So did the apostle Paul ([1 Corinthians 11:30](#); [15:20, 51](#); [1 Thessalonians 4:13-14](#)). Some of these statements show that there is a temporary nature to death. This is why it is called sleep. Even [Daniel 12:2](#) says that death is a sleep, until the dead "awake, some to everlasting life, but others to shame and everlasting contempt."

Other passages in the New Testament are more specific. The full teaching of the Bible on the meaning of death should include the context [Luke 23:43](#), [2 Corinthians 5:8](#), and [Philippians 1:23](#), and [1 Thessalonians 5:13-14](#). In the first of these, Jesus says to the dying thief on the cross, "Today you will be with me in paradise." In the second, Paul speaks of death for him as going to be "at home with the Lord."

Slime

The King James Version term of "tar" in [Genesis 11:3](#) and [Exodus 2:3](#).

See Asphalt; Bitumen.

Slimepits

The King James Version translation of asphalt pits or bitumen pits found in the valley of Siddim ([Genesis 14:10](#)).

See Siddim Valley.

Sling, Slinger

Weapon of war used to fire stones or lead pellets, and the thrower. See Armor and Weapons.

Smith

Worker in metals; a blacksmith. The earliest metalworker mentioned in the Bible is Tubal-cain ([Gn 4:22](#)). The term covers metalworkers of all kinds: copper, bronze, iron, silver, and gold. Silversmiths are mentioned in [Judges 17:4](#) and [Acts 19:24](#). Ironsmiths were rare or even nonexistent in Israel up to the time of Samuel, and the Israelites had to go to the Philistine smiths to have their iron tools sharpened ([1 Sm 13:19](#)). In the days of the kings, Israelite smiths were active and were subsequently taken into captivity by Nebuchadnezzar ([2 Kgs 24:14-16](#); [Jer 24:1](#); [29:2](#)). Details of the work of the smith are given in several accounts ([Prv 25:4](#); [Is 44:12](#); [54:16](#)). The smiths mentioned in [Zechariah 1:20](#) are probably ironsmiths or blacksmiths.

See also Minerals and Metals; Stones, Precious.

Smyrna

Location of one of the seven churches mentioned in the book of Revelation ([Rv 1:11](#); [2:8-11](#)). It is the modern Izmir, located in Turkey.

Smyrna was inhabited at least 3,000 years before Christ. The Aeolian Greeks were replaced by the Ionians. The city, along with Miletus and Ephesus to the south, flourished under Ionian dominance. The city was conquered by the Lydians, whose capital was Sardis. The site was left in ruins for nearly three centuries until its refounding by Alexander the Great in 334 BC at a site farther south along the gulf. Although built by the energy of the Seleucids, the city recognized the coming dominance of Pergamum and entered into an alliance with its king. Later, with remarkable foresight, she transferred her allegiance to Rome, and in 195 BC built a temple in which Rome was worshiped as a deity. As a reward for Smyrna's early commitment to the rising Roman influence, the city prospered under Roman rule, partly as a rival to Pergamum and partly as a rival to the prosperous island of Rhodes. Because they had been an ally of the Romans, the people of Smyrna

thought it would be to their credit to build (in AD 26) a temple in which the Roman emperor would be honored. This city became the seat of the Caesar cult that afflicted the church so seriously during the latter half of the first century.

[Revelation 2:8](#) speaks of the city as being “dead and then alive,” a possible allusion to the period of 300 years when it lay devastated until revived by Alexander and the Macedonians. Ancient writers, including Appollonius and Aristides, spoke of Smyrna as having the “crown of life.” This was a way of describing the hilltop behind the city as if it crowned Smyrna on top, with its feet at the seashore. The promise of “the crown of life” to the Smyrnan believers probably plays off this image. This promise was given to those believers in Smyrna who would remain faithful through persecution. The reference to the “synagogue of Satan” ([Rv 2:9](#)) and to the devil putting them in prison (v [10](#)) reflects the tribulation probably experienced under the Roman emperor Domitian (c. AD 95). It became a crime punishable by death to refuse to worship the image of the Roman emperor as “lord.” Many Christians were compelled to choose between “Caesar as Lord” or “Jesus as Lord.” To choose Jesus was to choose martyrdom.

See also Revelation, Book of.

Snail

A snail is a small, soft animal that carries its shell like a house on its back. Snails belong to a group of soft-bodied animals called mollusks, which includes other sea creatures like clams and oysters. Many snails live in the lands where the Bible stories took place. Some water snails can spread a serious disease (bilharzia, also known as schistosomiasis) that makes people sick.

In ancient times, people valued purple cloth very highly. They made this special purple dye from a type of sea snail (*Murex trunculus* and *Murex brandaris*). The Phoenicians, Egyptians, and Assyrians learned how to make this dye around 1500 BC.

During the Roman Empire, special fishermen caught these snails. They could only catch them in fall and winter. In spring, when the snails laid eggs, they produced very little dye. In summer, the snails stayed hidden. These snails lived in the Mediterranean Sea, especially near Crete and the

Phoenician coast. The city of Tyre became famous for making the best purple dye, called Tyrian purple. They dipped cloth in the dye twice to make it especially rich in color. Today, we can still find huge piles of snail shells along the Mediterranean coast where people made this dye.

Snails in the Bible

The Israelites could not make purple dye themselves and had to buy purple goods from other people ([Ezekiel 27:16](#)). Lydia was a “seller of purple” or of cloth dyed purple ([Acts 16:14](#)). Purple was a sign of status, royalty, and wealth (compare [Exodus 25:4](#); [28:5–6](#); [15](#); [Numbers 15:38](#); [2 Chronicles 2:7](#); [Esther 8:15](#); [Proverbs 31:22](#); [Song of Solomon 3:10](#); [Ezekiel 27:7](#); [Daniel 5:7](#)).

[Exodus 30:34–35](#) refers to “onycha,” which was an important ingredient used to make incense. Onycha comes from a sea snail (a Near Eastern member of the molluscan family Strombidae). When the snail pulls into its shell, it uses a hard plate to close the opening, like a door. This plate is called onycha. The operculum helps the snail move and defend itself. When burned, onycha releases a strong scent. It is even more potent when mixed with other fragrant substances. The name comes from the Greek word “onyx,” which means “fingernail” or “claw.”

See also Animals; Dye, Dyeing, Dyer.

Snake

A snake is a type of reptile that crawls on its belly. There are many different kinds of snakes in the world. Scientists classify snakes as part of a group called Serpentes.

The Bible uses several different words for snakes in its original languages. In Hebrew, there are nine different words for snake. In Greek, there are four words. The most common Hebrew word for snake sounds like the noise a snake makes. It copies both the sound of a snake’s hiss and the sound of its scales moving across the ground (compare [Jeremiah 46:22](#)). Many types of snakes lay eggs ([Isaiah 59:5](#)). Some keep the eggs in their bodies until the eggs are ready to hatch.

Snakes live in most places around the world, except for Antarctica. More snakes live in warm areas near the equator, and fewer live in cold areas near the Earth’s poles. In Palestine, there are 33 different types of snakes. Twenty of these snakes are poisonous and dangerous to humans. The Bible

writers noticed two dangerous things about snakes. First, snakes can move without making much noise. Second, they can hide very easily.

How Snakes Move and Hunt

Snakes can swallow animals that are much bigger than their own mouth. They can do this because their jaws can stretch very wide. Snakes do not have legs or eyelids that can open and close. They regularly shed their old skin and grow new skin. A snake's tongue helps it understand what is happening around it. The tongue can feel movements in the air and can sense heat.

Some snakes are poisonous. These snakes have special teeth called fangs that can inject poison into a person or animal's blood. The poison is a clear liquid that causes harm inside the body.

There are two main types of snake poison:

- Viper snakes have poison that makes it hard to breathe and damages blood.
- Cobra snakes have poison that stops the body's nerves from working.

Snakes in the Bible and Ancient Religion

The Bible uses different names for snakes. When it mentions an "asp," it probably means a cobra. When it talks about an "adder" or a "cockatrice," it probably means a viper snake.

Serpents were associated with worship in Canaanite religion and symbolized evil gods among many other peoples. Archaeologists found steles (stone structures with inscriptions carved into them) in Palestine and Syria. These stones depict a god or worshiper with a snake wrapped around them. The Bible tells a story about Moses making a bronze snake ([Numbers 21:8-9](#)). Later, the Israelites started burning incense to worship this bronze snake instead of God. Because of this, King Hezekiah had the bronze snake destroyed as part of his work to restore proper worship of God ([2 Kings 18:4](#)).

While some religions honored and worshiped snakes, the Bible uses snakes as a symbol of evil and the devil. This connection begins with the story of the snake in the garden of Eden ([Genesis 3:1-15](#)). The Bible continues using this symbol of the snake as evil until its final book, Revelation ([Revelation 12:9](#); [20:2-3](#)).

See also Adder; Animals; Asp.

Snare

Literally, a trap used for entangling birds or others mammals; figuratively, anything that entangles or impedes another person. The word is often used in the Scriptures in the figurative sense to describe anything that ensnares people in sin (see [Dt 7:25](#); [Ecc 7:26](#)).

So

A king of Egypt, mentioned once in Scripture ([2 Kgs 17:4](#)), with whom Hoshea, king of Israel, sought an alliance. This rebellious move, in part, prompted Shalmaneser V of Assyria to imprison Hoshea ([2 Kgs 17:3-5](#)). It is difficult to identify So with any of the rulers of Egypt who are named in extrabiblical sources.

Soap

Cleansing agent extracted from a number of alkali-bearing plants. The alkali was gathered from the ashes of the burned plants and formed into a detergent. Saltwort, soapwort, and glasswort were alkali-bearing plants indigenous to western Asia and known to the ancient Hebrews. Soap was used primarily for cleansing purposes. In [Jeremiah 2:22](#) soap is used to clean the body, and in [Malachi 3:2](#), to wash clothes.

Socho

KJV form of Soco, Heber's descendant, in [1 Chronicles 4:18](#). *See* Soco (Person).

Sochoh

KJV form of Socoh, a town in Sharon, in [1 Kings 4:10](#). *See* Soco (Place), Socoh #3.

Soco (Person)

Son of Heber, listed in the genealogy of Caleb ([1 Chr 4:18](#)). Since the Calebites were located in the southern hill country of Judah, Soco may be

identified with the city in [Joshua 15:48](#). See Soco (Place), Socoh #2.

Soco (Place), Socoh

1. One of 14 cities located in the Shephelah, in the territory allotted to Judah's tribe; it is listed between Adullam and Azekah ([Jos 15:35](#)). Jerome, in his Latin translation of Eusebius's *Onomasticon* (157:18–20), states that there were two settlements, one on the mountain and another on the plain. The description fits exactly the situation at Khirbet esh-Shuweikeh, a Roman-Byzantine site on the southern edge of the vale of Elah; just beside it to the east is a lofty mound with heavy fortifications from the Israelite period, called Khirbet 'Abbad. Socoh guarded the junction between two wadis that join to form the vale of Elah, a passageway to the central hill country, to Bethlehem or Hebron, respectively. This situation provides the background for [1 Samuel 17:1](#), when David killed Goliath during Saul's reign over Israel; the Philistines lined up their troops beside Socoh and extended toward Azekah. The Israelites were on the opposite ridge with the creekbed of the vale of Elah in between.

Rehoboam included Socoh in his network of fortifications designed to place forces on the main lines of communication throughout his kingdom ([2 Chr 11:7](#)). The town apparently remained in Judah's hands from the tenth to the eighth century BC, at which time the Philistines, moving against King Ahaz, took it and several other key towns on the approach routes ([2 Chr 28:18](#)).

2. Town in the southernmost district of the Judean hill region ([Jos 15:48](#)). The reference to Soco in [1 Chronicles 4:18](#) in the genealogy of the sons of Caleb may refer to this same place. It is identifiable with another Khirbet Shuweikeh located about 10 miles (16 kilometers) southwest of Hebron.

3. Town in the Sharon Plain listed only once in the Bible ([1 Kgs 4:10](#)) but well known from nonbiblical sources. It appears three times in Egyptian records. First, in the topographical list of Thutmose III (no. 67), it comes after Aphek and before Yaham. The former is at Ras el 'Ain (Rosh Ha'Ayin) by the springs of the Yarkon River; the latter must be located at Khirbet Yamma on the eastern edge of the Sharon Plain. Next, Socoh is mentioned in similar geographical context in the Annals of Amenhotep II. Thus, it was a key town on the highway passing along the western edge of the

mountains of Samaria in the 15th century BC. Third, it comes in an identical position in the topographical list of Pharaoh Shishak (no. 38) from the late 10th century BC.

The town conquered by Shishak was that mentioned in [1 Kings 4:10](#) as being in Solomon's third administrative district, which was governed by Ben-hesed and comprised "the land of Hephher" and other subdistricts in the Sharon Plain.

All of these texts point to this Socoh as the ancient name of present-day Khirbet Shuweikeh er-Ras, just to the north of Tul-Karem. Between Aphek and Socoh there were no good water sources along the road, so these two towns mark the principal way stations in the southern Sharon Plain.

Sodi

The father of Gaddiel. Sodi was one of the 12 spies sent by Moses to explore the land of Canaan ([Numbers 13:10](#)).

Sodom and Gomorrah

Two of the "cities of the plain [valley]" mentioned in [Genesis 13:12](#). There were five cities located in the valley of Siddim:

1. Sodom
2. Gomorrah
3. Admah
4. Zeboiim
5. Bela or Zoar ([Genesis 14:2](#))

Sodom and Gomorrah in the Bible

The valley of Siddim is near the Salt Sea. Of these cities, Sodom is mentioned most often in Genesis. It is mentioned 36 times, with 16 of those references to Sodom alone. The Bible made Sodom a famous example of a wicked city. Its destruction ([Genesis 19:24](#)) was used as a warning of God's judgment in other biblical writings:

- [Deuteronomy 29:23](#)
- [Isaiah 1:9–10](#)
- [Jeremiah 23:14](#)
- [Jeremiah 49:18](#)
- [Lamentations 4:6](#)
- [Amos 4:11](#)
- [Zephaniah 2:9](#)

The story of Sodom's destruction is also referenced in the New Testament:

- [Matthew 10:15](#)
- [Luke 10:12](#)
- [Luke 17:29](#)
- [Romans 9:29](#)
- [2 Peter 2:6](#)
- [Jude 1:7](#)
- [Revelation 11:8](#)

What Happened to Sodom and Gomorrah?

The main story of Sodom and Gomorrah occurs in [Genesis 18](#) and [19](#). The biblical interest in the city begins in chapter [13](#). Lot, Abraham's nephew, decides to settle in the Jordan Valley, near Sodom, among people who were known to be great sinners. One of the worst sins of Sodom was sexual perversion, especially homosexuality. Lot's offer of his virgin daughters to the men of Sodom to protect his heavenly visitors shows the city's corrupting influence.

After Lot settled in Sodom, four Eastern kings attacked the region, including Sodom and Gomorrah, and took control. They returned 14 years later to stop a rebellion ([Genesis 14:1–5](#)). Lot was captured during this conflict but was later rescued by Abraham. The wickedness of Sodom and Gomorrah was so great that the Lord decided to destroy them. Abraham pleaded for mercy. He asked God to spare the cities if ten righteous men could be found ([Genesis 18:20–33](#)).

The two heavenly visitors who went from Abraham to Sodom found Lot sitting at the city gate ([Genesis 19:1](#)). They told Lot about God's plan and urged him, his wife, and his two daughters to escape the city. The Lord then rained brimstone and fire on Sodom and Gomorrah. The next morning, Abraham

saw smoke rising from the destroyed cities like the smoke of a furnace.

See also Cities of the Plain.

Sodom, Sea of

Alternate name for the Dead Sea. *See* Dead Sea.

Sodom, Vine of

See Plants (Gourd, Wild).

Sojourner

Sojourner is a person who lives for a time in a place that is not their home. In the Bible, a sojourner is a type of foreigner. A sojourner is a foreigner who lives in a place only for a limited time, not as a permanent resident.

See Foreigner.

Soldier

The individual member in every army, whether part of the infantry, cavalry, or group engaged in siege warfare. *See* Warfare.

Solomon (Person)

Third king over Israel, the second son of David and Bathsheba, who reigned 40 years (970–930 BC). His alternative name was Jedidiah, "beloved of the Lord."

Appointed to the Throne

Once Amnon and Absalom were no longer in competition for the throne, the two most likely remaining candidates were Solomon and Adonijah, although the kingship had been assured to the former ([1 Chr 22:9–10](#)). Near the end of David's life, Adonijah contested the choice of Solomon and took steps to become king. With the help of Joab, general of the army, and Abiathar the priest, he was proclaimed the monarch. Solomon was not invited and neither were Nathan the prophet or Benaiah. Nathan brought word of this plot to Bathsheba, who in turn quizzed David as to his intentions.

David then ordered Solomon to be proclaimed king over Israel; he was anointed by Zadok amidst the blowing of the trumpets and the shout of the people: “Long live King Solomon” ([1 Kgs 1:34](#)). Adonijah realized his claim had collapsed and asked for mercy, promising to be faithful to the new king.

Solomon moved swiftly to establish his hold on the government ([1 Kgs 1-2](#)). When Adonijah asked to marry Abishag, David’s companion in his old age ([1:1-4](#)), Solomon refused and ordered his death because of possible claims to the throne ([2:22-25](#)). In addition, because Abiathar had joined with Adonijah, he was removed from his service as priest and sent back to Anathoth. Joab fled to the altar and there took hold of its horns and refused to let go. The king ordered his death at the hand of Benaiah, who then became commander-in-chief of the armies. Another contender, Shimei, of the house of Saul, was also executed.

One of Solomon’s earliest recorded acts as king was to go to the high place at Gibeon and sacrifice 1,000 burnt offerings. On the following night, the Lord appeared to the king in a dream, asking as to his fondest wish. Solomon asked for wisdom to judge Israel, and God was pleased with the request ([1 Kgs 3](#)). Israel’s king was given his wish, along with the gifts of long life, riches, and fame.

Solomon’s Accomplishments

His Government

David’s efforts had brought about a union of the 12 tribes, but Solomon established an organized state with many officials to help him ([1 Kgs 4](#)). The entire country was divided into 12 major districts; each district was to ensure the provisions of the king’s court for one month each year. The system was equitable and designed to distribute the tax burden over the entire country.

His Buildings

One of Solomon’s earliest building attempts was to construct the temple. David had wanted to build the temple, but this task was left to Solomon, the man of peace. Hiram, king of Tyre, provided cedar trees from Mt Lebanon for the temple ([1 Kgs 5:1-12](#)), and in return he was given an appropriate amount of food. In order to provide the necessary labor for these building projects, the Canaanites became slaves ([9:20-21](#)). Israelites likewise were compelled to work in groups of 10,000, every third month ([5:13-18](#); [2 Chr 2:17-18](#)). The workers for

the temple alone comprised 80,000 stonecutters, 70,000 common laborers, and 3,600 foremen.

It took seven years to finish the temple, which by modern standards was a rather small building: 90 feet (27.4 meters) long, 30 feet (9.1 meters) wide, and 45 feet (13.7 meters) high. Nevertheless, the gold covering for both walls and furniture made it quite expensive.

In the 11th year of Solomon’s reign, the dedication of the temple was celebrated in a great convocation ([1 Kgs 6:38](#); [8:1-5](#)). The presence of the Lord filled the temple, and Solomon then offered his great dedicatory prayer ([8:23-53](#)), marking it as one of the great peaks of his devotion to the Lord. Afterward, he offered up 22,000 oxen and 120,000 sheep as well as other offerings. The people were full of joy because David had so great a successor.

Solomon built other buildings: the House of the Forest of Lebanon, the Hall of Pillars, a hall for his throne, and a house for the daughter of Pharaoh ([1 Kgs 7:2-8](#)). Thirteen years were involved in the building of his own house, large enough to take care of his wives and concubines as well as the servants. A great fortress was also built, Millo, which was used to protect the temple ([9:24](#)), as well as other store and fortified cities.

His Trade with Other Nations

The king had an agreement with Hiram, king of Tyre, to pay yearly for cedar trees, stonecutters, and other buildings; for 125,000 bushels (4.4 million liters) of wheat; and for 115,000 gallons (435,275 liters) of olive oil ([1 Kgs 5:11](#)). In addition, Hiram received 20 cities in Galilee to cover all indebtedness. Contrary to the instruction not to trade in horses ([Dt 17:16](#)), Solomon bought horses and chariots from the Egyptians, and some of these in turn were sold to the Hittites and Arameans at a profit ([1 Kgs 10:28-29](#)).

Furthermore, Solomon engaged in sea trade. Ships built at shipyards at Ezion-geber sailed to ports on the Red Sea and Indian Ocean. The mariners collected gold, ivory, and peacocks. From Ophir, the traders brought back 420 talents of gold, a considerable fortune.

His Wisdom

Solomon wrote 3,000 proverbs and 1,005 songs ([1 Kgs 4:32](#)). Most of the book of Proverbs is attributed to him ([Prv 25:1](#)), as well as Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, and [Psalms 72](#) and [127](#). His obituary

notice mentions his literary accomplishments in the book of the acts of Solomon ([1 Kgs 11:41](#)).

The queen of Sheba came to see and hear if the reports of Solomon's fame and wisdom were correct. After viewing all he had in Jerusalem and hearing his wisdom, her final response was to bless the Lord God of Israel, who raised up such a wise person to sit upon such a magnificent throne ([1 Kgs 10](#)).

