SAMPLER
Including the complete books of Genesis and Matthew

NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION

CULTURAL
BACKGROUND

STUDY BIBLE

Bringing to Life the Ancient World of Scripture
YOUR WORD IS A LAMP FOR MY FEET,
A LIGHT ON MY PATH.
— PSALM 119:105 —
“Even though the Bible was written for us, it wasn’t written to us. When we take our Western, modern culture and impose it on the text, we’re putting in meaning that wasn’t there, and we’re missing the meaning that the text has.”
—Dr. John H. Walton

“Sometimes people get frustrated with the Bible because the difficult figures of speech and the images and the customs they read about seem foreign to them. But when we explain those, then we open up the text of the Bible in a fresh, new way to understand what the text of the Bible is really addressing. Ultimately, everything in the Bible was written in particular times and cultures. So even though everything in it is for all time, not everything in it is for all circumstances. The better we understand the circumstances a passage originally addressed, the more confidently we can reapply its message to appropriate circumstances today.”
—Dr. Craig S. Keener

Welcome to the NIV Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible. You have in your hands a comprehensive, multiuse tool that has been designed specifically to enhance your understanding of and appreciation for the cultural backgrounds that form the footings on which the foundation of God’s Word is built.

**About the NIV Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible**

This study Bible has been purpose-built to do one thing: to increase your understanding of the cultural nuances behind the text of God’s Word so that your study experience, and your knowledge of the ideas behind the ideas in the text, is enriched and expanded.

This study Bible contains the full text of the New International Version of the Bible along with a library of study features designed to help you more completely grasp what the text is saying. These notes introduce and explain a wide variety of information on the Biblical text, providing deeper insights for individuals who are ready to devote themselves to serious study of the text.

**What Help Do These Study Features Offer?**

Each of the features in the *NIV Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible* has been developed with the goal of allowing readers to immerse themselves in the culture, the literature, the geography, and the everyday life of the people to whom the Bible was originally written.

- Book Introductions answer questions about who wrote the books of the Bible, to whom, and when, as well as informing readers about the larger cultural and political context in which a book was written. In the Old Testament, dates of writing and specific authorship for each book are less clear than in the New Testament, where such information is marginally less controversial, although still debated. That’s why the Old Testament introductions include “Key Concepts” and the New Testament Introductions include “Quick Glance” information to help readers orient themselves.
- The New Testament includes a reference feature entitled “Key New Testament Terms” that is designed to help clarify and further define the cultural contexts behind these terms. It’s included as a background feature to define and explain terms that often repeat in the New Testament notes.
• The NIV Center-column Cross Reference system aids in deeper study of the Bible’s themes, language and concepts by leading readers to related passages on the same or similar themes.
• Over 10,000 study notes have been placed close to the text that they amplify and explain. These have been designed to provide the reader with a deep and rich understanding of the nuances that the original readers and hearers of the Bible would have intuitively understood. They focus on the land, the literature, and the political and cultural contexts that the Bible’s authors lived in, and emphasize how the people of Israel were both influenced by, as well as how they were called to be different from, their surrounding culture.
• Full-color in-text maps, charts and diagrams, along with some 320 essays, summarize and explain important background information and ideas from Scripture.
• Front and end matter features include author information, an author’s introduction with helpful questions and answers about this Bible, more information on the NIV translation itself (in the NIV Preface), and many other helpful study tools.
• The NIV Concordance is a tool designed to help readers who remember a key word or phrase in a passage to locate the verses they are looking for. Words and names are listed alphabetically, along with their more significant verse references.
• Color maps at the end of this study Bible complement the color maps in the interior of the Bible to help readers to visualize the geographic context of what they are studying.

Please take a few minutes to familiarize yourself with these features as you begin your study. We’re confident that as you expand your understanding of the social, economic, literary, and political culture in which the Bible was written over the course of many centuries, that your understanding of and love for God’s Word will increase all the more.
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Author Introduction

To the NIV Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible

Editor’s Note: This study Bible draws on the contributions of various scholars. The Old Testament (OT) comprises three-quarters of the Bible, and to provide study notes and articles on this body of work, Dr. John Walton has drawn on the works of various contributors, including his own work, in the Zondervan Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Old Testament. Also drawing on a range of research, Dr. Craig Keener, author of The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament, authored most NT notes, but others contributed some sidebars and “Quick Glance” notes.

Both scholars have published heavily documented works that support the sort of background provided here on a more accessible level. Both have been studying, writing and lecturing around the world about the field of the Bible’s cultural backgrounds for the duration of their decades-long careers as academics.

For whom has this study Bible been designed?

This study Bible is for those who want more out of the study of the Bible than they can get by just reading the text on their own. The notes, illustrations, charts and other study tools offer content for understanding that goes beyond most study Bibles. It is for the reader who isn’t content with being told what they should understand from the text, or with being given what they could figure out on their own. It is for the reader who already understands the importance of reading in context and seeing each book of the Bible as a whole. It is for the reader who is serious about the Bible itself, but has not had advanced training in the world in which the message of the Bible first came alive.

Can’t I read and understand the Bible just from the text itself?

Study Bibles often focus on helping readers apply the Bible to daily life. To be sure, applying the Bible to daily life is very important. Yet those who read the Bible enough can glean most principles from the Bible directly. After all, God’s story in the Bible is designed to be understood by children. As Jesus said, “I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children” (Mt 11:25), and “Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven” (Mt 18:3). Hearing God’s personal challenge from the Bible itself is more direct than hearing a challenge from someone else’s comments. Spiritual life comes from God’s Word itself.

The complication is the gulf between the world of the Bible and the modern reader’s world. The problem is normally not that the modern reader doesn’t know their own world; it’s that the reader is not familiar with the world of the Bible. It is here that a study Bible can help most by explaining the language, literature and culture of the Bible.

How does this study Bible differ from others that are available?

What these notes supply is background—the missing pieces of information that the biblical writers did not need to state explicitly because their original audiences intuitively knew them. Understanding these nuances help the reader “hear” the Bible in a way much closer to the way the Bible’s first audience heard it. Although the best study Bibles today include some background, this study Bible is unique in the massive wealth of background that it provides.
How will understanding the Bible’s cultural background improve my faith walk?

There is no such thing as a story or a teaching that doesn’t have a cultural setting. That is not to say that a story or teaching is not relevant for another setting, but to remember that it comes to us from a particular place and in a particular language. God sent his Son Jesus Christ in the flesh, in a specific home, nation, town and era. Likewise, God didn’t send the Bible as a transcultural feeling or impression, but gave it to us through the experiences that real people had in real historical situations. This Bible’s notes are meant to help readers hear and visualize the story closer to the way it was originally written, so they can get to know the people and places in the Bible more on their own terms.

Readers from different cultures bring a range of experiences and insights to their Bible reading. The place where we come together, however, is when we read God’s Word in the concrete framework in which he gave it. It is especially when we hear the message in its authentic, original cultural setting that we can reapply it afresh for our own different settings most fully, because we understand what issues were really being addressed. You should keep this purpose in mind as you read the notes.

Tell me about the notes in this Bible.

The study tools in this Bible are not meant to tell the reader everything about the biblical text — especially not what will be self-evident from the context. They do not always tell readers what is most important or what applies most directly to life, because these are points that mature readers can learn to do on their own. What they do is equip readers to study the Bible more on its own terms so they can discover its most valuable treasures for themselves.

Not every proposed background is equally relevant or certain, though the authors of the study notes have tried to screen out the least relevant and least certain proposals. New discoveries, especially in archaeology, also periodically invite us to revise older views, but the vast information available already allows us to affirm much biblical background with full confidence.

How can we know for sure what the Bible’s ancient culture was like?

As a result of the recovery of over a million texts from the ancient world, and a century of persistent research by scholars, we are now in a position to add significant nuances to our understanding of the life and thought of those who lived in Israel in Bible times. The end result is a more thorough and comprehensive understanding of the text.

Through understanding the background, we can better understand why people spoke and acted the ways they did and can better identify with them. Besides helping us understand the world that people in the Bible lived in, study of ancient texts from the cultures in the biblical world can provide information that we really need to understand the biblical material. If, as readers, we are isolated from the cultural background of the Bible, we might be inclined to think that the ideas in the biblical text have no anchors in time and culture.

How was Israelite culture shaped by its surrounding culture?

Though the Bible is unique in its inspiration, we find that God often communicated through culture rather than in total isolation from it. Becoming aware of this continuity with the ancient and classical worlds can help us see these ideas in a larger context. God was replacing his people’s views of God with a better one, but he was not replacing all of their culture.

Even when a Biblical text persuasively corrects its contemporary culture, we must be aware of how the text interacts with then-current thinking and literature. The biblical text formulated its discussion in relation to the thinking found in the ancient literature. It would be no surprise, then, if areas of similarity should be found. This is far different from the contention that Israelite literature is simply derivative mythology. There is a great distance between borrowing from a particular piece of literature and resonating with the larger culture that has itself been influenced by its literatures.

Can you provide a modern example of this?

When Americans speak of the philosophy of “eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die,” they are resonating with an idea that has penetrated society over thousands of years rather than
simply borrowing from the writings of Epicurus. In a similar way, an observer from the distant future would fail to understand American culture of the 21st century if they did not understand the foundations of individualism, personal rights, or consumerism (just to name a few of the influences). To offer a more specific example: a reader in the distant future would need some historical background to understand a familiar American question from the early twenty-first century: “Where were you on 9/11?” The question assumes a shared understanding of background that the asker does not bother to state.

Successful interpreters must try to understand the cultural background of the Bible just as successful missionaries must learn the culture, language and worldview of the people they are trying to reach. This is the rationale for us to study the Bible in light its cultural context. What we would contend, then, is that comparative work has three goals in mind:

1. We study the *history* of the biblical world as a means of recovering knowledge of the events that shaped the lives of people in the ancient world.
2. We study archaeology as a means of recovering the lifestyle reflected in the material culture of the ancient world.
3. We study the literature of the ancient world as a means of penetrating the heart and soul of the people who inhabited that world.

These goals are at the heart of comparative studies and will help us understand the Bible better.

**How do we understand the Bible — a book that billions have turned to over multiple centuries and many cultures — as literature in its ancient context?**

Readers today approach very differently such different sorts of writings as satire, news reports or a declaration of war. Knowing how a work was intended is an important key for understanding it. It should therefore be no surprise that the inspired authors adapted genres (literary types) that already existed in the larger culture; otherwise the first audiences would not have known what these works were meant for. Whether we are looking at wisdom literature, hymnic literature, historical literature, legal literature or the letters in the NT, we find generous doses of both similarities to and differences from the Biblical text and the literature of the time.

Understanding the genre of a piece of literature is necessary if we want to more fully understand the author’s intentions. Since perceiving an author’s intentions is essential to our theological interpretation of a text, we recognize that understanding genre contributes to legitimate theological interpretation. Some genres will operate differently in the ancient world than do the most similar genres in our own culture so we must become familiar with the mechanics of the genres represented in the ancient Near East and the Greco-Roman world.

In light of all of this, we can logically concluded that without the guidance of comparative studies, readers in cultures removed from the ancient world are bound to misinterpret the text at some points.

**But why is the study of cultural backgrounds so important?**

This field of research is important because grasping the original audience’s perspective helps us understand the setting to which the inspired authors communicated their message.

A text is a complex of ideas linked by threads of writing. Each phrase and each word communicates by the ideas and thoughts that they will trigger in the reader or hearer. Biblical writers normally could take for granted that their audiences shared their language and culture; some matters, therefore, they assumed rather than stated. But what happens when later readers from different cultures approach these texts? As each person hears or reads the text, the message takes for granted underlying gaps that need to be filled with meaning by the audience. (To use a previous example, in a message today, we might take for granted that our audience understands the term “9/11.”) Interpreters have the task of filling in those gaps, and when we are interpreting authoritative texts, it is theoretically essential that we fill them appropriately.

This approach is critical to practical application, because information from the original culture often fills those gaps in ways different from those we might guess, and these differences can sometimes yield quite theological insights. As readers who are interested in understanding the text’s message, we should value comparative studies that highlight conceptual issues intended to illumine the cultural dynamics behind the text.

Another importance to cultural backgrounds, then, is that by becoming aware of the ways that
ancient people thought, we can see the differences between them and us. If we know nothing of the ancient world, we will be inclined to impose our own culture and worldview on the biblical text. This will always be detrimental to our understanding.

What do I need to know before I begin?

Readers should carefully weigh how to use information in our notes, which we have deliberately kept concise. Information present may show contrasts as well as similarities. Here are therefore some principles to consider when comparing biblical texts with their ancient contexts:

1. Both cultural similarities and cultural differences must be considered.
2. Similarities may suggest a common cultural heritage rather than borrowing from a specific piece of literature.
3. It is common to find similarities at the surface but differences at the conceptual level or vice versa.
4. All elements of the text must be understood in their own context as accurately as possible before cross-cultural comparisons are made.
5. Proximity in time, geography and spheres of cultural contact all increase the possibility of interaction leading to influence.
6. A case for literary borrowing can rarely be made and requires identification of likely channels of transmission.
7. Similar functions may be performed by different genres in different cultures.
8. When literary or cultural elements are borrowed they may in turn be transformed into something quite different.
9. A single culture will rarely be monolithic, either in a contemporary cross-section or in consideration of a passage of time.
10. Cultural terms in the text of the notes (e.g., use of the term “Palestine” in the Old Testament, which refers to the larger region in which the people of Israel lived), do not refer to current political realities unless the notes indicate as such.

For more information, please see the article “Major Background Issues from the Ancient Near East,” p. XXXX.
Acknowledgments

The editors would like to thank the following individuals and institutions for their contributions to the editorial and composition stages of the NIV Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible.

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Other Content Providers

• InterVarsity Press for their permission to use portions of the IVP Bible Background Commentary for both the Old and New Testaments
• Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary for their permission to use fifteen articles in the New Testament from the NIV Archaeological Study Bible

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John H. Walton, Old Testament Editor

M.A. 1975 Biblical Studies: Old Testament; Wheaton Graduate School
A.B. 1974 Economics/Accounting, Muhlenberg College, Allentown, PA

Dr. John H. Walton is Professor of Old Testament at Wheaton College, Wheaton, IL, where he has been a professor since 2001. Dr. Walton came to Wheaton after a 20-year career as a professor at Moody Bible Institute in Chicago. He has written extensively on the backgrounds of the Old Testament, and has travelled the world lecturing about this field of study.

His publications include Lost World of Adam and Eve (IVP: 2015); Lost World of Scripture (IVP: 2013) with Brent Sandy; Job, NIV Application Commentary (Zondervan: 2012); Genesis 1 as Ancient Cosmology (Eisenbrauns: 2011); The Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Old Testament (General Editor, Zondervan, 2009); The Lost World of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate (IVP, 2009); Jonah (Expositor’s Bible Commentary, Zondervan: 2008); Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament (Baker: 2006); and Old Testament Today (Zondervan: 2004).

Dr. Walton summarizes his chosen path of study in this way:

“It was in my college years that I encountered a book by Joseph Free, a former Wheaton professor, called Archaeology and Bible History. It was apologetic in focus but brought to my attention the tremendous impact that archaeology and cultural background studies could have on our understanding of the Old Testament. It was in the very year that I read that book that I made the decision to pursue Old Testament studies as a vocational discipline. Instead of training to be an archaeologist, I determined to focus my attention on studies comparing the culture and literature of the Bible and the ancient Near East.

“I have never lost my fascination with this subject. But comparative studies only provide one of the means by which I try to get people excited about the Old Testament. I am saddened by how little exposure to and understanding of the Old Testament many Christians have, but I am passionate in doing whatever I can do to remedy this spiritual and theological loss.”

Craig S. Keener, New Testament Editor

Ph.D., Duke University, 1991
B.A., Central Bible College / Evangel University, 1982

Dr. Craig S. Keener is the F.M. and Ada Thompson professor of Biblical Studies at Asbury Seminary, Wilmore, KY. Before coming to Asbury in July 2011, Dr. Keener was professor of New Testament at Palmer Theological Seminary of Eastern University, where he taught for 15 years; before that time he was professor at Hood Theological Seminary. Craig is a sought-after speaker, writer and lecturer on the subject of New Testament cultural backgrounds.

Dr. Keener describes the origins of his interest in the cultures of the New Testament world:

“Not everyone is called to spend their professional career studying the cultural settings of the Bible, but some of us are called to bring this information in an accessible way to the body of Christ, as in this Bible. I’ve been studying the Bible’s cultural settings since the beginning of my undergraduate work. But the Lord was preparing me for this field of study even before my conversion. Even as an early teenager I was reading the works of Plato and Tacitus, the Roman historian, and spent time studying many different ancient sources.

“After my conversion I said to myself, ‘No, I don’t need to study any of these sources. I’m just going to read the Bible. The Bible is good enough on its own.’ But the more I read the Bible, often 40 chapters a day, the more I realized that the authors took for granted some information that their first readers knew—information that I didn’t have without studying background. Additionally, cross-cultural experiences in Africa, Asia and Latin America have helped me to think more cross-culturally. Both in preaching and teaching contexts, I have found that understanding the culture of the Bible helps my hearers understand the Biblical text more concretely and accurately.”
# Abbreviations

## General
- **c.** century
- **c.** about, approximately
- **cf.** compare, confer
- **ch., chs.** chapter, chapters
- **e.g.** for example
- **etc.** and so on
- **i.e.** that is
- **KJV** King James (Authorized) Version
- **lit.** literally, literal
- **NT** New Testament
- **OT** Old Testament
- **p., pp.** page, pages
- **v., vv.** verse, verses (in the chapter being commented on)

Standard abbreviations of month names are also sometimes used, as well as a few other common abbreviations.

## The Old Testament

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Book</th>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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## The New Testament

<table>
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<td>Jude</td>
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<td>Revelation</td>
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The goal of the New International Version (NIV) is to enable English-speaking people from around the world to read and hear God’s eternal Word in their own language. Our work as translators is motivated by our conviction that the Bible is God’s Word in written form. We believe that the Bible contains the divine answer to the deepest needs of humanity, sheds unique light on our path in a dark world and sets forth the way to our eternal well-being. Out of these deep convictions, we have sought to recreate as far as possible the experience of the original audience—blending transparency to the original text with accessibility for the millions of English speakers around the world. We have prioritized accuracy, clarity and literary quality with the goal of creating a translation suitable for public and private reading, evangelism, teaching, preaching, memorizing and liturgical use. We have also sought to preserve a measure of continuity with the long tradition of translating the Scriptures into English.

The complete NIV Bible was first published in 1978. It was a completely new translation made by over a hundred scholars working directly from the best available Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek texts. The translators came from the United States, Great Britain, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, giving the translation an international scope. They were from many denominations and churches—including Anglican, Assemblies of God, Baptist, Brethren, Christian Reformed, Church of Christ, Evangelical Covenant, Evangelical Free, Lutheran, Mennonite, Methodist, Nazarene, Presbyterian, Wesleyan and others. This breadth of denominational and theological perspective helped to safeguard the translation from sectarian bias. For these reasons, and by the grace of God, the NIV has gained a wide readership in all parts of the English-speaking world.

The work of translating the Bible is never finished. As good as they are, English translations must be regularly updated so that they will continue to communicate accurately the meaning of God’s Word. Updates are needed in order to reflect the latest developments in our understanding of the biblical world and its languages and to keep pace with changes in English usage. Recognizing, then, that the NIV would retain its ability to communicate God’s Word accurately only if it were regularly updated, the original translators established the Committee on Bible Translation (CBT). The Committee is a self-perpetuating group of biblical scholars charged with keeping abreast of advances in biblical scholarship and changes in English and issuing periodic updates to the NIV. The CBT is an independent, self-governing body and has sole responsibility for the NIV text. The Committee mirrors the original group of translators in its diverse international and denominational makeup and in its unifying commitment to the Bible as God’s inspired Word.

In obedience to its mandate, the Committee has issued periodic updates to the NIV. An initial revision was released in 1984. A more thorough revision process was completed in 2005, resulting in the separately published TNIV. The updated NIV you now have in your hands builds on both the original NIV and the TNIV and represents the latest effort of the Committee to articulate God’s unchanging Word in the way the original authors might have said it had they been speaking in English to the global English-speaking audience today.

**Translation Philosophy**

The Committee’s translating work has been governed by three widely accepted principles about the way people use words and about the way we understand them.

First, the meaning of words is determined by the way that users of the language actually use them at any given time. For the biblical languages, therefore, the Committee utilizes the best and most recent scholarship on the way Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek words were being used in biblical times. At the same time, the Committee carefully studies the state of modern English. Good translation is like good communication: one must know the target audience so that the appropriate choices can be made about which English words to use to represent the original words of Scripture. From its inception, the NIV has had as its target the general English-speaking population all
over the world, the “International” in its title reflecting this concern. The aim of the Committee is to put the Scriptures into natural English that will communicate effectively with the broadest possible audience of English speakers.

Modern technology has enhanced the Committee’s ability to choose the right English words to convey the meaning of the original text. The field of computational linguistics harnesses the power of computers to provide broadly applicable and current data about the state of the language. Translators can now access huge databases of modern English to better understand the current meaning and usage of key words. The Committee utilized this resource in preparing the 2011 edition of the NIV. An area of especially rapid and significant change in English is the way certain nouns and pronouns are used to refer to human beings. The Committee therefore requested experts in computational linguistics at Collins Dictionaries to pose some key questions about this usage to its database of English—the largest in the world, with over 4.4 billion words, gathered from several English-speaking countries and including both spoken and written English. (The Collins Study, called “The Development and Use of Gender Language in Contemporary English,” can be accessed at http://www.thenivbible.com/about-the-niv/about-the-2011-edition/. The study revealed that the most popular words to describe the human race in modern U.S. English were “humanity,” “man” and “mankind.” The Committee then used this data in the updated NIV, choosing from among these three words (and occasionally others also) depending on the context.

A related issue creates a larger problem for modern translations: the move away from using the third-person masculine singular pronouns—“he/him/his”—to refer to men and women equally. This usage does persist in some forms of English, and this revision therefore occasionally uses these pronouns in a generic sense. But the tendency, recognized in day-to-day usage and confirmed by the Collins study, is away from the generic use of “he,” “him” and “his.” In recognition of this shift in language and in an effort to translate into the natural English that people are actually using, this revision of the NIV generally uses other constructions when the biblical text is plainly addressed to men and women equally. The reader will encounter especially frequently a “they,” “their” or “them” to express a generic singular idea. Thus, for instance, Mark 8:36 reads: “What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?” This generic use of the “distributive” or “singular” “they/them/their” has been used for many centuries by respected writers of English and has now become established as standard English, spoken and written, all over the world.