His Fall

Solomon made many misjudgments during his reign, and one of them was his excessive taxation of the people. His worst blunder was adding more and more wives to his harem, accommodating their religious preferences with pagan shrines ([1 Kgs 11:1-8](#)). The Lord plagued Solomon, permitting Israel to be attacked on all sides. Although the kingdom was not damaged during Solomon's day, his son experienced its division. There is no record that Solomon repented, but it is quite possible that the book of Ecclesiastes does reveal his realization of his wrong decisions.

See also Chronology of the Bible (Old Testament); Ecclesiastes, Book of; Israel, History of; King, Kingship; Proverbs, Book of; Song of Solomon; Wisdom; Wisdom Literature.

Solomon, Pools of

Water-storage pools, whose construction has been attributed to Solomon. Solomon made pools for watering his vineyards, gardens, parks, and orchards ([Eccl 2:4-6](#)), but their location is uncertain.

The so-called pools of Solomon are situated in the valley of Etham, about ten miles (16.1 kilometers) south of Jerusalem and a little south of Bethlehem. The three reservoirs, which are somewhat rectangular in shape, are placed at different levels. They vary in size, with the highest the smallest and the lowest the largest. The lower pool is 582 feet (177.4 meters) long, 148 to 207 feet (45.1 to 63.1 meters) wide, and 50 feet (15.2 meters) deep. The small pool is also the most shallow, having a depth of only 15 feet (4.6 meters).

The pools are partly rock-cut and in part built of masonry; they are connected by conduits, and the lower end of the biggest pool serves as a dam. The water is supplied by springs and run-off rainwater.

The estimated capacity of all three pools is about 40 million gallons (151.4 million liters).

See also Aqueduct.

Solomon, Song of

See Song of Solomon.

Solomon's Porch

A covered walkway or colonnade that was part of the outer court of Herod's temple in Jerusalem ([John 10:23](#); [Acts 3:11](#); [5:12](#)).

See also Temple.

Son

See Family Life and Relations; Genealogy; Son of God.

Son of God

Term used to express the deity of Jesus of Nazareth as the unique divine Son.

Jesus' unique sonship is antithetical to concepts of sonship popular in the ancient world. In Hellenism, people believed a man could be a "son of the gods" in many ways: in mythology, by cohabitation of a god with a woman whose offspring was imagined to be superhuman; in politics, by giving generals and emperors high honors in the cult of Roman emperor worship; in medicine, by calling a doctor "son of Asclepius"; and eventually by ascribing to anyone with mysterious powers or qualities the title or reputation of "divine man."

The Term in the Old Testament

In the OT, certain men who lived before the time of Noah ([Gn 6:1-4](#)), "the angels" (including Satan, [Jb 1:6](#); [2:1](#)), and other heavenly beings ([Pss 29:1](#); [82:6](#); [89:6](#), rsv mg) are called "sons of God." Israel as a people was the chosen son of God. This corporate sonship became the basis of Israel's redemption from Egypt: "Israel is my first-born son" ([Ex 4:22](#); cf. [Jer 31:9](#)). Corporate sonship was the context for focus on personal sonship in the divine sanction of David as king: "I will be his father, and he will be my son" ([2 Sm 7:14](#)). David's

“adoptive” sonship was by divine decree: “I will proclaim the decree: . . . ‘You are my son; today I have become your Father’ ” ([Ps 2:7](#)); and it was the prophetic prototype of the “essential” sonship of Jesus, David’s royal son ([Mt 3:17](#); [Mk 1:11](#); [Lk 3:22](#); [Acts 13:33](#); [Heb 1:5](#); [5:5](#)). Other messianic prophecies ascribe divine names to the Davidic Messiah: “Immanuel” ([Is 7:13–14](#)) and “Mighty God, Everlasting Father” ([Is 9:6–7](#)). These are fulfilled in Jesus ([Mt 1:23](#); [21:4–10](#); [22:41–45](#)).

In the Gospels

Jesus’ identity as the Son of God is revealed in the Gospels in three distinct ways.

The first is his *eternal, personal sonship*. Jesus’ personal sonship is revealed in Peter’s confession, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” ([Mt 16:16](#)) and in Jesus’ identification of himself at his trial: “‘Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?’ . . . ‘I am,’ said Jesus” ([Mk 14:61–62](#)). In both instances, the issue is his personal being or essence, his eternal identity.

Long before Creation, even from eternity, the Father and the Son enjoyed fellowship with each other. We know this because the Bible tells us so—but not in any great detail. For the most part, the Scriptures are silent about the premundane scene. And yet there are a few verses that lift the veil slightly and give us a glimpse into that sublime, divine relationship that always existed between the Father and the Son.

Of all the books in the Bible, the Gospel of John has the most to say about the relationship between the Father and the Son. It is from John’s inspired pen that we read from the outset, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” This is a rather flat rendering. The Greek conveys something more picturesque: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was face to face with God, and the Word was himself God.” Imagine, the Word, who was the preincarnate Son of God, was face to face with God. The expression “face to face” translates the Greek preposition *pros* (short for *prosopon pros prosopon*, “face to face,” a common expression in koine Greek.) The expression signifies intimate fellowship. The Father and Son enjoyed such an intimate fellowship from eternity. How they must have delighted in each other!

After the Son of God became a man and began his ministry on earth, he referred to the relationship he enjoyed with the Father before the foundation of

the world. Jesus spoke of what he had seen and heard together with the Father before coming to earth (see [John 3:13](#) and [8:38](#)). Jesus longed to return to that glorious sphere. In his prayer before going to the cross (in ch [17](#)), he asked the Father to glorify him with the glory he had with the Father before the world was (v [5](#)). Jesus wanted to recapture his primordial equality with the Father—something he had willingly relinquished for the sake of his Father’s plan (see [Phil 2:6–7](#)). As he prayed to the Father, a wonderful utterance escaped from his lips: “Father, . . . you loved me before the foundation of the world” ([Jn 17:24](#)). God’s Son, the unique Son, was the single object of the Father’s love.

The second aspect of Jesus’ sonship is his *nativity sonship*. The nativity of Jesus is traced to the direct, spiritual paternity of God. Jesus is the Son of God because his incarnation and birth into the human race was created by the Holy Spirit. In Matthew, Jesus’ conception “is of the Holy Spirit” ([Mt 1:20](#)). He is to be named “Jesus” (meaning Yahweh is salvation) “because he will save his people from their sins” (v [21](#)), and “Immanuel” (God with us) because he is himself the Son of God in human flesh (v [23](#)). In Luke, Jesus’ conception was by the Holy Spirit and the power of the Most High ([Lk 1:31, 35](#)), so Jesus was called “the Son of God” (v [35](#)). If the father of Jesus had been the man Joseph, he would have been called “Jesus, the son of Joseph.” Luke’s teaching clearly means that since the Spirit of God was the father of Jesus, this son of the virgin Mary is properly called “Jesus, the Son of God.”

The third aspect is his *messianic sonship*. Jesus is the Father’s Son and representative, whose earthly mission is to establish the kingdom of God. At his baptism, he began his mission with the Father’s coronation: “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased” ([Mt 3:17](#); cf. [Ps 2:7](#)). Jesus received a similar pronouncement from heaven at his Transfiguration ([Lk 9:35](#)). As the messianic Son, Jesus perfectly completed the redeeming work given him to do by his Father.

In the New Testament Epistles

Paul spoke of the essential, ontological sonship of Jesus—not as an isolated fact, but in the context of his redemptive work. It was as God’s Son that Jesus took human nature ([Rom 1:3](#)) and as “the Son of God” that he was resurrected and enthroned in power ([Mt 28:18](#); [Rom 1:4](#); [1 Cor 15:28](#)). The Incarnation is spoken of as “God sending his own Son” ([Rom 8:3](#); [Gal 4:4](#)) for humanity’s redemption,

a redemption that was accomplished “through the death of his Son” ([Rom 5:10](#); [8:29, 32](#)). As a consequence, believers can have “fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord” ([1 Cor 1:9](#)), and they can live by faith in “the Son of God” ([Gal 2:20](#)). Paul’s first preaching was “that Jesus is the Son of God” ([Acts 9:20](#)); this was later expounded by Paul in the light of [Psalm 2:7](#) (see [Acts 13:33](#)).

In Hebrews, Jesus is “the Son,” who is God’s “firstborn” and personal “heir,” who is creator and sustainer of the universe, and who is the “radiance of God’s glory” ([Heb 1:2–12](#); [3:6](#); [5:5](#)). As the Son, he is the final and eternal High Priest who ascended to heaven and whose mediatorial work remains perfect forever ([4:14](#); [6:6](#); [7:3, 28](#)). In [1 John 4](#) and [5](#), belief in Jesus as the incarnate Son of God is essential for salvation; disbelief comes from the spirit of the Antichrist.

See also Christology; Jesus Christ, Teachings of; Messiah; Son of Man.

Son of Man

Messianic title used by Jesus to express his heavenly origin, earthly mission, and glorious future coming. It does not refer just to his human nature or humanity, as some church fathers or contemporary scholars believe. Rather, it shows the heavenly origin and divine dignity of Jesus; the mystery of his manifestation in human form; and his earthly mission that took him to the cross and then into glory.

The background of the term “Son of Man” is found in the OT. It is mostly found in the book of Ezekiel, since this prophet was referred to as “son of man” 90 times. For example, God addressed him, “Son of man, stand upon your feet, and I will speak with you” ([Ez 2:1](#)). Jesus’s use of the term “Son of Man” and many themes from Ezekiel suggest he wanted to identify himself as the end-time prophet who, like Ezekiel (chs [4](#), [7](#), [10](#), [22](#), [40–48](#)), had the last word about the destruction of Jerusalem and the restoration of the kingdom of God to Israel ([Mt 23–24](#); [Acts 1:6–8](#)).

The specific source of the term is [Daniel 7:13–14](#), where Daniel has a vision of one “like a son of man” who “comes with the clouds” into the presence of “the Ancient of Days,” who gives him the universal and eternal kingdom of God. Jesus repeatedly quoted parts of this text in teaching about his second coming ([Mt 16:27](#); [19:28](#); [24:30](#); [25:31](#);

[26:64](#)). Clearly, Jesus understood this passage as prophetic about himself and portraying his incarnation, ascension, and inheritance of the kingdom of God.

In the Gospels, the term “Son of Man” is used by Jesus about 80 times as a hidden, indirect way of speaking about himself (Mt, 32 times; Mk, 14 times; Lk, 26 times; Jn, 10 times). In all these texts, Jesus was always the speaker, and no one ever addressed him as “Son of Man.” In some texts the reference is so mysterious that some interpreters insist that Jesus was speaking about another person. Such doubt about it is recorded in only one text in John, where the crowd asks Jesus, “Who is this ‘Son of Man’?” ([Jn 12:34](#)). In most texts, the identification with Jesus is clear. In some it is explicit: “Who do men say that the Son of Man is?”—followed by, “Who do you say that I am?” ([Mt 16:13, 15](#)). The conclusion generally drawn is that Jesus used the term as a messianic title for himself, so that he could speak modestly about his person and mission yet communicate the important fact that he wished to reveal about himself. He could do this with originality because the term was not filled with popular misconceptions concerning the Messiah.

The term occurs only four other times in the NT. In [Acts 7:56](#), Stephen says, “Look, I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing in the place of honor at God’s right hand!” [Hebrews 2:6](#) applies [Psalm 8:4](#) to Jesus. Finally, [Revelation 1:13](#) and [14:14](#) depict visions of someone “like a son of man,” who is undoubtedly the glorified Jesus.

In the synoptic Gospels, the first theme related to Jesus’s use of the title “Son of Man” is that of his coming to earth to accomplish his messianic mission. Jesus compared his earthly condition with his previous heavenly glory by saying “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head” ([Mt 8:20](#); see [Lk 9:58](#)). This indicates that the Son of Man gave up his heavenly home to suffer all the humiliations of his earthly ministry ([Phil 2:5–11](#)).

Jesus used the title to claim divine privileges, saying, “The Son of Man is Lord of the sabbath” ([Mt 12:8](#); [Mk 2:28](#); [Lk 6:5](#)). The Sabbath, a divine institution, may not be revised by ordinary men. But since Jesus is the Son of Man from heaven, he is free to rule as Lord even of the Sabbath, because he is the same Lord who instituted the Sabbath ([Gn 2:2](#); [Ex 20:8–11](#)). After healing the paralytic at Capernaum, Jesus claimed that “the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins” ([Mt 9:6](#); [Mk 2:10](#); [Lk 5:24](#)). Previously, forgiveness of sins came from

heaven and from God, but now forgiveness is given on earth by Jesus.

The second aspect of Jesus's use of the title "Son of Man" concerns his suffering, death, and glorious resurrection as the mysterious way to fulfill his earthly mission as the Son of Man. Jesus developed the theme of his suffering after Peter confessed him to be Messiah and Son of God ([Mt 16:16](#)). Jesus's prediction of his suffering as the Son of Man begins in [Mark 8:31-32](#) and is repeated in several other texts. The Gospels expand the theme to include mockery and scourging ([Mt 17:12](#); [20:18](#); [Mk 8:31](#); [Lk 9:22](#)), betrayal by Judas ([Mt 17:22](#); [26:24-25](#); [Mk 14:21, 41](#)), rejection by the Jewish leaders ([Mt 20:18](#)), death by crucifixion ([Mt 20:19](#); [Mk 9:12, 31](#); [10:33](#)), burial for three days ([Mt 12:40](#); [Lk 11:30](#)), and resurrection ([Mt 17:22-23](#); [Mk 8:31](#)).

In the famous text "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" ([Mt 20:28](#); [Mk 10:45](#)), Jesus teaches that his death was a substitute sacrifice for the salvation of his people. This idea comes from Jesus's understanding of himself as the suffering Servant of the Lord ([Is 53](#)).

Jesus also used the "Son of Man" title to teach about his second coming. As the Son of Man, Jesus will return to earth from heaven in the glory of his Father with the angels ([Mt 16:27](#); [Mk 8:38](#); [Lk 9:26](#)). First, he will be seated at the right hand of God, and then he will come again ([Mt 26:64](#); [Mk 14:62](#); [Lk 22:69](#)) with the clouds ([Mt 24:30](#); [Mk 13:26](#); [Lk 21:27](#)). This coming will be unexpected ([Mt 24:27](#); [Lk 12:40](#)), like a flash of lightning or the flood of Noah ([Mt 24:37](#); [Lk 17:24](#)). His coming will be for the gathering of the elect; the judgment of all the nations of the earth ([Mt 19:28](#); [25:32](#)); and the restoration of final righteousness in the world ([19:28](#); [25:46](#)).

In these passages, Jesus shifts the focus from the provisional victory in his suffering and resurrection to the final victory of the Son of Man at his second coming. Again, the highlight is on the heavenly origin and divine privileges of the Son of Man. This man Jesus, the Son of Man, will be the final judge (cf. [Acts 17:31](#)).

The Gospel of John has its own distinctive material concerning the Son of Man. The angels are said to ascend and descend on the Son of Man ([Jn 1:51](#)), thus signifying that he is a person who existed before time and has come from heaven to earth ([3:13](#); [6:62](#)). His being lifted up (by crucifixion) will bring eternal life for all who believe in him ([3:14](#)).

The Son of Man ([3:14](#)) is also the Son of God ([3:16](#)), God's one and only Son ([1:18](#); [3:18](#)). Quite simply, in John's Gospel, the "Son of Man" title is equivalent to the title "Son of God." It reveals his divinity, existence before time, heavenly origin, and divine privileges. It affirms his present earthly condition for revelation and suffering, and his future end-time glory. The Father has given the Son of Man authority to raise the dead and to judge the world ([5:25-27](#)).

See also Christology; Jesus Christ, Teachings of; Messiah; Son of God.

Song

See Music; Musical Instruments.

Song of Ascents

The superscription (title or heading) of [Psalms 120-134](#). *See* Song of Ascents, Song of Degrees.

Song of Ascents, Song of Degrees

A title that is given to each of the Psalms from 120 to 134. It is possible that these psalms were sung by pilgrims travelling up to Jerusalem for the major feasts. *See* Music; Musical Instruments; Psalms, Book of.

Song of Deborah

The Song of Deborah is an ancient poem found in [Judges 5](#). It celebrates an Israelite victory over the Canaanites. This song is similar to Moses's song in [Exodus 15:1-18](#). It also tells the same story as the prose account in [Judges 4](#). The song describes how the Israelites defeated the powerful Canaanite king Jabin of Hazor and his general Sisera with God's help. The song's poetic style and use of old Hebrew forms can be seen in the slightly different translations found in modern Bible versions. The poem's strong language suggests that an eyewitness to the battle wrote it, probably Deborah herself.

[Judges 5:2](#) addresses Israel with an invitation to praise God. The song also tells foreign kings to learn about Israel's God and what he did. Verses [4-5](#) may describe the current battle or God's earlier

appearance to Moses at Mount Sinai. Verse [5](#) could be translated, "The mountains quaked at the presence of the One of Sinai."

Deborah is first introduced in verse [7](#). Verse [8](#) might mean that the Canaanites stopped the Israelites from openly carrying weapons. More likely, it means the Canaanites had destroyed all weapon-making in Israel (compare [1 Samuel 13:19](#)). During a time of fear and division, Deborah, who was a judge, urged the Israelite tribes to fight. When Deborah asked all the tribes for help, some did not respond, but others came to assist.

The battle took place at Taanach, 24.1 kilometers (15 miles) southwest of Mount Tabor. The Canaanites had gathered their forces there ([Judges 4:13](#)). This meant the Israelites lost the advantage of fighting from their mountain position. However, Deborah's song suggests that God helped them, possibly through a strong storm.

God's help is also mentioned in [Judges 4:14](#) ("Has not the LORD gone before you?"). The song describes stars fighting against Sisera and the river Kishon flooding. These represent natural forces helping Israel ([Judges 5:20-21](#)). Also, the Canaanites' chariots lost their advantage when Jael, a brave Hebrew woman, killed Sisera, the chariot leader ([Judges 5:24-27](#)). Sisera's death fulfilled Deborah's prophecy to Barak, the Israelite commander. A woman, not he, would receive glory for that deed ([Judges 4:9](#)).

The song shows Sisera's mother sadly waiting for him to return. In contrast to this sad picture of the Canaanite woman, Deborah's song ends with a strong prayer for future safety. Although Jael was blessed ([Judges 5:24](#)) and Deborah was praised, the God of Israel received the glory ([Judges 5:1-3](#)).

Song of Moses

One of two ancient poems:

- The Blessing of Moses in [Deuteronomy 33](#)
- The Song of Moses in [Deuteronomy 32](#)

The Song of the Sea ([Exodus 15](#)) is from an earlier time in Moses's life, while these two poems are like his "final message" before death.

Moses had already written books of the Law as a witness against Israel if they were to turn away from God. But the law itself required at least two

witnesses to establish any charge ([Deuteronomy 17:6](#)). Moses was then commanded to write down the song as a further witness against Israel ([Deuteronomy 31:19](#)).

The song serves as a witness to God's greatness and goodness, especially his kindness to Israel ([Deuteronomy 32:10-14](#)). This kindness makes Israel's sinful response even worse, which brings God's anger and punishment. God will use disasters in nature, wild animals, and wars to carry out his purposes. Yet this is not the end. God, in his grace, will turn against Israel's enemies instead and rescue his own people ([Deuteronomy 32:36](#)).

This song carries the same message as every great prophet of the Old Testament. [Psalm 78](#) expresses this message through examples from Israel's history. The song describes the very nature of God, so it makes sense that in heaven people sing "the song of God's servant Moses and of the Lamb" ([Revelation 15:3](#)).

See also Moses.

Song of Solomon

Short OT book (eight chapters) containing only poetry. Its beautiful poetic passages describe the many dimensions of human love; there is little in this book that is explicitly religious. In addition to the popular title, the book is sometimes referred to as the "Song of Songs." This is the most literal translation of the short title of the book in the original language and means "the best of all possible songs." Some writers also entitle the book "Canticles"; this title is based on the name of the Latin version of the book, *Canticum Canticorum*.

Preview

- Author
- Date
- Various Interpretations
- Purpose and Theological Teaching
- Content

Author

There was an old tradition among the Jews that King Solomon (c. 970–930 BC) wrote the Song of Songs. This view is based on one of several possible translations of the first verse of the Song: "Solomon's song of songs" ([1:1](#), nlt). This view

could be correct, though there cannot be absolute certainty, for the last words of the verse in the original language could be translated in various ways. An English translation that preserves the ambiguity of the original would be “The song of songs, which is Solomon’s” (kjv); the last words could mean that Solomon was author, but equally they could indicate that the song was “dedicated to Solomon” or “written for Solomon.” As is often the case with the OT writings, authorship cannot be known with absolute certainty.

Date

It follows that if the authorship is uncertain, there must also be uncertainty concerning the date at which the song was written. If Solomon was the author, it was written during the latter half of the tenth century BC. If he was not the author, then the song was probably written at a later date. But the contents indicate that the song must have been written and completed at some point during the Hebrew monarchy (before 586 BC). For those who do not accept Solomon as author, the precise date will depend to some extent upon the theory that is adopted concerning the interpretation of the song. If the song is an anthology of Israelite love poetry, then the many poems making up the song would have been written at different dates and gathered together into a single volume toward the end of the Hebrew monarchy.