A second linguistic principle that feeds into the Committee’s translation work is that meaning is found not in individual words, as vital as they are, but in larger clusters: phrases, clauses, sentences, discourses. Translation is not, as many people think, a matter of word substitution: English word x in place of Hebrew word y. Translators must first determine the meaning of the words of the biblical languages in the context of the passage and then select English words that accurately communicate that meaning to modern listeners and readers. This means that accurate translation will not always reflect the exact structure of the original language. To be sure, there is debate over the degree to which translators should try to preserve the “form” of the original text in English. From the beginning, the NIV has taken a mediating position on this issue. The manual produced when the translation that became the NIV was first being planned states: “If the Greek or Hebrew syntax has a good parallel in modern English, it should be used. But if there is no good parallel, the English syntax appropriate to the meaning of the original is to be chosen.” It is fine, in other words, to carry over the form of the biblical languages into English—but not at the expense of natural expression. The principle that meaning resides in larger clusters of words means that the Committee has not insisted on a “word-for-word” approach to translation. We certainly believe that every word of Scripture is inspired by God and therefore to be carefully studied to determine what God is saying to us. It is for this reason that the Committee labors over every single word of the original texts, working hard to determine how each of those words contributes to what the text is saying. Ultimately, however, it is how these individual words function in combination with other words that determines meaning.

A third linguistic principle guiding the Committee in its translation work is the recognition that words have a spectrum of meaning. It is popular to define a word by using another word, or “gloss,” to substitute for it. This substitute word is then sometimes called the “literal” meaning of a word. In fact, however, words have a range of possible meanings. Those meanings will vary depending on the context, and words in one language will usually not occupy the same semantic range as words in another language. The Committee therefore studies each original word of Scripture in its context to identify its meaning in a particular verse and then chooses an appropriate English word (or phrase) to represent it. It is impossible, then, to translate any given
Hebrew, Aramaic or Greek word with the same English word all the time. The Committee does try to translate related occurrences of a word in the original languages with the same English word in order to preserve the connection for the English reader. But the Committee generally privileges clear natural meaning over a concern with consistency in rendering particular words.

Textual Basis
For the Old Testament the standard Hebrew text, the Masoretic Text as published in the latest edition of *Biblia Hebraica*, has been used throughout. The Masoretic Text tradition contains marginal notations that offer variant readings. These have sometimes been followed instead of the text itself. Because such instances involve variants within the Masoretic tradition, they have not been indicated in the textual notes. In a few cases, words in the basic consonantal text have been divided differently than in the Masoretic Text. Such cases are usually indicated in the textual footnotes. The Dead Sea Scrolls contain biblical texts that represent an earlier stage of the transmission of the Hebrew text. They have been consulted, as have been the Samaritan Pentateuch and the ancient scribal traditions concerning deliberate textual changes. The translators also consulted the more important early versions. Readings from these versions, the Dead Sea Scrolls and the scribal traditions were occasionally followed where the Masoretic Text seemed doubtful and where accepted principles of textual criticism showed that one or more of these textual witnesses appeared to provide the correct reading. In rare cases, the translators have emended the Hebrew text where it appears to have become corrupted at an even earlier stage of its transmission. These departures from the Masoretic Text are also indicated in the textual footnotes. Sometimes the vowel indicators (which are later additions to the basic consonantal text) found in the Masoretic Text did not, in the judgment of the translators, represent the correct vowels for the original text. Accordingly, some words have been read with a different set of vowels. These instances are usually not indicated in the footnotes.

The Greek text used in translating the New Testament has been an eclectic one, based on the latest editions of the Nestle-Aland/United Bible Societies’ Greek New Testament. The translators have made their choices among the variant readings in accordance with widely accepted principles of New Testament textual criticism. Footnotes call attention to places where uncertainty remains.

The New Testament authors, writing in Greek, often quote the Old Testament from its ancient Greek version, the Septuagint. This is one reason why some of the Old Testament quotations in the NIV New Testament are not identical to the corresponding passages in the NIV Old Testament. Such quotations in the New Testament are indicated with the footnote “(see Septuagint).”

Footnotes and Formatting
Footnotes in this version are of several kinds, most of which need no explanation. Those giving alternative translations begin with “Or” and generally introduce the alternative with the last word preceding it in the text, except when it is a single-word alternative. When poetry is quoted in a footnote a slash mark indicates a line division.

It should be noted that references to diseases, minerals, flora and fauna, architectural details, clothing, jewelry, musical instruments and other articles cannot always be identified with precision. Also, linear measurements and measures of capacity can only be approximated (see the Table of Weights and Measures). Although *Selah*, used mainly in the Psalms, is probably a musical term, its meaning is uncertain. Since it may interrupt reading and distract the reader, this word has not been kept in the English text, but every occurrence has been signaled by a footnote.

As an aid to the reader, sectional headings have been inserted. They are not to be regarded as part of the biblical text and are not intended for oral reading. It is the Committee’s hope that these headings may prove more helpful to the reader than the traditional chapter divisions, which were introduced long after the Bible was written.

Sometimes the chapter and/or verse numbering in English translations of the Old Testament differs from that found in published Hebrew texts. This is particularly the case in the Psalms, where the traditional titles are included in the Hebrew verse numbering. Such differences are indicated in the footnotes at the bottom of the page. In the New Testament, verse numbers that marked off portions of the traditional English text not supported by the best Greek manuscripts now appear in brackets, with a footnote indicating the text that has been omitted (see, for example, Matthew 17:21).
Mark 16:9–20 and John 7:53—8:11, although long accorded virtually equal status with the rest of the Gospels in which they stand, have a questionable standing in the textual history of the New Testament, as noted in the bracketed annotations with which they are set off. A different typeface has been chosen for these passages to indicate their uncertain status.

Basic formatting of the text, such as lining the poetry, paragraphing (both prose and poetry), setting up of (administrative-like) lists, indenting letters and lengthy prayers within narratives and the insertion of sectional headings, has been the work of the Committee. However, the choice between single-column and double-column formats has been left to the publishers. Also the issuing of “red-letter” editions is a publisher’s choice—one that the Committee does not endorse.

The Committee has again been reminded that every human effort is flawed—including this revision of the NIV. We trust, however, that many will find in it an improved representation of the Word of God, through which they hear his call to faith in our Lord Jesus Christ and to service in his kingdom. We offer this version of the Bible to him in whose name and for whose glory it has been made.

The Committee on Bible Translation
### ANCIENT TEXTS RELATING TO THE OLD TESTAMENT

Major representative examples of ancient Near Eastern non-Biblical documents that provide parallels to or shed light on various Old Testament passages

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>TITLE</th>
<th>ORIGIN</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AMARNA LETTERS</td>
<td>Canaanite Akkadian</td>
<td>Hundreds of letters, written primarily by Canaanite scribes, illuminate social, political and religious relationships between Canaan and Egypt during the reigns of Amunhotep III and Akhenaten.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AMENEMOPE'S WISDOM</td>
<td>Egyptian</td>
<td>Thirty chapters of wisdom instruction are similar to Pr 22:17—24:22 and provide the closest external parallels to OT Wisdom Literature.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ATRAHASIS EPIC</td>
<td>Akkadian</td>
<td>A cosmological epic depicts creation and early human history, including the flood (cf. Ge 1–9).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BABYLONIAN THEODICY</td>
<td>Akkadian</td>
<td>A sufferer and his friend dialogue with each other (cf. Job).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CYRUS CYLINDER</td>
<td>Akkadian</td>
<td>King Cyrus of Persia records the conquest of Babylon (cf. Da 5:30; 6:28) and boasts of his generous policies toward his new subjects and their gods.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEAD SEA SCROLLS</td>
<td>Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek</td>
<td>Several hundred scrolls and fragments include the oldest copies of OT books and passages.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EBLA TABLETS</td>
<td>Sumerian, Eblaite</td>
<td>Thousands of commercial, legal, literary and epistolary texts describe the cultural vitality and political power of a pre-patriarchal civilization in northern Syria.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELEPHANTINE PAPYRI</td>
<td>Aramaic</td>
<td>Contracts and letters document life among Jews who fled to southern Egypt after Jerusalem was destroyed in 586 BC.</td>
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<td>ENUMA ELISH</td>
<td>Akkadian</td>
<td>Marduk, the Babylonian god of cosmic order, is elevated to the supreme position in the pantheon. The seven-tablet epic contains an account of creation (cf. Ge 1–2).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GEZER CALENDAR</td>
<td>Hebrew</td>
<td>A schoolboy from west-central Israel describes the seasons, crops and farming activity of the agricultural year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GILGAMESH EPIC</td>
<td>Akkadian</td>
<td>Gilgamesh, ruler of Uruk, experiences numerous adventures, including a meeting with Utanapishtim, the only survivor of a great deluge (cf. Ge 6–9).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HAMMURAPI'S CODE</td>
<td>Akkadian</td>
<td>Together with similar law codes that preceded and followed it, the Code of Hammurapi exhibits close parallels to numerous passages in the Mosaic legislation of the OT.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Cyrus Cylinder, a cuneiform text that describes Cyrus’s (Persian ruler 559–530 BC) capture of Babylon in 539 BC. Cyrus allowed the Jews to return from Babylonia and rebuild the temple in Jerusalem (2 Ch 36:23; Ezr 1:2–4; 7:1–5).

Gezer Calendar—-one of the earliest examples of Hebrew writing—highlights the agricultural seasons in Israel.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>TITLE</th>
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<tr>
<td>HYMN TO THE ATEN</td>
<td>Egyptian</td>
<td>Fourteenth century BC</td>
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<td>ISHTAR'S DESCENT</td>
<td>Akkadian</td>
<td>First millennium BC</td>
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<tr>
<td>JEHOIACHIN'S RATION DOCKETS</td>
<td>Akkadian</td>
<td>Early sixth century BC</td>
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<tr>
<td>KING LISTS</td>
<td>Sumerian</td>
<td>Early second millennium BC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LACHISH LETTERS (OSTRACA)</td>
<td>Hebrew</td>
<td>Early sixth century BC</td>
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<tr>
<td>LAMENTATION OVER THE DESTRUCTION OF UR</td>
<td>Sumerian</td>
<td>Early second millennium BC</td>
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<tr>
<td>LUDLUL BEL NEMEQI</td>
<td>Akkadian</td>
<td>Late second millennium BC</td>
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<tr>
<td>MARI TABLETS</td>
<td>Akkadian</td>
<td>Eighteenth century BC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MERNEPTAH STELE</td>
<td>Egyptian</td>
<td>Thirteenth century BC</td>
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<tr>
<td>MESHA STELE (MOABITE STONE)</td>
<td>Moabite</td>
<td>Ninth century BC</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mesha Stele (Moabite Stone), a Moabite inscription (c. 840–820 BC), recounts the exploits of Mesh, king of Moab (2 Ki 3:4).

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Sennacherib’s Prism was discovered among the ruins of Nineveh, the ancient capital of the Assyrian Empire. It contains the annals of Sennacherib, the Assyrian king who besieged Jerusalem in 701 BC during the reign of King Hezekiah.

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## ANCIENT TEXTS RELATING TO THE OLD TESTAMENT (CONT.)

<table>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>MURASHU TABLETS</td>
<td>Akkadian</td>
<td>Commercial documents describe financial transactions engaged in by Murashu and Sons, a Babylonian firm that did business with Jews and other exiles.</td>
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<tr>
<td>MURSILIS’S TREATY WITH DUPPI-TESSUB</td>
<td>Hittite</td>
<td>King Mursilis imposes a suzerainty treaty on King Duppi-Tessub. The literary outline of this and other Hittite treaties is strikingly paralleled in OT covenants established by God with his people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NABONIDUS CHRONICLE</td>
<td>Akkadian</td>
<td>The account describes the absence of King Nabonidus from Babylon. His son Belshazzar is therefore the regent in charge of the kingdom (cf. Da 5:29–30).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEBUCHADNEZZAR CHRONICLE</td>
<td>Akkadian</td>
<td>A chronicle from the reign of Nebuchadnezzar II includes the Babylonian account of the siege of Jerusalem in 597 BC (see 2Ki 24:10–17).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NUZI TABLETS</td>
<td>Akkadian</td>
<td>Adoption, birthright sale and other legal documents graphically illustrate OT patriarchal customs current centuries earlier.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PESSIMISTIC DIALOGUE</td>
<td>Akkadian</td>
<td>A master and his servant discuss the pros and cons of various activities (cf. Ecc 1–2).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RAS SHAMRA TABLETS</td>
<td>Ugaritic</td>
<td>Canaanite deities and rulers experience adventures in epics that enrich our understanding of Canaanite mythology and religion and of OT poetry.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SARGON LEGEND</td>
<td>Akkadian</td>
<td>Sargon I (the Great), ruler of Akkad in the late third millennium BC, claims to have been rescued as an infant from a reed basket found floating in a river (cf. Ex 2).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SARGON’S DISPLAY INSCRIPTION</td>
<td>Akkadian</td>
<td>Sargon II takes credit for the conquest of Samaria in 722/721 BC and states that he captured and exiled 27,290 Israelites.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SENNACHERIB’S PRISM</td>
<td>Akkadian</td>
<td>Sennacherib vividly describes his siege of Jerusalem in 701 BC, making Hezekiah a prisoner in his own royal city (but cf. 2Ki 19:35–37).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEVEN LEAN YEARS TRADITION</td>
<td>Egyptian</td>
<td>Egypt experiences seven years of low Niles and famine, which, by a contractual agreement between Pharaoh Djoser (twenty-eighth century BC) and a god, will be followed by prosperity (cf. Ge 41).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SHALMANESER’S BLACK OBELISK</td>
<td>Akkadian</td>
<td>Israel’s king Jehu presents tribute to Assyria’s king Shalmaneser III. Additional Assyrian and Babylonian texts refer to other kings of Israel and Judah.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SHISHAK’S GEOGRAPHICAL LIST</td>
<td>Egyptian</td>
<td>Pharaoh Shishak lists the cities that he captured or made tributary during his campaign in Judah and Israel (cf. 1Ki 14:25–26 and note on 14:25).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SILOAM INSCRIPTION</td>
<td>Hebrew</td>
<td>A Judahite workman describes the construction of an underground conduit to guarantee Jerusalem’s water supply during Hezekiah’s reign (cf. 2Ki 20:20; 2Ch 32:30).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SINUHE’S STORY</td>
<td>Egyptian</td>
<td>An Egyptian official of the Twelfth Dynasty goes into voluntary exile in Aram (Syria) and Canaan during the OT patriarchal period.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TALE OF TWO BROTHERS</td>
<td>Egyptian</td>
<td>A young man rejects the amorous advances of his older brother’s wife (cf. Ge 39).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WENAMUN’S JOURNEY</td>
<td>Egyptian</td>
<td>An official of the temple of Amun at Thebes in Egypt is sent to Byblos in Canaan to buy lumber for the ceremonial barge of his god.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Old Testament Chronology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Creation</th>
<th>Fall</th>
<th>Flood</th>
<th>Babel</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ge 1–2</td>
<td>Ge 3</td>
<td>Ge 6–9</td>
<td>Ge 11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dates Accepted by Many Scholars</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crete</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anatolia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syria-Palestine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N. Mesopotamia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S. Mesopotamia</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Emphasis is placed on broad historical periods and astronomical and archaeological synchronisms for the Twelfth and Eighteenth Egyptian Dynasties. Mesopotamian chronology together with certain elements in this chart is the use of the low interpretative theories of various scholars. Dates are approximate and dependent on the context.
Old Testament Chronology

Patriarchs
Ge 12–50

2166 Abram born
2091 Abram moves to Canaan
2006 Jacob and Esau born
1991 Abraham dies

Early Biblical Period

BIBLICAL HISTORY

TRADITIONAL DATES

DATES ACCEPTED BY MANY SCHOLARS

2500 BC 2400 2300 2200 2100 2000

2066 Isaac born
2050 Abraham offers Isaac
2080 Ishmael born

WORLD HISTORY

2500 BC 2400 2300 2200 2100 2000

S. MESOPOTAMIA
N. MESOPOTAMIA

Early Dynastic Period
Akkadian Period
Neo-Sumerian Period

EGYPT

Old Kingdom
First Intermediate Period

SYRIA-PALESTINE

Ebla

ANATOLIA

Hattian Kingdoms

CRETE

Early Minoan Period

PERSIA

Elamite Dynasties

GREECE

Early Helladic Period

ITALY

Dates are approximate and dependent on the interpretative theories of various scholars. A key element in this chart is the use of the low Mesopotamian chronology together with certain astronomical and archaeological synchronisms for the Twelfth and Eighteenth Egyptian Dynasties. Emphasis is placed on broad historical periods and cultural sequences.
Old Testament Chronology

TRADITIONAL DATES

EGYPT

N. MESOPOTAMIA

ITALY

CRETE

ANATOLIA

SYRIA-PALESTINE

S. MESOPOTAMIA

Cultural sequences.

Emphasis is placed on broad historical periods and for the Twelfth and Eighteenth Egyptian Dynasties.

Astronomical and archaeological synchronisms Mesopotamian chronology together with certain interpretative theories of various scholars. A key element in this chart is the use of the low dates are approximate and dependent on the texts.

BIBLICAL HISTORY

WORLD HISTORY

Early Biblical Period

Early Dynastic Period

Early Minoan Period

Early Helladic Period

Amarna texts

Muttianu Period

Late Helladic (Mycenaean) Period

Mari texts

Ugaritic texts

Late Minoan Period

Late Helladic

Late Minoan

Hittite Old Kingdom

Middle Minoan Period

Middle Helladic Period

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1929 Jacob flees to Haran</th>
<th>1876 Jacob and family settle in Egypt</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1859 Jacob dies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1886 Isaac dies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1898 Joseph sold into Egypt</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1915 Joseph born</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1800 1805 Joseph dies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1526 Moses born</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

Patriarchal Age

Sojourn in Egypt

1500 BC
### Exodus and Conquest

Ex 1:1–Jos 24:29

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1400 BC</td>
<td>The exodus, “Red Sea” crossed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1367-1327</td>
<td>Othniel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1309-1229</td>
<td>Ehud</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1209-1169</td>
<td>Deborah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1162-1122</td>
<td>Gideon</td>
</tr>
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<td>1078-1072</td>
<td>Jephthah</td>
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<td>1075-1055</td>
<td>Samson</td>
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<tr>
<td>1010-970</td>
<td>Saul</td>
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<tr>
<td>970-930</td>
<td>Solomon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>910-869</td>
<td>Divided Kingdom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>872-848</td>
<td>Ahab</td>
</tr>
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<td>852-841</td>
<td>Joram</td>
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<td>850-822</td>
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<td>821-796</td>
<td>Jehoshaphat</td>
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<td>793-753</td>
<td>Jero boam II</td>
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<td>750-735</td>
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### Old Testament Chronology

#### Dated Texts Accepted by Many Scholars

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Traditional Dates</th>
<th>N. Mesopotamia</th>
<th>S. Mesopotamia</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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#### Dates

- **2500 BC**: Abraham born
- **2091 BC**: Abram
- **1991 BC**: Abraham offers Isaac
- **1929 BC**: Jacob born
- **1915 BC**: Joseph born
- **1898 BC**: Joseph dies
- **1886 BC**: Jacob dies
- **1876 BC**: Jacob settles in Egypt
- **1805 BC**: Patriarchal Age Sojourn in Egypt
- **1526 BC**: Moses born
- **1446 BC**: Israelites enter Canaan
- **1406 BC**: Moses dies
- **1375-1327 BC**: Judges
- **1305 BC**: Gideon
- **1209-1169 BC**: Samuel born
- **1105 BC**: Saul
- **1000 BC**: Judges
- **910-722 BC**: Kings of Judah
- **722 BC**: Fall of the Northern Kingdom
- **538 BC**: First group returns under Zerubbabel
- **458 BC**: Second group returns under Ezra
- **432 BC**: Last group returns under Nehemiah

#### Division of Kingdoms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Divided Kingdom</th>
<th>1Ki 12–2Ki 17</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>930-909 Jeroboam I</td>
<td>908-886 Baasha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>885-874 Omri</td>
<td>874-853 Ahab</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>852-841 Joram</td>
<td>841-814 Je hu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>835-796 Joash</td>
<td>792-740 Azariah (Uzziah)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>790-735 Jotham</td>
<td>735-715 Ahaz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>715-686 Hezekiah</td>
<td>697-642 Manasseh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>640-609 Josiah</td>
<td>609-598 Jehoiakim</td>
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<tr>
<td>597-586 Zedekiah</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>930-913 Rehoboam</td>
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#### Exile

- **586 BC**: Fall of Jerusalem

#### Restoration

- **538 BC**: First group returns under Zerubbabel
- **458 BC**: Second group returns under Ezra
- **432 BC**: Last group returns under Nehemiah

#### Between the Testaments

- **500 BC**: Elisha
- **550 BC**: Onias

#### KINGS OF ISRAEL

- **722 BC**: Fall of the Northern Kingdom

#### KINGS OF JUDAH

- **586 BC**: Fall of Jerusalem

#### Prophets of Israel

#### Prophets of Judah

- **605-530 BC**: Daniel
- **520-480 BC**: Zechariah
- **440-350 BC**: Malachi

#### Lines to timeline denote last year of reign or life

- **Coregencies and short reigns are omitted**

#### Historical Periods

- **Late Dynastic Period**
- **Neo-Babylonian Empire**
- **Saitic Dynasty**
- **Persian Empire**
- **Achaemenian and Median Dynasties**
- **Classical Period**
- **Roman Republic**

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OLD
TESTAMENT

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To think about the ancient world, we can use the metaphor of a cultural river that flowed through the societies and thoughts of the peoples and nations of the ancient Near East. Israel was immersed in that cultural river; it was embedded in that conceptual world. Sometimes God gave revelation that drew them out, as Moses from the Nile, and distinguished them; but we should generally think of them in this cultural river. Sometimes they were simply floating on its currents; sometimes they veered out of the currents and stood apart. At other times they swam resolutely upstream against those currents.

The twelve issues identified below describe major currents in this metaphorical ancient cultural river. Israel’s relationship to those currents varies case by case. Importantly, however, as modern readers, we have no familiarity with that river at all. Our cultural river is very different. Whether Israel was floating or swimming, as we read through the Old Testament we must recognize that they were in a different river than we are. To interpret the Old Testament well, we must try to dip into their cultural river.

1. The “Great Symbiosis.” People in the ancient world believed that the gods had made people as slave laborers because they were tired of growing their own food and taking care of their own needs. People cared for the gods (who lived an opulent, pampered lifestyle including food, drink, clothing, housing, etc.) and in turn, the gods took care of the people (because they had vested interests in doing so). Thus there was a codependent relationship of mutual need. This provides the context for understanding temples, rituals, worship, and religious obligation in the ancient world. Israel is called to a far different way of thinking, as Yahweh has no needs.

2. Presence of God in Sacred Space. This is an extension of the previous item. People in the ancient world highly desired that their god to take up residence among them. It was important for the god so they could be pampered, and important for the people so that they could receive blessing. The presence of the god created sacred space that had to be respected and honored. Limited access and purity requirements were taken very seriously. Combined with the Great Symbiosis, this shows why all religion in the ancient world was local. Only those who lived in the vicinity of the temple could be engaged in caring for the gods. And the gods would only be interested in providing for and protecting those who could take care of him/her. It is not that the gods were powerless beyond their local area; rather, they were disinterested in other places. Their needs were all that mattered. Israel took its sacred space very seriously, but Yahweh was a very different sort of God.

3. Gods in Community. The polytheism of the ancient world was not just a matter of numbers. In the ancient world identity was found in one’s community rather than in one’s individuality. Like people, gods found their identity in relationship to the group to which they belonged. Each god had a constellation of attributes, just as people have different skills and abilities. As in human communities, the community of the gods called for hierarchy. So the pantheon of the gods was characterized by a hierarchy (cosmic gods, national gods, city patrons, clan deities, ancestral deities) and by differentiation (according to their jurisdiction, manifestations and attributes). Given this cultural reality, we can surmise that it was very difficult for the Israelites to adjust to a single God spanning all levels of hierarchy and all categories of jurisdiction.
4. Revelation and Manifestation of Deities. The gods in the ancient word were generally believed to not be forthcoming—that is, they were not believed to reveal themselves broadly (with exceptions in responding to divinatory inquiries). Consequently, one could never be sure exactly what the god expected from people (except to be pampered). Whenever something went wrong, people in the ancient world would assume that they had somehow offended a petty deity. Even though the gods did not reveal themselves or their expectation, they did manifest themselves in diverse ways. The sun, moon, planets and stars, for example, were all considered manifestations of various gods. The most important manifestation of the deity was in the image, which was commissioned by the god, manufactured from the finest of materials with the help of the god, and then ritually energized so that the essence of the god took up residence in the image. The image was not the god, but a manifestation of the god, and therefore it was capable of serving as mediator for the presence of the deity, for the care of the deity and for the worship given the deity. The Israelites were to have no such mediators—no man-made image could accomplish such things and Yahweh had no needs to be met through the image.

5. Spirit world. In the ancient world the reality of spiritual beings extended beyond the gods themselves. Other classes of spirit beings included chaos creatures, demons, servants of the gods, and spirits of deceased humans. These beings were generally not considered to be morally flawed or evil. Sometimes their intrinsic nature just wreaked havoc. Some could serve apotropaic functions whereas others were more inclined to devour. None of this fits in to how we think about demons today as evil fallen angels. The Old Testament lacks demons almost entirely and considers chaos creatures less free of Yahweh’s control.

6. Natural versus Supernatural. Today we are inclined to separate our understanding of events and phenomena into the categories of “natural” or “supernatural,” the former of these two being the result of natural laws and explainable as natural cause and effect; the latter being acts of God beyond scientific explanation. In the ancient world there was no such classification system. Nothing would have been considered purely natural with God/the gods uninvolved. They would not speak of miracles (i.e., supernatural occurrences), but rather of signs and wonders that were manifestations of God’s power. Israel was very much like the rest of the ancient world in this regard.

7. Deep Reality. Corresponding to the previous point, in the ancient world people did not circumscribe reality within the category of historical events. Today it is not uncommon for us to think that reality is defined by events: we ask ourselves, “Did it really happen?” In the ancient world people considered events as a small slice of a reality that transcended events of history. What we call their mythology was more real to them than their history. When ancient people talked about events, they often found the most significant reality in what God/the gods had done, not in what people had done. We misunderstand when we think of mythology as made-up stories about gods that did not exist and therefore treat them as fairy tales. Ancient Israel’s thinking was very similar to the ancient world in this regard.

8. Creation and Order. Since we modern readers tend to be materially focused, we think of creation and origins we think in material terms. In the ancient world people were much more inclined to think of creation not so much as manufacturing the material cosmos, but of establishing order in the cosmos and making it function with a particular purpose in mind. Gods were the source of order; wisdom was the pursuit of order; creation was the establishment of order. Israelites would have thought about the cosmos and God’s creative work in similar terms, but, of course, Yahweh was the Creator.

9. Religion and Magic. Religion and magic were not different categories in the ancient world and it is not possible to separate them from one another. Magic entailed the exercise of power (in spells, hexes, exorcisms, sorcery, necromancy, etc.) but operated primarily on the power associated with the name of a person and the name
of a deity. A god’s name could be invoked either for effective exercise of power over another person, or for summoning or commanding the god himself. Divination was understood to provide access to information about what the gods were doing (signaled in the stars, terrestrial occurrences, dreams, entrails of sacrificed animals, and in many other indicators). Israelites were forbidden to practice most forms of divination and were not to use God’s name to attempt to control him.

10. Death and Memory. In the ancient world people viewed community as extending beyond the world of the living. When someone died, the deceased joined the group of ancestors in the netherworld, yet also remained in the community of those still alive—remembered by them and in most instances, receiving care from them (in the form meals to the dead). Burial customs reflected these beliefs: people believed that improper burial (or no burial) would make it impossible for the dead to join the community of ancestors and would therefore leave them homeless, uncared for, and very unhappy (as well as prone to haunt the living). As to the concern to be remembered, people would strive throughout their lives to make a name for themselves (defined as doing anything that would cause them to be remembered). Having children was the most important way of doing this. To die childless was to die with little hope of being remembered, which in turn would have a severely negative impact on their existence in the netherworld. Israel thought in very similar ways.

11. Identity in Community. In stark contrast to Westerners who find their main identity in themselves as individuals, in the ancient world people found their identity in their community. It was in this sort of context that arranged marriages made sense and levirate marriage would be important. In such a community context, religion was a family choice, not an individual choice. Families worshiped gods within their family circle, so that a woman who married into another clan naturally adopted the gods of that clan. Legal cases related to clan identities and judgment could target the whole communal group rather than just one individual. Guilt and blessing both operated on a communal level. Israel’s perspectives were very much the same.

12. Retribution Principle. People believed that the righteous would prosper and the wicked would suffer. This led to the belief that if one pleased the gods (took care of them well), one would receive their blessing; if one didn’t, the gods would be angry and lash out. Such a belief led people to conclude that if someone was prospering, they must be doing well by the gods; if they were suffering, they must have done something to anger the gods and as such should be shunned. In the ancient world this was applied not only to the level of the individual but also to the level of the community, clan or family. This particular belief can be problematic for the modern Bible reader because some of the psalms and proverbs seem to affirm this principle. A full reading of the Bible, however, especially from the book of Job, nuances this principle. ◆
The Torah

God Establishes His Covenant
A wide array of literature from the ancient Near East provides information that is helpful for interpreting the Pentateuch. Ancient Near Eastern mythology reflects ideas about creation. Though ancient texts provide accounts of creation from Mesopotamia and Egypt and in the process provide insight into the creator deities and their roles (which are far different from what we find in the Bible), they also provide important information concerning how the ancients thought about the cosmos (which is often very similar to what we find in the Bible).

The patriarchal narratives can be read against the background of family archives from the ancient Near East that explain customs and legal traditions that are unlike our modern traditions in many ways. The religious practices and beliefs of the patriarchs can be investigated in comparison to the ancient world. Though these practices and beliefs were rooted in the ancient world, God was also gradually drawing them out of their familiar ways of thinking. At the same time, we would be mistaken to think that Abraham’s theology was the same as ours.

Ritual descriptions can be illuminated by ritual texts available in wide variety. Covenant documents in the Pentateuch can be read in light of treaties between countries. Laws can be compared to a variety of law collections dating from the second millennium BC. Such comparison can not only focus on the form or content of the individual laws but, more important, it can expand to a study of the source of law and the literary functions of law collections. How did people in the ancient world think about such collections of laws? These collections certainly did not have the same role as our legislative literature does today. All of these studies show us that God communicated to Israel within the cultural context of their world.

Historical and archaeological studies can provide background information to help understand the situation in Canaan during the patriarchal period and try to resolve basic questions such as the historical setting of Israel’s slavery in Egypt and the date of the exodus. Of particular importance are all of the archaeological studies trying to bring further understanding to the Egyptian backdrop of these events.

Sociological studies can comment on the concept of sacred space and the variety of institutions that existed in a society to manage sacred space—from priests to sanctuaries to rituals. Additional studies in religion also help us understand some of the ways that God called the people of Israel to be distinct from the people around them. As we learn about the ancient perception of deity and the way that perception is reflected in ancient Near Eastern ideas about pantheons, images, divination and magic, we can understand more clearly some of what Israel was to guard against.

What eventually is included in the books of Exodus through Deuteronomy identifies Moses as the authority figure from whom the material derives, and there is no reason to doubt the centrality of his role. At the same time, communication in the ancient world was primarily oral, since these were hearing-dominant cultures. Writing was known and conducted largely by the specialists (scribes), but scribes primarily produced documents rather than what we call books. The scribes themselves were not authors; they preserved the words of authority figures such as Moses. We don’t know when scribal archives of this sort of document would have been compiled into the books as we know them today.
Date and Author

We have no certain information about the authorship of Genesis, though early Biblical tradition views Moses as having a significant role in transmitting and perhaps even formulating the traditions preserved in the book. The oral nature of ancient culture may suggest that actual written forms of the traditions came much later, though whenever they were produced, they maintained their connectedness to the authority figures, such as Moses, who were instrumental. Regardless of the date of the final writing, the text largely preserves its mid-second-millennium BC context and perspective.

Literary Setting

Literary genres have rules and conventions by which they operate. Communication is jeopardized if we do not understand the parameters of the genre of the literature we are reading. How confusing it would be if we were reading a mystery in which the author gave every appearance of writing a biography! But at the same time, the features that indicate whether a literary work is a mystery or biography are to some extent culturally determined. The reason that genre categories work is that the categories represent a consensus of expectation among the readers.

When we approach a book like Genesis, we must be aware of what genres we will be encountering. But just as important, we must adjust our expectations so that we will come to those genres understanding the ancient conventions attached to that genre rather than imposing our own genre conventions on their literature.

Genesis contains cosmogony texts, i.e., texts that deal with the origins of key aspects of the cosmos. It also contains genealogies (e.g., chs. 5; 11; 36), founders’ or ancestors’ narratives (e.g., chs. 12 – 35), destiny proclamations (i.e., formal blessings and/or curses from father to son, e.g., chs. 9; 27; 49), conflict tales (e.g., chs. 4; 6 – 7; 11; 19; 34), battle accounts (e.g., ch. 14), and a narrative about the rise of a courtier from humble beginnings to a position of power (chs. 40 – 45). Some of these are unparalleled in the ancient world, and even when possible parallels exist, significant differences lead us to proceed with caution.

KEY CONCEPTS

- The covenant is God’s program of revelation.
- The focus of creation is the establishment and maintenance of order and operation.
- The stories in the Bible are stories about God.
The Beginning

1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

2 And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. 3 Then God called the light “day,” and the darkness He called “night.” And there was evening and morning—a day.

If creation is the act of bringing something into existence, we must ask what constituted existence in the ancient world. In our culture, we consider existence to be either material (i.e., having molecules/taking up space and extending to energy and subatomic particles) or experiential (e.g., abstractions such as love or time). Those definitions, however, are culturally determined. By contrast, in the ancient world something existed when it had a function—a role to play.

In Mesopotamia one way to accomplish this was to name something, because a name designated a thing’s function or role. Thus, in the Babylonian creation account, bringing the cosmos into existence begins “When on high no name was given in heaven, nor below was the netherworld called by name... When no gods at all had been brought forth, none called by names, none destinies ordained, then were the gods formed.” In Egyptian accounts existence was associated with something having been differentiated. The god Atum is conceptualized as the primordial monad—the singularity embodying all the potential of the cosmos, from whom all things were separated and thereby created. The Genesis account includes both of these concepts as God separates and names.

The actual Hebrew verb “create” (bara) also focuses our attention in this direction. In the Bible, only God can perform this action of bringing something into existence. What is even more intriguing is that the objects of this verb point consistently toward its connection to functional existence rather than material existence; e.g., God “creates” fire, cloud, destruction, calamity, darkness, righteousness and purity. This is much like the ancient Near Eastern way of thinking that it was more important to determine who controlled functions rather than who/what gave something its physical form. In the ancient world something was created when it was given a function. In the ancient world, the cosmos is less like a machine, more like a kingdom. ◆
there was light. 4God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. 5God called the light “day,” and the darkness he called “night.” 9And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day.

6And God said, “Let there be a vault between the waters to separate water from water.” 7So God made the vault and separated the water under the vault from the water above it. 1And it was so. 8God called the vault “sky.” 9And there was evening, and there was morning—the second day.

9And God said, “Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place, and let dry ground appear.” And it was so. 10God called the dry ground “land,” and the gathered waters he called “seas.” And God saw that it was good.

11Then God said, “Let the land produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds.” And it was so. 12The land produced vegetation: plants bearing seed according to their kinds and trees bearing fruit with seed in it according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good. 13And there was evening

14And God said, “Let there be lights in the vault of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as signs to mark sacred times, 15and days and years, 16and let them be lights in the vault of the sky to give light on the earth.” And it was so. 16God made two great lights—the greater light to govern 17the day and the lesser light to govern 18the night. He also made the stars. 17God set them in the vault of the sky to give light on the earth, 18to govern the day and the night, 19and to separate light from darkness. And God saw that it was good. 19And there was evening, and there was morning—the fourth day.

20And God said, “Let the water teem with living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the vault of the sky.” 21So God created the great creatures of the sea and every living thing with which the water teems and that moves about in it, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. 22God blessed them and said, “Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the water in the

existence, not necessarily a physical existence (see the article “Creation and Existence,” p. 4). In this case, though we think of light as a having physical properties, the ancients did not think in those terms. They also did not think of all light as coming from the sun. “Daylight” was not caused by “sunlight”; although the sun, moon and stars were bearers of light, daylight was present even when these were hidden by clouds or an eclipse. Light was not considered something physical in the ancient world; rather, it was a phenomenon. Here in Genesis, light is identified with alternating periods of day and night. Since light is called “day” and darkness is called “night” (v. 5), the text indicates that the functional focus is time. 1:16 vault. See the article “The Vault” and “Water Above,” p. 6.

1:9 dry ground. Nonexistence for the Egyptians was not wiped out in the acts of creation, but was pushed to the outer limits of the cosmos. Consequently their literature speaks of the primeval hillock that emerged from the primeval waters. Temples were sometimes understood as containing the original primeval hillock in the center of their sacred space. Mesopotamian literature does not speak much of the emergence of the land, but there is discussion of the collection of the waters to their appropriate place. In this feature, then, Genesis shows more similarity to Egyptian literature. It was common in the ancient world to think of the earth as a single continent in the shape of a flat disc. Likewise in Genesis, the waters are all gathered into one place, and land appears, presumably in one place.

1:11 vegetation. The indication that the land produces vegetation is not a statement about the land being involved in creation. What is being created by God is a function whereby the land regularly and characteristically produces vegetation—the principle of fecundity whereby agriculture can exist and food can be grown. 1:14 signs. The Hebrew word used for “sign” has a cognate in Akkadian that is used for omens, but the Hebrew has a more neutral sense. The author has emptied the element of another world, and these are occasionally associated with the threatening forces of chaos that need to be defeated and harnessed by creator deities. The OT also refers to a number of different cosmic sea creatures (e.g., Ps 74:13–15; Isa 27:1). In Ps 74:13–14 the sea creature (Hebrew tannin) is portrayed with multiple heads and is parallel to Leviathan. This depiction of battle is also seen in Isa 51:9, where tannin, like “Rahab,” is defeated. Unlike the ancient Near East creation texts, though, Genesis shows no indication of a battle—only that tannin is created.

This is the first use of the verb bara (“created”) since v. 1, perhaps emphasizing that tannin is not some primeval chaos monster that must be overcome, but a creature being given its role (see the article “Creation and Existence,” p. 4) just like everything else in creation. Yet it ought to be viewed as a cosmic creature rather than a marine specimen. The passages in which the word may refer to zoological specimens (Ex 7:9–10; Dt 32:33; Ps 91:13) indicate a land creature or amphibian, not a sea creature as here.
The “Vault” and “Water Above”

The Hebrew ṭāqē’ (“vault”) is of unspecified material, but in at least one text it refers to something solid (cf. Eze 1:25–26). It is the boundary between heaven and earth, and its main function is to hold back the water above. Some mountains are identified as intersecting the sky and perhaps holding it up. Mesopotamian literature at times suggests some sort of skin, but also speaks of the various levels of heaven having pavements, the most visible one being blue. Heaven and earth were kept in place by cables held by the gods.

In Egyptian iconography the sky is represented by the goddess Nut, whose body arched over the land. The Israelites portray no god, living or dead, as the sky, but their cosmic geography saw the sky as having a composition and role similar to what can be seen across the ancient Near East. We know from Ex 24:10 that they shared the idea of a pavement in God’s abode—and it is even of sapphire as in the Mesopotamian texts.

Intertestamental and rabbinic speculation sometimes focused on the material that the vault was made of and how thick it was. The church fathers likewise were united in their belief that the vault was solid. Though it may be surprising for modern minds to learn, the testimony of historical evidence shows that most people in the ancient world believed the sky was solid. The idea that it’s not is a thoroughly modern notion.

Pictorial representations throughout the ancient Near East portray waters above and below, which demonstrates that this was a common feature of ancient cosmic geography. In Mesopotamia the god Marduk assigns guards to keep the heavenly waters from flooding the earth. In Egyptian texts, the sun-god’s barque travels from horizon to horizon across a heavenly ocean. In the OT, the heavenly waters are sometimes called the mābbûl, above which Yahweh is enthroned (Ps 29:10) and which are released in the time of Noah (Ge 7:10).

The concept of heavenly waters is the natural deduction to be drawn from the experience of precipitation. If moisture comes from the sky, there must be moisture up there. Thus the sky becomes the pivotal phenomenon associated with weather.

1:28 Be fruitful and increase in number. Contrary to concerns about overpopulation that are evident in early Mesopotamian literature, in Genesis God desires that people multiply without restriction — they may fill the earth. In contrast, in the Akkadian Atrahasis epic, the gods are distressed because, with the multiplica-
and all the creatures that move along the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food.\(^d\)

And it was so.\(^e\)

And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day.

\(^{1:29}\text{b Ps 104:14}\)

\(^{1:30}\text{c Ps 104:14, 27; 145:15}\)

\(^{1:31}\text{d Ps 104:24}\)

\(^{e}\text{1Ti 4:4}\)

Mesopotamian imagery refers to “breasts of heaven,” through which rain comes. Ugaritic texts use the symbolism of the clouds serving as buckets to deliver the rain. The OT refers to gates in the sky through which precipitation comes as “windows” used only for rain, not for the celestial bodies (e.g., Ge 7:11; 8:2; 2Ki 7:19). Job 38:22 also poetically speaks of storehouses for snow and hail. All precipitation (including dew, see Pr 3:19–20) comes from above, and thus weather is regulated by the sky.

It should also be noted that an alternative interpretation of the Hebrew word \(\text{ra\text{q}i\text{a}}\) is that it refers to the living space created by the separation of the waters. In this case, a different Hebrew word refers to the vault.

In Egyptian iconography the sky is represented by the goddess Nut, whose body arched over the land.

Wikimedia Commons
Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array. By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.

Adam and Eve

This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created, when the Lord God made the earth and the heavens.

2 Now no shrub had yet appeared on the earth—and no plant had yet sprung up, for the Lord God had not sent rain on the earth and there was no one to work the ground. But streams from the ground covered the whole surface of the ground. Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.

2:5 Or land; also in verse 6. 6 Or mist 7 The Hebrew for man (adam) sounds like and may be related to the Hebrew for ground (adamah); it is also the name Adam (see verse 20).

2:2 Ex 20:11; 31:17; Heb 4:4a b Lev 23:3; Isa 58:13
2:3 5 Ge 1:1
6 Ps 65:9-10
7 Gen 3:19
k Ps 103:14
l Job 33:4
m Ac 17:25
n 1Co 15:45

The description of an inchoate condition on the earth is paralleled in part by descriptions of a primeval condition in some ancient Near Eastern texts. Unlike Genesis, these texts consider the primeval condition of humans to be primitive and uncivilized. Like the ancient Near East, however, Genesis begins with a time when no irrigation or planting strategies were being carried out by people. In the ancient Near East this resulted in no offerings for the gods. In Genesis God plants the garden and puts people in it. The similarities show the common idea that creation accounts proceed from an unordered, nonfunctional beginning through an ordering process. It does not mean that God had not yet produced any plants.

2:7 formed a man from the dust. The creation of humans from dust is similar to what is found in ancient Near Eastern mythology. In Mesopotamia, physical elements from the gods such as blood and flesh are mixed with clay, while in Egypt it is tears or breath. Genesis, by contrast, represents the divine element in human beings as seen in the image of God and the breath of life (closer to Egyptian than Mesopotamian thinking).

In the rest of the ancient Near East the creation of people focuses on archetypal and often corporate elements. Ge 1:26–27 could be viewed as corporate and generic rather than individual. Here in ch. 2 there are archetypal elements that are identifiable. Man is made from the dust, and since he will also return to dust (3:19), all people can be seen as created from the dust (see Ps 103:14). The creation of Eve from Adam’s side (Ge 2:21–23) likewise expresses a relationship between man and woman that permeates the race. In these Adam and Eve are archetypes representing all of humanity in their creation, just
Now the Lord God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden, and there he put the man he had formed. 9 The Lord God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground—trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

The concept of divine rest is prominent in ancient Near Eastern literature. Deity’s rest is achieved in a temple, generally as a result of order having been established. The rest, while it represents disengagement from any process of establishing order (whether through conflict with other deities or not), is more importantly an expression of engagement as the deity takes his place at the helm to maintain an ordered, secure and stable cosmos. The following aspects of divine rest can be found in literature of the ancient Near East:

1. The divine rest can be disturbed by rebellion.
2. The divine rest is achieved after conflict.
3. The divine rest is achieved after order-bringing acts of creation.
4. The divine rest is achieved in the temple.
5. The divine rest is achieved in part by creating people to work in their place and on their behalf.
6. The divine rest is characterized by ongoing control and stability.

Only point 3 is transparent in Genesis, though points 4 and 6 can also be defended. Given the connection between temple and rest in the ancient Near East, it becomes natural to see the Biblical creation of the cosmos as being configured in temple-building and dedication terms; the seven-day creation account culminating in divine rest should be understood as somehow parallel to the building of temples for divine rest. This course of analogy and logic results in the understanding that Ge 1 is framed in terms of the creation of a cosmic temple in which Yahweh takes up his repose. The seven days are comparable to seven-day temple dedications at the end of which the deity takes up his rest in the temple.

The temple on earth was considered only a type of the larger, archetypal cosmic temple in the cosmic sky.
temple, and there are many images and symbols that evoke the relationship between temple and cosmos. The temple is considered the center of the cosmos and is itself a microcosmos. In Egypt the temple contained within its sacred precincts a representation of the original primeval hillock that emerged from the cosmic waters. In Mesopotamia, the primary imagery of the temple was that it was the center of the cosmos. In Syro-Palestine, the temple is the architectural embodiment of the cosmic mountain. This concept is represented in Ugaritic literature as well as in the Bible, where Mount Zion is understood as the mountain of the Lord (e.g., Ps 48) and the place where his temple, a representation of Eden, was built. In Isa 66:1 the Lord indicated: “Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. Where is the house you will build for me? Where will my resting place be?” Here God indicates that the man-made temple cannot be considered the true temple (cf. 1Ki 8:27). It is only a micro-scale representation of the cosmic temple. Ps 78:69 communicates a similar idea by indicating that the temple was built on the model of the cosmos. Ideas like these are also found in literature from Mesopotamia that compares temples to the heavens and the earth and gives them a cosmic location and function. It is evident, then, that Israel and her neighbors viewed the cosmos in temple terms and viewed the temple as a model of the cosmos or the cosmic temple.