Various Interpretations

There are two major difficulties in interpreting this book. First, the song appears to be secular in its present form and God’s name does not appear; the only exception to this statement is in [8:6](#), where some English versions translate the text to show God’s name, though the original text uses the name in an unusual (adjectival) sense. The second problem is that, taken at face value, the song contains only secular poetry of human love. What is the theological significance of love poetry? These and other difficulties have led to a multitude of different interpretations of the song. A brief survey of some of the most significant interpretations will clarify not only the problem of understanding the book but also its content and meaning.

The Song as an Allegory

One of the oldest interpretations of the song sees it as an allegory. This view was held by both Jewish and Christian scholars from an early date. The description of human love in the song is seen as an

allegory of the love between Christ and the church. Augustine of Hippo (AD 354–430) believed that the marriage referred to in the song was an allegory of the marriage between Christ and the church.

This theory was valued for a long time. It influenced the translators of the kjv. They added chapter headings to their translations as an aid to readers in understanding the Bible. For example, at the beginning of the first chapter of the Song of Solomon, they wrote, “1. The Church’s love unto Christ, 5. She confesseth her deformity, 7. and prayeth to be directed to his flock.” It is important to stress, however, that the Hebrew text does not mention Christ or the church. The headings represent the understanding of the translators, not the content of the original Hebrew.

The Song as a Drama

The view that the song is a drama is also an old one. Those who hold this theory begin by noting that there are several speakers or actors. Perhaps, then, the song is the script of an ancient dramatic play.

This theory has some strong points. In the manuscript of an ancient Greek translation of the OT, headings have been added to the Song of Solomon that identify the speakers. The cast includes bride, bridegroom, and companions. However, the headings were probably not a part of the original Hebrew text. They reflect the interpretation of the early Greek translators.

There is one major difficulty with this theory: there is no clear evidence that drama was a form of art used by the Hebrews. Although drama was common among the Greeks, it does not appear to have been employed in the Near East. It is possible, however, to suggest a slight variation to the drama theory. Perhaps the Song of Solomon is not a drama but simply dramatic poetry, similar to the book of Job. This possibility is more plausible, but it too has difficulties. A story or plot would be expected for either drama or dramatic poetry, but it is not clear that there is a story.

According to one interpretation, the story might go as follows. The song tells the story of true love. A maiden was in love with a shepherd lad. King Solomon, however, fell in love with the maiden and took her to his palace. There he tried to win her love with beautiful words but failed. She remained faithful to the shepherd lad whom she loved. Failing to win her, Solomon released her and allowed her to return to her true lover. The story is beautiful and simple, but it is not easy to see in the

text without added headings and explanations. Other interpreters have discerned a quite different story in the Song of Solomon. In conclusion, it is not absolutely clear that there is a single story being told.

The Song as Reflecting a Fertility Cult

Some modern scholars claim that the origin of the Song of Solomon is to be found in the fertility cults of the ancient Near East. In ancient fertility cults there was great emphasis on the fertility of the land, which would be seen in bountiful harvests. The cults were designed to ensure that the land remained fertile. They were accompanied by a mythology describing the gods responsible for fertility. This mythology included love poetry about the gods, and the poetry has some similarity to the Song of Solomon.

The theory might go like this: Originally the Hebrews also had a fertility cult. The Song of Solomon contains the love poetry associated with that cult. Later, the mythological references were omitted, so that the present song looks like secular love poetry.

The main difficulty with this theory is the lack of any firm evidence. There is no reference to God or any other gods in the Song of Solomon. There is no reference to a fertility cult or any other kind of cult. If the theory has some validity to it, the evidence no longer exists.

The Song as a Collection of Poems

This last, most probable theory of interpretation involves two basic principles. First, the song is to be interpreted literally; it is what it seems to be—poetry celebrating human love. Second, the Song of Solomon is a collection, not a single piece of poetry. Just as the book of Psalms contains songs, hymns, and prayers from many different periods of Israel's history, so too the Song of Solomon contains poetry from different periods and different authors. The common theme joining all the passages together is human love. Opinions differ concerning where one song ends and the next begins. There may be as many as 29 songs in the book, some consisting of only one verse and others much longer.

Purpose and Theological Teaching

If the Song of Solomon is primarily an anthology of the poetry of human love, what is its significance as a biblical book? What are its theological implications? First, the presence of the song in the

Bible provides a valuable insight concerning human love. The love between a man and a woman is a noble and beautiful thing; it is a gift of God. It is characterized by a certain mystery and cannot be bought. But because human love is a beautiful and noble thing, it can easily be debased. In the modern world, the Song of Solomon provides a proper perspective and a balanced view of human love. Further, a high value of human love is essential. Since human love and marriage are employed in the Bible as an analogy of God's love for humanity, love in itself must be good and pure.

Content

The Woman Sings Her Love Song ([1:2-7](#))

In each of the songs, the reader is like an eavesdropper listening to the words of love spoken, sometimes privately and sometimes to the beloved one. The opening song is a song of praise, rejoicing in love and delighting in a particular loved one: "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth—for your love is more delightful than wine" (v [2](#), niv). This song, as many others, is characterized by a country setting, here highlighted by a contrast with the city. The young woman is from the country and tanned from working in the open air; it makes her self-conscious among the city women of Jerusalem. But love overpowers self-consciousness, and it is in the country that she will meet her lover.

The King Converses with the Woman ([1:8-2:7](#))

In this passage, both the man and the woman are talking, though it is not a conversation in the normal sense. They are talking about each other, rather than to each other, and the beauty of both the man and the woman emerges, not in an abstract sense, but through the eyes of the beholder. Though beauty may perhaps be defined in an abstract sense, the beauty perceived by lovers is of a different kind; it is rooted in the lover's perception of the loved one and in the relationship of love that acts like a lens to focus that perception.

A Song of Springtime ([2:8-13](#))

This beautiful song describes the young maiden watching her beloved come to her. He calls her to join him in the countryside, where the winter has passed and the new life of spring can be seen in the land. The beauty of young love is here likened to

the blossoming forth of fresh life and fragrance that characterizes Palestine in spring.

The Woman Searches for Her Loved One (2:14-3:5)

Now the woman sings and a new dimension of her love emerges from the words of her song. Love is full when the partners are together, but separation creates sorrow and loneliness. The words of the maiden evoke the desperation of separated lovers, a desperation that could only be dissipated when she held her lover again and would not let him go (3:4).

The King's Wedding Procession (3:6-11)

The song begins with a description of the approach of the royal wedding procession, a palanquin surrounded by men of war. The king approaches the city for his wedding, and the young girls of the city go out to greet him. The song can be compared with [Psalm 45](#), another wedding song.

The Woman's Beauty, Like a Garden (4:1-5:1)

In sumptuous language, the man describes his maiden's beauty. To the modern reader, the language is sometimes strange: "your neck is like the tower of David" (4:4, rsv). But the strangeness lies principally in our unfamiliarity with the ancient metaphors. Nonetheless, much of the language here draws upon the imagery of nature and wildlife, which can be appreciated by all. Again, beauty is not described merely as something aesthetic, for it is intimately tied to the relationship of love: "How delightful is your love, my sister, my bride! How much more pleasing is your love than wine" (v 10, niv). And again, the maiden's beauty is not simply to be admired; it is to be given to the beloved. So when the man stops his words of adoration, the woman offers herself to him (v 16) and he accepts (5:1).

The Woman Speaks of Her Beloved (5:2-6:3)

In this song, the woman is talking with other women, and the man is not present. As she speaks about her lover, there is a change from words expressing a sense of loneliness and separation (5:4-8) to a resurgence of delight as she contemplates her loved one. The sorrow of separation from her beloved is dispelled as she recounts to them the handsomeness of her man (vv 10-16).

The Man Speaks of His Loved One's Beauty (6:4-7:9)

This long passage may contain more than a single song; there are words from the man, the maiden, and the female companions. The principal theme is further description by the man of his beloved's beauty (6:4-10; 7:1-9), a theme already known from an earlier passage (4:1-5:1). Each part of the maiden's body is exquisitely beautiful in the eyes of the one who loves her.

The Woman and the Man Reflect upon Love (7:10-8:14)

Both partners speak in this complex passage, which may contain a number of short love songs. While some parts are difficult to interpret (especially 8:8-14), other verses reveal in the most profound language the meaning of love. Love, that most powerful of all human relationships, creates a sense of mutual belonging and mutual possession: "I belong to my lover, and his desire is for me" (7:10, niv). And later, the girl speaks of love with words that convey one of the most powerful understandings of love in the entire Bible: "For love is as strong as death. . . . Many waters cannot quench love; rivers cannot wash it away. If one were to give all the wealth of his house for love, it would be utterly scorned" (8:6-7, niv).

See also Solomon (Person).

Song of Songs

See Song of Solomon.

Song of the Three Young Men

See Daniel, Additions to.

Sons and Daughters of God

Expression designating human beings who have been born of God and have become part of his family. When the Bible speaks of God's sons, it does not intend to exclude females. The term "sons" is inclusive of all believers. But the Scriptures nearly always have the word "sons"—with one exception in the NT, [2 Corinthians 6:18](#), in which God's people are called "sons and daughters."

From the beginning, God the Father desired to have many sons and daughters sharing the image and likeness of his beloved Son. It could be said that his one Son brought him so much satisfaction that he yearned to have many more. This may have been the impetus for the creation of the universe and, most specifically, of human beings (see [Gn 1:26-27](#)). [Proverbs 8](#) indicates that God was delighted with the sons of men. This is again expressed in the NT, especially in the book of Ephesians. The opening verses in Ephesians resound with this note: the heart's desire of God was to obtain many sons in and through his Son. The many sons, in union with the unique Son, would bring great glory and satisfaction to the Father.

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

The impetus of God's eternal purpose came from a heart's desire, and that heart's desire was to have many sons made like his only Son (see [Rom 8:26-28](#)). In love, he predestined many people to participate in this "sonship"—not by their own merits but by virtue of their being united to the Son ([Eph 1:4-5](#)). Notice how often in [Ephesians 1](#) Paul speaks of the believers' position "in him." Outside of him (the Son), no one could be a son of God and no one could be pleasing to the Father. The many sons and daughters owe all their divine privileges to the Beloved, as ones given grace through him (v [6](#)). If it were not for God's satisfaction in his beloved Son, there would not have been the inspiration for the creation of man in the first place. Humans exist because God wanted to obtain many sons and daughters, each bearing the image of God's unique Son. People are well pleasing to God and bring him satisfaction by being united to the one who has always satisfied him. Apart from the

Son, no one has access to the Father. But because of the Son's redemption, all believers have the right to become children of God ([Jn 1:12](#)) and now have access to the Father through the Son ([14:6](#)).

Sons of the Prophets

"Band of prophets" whom Saul met ([1 Sm 10:5-6, 10-13](#)) and forerunners of the "schools," "guilds," or "sons of the prophets," which flourished under Israel's early kings. Jezebel persecuted those defending the worship of Yahweh and established rival "schools" to propagate worship of Baal and Asherah ([1 Kgs 18:19-29; 22:6](#)). Ahab's steward, Obadiah, sheltered two companies of 50 prophets of Yahweh in caves and gave them provisions ([18:4](#)).

[First Kings 22:5-28](#) illustrates the political danger of such royal guilds, and chronicles the emergence of individual spokesmen claiming spontaneous inspiration. [First Kings 20:35-43](#) shows another individual, acting strangely yet recognizable as a true prophet. From [2 Kings 2-6](#), we learn that groups persisted at Bethel (about 50) and Gilgal (about 100).

See also Prophecy; Prophet, Prophetess.

Sons of Thunder

The literal meaning of the word "Boanerges." Jesus gave this name to his disciples, James and John ([Mark 3:17](#)). *See* Boanerges.

Soothsayer

One who foretells events; a pagan practice, soothsaying was forbidden in Israel ([Dt 18:10, 14](#)). In Scripture, soothsaying was practiced by Balaam, Beor's son ([Jos 13:22](#)) and King Manasseh of Judah ([2 Kgs 21:6; 2 Chr 33:6](#)); Jacob's descendants were likened to the soothsayers of Philistia ([Is 2:6](#)); they were listed among the false prophets of Judah ([Jer 27:9](#)). During NT times, soothsaying was the source of a lucrative trade in Philippi ([Acts 16:16](#)).

See also Magic; Sorcery.

Sop

KJV term for a thin piece of bread, dipped into a common dish and used as a spoon ([In 13:26](#)). *See* Lord's Supper, The.

Sopater

A man from the church at Berea. Sopater accompanied the apostle Paul to Jerusalem to deliver the offering collected by the gentile churches. This offering was for the Jewish Christians who were suffering from the effects of a famine ([Acts 20:4](#)). Sopater may be the same person as Sosipater, the relative of Paul who sent greetings to the church at Rome ([Romans 16:21](#)).

Sophereth

Alternate form of Hassophereth, the name of a postexilic Levitical family, in [Nehemiah 7:57](#). *See* Hassophereth.

Sorcery

A sorcery practitioner (sorcerer) claims to have supernatural powers to do magic, predict the future, and contact evil spirits through special words and objects. Sorcerers were present in:

- The royal courts of Egypt ([Exodus 7:11](#))
- Assyria ([Nahum 3:4](#))
- Babylonia ([Daniel 2:2](#))

Sorcery was not allowed in Israel ([Deuteronomy 18:10](#)). It was punishable by death ([Exodus 22:18](#)). But the Israelites still looked for sorcerers ([2 Kings 17:17](#); [2 Chronicles 33:6](#); [Micah 5:12](#)). This made God angry ([Isaiah 57:3](#); [Malachi 3:5](#)).

Paul listed sorcery as a sin ([Galatians 5:20](#)). The book of Revelation says that people who practice sorcery will be thrown into the lake of fire ([Revelations 21:8](#)). They will be separated from the righteous forever ([Revelation 22:15](#)).

See also Magic.

Sore

A sore is an area of skin that looks different from the normal skin around it. It has clear edges where the abnormal skin meets healthy skin. Even if someone has sores from head to toe, there will still be normal skin between each sore.

The word "sore" can describe many kinds of skin problems. These include scall, scab, swelling, emerod (a painful swelling), plague (a serious skin disease), and scar.

The King James Version also uses "sore" in a nonmedical way to mean "very" or "extremely." For example, "Hezekiah wept sore" means "Hezekiah wept very much" ([2 Kings 20:3](#)) or "sore afraid" ([Ezekiel 27:35](#)).

See also Disease; Medicine and Medical Practice.

Sorek, Valley of

Valley in which Delilah lived ([Jgs 16:4](#)). It began in the hill country of Judah, about 13 miles (20.9 kilometers) southwest of Jerusalem, and took a northwesterly course to the Mediterranean Sea. It is identifiable with the Wadi es-Sarar. The Danites attempted to settle this area but were driven out by the Philistines in the region by the Mediterranean. The town of Zorah, Samson's birthplace, was near the head of the valley of Zorek, which provided the setting for his intrigues and the concentration of his activities as judge.

Sorghum

A type of grass that grows and dies each year. It can grow to over 1.8 meters (six feet) tall. This plant may have been what is called "hyssop." A sponge soaked in vinegar was attached to a tall plant stalk during Jesus's crucifixion to offer him a drink ([Matthew 27:48](#); [Mark 15:36](#); [John 19:29](#)). *See* Plants (Hyssop).

Sosipater

Jewish Christian who joined Paul, Timothy, Lucius, and Jason in sending greetings to the church at Rome ([Rom 16:21](#)).

Sosthenes

1. A leader of the synagogue in Corinth. Sosthenes brought legal action against Paul before Gallio, proconsul of Achaia. A mob, who could have been Greeks, heard Gallio dismiss the Jewish accusations against Paul. So, they seized Sosthenes and beat him ([Acts 18:17](#)).
2. A Christian brother and companion of the apostle Paul, known to the Christians at Corinth and mentioned by Paul in [1 Corinthians 1:1](#).

Sostratus

Governor of the citadel of Jerusalem under Antiochus IV ([2 Macc 4:28](#)). He attempted to secure from Menelaus, the high priest, the sum of money Menelaus had promised to pay the king for his appointment to the priestly office. When the payment was not made, both men were called to account by Antiochus.

Sotai

Head of a family of temple servants who returned to Jerusalem with Zerubbabel following the exile ([Ezr 2:55](#); [Neh 7:57](#)).

Soul

A word used to translate the Greek word *psuche* and the Hebrew *nephesh*.

The Greek philosopher Plato, who lived in the fourth century BC, believed that the soul is the eternal part of humans. While the body dies, the soul does not. When a person dies, their soul enters another body. If they were bad, their soul might go into a lower human, an animal, or a bird. Over time, through moving from one body to another, the soul is purified of evil. In the early centuries of the Christian era, Gnosticism also taught that the body was like a prison for the soul. Redemption, or being saved, happened when people learned Gnostic secrets, allowing their soul to be freed from the body.

Biblical View of the Soul

The Bible has a different view of the soul.

Soul in the Old Testament

In the Old Testament, the soul is vital to human life. The Hebrew and Greek words for soul often mean "life" and can sometimes refer to the life of animals ([Genesis 1:20](#); [Leviticus 11:10](#)). "Soul for soul" means "life for life" ([Exodus 21:23](#)). In legal texts, a soul means a person in relation to the law (for example, "If a soul shall sin...", [Leviticus 4:2](#), King James Version). When people were counted, they were counted as souls, meaning persons ([Exodus 1:5](#); [Deuteronomy 10:22](#)).

More narrowly, the soul refers to human emotions and inner strength. People are called to love God with all their heart and soul ([Deuteronomy 13:3](#)).

Certain aspects of life come from the soul:

- Knowledge and understanding ([Psalm 139:14](#))
- Thought ([1 Samuel 20:3](#))
- Love ([1 Samuel 18:1](#))
- Memory ([Lamentations 3:20](#))

Here, the soul is like the self, one's personality or ego.

The Old Testament does not suggest that the soul moves to another body after death. Humans are seen as a unity of body and soul, meaning one person viewed from different angles. In [Genesis 2:7](#), the phrase "a living being" is sometimes translated as "a living soul" in error. The thought is not that men and women became *souls*, for clearly they had bodies. The use of the word in the original draws attention to the vital aspect of humans as "living beings." This does not mean humans became souls, but highlights the vital aspect of being "living beings." The Hebrew idea of person unity helps explain the shadowy view of life after death in the Old Testament, as it's hard to imagine existence without a body ([Psalms 16:10](#); [49:15](#); [88:3-12](#)). Where hope of an afterlife exists, it is due to faith in God's power over death, believing that communion with Him continues after death ([Exodus 3:6](#); [1 Samuel 2:6](#); [Job 19:25-26](#); [Psalms 16:10-11](#); [73:24-25](#); [Isaiah 25:8](#); [26:19](#); [Daniel 12:2](#); [Hosea 6:1-3](#); [13:14](#)).

Soul in the New Testament

In the New Testament, the word for soul (*psuche*) has meanings similar to those in the Old Testament. Often, it means life itself. Followers of Jesus risked their lives (souls) for his sake ([Acts 15:26](#); compare [John 13:37](#); [Romans 16:4](#); [Philippians 2:30](#)). Jesus, as the Son of Man, came to serve and give his life (soul) as a ransom for many ([Matthew 20:28](#); [Mark 10:45](#)). As the Good Shepherd, he lays down his life (soul) for the sheep ([John 10:14, 17-18](#)). In [Luke 14:26](#), discipleship means being willing to deny oneself to the point of losing one's life for Christ's sake (compare [Luke 9:23](#); [Revelation 12:11](#)).

Frequently "soul" can mean "person" ([Acts 2:43](#); [3:23](#); [7:14](#); [Romans 2:9](#); [13:1](#); [1 Peter 3:20](#)). The expression "every living soul" (as sometimes used in [Revelation 16:3](#)) reflects the vital aspect of living beings. As in the Old Testament, the soul can refer to the emotional energies of a person. It represents the person's inner being. When Jesus was agonizing about his death, he spoke of his soul being crushed ([Matthew 26:38](#); [Mark 14:34](#); compare [Psalm 42:6](#)). In another context, Jesus promised rest to the souls of those who come to him ([Matthew 11:29](#)). Here, "soul" means the essential person (compare [Luke 2:35](#); [2 Corinthians 1:23](#); [2 Thessalonians 2:8](#); [3 John 1:2](#)).

Soul and Spirit

Several passages mention the soul alongside the spirit. [Luke 1:46](#) is probably "poetic parallelism," where one idea is written in two different ways. Both terms refer to Mary as a person in her inmost being. [Hebrews 4:12](#), "dividing soul and spirit," is a graphic way of showing how God's Word probes our inner being. In [1 Thessalonians 5:23](#), the prayer for readers to be kept blameless in spirit, soul, and body means the whole person. Here, the soul may suggest physical existence, while the spirit might imply a higher or "spiritual" life.

In other passages, the soul relates to emotions, will, and mind, always implying a person's inner being. People are to love God with all their soul ([Matthew 22:37](#); [Mark 12:30](#); compare [Deuteronomy 6:5](#)). The phrase "from your soul" (as sometimes rendered in [Ephesians 6:6](#); [Colossians 3:23](#)) means "from the heart," with all one's being. In [Philippians 1:27](#), believers are called to be of one mind (compare [Acts 4:32](#); [14:2](#)).