If the cosmos is being ordered as sacred space, then it is possible that a cosmological text could adopt the language of temple-building and temple-dedication. In a temple construction project, the structure would be built, and the furniture and trappings would be made in preparation for the moment when all was ready for the dedication of the temple. On this occasion, often a seven-day celebration, the functions of the temple were declared, the furniture and hangings were put in place, the priests installed, and the appropriate sacrifices made to initiate the temple’s operation. Somewhere in the process, the image of the deity was brought into the temple to take up his repose. On the basis of all of this, Ge 1 can be viewed as using the metaphor of temple-dedication as it portrays God’s creation (= making functional/operational) of his cosmos (which is his temple, Isa 66:1). The main connection, however, is the rest motif, for rest is the principal function of a temple, and a temple is always where deity finds rest.

A river watering the garden flowed from Eden; from there it was separated into four headwaters. The name of the first is the Pishon; it winds through the entire land of Havilah, where there is gold. (The gold of that land is good; aromatic resin and onyx are also there.) The name of the second river is the Gihon; it winds through the entire land of Cush. The name of the third river is the Tigris; it flows out of the mouth of Nun, which is at the furthermost part of the sea. The name of the fourth river is the Euphrates.

Most scholars would place Eden in or near the northern end of the Persian Gulf, based on the locations of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. The distinction “in the east” (v. 8) merely indicates Mesopotamia, and is typical of primordial narratives. The flow of the rivers and the uncertainty of the location of the Pishon and Gihon (see note on vv. 11–13) has caused some to look near the source of the Tigris and Euphrates and some scholars have identified two other major rivers in that area that might qualify. In such a mountainous region the garden would be in an elevated valley, though for some, the imagery of a well-watered garden where humans do no work and life springs up without cultivation is more suited to the marshy areas around the Persian Gulf.

four headwaters. Genesis uses a familiar picture of fertile waters flowing from the seat of deity. In Egyptian depictions two or four rivers flow out of the mouth of Nun, who represents the cosmic abyss. An ivory inlaid plaque from Assyria shows a central divine figure with four rivers flowing from him in four directions. He is flanked by two trees, and standing next to each tree is a winged guardian. It should also be noted that the idea of rivers flowing from the holy place is found not only in ch. 2 (which portrays Eden as the Most Holy Place) but also in Ezekiel’s temple (Eze 47:1). The picture is of a mighty spring that gushes out from Eden and is channeled through the garden for irrigation purposes. All of these channels then serve as headwaters, for the four rivers flow out in various directions as the waters exit the garden.
it runs along the east side of Ashur. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.

17 The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. 18 And the LORD God commanded the man, “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; 19 but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die.”

18 The LORD God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.”

19 Now the LORD God had formed out of the ground all the wild animals and all the birds in the sky. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. 20 So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds in the sky and all the wild animals.

But for Adam no suitable helper was found. 21 So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man’s ribs and then closed up the place with flesh.

22 Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.

potamia (e.g., Nile, Indus, Ganges), or larger bodies such as the Persian Gulf or the Red Sea. Recent investigations have attempted to identify the Pishon as a major river through Saudi Arabia from the Hijaz mountains near Medina (which contains one of the richest gold mines in the region) to the Persian Gulf in Kuwait, near the mouth of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. As mentioned in note on vv. 10–14, others have identified the Pishon and Gihon as rivers in the area of Urartu. A final suggestion is that the Pishon and Gihon refer to the encircling cosmic waters. None of these options may be adopted with any confidence, though some are more plausible than others.

2:15 to work it and take care of it. In the rest of the ancient world it was believed that humans had been created to serve the needs of the gods; the gods had grown tired of the drudgery of providing for themselves. In Genesis people also serve God but not by meeting his needs.

When people are assigned their function here, priestly terms are used in contrast to the royal functions given in 1:28–29. In the rest of the ancient Near East, caring for the needs of the gods was also a priestly function. In the OT, the priestly function involved maintaining the status of sacred space and providing for the proper worship and obedience to God’s requirements.

2:20 names. Names were not given randomly in the ancient world. A name may identify the essential nature of the creature, so that giving a name may be an act of assigning the function that creature will have. In Mesopotamia the assigning of function is referred to as the decreeing of destiny. Decreeing destiny by giving a name is an act of authority. In the ancient world, when a king conquered another country, the king he put on the throne was given a new name. In other cases, the giving of a name is an act of discernment in which the name is determined by the circumstances. In either case, Adam’s naming of the animals is his first step in subduing and ruling (see 1:28 and note). He is fulfilling the role that he had by virtue of being in God’s image (see the article “Image and Likeness,” p. 8), but it also leads him to realize that among the animals there is no social equal to share his function and place.

2:22 rib. In Genesis the woman was built from the side (Hebrew têla) of the man (see NIV text note on v. 21). The Hebrew word is usually architectural, and is used anatomically only here in the OT. In Akkadian, the cognate term têla is also both architectural and anatomical. Its anatomical uses generally refer not just to bone, but to bones and flesh (cf. v. 23).

2:24 leaves … united … one flesh. The text establishes a “flesh-line,” which is stronger than a bloodline and causes the man to seek her out. Woman is recognized as being of the same essence as man and therefore of serving as his ally in sacred space.

2:25 naked. In Genesis the nakedness of the humans does not appear to be a negative comment, though it is contrasted through wordplay to the craftiness of the serpent in the next verse (3:1), so it may refer to a relative naïveté. In contrast, ancient Near Eastern texts indicate that the primitive nakedness of people is a sign of a primitive, uncivilized condition. When Enkidu is civilized in the Gilgamesh Epic, he is clothed by the woman who civilizes him. The Sumerian text Ewe and Wheat opens with a description of primval humans who are clearly primitive, and the text apparently considers that a negative. In this way there are similarities in how Genesis and the Mesopotamian texts describe early humankind, but there is a contrasting assessment of how their condition should be interpreted.

3:5 be like God. One can imagine a variety of ways in which people might desire or strive to “be like God” — some commendable, others inappropriately ambitious or subversive.
The Serpent

In the Gilgamesh Epic, after Gilgamesh acquires the magical plant that will rejuvenate him, it is stolen by a snake. In the Story of Adapa, one of the guardians of Anu’s palace, where Adapa is offered the food of life, is serpent-shaped or accompanied by horned serpents, and he is the guardian of the demons who live in the netherworld. In Egypt, the serpent was associated with both death and wisdom. The Genesis account draws on both aspects in the wisdom dialogue between the serpent and Eve and with the introduction of death after the expulsion from Eden.

Many Egyptian gods, especially the primeval gods, were represented in serpent form. Wadjet, a lower Egyptian deity, was considered the protector of the pharaoh and is represented by the uraeus serpent on his crown. The earth-god Geb had a serpent’s head. The snake-god Apophis was considered the enemy of order. In addition, the idea that animals in general, and serpents in particular, could communicate with humans is common in Egyptian literature. Serpents in Egypt are also connected with occult wisdom. The uraeus is sometimes invoked as a magician.

Because of the NT and the development of Christian theology, it is most common for people today immediately to think of Satan as the serpent in Ge 3, but the Israelites never made that connection. We cannot recover what Adam and Eve would have thought about the serpent, but the ancient Near Eastern literature gives us an idea of some of the images that came to mind for the Israelites living in their time and culture. Foremost is the association of the serpent with life and death. Likewise the serpent is wise, is connected with disorder, and can be the enemy of God—perspectives that are meaningful in this context.

6When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. 7Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves. 8Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. 9But the Lord God called to the man, “Where are you?” 10He answered, “I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid.” 11And he said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?” 12The man said, “The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it.” 13Then the Lord God said to the woman, “What is this you have done?”

The aspiration targeted here is in the category of wisdom, a defensibly laudable pursuit. In the ancient Near East godlikeness pertains to the categories of splendor (Enkidu became handsome like a god) or immortality (Gilgamesh, Adapa). It is interesting that Gilgamesh and Adapa both encounter a snake figure and Enkidu achieves his godlikeness through a woman (who also gives him understanding). Gilgamesh and Adapa fail to achieve immortality, both through an inability to eat the necessary food.

These examples show that in the ancient world it was common for people to meditate on ways in which people succeeded and failed in becoming like deity. At the same time the differences are significant. In Genesis disobedience figures prominently, and the category of godlikeness is distinct. Furthermore, the consequences of the attempt differ. Adam and Eve do achieve a level of godlikeness (like Enkidu), but with significant negative repercussions. At the same time they lose their access to immortality (like Gilgamesh and Adapa) and also suffer in their lost relationship with God, which is not an issue in any of the others. This is then an excellent example of how the comparison between the Bible and the ancient Near East shows a similar landscape but with important variations in the essential nature of the issue.
The woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.”

14So the LORD God said to the serpent, “Because you have done this,
  “Cursed are you above all livestock and all wild animals!
  You will crawl on your belly all the days of your life.
  And I will put enmity between you and the woman,
  and between your offspring and hers;
  he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.”

16To the woman he said, “I will make your pains in childbearing very severe;
  with painful labor you will give birth to children.
  Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.”

17To Adam he said, “Because you listened to your wife and ate fruit from the tree about which I commanded you, ‘You must not eat from it’;
  “Cursed is the ground because of you;
  through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life.
  It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field.”

18By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, from which you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return.”

20Adam named his wife Eve, because she would become the mother of all the living.

21The LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them.

22And the LORD God said, “The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever.”

23So the LORD God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken. After he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.

Cain and Abel

4Adam made love to his wife Eve, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Cain. She said, “With the help of the LORD I have brought forth a man.”

Later she gave birth to his brother Abel.

Now Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil. In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering...
to the Lord. 4 And Abel also brought an offering—fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. 5 The Lord looked with favor on Abel and his offering, 6 but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast.

Then the Lord said to Cain, “Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it.”

Now Cain said to his brother Abel, “Let’s go out to the field.” While they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him.

Then the Lord said to Cain, “Where is your brother Abel?”

“I don’t know,” he replied. “Am I my brother’s keeper?”

The Lord said, “What have you done? Listen! Your brother’s blood cries out to me from the ground. Now you are under a curse and driven from the ground, which opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand. When you work the ground, it will no longer yield its crops for you. You will be a restless wanderer on the earth.”

Cain said to the Lord, “My punishment is more than I can bear. Today you are driving me from the land, and I will be hidden from your presence; I will be a restless wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me.”

But the Lord said to him, “Not so; anyone who kills Cain will suffer vengeance seven times over.” Then the Lord put a mark on Cain so that no one who found him would kill him. So Cain went out from the Lord’s presence and lived in the land of Nod, east of Eden.

Cain made love to his wife, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Enoch. Cain was then building a city, and he named it after his son Enoch. To Enoch was born Irad, and Irad was the father of Mehujael, and Mehujael was the father of Methushael, and Methushael was the father of Lamech.

Lamech married two women, one named Adah and the other Zillah. Adah gave birth to Jabal; he was the father of those who live in tents and raise livestock. His brother’s name was Jubal; he was the father of all who play stringed instruments and pipes. Zillah also had a son, Tubal-Cain, who forged all kinds of tools out of bronze and iron. Tubal-Cain’s sister was Naamah.

Lamech said to his wives,

“Adah and Zillah, listen to me: wives of Lamech, hear my words. I have killed a man for wounding me, a young man for injuring me.

If Cain is avenged seven times, then Lamech seventy-seven times.”
25 Adam made love to his wife again, and she gave birth to a son and named him Seth,15 saying, “God has granted me another child in place of Abel, since Cain killed him.” 16 Seth also had a son, and he named him Enosh.

At that time people began to call on b the name of the LORD.17

4:26 call on the name of the LORD. Just as there is no implication that only Cain’s line had cities and the arts of civilization, so the text does not imply that only the line of Seth called on the name of the Lord. About a dozen times in the OT people are said to call on the name of the Lord — generally either calling for help in connection with a ritual or invoking God’s presence at a cultic site. Eventually humans sought to procure the presence of God through establishing cultic places and performing rituals there, but here there is no indication of these trappings. Thus it seems that people began to invoke the Lord’s presence (the presence that was lost at the fall). This verse, then, represents the beginning of religion.

Genesis 5:2

This is the written account of Adam’s family line.

When God created mankind, he made them in the likeness of God. a He created

4:25 Ge 5:3
4:26 Ge 12:8; 1Ki 18:24; Ps 116:17; Joel 2:32; Zep 3:9; Ac 2:21; 1Co 1:2
5:1 Ge 1:27; Eph 4:24; Col 1:10

From Adam to Noah

God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

2

5

This is the written account of Adam’s family line.

25 Seth probably means granted. 26 Or to proclaim

GENESIS 4:26

The Name of God

The personal name “Yahweh” (NIV “LORD”) is used frequently throughout Genesis. The patriarchs address God by that name, and God identifies himself by that name. But a problem surfaces in Exodus: At the burning bush Moses asks what name he should give for the God who is sending him — even though God has already identified himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Ex 3:6–13). In Ex 3:15, the name Yahweh (NIV “LORD”) is introduced and it seems to some interpreters that God is giving a new name not previously revealed.

The situation is made more confusing in Ex 6:2–3, where God says to Moses, “I am the LORD [Yahweh], I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob as God Almighty [El-Shaddai], but by my name the LORD [Yahweh], I did not make myself fully known to them.” Verses such as these have led some to postulate that the occurrence of Yahweh in the patriarchal narratives is simply the work of the editor of Genesis, showing the continuity between the patriarchs and later Israel.

The fact that Genesis takes its final form no earlier than the time of Moses has allowed some conservative scholars to be content with viewing the references to Yahweh in the patriarchal narratives as purposeful intrusion. To them, the name of Yahweh was added in appropriate places to affirm that the patriarchs really did worship the same God as the Israelites, though they called him by a different name. This may be acceptable in some cases, but it does not explain the passages in which God is presented as identifying himself as Yahweh.

In Ex 3:13, Moses is not looking to fill an information gap concerning God’s identity, but rather, is asking which previously known epithet is most appropriate to use. In Ex 3:15, God explains that the epithet Yahweh (NIV “LORD”) is the appropriate one. In Ex 6:3 God explains that El-Shaddai (NIV “God Almighty”) was the epithet most appropriately connected with how God interacted with the patriarchs and what he accomplished for them. They did not experience firsthand the significance of the epithet Yahweh, which was connected to the longer-term promises of God, specifically the land. In other words, it is not that the patriarchs were ignorant of the name Yahweh, but the epithet El-Shaddai was appropriate for the aspects of the covenant they experienced. The name Yahweh was one of many epithets they used to refer to their God, but it was not the primary one in their usage or understanding.
them male and femalew and blessed them. And he named them "Mankind"w when they were created.

3 When Adam had lived 130 years, he had a son in his own likeness, in his own image; and he named him Seth. 4 After Seth was born, Adam lived 800 years and had other sons and daughters. 5 Altogether, Adam lived a total of 930 years, and then he died.

6 When Seth had lived 105 years, he became the fatherb of Enosh. 7 After he became the father of Enosh, Seth lived 807 years and had other sons and daughters. 8 Altogether, Seth lived a total of 912 years, and then he died.

9 When Enosh had lived 90 years, he became the father of Kenan. 10 After he became the father of Kenan, Enosh lived 815 years and had other sons and daughters. 11 Altogether, Enosh lived a total of 905 years, and then he died.

12 When Kenan had lived 70 years, he became the father of Mahalalel. 13 After he became the father of Mahalalel, Kenan lived 840 years and had other sons and daughters. 14 Altogether, Kenan lived a total of 910 years, and then he died.

15 When Mahalalel had lived 65 years, he became the father of Jared. 16 After he be-

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**Genealogies**

Mesopotamian genealogies are mostly royal, mostly linear (one line of descent, such as Ge 5) as opposed to segmented (containing more than one line of descent, such as Ge 10), and rarely more than three or four generations deep. Fluidity occurs primarily in telescoping (i.e., eliminating names), though some rearrangement of the order of the ancestors may be detected in the king lists. Egyptian sources (mostly from the Persian and Hellenistic periods) preserve long linear genealogies, sometimes extending 15 to 20 generations, often connecting to priestly lines. Fluidity is also evident only in telescoping within these genealogies. Comparing Biblical genealogies to one another shows that often several generations are skipped. Thus, a genealogy’s purpose is apparently not to represent every generation, as our modern family trees attempt to do. Genealogies represent continuity and relationship and are often used for purposes of power and prestige. Genealogies are sometimes formatted to suit a literary purpose. Thus, e.g., the genealogies between Adam and Noah, and Noah and Abraham, are each set up to contain ten members with the last having three sons.

If the long lives in the antediluvian world (cf. Methuselah, 969 years) seem amazing to us, we will be utterly astounded by the length of reign credited to antediluvian kings in the Sumerian King List:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>King</th>
<th>Reign</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alulim</td>
<td>28,800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alalgar</td>
<td>36,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enmenluanna</td>
<td>43,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enmengalanna</td>
<td>28,800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dumuzi</td>
<td>36,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ensipazianna</td>
<td>28,800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enmeduranna</td>
<td>21,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uburtutu</td>
<td>18,600</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Eight kings compile 241,200 years between them. The Sumerian King List uses the standard Sumerian sexagesimal system. If the notation is read with decimal values rather than sexagesimal values, the numbers are in the same range as the Biblical numbers, and the totals of the lists are nearly identical.◆
came the father of Jared, Mahalalel lived 830 years and had other sons and daughters. 17 Altogether, Mahalalel lived a total of 895 years, and then he died.

18 When Jared had lived 162 years, he became the father of Enoch. 2 After he became the father of Enoch, Jared lived 800 years and had other sons and daughters. 20 Altogether, Jared lived a total of 962 years, and then he died.

21 When Enoch had lived 65 years, he became the father of Methuselah. 22 After he became the father of Methuselah, Enoch walked faithfully with God 300 years and had other sons and daughters. 23 Altogether, Enoch lived a total of 365 years.

24 Enoch walked faithfully with God; then he was no more, because God took him away.

25 When Methuselah had lived 187 years, he became the father of Lamech.

26 After he became the father of Lamech, Methuselah lived 782 years and had other sons and daughters. 27 Altogether, Methuselah lived a total of 969 years, and then he died.

5:24 Enoch ... was no more, because God took him away. The idea of humans being taken to heaven is known in the ancient world outside of the Bible, but not in the way that would develop in Christian theology. First is the example of Utuabuzu, the seventh of the renowned sages (just as Enoch is the seventh from Adam, vv. 3 – 18). Second are characters such as Etana and Adapa, who both ascend to heaven under different circumstances. Notable is the fact that their ascensions are passing experiences rather than changes in status and therefore are not in the same category as Enoch.

As a further observation, we should note that Genesis does not indicate where Enoch was taken, so we should not necessarily assume ascension to heaven. Utuabuzu (the survivor of the flood in the Gilgamesh Epic) was a favorite of the gods and was also “taken” so that he did not experience death. But he was taken neither to heaven nor to the netherworld, but to a faraway, inaccessible place “at the mouth of the rivers” (Gilgamesh Epic, 11.205 – 6). None of these offer transparent explanation of Enoch’s experience, but they show a variety of possibilities to be considered otherwise would not be recognized. As a result of his piety (“walking with God”), Enoch was “taken” as an alternative to dying, the stated fate of all others in the genealogy.

6:2 sons of God. Royal titles of the ancient Near East regularly suggested the divine descent of kings, even outside Egypt’s context of deified kings. This idea of divine descent was a rhetorical expression of the divine election and legitimation of the king and is typical in royal inscriptions. Throughout the Biblical period it was part of the royal prerogative to claim divine heritage. Thus the title “sons of God” can be identified as a royal motif both in the Bible and outside of it. Gilgamesh is portrayed as two-thirds god and one-third man (Gilgamesh Epic, 1.48) and “flesh of the gods” (Gilgamesh Epic, 9.49). Nevertheless, though it is common for kings to be portrayed as having divine parentage, there is no precedent for ancient kings as a group being referred to as “sons of god.” This keeps open the possibility that this title could refer to royal elites, though a reference to members of the heavenly council (cf. Job 1:6) certainly cannot be ruled out. married any of them they chose. There are no examples from Akkadian or Northwest Semitic mythological texts of divine beings marrying or cohabiting with human women, so it would be difficult to make the claim that this account is a vestige of ancient mythology as some do. There are examples of kings claiming mixed ancestry of gods and humans (see “sons of God” above in this note), but that is a different concept. If the “sons of God” are viewed as kings, the question remains as to what offense they are committing here. Polygamy has always been a weak candidate since the OT does not condemn it. Promiscuity is likewise an unlikely explanation since the Hebrew text describes the situation using the standard idiom for marriage (“taking wives”). An alternate understanding may be found in a practice noted in the Gilgamesh Epic as the prime example of Gilgamesh’s tyranny, namely, his exercising the right of the first night with a new bride: “He will couple with the wife-to-be, he first of all, the bridegroom after” (Gilgamesh Epic, Old Babylonian version, v.159 – 60). This practice accommodates the marriage terminology, and in Gilgamesh it is clearly both oppressive and offensive behavior. The remaining problem is that this practice is infrequently attested in ancient literature. Nonetheless, in the Gilgamesh Epic it is clear.

6:3 a hundred and twenty years. A Sumerian folktales speaks of 120 years as an ideal human lifespan. Speculation suggests that this number derives not from observation but from abstraction within the Sumerian mathematical system. (it is clearly not a fixed boundary, as a woman who died in 1997 lived for 122 years). The idea that deity governs lifespan is reflected in Mesopotamia in the Gilgamesh Epic as the hero continues his quest for immortality. In the Egyptian “Book of the Dead” the god Thoth reports to the creator-god Atum: “You shall not witness wrongdoing, you shall not suffer it! Shorten their years, cut short their months, because they have done hidden damage to all that you have made.” This is the same Atum who in the beginning floated in Nun, the
4 The Nephilimb were on the earth in those days—and also afterward—when the sons of God went to the daughters of humans and had children by them. They were the heroes of old, men of renown. 5 The LORD saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was evil all the time. 6 The LORD regretted that he had made human beings on the earth, and his heart was deeply troubled. So the LORD said, “I will wipe from the face of the earth the human race I have created—and with them, the animals, the birds and the creatures that move along the ground—for I regret that I have made them.” 8 But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD. 9

Noah and the Flood

This is the account of Noah and his family. Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked faithfully with God. 10 Noah had three sons: Shem, Ham and Japheth. 11 Now the earth was corrupt in God’s sight and was full of violence. 12 God saw how corrupt the human race had become, for all the people on earth had corrupted their ways. 13 So God said to Noah, “I am going to put an end to all people, for the earth is filled with violence because of them. I am surely going to destroy both them and the earth. 14 So make yourself an ark of cypress wood; 15 make rooms in it and coat it with pitch inside and out. 16 This is how you are to build it: The ark is to be three hundred cubits long, fifty cubits wide and thirty cubits high. 17 Make a roof for it, leaving below the roof an opening one cubit high all around. 18 Put a door in the side of the ark and make lower, middle and upper decks. 19 I am going to bring floodwaters on the earth to destroy all life under the heavens, every creature that has the breath of life in it. Everything on earth will perish. 20 But I will establish my covenant with you, and you will enter the ark—you and your sons and your wife and your sons’ wives with you. 21 You are to bring into the ark two of every kind of living creature, male and female, to keep them alive with you. 22 Two of every kind of bird, of every kind of animal and of every kind of creature that moves along the ground will come to you to be kept alive. 23 You are to take every kind of food that is to be eaten and store it away as food for you and for them.”