The Soul and Salvation

Passages about the soul and salvation include:

- [Matthew 10:28](#)
- [Luke 12:5](#)
- [Hebrews 6:19](#)
- [Hebrews 10:39](#)
- [Hebrews 12:3](#)
- [Hebrews 13:7](#)
- [James 1:21](#)
- [James 5:20](#)
- [1 Peter 1:9, 22-23](#)
- [1 Peter 2:25](#)
- [1 Peter 4:19](#)
- [Revelation 6:9](#)
- [Revelation 20:4](#)

These passages either stress the human being, apart from the physical body, or the person's continued existence with God before the resurrection.

See also Human Being; Human Spirit.

Sowing

Planting seeds in the ground so they can grow.

See Agriculture.

Spain

The name of a peninsula in southwestern Europe that is farthest west. Biblical references to the peninsula mention the role of the Phoenicians. Their Carthaginian Empire expanded as far as Spain. The Romans expelled the Carthaginians from Spain as early as 206 BC. However, they did not conquer the local tribes until 25 BC. Only by then had the Romans gained control of the whole region ([1 Maccabees 8:3](#)).

Carthage

The Phoenician traders of Tyre extended their commercial empire to Spain (historic Iberia) as early as 1100 BC. Carthage on the North African coast was a center of the Phoenician Empire. They tried a series of colonizing efforts after trading

contacts. When their republic prospered, Carthaginians established many settlements on the Spanish coast. These included Carthago Nova (now Cartagena) and Malacca (now Malaga).

Later, they captured Tartessus and much of the peninsula became part of their empire. From this base in Spain, the Carthaginians sought to expand their empire into Europe.

Rome

The Romans met the Carthaginian challenge. They caused Hannibal to retreat when he attacked Italy during the Second Punic War (218–201 BC). The Romans extended their territory by defeating the Carthaginians on the Spanish peninsula. At last, under Augustus, the Romans made Spain part of the empire. At that time the Romans built a magnificent road system circling and crossing the whole Spanish peninsula.

Roman civilization had a deep and lasting influence on Spain. Three emperors (Trajan, Hadrian, and the first Theodosius) were born in Spain. Several scholars and famous writers in Roman culture came from Spain. These included the two Senecas, Martial, Prudentius, Lucan, Quintilian, Pomponius, and Mela.

New Testament

The apostle Paul wanted to share the message about Jesus Christ with people in every part of the Roman world. He probably realized the potential of converts in Spain. The main evidence that Paul included Spain in his strategic planning is in [Romans 15:24, 28](#). In that letter, Paul presents his message with clarity to Romans and Gentiles throughout the empire. To follow up on this letter, he planned to visit Rome and then make his way to Spain. Record of Paul visiting Spain comes only from an unclear reference after his death.

Clement of Rome was an early Christian writer at the end of the first century AD. He stated that Paul went to “the limits of the West” (1 Clement 1:5). Most Romans considered Spain as the western limit of their empire. Yet, this unclear phrase does not give enough evidence that Paul visited.

It is clear that Paul saw Spain as a strategic place for mission work. So, it seems probable that he himself, or others whom he designated, planted the Christian church in Spain during the first century AD.

Span

A hand measurement equaling one-half cubit ([Exodus 28:16](#); [39:9](#)).

See *Weights and Measures*.

Sparrow

A sparrow is a small bird in the finch family or the weaver finch family. In the Bible, the Hebrew word oftent translated “sparrow” is a general term for “bird.” It can refer to sparrows, finches, thrushes, or starlings. In some places, it likely means the common house sparrow (*Passer domestica*; [Psalm 84:3](#); [Proverbs 26:2](#)).

The male house sparrow is dull brown with a black throat. It is noisy and active. When sparrows build nests in open places, the opening is on the side. They make their nests from almost anything they can find. Sparrows also build in sheltered places such as houses, boxes, or holes in trees. They lay four to seven eggs at a time.

The common house sparrow was known in ancient Greece and Egypt. Large flocks could damage fields by eating seeds. In the Holy Land, sparrows are permanent residents. They live close to people and are very common.

Sparrows in the Bible

Sparrows were considered ceremonially clean. They were sold for very little money ([Matthew 10:29](#); [Luke 12:6](#)). In some marketplaces today in the Near East, boys still sell sparrows. They tie the birds together in groups of four to six by one leg, letting them fly above their heads. Such scenes were also common in New Testament times.

See also *Birds*.

Spear, Spearman

See *Armor and Weapons*.

Spelt

Spelt is a hardy member of the wheat family. The “rye” mentioned in [Isaiah 28:25](#) is thought to be spelt. Spelt is also mentioned in [Exodus 9:32](#) and [Ezekiel 4:9](#). It is a hard-grained type of wheat with loose ears and grains that are triangular when cut

across. Spelt was the most common form of wheat in ancient times.

This grain has a stronger stem than regular wheat and strong spikes of grain. Bread made from spelt flour is not as good as bread made from wheat flour. However, spelt will grow well in almost any kind of soil and will produce a crop on land that is not suitable for wheat. People that lived a long time ago preferred spelt to barley for making bread.

Spice, Spicery

See Incense; Perfume.

Spider

An animal that is part of the Araneida family. There are between 600 and 700 species in the Holy Land. Unlike insects, spiders (and scorpions) each have eight legs. They also have poison glands. The strength of the poison depends on the kind of spider. Some can kill only insects. Others can also kill birds and mice.

Most spiders have a pair of spinnerets. These are connected to silk glands under the abdomen. The spider uses them to make a web. In the Bible, a spider's web is a picture of weakness and insecurity ([Job 8:14](#); [Isaiah 59:5-6](#)).

Spinner, Spinning

In all periods of Israel's history, women spun fibers into yarn. But, a class of professional spinners arose alongside them. [Exodus 35:25-26](#) mentions women spinners. Among her other virtues, the good wife of [Proverbs 31](#) engaged in spinning ([Proverbs 31:19](#)). Jesus spoke of the lilies of the field that did not need to spin ([Matthew 6:28](#); [Luke 12:27](#)).

Spirit

Designation of that aspect of existence that is noncorporeal and immaterial. Its Latin derivation (as with the Hebrew and Greek words in the Bible—*ruach* and *pneuma*) denotes blowing or breathing ([Jb 41:16](#); [Is 25:4](#)). So the noun *spiritus* signifies breath and life. God, the source of all life, is himself Spirit ([Jn 4:24](#)). He put a spirit within all

human beings so that they could commune with him in his realm and in his nature. A Christian's experience of Jesus Christ is made real when that person experiences the Spirit of Jesus Christ in his or her spirit.

Three articles follow that describe three major aspects of spirit: (1) Spirit of God; (2) Spirit of Jesus Christ; (3) spirit of man.

Spirit of God

Description of God in action, God in motion. The word "spirit" (Hebrew, *ruach*; Greek, *pneuma*) is the word used from ancient times to describe and explain the experience of divine power working in, upon, and around people.

In the Old Testament

There are three basic meanings evident in the use of "spirit" from the earliest Hebrew writings: It was a wind from God, it was the breath of life, and it was a spirit of ecstasy.

First, it was a wind from God (the same Hebrew word translated "Spirit" in [Gn 1:2](#)) that caused the waters of the Flood to subside ([8:1](#)). A wind from God blew locusts over Egypt ([Ex 10:13](#)) and quail over the camp of Israel. The blast of his nostrils separated the waters of the Red Sea at the exodus ([14:21](#)).

Second, it was the breath of God that made man a living being ([Gn 2:7](#)). It is one of the earliest perceptions of Hebrew faith that humans live only because of the stirring of the divine breath or spirit within them ([Gn 6:3](#); [Jb 33:4](#); [34:14-15](#); [Ps 104:29-30](#)). Later, a clearer distinction was drawn between divine Spirit and human spirit, and between spirit and soul, but at the earliest stage these were all more or less perceived to be synonymous manifestations of the same divine power, the source of all life—animal as well as human ([Gn 7:15, 22](#); see [Eccl 3:19-21](#)).

Third, there were occasions when this divine power seemed to overtake and possess an individual fully, so that his or her words or actions far transcended those of normal behavior. Such a person was clearly marked as an agent of God's purpose and given respect. This was apparently how leaders were recognized in the premonarchy period—Othniel ([Jgs 3:10](#)), Gideon ([6:34](#)), Jephthah ([11:29](#)), and the first king, Saul ([1 Sm 11:6](#)), as well. So, too, the earliest prophets were

those whose inspiration came in ecstasy ([1 Sm 19:20-24](#)).

In the earlier stages of Hebrew thought, ecstatic experience was seen as the direct effect of divine power. This was true even when the ecstasy was recognized as evil in character, as in the case of Saul's seizure by the Spirit ([1 Sm 16:14-16](#)). A spirit from God could be for evil as well as for good (see [Jgs 9:23](#); [1 Kgs 22:19-23](#)).

In the Writings of the Prophets

For Isaiah, the spirit was that which characterized God and distinguished him and his actions from human affairs ([Is 31:3](#)). Later, the adjective "holy" appeared as that which distinguished the Spirit of God from any other spirit, human or divine ([Ps 51:11](#); [Is 63:10-11](#)).

The problem of false prophecy emphasized the danger of assuming that every message delivered in ecstasy was the word of the Lord. Thus, tests of prophecy evaluated the content of the message delivered or the character of the prophet's life, not the degree or quality of inspiration (see [Dt 13:1-5](#); [18:22](#); [Jer 23:14](#); [Mi 3:5](#)). This sense of a need to discriminate between true and false inspiration and to distinguish the word of God from the merely ecstatic oracle may help to explain the otherwise puzzling reluctance of the major eighth- and seventh-century BC prophets to attribute their inspiration to the Spirit.

In the Exilic and Postexilic Writings

In exilic and postexilic literature, the role of the Spirit is narrowed to two major functions: that of the prophetic Spirit and that of the Spirit of the age to come.

The later prophets again spoke of the Spirit in explicit terms as the inspirer of prophecy (see [Ez 3:1-4, 22-24](#); [Hg 2:5](#); [Zec 4:6](#)). As they looked back to the preexilic period, these prophets freely attributed the inspiration of "the former prophets" to the Spirit as well ([Zec 7:12](#)).

This tendency to exalt the Spirit's role as the inspirer of prophecy became steadily stronger in the period between the OT and NT, until in rabbinic Judaism the Spirit was almost exclusively the inspirer of the prophetic writings now regarded as Scripture.

The other understanding of the Spirit's role during exilic and postexilic times was that the Spirit would be the manifestation of the power of God in the age

to come. That eschatological hope of divine power effecting a final cleansing and a renewed creation is rooted principally in Isaiah's prophecies ([Is 4:4](#); [32:15](#); [44:3-4](#)). Isaiah speaks of one anointed by the Spirit to accomplish complete and final salvation ([11:2](#); [42:1](#); [61:1](#)). Elsewhere, the same longing is expressed in terms of the Spirit being freely dispensed to all Israel ([Ez 39:29](#); [Il 2:28-29](#); [Zec 12:10](#)) in the new covenant ([Jer 31:31-34](#); [Ez 36:26-27](#)).

In the period prior to Jesus, the understanding of the Spirit as the Spirit of prophecy and as the Spirit of the age to come had developed into the widespread dogma that the Spirit was no longer to be experienced in the present. The Spirit had been known in the past as the inspirer of prophetic writings, but after Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, the Spirit had withdrawn ([1 Macc 4:44-46](#); [9:27](#); [2 Bar 85:1-3](#); see also [Ps 74:9](#); [Zec 13:2-6](#)). The Spirit would be known again in the age of the Messiah, but in the interim the Spirit was absent from Israel. Even the great Hillel (learned Jewish leader and teacher, 60? BC-AD 20?), a near contemporary of Jesus, had not received the Spirit—though if anyone was worthy of the Spirit, it was he. There is a tradition that at a meeting of Hillel and other wise men, a voice from heaven said, "Among those here present is one who would have deserved the Holy Spirit to rest upon him, if his time had been worthy of it." The wise men all looked at Hillel.

The consequence of this accepted dearth of the Spirit was that the Spirit in effect became subordinated to the law. The Spirit was the inspirer of the law, but since the Spirit could no longer be experienced directly, the law became the sole voice of the Spirit. It was this increasing dominance of the law and its authoritative interpreters that provided the background for the mission of Jesus and the initial spread of Christianity.

In the New Testament

If we are to understand the NT's teaching on the Spirit, we must recognize both its continuity and discontinuity with the OT. At many points NT usage cannot be fully understood except against the background of OT concepts or passages. For example, the ambiguity of [John 3:8](#) ("wind," "Spirit"), [2 Thessalonians 2:8](#) ("breath"), and [Revelation 11:11](#) ("breath of life") takes us back to the basic Hebrew meanings of "spirit." [Acts 8:39](#) and [Revelation 17:3](#) and [21:10](#) reflect the same conception of the Spirit that we find in [1 Kings 18:12](#), [2 Kings 2:16](#), and [Ezekiel 3:14](#). The NT

writers generally share the rabbinic view that Scripture has the authority of the Spirit behind it (see [Mk 12:36](#); [Acts 28:25](#); [Heb 3:7](#); [2 Pt 1:21](#)). The principal continuity is that the NT brings the fulfillment of what the OT writers looked forward to. At the same time, Christianity is not simply fulfilled Judaism. Jesus' coming and his giving of his Spirit to live within his believers marks off the new faith as something new and distinct.

The Spirit of the New Age

The most striking feature of Jesus' ministry and of the message of the earliest Christians was their conviction and proclamation that the blessings of the new age were already present, that the eschatological Spirit had already been poured out. With the exception of the Essenes at Qumran, no other group or individual within the Jewish religion of that time had dared to make such a bold claim. The prophets and the rabbis looked for a messianic age yet to come, and the apocalyptic writers warned of its imminent arrival, but none thought of it as already present. Even John the Baptist spoke only of one about to come and of the Spirit's operation in the imminent future ([Mk 1:8](#)). But for Jesus and first-century Christians, the longed for hope was a living reality, and the claim carried with it the exciting sense of being in "the last days." Without some recognition of that eschatological dimension of the Christians' faith and life, we cannot understand this teaching on, and experience of, the Spirit.

Jesus clearly thought of his teachings and healings as fulfillment of the prophetic hope ([Mt 12:41-42](#); [13:16-17](#); [Lk 17:20-21](#)). In particular, he saw himself as the one anointed by the Spirit to provide salvation ([Mt 5:3-6](#); [11:5](#); [Lk 4:17-19](#)). So, too, Jesus understood his exorcisms as the effect of the power of God and as manifestations of the end-time rule of God ([Mt 12:27-28](#); [Mk 3:22-26](#)). The Gospel writers, especially Luke, emphasize the eschatological character of Jesus' life and ministry by stressing the role of the Spirit in his birth ([Mt 1:18](#); [Lk 1:35, 41, 67](#); [2:25-27](#)), his baptism ([Mk 1:9-10](#); [Acts 10:38](#)), and his ministry ([Mt 4:1](#); [12:18](#); [Mk 1:12](#); [Lk 4:1, 14](#); [10:21](#); [Jn 3:34](#)).

The Christian church began with the in-breathing of the Holy Spirit on the day of Christ's resurrection ([Jn 20:22](#)), followed by the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost "in the last days." The overwhelming experience of vision and inspired utterance was taken as proof positive that the new age prophesied by Joel had now arrived ([Acts 2:2-5](#),

[17-18](#)). Similarly, in Hebrews the gift of the Spirit is spoken of as "the powers of the age to come" ([Heb 6:4-5](#)). More striking still is Paul's understanding of the Spirit as the guarantee of God's complete salvation ([2 Cor 1:22](#); [5:5](#); [Eph 1:13-14](#)), and as the first installment of the believer's inheritance of God's kingdom ([Rom 8:15-17](#); [1 Cor 6:9-11](#); [15:42-50](#); [Gal 4:6-7](#); [5:16-18, 21-23](#); [Eph 1:13-14](#)). The Spirit is here again thought of as the power of the age to come, as that power (which will characterize God's rule at the end of time) already shaping and transforming the lives of believers.

For Paul, this means also that the gift of the Spirit is but the beginning of a lifelong process that will not end until the believer's whole person is brought under the Spirit's power ([Rom 8:11, 23](#); [1 Cor 15:44-49](#); [2 Cor 3:18](#); [5:1-5](#)). It also means that the present experience of faith is one of lifelong tension between what God has already begun to bring about in the believer's life and what has not yet been brought under God's grace ([Phil 1:6](#)). It is this tension between life "in the Spirit" and life "in the flesh" (see [Gal 2:20](#)) that comes to poignant expression in [Romans 7:24](#) and [2 Corinthians 5:2-4](#).

The Spirit of New Life

Since the Spirit is the mark of the new age, it is not surprising that the NT writers understood the gift of the Spirit to be that which brings an individual into the new age. John the Baptist described the way the coming one would baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire ([Mt 3:11](#)). According to [Acts 1:5](#) and [11:16](#), this imagery was taken up by Jesus, and the promise is seen as fulfilled at Pentecost—the outpouring of the Spirit here being understood as the risen Christ's action in drawing his disciples into the new age ([Acts 2:17, 33](#)).

It seems to be one of Luke's aims in the book of Acts to highlight the central importance of the gift of the Spirit in conversion-initiation—it is that decisive "gift of the Holy Spirit" that makes one a Christian ([Acts 2:38-39](#)). People could have been followers of Jesus on earth, but it was only when they received the gift of the Spirit that they could be said to have "believed in the Lord Jesus Christ" ([11:16-17](#)). When the Spirit's presence was manifested in and upon a person's life, that was recognized by Peter as proof enough that God had accepted that person, even though he or she had not yet made any formal profession of faith or been baptized ([10:44-48](#); [11:15-18](#); [15:7-9](#)). So too Apollos,

already aglow with the Spirit ([18:25](#)), even though his knowledge of “the way of God” was slightly defective (vv [24-26](#)), apparently was not required to supplement his “baptism of John” with Christian baptism. However, the 12 so-called disciples at Ephesus proved by their very ignorance of the Spirit that they were not yet disciples of the Lord Jesus ([19:1-6](#)). Paul asked these 12 men, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” ([19:2](#)).

This accords with Paul’s emphasis in his letters. Belief and reception of the Spirit go together: to receive the Spirit is to begin the Christian life ([Gal 3:2-3](#)); to be baptized in the Spirit is to become a member of the body of Christ ([1 Cor 12:13](#)); to “have the Spirit of Christ” is to belong to Christ ([Rom 8:9-11](#)); to receive the Spirit is tantamount to becoming a child of God ([Rom 8:14-17](#); [Gal 4:6-7](#)). The Spirit so characterizes the new age and the life of the new age that only the gift of the Spirit can bring a person into the new age to experience the life of the new age. For the Spirit is distinctively and peculiarly the life-giver; the Spirit indeed *is* the life of the new age ([Rom 8:2, 6, 10](#); [1 Cor 15:45](#); [2 Cor 3:6](#); [Gal 5:25](#)).

In just the same way in John’s writings, the Spirit is characteristically the life-giving Spirit ([Jn 6:63](#)), the power from above, the seed of divine life that brings about the new birth ([Jn 3:3-8](#); [1 Jn 3:9](#)), and a river of living water that brings life when one believes in Christ ([Jn 7:37-39](#); so also [4:10, 14](#)). Or again, reception of the Spirit in [John 20:22](#) is depicted as a new creation analogous to [Genesis 2:7](#). Consequently, in [1 John 3:24](#) and [4:13](#), possession and experience of the Spirit count as one of the “tests of life” listed in that letter.

Manifestations of the Spirit

It will be clear from what has already been said that when the first Christians, like the ancient Hebrews, spoke of the Spirit, they were thinking of experiences of divine power. In the NT, as in the OT, “Spirit” is the word used to explain the experience of new life and vitality (see above), of liberation from legalism (e.g., [Rom 8:2](#); [2 Cor 3:17](#)), of spiritual refreshing and renewal (cf. e.g., [Is 32:15](#); [Ez 39:29](#) with [Jn 7:37-39](#); [Rom 5:5](#); [1 Cor 12:13](#); [1 Tm 3:5-6](#)). It is important to realize how wide a range of experiences were attributed to the Spirit: ecstatic experiences ([Acts 2:24](#); [10:43-47](#); [19:6](#); cf. [10:10](#); [22:17](#)—“in ecstasy”; [2 Cor 12:1-4](#); [Rv 1:10](#)), emotional experiences (e.g., love—[Rom 5:5](#); joy—[Acts 13:52](#); [1 Thes 1:6](#); see also [Gal 5:22](#); [Phil 2:1-2](#)), experiences of illumination ([2 Cor 3:14-17](#); [Eph](#)

[1:17-18](#); [Heb 6:4-5](#); [1 Jn 2:20-21](#)), and experiences issuing in moral transformation ([1 Cor 6:9-11](#)). Likewise, when Paul speaks of spiritual gifts, called charismata (acts or words that bring divine grace to concrete expression), he evidently has a wide range of actual events in mind: inspired speech ([1 Cor 12:8-10](#); [1 Thes 1:5](#)), miracles and healings ([1 Cor 12:9](#); [Gal 3:5](#); cf. [Heb 2:4](#)), and various acts of service and help, of counsel and administration, and of aid and mercy ([Rom 12:7-8](#); [1 Cor 12:28](#)).

In talking thus of the Spirit in terms of experience, we should not overemphasize particular experiences or manifestations, as though earliest Christianity consisted of a sequence of mountaintop experiences or spiritual highs. There clearly were such experiences, indeed a wide range of experiences, but no one experience is singled out to be sought by all (except prophecy). There is no distinctively second (or third) experience of the Spirit in the NT, and Paul warned against overvaluing particular manifestations of the Spirit ([1 Cor 14:6-19](#); [2 Cor 12:1-10](#); cf. [Mk 8:11-13](#)). Where particular experiences are valued, it is as manifestations of a more sustained experience, particular expressions of an underlying relationship (cf. [Acts 6:3-5](#); [11:24](#)—“full of the Spirit”; [Eph 5:18](#)). What we are in touch with here is the vigor of the experiential dimension of earliest Christianity. If the Spirit is the breath of the new life in Christ (cf. [Ez 37:9-10, 14](#); [Jn 20:22](#); [1 Cor 15:45](#)), then presumably the analogy extends further, and the experience of the Spirit is like the experience of breathing: one is not conscious of it all the time, but if one is not conscious of it, at least sometimes, something is wrong.

The Fellowship of the Spirit

It was out of this shared experience of the Spirit that the earliest Christian community grew and developed, for this is what “the fellowship [koinonia] of the Spirit” properly means: common participation in the same Spirit ([Phil 2:1](#); cf. [Acts 2:42](#); [1 Cor 1:4-9](#)). It was the gift of the Spirit that brought those in Samaria, Caesarea, and elsewhere effectively into the community of the Spirit ([Act 8, 10](#)). So also, it was the experience of the one Spirit that provided the unifying bond in the churches of Paul’s mission ([1 Cor 12:13](#); [Eph 4:3-4](#); [Phil 2:1-2](#)). Here we see the real importance of the divine manifestations of the Spirit for Paul: it is out of the diversity of these particular manifestations that the body of Christ grows in unity ([Rom 12:4-8](#); [1 Cor 12:12-17](#); [Eph 4:4-16](#)).

Spirit of Jesus Christ

The Spirit as identified with Jesus Christ.

The most important development and element in earliest Christian understanding of the Spirit is that the Spirit is now the Spirit of Jesus Christ ([Acts 16:7](#); [Rom 8:9](#); [Gal 4:6](#); [Phil 1:19](#); [1 Pt 1:11](#); see also [Jn 7:38](#); [15:26](#); [16:7](#); [19:30](#); [Rv 3:1](#); [5:6](#)). The Spirit is to be identified as the Spirit that bears witness to Jesus ([Jn 15:26](#); [16:13–15](#); [Acts 5:32](#); [1 Cor 12:3](#); [1 Jn 4:2](#); [5:7–8](#); [Rv 19:10](#)), but also, and more profoundly, as the Spirit that inspired and empowered Jesus himself. This Spirit became available to the believers after Christ's resurrection.

The apostles John and Paul were quite clear in their writings about Christ becoming spirit through resurrection. The keynote verses penned by John are [John 6:63](#); [7:37–39](#); [14:16–18](#); [20:22](#); and [1 John 3:24](#); [4:13](#). The critical passages written by Paul are [Romans 8:9–10](#); [1 Corinthians 15:45](#); [2 Corinthians 3:17–18](#); and [1 Corinthians 6:17](#).

Revelation concerning the Spirit of Jesus is progressive in the Gospel of John. John does not tell us from the beginning that people could not actually receive eternal life until the hour of Christ's glorification. Throughout the Gospel, Jesus declares to various people that he can give them eternal life if they would believe in him. He promises them the water of life, the bread of life, and the light of life. But no one could really partake of these until after the Lord had risen. As a foretaste, as a sample, they could receive life via the Lord's words because his words were themselves spirit and life ([Jn 6:63](#)); however, it was not until the Spirit would become available that believers could actually become the recipients of the divine, eternal life. After the Lord's discourse in [John 6](#), Jesus said, "It is the Spirit that gives life, the flesh profits nothing" (v [63](#)). In the flesh Jesus could not give them the bread of life, but when the Spirit became available, they could have life. Again, Jesus offered the water of life—even life flowing like rivers of living water—to the Jews assembled at the Feast of Tabernacles. He told them to come and drink of him. But no one could, then and there, come and drink of him. So John added a note: "But this he spoke concerning the Spirit, for the Spirit was not yet because Jesus was not yet glorified" ([7:39](#)). Once Jesus would be glorified through resurrection, the Spirit of the glorified Jesus would be available for people to drink. In [John 6](#), Jesus

offered himself as the bread of life to be eaten by people; and in [John 7](#), he offered himself as the water of life to refresh men. But no one could eat him or drink him until he became spirit, as was intimated in [John 6:63](#) and then stated plainly in [John 7:39](#).

In [John 14:16–18](#), Jesus went one step further in identifying himself with the Spirit. He told the disciples that he would give them another Comforter. Then he told them that they should know who this Comforter was because he was, then and there, abiding with them and would, in the near future, be in them. Who else but Jesus was abiding with them at that time? Then after telling the disciples that the Comforter would come to them, he said, "I am coming to you." First he said that the Comforter would come to them and abide in them, and then in the same breath he said that he would come to them and abide in them (see [14:20](#)). In short, the coming of the Comforter to the disciples was one and the same as the coming of Jesus to the disciples. The Comforter who was dwelling with the disciples that night was the Spirit in Christ; the Comforter who would be in the disciples (after the resurrection) would be Christ in the Spirit.

On the evening of the resurrection, the Lord Jesus appeared to the disciples and then breathed into them the Holy Spirit. This inbreathing, reminiscent of God's breathing into Adam the breath of life ([Gn 2:7](#)), became the fulfillment of all that had been promised and anticipated earlier in John's Gospel. Through this impartation, the disciples became regenerated and indwelt by the Spirit of Jesus Christ. This historical event marked the genesis of the new creation. Jesus could now be realized as the bread of life, the water of life, and the light of life. The believers now possessed his divine, eternal, risen life. From that time forward, Christ as spirit indwelt his believers. Thus, in his first epistle John could say, "And hereby we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit whom he gave to us" ([1 Jn 3:24](#)), and again, "Hereby we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit" ([4:13](#)).

The apostles had quite an adjustment to make after Christ's resurrection. They had become so accustomed to his physical presence that it was difficult for them to learn how to live by his spiritual, indwelling presence. All through the 40 days after his resurrection, from the time the apostles received the inbreathing of the Spirit, Christ was teaching the disciples to make the transfer. He would physically appear and then

disappear intermittently. His appearances were very frequent in the beginning and then they steadily diminished. His aim was to guide the apostles into knowing him in his invisible presence. However, this was so new to them that he had to keep appearing to them in order to strengthen and reassure them. But his real desire was to help them live by faith and not by sight. When he appeared to the disciples as they were all together the second time, with Thomas present, he chided Thomas for his unbelief. Then he pronounced this blessing, “Blessed are those who do not see me and yet believe” ([In 20:29](#)).

The apostle Paul was such a “blessed” one. He did not know Christ in the flesh. He knew only the risen Christ ([2 Cor 5:15-16](#)). In this regard, he had an advantage over the early apostles. They had a great adjustment to make, but from the very beginning, Paul knew the risen Christ as Spirit. Paul became the forerunner of all those Christians who have never seen Jesus in the flesh and who have come to experience him in the Spirit. Yes, Paul had seen the risen Lord; he was the last one to do so ([1 Cor 15:8](#)). And from that time onward he realized that Jesus was a glorified man, exalted far above all. Paul wrote much concerning this, but his writings did not leave the far-above-all Jesus far away because this was not what Paul experienced. Any experienced Christian should be able to testify that the Christ in the heavens is also the Christ in the heart.

In his writings, Paul often speaks of the Spirit and Christ synonymously. This is evident in [Romans 8:9-10](#). The terms “Spirit of God,” “Spirit of Christ,” and “Christ” are all used interchangeably. The Spirit of God is the Spirit of Christ, and the Spirit of Christ is Christ. In these verses, it is evident that Paul identified the Spirit with Christ because in Christian experience they are absolutely identical. There is no such thing as an experience of Christ apart from the Spirit. The separation and/or distinction does exist in Trinitarian theology—and for very good reasons—but the separation is nearly nonexistent in actual experience. Several of Paul’s statements are written from the vantage point of experience.

In [1 Corinthians 15:45](#), Paul says that the risen Jesus became life-giving spirit. Notice the verse does not say Jesus became the Spirit, as if the second person of the Trinity became the third, but that Jesus became spirit in the sense that his mortal existence and form were metamorphosed into a spiritual existence and form. Jesus’ person was not

changed through the resurrection, only his form. With this changed spiritual form, Jesus regained the essential state of being he had emptied himself of in becoming a man. Before he became a man, he subsisted in the form of God ([Phil 2:6](#)), which form is Spirit and thereby was united to the Spirit (the third of the Trinity), while still remaining distinct. Thus, when the scripture says that the Lord “became life-giving spirit,” it does not mean that the Son became the Holy Spirit. But it does indicate that Christ, via resurrection, appropriated a new, spiritual form (while still retaining a body—a glorified one) that enabled him to commence a new spiritual existence (see [1 Pt 3:18](#)).

In [2 Corinthians 3](#), Paul explains that the NT ministry is a ministry carried out by the Spirit of the living God (v [3](#)), who is the Spirit that gives life (v [6](#)). In fact, the whole NT economy is characterized as “the ministry of the Spirit” (v [8](#)). At the same time, Paul emphasizes that the function of the NT ministry is to bring God’s people to see and experience the glorious Christ ([3:3, 14, 16-18; 4:4-6](#)). It is in this context that Paul boldly declares, “The Lord is the Spirit” ([3:17](#)). He who turns his heart to the Lord is, in effect, turning his heart to the Spirit. If the Lord were not the Spirit abiding in the believers, how could they turn their hearts to him? And how could they be transformed into the same image? [Second Corinthians 3:18](#) says, “But we all, with unveiled face mirroring the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord-Spirit.” According to the Greek, the last phrase of this verse could be rendered “the Lord, the Spirit” (see asv) or “the Lord, who is the Spirit” (see rsv, niv) because the expression “the Spirit” is in direct apposition to “the Lord” (i.e., it is a further description of the Lord). Thus, the Lord is the Spirit.

In conclusion, when the Scriptures identify the Spirit with Christ and vice versa, the identification is not equivocation. Christ is not the Holy Spirit. Christ and the Spirit are distinct persons of the Trinity, as is affirmed by the overall teaching of the Word. But the Scriptures do identify Christ and the Spirit in the context of Christian experience. It would be accurate to say that Christians experience Christ through his Spirit, the Spirit of Christ. One cannot know Jesus apart from the Spirit or other than through the Spirit.

See also Resurrection.

Spirit of Man

The innermost being of the human person, corresponding with the nature of God, which is Spirit. Some scholars think the spirit is the same as the soul; others see a distinction. As such, some believe in the tripartite (threefold) nature of a human (cf. [1 Thes 5:23](#)), spirit, soul, and body, as against a bipartite (twofold) nature, material and immaterial.

[First Thessalonians 5:23](#) clearly speaks of a tripartite design for mankind. Other Scriptures see soul and spirit as the same. A clear case of the parallel (synonymous) use of soul and spirit (as in [Jb 7:11](#); [Is 26:9](#), etc.) is in Mary's "Magnificat." She says, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior" ([Lk 1:47](#), nkjv). Rather than divide the two as "parts," some have suggested that a human *has* a spirit and *is* a soul. Usually spirit indicates the vitalizing, energizing, empowering agent; it is that essence of the human being that corresponds with God's nature and can commune with God, who is Spirit.

Those who are united to Christ experience spiritual union with him—his Spirit with their spirit. This is what Paul meant when he said, "He who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit" ([1 Cor 6:17](#)). Note that Paul does not say, "he who joins himself to the Spirit is one spirit"; he uses the word "Lord" as synonymous with "the Spirit." Union with the Lord is a union of the human spirit with his Spirit. Since the day of regeneration, a believer's human spirit is united to Christ's Spirit. Look at [John 3:6](#) ("that which is born of the Spirit is spirit") and [Romans 8:16](#) ("his Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God"). These scriptures show that one's union with Christ is based upon the regeneration of one's spirit by the divine Spirit.

Spirits

Synonym for angels and demons. *See* Angel; Demon.

Spirits in Prison

Term used in [1 Peter 3:18–20a](#). There is little agreement among scholars as to what "spirits in prison" really refers to or why Jesus would have gone to preach to them. Martin Luther confessed that verse [19](#) "is an amazing text and as dark as any in the New Testament and I am not sure I know

what St. Peter means." Because there is so much disagreement and uncertainty, several possible interpretations are presented here.

First, many commentators take "spirits in prison" to refer to the disembodied spirits of the people who disobeyed the preaching of Noah and are now in Sheol or hades—the place of the departed unbelievers. Some think Christ preached the gospel to them so that they could believe and be saved (though there is little, if any, support in the NT that a person who dies as an unbeliever can get a second chance). Others think that Christ simply proclaimed his victory over Satan and made known the blessings that these spirits once for all rejected.

Second, other commentators argue that the "spirits in prison" are not human spirits but rather are the same supernatural beings referred to in [1 Peter 3:22](#)—the evil angels, authorities, and powers. They are related to the "sons of God" in [Genesis 6:1–4](#). In support of this, they argue that the proclamation to these spirits is not before but after Jesus' resurrection, and so is probably not a *descent* to the dead but an *ascent* to the "heavenly places," where the rebellious spiritual powers live (see [Eph 6:12](#)). Furthermore, in the pre-Christian Jewish book of 1 Enoch, Enoch is pictured as proclaiming doom to the apostate angels. So Christ is seen as the new Enoch declaring to the "spirits in prison" his victory on the cross and their final defeat.

Finally, still others have suggested that the preaching of Christ was neither to supernatural spiritual beings nor to the departed spirits in Hades. Rather, the preaching took place in the days of Noah and was addressed to Noah's contemporaries, who, because they disobeyed, are now in prison. In other words, the Spirit of Christ, referred to in [1 Peter 1:11](#), and which existed before the Incarnation, inspired Noah to preach to the people. In this interpretation there is no "descent into hell" and no declaration to the fallen angels. The text simply says that Christ in his spiritual dimension preached in the days of Noah.

See also Peter, First Letter of.

Spirits, Discerning of

See Spiritual Gifts.

Spirits, Unclean

See Demon; Demon-possession.

Spiritual Gifts

The term "spiritual gifts" comes from two words in the original Greek language of the New Testament: *charismata* and *pneumatika* (these are the plural forms of *charisma* and *pneumatikon*.) In the Bible, the apostle Paul uses these words more than anyone. In fact, in the New Testament, these words do not appear anywhere else except for [1 Peter 2:5](#) and [4:10](#). While other New Testament writers mention abilities that God gives to believers, Paul provides the most complete teaching about spiritual gifts.

Origin of the Term

These Greek words come from simpler Greek words. The word *charisma* comes from *charis* (which means grace). The word *pneumatikon* comes from *pneuma* (which means spirit). Both words describe similar things: *charisma* means "an expression of grace," while *pneumatikon* means "an expression of Spirit." However, these words can be used in slightly different ways.

Charisma

Charisma explains how God saves in Jesus Christ ([Romans 5:15-16](#)). It also is the gift of eternal life ([6:23](#)). In [Romans 11:29](#), *charisma* describes God's special acts of kindness toward Israel, which confirmed God's choice of Israel as His people (see also [2 Peter 1:10](#)). In [2 Corinthians 1:11](#), the term seems to refer to a particular action of God. God delivered Paul from a life-threatening danger.

Most often, it describes special abilities that God gives to individual believers. Paul lists examples of these abilities, such as speaking God's message and serving others ([Romans 12:6-8](#); [1 Corinthians 12:8-10](#)). Other passages that talk about these gifts include [Romans 1:11](#); [1 Corinthians 1:7](#); [7:7](#); [12:4-11](#), [28-30](#); and [1 Peter 4:10](#).

Pneumatikon

Paul uses *pneumatikon* in a broader sense. It is more proper to translate it as an adjective. So, it describes various things and people as "spiritual." Paul uses this word:

- To describe specific acts or words given by the Spirit ([Romans 1:11](#))
- To describe God's law as spiritual ([7:14](#))
- To describe several things from Israel's history in the wilderness as spiritual:
 - The special food (manna) God provided
 - The water from the rock
 - The rock itself that provided water ([1 Corinthians 10:3-4](#))
- To describe the new body believers will receive in the resurrection ([15:44-46](#)).
- To describe various spiritual blessings:
 - Blessings in heaven ([Ephesians 1:3](#))
 - Understanding God's will ([Colossians 1:9](#))
 - Songs used in worship ([Ephesians 5:19](#); [Colossians 3:16](#)).

When used as a plural noun, *pneumatika* can refer to:

- People who are spiritual ([Galatians 6:1](#))
- Things that are spiritual ([Romans 15:27](#); [1 Corinthians 2:13](#); [9:11](#); [12:1](#); [14:1](#))
- Powers in heaven that are spiritual ([Ephesians 6:12](#))

What Are Spiritual Gifts?

From this short study, we can give a more precise definition of "spiritual gifts." There are three main ways to describe them:

1. Spiritual gifts are whatever tools or abilities the Holy Spirit uses.
2. Spiritual gifts are whatever show the Holy Spirit's work.

3. Spiritual gifts are whatever expresses the Holy Spirit's presence.

So then, whatever event, word, or action is a clear expression of grace is a spiritual gift (*charisma*). Or, it is anything that helps people receive God's grace. *Pneumatikon* is the more general word, and so it is less precise. *Charisma* is more specific. Also, chose to use the word *charisma* more often ([Romans 1:11](#); [12:6](#); [1 Corinthians 7:7](#); [12:4](#)). The people who disagreed with Paul in the city of Corinth preferred to use the word *pneumatikon* instead ([1 Corinthians 2:13-3:4](#); [14:37](#); [15:44-46](#)).

In the rest of our discussion, we will focus on the word *charisma*. Paul sometimes uses this word to describe God's direct actions in general ([Romans 5:15](#), [16](#); [6:23](#); [11:29](#); [1 Corinthians 1:11](#)). However, we will look more closely at the places where Paul uses the word in a specific way. In these passages, "spiritual gifts" are specific ways that God's grace becomes visible. These gifts work through one person to help other people.

The Bible gives us clear lists of spiritual gifts (*charismata*) in several places ([Romans 12](#); [1 Corinthians 12](#); [Ephesians 4](#); [1 Peter 4](#)). These lists help us understand what Paul meant by spiritual gifts. Paul, who first defined the idea of spiritual gifts in the church, explained them in a simple way. A spiritual gift is an ability that God's Spirit gives to a person. When someone uses this gift, it shows God's kindness in action, either through words or actions, to help other people.

A spiritual gift is something God does through a person, but God is always the one doing it. It is never the person themselves. This means people can only show these gifts when they stay open to God and depend on him.

Paul sometimes writes about people "having" or "possessing" spiritual gifts ([Romans 12:6](#); [1 Corinthians 7:7](#); [12:3](#)). But, this is another way of saying they depend on grace of God. They rely on God all the time to show his grace through them in different ways. Paul does not suggest that the spiritual gift is a power the gifted person commands. Nor is this what it means to "have the Spirit" ([Romans 8:9](#), [23](#)). But, it is true that in [1 Timothy 4:14](#) and [2 Timothy 1:6](#), this basic meaning starts to change a bit.

A spiritual gift is any event, word, or action that shows the grace of God in action. In this way, sacraments (sacred practices like the Lord's Supper and baptism) can be "means of grace" (even though they are never called this in the New

Testament). Many other words and actions can also show God's grace. This helps us understand that when the Bible lists spiritual gifts (for example, [Romans 12:6-8](#); [1 Corinthians 12:8-10](#)), these lists are not complete or final. Instead, they show common examples of how God's Spirit works. Or they address specific situations where people need guidance.

The fact that these different lists share some of the same gifts shows that Paul was not trying to make a perfect, complete list. Instead, he chose examples of activities and words through which he saw God's grace working in his churches.

Purpose of Spiritual Gifts

Paul believed all Christians could show spiritual gifts. Anyone who is open to God's Spirit and follows God's leading will naturally show God's kindness in some way ([Romans 8:9-14](#)). These people should also be ready for God's power to work through their words and actions when they are with other believers.

Paul explained that the church is "the body of Christ." Spiritual gifts demonstrate how the body functions ([Romans 12:4-6](#); [1 Corinthians 12:14-30](#)). If someone is not using their spiritual gifts, they are not working as part of Christ's body. These gifts are how Christ's body stays active and alive. Just as a body needs many different parts working together, the church grows stronger when people use their different gifts to help each other.

So then, a spiritual gift is mainly given to help the whole church community. The gift is "for the common good" ([1 Corinthians 12:7](#)). This is why it is wrong to selfishly want spiritual gifts or use them without love ([13:1-3](#)). A person cannot use their spiritual gift however they want for their own benefit. (Speaking in tongues [called *glossolalia* in Greek] might be an exception, but this is why Paul says it is less important than other gifts.)

God chooses to act through one person for the benefit of others. In other words, one person receives the gift for the community. The person with the gift only benefits when the whole community benefits. The spiritual health of each person is closely connected to the health of the whole church community ([1 Corinthians 12:14-26](#); [Ephesians 4:16](#)).

See Apostle, Apostleship; Miracle; Prophecy; Teacher; Tongues, Speaking in.