22 Noah did everything just as God commanded him.

7 The LORD then said to Noah, “Go into the ark, you and your whole family, because I have found you righteousb in this generation. 2 Take with you seven pairs of every kind of clean animal, a male and its mate, and one pair of every kind of unclean animal, a male and its mate, 3 of every bird in the sky. 4 The meaning of the Hebrew for this word is uncertain. 5 That is, about 450 feet long, 75 feet wide and 45 feet high or about 135 meters long, 23 meters wide and 14 meters high. 6 That is, about 18 inches or about 45 centimeters. 7 The meaning of the Hebrew for this clause is uncertain.

primeval ocean. In this way the first two references to the Spirit of God in Genesis (here; 1:2) both have parallels to the role of Atum in Egyptian texts. One key difference is that Atum is identified as the creator-God in the Egyptian texts, while in Genesis, God (Elohim) and not the Spirit of God (ruah Elohim) is the Creator.

6:4 Nephilim. They occur only here and in Nu 13:33. The text presents them not as the offspring of the union, but as contemporaries. The fact that they are also around after the flood indicates that the label is not ethnic. Analysis of the meaning of the designation has been unsuccessful in identifying this group. The latter part of the verse indicates that they are heroic figures, perhaps of the sort exemplified by Gilgamesh, who is described as possessing heroism (Gilgamesh Epic, 1.30) and as being tall, magnificent, and terrible (Gilgamesh Epic, 1.37). He has a six-cubit (nine-foot or 2.7-meter) stride (Gilgamesh Epic, 1.57) and is 11 cubits (16.5 feet or 5 meters) tall (Hitite version of Gilgamesh Epic, 1.18). 8 More specific interpretation suggests that the Nephilim ought to be identified as the ancient sages (the apkallu). The apkallu were considered semidivine (one of their number, Adapa, is called the ‘son of [the god Ea]’). They likewise marry human women, creating mixed classes. After the flood, the sages are considered of human descent and are called the ummianu. These individuals, unlike their predecessors, are more infamous than famous (though only in general terms, e.g., “angered Adad”). The apkallu and the ummianu, were indeed heroic figures of old. This makes sense of the terminology here. This view is additionally attractive in that in Genesis this section is in close proximity to the account of the flood, which is also recorded in the context of the apkallu. Though some similarities are evident, the term “Nephilim” remains unexplained, as does their connection to the inhabitants of the land in Nu 13:33.

7:2 clean animal. This is the only hint that the category of “clean” animals existed prior to Sinai. Here it is not a designation pertaining to diet since the eating of meat was ostensibly not permitted until after the flood (cf. 9:3). No distinction between clean and unclean animals is made anywhere else in the ancient Near East. Nevertheless, the designation “clean” could refer to the acceptability of the animal for sacrifice (one could infer that this is how Noah used them). On this count, every temple and culture had its regulations about which animals could be offered and which could not.

When we remember that sacrifices in the rest of the ancient Near East were considered meals for the nourishment of the gods, the decision about acceptable and unacceptable animals would have been based on what was considered edible or delectable. In Egypt, wild animals such as wild cattle, antelope, gazelle, and ibex were
3and also seven pairs of every kind of bird, male and female, to keep their various kinds alive throughout the earth. 4Seven days from now I will send rain on the earth for forty days and forty nights, and I will wipe from the face of the earth every living creature I have made.”

5And Noah did all that the LORD commanded him. 6Noah was six hundred years old when the floodwaters came on the earth. 7And Noah and his sons and his wife and his sons’ wives entered the ark to escape the waters of the flood. 8Pairs of clean and unclean animals, of birds and of all creatures that move along the ground, 9male and female, came to Noah and entered the ark, as God had commanded Noah. 10And after the seven days the floodwaters came on the earth.

11In the six hundredth year of Noah’s life, on the seventeenth day of the second month — on that day all the springs of the great deep burst forth, and the floodgates of the heavens were opened. 12And rain fell on the earth forty days and forty nights.

13On that very day Noah and his sons, Shem, Ham and Japheth, together with his wife and the wives of his three sons, entered the ark. 14They had with them every wild animal according to its kind, all livestock according to their kinds, every creature that moves along the ground according to its kind and every bird according to its kind, everything with wings. 15Pairs of all creatures that have the breath of life in them came to Noah and entered the ark, 16The animals going in were male and female of every living thing, as God had commanded Noah. Then the LORD shut him in.

17For forty days 9the flood kept coming on the earth, and as the waters increased they lifted the ark high above the earth. 18The waters rose and increased greatly on the earth, and the ark floated on the surface of the water. 19They rose greatly on the earth, and all the high mountains under the entire heavens were covered.

20The waters rose and covered the mountains to a depth of more than fifteen cubits. 21Every living thing that moved on land perished — birds, livestock, wild animals, all the creatures that swim over the earth, and all mankind. 22Everything on dry land that had the breath of life in its nostrils died. 23Every living thing on the face of the earth was wiped out; people and animals and the creatures that move along the ground and the birds were wiped from the earth. Only Noah was left, and those with him in the ark.

24The waters flooded the earth for a hundred and fifty days.

8But God remembered Noah and all the wild animals and the livestock that were with him in the ark, and he sent a wind over the earth, and the winds receded. 2Now the springs of the deep and the floodgates of the heavens had been closed, and the rain had stopped falling from the sky. 3The water receded steadily from the earth. At the end of the hundred and fifty days the water had gone down, 4and on the seventeenth day of the seventh month the ark came to rest on the mountains of Ararat. 5The waters continued to recede until the tenth month, and on the first day of the tenth month the tops of the mountains became visible.

6After forty days Noah opened a window he had made in the ark 7and sent out a raven, and it kept flying back and forth until the water had dried up from the earth. 8Then he sent out a dove to see if the water had receded from the surface of the ground. 9But the dove could find nowhere to perch because there was water over all the surface of the earth; so it returned to Noah in the ark. He reached out his hand and took the dove and brought it back to himself in the ark. 10He waited seven more days and again sent out the dove from the ark. 11When the dove returned to him in the evening, there in its beak was a freshly plucked olive leaf!

favored for sacrifice, while sheep and goats were largely avoided. Other cultures favored domesticated animals in their sacrificial practices, mostly ungulates such as sheep, goats and cattle. Finally, among the birds, doves and pigeons are the most widely attested sacrificial types. Many of these were recognized as appropriate in the broader ancient Near Eastern world.

7:11 springs … floodgates. These are terms from the contemporary understanding of cosmic geography (see the article “Cosmic Geography,” p. 836). The Hebrew word translated “deep” (hehom) in this verse is the same Hebrew word used in 1:2. It refers to the great cosmic ocean that not only surrounds the land, but is that on which the land floats (cf. Ps 24:1–2). This is what 1:7 calls “the water under the vault.” The “springs” were considered the entry points of these waters to the earth. The “floodgates,” or the windows of heaven, were the comparable entry points for the waters above the earth that are held back by the sky. These allowed rain to fall. In ch. 1 separating these waters and then inserting the dry land between them remedied the initial watery condition. In the flood, the restraints on these cosmic waters were lifted and the cosmos was returned to its nonfunctional watery state.

8:11 olive leaf. Olive trees are difficult to kill, and they resprout easily. They do not mind rocky soil and grow

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6, 7 That is, about 23 feet or about 6.8 meters

8 Or rose more than fifteen cubits, and the mountains were covered
Then Noah knew that the water had receded from the earth. 12 He waited seven more days and sent the dove out again, but this time it did not return to him.

13 By the first day of the first month of Noah's six hundred and first year, the water had dried up from the earth. Noah then removed the covering from the ark and saw that the surface of the ground was dry. 14 By the twenty-seventh day of the second month the earth was completely dry.

15 Then God said to Noah, 16 "Come out of the ark, you and your wife and your sons and their wives. 17 Bring out every kind of living creature that is with you—

best on hillsides, but not in high elevations. The olive leaf brought by the dove gives Noah an indication that the lower elevations have drained and that vegetation is once again sprouting.
the birds, the animals, and all the creatures that move along the ground—so they can multiply on the earth and be fruitful and increase in number on it.\(^r\)

18 So Noah came out, together with his sons and his wife and his sons’ wives. All the animals and all the creatures that move along the ground and all the birds—everything that moves on land—came out of the ark, one kind after another.

20 Then Noah built an altar to the LORD\(^s\) and, taking some of all the clean animals and clean\(^t\) birds, he sacrificed burnt offerings\(^u\) on it. 21 The LORD smelled the pleasing aroma and said in his heart: “Never again will I curse the ground because of this point than on any other (see the article “The Flood,” p. 20). In the Gilgamesh Epic the gods have apparently

and requests. All of this is captured as the “noise” of humankind that led the gods to embark on a course of total destruction.

Noah attracts God’s attention as one who should not share in the fate of the rest of the population (6:8). Special provision is therefore made for him to be spared. Mesopotamian accounts agree among themselves that the plan of the gods was that no one should survive. Despite the fact that they were sworn to secrecy concerning the plans of the assembly, one of their number, Ea, successfully carried out a scheme so that his favorite human would learn of the coming flood. He then instructed him secretly how to keep his knowledge hidden from the gods and the rest of the people and survive the seven days of the flood. His boat resembled a temple and saved not just his family, but also various skilled workmen so that the arts of civilization could be preserved.

When Noah disembarked from the ark, he offered a sacrifice of thanksgiving and received covenant promises that God would preserve a certain order in the cosmos rather than oppose the chaos of human sin by means of flooding waters (18–22). When the Mesopotamian flood heroes emerged, they offered a sacrifice of appeasement to calm the anger of the gods. The gods had forgotten how much they were dependent on humans to supply them with food (sacrifices) and gathered around hungrily, wondering how such a foolish decision (the flood) could have been made. The hero is grudgingly granted eternal life by the head of the gods, who remains miffed that word of the flood leaked out.

The flood stories from the ancient Near East and from around the world offer persuasive evidence that a flood of significant magnitude occurred and was remembered. The accounts from the ancient Near East are closest to the Biblical account and help us see how the Israelites would have understood the whole event differently than their neighbors.
humans, even though every inclination of the human heart is evil from childhood. And never again will I destroy all living creatures, as I have done.

22 “As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease.”

God’s Covenant With Noah

9 Then God blessed Noah and his sons, saying to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth, a and the resulting commitment not to destroy them.

represents God’s pleasure in the creatures he has made. It functions to appease their anger. In Genesis it represents the gods’ needs and exposes their shortsightedness. Many of these indicate that capital punishment was compendia demonstrate that the kings and societies of systems here, whether they are located in courts or in clans. This verse may well mark the beginning of judicial responsibility that is eventually evidenced in the compilations of sample verdicts (such as those found on the Hammurapi Stele) throughout the ancient Near East. These compendia demonstrate that the kings and societies of the ancient world took their judicial responsibilities seriously. Many of these indicate that capital punishment was common in cases of homicide, though often lesser penalties were exacted depending on the social status of both the perpetrator and the victim.

9:16 v But you must not eat meat that has its blood in it. f And for your lifeblood I will surely demand an accounting. I will demand an accounting from every animal. d And from each human being, too, I will demand an accounting for the life of another human being.e

8:9 f Ge 6:18
8:11 k Ver 16; l Isa 24:5
8:12 k Ge 8:21; l Isa 54:9
8:19 k Ge 10:32
9:7 g Ge 1:22
9:11 k Ver 17; Ge 17:11
9:12 h Ver 16; v Ge 17:11
9:15 h Ex 2:24; Lev 26:42; 45; Dt 7:9; Eze 16:60
9:16 v Ver 16; Ge 17:13, 19; 25:13; 23:25
9:17 v Ver 12; Ge 17:1
9:18 v Ver 25–27; Ge 10:6, 15
9:19 g Ge 10:32
9:20 – 27 In the history of interpretation of this passage, a number of alternatives have been suggested for explaining the offense committed by Ham, especially in the broadest sense, the word sacrifice also refers to the aroma/savor of the sacrifice, but the portrayal of deity but is placed under the purview of human judicial authority. It does not entail a new phase of revelation, and is made with “every living creature” (v. 10), not just people (v. 9).

The Sons of Noah

18 The sons of Noah who came out of the ark were Shem, Ham and Japheth. (Ham was the father of Canaan.) g These were the three sons of Noah, and from them came the people who were scattered over the whole earth. f

20 Noah, a man of the soil, proceeded b to plant a vineyard. When he drank some of its wine, he became drunk and lay with youi and with your descendants after you. a and with every living creature that was with you— the birds, the livestock and all the wild animals, all those that came out of the ark with you—every living creature on earth. 11 I establish my covenant with you: Never again will all life be destroyed by the waters of a flood; never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth.” k

12 And God said, “This is the sign of the covenant! I am making between me and you and every living creature with you, a covenant for all generations to come: 13 I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth. 14 Whenever I bring clouds over the earth and the rainbow appears in the clouds, 15 I will remember my covenant between me and you and all living creatures of every kind. Never again will the waters become a flood to destroy all life. 16 Whenever the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and all living creatures of every kind on the earth.”

17 So God said to Noah, “This is the sign of the covenant I have established between me and all life on the earth.”

a 21 Or humans, for b 20 Or soil, was the first
### MAJOR COVENANTS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COVENANTS</th>
<th>REFERENCE</th>
<th>TYPE</th>
<th>PARTICIPANT</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Noahic</td>
<td>Ge 9:8–17</td>
<td>Royal Grant</td>
<td>Made with righteous (6:9) Noah (and his descendants and every living thing on earth—all life that is subject to human jurisdiction)</td>
<td>An unconditional divine promise never to destroy all earthly life with some natural catastrophe, the covenant “sign” (9:13,17) being the rainbow in the storm cloud</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abrahamic A</td>
<td>Ge 15:9–21</td>
<td>Royal (land) Grant</td>
<td>Made with “righteous” (his faith was “credited … to him as righteousness,” v. 6) Abram (and his descendants, v. 16)</td>
<td>An unconditional divine promise to fulfill the grant of the land; a self-maledictory oath symbolically enacted it (v. 17; see the article “Ratifying the Covenant,” p. 42)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abrahamic B</td>
<td>Ge 17</td>
<td>Suzerain-vassal</td>
<td>Made with Abraham as patriarchal head of his household</td>
<td>A conditional divine pledge to be Abraham’s God and the God of his descendants (cf. “as for me,” v. 4; “as for you,” v. 9); the condition: total consecration to the Lord as symbolized by circumcision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sinaitic</td>
<td>Ex 19–24</td>
<td>Suzerain-vassal</td>
<td>Made with Israel as the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and as the people the Lord had redeemed from bondage to an earthly power</td>
<td>A conditional divine pledge to be Israel’s God (as the protector and the guarantor of Israel’s blessed destiny); the condition: Israel’s total consecration to the Lord as his people (his kingdom) who live by his rule and serve his purposes in history</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phinehas</td>
<td>Nu 25:10–13</td>
<td>Royal Grant</td>
<td>Made with the zealous priest Phinehas</td>
<td>An unconditional divine promise to maintain the family of Phinehas in a “lasting priesthood” (v. 13; implicitly a pledge to Israel to provide it forever with a faithful priesthood)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Davidic</td>
<td>2Sa 7:5–16</td>
<td>Royal Grant</td>
<td>Made with faithful King David after his devotion to God as Israel’s king and the Lord’s anointed vassal had come to special expression (v. 2)</td>
<td>An unconditional divine promise to establish and maintain the Davidic dynasty on the throne of Israel (implicitly a pledge to Israel) to provide the nation forever with a godly king like David and through that dynasty to do what he had done through David—bring Israel into rest in the promised land (1Ki 4:20–21; 5:3–4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New</td>
<td>Jer 31:31–34</td>
<td>Royal Grant</td>
<td>Promised to rebellious Israel as the people are about to be expelled from the promised land in actualization of the most severe covenant curse (Lev 26:27–39; Dt 28:36–37, 45–68)</td>
<td>An unconditional divine promise to unfaithful Israel to forgive the people’s sins and establish his relationship with his people on a new basis by writing his law “on their hearts” (v. 33)—a covenant of pure grace</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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### MAJOR TYPES OF ROYAL COVENANTS/TREATIES IN THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ROYAL GRANT (UNCONDITIONAL)</th>
<th>PARITY</th>
<th>SUZERAIN-VASSAL (CONDITIONAL)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A king’s grant (of land or some other benefit) to a loyal servant for faithful or exceptional service. The grant was normally perpetual and unconditional, but the servant’s heirs benefited from it only as they continued their father's loyalty and service. (cf. 1Sa 8:14; 22:7; 27:6; Est 8:1.)</td>
<td>A covenant between equals, binding them to mutual friendship or at least to mutual respect for each other’s spheres and interests. Participants called each other “brother.” (cf. Ge 21:27; 26:31; 31:44–54, 16:5; 15:19; 20:32–34; Am 1:9.)</td>
<td>A covenant regulating the relationship between a great king and one of his subject kings. The great king claimed absolute right of sovereignty, demanded total loyalty and service (the vassal must “love” his suzerain) and pledged protection of the subject’s realm and dynasty, conditional on the vassal’s faithfulness and loyalty to him. The vassal pledged absolute loyalty to his suzerain—whatever service his suzerain demanded—and exclusive reliance on the suzerain’s protection. Participants called each other “lord” and “servant” or “father” and “son.” (cf. Jos 9:6,8; Eze 17:13–18; Hos 12:1.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Commitments made in these covenants were accompanied by self-maledictory oaths (made orally, ceremonially or both). The gods were called on to witness the covenants and implement the curses of the oaths if the covenants were violated.
uncovered inside his tent. 22Ham, the father of Canaan, saw his father naked and told his two brothers outside. 23But Shem and Japheth took a garment and laid it across their shoulders; then they walked in backward and covered their father’s naked body. Their faces were turned the other way so that they would not see their father naked.

24When Noah awoke from his wine and found out what his youngest son had done to him, 25he said,

“Cursed be Canaan!
The lowest of slaves
will he be to his brothers.” 5

26He also said,

“Praise be to the LORD, the God of Shem!
May Canaan be the slave of Shem.
27May God extend Japheth’s territory;
may Japheth live in the tents of Shem,
and may Canaan be the slave of Japheth.”

28After the flood Noah lived 350 years. 29Noah lived a total of 950 years, and then he died.

The Table of Nations

10 This is the account of Shem, Ham and Japheth, Noah’s sons, who themselves had sons after the flood.

light of the severe curse (on Canaan) that results. The options of “voyeurism” and paternal (homosexual) incest have little support from the ancient Near East regardless of the case that might be made for them in the Biblical text. The option of castration was offered in rabbinic literature and has one supporting text from ancient Near East mythology that portrays a son castrating his father (both deities) in an attempt to usurp his position. Another option that can be supported conceptually from the ancient Near East is that Ham committed incest with his mother in an attempt to usurp the authority of the family from his father (cf. Reuben in Ge 35:22 and Absalom in 2Sa 15:21–22), or in an attempt to provide for additional offspring in a depopulated world (cf. Lot’s daughters in Ge 19:30–38). The idea of usurping someone’s authority by taking his wife is attested in royal contexts in an Akkadian text from Ugarit. None of this information offers clarification of Ham’s behavior, but it does alert us to a number of alternatives that we otherwise might not have recognized.

10.2–29 This passage is called the table of nations. The list of the sons of Shem, Ham and Japheth contains 70 names, a number that stood for totality and completion. More important, the concept of 70 nations is offered as the design of God. Nevertheless, the list is certainly not complete in its presentation of the descendants of Noah and his sons. The author penetrated selectively into various lines in order to achieve that final number. This group of 70 does not reflect the perspective of Noah’s descendants in the third or fourth generation; rather, it is Israel’s perspective at the time of the author. Note that there is no discussion of anyone outside the known world of the ancient Near East in the middle of the second millennium BC. The text only seeks to account for the groups the Israelites were aware of and does not hint at a world beyond the ancient Near East. In other words, the author has not attempted to provide a comprehensive list of all people(s) descended from the sons of Noah. Instead, he has addressed how all the known peoples and nations of his day are related to the sons of Noah.

10.8–12 Attempts to identify Nimrod with some historical or literary figure from the ancient world have been many, including an Assyrian king (Tukulti-Ninurta I, end of the thirteenth century BC) or the Assyrian god Ninurta, a warrior and hunter of myriad mythical creatures. An Assyrian poem from the end of the second millennium BC epitomizes an Assyrian king (thought to be Tiglath-Pileser I) as a great hunter, but the piece is an extended metaphor using the language of hunting to describe the conquests of the king. It cannot be ruled out that this is also the case in the description of Nimrod, since hunting is a metaphor for royal conquest from earliest times. For example, the royal mace head of Mesilim, king of Kish in the twenty-sixth century BC, is decorated with six intertwined lions around its circumference. The identification of the hunter as a royal metaphor would offer an explanation of why v. 9 includes “before the LORD”; it would indicate that his conquests had divine support. The royal lion hunt was considered a cultic act. “King of Kish” (notice the similarity
was a mighty hunter before the Lord; that is why it is said, “Like Nimrod, a mighty hunter before the Lord.” 11 The first centers of his kingdom were Babylon, 9 Uruk, Akkad and Kalneh, in a Shinar. 12 From that land he went to Assyria, 9 where he built Nineveh, 9 Rehoboth Ir, 9 Calah 9 and Resen, which is between Nineveh and Calah—which is the great city.

13 Egypt was the father of the Ludites, Anamites, Lehabites, Naphtuhites, 14 Pathrusites, Kasluhites (from whom the Philistines came) and Caphtorites.

15 Canaan 9 was the father of Sidon 9 his firstborn, 10 and of the Hittites, 11 Jebusites, 12 Amorites, Girgasites, 13 Hivites, Arkites, Sinites, 14 Arvadites, Zemarites and Hamathites.

Later the Canaanite 9 clans scattered 19 and the borders of Canaan 1 reached from Sidon 10 toward Gerar as far as Gaza, and then toward Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboim, as far as Lasha.

20 These are the sons of Ham by their clans and languages, in their territories and nations.

The Semites
10:21–31pp — Ge 11:10–27; 1Ch 1:17–27

21 Sons were also born to Shem, whose older brother was 9 Japheth; Shem was the ancestor of all the sons of Eber. 9

22 The sons of Sem:
   Elam, 9 Ashur, Arphaxad, 9 Lud and Aram.

23 The sons of Aram:
   Uz, 9 Hul, Gether and Meshek. 9

24 Arphaxad was the father of 9 Shelah, and Shelah the father of Eber. 9

25 Two sons were born to Eber:
   One was named Peleg, 9 because in his time the earth was divided; his brother was named Joktan.

26 Joktan was the father of Almodad, Sheleph, Hazarmaveth, Jerah, 27 Hadoram, Uzal, Diklah, 28 Obal, Abimael, Sheba, 29 Ophir, Havilah and Jobab. All these were sons of Joktan.

30 The region where they lived stretched from Mesha toward Seiph, in the eastern hill country.

31 These are the sons of Shem by their clans and languages, in their territories and nations.

32 These are the clans of Noah’s sons, according to their lines of descent, within their nations. From these the nations spread out over the earth 1 after the flood.
The Historical Setting of Genesis

Mesopotamia: Sumer Through Old Babylonia

Sumerians. It is not possible at this time to put Ge 1–11 into a specific place in the historical record. Our history of the ancient Near East begins in earnest after writing has been invented, and the earliest civilization known to us in the historical record is that of the Sumerians. This culture dominated southern Mesopotamia for over 500 years during the first half of the third millennium BC (2900–2350 BC), known as the Early Dynastic Period. The Sumerians have become known through the excavation of several of their principal cities, which include Eridu, Uruk and Ur. The Sumerians are credited with many of the important developments in civilization, including the foundations of mathematics, astronomy, law and medicine. Urbanization is also first witnessed among the Sumerians. By the time of Abraham, the Sumerians no longer dominate the ancient Near East politically, but their culture continues to influence the region. Other cultures replace them in the political arena but benefit from the advances they made.

Dynasty of Akkad. In the middle of the twenty-fourth century BC, the Sumerian culture was overrun by the formation of an empire under the kingship of Sargon I, who established his capital at Akkad. He ruled all of southern Mesopotamia and ranged eastward into Elam and northwest to the Mediterranean on campaigns of a military and economic nature. The empire lasted for almost 150 years before being apparently overthrown by the Gutians (a barbaric people from the Zagros Mountains east of the Tigris), though other factors, including internal dissent, may have contributed to the downfall.

Ur III. Of the next century little is known as more than 20 Gutian kings succeeded one another. Just before 2100 BC, the city of Ur took control of southern Mesopotamia under the kingship of Ur-Nammu, and for the next century there was a Sumerian renaissance in what has been called the Ur III period. It is difficult to ascertain the limits of territorial control of the Ur III kings, though the territory does not seem to have been as extensive as that of the dynasty of Akkad. Under Ur-Nammu’s son Shulgi, the region enjoyed almost a half century of peace. Decline and fall came late in the twenty-first century BC through the infiltration of the Amorites and the increased aggression of the Elamites to the east. The Elamites finally overthrew the city.

It is against this backdrop of history that the OT patriarchs emerge. Some have pictured Abraham as leaving the sophisticated Ur that was the center of the powerful Ur III period to settle in the unknown wilderness of Canaan, but that involves both chronological and geographic speculation. By the highest chronology (i.e., the earliest dates attributed to him), Abraham probably would have traveled from Ur to Harran during the reign of Ur-Nammu, but many scholars are inclined to place Abraham in the later Isin-Larsa period or even the Old Babylonian period. From a geographic standpoint it is difficult to be sure that the Ur mentioned in the Bible is the famous city in southern Mesopotamia (see note on 11:28). All this makes it impossible to give a precise background of Abraham.

The Ur III period ended in southern Mesopotamia as the last king of Ur, Ibbi-Sin, lost the support of one city after another and was finally overthrown by the Elamites, who lived just east of the Tigris. In the ensuing two centuries (c. 2000–1800 BC),

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power was again returned to city-states that controlled more local areas. Isin, Larsa, Eshnunna, Lagash, Mari, Assur and Babylon all served as major political centers.

**Old Babylonian Period.** Thanks substantially to the royal archives from the town of Mari, the eighteenth century BC has become thoroughly documented. As the century opened there was an uneasy balance of power among four cities: Larsa ruled by Rim-Sin, Mari ruled by Yahdun-Lim (and later, Zimri-Lim), Assur ruled by Shamshi-Adad I, and Babylon ruled by Hammurapi. Through a generation of political intrigue and diplomatic strategy, Hammurapi eventually emerged to establish the prominence of the first dynasty of Babylon.

The Old Babylonian period covered the time from the fall of the Ur III dynasty (c. 2000 BC) to the fall of the first dynasty of Babylon (just after 1600 BC). This is the period during which most of the narratives in Ge 12–50 occur. The rulers of the first dynasty of Babylon were Amorites. The Amorites had been coming into Mesopotamia as early as the Ur III period, at first being fought as enemies, then gradually taking their place within the society of the Near East. With the accession of Hammurapi to the throne, they reached the height of success. Despite his impressive military accomplishments, Hammurapi is most widely known today for his collection of laws.

The first dynasty of Babylon extends for more than a century beyond the time of Hammurapi, though decline began soon after his death and continued unabated, culminating in the Hittite sack of Babylon in 1595 BC. This was nothing more than an incursion on the part of the Hittites, but it dealt the final blow to the Amorite dynasty, opening the doors of power for another group, the Kassites.

**Canaan: Middle Bronze Age**

Abraham entered the Palestine region during the Middle Bronze Age (2200 – 1550 BC), which was dominated by scattered city-states, much as Mesopotamia had been, though Palestine was not as densely populated or as extensively urbanized as Mesopotamia. The period began about the time of the fall of the dynasty of Akkad in Mesopotamia (c. 2200 BC) and extended until about 1500 BC (plus or minus 50 years, depending on the theories followed). In Syria there were power centers at Yamhad, Qatna, Alalakh and Mari, and the coastal centers of Ugarit and Byblos seemed to be already thriving.

In Palestine only Hazor is mentioned in prominence. Contemporary records from Palestine are scarce, though the Egyptian *Story of Sinuhe* has Middle Bronze Age Palestine as a backdrop and therefore offers general information. Lists of cities in Palestine are also given in the Egyptian texts. Most are otherwise unknown, though Jerusalem and Shechem are mentioned. As the period progresses there is more and more contact with Egypt and extensive caravan travel between Egypt and Palestine.

**Egypt: Old and Middle Kingdoms**

Roughly concurrent to the Early Dynastic period in Mesopotamia was the formative Old Kingdom period in Egypt, which permanently shaped Egypt both politically and culturally. This was the age of the great pyramids. During Egypt’s Sixth Dynasty, contemporary with the dynasty of Akkad in Mesopotamia, disintegration became

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**ERAS OF MESOPOTAMIAN HISTORY (ROUND DATES)**

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<tr>
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<td>Dynasty of Akkad</td>
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<td>Ur III Empire</td>
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<td>Old Babylonian Period</td>
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**ERAS OF EGYPTIAN HISTORY (ROUND DATES)**

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evident. From the mid-twenty-second century BC until about 2000 BC, Egypt was plunged into a dark period known as the First Intermediate Period, which was characterized by disunity and at times by practical anarchy. Order was finally restored when Mentuhotep reunited Egypt, and Amenemhet I founded the Twelfth Dynasty, beginning a period of more than two centuries of prosperous growth and development.

The Twelfth Dynasty developed extensive trade relations with Syro-Palestine and is the most likely period for initial contacts between Egypt and the Hebrew patriarchs. By the most conservative estimates, Sesostris III would have been the pharaoh who elevated Joseph to his high administrative post. Others are more inclined to place the emigration of the Israelites to Egypt during the time of the Hyksos. The Hyksos were Semitic peoples who began moving into Egypt (particularly the delta region in the north) as early as the First Intermediate Period. As the Thirteenth Dynasty ushered in a gradual decline, the reins of power eventually fell to the Hyksos (whether by conquest, coup or consent is still indeterminable), who then controlled Egypt from about the middle of the eighteenth century BC to the middle of the sixteenth century BC. It was during this time that the Israelites began to prosper and multiply in the delta region, waiting for the covenant promises to be fulfilled.
The Tower of Babel

11 Now the whole world had one language and a common speech. 2 As people moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar and settled there. 3 They said to each other, “Come, let’s make bricks and bake them thoroughly.” They used brick instead of stone, and tar for mortar. 4 Then they said, “Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves; otherwise we will be scattered over the face of the whole earth.”

But the Lord came down to see the city and the tower the people were building. 6 The Lord said, “If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them. 7 Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other.”

So the Lord scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city. 9 That is why it was called Babel—because there the Lord confused the language of the whole world. From then on peoples went everywhere in search of their own language, their own speech.

11:1 one language. A Sumerian epic entitled Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta speaks of a time when there was only harmony among people and “the whole universe in unison spoke to Enlil in one tongue.” Speech was then changed and “contention” was brought into it. Nothing else in this account parallels the tower of Babel, but it indicates that confusion of language by deity was a known theme in the ancient world.

11:2 moved eastward. Geological and hydrological studies and migration patterns discernible from the fourth and third millennia BC suggest that there was a drying out of the southern alluvial plain as the Persian Gulf receded and a corresponding population movement into that plain toward the end of the fourth millennium BC. This period, known as the Uruk Phase, features technological advances in urbanization, architecture, technology and language that correspond to elements referred to in v. 3 (see note). Shinar. The Hebrew term (shinâr) refers to the area that ancient Near Eastern texts refer to as Sumer. It covered the southern part of the Tigris-Euphrates River basin as far north as Sippar, where the rivers converge in the area of modern southern Iraq. Major cities of the region included Kish, Nippur, Shuruppak, Girsu, Ur, Eridu and Ur. This is the area where urbanization developed and is the heartland of Mesopotamian civilization.

11:3 make bricks and bake them. Stone is not readily available in the alluvial plain of southern Mesopotamia, so a logical economical choice is to use brick — there is plenty of mud. Mud brick, however, is not durable, so it was a great technological development to discover that baking the brick made it as durable as stone. This was still an expensive process, since the kilns had to be fueled. As a result, mud brick was used as much as possible, with baked brick used only for outer shells of important buildings or where waterproofing was desirable. No baked bricks have been found earlier than the Uruk period (latter part of the fourth millennium BC).

11:4 a city, with a tower. One single architectural feature dominated the landscape of early Mesopotamian cities; towers known as ziggurats (see the article “Ziggurats,” p. 30). In the earliest stages of urbanization, the city was not designed for the private sector. People did not live in the city. Instead, it was comprised of the public buildings, such as administrative buildings, and granaries, which were mostly connected with the temple. Consequently, the city was, in effect, a temple complex. reaches to the heavens. Throughout Mesopotamian literature, almost every occurrence of the expression describing a building “with its head in the heavens” refers to a temple with a ziggurat (see the article “Ziggurats,” p. 30). It is this language, along with the indication that God “came down” (v. 5), that gives textual confirmation that the tower is a ziggurat. This would have been transparent to the ancient reader. In keeping with the negative results of the project here, the reader of Genesis will find a few of the omens in the Shunnamma series remarkable: “If a city lifts its head to the midst of heaven, that city will be abandoned” (1.15), and “If a city rises like a mountain peak to the midst of heaven, that city will be turned to a ruin” (1.16). Yet Mesopotamian cities were regularly built on high ground, with the temple on the highest ground. The wording of these omens understood in the context of the omen series is essentially about exceeding natural boundaries to the effect that a city can overpower itself to rival sacred structures and thus bring about its own destruction. make a name. The ancient world placed immense value on the sense of continuity from one generation to another. In some cultures a person’s continued comfort in the afterlife was dependent on care from descendants in the land of the living. The details often involved memorial meals and various regular mortuary rites, but more important for this passage, they provided opportunity for the name of the deceased to be spoken. There is continued life and vitality as long as one is remembered. The building of monuments could also contribute to the desirable end result, as could achievements and adventures of various sorts. The important point here is that the desire to make a name in the ancient world is common to all. The more people who remember one’s name, the more secure is one’s existence in the afterlife. While there is nothing inherently evil or sinful in the desire to be remembered (e.g., God promises to “make your name great” for Abraham in 12:2 and David in 25a:7-9), this desire may become obsessive or motivate evil or sinful behavior. scattered. The fear of scattering is directly related (both syntactically and conceptually) to the previously stated desire to make a name. Remembrance takes place in the vicinity of the burial ground. Descendants who move away (as Abraham does in ch. 12) cut the ties of continuity between the past and the present. Though some have considered this desire not to scatter as disobedience to the blessing in 1:28, it must be recognized that the blessing does not relate to scattering, only to filling — far different issues. God scattered them, not because it was wrong for them to be together, but because their desire to retain continuity was causing them to launch flawed strategies.

11:5 The Lord came down. Precisely the reason the tower was built — for God to come down (see the article “Ziggurats,” p. 30). Unfortunately, rather than being pleased to take up his residence among the people, God finds it an occasion for counteraction. Rather than being pleased at the convenience, he is distressed by the pagan concepts inherent in the nature of the ziggurat.
30 | Genesis 11:10

**GENESIS 11:4**

ZIGGURATS

Though they may resemble pyramids in appearance, ziggurats are nothing like them in function. Ziggurats have no inside. The structure was framed in mud brick, and then the core was packed with fill dirt. The facade was then completed with kiln-fired brick. Ziggurats were dedicated to particular deities. Any given deity may have several ziggurats dedicated to him or her in different cities. Furthermore, a given city may have several ziggurats, though the main one was associated with the patron deity of the city. Archaeologists have discovered nearly 30 ziggurats in the general region, and texts mention several others. The main architectural feature is the stairway or ramp that leads to the top. There was a small room at the top where a bed was made and a table set for the deity. Ziggurats range in size from 60 feet (18 meters) per side to almost 200 feet (60 meters) per side.

Most important is the function of the ziggurat. The ziggurat did not play a role in any of the rituals known to us from Mesopotamia. If known literature were our only guide, we would conclude that common people did not use the ziggurat for anything. It was sacred space and was strictly off-limits to profane use. Though the structure at the top was designed to accommodate the god, it was not a temple where people would go to worship. In fact, the ziggurat was typically accompanied by an adjoining temple near its base, where the worship did take place.

The best indication of the function of zig-

**From Shem to Abram**

11:10-27pp — Ge 10:21-31; 1Ch 1:17-27

10This is the account of Shem’s family line.

Two years after the flood, when Shem was 100 years old, he became the father
of Arphaxad. 11And after he became the father of Arphaxad, Shem lived 500 years and had other sons and daughters. 12When Arphaxad had lived 35 years, he became the father of Shelah. 13And after he became the father of Shelah, Arphaxad lived 403 years and had other sons and daughters.

— Ge 10:21-31; 1Ch 1:17-27

10Father may mean ancestor; also in verses 11-25.
12,13 Hebrew; Septuagint (see also Luke 3:35, 36 and note at Gen. 10:24) 35 years, he became the father of Caiman. 12And after he became the father of Caiman, Arphaxad lived 430 years and had other sons and daughters, and then he died. When Caiman had lived 130 years, he became the father of Shelah. 13And after he became the father of Shelah, Caiman lived 380 years and had other sons and daughters.

11:12  Lk 3:35
14 When Shelah had lived 30 years, he became the father of Eber. 15 And after he became the father of Eber, Shelah lived 403 years and had other sons and daughters.

16 When Eber had lived 34 years, he became the father of Peleg. 17 And after he became the father of Peleg, Eber lived 430 years and had other sons and daughters.

18 When Peleg had lived 30 years, he became the father of Reu. 19 And after he became the father of Reu, Peleg lived 209 years and had other sons and daughters.

20 When Reu had lived 32 years, he became the father of Serug. 9 21 And after he became the father of Serug, Reu lived 207 years and had other sons and daughters.

22 When Serug had lived 30 years, he became the father of Nahor. 23 And after he became the father of Nahor, Serug lived 200 years and had other sons and daughters.

24 When Nahor had lived 29 years, he became the father of Terah. 25 And after he became the father of Terah, Nahor lived 119 years and had other sons and daughters.
After Terah had lived 70 years, he became the father of Abram,1 Nahor, and Haran.

**Abram’s Family**

27 This is the account of Terah’s family line.

Terah became the father of Abram, Na-

hor and Haran. And Haran became the father of Lot. k While his father Terah was still alive, Haran died in Ur of the Chaldeans,i in the land of his birth. k Abram and Nahor both married. The name of Abram’s wife was Sarai, m and the name of Nahor’s wife was Milkah; n she was the daughter of Haran, the father of both Milkah and

11:28 Ur of the Chaldeans. The city of Ur in southern Mesopotamia is well known in the literature of the ancient Near East, particularly prominent over the latter half of the third millennium BC. A temple already stood there in the late fourth millennium BC and its ziggurat (completed later) is the best preserved from ancient Mesopotamia. An early empire with Ur as its capital existed for about a century at the end of the third millennium BC founded by Ur-Nammu and solidified by his successor, Shulgi.

By some chronological schemes Abraham’s time in Ur and Harran coincide with the empire phase. Some have deduced that Abraham was an urbane socialite in this grand center of civilization and that Yahweh’s call required a substantial change in lifestyle. Even if it were true that Abraham was born in this highly civilized city, however, we cannot necessarily conclude that he was a city dweller. Ur had its share of herdsmen and farmers as any city did.

Controversy still remains as to why Genesis adds “of the Chaldeans.” Unfortunately we know little about the history of the Chaldeans at this period. During the mid-first millennium BC the Chaldeans ruled in southern Mesopotamia (Nebuchadnezzar), and consequently the Chaldeans are associated with Babylon by the prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel. But prior to this period, the earliest substantial reference to the Chaldeans is in the ninth-century BC inscriptions of Shalmaneser III, when the Chaldeans are located southeast of Babylon near Elam.

A vague, earlier reference is in the campaign inscriptions of Ashurnasirpal II, where the Chaldeans are referred to in passing. Their mention in Job 1:17 suggests that they

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**Genesis 11**

**Cosmic History and Mythology**

Defining the term “mythology” is treacherous. Many formal definitions have been offered, and beyond those, one can find a wide variety of popular conceptions that impede fruitful discussion. Rather than offer yet another definition, it is more productive to identify the function of mythological literature. The mythology of the ancient world encapsulated contemporary thinking about how the world worked and how it came to work that way. It features the gods prominently because the ancients found the answers to their questions about the world in the divine realm.

If we describe mythology functionally in this way, we can conclude that our modern mythology is what we call science. That is our culture’s way of encapsulating how the world works and how it came to work that way. Contrary to the divine orientation of the ancients, our scientific worldview is naturalistic and empiricist.

Genesis functions in Israelite society the same way that science functions in our culture and the same way that mythology functioned in the rest of the ancient world. Genesis offers an alternative encapsulation of how the world worked and how it came to work that way. Like the rest of the ancient world, it has a divine orientation rather than a naturalistic/empiricist one as is common today. But its view of the situation in the divine realm also makes it distinct from the mythology of the ancient world.

Consequently, studying the mythological literature of the ancient world can help us, whose cultural worldview tends toward empiricism, to make adjustments as we try to understand how a nonempiricist worldview works. The result is that we can be drawn out of the restricted perspectives that come most naturally to us. This is the value of the mythological literature for the study of the Bible.
Iskah. 30 Now Sarai was childless because she was not able to conceive. e

31 Terah took his son Abram, his grandson Lot son of Haran, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, the wife of his son Abram, and together they set out from Ur of the Chaldeans p to go to Canaan. f But when they came to Harran, they settled there. 32 Terah lived 205 years, and he died in Harran.

The Call of Abram

12 The Lord had said to Abram, “Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you.” 2 “I will make you into a great nation, 3 and I will bless you; 4 I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. 5 I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse;” 6 and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.” v

4 So Abram went, as the Lord had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Harran. 5 He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and the people 3 they had acquired in Harran, and they set out for the land of Canaan, and they arrived there. 6 Abram traveled through the land as far as the site of the great tree of Moreh 4 at Shechem. At that time the Canaanites 3 were in the land. The Lord appeared to Abram 5 and said, “To your offspring I will give this land.” 6 So he built an altar there to the Lord, 4 who had appeared to him. 7 From there he went on toward the hills east of Bethel 6 and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. There he built an altar to the Lord and called on the name of the Lord.

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12:1 Go from your country, your people and your father’s household. One reason God may ask Abram to leave these people is because it is in these three connections that one related to deity. The gods one worshiped tended to be national or city gods (‘country’), the clan god (‘people’), or ancestral gods, i.e., ancestors who have taken a place in the divine world (‘father’s household’). As Yahweh severed the ties Abram would have had with other deities, he then filled the resulting void as the only God Abram would need. 12:2 great nation. This offer is unique in the ancient world. One can certainly find offers by deities to make someone king and to prosper their line—or even a promise that a particular individual would have many offspring. But the prospect that an individual would grow into a great nation is not broached in any other extant literature from the ancient world.

12:6 great tree of Moreh. No hint is given that trees themselves were worshiped, but notable trees became places where various sacred rituals were performed. The significance given to certain trees in the Biblical text suggests that they designated sacred space (cf. 13:18; 35:4,8; Dt 11:30; Jdg 4:5; 6:11; 9:37). Note the eventual indictment of the Israelites that they set up sacred stones and Asherah poles “under every spreading tree” (2Ki 17:10). Moreh. The name given to the oak here has been interpreted as suggesting that oracular information was given here (Moreh means “teacher”). Of all of the divination procedures known from the ancient world, there is no suggestion of trees used as divinatory mechanisms; thus, we conclude that the tree had significance as a locale rather than as a mechanism. 12:8 altar. Usually thought of as raised platforms used for offering sacrifices; here, however, there is no mention of sacrifices. Furthermore, sacrifices usually take place in
Patriarchal Religion

Around 2000 BC, when the Abraham stories should probably be placed, an interesting development was taking place in Mesopotamia — the rise of the concept of a “personal God.” In this period people began to see themselves in a personal relationship with a family god who undertook the divine sponsorship of the family. As a result, most family worship was directed to this god with the expectation that protection and guidance would be provided. When someone sensed that a god had taken his family under his protective wing, the expression used is that they had “acquired a god.”

In Mesopotamia this god came to be known as the “god of the father(s)”— a description also used in Genesis (Ge 26:24; 28:13; 31:5,29,42,53; 32:9; 43:23; 46:1 – 3; 50:17; cf. the plural in Ex 3:13 – 16). A personal god was not viewed as the only god, but was the god most directly involved with the family and the one that was the focus of most of the routine religious activity. Devotion to this deity was extended in the family from generation to generation, and as such was inherited rather than chosen. Though the major gods could on occasion serve as a personal god, more typically a personal god was a lower-echelon deity in terms of rank within the pantheon. Only in Israel did a personal God eventually become the God of a nation.

The Biblical text is clear on the point that Abram comes from a family that is not monotheistic (cf. Jos 24:2,14). We must assume that he was brought up sharing the polytheistic beliefs of the ancient world. In this type of system the gods are connected with the forces of nature and show themselves through natural phenomena. These gods do not reveal their natures or give any idea of what will bring their favor or wrath. They are worshiped by being flattered, cajoled, humored and appeased. Manipulation is the operative term. They are gods with needs made in the image of human beings.

One of the main reasons God makes a covenant with Abram is in order to reveal what he is really like — to correct the false view of deity that people have developed. But this is projected to take place in stages, not all at once.

The Lord, Yahweh, is not portrayed as a god whom Abram already worshiped. It is interesting, then, that God does not give him a doctrinal statement or require rituals or issue demands when he appears to Abram; he makes an offer. Yahweh does not tell Abram that he is the only god there is, and he does not ask him to stop worshiping the gods his family is worshiping. God does not tell him to get rid of his idols, nor does he proclaim a coming Messiah or salvation. Instead, God says that he has something to give Abram if Abram is willing to give up some things first.