Spirituality

Spirituality is the quality of living according to the Holy Spirit's guidance and power. Spirituality is the visible result of sanctification, which is the process by which God makes a person holy (set apart for him). As sanctification grows, spirituality becomes stronger.

See Sanctification.

Sponge

A sponge is a simple sea animal in the Porifera family. The term "sponge" also describes their skeletal remains. Sponges have a body full of pores, tubules, and cells.

In ancient times, sponge fishing was popular in the Mediterranean, especially along the coasts of Anatolia and Syria. Divers harvested these sponges. The Bible references their use for absorbing liquids ([Matthew 27:48](#); [Mark 15:36](#)).

See also Animals.

Spring Rains, Latter Rain

Palestine's yearly spring rains fall from late March to early April. The spring rains (or latter rains) come after the citrus harvest and before the wheat and barley harvests. The spring rains typically mark the end of the rainy season until the fall rains start again in October.

In the Bible, the spring rains were associated with God's favor or displeasure with Israel ([Deuteronomy 11:13-17](#); [Job 29:23](#); [Proverbs 16:15](#); [Jeremiah 3:3](#); [Hosea 6:3](#); [Joel 2:23](#); [Zechariah 10:1](#); [James 5:7](#)).

Sprinkling of Blood

See Offerings and Sacrifices.

Stachys

Christian in Rome to whom Paul sent greetings, calling him "my beloved" ([Rom 16:9](#)).

Stacte

One of the fragrant spices used by Moses to make the incense offering ([Exodus 30:34](#)).

See Plants (Balm; Storax Tree).

Stadium

A Greek unit of linear measure equivalent to about 200 yards or 182.9 meters ([Matthew 14:24](#)).

See Weights and Measures.

Stag

A stag is an adult male deer

See Deer; see also Animals.

Stallion

A stallion is an adult male horse that has not been castrated and is used for breeding.

See Horse; see also Animals.

Star

A star is a large ball of burning gas in space that gives off light. Many stars can be seen in the night sky.

The Bible sometimes uses "star" in a symbolic way. For example, stars can represent angels or leaders ([Numbers 24:17](#); [Revelation 1:20](#)).

See Astronomy.

Star in the East

Star that guided the magi to the infant Jesus ([Matthew 2:2, 7-10](#)). The magi were wise men from an Eastern land (possibly Parthia, Babylon, or Arabia) who came to Herod. They explained that they had seen the star of the King of the Jews in their homeland. Herod and the Jewish scribes directed the magi to Bethlehem. The star then guided them to where Jesus was born.

Many theories have been suggested to explain this phenomenon. In the 17th century, Johannes Kepler

proposed a supernova could produce extraordinary light. Many such explosions are recorded each year, but few are visible to the naked eye. None are known from the time of Christ. The ancients were fascinated with comets. Halley's comet was first seen in 240 BC. If calculated at 77-year intervals, it would have appeared in Judea around 12–11 BC. However, this date is much earlier than Jesus's birth.

Comets were usually linked to disasters in the ancient world. The ancients also practiced astrology, studying the constellations and the movement of planets. They closely observed rare planetary alignments. In 7 BC, Jupiter and Saturn aligned in Pisces. This happens every 257 years. This theory held that Jupiter was the world ruler. Saturn was linked to Syria-Palestine. Pisces was associated with the end times.

First-century readers, whether Jewish or Greek, would not have been surprised to read about a new star announcing the birth of Jesus. In [Matthew 2:2](#), the phrase "in the east" might mean "at its rising." This could mean that the wise men saw a new star and interpreted it as marking an important event. In Greco-Roman society, the heavens often foretold or explained events, like the founding of Rome and the birth of Augustus. Judaism also stressed the importance of stars. Josephus noted star events during the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70. Also, rabbis were fascinated by the imagery in the Balaam story in [Numbers 24:17](#) (see especially, [Numbers 24:17](#) in the Septuagint) and symbolized their messianic expectations in a star. This was also common at Qumran (Damascus Document 7:19 and following; 1QM 11:6; compare Testament of Levi 18:3; [Revelation 22:16](#)). Similarly, coins minted after the revolt of Simon Bar-Kochba ("son of a star") featured a star.

See also Astronomy.

Stater

A common coin in Jesus's day ([Matthew 17:27](#)).

See Coins.

Stealing

See Criminal Law and Punishment; Commandments, The Ten.

Steer

A young male of the cattle family that has been castrated and raised for work or meat.

See Cattle; *see also* Animals.

Stephanas

Christian believer at Corinth. He and his household were evidently Paul's first converts in Achaia. The members of Stephanas's family were some of the few Corinthian believers personally baptized by Paul. Stephanas and his kin were praised for their devotion and service to the Corinthian church. Stephanas, with Fortunatus and Achaicus, visited Paul at Ephesus in Asia Minor. Their mission probably included bringing aid for Paul's personal needs and seeking his advice for resolving the problems in the Corinthian church. Undoubtedly, Paul wrote and sent his first letter to the Corinthian church with this small delegation when they returned to Corinth ([1 Cor 1:16](#); [16:15–17](#)).

Stephen

Stephen was one of the first deacons (church leaders who took care of practical needs) in the early church. He was the first person to die for his faith in Jesus.

Stephen's Role in the Early Church

For Luke, Stephen shows how some people in the early Jerusalem church were becoming more interested in Greek culture. Also, Stephen's speech criticizes traditional Judaism and suggests spreading the gospel beyond Judea ([Acts 7:1–53](#)).

In [Acts 6](#), Luke describes the first division in the early church. The community included two groups of Jewish believers: "Hebrews" and "Hellenists." These terms show a cultural and language difference. The Hebrews came from Aramaic-speaking synagogues, and the Hellenists came from Greek-speaking ones. Stephen was one of seven deacons chosen to care for the Hellenists. From the beginning, his importance stands out. He is the only one described as "full of faith and of the Holy Spirit" ([Acts 6:5](#)). After the deacons were chosen, Stephen is mentioned again as "full of grace and power." He performed "great wonders and signs among the people" ([Acts 6:8](#)).

Stephen's Trial Before the Sanhedrin

Stephen's preaching caused conflict with the Greek-speaking synagogues in Jerusalem ([Acts 6:9](#)). His speech before the Sanhedrin shows that Stephen wanted to separate from old Jewish customs and temple practices. Luke's account of Stephen's arrest and trial ([6:10–7:60](#)) mirrors the trial of Jesus. Once Judea became a province, the Roman governor controlled most punishments. But, the Sanhedrin could still prosecute temple offenses. Stephen was ultimately stoned to death ([Acts 7:54–60](#)). As the first martyr of the church, Stephen imitated Jesus even in death. He gave his spirit to Jesus (like Jesus did to the Father, [Luke 23:46](#)) and asked forgiveness for his killers ([Acts 7:59–60](#)).

Stephen's Speech and Martyrdom

Stephen's speech in [Acts 7](#) is his defense. It also serves Luke's goal of spreading the gospel to other lands ([Acts 1:8](#)). It is the longest speech in Acts and comes at a crucial moment in early church history. Stephen reviews biblical history. He argues that the core of Judaism was at risk. He notes that the Jews took pride in the temple. But, it was not God's original idea. Solomon's temple was different from the tabernacle in the wilderness. Stephen also uses the Torah to highlight Israel's repeated disobedience. The same scriptures predicted the coming of "the righteous one," who Israel crucified.

Stephen's speech has important meanings. He shows that the national and religious boundaries of Judaism do not limit God. Judaism's exclusive attitude is unnatural, and God's work is always moving. If Stephen was right, the Jewish church should be free to take the gospel beyond Judea. Stephen's martyrdom led to persecution in Jerusalem ([Acts 8:1–3](#)). This also led to the gospel spreading to the Samaritans and then to the Greeks.

Stocks

A common form of punishment and confinement in Bible times ([2 Chronicles 16:10](#); [Acts 16:24](#)). Stocks were wooden frames with holes for locking a prisoner's feet, hands, or neck. This prevented movement and caused great discomfort.

See Criminal Law and Punishment.

Stoicism, Stoics

A widespread Greek philosophy, well represented in the audience at Athens listening to Paul ([Acts 17:16–34](#)). The apostle was probably familiar with it, for it had begun in Athens around 300 BC, with Zeno's teaching in the "stoa" (porches) of public buildings, and had spread throughout the Greco-Roman world. It was known, for example, at Tarsus and on the island of Cyprus, so that Paul would no doubt have encountered Stoics earlier in his journeys and possibly even in his hometown. The scope and power of its influence are indicated by the fact that the Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius (d. AD 180) was himself a Stoic, some of whose philosophical writings have survived.

The earliest Stoics were primarily concerned with cosmology, that is, the study of nature's origin and its laws. They were materialists, who held that all things come from the one basic element of fire and will eventually return to that one element in a vast cosmic conflagration. They, therefore, had a cyclical view of cosmic history, in which one universe after another arises and is destroyed. Both the orderliness of things as we know them, and this cyclical pattern of history, were ascribed to the organizing and sustaining power of a pervasive force known as the Logos that is sometimes regarded as divine. Its laws were the laws of nature to which all creatures must conform. It gives to all things their essential nature and so gives life and reason to men. In fact, the Logos is in man, taking the form of the human soul. Hence, to live according to reason is to live according to the natural order of things, and this is good. Conscious obedience to natural law liberates a man from fear and concern about external circumstances over which he has no control but which are still ruled by nature's laws. The good life, then, is one in which reason, not passion, rules, and peace of mind and harmony with nature consequently prevail.

Stoic ideas proved attractive to some Christians because of the apparent similarities between the Stoic logos and the Logos of [John 1:1–18](#), and between the idea of natural law and the law of God.

See also Epicureans; Philosophy.

Stone of Zoheleth

An alternate rendering for "Serpent's Stone" in [1 Kings 1:9](#).

See Serpent's Stone.

Stonecutter

A stonecutter is a skilled worker who cuts and shapes stone for buildings. These workers would remove stone from quarries and prepare it for use in large structures like palaces, temples, government buildings, and wealthy homes ([1 Kings 5:18](#), [2 Kings 12:12](#); [1 Chronicles 22:2, 15](#)).

At first, the Israelites used stonecutters from Phoenicia. But, they soon learned how to cut and shape stones themselves. After learning these skills, the Israelites built many impressive buildings, including those in the city of Samaria. Later, King Herod's stonecutters created beautiful stone buildings that can still be seen today in Jerusalem, Hebron, Samaria, and other places.

Some stonecutters specialized in detailed work for the inside of buildings, making stone pieces for windows, doors, and pillars. A special group called engravers worked with precious stones to make seals (carved stones used as signatures), decorative items, and jewelry ([Exodus 28:11](#)).

Stones, Precious

A lengthy list of the precious stones used in OT times occurs in [Exodus 28:17–20](#) and [39:10–13](#), where four rows of three stones, each engraved with the name of one of the 12 tribes of Israel, were set in the high priest's breastplate. Other lists occur in [Ezekiel 28:13](#) and [Revelation 21:19–21](#). It is difficult to properly identify all of these stones, since an accurate translation is not always possible. Some of the differences of translation are indicated in the following list, as translated in the rsv:

1. Agate, an oxide of silicon, a type of translucent quartz with layers of different colors ([Ex 28:19](#); [39:12](#); [Is 54:12](#); [Rv 21:19](#)).
2. Alabaster, a finely granular banded variety of calcium carbonate (gypsum), often white and translucent and widely used in Bible times for ornamental vases, bowls, kohl pots, statues, perfume jars, and so on ([Sg 5:15](#); [Mt 26:7](#); [Mk 14:3](#); [Lk 7:37](#)).
3. Amethyst, an oxide of silicon, a purple or violet variety of transparent crystalline quartz ([Ex 28:19](#); [39:12](#); [Rv 21:20](#)).
4. Beryl, a silicate of aluminum ([Ex 28:20](#); [39:13](#); [Sg 5:14](#); [Dn 10:6](#)). It is usually green in color ([Rv](#)

[21:20](#)) but can be blue, white, or golden and may be either opaque or transparent—the latter variety including the gems emerald and aquamarine.

5. Carbuncle. See Emerald below.

6. Carnelian, a silicon oxide reddish in color. In translations it is sometimes equated with sardius ([Ex 28:17](#); [39:10](#); [Ez 28:13](#)), a type of deep brown or red quartz ([Rv 4:3](#); [21:20](#)).

7. Chalcedony. See Agate above.

8. Chrysolite, an aluminum fluosilicate, yellowish in color ([Rv 21:20](#)), probably equivalent to topaz ([Ex 28:17](#)) or beryl ([Ez 1:16](#); [10:9](#); [28:13](#)).

9. Chrysoprase, a nickel-stained apple-green chalcedony widely used in jewelry ([Rv 21:20](#)).

10. Coral, the hard calcareous skeleton of a variety of marine animals occurring in various colors—red, white, and black. It is not strictly a stone ([Jb 28:18](#); [Ez 27:16](#)).

11. Crystal, a clear, translucent crystalline quartz ([Jb 28:18](#)). In [Revelation 4:6](#), [21:11](#), and [22:1](#) the Greek word *krystallon* may be rock crystal or even ice.

12. Diamond, a stone of uncertain identification ([Ex 28:18](#); [39:11](#); [Ez 28:13](#)). It may not be the equivalent of the modern diamond. In [Jeremiah 17:1](#), adamant was probably a form of corundum, a very hard substance.

13. Emerald, probably a green stone like the modern emerald ([Ex 28:18](#); [39:11](#); [Ez 27:16](#); [28:13](#)). The Septuagint suggests a purple stone like a garnet. In the NT *smaragdinos* in [Revelation 4:3](#) and *smaragdus* in [Revelation 21:19](#) suggest an emerald.

14. Jacinth, perhaps a reddish-orange zircon or a blue stone such as turquoise, amethyst, or sapphire ([Ex 28:19](#); [39:12](#)). In [Revelation 21:20](#) *huakinthos* is a blue stone. The exact identification is uncertain.

15. Jasper, a compact, opaque, often highly colored crystalline quartz substance ([Ex 28:20](#); [39:13](#)). In the NT the Greek term *iaspis* ([Rv 4:3](#); [21:11, 18–19](#)) is a green quartz.

16. Lapis lazuli, a deep blue stone; a compound of sodium, aluminum, calcium, sulphur, and silver containing a mixture of several minerals. It generally has golden flecks of iron pyrites and was widely used for ornamental purposes in the ancient world. It is akin to sapphire.

17. Marble, a limestone crystallized by metamorphism, taking a high polish, durable and suitable for building purposes ([1 Chr 29:2](#); [Est 1:6](#); [Rv 18:12](#)).

18. Onyx, a quartz consisting of straight layers or bands which differ in color ([Gn 2:12](#); [Ex 25:7](#); [28:9](#); [20](#); [39:6](#); [13](#); [1 Chr 29:2](#); [Jb 28:16](#); [Ez 28:13](#)). See Sardonyx below.

19. Pearl, a hard smooth substance, white or variously colored, which grows in the shell of various bivalve mollusks. In the NT “pearls” are known as ornaments for women ([1 Tm 2:9](#); [Rv 17:4](#)) or as items for trade ([Rv 18:12](#), [16](#)). The kingdom of heaven is likened to a fine pearl, which people seek at great cost ([Mt 13:45-46](#)).

20. Ruby, an uncertain translation of the Hebrew word *peninim* in six places ([Jb 28:18](#); [Prv 3:15](#); [8:11](#); [20:15](#); [31:10](#); [Lam 4:7](#)). This deep red or carmine stone was probably known in the ancient world, but there are difficulties in the translation of terms that may refer to it.

21. Sapphire, a deep blue stone ([Ex 24:10](#); [28:18](#); [39:11](#); [Jb 28:6](#); [16](#); [Sg 5:14](#); [Is 54:11](#); [Lam 4:7](#); [Ez 1:26](#); [10:1](#); [28:13](#)), which may have referred at times to lapis lazuli as in [Job 28:6](#) and [Revelation 21:19](#).

22. Sardius, a red or deep brown form of quartz ([Ex 28:17](#); [39:10](#); [Ez 28:13](#) kjv). It is referred to also in [Revelation 4:3](#) (kjv “sardine stone”), though in modern versions it is often rendered as “carnelian.” See Carnelian above.

23. Sardonyx, a form of agate with layers of brown and white ([Rv 21:20](#), kjv, nasb; “onyx” in nlt).

24. Topaz, a yellow stone, a fluosilicate of aluminum occurring in crystalline form ([Ex 28:17](#); [39:10](#); [Jb 28:19](#); [Ez 28:13](#); [Rv 21:20](#)).

See also Minerals and Metals.

Stoning

See Criminal Law and Punishment.

Stony Arabia

A division of Arabia, also called Rocky Arabia. See Arabia, Arabs.

Storax Tree

The storax tree (*Styrax officinalis*) belongs to a group of trees that produce a sweet-smelling resin. Today, scholars think that the “gum resin” mentioned in [Exodus 30:34](#) came from the storax tree. It is an irregular shrub or small tree with stiff branches that grows 2.7 to 6.1 meters (9 to 20 feet) tall.

This tree is common on low hills and rocky places from Lebanon throughout the Holy Land. Its gum is collected by making cuts in the stems and branches. The resin has a strong, pleasant smell and is still valued today as a perfume.

Stork

A stork is a large, long-legged wading bird (genus *Ciconia*) with strong wings and black flight feathers. When it flaps its wings, the sound is loud and rushing. Skin between the toes keeps the bird from sinking into mud. Its long, sharp red bill helps it catch and lift prey from the water. Storks are mute (they do not have a voice box).

Storks pass through the Holy Land during their migration in September as they travel to central and southern Africa. They return in the spring to northern Israel, Syria, and Europe. They travel in large flocks during the day, often spread across the sky.

Storks are known for caring well for their young and for returning to the same nesting place every year. They add to their nests each year. Some nests are more than 100 years old and over a meter (about 3 feet) high.

Two species of storks frequent the Holy Land. The white stork (*Ciconia alba*) is 101.6 centimeters (40 inches) tall. Its wingspread is 1.8 meters (6 feet). This enables it to move with a slow, sustained flight or to soar. In folklore the white stork is sometimes considered to be a sign of good fortune.

The black stork (*Ciconia nigra*) lives mainly around the Dead Sea valley and nests in trees. It may be the tree-dwelling bird in [Psalm 104:17](#).

Storks in the Bible

The Hebrew word for “stork” means “kingly one” or “loyal one,” likely because of its care for its young. The stork was ceremonially unclean because it ate water creatures, refuse, small animals, birds, and reptiles ([Leviticus 11:19](#); [Deuteronomy 14:18](#)).

Jeremiah wrote about the stork's instinctive knowledge of migration times ([Jer 8:7](#)). Zechariah described a vision that included storks with large wings ([Zec 5:9](#)).

See also Birds.

Straight Street

Straight Street is a street in Damascus where the apostle Paul stayed after his first encounter with the risen Jesus. In the house of Judas on this street, Ananias baptized Paul and Paul's sight was restored ([Acts 9:11](#)). People called the street "Straight" because, unlike many other streets in the city, this one was actually ran in a straight line.

The street still exists today and is still straight, though the current street is about 4.6 meters (15 feet) higher than the original route. People still call the street by this same name (the French name is Rue Droite). It runs east and west on the south boundary of the Christian section of town. The "house of Judas" is no longer there. But in a lane off the eastern end of Straight Street is the "house of Ananias."

See also Damascus.

Stranger

A person who is not from a place or group. In the Bible, "stranger" often means someone from another land who lives among the Israelites ([Leviticus 25:35](#)).

See Foreigner.

Strangling

Strangling is the act of choking or suffocating a person or animal by squeezing the throat, cutting off air and blood flow. In the Bible, the term refers to animals that were killed without their blood being drained, such as by suffocation. It was one of four practices that the early gentile Christians were asked to avoid out of respect for their Jewish Christian brothers and sisters.

Jewish law did not allow eating meat from animals whose blood was not fully drained when they were killed. The Jerusalem Council asked the early church to follow this practice to keep peace

between Jewish and gentile Christians ([Acts 15:20, 29; 21:25](#)).

Strangling was also one of four ways that Jewish law courts carried out the death penalty. Even though the Bible does not mention it as a punishment method, strangling was later used by rabbinic Judaism as a way to execute people.

See also Criminal Law and Punishment.

Stringed Instrument

See Musical Instruments.

Strong Drink

A strong drink is any kind of alcoholic drink.

It was forbidden to:

- Levites who were entering the tent of meeting ([Leviticus 10:9](#))
- Those taking the Nazirite vow ([Numbers 6:3; Judges 13:4-14](#))
- Kings and rulers ([Proverbs 31:4](#))
- John the Baptist ([Luke 1:15](#))

The writer of [Proverbs 20:1](#) suggests that the wise man does not become drunk by it. Isaiah warns against those who are addicted to it ([Isaiah 5:11, 22](#)). Strong drink was used as an offering in the Levitical sacrifice ([Numbers 28:7](#)). It was allowed during the feast when tithing ([Deuteronomy 14:26](#)).

See also Wine.

Stumbling Block

Term used both literally and figuratively to refer to anything that might cause one to stumble.

The phrase is used literally in [Leviticus 19:14](#), where the people of Israel are admonished not to "put a stumbling block before the blind," but to "fear the Lord your God." An isolated figurative use occurs in [Jeremiah 6:21](#), where God promises to put a stumbling block before the people of Israel if they do not heed his warnings.