It is possible that Abram first views Yahweh as a “personal god” who is willing to become his “divine sponsor.” The Lord provides for Abram and protects him, while obedience and loyalty are expected in return. One major difference, however, is that our clearest picture of the personal god in Mesopotamia comes from the many laments that are offered as individuals seek favors from the deity or complain about his neglect of them. There is no hint of this in Abram’s approach to Yahweh. Abram maintains an elevated view of deity that is much more characteristic of the overall Biblical view of deity than it is of the Mesopotamian perspective.

Though we have no indication that Yahweh explained or demanded a monotheistic belief or that Abram responded with one, it is clear that the worship of Yahweh dominated Abram’s religious experience. By making a break with his land, his family and his inheritance, Abram is also breaking all of his religious ties, since deities are associated with geographic, political and ethnic divisions. In his new land, Abram does not have any territorial gods; as a new people he does not bring any family gods (though Rachel attempts to when she leaves); having left his country he does not have any national or city gods. It is Yahweh who fills this void, becoming “the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob” (Ex 3:16; cf. Ex 3:6,15). ◆
**The Covenant**

Though the agreement between the Lord and Abram is not termed a “covenant” until Ge 15:18, the first articulation of the general terms of the covenant occurs in Ge 12:1–3. The monotheistic worship of Yahweh is a clear distinctive for Israel in contrast to the peoples of the ancient world, but more distinctive still is the covenant relationship between God and people. Israel’s self-identity, her view of history, her belief in her destiny, her understanding of the attributes of God (e.g., as holy and faithful), her understanding of her obligations to God (articulated in the *torah*), and the basis of the prophetic institution all derive directly from the covenant.

In each of those areas, despite the existence of similarities with the rest of the ancient world, the Abrahamic covenant marks the departure and underlies the uniqueness of Israel. In the ancient world gods may have been viewed as personal gods who undertook the protection of the family, but they did not make covenants.

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> 9Then Abram set out and continued toward the Negev.

**Abram in Egypt**

*12:10* Ref — Ge 20:1-18; 26:1-11

10Now there was a famine in the land, and Abram went down to Egypt to live there for a while because the famine was severe. 11As he was about to enter Egypt, he said to his wife Sarai, “I know what a beautiful woman you are. 12When the Egyptians see you, they will say, ‘This is his wife.’ Then they will kill me but will let you live. 13Say you are my sister, so that I

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The vicinities of a temple and are served by a priesthood. No ancient Near Eastern document refers to altars used for anything other than sacrifices in the presence of deity; sacrifices were pointless if not offered where a deity was believed to be present. In fact, the only sacrifice by Abram described in the text is the near sacrifice of Isaac (ch. 22). If Abram was not using the altar for sacrifice in a place where God’s presence was established, what was he using it for? One option: as a land claim marker. This use of “altar” is described in the text is the near sacrifice of Isaac (ch. 22). If Abram was not using the altar for sacrifice in a place where God’s presence was established, what was he using it for? One option: as a land claim marker. This use of “altar” is attested in the OT in Jos 22:26–28, but nothing in Genesis indicates this function. We are told only that Abram “called on the name of the LORD” at the place of the altars he built here and in 13:4, *called on the name of the LORD*. Can be understood as invoking God’s presence, thus anticipat- ing God’s presence rather than assuming it. Support for this interpretation is that several of Abraham’s altars are built at potentially sacred sites (trees, v. 6; 13:18; hills, here).

**Famine.** In the Negev rainfall is minimal (averaging 4–12 inches [10–30 centimeters] per year), thus making the availability of grazing lands and subsistence agriculture fragile and vulnerable to climatic whims. Water is supplied to the region by wells, and even the rain that does fall does not easily support agriculture. Modern archaeologists and geologists have found evidence of a massive 300-year drought cycle that occurred during the end of the third millennium BC and the beginning of the second millennium BC — one of the time periods to which Abraham is dated. *Egypt.* Recourse there in time of famine in Canaan was not unusual because the food supply in Canaan depended on rainfall, while the food supply in Egypt depended on the flooding of the Nile. The text offers no identification of the pharaoh at this time. By the earliest chronology for Abraham, the pharaoh of ch. 12 would have been one of the kings of the “First Intermediate Period” that preceded the Middle Kingdom (perhaps Inyotef II). Many are more comfortable locating Abraham and his immediate descendants in the first quarter of the second millennium BC, which coincides with the Middle Kingdom. Little is known of this period in Egyptian history, and it is difficult to date the patriarchs with any precision or confidence.

**Beautiful Woman.** Sarai was 65 when she and Abram left Haran; perhaps several years have gone by, so we can estimate her age at 70. The compliment cannot simply be attributed to a doting husband, for the text indicates that the Egyptians share this opinion (vv. 14–15). What is not clear is which features lead to this assessment. In 41:2 the cows of pharaoh’s dream are described by this same Hebrew term (translated “sleek”), where it conveys robust healthiness — fine specimens. We need not think that every culture is as superficial as our modern culture in their assessments of beauty. A woman in the ancient world could be attractive either as showing good potential for childbearing or as a tool for political alliance. Neither of these seems appropriate for Sarai, however, for she is clearly not entering childbearing years, and there is no political alliance that makes it attractive to marry her; however, we should not assume that Sarah has miraculously attained the beauty of youth. Her dignity, bearing or countenance could all create the impression of a striking woman.

**Say you are my sister.** This is the first of three narratives...
20 Then Pharaoh gave orders about Abram to his men, and they sent him on his way, with his wife and everything he had.

Abram and Lot Separate
13 So Abram went up from Egypt to the Negev, with his wife and everything he had, and Lot went with him. 2Abram had become very wealthy in livestock and in silver and gold. 3From the Negev he went from place to place until he came to Bethel, to the place where his tent had been earlier and where he had first built
Lot looked around and saw that the whole plain of the Jordan toward Zoar was well watered, like the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt. (This was before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.) 11 So Lot chose for himself the whole plain of the Jordan and set out toward the east. The two men parted company:

12 Abram lived in the land of Canaan, while Lot lived among the cities of the plain and pitched his tents near Sodom. 13 Now the people of Sodom were wicked and were sinning greatly against the Lord. 14 The Lord said to Abram after Lot had parted from him, “Look around from where you are, to the north and south, to the east and west. 15 All the land that you

13:10 plain of the Jordan. The Jordan Valley is at a considerably lower elevation than the hill country and has a more stable climate. The area features lush vegetation and is therefore attractive. It is difficult to determine how the plain of the Jordan relates to the “cities of the plain” (v. 12) since we still cannot identify the location of those cities with any certainty (see the article “Genesis 14 and Ancient History,” p. 40).
See I will give to you and your offspring forever. I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth, so that if anyone could count the dust, then your offspring could be counted. Go, walk through the length and breadth of the land, for I am giving it to you.”

So Abram went to live near the great trees of Mamre at Hebron, where he pitched his tents. There he built an altar to the LORD.

Abram Rescues Lot

At the time when Abram was king of Shinar, Arioch king of Ellasar, Kedorlaomer king of Elam and Tidal king of Goyn, these kings went to war against Bera king of Sodom, Birsha king of Goormorrah, Shinem king of Admah, Shemeber king of Zeboiyim, and the king of Bela (that is, Zoar). All these latter kings joined forces in the Valley of Siddim (that is, the Dead Sea Valley). For twelve years they had been subject to Kedorlaomer, but in the thirteenth year they rebelled.

In the fourteenth year, Kedorlaomer and the kings allied with him went out and defeated the Rephaites in Ashteroth Karnaim, the Zuzites in Ham, the Emites in Shaveh Kiriathaim and the Horites in the hill country of Seir, as far as El Paran near the desert. Then they turned back and went to En Mishpat (that is, Kadesh), and they conquered the whole territory of the Amalekites, as well as the Amorites who were living in Hazezon Tamar.

Then the king of Sodom, the king of Goormorrah, the king of Admah, the king of Zeboiyim and the king of Bela (that is, Zoar) marched out and drew up their battle lines in the Valley of Siddim against Kedorlaomer king of Elam, Tidal king of Goyn, Amraphel king of Shinar and Arioch king of Ellasar—four kings against five. Now the Valley of Siddim was full of tar pits, and when the kings of Sodom and Goormorrah fled, some of the men fell into them and the rest fled to the hills.

The four kings seized all the goods of Sodom and Goormorrah and all their food; then they went away. They also carried off Abram’s nephew Lot and his possessions, since he was living in Sodom.

A man who had escaped came and reported this to Abram the Hebrew. Now Abram was living near the great trees of Mamre the Amorite, a brother of Eshkol and Aner, all of whom were allied with Abram. When Abram heard that his relative had been taken captive, he called out the 318 trained men born in his household and went in pursuit as far as Dan. During the night Abram divided his men to attack them and he routed them, pursuing them as far as Hobah, north of Damascus. He recovered all the goods and brought back his relative Lot and his possessions, together with the women and the other people.

After Abram returned from defeating Kedorlaomer and the kings allied with him, the king of Sodom came out to meet him in the Valley of Shaveh (that is, the King’s Valley).

Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. He was priest of God Most High, and he blessed Abram, saying:

“Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth.”

13:17 I am giving it to you. It is common for the Biblical covenants to be compared to political treaties in the ancient Near East. These treaties formed relationships between political entities that required loyalty from the vassal and offered protection from the suzerain. The formal documents that articulate the covenant between Yahweh and Israel compare favorably in form and function to these treaties (see the article “Treaty Formats,” p. 303). The covenant with Abram, however, seems different. Rather, it is better to compare this covenant with ancient land grants. In the ancient Near East ruling elites commonly made land grants to their faithful vassals. While the form of treaties and land grants overlap considerably, the important difference is that the treaty is a document that imposes obligation on the vassal, while the royal grant represents an obligation of the suzerain. Abram would have easily recognized what is transpiring here, and it will be formally confirmed and ratified in ch. 15.

14:13 Hebrew. The designation of Abram as a “Hebrew” may reflect a social status more than an ethnic identity. The term is usually used in the Bible to identify Israelites to foreigners (39:14–17; Ex 2:11; 1Sa 4:6; Jnh 1:9). As a social status it seems to have referred to dispossessed or disenfranchised peoples. This is the usage of a similar-sounding term throughout a wide range of ancient texts (often transliterated habiru, more accurately, Apiiru, referring to various people groups throughout the second millennium BC). At times the label implies an “outsider” status and that the people are unsettled or even lawless renegades. Other times they are refugees or political opponents. In the Amarna texts they sometimes serve as mercenaries. The term cannot be considered as a reference to ethnic Israelites, but it is possible that ethnic Israelites (and here, Abram) are being classified socially as Apiiru naïve. The Apiiru concept was certainly considerable.

14:18 Melchizedek king of Salem. If we base our analysis solely on information from this chapter, Melchizedek is a city-state king of Canaanite, Amorite or Hurrian extraction, and apparently one of the chief petty kings of the region. His city is Salem, generally considered to be Jerusalem (cf. Ps 76:2). Archaeological finds, though scant, attest to the fact that Jerusalem is settled at this period. The city is mentioned in extra-Biblical literature as early as the Egyptian execution texts from around 1900 BC.
Melchizedek makes a brief appearance in Ps 110:4, where the idealized Davidic king is identified as also having priestly credentials ‘in the order of Melchizedek.’ Once we get to the intertestamental period, Melchizedek becomes a much more intriguing figure. The Hasmo-neans, seeking to establish a Messianic dimension to their rule in the second century BC, justified their priestly-royal prerogatives by reference to Melchizedek. This practice was continued by the Sadducees. In the Dead Sea Scrolls Melchizedek has become the subject of much speculative interpretation. He is depicted as a heavenly redeemer figure, a leader of the forces of light, who brings release to the captives and reigns during the Messianic age. He is the heavenly high priest to whom archangels make expiation for the sins of ignorance of the righteous.

When we get to Heb 7, all of this Jewish tradition is mixed into consideration of Melchizedek. The author of Hebrews is not drawing his information on Melchizedek solely from the OT; he is also interacting with the traditions known to his audience. It is the Jewish profile of Melchizedek, not just the canonical profile, that informs his comparison. As a result, there is nothing in Hebrews or anywhere else to suggest that we need to believe that Melchizedek in the context of Ge 14 was anything other than the Canaanite king he is depicted to be. The fact that he combined the roles of priest and king (as many did in the ancient world) in Jerusalem was sufficient to establish the precedent of a royal priesthood in Jerusalem that was adopted by the Davidic dynasty and therefore came into the Messianic profile.

*bread and wine.* It is unclear whether these are shared by all of Abram’s men or just in council between Melchizedek and the victorious commander(s). It would seem to be meager fare if the latter were the case. Abram’s success has signaled the possibility of a major shift of power in the region, and it appears that Melchizedek is taking the opportunity of the army’s return to explore what ambitions or loyalties Abram might have. It was common for a meal to be shared when treaty negotiations were being finalized, but generally meat was part of the meal as sacrifices were made in association with oaths to the respective deities. *God Most High.* A translation of El Elyon, a compound divine name/title. El is well-known as the chief Canaanite god in Ugaritic and Phoenician literature, but it is sufficiently generic to use for any high God. Though Hebrew regularly uses the plural form Elohim for the God of Israel, El is also sometimes used. Consequently, El could refer to either a Canaanite deity or to Abram’s God. The epithet Elyon (elyon) is used parallel to the Canaanite El as well as Baal, but El Elyon never occurs as a compound in Ugaritic texts. No evidence of Elyon as an independent deity is found until the writings of Philo (first century AD).

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20 And praise be to God Most High, y who delivered your enemies into your hand.”

Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything.21 The king of Sodom said to Abram, “Give me the people and keep the goods for yourself.”22 But Abram said to the king of Sodom, “With raised hand I have sworn an oath to the LORD, God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth, that I will accept nothing belonging to you, not even a thread or the strap of a sandal, so that you will never be able to say, ‘I made Abram rich.’ 24 I will accept nothing but what my men have eaten and the share that belongs to the men who went with me—to Aner, Eshkol and Mamre. Let them have their share.”

The Lord’s Covenant with Abram

After this, the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision:

“Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward.”

Since El Elyon can designate a Canaanite god, we have no reason to think of Melchizedek as a worshiper of Yahweh or even as monotheistic. It is Abram who identifies El Elyon as Yahweh.

20 a tenth. Tithing (giving “a tenth”) is known in the ancient Near East and in the OT in a variety of contexts. Evidence from the ancient Near East occurs as early as about 2000 BC, where the obligatory tithe is in goods given to the temples. In this period there is also reference to a tithe assessed by the palace. Ugaritic texts attest to grain payment tithes to the royal storehouses being made from villages rather than individuals. No texts suggest a tithe of booty taken in battle.

The question, then, is whether this tithe was paid to Melchizedek in his role as priest (thereby indirectly to the god El Elyon) or in his role as king (tribute and acknowledgment of his political position). Hittite treaties did not require vassals fighting on the suzerain’s behalf to give the suzerain a share of their “take,” but allowed them to keep captives and booty (though the land remained in the possession of the suzerain). In light of all of this information, Abram’s payment of a tithe to Melchizedek stands as unique both in the Bible and the ancient Near East.

14:23 accept nothing. Though it seems likely that the armies of the East did not traverse the territory west of the Jordan, they had come into possession of much land in the region by virtue of conquest. Abram’s defeat of them would have theoretically given him possession of that land, however its boundaries would be drawn. This right has suddenly made him a political power to be reckoned with and explains Melchizedek’s overtures. Abram, instead of exerting his newfound political leverage, relinquished any and all claims to the land, claiming that he is under oath to Yahweh (who he identifies with El Elyon) not to profit from military action. This claim may have prompted the formation of a document to formalize the terms, which may in turn have served as the source for the material in this chapter.

15:1 vision. Visions may be either visual or auditory and are not the same as dreams in that one does not have to be asleep to experience a vision. God used visions to communicate to people; they constitute a more aggressive form of communication than dreams. In contrast to this one, visions in the OT were typically given to prophets in order to communicate oracles or messages that were to be delivered to the people. They may involve natural or supernatural settings, and the individual having the vision may be either an observer or a participant. Besides the category of “dream” in the ancient Near East, there are “waking dreams,” but these are the dreams one has when half-awake in the morning, not like Biblical visions. The closest things to Biblical visions are the oracular
Genesis 14 and Ancient History

Genesis 14 theoretically offers the best chance of placing the patriarchal narratives in the framework of the ancient Near East historically and chronologically. Unfortunately, details continue to give a mixed picture and connections elude us.

None of the kings of the East mentioned in 14:1 is clearly attested in ancient literature. The issues concerning their identities are as follows:

Amraphel king of Shinar. Amraphel is a Semitic name that has many possible connections to names known from the ancient Near East. Both the “Amar” element and the “a-p-l” element occur in personal names. Shinar refers to the southern Mesopotamian plains, better known as Sumer (see note on 11:2). During the early part of the second millennium BC southern Mesopotamia was characterized by independent city-states.

Arioch king of Ellasar. One name from the second millennium BC similar to this one is Zimri-Lim’s subordinate, Arriwuk, from the eighteenth-century BC Mari archives. A city named Ilan-Sura is also known from those texts in the vicinity of Shubat-Enlil north of Mari, though it does not seem prominent enough to figure here. Others have noticed the vague similarity to Larsa, a prominent city-state in Mesopotamia during the first half of the second millennium BC.

Kedorlaomer king of Elam. Kedorlaomer appears to be the head of the coalition. The first part of the name is a common element in Elamite royal names (compare Kutir-Nahhunte, who ruled during the Old Babylonian period in the eighteenth century BC. Nahhunte is the name of an Elamite deity, as is Lagamar (represented in the Hebrew Laomer). Though the two elements of Kedorlaomer (= *Kutir-Lagamar) are thus attested as authentic, so far that combination is not known among Elamite royal names. Elam is the usual name for the region that in this period comprised all the land east of Mesopotamia from the Caspian Sea to the Persian Gulf (modern Iran). In the first several centuries of the second millennium BC Elam was involved in international politics in Mesopotamia and the West, but no information suggests the Elamites controlled any section of Palestine.

Tidal king of Goyim. Goyim (Hebrew “nations”) is the most vague, but is generally associated by commentators with the Hittites (located in the eastern section of present-day Turkey), mostly because the king’s name (Tidal) is easily associated with Tudhaliya, the common Hittite royal name. The earliest occurrence of this name for a ruler, however, is about 1400 BC, far too late to match this context. Furthermore, the names of the Hittite kings as early as the mid-eighth century BC are known, and none of them bears any resemblance to Tidal.

As a reference to a group of people, Goyim could be handled in a number of different ways. One option is that it reflects how the population of Anatolia called themselves: “peoples” from the land of Hatti. A second option is that it should be considered a way to refer to a coalition of “barbaric” peoples, like the Akkadian designation “Umman Manda,” a term associated with the Gutians who overran Mesopotamia at the end of the dynasty of Akkad toward the end of the third millennium BC. “Umman Manda” continues to be used as a reference to enemies of the Hittites and the Babylonians in the mid-second millennium BC. The trouble with this interpretation is that the Umman Manda would not likely be involved in a large, formal coalition of nations. None of these options offers clarification of this king’s identity.

While there were many periods in the first half of the second millennium BC when the Elamites were closely associated with powers in Mesopotamia, it is more difficult to bring the Hittites into the picture (and, it should be noted, we are not even sure the...
Hittites are involved here). We do know that Assyrian merchants had a trading colony in the Hittite region, and one of the key trade items was tin from Elam. But there is no indication of joint military ventures.

Early Hittite history is sketchy as well, and we have little information about where they came from or precisely when they moved into Anatolia. None of the known empires or major military coalitions from Mesopotamia is known to have made forays into the southern Levant (Canaan) at any time during the second millennium BC.

Likewise, even the “cities of the plain” (Ge 13:12) themselves are not yet attested. The association of Sodom and Gomorrah with Zoar (14:2,8) and the bitumen pits in “the Valley of Siddim” (14:10) both point to the southern end of the Dead Sea as the most likely location of these cities. Arguments for their identification with the north end are based on the distance to travel from Hebron (18 miles [30 kilometers] versus 40 miles [65 kilometers] to the southern location) and the mention of the “plain of the Jordan” in Ge 13:11. The southern location enjoys stronger Biblical support as well as the support of earliest extra-Biblical traditions.

There are five sites of Early Bronze Age cities on the southeast plain of the Dead Sea; these demonstrate that fairly large populations existed there in the third millennium BC. From north to south they are Bab edh-Dhra (Sodom?), Numeira (Gomorrah?), Safi (Zoar), Feifa and Khanazir — with the last being about 20 miles (32 kilometers) from the first. Only Bab edh-Dhra and Numeira have been excavated extensively, and the destruction of these cities (by fire) has been set by archaeologists at about 2350 BC, seemingly too early for Abraham, though chronological reckoning of this period is difficult.

The route described in Ge 14:5–10 represents a straightforward march through the land going south on the main route through Transjordan to Tamar and from there north to the cities of the plain in the vicinity of the Dead Sea. Ashteroth (14:5) was the capital of the region just east of the Sea of Galilee and was the home to people known as the Rephaim. Little is known of the Rephaim as an ethnic group, though the same term is used in other places both in and out of the Bible as a reference to the heroic dead. Zuzites, Emites and Horites (14:5–6), judging by the cities identified with them, are the inhabitants of Transjordan in the regions eventually occupied by the Ammonites, Moabites and Edomites, respectively (see notes on Dt 2:10,11). Ham is located in northern Gilead, and Shaveh, also known as Kiriathaim, was in Reubenite territory when the land was divided among the tribes (Jos 13:19).

El Paran (Ge 14:6) should probably be equated with Elath at the tip of the Gulf of Aqaba. The Amalekites are engaged at Kadesh Barnea, i.e., En Mishpat (14:7), located in the northeastern Sinai peninsula near the southwestern extremity of Canaan (about 50 miles [80 kilometers] southwest of Beersheba). It is identified with Wadi el-Ain near Ain el-Qudeirat and boasts one of the most productive water sources in the region in its oasis. Finally, the Amorites are met at Hazezon Tamar (14:7). 2Ch 20:2 identifies it with En Gedi, halfway up the western shore of the Dead Sea. The association with En Gedi is problematic if the cities of the plain are along the southeastern rim of the Dead Sea, since the itinerary then requires significant retracing of steps. No known routes travel the western bank of the Dead Sea to En Gedi.

It is difficult to imagine what route would have taken the armies of the east through Dan (Ge 14:14) if they were traveling from the cities of the plain. The only route that would take them through Dan proceeds north along the spine of hills through Jerusalem, Shechem and Hazor — and there is no indication that they went that far west or had any reason to do so. Thus, it was most likely Abram and his allies who traveled the route through Dan, rather than the armies, as they tried to cut off the armies traveling by the King’s Highway. Dan is mentioned not as the place where Abram catches them, but as a marker that he is leaving the land. The only other alternative is to maintain that the whole region was different at this time before the destruction in the region in Ge 19.