The most common OT usage, however, is found in Ezekiel, where the phrase is used to refer to idols

and idolatry: “Son of man, these men have taken their idols into their hearts, and set the stumbling block of their iniquity before their faces; should I let myself be inquired of at all by them?” ([Ez 14:3](#), rsv; also [7:19](#); [44:12](#)).

In the NT the term essentially retains its Hebraic meaning. Even so, the phrase is employed figuratively to speak of the difficulties encountered by many Jews in believing Jesus to be the Son of God: “But we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles” ([1 Cor 1:23](#), rsv; see also [Rom 9:31–32](#)). In [Romans 11:11–12](#), Paul says that this resistance is actually part of God’s plan to spread his riches to the world. Finally, [1 Corinthians 8:9](#) uses “stumbling block” to speak of some practices that might in themselves be appropriate but might also have the unintended effect of offending a weaker brother (see also [Rom 14:13](#)).

Stylus

A tool used for writing characters on clay tablets ([Job 19:24](#); [Jeremiah 17:1](#)).

See Writing.

Suah

Zophah’s son, who was a leader in his father’s household and a mighty warrior in Asher’s tribe ([1 Chr 7:36](#)).

Sucathite

Family of scribes living at Jabez of Judah and descendants of the Kenites ([1 Chr 2:55](#)).

Succoth

1. A town in the Jordan Valley listed along with other towns as belonging to the tribe of Gad ([Joshua 13:27](#)). Succoth is located in a fertile valley called Ghaur Abu 'Udeidah, known in the Bible as the valley of Succoth ([Psalms 60:6](#); [108:7](#)). This valley forms the central portion of the Jordan Valley on the eastern side, between the Wadi Rejeb and the Jabbok River.
The place first appears in the story of Jacob's meeting with Esau, which happened just south of Penuel. After meeting Esau, Jacob went to Succoth and built shelters for his cattle. This is given as the explanation for the name of the settlement (Succoth means "shelters," [Genesis 33:17](#)).
Later, the people of Succoth refused to give food to Gideon and his men when they were chasing the Midianites ([Judges 8:5-9](#)). When Gideon returned, he made sure to punish the elders of Succoth ([Judges 8:13-17](#)).
The type of social organization described in this passage suggests that the population may not have been Israelite at the time of Gideon's visit.
Succoth is also mentioned in connection with Solomon's building projects. The metal casting for important fixtures and tools of the temple was done in the area between Succoth and Zarethan ([1 Kings 7:46](#); [2 Chronicles 4:17](#)). It is possible that Succoth was destroyed by Shishak of Egypt during the time Israel was ruled by kings.
Some scholars suggest that the place-name appears in two other passages: as the gathering place for David's forces before the battle with Ammon, when the ark and the army were "living in shelters (*sukkoth*)" ([2 Samuel 11:11](#)). Second, the gathering place for Ben-hadad's troops in his war against Samaria ([1 Kings 20:12, 16](#)).

2. A town in Egypt mentioned as the first stopping place of the Israelites during their exodus from Egypt ([Exodus 12:37](#); [13:20](#); [Numbers 33:5-6](#)). Succoth appears between Rameses and Etham.
Egyptian sources, texts of the Anastasi collection, refer to a place that is most likely the same as biblical Succoth. An Edomite tribe is recorded as bringing their herds in from the desert to feed them in the Delta, passing by the strong point at *Tkw* [Old Egyptian for Succoth] (Papyrus Anastasi VI, 54).
The military garrison there was commanded by a leader of archer troops, and the fort was named after Pharaoh Merneptah (Papyrus Anastasi, VI, 55).
Most scholars believe Succoth is at Tell el-Maskhuta, a site near the source of the Wadi Tumeilat.
See map.

Succoth-Benoth

Deity and shrine worshiped by Babylonians settled in Samaria by Assyria after the fall of Israel in 722 BC ([2 Kgs 17:30](#)). Various opinions exist as to the specific understanding of Succoth-benoth. Some suggest that it refers to a place of prostitution honoring a Babylonian deity or to a small structure housing female idols. Others suggest it refers to Sarpanitu, the consort of Marduk (a Babylonian deity), or to Marduk himself.

Suchathite

KJV spelling of Sucathite, a family of scribes, in [1 Chronicles 2:55](#). *See* Sucathite.

Suffering

Anything that causes pain or distress, such as a calamity.

According to the Bible, affliction began when sin entered the world. Both humanity and all of creation became afflicted with "thorns and

thistles," sin, death, and decay (compare [Genesis 3:16-19](#); [Romans 8:18-21](#)). Because of sin, misery is a common human experience, and our short lives are filled with trouble ([Job 14:1-6](#)). People cannot avoid natural disasters, physical injuries, and conflicts with others ([2 Chronicles 20:9](#)). Yet, God uses affliction to teach and discipline his people. This affliction is shown by the oppression the Israelites faced in:

- Egypt ([Exodus 4:31](#))
- Their struggles during the judges ([Nehemiah 9:26-27](#))
- Their exile in Babylon ([Isaiah 26:16](#))

In their distress, the Israelites cried out to God. He delivered them and guided them to obey ([Jeremiah 10:18](#); [Hosea 5:15-6:3](#)).

The Bible knows it is hard to understand. It is hard to see why the righteous suffer so ([Psalms 34:19](#); [37:39](#); [138:7](#)). Even the prophet and "Servant of the Lord" (the Messiah) were not spared ([Isaiah 53:2-12](#); [Jeremiah 15:15](#)). Jesus Christ carried humanity's griefs and sorrows. He fulfilled the prophecy of affliction that began with Adam's sin ([Isaiah 53:4-5](#); [1 Peter 2:24](#)).

Jesus warned that his followers would face many trials and sorrows ([John 16:33](#)). Paul taught that entering God's kingdom comes with many troubles ([Acts 14:22](#)). But these should not weaken a Christian's faith ([1 Thessalonians 3:3](#)). They should be seen as completing what is lacking in Christ's sufferings for his body, the church ([2 Corinthians 4:10-11](#); [Colossians 1:24](#)). The Bible also suggests that affliction will become more intense as "the end" approaches ([Matthew 24:9-14](#); [2 Timothy 3:13](#)). Satan's forces will attack to deceive and destroy the "elect" ([Matthew 24:24](#); [2 Thessalonians 2:9-12](#); [Revelation 20:7-9](#)). When Jesus Christ is revealed from heaven in flaming fire, God will afflict those who have harmed believers. He will take vengeance on those who have not obeyed the gospel of Jesus Christ ([Romans 2:9](#); [2 Thessalonians 1:5-10](#); [2:7-8](#)).

See also Persecution; Tribulation.

Suffering Servant

See Servant of the Lord.

Suicide

The act of taking one's own life on purpose and without being forced. The word "suicide" does not appear in most Bible translations. [John 8:22](#) in the New Living Translation is an exception to this. The Old Testament records suicides by Saul and his armor bearer in [1 Samuel 31:3-6](#), Ahitophel in [2 Samuel 17:23](#), and Zimri in [1 Kings 16:15-19](#). Judas Iscariot is the only suicide victim mentioned in the New Testament ([Matthew 27:3-5](#)).

The Bible does not clearly say that suicide is wrong. But, it sees suicide as a sign of moral failure. People often think about suicide when they feel very guilty or have lost something important to them. Saul had lost his sanity, his stability, and then his three sons on the battlefield. He then ended his life. Ahitophel was once a trusted counselor, but his desire for power destroyed him. When Absalom refused Ahitophel's plot against David, Ahitophel felt ashamed. He went home, made arrangements for after his death, and hanged himself.

Judas Iscariot also hung himself. His suicide was even sadder than Ahitophel's. Judas was one of the twelve disciples and he betrayed Jesus for thirty pieces of silver. Then he deeply regretted what he had done. He returned the money to the Jewish leaders, saying "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood" ([Matthew 27:3-4](#)). Judas hanged himself which showed his deep regret.

Sukkiim, Sukkiims, Sukkites

A tribe who joined forces with King Shishak of Egypt and entered Palestine to wage war against King Rehoboam of Judah (930-913 BC). The Sukkites are mentioned with the Libyans and the Ethiopians ([2 Chr 12:3](#)). They were probably a Libyan people.

Sulfur

See Brimstone; Minerals and Metals; Stones, Precious.

Sumer, Sumerians

Sumer was a region settled before 3500 BC in the lower part of Mesopotamia, now called Iraq. The Sumerians had a highly civilized society,

developing cuneiform (a type of writing), medicine, mathematics, and astronomy. Thousands of clay tablets discovered in this region reveal their cultural, religious, and political endeavors. The Sumerian culture was absorbed by Semitic invaders who moved into Mesopotamia and slowly took over. By 2000 BC they had lost their political powers. Nevertheless, their culture formed the basis for the great Babylonian and Assyrian civilizations that developed there later.

See also Mesopotamia.

Sun

The sun is one of the great lights created by God to govern the day ([Genesis 1:14–15](#)). In biblical times, a new day began with the setting of the sun, and daily sacrifices were tied to its position. The first burnt offering was given at sunrise ([Exodus 29:39](#); [Numbers 28:4](#)). In rabbinic Judaism, daylight hours varied with the seasons. They depended on the solar cycle.

The Israelite calendar was lunar. But, the timing of major festivals in spring (Passover) and fall (Trumpets, Atonement, Tabernacles) shows they also considered the solar year. The Gezer calendar, which aligns with farming, is based on the solar year. The Jewish calendar has a 19-year cycle. It adds extra months in seven of those years to align the lunar and solar cycles. The Bible does not mention this system. Scholars believe the 13th month was a later addition. Aramaic documents from the Jewish colony at Elephantine show that this 19-year cycle was used as early as the fifth century BC. The kingdoms of Judah and Israel likely used a similar system, though no records survive.

Rabbinic Judaism recognizes four seasons. The Old Testament mentions only two: "seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter" ([Genesis 8:22](#)).

The four seasons are tied to the sun's movement:

- Fall (called *setav*, a word originally meaning "rainy season" or "rain"; [Song of Solomon 2:11](#)) begins with the autumn equinox (September 21)
- Winter (*horeph*) starts with the winter solstice (around December 22)
- Spring (*aviv*) begins with the spring equinox (March 21)
- Summer (*qayits*) starts with the summer solstice (June 22)

A temple found at Beersheba, dating to 125 BC, was aligned with the sunrise at the summer solstice. A similar temple at Lachish is oriented toward the winter solstice. The Arad temple from monarchical times faced almost due east. It likely aligned with the equinox sunrise, as did the Jerusalem temple.

In Hebrew poetry, the sun is often used as a powerful image. It is described as:

- Having a dwelling place ([Habakkuk 3:11](#))
- Coming out of a tent like a bridegroom ([Psalm 19:4–5](#))

The sun symbolizes:

- Constancy ([Psalm 72:5, 17](#))
- The law ([Psalm 19:7](#))
- God's presence ([Psalm 84:11](#))
- Beauty ([Song of Solomon 6:10](#))

In Ecclesiastes, life on earth is often described as happening "under the sun" ([Ecclesiastes 1:3, 9, 14; 2:11](#)).

In times of chaos and divine wrath, the Bible describes the sun as darkening ([Isaiah 13:10](#); [Ezekiel 32:7](#); [Joel 2:10, 31; 3:15](#); [Zephaniah 1:15](#); [Matthew 24:29](#); [Revelation 8:12](#)). This imagery likely refers to an eclipse, an event that terrified ancient peoples. The sun turning pale might also refer to the effects of a "sirocco," where sandstorms and hazy clouds darken the sky. On the other hand, the day of the Lord's victory is depicted as a time when the sun will shine seven times brighter than it does now ([Isaiah 30:26](#)).

See also Astronomy; Calendars, Ancient and Modern; Day; Moon.

Sunday

See Lord's Day, The.

Sundial

Instrument used for telling time installed by King Ahaz of Judah (735–715 BC) in the royal palace of Jerusalem. Some suggest that this time indicator was not a sundial but a stairway. The time of day was determined by the position of the shadow of some object cast on the stairs. At Isaiah's command, the Lord miraculously caused the shadow to recede ten steps, divinely confirming to King Hezekiah of Judah (715–686 BC) that he would recover from his illness, live 15 more years, and be delivered from the Assyrian threat ([2 Kgs 20:7–11](#); [Is 38:7–8](#)).

Suph

Region mentioned in [Deuteronomy 1:1](#), which was "beyond the Jordan in the wilderness, in the Arabah over against Suph" (rsv; kjv "the Red Sea"). The exact location of Suph is uncertain. It may refer to the region of Suphah (cf. [Nm 21:14](#)), east of the Jordan River, or perhaps to the Gulf of Aqaba, the northeastern branch of the Red Sea.

Suphah

A place east of the Jordan River in the land of Moab ([Numbers 21:14](#)). The King James Version translates it as "Red Sea."

See Waheb.

Supper, Lord's

See Lord's Supper, The.

Supplication

A supplication is a humble and serious request made to God. It is a kind of prayer.

See Prayer.

Sur Gate

Gate in Jerusalem linking the king's palace to the temple. It is mentioned in [2 Kings 11:6](#) in connection with the enthronement of Jehoash over Judah and the murder of Athaliah. Its parallel passage in [2 Chronicles 23:5](#) reads the "Gate of the Foundation," revealing perhaps a corruption within the Hebrew text.

Surgery

See Medicine and Medical Practice.

Susa

Susa was the capital city of Elam, an ancient region whose people spoke a different language from the Hebrew-speaking peoples. Today, Susa is called Shush and is located in southwest Iran. It lies about 241.4 kilometers (150 miles) north of the Persian Gulf and directly east of the well-known ancient city of Babylon. In 1884, French researchers began studying the ruins of Susa. They found that people had lived there since around 4000 BC.

Susa in the Old Testament

Susa became most important in the Old Testament when it became part of the Persian Empire. In 550 BC, King Cyrus founded the Persian Empire and made Susa one of his royal cities. The other royal cities were Ecbatana (another major city in Elam), Babylon, and Persepolis.

This was when Susa was at its most powerful, though it had also been an important city much earlier, in the 12th century BC. During this earlier time, people found something very important in Susa: the first known copy of Hammurabi's laws. Hammurabi was a famous king who wrote down many laws that helped govern his kingdom.

At the center of Persian Susa was an acropolis or citadel (a raised area built on a flat, rectangular platform). This area was surrounded by a huge wall and stood higher than the rest of the city. This protected central area contained the royal palace where the Persian kings lived during the winter months.

Susa in the Book of Nehemiah

Several important Bible stories happened in Susa. Nehemiah served as a trusted royal servant in Susa's palace, where his job was to taste and serve wine to King Artaxerxes I ([Nehemiah 1:1, 11; 2:1](#)). This protected the king from being poisoned.

Susa in the Book of Esther

The story of Esther also takes place mostly in Susa. In [Esther 1:2](#) and [2:8](#), Esther, the young Jewish woman, was brought to the court of King Ahasuerus (also called Xerxes), who ruled from 485 to 465 BC. Many important events in the book of Esther happened in Susa (compare [Esther 3:15; 8:14-15; 9:6-18](#)).

Susa in the Book of Daniel

The Bible tells us that Daniel had a vision about Susa ([Daniel 8:2](#)). Daniel was not physically in Susa when this happened. In his vision, God showed him this place. This vision came near the end of the Babylonian period, a time when Babylon was the most powerful kingdom in the region ([Daniel 8:1](#); compare [7:1](#)). At that time, Susa was a strong city that ruled over the Medes (a group of people who lived in what is now Iran). Susa was independent and not under Babylon's control.

See also Persia, Persians.

Susanchite

KJV translation for "men of Susa" or "Shushanchites" in [Ezra 4:9](#). *See Susa.*

Susanna

1. One of the women who helped and supported Jesus out of her own resources ([Luke 8:3](#)).

2. The main female character of the book Susanna and the Elders. This book is part of the Apocrypha, a collection of ancient religious texts included in the Bible by some Christian traditions but not by others. In the story, two respected community leaders falsely accuse Susanna of doing something wrong (committing adultery). The young prophet Daniel saves her by cleverly proving she is innocent. The story is 64 verses long and shows how truth and justice win in the end. It has four main characters:

- Susanna, a beautiful woman who stays faithful to God
- Daniel, a young prophet who finds out the truth
- Two leaders who lie about Susanna because she refuses their evil demands

The story is often called one of the first stories where someone solves a crime by finding clues and questioning witnesses.

Susanna and the Elders

Susanna and the Elders is a story added to the book of Daniel that tells how God rescued a faithful woman named Susanna from false accusation through the wisdom of the prophet Daniel.

See Daniel, Additions to.

Susi

The father of Gaddi from the tribe of Manasseh. Gaddi was one of the 12 spies sent to explore the land of Canaan ([Numbers 13:11](#)).

Swaddling Clothes

The translation some Bible versions use for the kind of clothes that were wrapped around the baby Jesus ([Luke 2:7](#)). Some translations describe this in modern terms as "strips of cloth."

Swallow

A swallow is a small bird with black or dark brown feathers and a forked tail. It has long, narrow wings and flies with smooth, quick movements. The barn swallow (*Hirundo rustica*) is the most common type. Swallows have small, weak feet and cannot walk well. Swallows are similar to swifts in shape and life habits but are somewhat smaller.

The swallow has a large mouth that helps it catch insects while flying. Its feathers can be brown, blue, or white. Swallows often make nests inside buildings. The psalmist once spoke about seeing a swallow's nest at the temple ([Psalm 84:3](#)).

Swallows usually live year-round in Israel. This is different from swifts, which migrate on a regular schedule. The word "swallow" in [Isaiah 38:14](#) probably means "swift." In [Jeremiah 8:7](#), the writer compares the swift's regular migration with the unfaithfulness of God's people. [Proverbs 26:2](#) may refer to either the swallow or the swift.

See also Birds; Swift.

Swan

A swan is a large, graceful water bird. Two types of swan (genus *Cygnus*) pass through the Middle East when they migrate. These are the mute swan (*Cygnus olor*) and the whooper swan (*Cygnus musicus*).

Swans are sometimes called the best musicians among birds. The ancient Greeks considered them sacred to the god Apollo. Their voices sound soft and musical, like flutes or harps.

The King James Version lists the swan in [Leviticus 11:18](#) and [Deuteronomy 14:16](#). These verses probably do not refer to the swan, because the swan eats only plants. There would be little reason to call it an unclean animal. These verses more likely refer to the water hen or the barn owl.

See also Birds; Owl; Water Hen.

Swearing

Swearing is making a strong promise or statement in God's name. It is a kind of oath.

See Oath.

Sweet Bay Tree, Bay Laurel

A tree that naturally grows in Israel and the surrounding areas. It grows 12 to 18 meters (40 to 60 feet) high. It has fragrant, evergreen leaves.

In [Psalm 37:35](#), the "well-rooted native tree" might refer to the cedar of Lebanon (*Cedrus libani*). But most scholars believe it refers to the sweet bay (*Laurus nobilis*), also called the bay laurel. This evergreen tree is native to the Mediterranean region and grows in thickets and woodlands, from coastal areas to mid-elevation mountain regions. While it grows abundantly in certain areas, such as Mount Carmel and near Hebron, it is not common throughout Israel and the surrounding areas.

People have used its leaves as a seasoning in cooking for centuries. Additionally, its fruit, leaves, and bark have been used in traditional medicine for many years.

Sweet Storax

A small tree with stiff branches was used to make incense. People extracted a sweet spice called stacte from it ([Exodus 30:34](#)).

See Storax Tree.

Swift

A swift is a small bird and a strong flyer (genus *Apus*). Like the swallow, it has long, bent wings and a split tail. These help it fly very fast as it skims the ground and sweeps through the air. A swift eats many harmful insects, catching them in its mouth while flying.

Many swifts build nests in rooftops or small spaces in city walls. Their nests are made of strong feathers glued together with saliva. Other swifts live in caves or cracks in rocks.

Common swifts are native to Israel. In the Jordan Valley they often gather in large flocks. The swift has a soft, delicate voice, and its cry could be easily interpreted as melodious wailing.

Swifts migrate with great timing ([Jeremiah 8:7](#)). They arrive in the Holy Land in late winter. Huge flocks fill the cities with their cries.

See also Birds; Swallow.

Swine

A farm animal with a short snout and thick body, raised for meat. The word can mean one or more pigs. Swine is an older word for pigs, but today "pig" is more common.

See Pig; see also Animals.

Sword

See Armor and Weapons.

Sycamine

A black mulberry tree, valued for its fruit ([Luke 17:6](#)).

See Mulberry.

Sycamore

A large, spreading tree that grows a fruit similar to a fig.

The tree translated as "sycamore" in [1 Kings 10:27](#); [1 Chronicles 27:28](#); [2 Chronicles 1:15](#); [9:27](#); [Psalm 78:47](#); [Isaiah 9:10](#); [Amos 7:14](#); and [Luke 19:4](#) definitely refers to the well-known sycamore-fig. This tree is also known as the mulberry-fig or fig-mulberry. It should not be confused with the common sycamore of North America, which is actually a plane tree.

The sycamore-fig of the Bible is a strong-growing, robust, wide-spreading tree growing 9.1 to 12.2 meters (30 to 40 feet) tall. The trunk sometimes grows to 6.1 meters (20 feet) or more around. The top of the tree (the crown) can grow up to 120 feet (36.6 meters) across. It is a tree that people can easily climb and is often planted along roadsides, which explains the reference in [Luke 19:4](#) when Zacchaeus climbed a sycamore tree.

This tree produces large amounts of fruit in clusters on all parts of the tree, on both young and old branches and even on the trunk itself. The fruit is very similar to the common fig, only smaller and much lower in quality. In David's time, the sycamore-fig was so valuable that he appointed a special overseer for these trees ([1 Chronicles 27:28](#)). Scholars think that Amos was not just a

gatherer of sycamore fruit but rather someone who took care of sycamore trees.

Sychar

Town in Samaria, mentioned in the Bible only in [John 4:5](#). The name has been taken as a variant form of the Greek transliteration of the Hebrew name Shechem. Many scholars favor an identification with the present-day village of Askar, which is located at the southeast foot of Mt Ebal, about one-half mile (.8 kilometer) north of Jacob's well. Excavations appear to favor the Shechem identification, which was proposed by Jerome. The Babylonian Talmud refers to a place called Schar or Suchar, but its location is not known.

Sychar is said to be near the field that Jacob gave to his son Joseph ([Jn 4:5](#)). The record of the giving of this parcel of land is recorded in [Genesis 48:22](#). When Jacob had concluded the blessing of Joseph's two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim, he told Joseph that he had given to him rather than to his brothers "one mountain slope which I took from the hand of the Amorites with my sword and with my bow" ([Gn 48:22](#), rsv). The Hebrew word translated "slope" is the word for shoulder and the name of the city of Shechem. It was on this piece of property that Joseph was buried ([Jos 24:32](#)). This passage also states that Jacob bought the ground from the sons of Hamor, the father of Shechem, for a hundred pieces of silver (cf. [Gn 33:19](#); [Acts 7:16](#)).

The account of Jesus' visit to Sychar in [John 4](#) is important. Jesus came to Sychar because of a spiritual, not geographical, imperative ([Jn 4:4](#)). One of the objectives of this mission was to break down barriers: the hostility between the racially pure Jew and the mixed-race Samaritan (v [9](#)); the social restrictions between men and women (v [27](#)); the societal separation between the ritually clean and the morally impure (this woman was ostracized; she came to the well alone and at an unusual time, v [6](#)). The conversation between Jesus and the woman is instructive as to personal witness. The spiritual discernment and compassion of Jesus are evident. When the woman received the testimony of his identity as the Messiah, she too became an effective witness (vv [28-30](#)). The new believers among the Samaritans asked Jesus to stay with them, so he remained for two days and many more believed in him (vv [39-41](#)).

Sychem

The King James Version form of Shechem in [Acts 7:16](#).

See Shechem (Place).

Syene

Southern Egyptian village (modern Aswan) demarcating Egypt's border with Ethiopia. The Hebrew form possibly derives from a word for "market" or "trading center," reflecting the importance of the outpost as a place of commerce. The remote location of Syene made it a useful geographical reference for designating the full span of Egypt's borders. "From Migdol to Syene" ([Ez 29:10](#); [30:6](#)) describes Egypt from northern delta to southern border (cf. Israel's description, "from Dan to Beersheba," [1 Sm 3:20](#); [1 Kgs 4:25](#)). Syene was located on the east bank of the Nile just north of the first cataract. While valued by the Egyptians as a source of granite, Syene's fate was closely tied to Elephantine Island nearby. Elephantine was South Egypt's administrative center and was well fortified against attack. It was at Elephantine that Jews fleeing Judea in 587 BC found refuge and formed a colony.

Symeon

An alternate spelling of Simeon, the name of a member of the church in Antioch ([Acts 13:1](#)).

See Simeon (Person) #4.

Synagogue

A synagogue is a building where Jewish people gather to worship, pray, and study their sacred writings. The transliteration of the Greek word *sunagoge*, which means "a gathering together." It appears over 50 times in the New Testament, mainly referring to Jewish community gathering places in Palestine and the Diaspora (areas outside Israel where Jews lived). In the Greek translation of the Old Testament, *sunagoge* often translates Hebrew words that describe the assembly of people.

Origins and Early History

We are not certain exactly when synagogues first began. They may have started after the Babylonians destroyed the temple in Jerusalem in 586 BC. The people who stayed nearby wanted to continue practicing their faith. They likely felt the need to meet for worship, to teach the law, and to share the prophets' messages. Some believe synagogues began in this context.

Jewish people in different areas of the Dispersion likely felt a similar need. Jewish elders met with Ezekiel while in exile in Babylon ([Ezekiel 8:1](#); [14:1](#); [20:1](#)). However, there is no clear evidence of synagogues at this early time. After the exile, when the people returned to Jerusalem, Ezra the scribe read and explained God's law to the people ([Nehemiah 8:1-8](#)). The people listened, and when Ezra praised God, they bowed their heads to worship. These were the basic elements of synagogue worship.

The first clear evidence of a synagogue is from Egypt in the third century BC. By the first century BC, there were many synagogues in different places.

Synagogues in New Testament Times

The Gospels suggest that many synagogues existed throughout Palestine. Jesus often taught in synagogues (for example, [Matthew 4:23](#); [9:35](#)), especially during his Galilean ministry, and likely in Judea too. In [John 18:20](#), during his trial before the high priest, Jesus said, "I have spoken openly to the world... I always taught in the synagogues and at the temple, where all the Jews come together."

The Acts of the Apostles mentions synagogues in:

- Jerusalem ([Acts 6:9](#))
- Damascus ([Acts 9:2](#))
- Cyprus ([Acts 13:5](#))
- The Roman province of Galatia ([Acts 13:14](#); [14:1](#))
- Macedonia and Greece ([Acts 17:1, 10, 17](#); [18:4](#))
- Ephesus in the Roman province of Asia ([acts 19:8](#))

Paul usually went straight to the synagogue to preach as long as he was allowed.

Synagogue Worship

The Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles show that Jewish people gathered on the Sabbath to worship in the synagogue. They also met for worship on the second and fifth days of the week. Luke gives us the earliest description of a synagogue service ([Luke 4:16-22](#)). The Mishnah (a written collection of Jewish oral laws and teachings) outlines the synagogue service pattern:

- The confession of faith called the Shema was recited (which included reading [Deuteronomy 6:4-9](#); [11:13-21](#); and [Numbers 15:37-41](#)).
- The people prayed together, including a set of special prayers called the 18 Benedictions.
- The people read from Scripture. They always read from the Law (see [Acts 15:21](#)). They followed a three-year schedule to read through the entire Law (the first five books of the Hebrew Bible, also called the Pentateuch). They also read from the Prophets, though these readings were chosen more freely.
- The people interpreted the readings. Since fewer people understood biblical Hebrew in Palestine, an Aramaic translation was given after the Hebrew reading, and a Greek translation in the Diaspora.
- People would teach about the readings. After the reading, anyone qualified could speak to the people, as Jesus and the apostle Paul often did.
- A blessing was given at the end of the service.

Legal Matters

The synagogue also helped resolve disputes and deal with legal matters in the community. The community brought those who disobeyed the law and those acting against Jewish religion before the elders. These elders acted like local judges. In extreme cases, they could ban someone from the synagogue, which meant the person could not join in worship or community life. They could also

order physical punishment, usually whipping (see [John 9:22, 34-35](#); [12:42](#)). Jesus warned his disciples to be ready for either outcome ([Matthew 10:17](#); [John 16:2](#)).

Saul, who persecuted Christians, had letters addressed to the synagogues in Damascus. These letters allowed him to arrest Christians and take them to Jerusalem ([Acts 9:2](#)). In [Acts 22:19](#), Paul mentions causing them to be beaten and imprisoned. Paul himself received the 39 lashes given in the synagogues ([2 Corinthians 11:24](#)).

Teaching the Law

Reading the Law was very important in synagogue worship. Teaching the Law to people, especially children, was closely linked to the synagogue. They used either the synagogue building or a school for this purpose.

Leadership

The New Testament specifically mentions two roles in the synagogue:

- The "ruler of the synagogue"
- An attendant

The ruler of the synagogue maintained order and chose the Scripture reader (for example, [Mark 5:22](#); [Luke 13:14](#); [Acts 18:8, 17](#)). The attendant managed the Scripture scrolls and disciplined students who misbehaved ([Luke 4:20](#)). Later, a person was appointed to lead prayers.

Building Design

The synagogue's structure was similar to the temple. It was often built on high ground and constructed so that the people could sit facing the direction of Jerusalem. There was a portable chest for the scrolls of the Law and the Prophets, and a platform for reading Scriptures and preaching. Men and women sat separately. The scribes preferred the "chief seats" facing the people ([Mark 12:39](#)). Many synagogues featured decorations like vine leaves, seven-branched candlesticks, the paschal lamb, and the pot of manna. Early synagogues also had a genizah, which was a cellar or attic. They stored worn scrolls here, as these scrolls were too sacred to destroy because they had the name of God written on them.

See also Judaism; Ruler of the Synagogue.

Synoptic Gospels

This term describes the first three books about Jesus in the New Testament: Matthew, Mark, and Luke. The word "synoptic" means "seeing things the same way." The Synoptic Gospels tell the story of Jesus in similar ways, which is different from John's Gospel.

How Are the Synoptic Gospels the Similar?

These three books follow the same basic outline:

1. An introduction
2. The work of John the Baptist
3. The baptism and testing of Jesus
4. Jesus's ministry in Galilee
5. Jesus's travels through Samaria, Perea, and Judea
6. The final week of Jesus's life, his death, and his return to life in Jerusalem

Matthew, Mark, and Luke focus on the same main message:

- What is the kingdom of God like?
- How does the kingdom of God work?
- How does the kingdom of God affect people's lives?

These three books often tell the same stories about Jesus, usually in the same order. They sometimes even use the same words to tell these stories.

How Are the Synoptic Gospels Different?

Matthew, Mark, and Luke also have important differences. These differences appear in:

- How they arrange their stories
- What stories they choose to tell
- What words they use to tell the stories

Matthew and Luke both include many teachings from Jesus that are not in Mark's Gospel. Most of these extra parts are about what Jesus taught. Only one story describes an action: when Jesus healed a Roman officer's servant.

Each Gospel includes some stories and teachings that appear only in that book. This means that

while the three books tell the same basic story, each one shows us Jesus in a different way.

Matthew's Gospel:

- Shows Jesus as a Jewish teacher
- Explains how Jesus fulfills what the Old Testament promised

Mark's Gospel:

- Tells a fast-moving story
- Focuses on Jesus's actions more than his teachings
- Shows Jesus serving and helping others

Luke's Gospel:

- Uses skilled writing in Greek
- Writes especially for non-Jewish readers
- Shows Jesus helping people who were poor or ignored by society

The Synoptic Problem

Interpreters have differing explanations of how these Gospels are related to each other. The phrase "synoptic problem" refers to the study of these relationships.

As early as the second century, Tatian combined the four accounts into one narrative. This is called a "harmony." Additional "harmonies" of the Gospel accounts have been continually produced.

Since the 1600s, scholars have tried to understand why these books are both similar and different. They study how the stories about Jesus developed before they were written down in the Gospels we have today. They examine the stages the Gospel material passed through before it became what it is today. Scholars look at three main questions:

- How did people tell these stories about Jesus before they were written down? Scholars who study this question use a method called form criticism.
- What written sources might Matthew, Mark, and Luke have used when they wrote their books? Scholars who study this question use a method called source criticism or literary criticism.
- How did each writer shape their book in their own way when they wrote down these stories about what Jesus did and taught? Scholars who study this question use a method called redaction criticism (or editorial criticism).

Scholars study these differences in other ways. Some look at how each Gospel writer shaped their book for their specific readers. Others compare Jesus's teachings with the teachings of Jewish religious teachers recorded in ancient Jewish writings called the Talmud.

No one has found a complete answer to why these books are both similar and different. What we do know is that Matthew, Mark, and Luke show us Jesus from different views. Each view helps us understand more about "the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God" ([Mark 1:1](#)).

See Gospel; Luke, Gospel of; Mark, Gospel of; Matthew, Gospel of.

Synoptic Problem

See Synoptic Gospels.

Syntyche

Woman encouraged by Paul to reconcile her differences with Euodia. Syntyche worked with Paul in proclaiming the gospel and evidently held a position of leadership in the Philippian church ([Phil 4:2](#)).

Syracuse

Town on the east coast of Sicily and the island's most important city. Here Paul's ship, on which he traveled to Rome as a prisoner, made a three-day stop following his shipwreck and three-month stay in Malta ([Acts 28:12](#)). Syracuse had a fine harbor and was a natural port of call for a ship sailing from Malta through the straits of Messina between Sicily and Italy en route to Rome.

In the eighth century BC, Syracuse became a Greek colony, funded by Archias of Corinth. During the fifth century, it grew to great power and influence and was second only to Carthage as the most prominent city of the western Mediterranean. It played a significant role in the struggle between Rome and Carthage in the third century and was captured by Rome in 212 BC. Caesar Augustus settled Syracuse in 21 BC, making it a Roman colony (cf. Philippi). It is not stated in [Acts 28](#) that Paul found Christians there, but later evidence from its catacombs indicates the existence of a church.

Syria, Syrians

Terms used in the Septuagint and in some English translations to render the names Aram, Arameans.

History of the Arameans

According to the "table of nations" in [Genesis 10:22-23](#), the Arameans were a Semitic group, descendants of Shem. Another genealogy in [Genesis 22:20-21](#) makes Aram a descendant of Nahor. According to [Amos 9:7](#), the Arameans (Syrians) came from Kir, which is linked with Elam in [Isaiah 22:6](#). The exile of the Arameans to Kir ([2 Kgs 16:9](#); [Am 1:5](#)) may suggest they were to go back to their original home. The precise origins of this group of people are, however, lost in antiquity. When they emerged clearly into history, they were settled around the central Euphrates from which they were spread out east, west, and north.

The Arameans were traditionally thought to have been established in upper Mesopotamia in the first part of the second millennium BC. Bethuel and Laban were known as Arameans ([Gn 25:20](#); [28:1-7](#)); the home of Bethuel was in Paddan-aram ([25:20](#)). The prophet Hosea recalls the tradition by noting that Jacob fled to "the field of Aram" ([Hos 12:12](#)) or "Aram-naharaim" (Aram of the two rivers), which was the northern part of

Mesopotamia between the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers. In the creedal confession in [Deuteronomy 26:5](#), the Israelite who brought his firstfruits confessed, “My father [probably Jacob] was a wandering Aramean.”

Probably the best early evidence of an Aramean presence in this area comes from Tiglath-pileser I. In his annals of his fourth year (1112 BC), he speaks of a campaign among the “Akhlama, Arameans” in the Middle Euphrates area and the sacking of six Aramean villages in the Mt Bishri area.

The Arameans of upper Mesopotamia became important in biblical history. They set up a number of separate Aramean states, two of which were especially important for the people of Israel—Aram-zobah in the days of David, and Aram-damascus from the days of Solomon onward.

By about 1100 BC, the Aramean tribes had spread throughout Syria and had expanded into northern Transjordan, where they came into conflict with the Israelites. At his peak Hadadezer, king of Aram-zobah, embraced several vassals, such as Damascus, Maacah, and Tob. He was eventually defeated by King David ([2 Sm 8:3-4](#); [10:17-19](#)).

Events in Israel and Judah had some bearing on Damascus. After the death of Solomon, when the formerly united kingdom became divided into Judah and Israel, tension arose between the two small states. War broke out between Baasha of Israel and Asa of Judah in the years 890-880 BC. Asa sought aid from Ben-hadad I of Damascus ([1 Kgs 15:18](#)). Lands in Transjordan changed hands several times. The successors of Omri of Israel—namely Ahab, Ahaziah, Jehoram, Jehu, Jehoahaz, and Jehoash—had many conflicts with Damascus. Ahab fought Ben-hadad and his 32 allies who besieged Samaria ([20:1](#)), but Israel defeated him. A second time Ben-hadad entered Israelite territory and reached Aphek ([20:26](#)), but he was again defeated and captured. As a consequence of his defeat and for the price of his release, he was obliged to make bazaars available in Damascus for Israelite trade. After three years of peace between Israel and Damascus, hostilities broke out again and resulted in a battle in the region of Ramoth-gilead in which Ahab was killed ([22:29-37](#)). Aram-damascus was eventually defeated by King Jehoash of Israel ([2 Kgs 13:25](#)).

Syria after the Collapse of the Aramean Kingdoms

After the collapse of Aram-damascus in 733-732 BC, the political character of the whole region changed. Over the centuries that followed and on into Christian times, the region passed under the control of several great powers and no independent Aramean state survived. When Assyria collapsed in 612-609 BC, the region came under Babylonian control, but only for a comparatively short period. With the rise of Cyrus the Persian, the Syrian region was quickly overrun by Persian armies. Palestine, Asia Minor, and Egypt were absorbed into the Persian Empire at the same time.

The next significant political change that affected the region came with the appearance of Philip of Macedon in 360 BC. His son Alexander the Great (336-323 BC) consolidated Greek power throughout western Asia and as far as the borders of India. On his death in 323 BC, at the age of 33, the control of western Asia passed to Alexander's generals. General Seleucus I (312-280 BC) controlled the southern half of Asia Minor, the region of Syria, Mesopotamia, and eastward to the borders of India. Syria thus fell under the influence of Hellenist rulers, the Seleucids, who founded a new capital at Antioch.

Further west, Rome was rising to power and cast her eyes eastward. It was General Pompey who overcame Mithridates, the young king of Pontus, and moved to crush the remnants of the kingdom of the Seleucids. The western parts of Syria were formed into a Roman province in 64 BC. Pompey finally moved into Palestine, which came under Roman control in 63 BC.

The Roman province of Syria included Cilicia, a strip of territory in the southeastern corner of Asia Minor. The northern boundary reached to the Euphrates River. The boundary then swung south well to the east of Damascus and then turned west about halfway down the Dead Sea and continued west to the Mediterranean Sea. Syria was bound to the west by the Mediterranean up to the Gulf of Alexandretta, where it turned west. The province of Syria and Cilicia ([Acts 15:23, 41](#); [Gal 1:21](#)) was governed by an imperial legate (*legatis*) who commanded a strong force of legionary troops. One such governor, Quirinius, governed Syria at the time of the census of Caesar Augustus; this census brought Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem for the birth of Jesus ([Lk 2:2](#)).

In the following centuries the population of Damascus was Christianized, and Christianity spread throughout the Roman province of Syria, giving rise to the Old Syrian Church, which remains to this day. It has left a remarkable legacy of Christian literature written in Syriac (Aramaic). The old Aramaic language remained, though a modified alphabet was used to write it.

It was the rise of Islam in the seventh century AD that brought about a considerable weakening of the Syrian church, although it has never been completely destroyed. Scattered communities of Aramaic-speaking people still survive in parts of Syria, and numerous remains of Christian churches have been brought to light as a result of modern archaeological work.

Language and Culture

Aramaic was the language of the Arameans, of which numerous inscriptions have been discovered. The Aramaic script was adapted for use by the Israelites, and the language became the international language for diplomacy and administration all over the Near East. It was the *lingua franca* of the Persian period from Egypt to India and was widely spoken in Palestine in Jesus' day. The words "*talitha cumi*" ([Mk 5:41](#)) and "*marana tha*" ([1 Cor 16:22](#)) are Aramaic.

Excavations in many sites have provided a good idea of the Aramean architecture, sculpture, pottery, and other arts. The religion of the Arameans was polytheistic. The people adopted many foreign deities as well. The principal Aramean deity was the ancient west Semitic storm god Hadad. In the days of Ahaz of Judah, the Damascus cult was forced on the people of Jerusalem when an altar based on a Damascus model was placed in the temple ([2 Kgs 16:10-13](#)). Arameans exiled to Samaria by the Assyrian ruler Sargon brought foreign Aramean cults with them ([17:24-34](#)).

Through the centuries that followed the disappearance of the Aramean states, the Aramaic language has survived. The Christian form of Aramaic, Syriac, has left behind a vast legacy of literature, histories, theologies, commentaries, treatises, and translations, which have been carefully preserved in ancient monastic libraries, particularly in northern Syria, northern Iraq, and southern Turkey.

See also Aramaic.

Syrophoenicia

The homeland of the Greek woman who pleaded with Jesus near Tyre and Sidon to cast a demon out of her daughter ([Mark 7:26](#)). The region of Phoenicia was located in the Roman province of Syria.

It is unclear why Mark specified Syrophoenicia as her homeland. Another North African province was called Libyaphoenicia. This could have been a potential cause of confusion. In a parallel passage, this woman is identified as a Canaanite. Phoenicians referred to themselves as Canaanites ([Matthew 15:22](#)).

Syrtis

Syrtis was the name of two bodies of water off the northern coast of Africa that ancient sailors feared. People called the larger one Syrtis Major and the smaller one Syrtis Minor. Paul and his shipmates were in danger of drifting toward Syrtis Major after they left the island of Crete on their voyage to Rome. A powerful northeasterly wind had blown across their path, threatening to push their ship southwestward across the Mediterranean Sea into Syrtis Major ([Acts 27:17](#)).

Today, people call Syrtis Major the Gulf of Sidra. It cuts into the coast of Libya and stretches 442.5 kilometers (275 miles) from the town of Misratah to the city of Benghazi. Today, people call Syrtis Minor the Gulf of Gabes. It cuts into the eastern coast of Tunisia. Sailors feared these bodies of water because their sandbars shifted quickly. This created unpredictable shallow areas (called shoals) and dangerous tides and currents.