Consequently, though many authentic features characterize this narrative, no ready links to the known history are currently possible. ❖
2 But Abram said, “Sovereign Lord, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?” 3 And Abram said, “You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir.”

4 Then the word of the Lord came to him: “This man will not be your heir, but a son who is your own flesh and blood will be your heir.” 5 He took him outside and said, “Look up at the sky and count the stars— if indeed you can count them.”

These visions are distinct from dreams but can be communicated in dreams.

15:3 no children … a servant … will be my heir. Besides today’s practice in which children are adopted to provide for the child, ancient Near Eastern practice sometimes...
Then he said to him, “So shall your offspring be.”

Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness.  

He also said to him, “I am the Lord, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to take possession of it.”

Despite the attestation of this practice, information is lacking here to suggest that Abram has actually adopted Eliezer. Another possibility is that Abram simply sees this as his only option at the moment.

representations of him. These implements are occasionally used symbolically to represent deities in ancient Near Eastern literature, but usually sun-gods (e.g., Shamash) or fire-gods (e.g., Girru/Gibil). Gibil and Kusu are often invoked together as divine torch and censer in a wide range of cultic ceremonies for purification. Abram would have probably been familiar with the role of Gibil and Kusu in purification rituals, so that function would be plausibly communicated to him by the presence of these implements. Yet in a purification role, neither the torch nor the censer ever pass between the pieces of cut-up animals in the literature available to us. Further weakness is in the fact that Yahweh doesn’t need purification and Abram is a spectator, not a participant, so neither does he. In the Mesopotamian Hymn to Gibil (the torch), the god purifies the objects used in the ritual, but the only objects in the ritual in Ge 15 are the dead animals, and it is difficult to understand why they would need to be purified.

Option 3: Confirming signs related to the promise of what will be done to the nations. In incantations seeking to rid a person of the consequences of offense, the torch and oven are two in a series of objects that can serve as confirmatory signs. This same incantation series also occasionally speaks of the person who is swearing an oath in connection with their participation in the incantation as holding an implement of light and/or heat. The strength of this option is that it fits best the context of land promise. The problem is that it offers little connection to the cutting up of the animals. The parts of the animals would refer to the nations to be dispossessed.

The only example of ritual participants passing between the pieces of several cut-up animals occurs in a Hittite military ritual. In response to their army’s defeat, several animals are cut in half (goat, puppy, piglet—as well as a human), and the army passes through the parts on their way to sprinkling themselves with water from the river to purify themselves; the idea is that this will ensure a better outcome next time. As with Achan’s story in Jos 7, they fear that some offense of the soldiers has caused them to be defeated. The obvious problem is that the context of the Hittite ritual has no similarity to the context in Ge 15.

In summary, the torch and censer figure frequently in a variety of Mesopotamian ritual contexts, and multiple examples can be found of rituals that involve passing through the pieces of a single animal—but these two elements never occur together. There are plenty of examples of oaths with division of animals, but never passing through the pieces. There are plenty of examples with self-curse, but never by a deity. It is therefore difficult to combine all of the elements from the context of Ge 15 into a bona fide ritual assemblage.

The context refers to a “covenant” (15:18), and therefore an oath (by Yahweh) could easily be involved. If there is purification, it would have to be purification of the ritual or its setting, for neither Abram nor Yahweh require purification. Since the pieces cannot represent self-curse, the only other ready option is that they represent the nations, but it is hard to imagine in that case what the force of the ritual is.
old, along with a dove and a young pigeon.”

10 Abram brought all these to him, cut them in two and arranged the halves opposite each other; the birds, however, he did not cut in half. 11 Then birds of prey came down on the carcasses, but Abram drove them away.

12 As the sun was setting, Abram fell into a deep sleep, 16 and a thick and dreadful darkness came over him. 17 Then the Lord said to him, “Know for certain that for four hundred years your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own and that they will be enslaved 4 and mistreated there. 18 But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward they will come out with great possessions. 19 You, however, will go to your ancestors in peace and be buried at a good old age. 20 In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure.”

17 When the sun had set and darkness had fallen, a smoking firepot with a blazing torch appeared and passed between the pieces. 18 On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram and said, “To your descendants I give this land, 21 from the Wadi of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates— 22 the land of the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, 20Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaites, 21Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites and Jebusites.”

Hagar and Ishmael

16 Now Sarai, Abram’s wife, had borne him no children. 2 But she had an Egyptian slave named Hagar; 3 so she said to Abram, “The Lord has kept me from having children. Go, sleep with my slave; perhaps I can build a family through her.”

Abram agreed to what Sarai said. 3 So after Abram had been living in Canaan ten years, Sarai his wife took her Egyptian slave Hagar and gave her to her husband to be his wife. 4 He slept with Hagar, and she conceived.

When she knew she was pregnant, she began to despise her mistress. 5 Then Sarai said to Abram, “You are responsible for the wrong I am suffering. I put my slave in your arms, and now that she knows she is pregnant, she despises me. May the Lord judge between you and me.”

6 “Your slave is in your hands,” Abram said. “Do with her whatever you think best.” Then Sarai mistreated Hagar; so she fled from her.

7 The angel of the Lord 6 found Hagar near a spring in the desert; it was the spring that is beside the road to Shur. 8 And he said, “Hagar, slave of Sarai, where have you come from, and where are you going?”

9 “I’m running away from my mistress Sarai,” she answered.

10 Then the angel of the Lord told her, “Go back to your mistress and submit to her.” 11 The angel added, “I will increase your descendants so much that they will be too numerous to count.”

11 The angel of the Lord also said to her: “You are now pregnant and you will give birth to a son.

16:2 build a family through her. The solution proposed by Sarai is not as shocking or outlandish as it would seem to us today. In the ancient world, barrenness was a catastrophe (see note on 11:30) because one of the primary roles of the family was to produce the next generation. The survival of the family line was of the highest value, and it depended on producing progeny. Whatever threat a second wife might pose to harmony in the family paled in comparison to the necessity of an heir being produced.

Marriage contracts of the ancient world, therefore, anticipated the possibility of barrenness and at times specifically dictated a course of action. Solutions ranged from serial monogamy (divorcing the barren wife to take another, presumably fertile, bride), to polygyny (taking a second wife of equal status), to concubiny (the addition of handmaids or concubines for the purpose of producing an heir), to adoption. The third option is the one pursued here; this attempted remedy is consistent with contemporary practice as a strategy for heisrship. This option was often more attractive because if the wife were divorced, there would be an economic impact on the family (she took her marriage fund/dowry with her). Concubines bring no dowry, only their fertility, to the family.

A marriage contract from the town of Nuzi a few centuries after the patriarchal period illustrates the practice: “If Gilimmunu bears children, Shennimu shall not take another wife. But if Gilimmunu fails to bear children, Gilimmunu shall get for Shennimu a woman from the Lulu country (a slave girl) as concubine. In that case, Gilimmunu herself shall have authority over the offspring.” An Old Assyrian marriage contract closer to the time of the patriarchs reflects a similar solution to infertility. It is therefore plausible that Sarai is simply invoking the terms of their marriage contract.

16:7 angel of the Lord. In the ancient world direct communication between important parties was a rarity. Diplomatic and political exchange normally required the use of an intermediary, whose function was similar to that of ambassadors today. The messenger who served as the intermediary was a fully vested representative of the party he represented. He spoke for that party and with the authority of that party. He was accorded the same treatment as that party would enjoy were he there in person. While this was standard protocol, there was no confusion about the person’s identity. This explains how the angel in this chapter can comfortably use the first person to convey what God will do (v. 10). When official words are spoken by the representative, everyone understands that he is not speaking for himself but is merely conveying the words, opinions, policies and decisions of his liege. So in
You shall name him Ishmael,\textsuperscript{4} for the Lord has heard of your misery.\textsuperscript{h}

\textbf{12} He will be a wild donkey of a man; his hand will be against everyone and everyone’s hand against him, and he will live in hostility toward\textsuperscript{b} all his brothers.\textsuperscript{11}

\textbf{13} She gave this name to the LORD who spoke to her: “You are the God who sees me,” for she said, “I have now seen the One who sees me.”\textsuperscript{14} That is why the well was called Beer Lahai Roi;\textsuperscript{d} it is still there, between Kadesh and Bered.

\textbf{15} So Hagar bore Abram a son,\textsuperscript{k} and Abram gave the name Ishmael to the son she had borne.\textsuperscript{16} Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore him Ishmael.

**The Covenant of Circumcision**

When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to him and said, “I am God Almighty;\textsuperscript{17} walk before me faithfully and be blameless.\textsuperscript{m} Then I will make my covenant between me and you\textsuperscript{n} and will greatly increase your numbers.”

Abram fell face down, and God said to him, \textsuperscript{4} “As for me, this is my covenant with you: \textsuperscript{o} You will be the father of many nations.\textsuperscript{p} No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham,\textsuperscript{q} for I have made you a father of many nations.\textsuperscript{r} I will make you very fruitful;\textsuperscript{s} I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you.\textsuperscript{t} I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you.\textsuperscript{u} The whole land of Canaan,\textsuperscript{w} where you now reside as a foreigner,\textsuperscript{x} I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you;\textsuperscript{y} and I will be their God.”

Ugaritic literature when Baal sends messengers to Mot, the messengers use first-person forms of speech. Such usage indicates that the messengers are not only envoys of the god, but actually embody the power of the deity who sent them.

17:1 *God Almighty.* Translates the epithet El-Shaddai. Much controversy surrounds the meaning of the name El-Shaddai. One Ugaritic text refers to “El of the field” (il sh) while Akkadian refers to the “Lord of the Mountain/Steppe” (belu shadu), though these may be descriptions rather than divine epithets. The only extra-Biblical use of the divine epithet occurs in the Balaam text of Deir Alla, where the shdyi are the beings of the heavenly council.

17:5 *Abraham.* Personal names in the ancient world provided much more than a moniker. Sometimes they preserved recognition of a distinguishing characteristic or reflected circumstances at the time of the person’s birth. Often they made statements about deity (e.g., Isaiah = Yahweh saves). Names generally offered information, at some level, about the person’s identity and in a variety of ways names were believed to be intertwined with a person’s destiny (see note on 2:20). Knowing a person’s name created a relationship with that person — i.e., the person was further known by knowing the name. Knowing a person’s name also provided potential power over that person, most radically when used in spells or hexes. The naming of a person was one of the most dramatic impositions of authority over another individual. Since the name of a person was believed to be intertwined with their destiny, to name a person meant that you controlled their identity and directed their destiny. In this verse, it is not that God is demonstrating his authority over Abram (though the fact that he can change his name is not insignificant), but more important, he is designating Abram’s destiny — to be the father of a multitude. The name Abram meant “the father is exalted.” Reference to “father” (ab) in personal names usually indicated veneration of an ancestor, so this name looked to the past. His new name Abraham designates him as the significant ancestor as it looks to future generations yet to be born.
Circumcision is well-known in the ancient Near East from as early as the fourth millennium BC, though the details of its practice and its significance vary from culture to culture. Circumcision was practiced in the ancient Near East by many peoples. The Egyptians practiced circumcision as early as the third millennium BC. West Semitic peoples, Israelites, Ammonites, Moabites and Edomites performed circumcision. Eastern Semitic peoples did not (e.g., Assyrans, Babylonians, Akkadians) — nor did the Philistines, an Aegean or Greek people. Anthropological studies have suggested that the rite always has to do with at least one of four basic themes: fertility, virility, maturity and genealogy. Study of Egyptian mummies demonstrates that the surgical technique in Egypt differed from that used by the Israelites; while the Hebrews amputated the prepuce of the penis, the Egyptians merely incised the foreskin and so exposed the glans penis. Egyptians were not circumcised as children, but in either prenuptial or puberty rites. The common denominator, however, is that it appears to be a rite of passage, giving new identity to the one circumcised and incorporating him into a particular group.

Evidence from the Levant comes as early as bronze figurines from the Amuq Valley (Tell el-Judeideh) from the early third millennium BC. An ivory figurine from Megiddo from the mid-second millennium BC shows Canaanite prisoners who are circumcised. Southern Mesopotamia shows no evidence of the practice, nor is any Akkadian term known for the practice. The absence of such evidence is significant since Assyrian and Babylonian medical texts are available in abundance. Abraham is therefore aware of the practice from living in Canaan and visiting Egypt rather than from his roots in Mesopotamia. Since Ishmael is 13 years old at this time, Abraham may even have been wondering whether it was a practice that would characterize this new family of his. In Ge 17 circumcision is retained as a rite of passage, but one associated with identity in the covenant.

In light of today’s concerns with gender issues, some have wondered why the sign of the covenant should be something that marks only males. Two cultural issues may offer an explanation: patrilineal descent and identity in the community. (1) The concept

Ishmael, I have heard you: I will surely bless him; I will make him fruitful and will greatly increase his numbers. I will be the father of twelve rulers, and I will make him into a great nation. But my covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah will bear to you by this time next year. When he had finished speaking with Abraham, God went up from him.

On that very day Abraham took his son Ishmael and all those born in his household or bought with his money, every male in his household, and circumcised them, as God told him. Abraham was ninety-nine years old when he was circumcised, and his son Ishmael was thirteen; Abraham and his son Ishmael were both circumcised on that very day. And every male in Abra-

The Three Visitors

The Lord appeared to Abraham near the great trees of Mamre while he was sitting at the entrance to his tent in the heat of the day. Abraham looked up and saw three men standing nearby. When he saw them, he hurried from the entrance of his tent to meet them and bowed low to the ground.

He said, “If I have found favor in your eyes, my lord, do not pass your servant by. Let a little water be brought, and then

a 3 Or eyes, Lord
So Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah. “Quick,” he said, “get three seahs of the finest flour and knead it and bake some bread.”

Then he ran to the herd and selected...
a choice, tender calf and gave it to a servant, who hurried to prepare it. He then brought some curds and milk and the calf that had been prepared, and set these before them. While they ate, he stood near them under a tree.

9 “Where is your wife Sarah?” they asked him.

“There, in the tent,” he said.

10 Then one of them said, “I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife will have a son.”

Now Sarah was listening at the entrance to the tent, which was behind him. Abraham and Sarah were already very old, and Sarah was past the age of childbearing. So Sarah laughed to herself as she thought, “After I am worn out and my lord is old, will I now have this pleasure?”

13 Then the Lord said to Abraham, “Why did Sarah laugh and say, ‘Will I really have a child, now that I am old?’ Is anything too hard for the Lord? I will return to you at the appointed time next year, and Sarah will have a son.”

15 Sarah was afraid, so she lied and said, “I did not laugh.” But he said, “Yes, you did laugh.”

16 When the men got up to leave, they looked down toward Sodom, and Abraham walked along with them to see them on their way. Then the Lord said, “Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do? 17 Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all nations on earth will be blessed through him. 18 For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just, so that the Lord will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him.”

20 Then the Lord said, “The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great and their sin so grievous 21 that I will go down and see if what they have done is as bad as the outcry that has reached me. If not, I will know.”

22 The men turned away and went toward Sodom, but Abraham remained standing before the Lord. Then Abraham approached him and said: “Will you

represented rations for a month for an adult. This amount of flour would have probably made up to 60 loaves of bread. In the end, however, we don’t know how many people the food is serving. The text only mentions Abraham, Sarah and the three guests, but we learned earlier that Abraham has a large household (12:16; 14:14), and perhaps some of his most trusted servants join him for a meal with the travelers. This bread would have been baked in an oven of pottery that probably used animal dung as fuel.

18:7 choice, tender calf. The offer of fresh meat is extremely generous since it is not a normal component in their daily diet.

18:9 Where is your wife Sarah? It could be inferred from the angel’s question that it was unusual for Sarah not to be there — either in a serving capacity or joining them in the meal (there is no evidence of women eating separately in the ancient world). It could also be inferred from Abraham’s curt response (‘there, in the tent’) that this was not just the circumstance of the moment and that she could be sent for. These are not necessary inferences, but there is a possibility that something is indicated here that was transparent to the Israelite reader, yet elusive to us. That is, it is possible that Sarah has had to retreat to the tent and is now confined there — that she has suddenly, much to her shock and consternation, become “indisposed.” Menstruation rendered a woman unclean in the ancient world and would have prohibited her from social contact and from food preparation and serving. The text specifically indicates that she had already gone through menopause (v. 11), but if she were to bear a child, her period would need to restart. The timing would have to be precise here.

In v. 6 Abraham asked Sarah to bake some bread, an activity often forbidden to menstruating women in Abraham’s time, so at that point her period had not begun. Yet she would not be confined to her tent unless she actually had her period. If this is the issue, she experienced the onset of her period as dinner is being served. We know even from the Biblical narratives that menstruating women were at times confined to their tents (cf. 31:34 – 35). This view is also attested in the ancient Near East. Though somewhat speculative, this line of thinking would explain why the announcement that Sarah would bear a child is introduced by a question concerning Sarah’s whereabouts, leading the somewhat embarrassed Abraham to offer the euphemistic explanation that she is “in the tent” as a way of explaining that she is indisposed (note our modern euphemism, “it’s that time of the month”). One could almost imagine a transitional, “Indeed, and that is just the beginning…” It would have constituted a remarkable sign of the resumption of her fertility.

18:23 Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked? In the ancient world people tended to find their identity not as individuals, but in the family, clan or city of which they were a part. Consequently, it was not unusual for good fortune or ill fortune to be experienced on the communal level. The crimes of one member of the group could often lead to the consequences being experienced by all, for they constituted an organic whole. Yet at times a discerning judge needed to impose punishment on discrete individuals rather than on the larger group. This is particularly the case when the group in question extended beyond clan boundaries. Examples of such a concern occur in a few places in ancient Near Eastern literature. In the Hittite Prayer of Mursili, the king prays: “Whoever is a cause of rage and anger to the gods, and whosoever is not respectful to the gods, let not the good ones perish with the evil ones. Whether it is a single town, a single house, or a single person, O gods, destroy only that one!” Likewise in the Gilgamesh Epic, after the flood, the god Ea reprimands the god Enlil with the exhortation that in the future he “punish the sinner for his sin, punish the criminal for his crime” rather than bringing widespread destruction. Abraham is making a similar plea on behalf of the cities of the plain.
sweep away the righteous with the wicked? But 24What if there are fifty righteous people in the city? Will you really sweep it away and not spare the place for the sake of the fifty righteous people in it? 25Far be it from you to do such a thing—to kill the righteous with the wicked, treating the righteous and the wicked alike.Far be it from you! Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?" 26The Lord said, “If I find fifty righteous people in the city of Sodom, I will spare the whole place for their sake.”

Then Abraham spoke up again: "Now that I have been so bold as to speak to the Lord, though I am nothing but dust and ashes, 28what if the number of the righteous is five less than fifty? Will you destroy the whole city for lack of five people?"

“If I find forty-five there,” he said, “I will not destroy it.”

29Once again he spoke to him, “What if only forty are found there?”

He said, “For the sake of forty, I will not do it.”

30Then he said, “May the Lord not be angry, but let me speak. What if only thirty can be found there?”

He answered, “I will not do it if I find thirty there.”

31Abraham said, “Now that I have been so bold as to speak to the Lord, what if only twenty can be found there?”

He said, “For the sake of twenty, I will not destroy it.”

Sodom and Gomorrah Destroyed

19 The two angels arrived at Sodom in the evening, and Lot was sitting in the gateway of the city. 2When he saw them, he got up to meet them and bowed down with his face to the ground.

3“My lords,” he said, “please turn aside to your servant’s house. You can wash your feet and spend the night and then go on your way early in the morning.”

4“No,” they answered, “we will spend the night in the square.”

But he insisted so strongly that they did go with him and entered his house. He prepared a meal for them, baking bread without yeast, and they ate. 9Before they had gone to bed, all the men from every part of the city of Sodom—both young and old—surrounded the house. 5They called to Lot, “Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us so that we can have sex with them.”

6Lot went outside to meet them1 and shut the door behind him 2and said, “No, my friends. Don’t do this wicked thing.

19:1 gateway of the city. The central public gate was a place of assembly, business and legal transactions (cf. Am 5:15). Impressive flagstone pavement was used to garnish the gate at Tell Dan. Offerings during festivals were sometimes presented at city gates to honor the gods at the Zukru festival at Emar. In this case the name of the gate was the Gate of the Upright Stones (for the storm-god and Hebat, his consort). The gate area constituted special space in the ancient Near East that separated the city from tilled ground; hence, it was the center of many religions and social activities. At Megiddo over 400 people could gather just outside its central gate.

Lot’s presence at the gate is neither casual nor incidental. At the gate formal activities took place. Public decisions were made, cases heard, business transacted, and visitors processed or registered according to the conventions of the city. Lot’s presence in the gate was undoubtedly related to some of these activities. We have no reason to think that Lot was alone in the gateway, yet he was the one who interacted with the messengers. Perhaps security in the city had been heightened in the aftermath of the invasion in ch. 14 so that they were on the watch for the infiltration of possible spies reconnoitering the city (cf. the spies who go to Jericho in Jos 2). In this view Lot’s intention in taking the visitors in not only fulfilled the obligations of hospitality, but also placed them under guard.

19:4 all the men. Though the designation “all” can be hyperbolic, the addition of the merism “both young and old” indicates widespread participation. It is unlikely, though, that every single member of the male population is present, for Lot’s sons-in-law do not seem to be there.

19:5 have sex with them. Perhaps one of the most developed alternative interpretations to the Hebrew here is the contentment that when the men say they want to “know” the visitors, they are expressing distrust in Lot’s ability to protect the city from spies and they want to “interrogate” the men. Lot identifies this intention as “wicked” (v. 7) because interrogations in the ancient world were typically not gentle. In this view Lot offers his daughters as hostages to be held as warranty that he has the situation under control.

19:7 wicked thing. The text does not discuss what social norms are being broken. The sin of the Sodomites is self-evident and multileveled, blatant and unambiguous. The standard is not the later Mosaic Law but civilized behavior regulated by laws in every city and country. There is nothing subtle or secretive about their behavior. No inhibitions interfere with their threats of violence or demands to induce their lust. The last thing anyone in the reading audience would be expected to do would be to come to the defense of Sodom or try to make excuses for their behavior. The text also makes it clear that the wicked behavior was not isolated (see note on v. 4). The intentions...
Genesis 19:8

8 Look, I have two daughters who have never slept with a man. Let me bring them out to you, and you can do what you like with them. But don’t do anything to these men, for they have come under the protection of my roof."

9 "Get out of our way," they replied. "This fellow came here as a foreigner, and now he wants to play the judge! We’ll treat you worse than them." They kept bringing pressure on Lot and moved forward to break down the door.

10 But the men inside reached out and pulled Lot back into the house and shut the door. Then they struck the men who were at the door of the house, young and old, with blindness so that they could not find the door.

11 The two men said to Lot, "Do you have anyone else here—sons-in-law, sons or daughters, or anyone else in the city who belongs to you? Get them out of here, because we are going to destroy this place. The outcry to the Lord against its people is so great that he has sent us to destroy it."

12 So Lot went out and spoke to his sons-in-law, who were pledged to marry his daughters. He said, "Hurry and get out of this place, because the Lord is about to destroy Sodom."

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The paved gateway at Dan featured a canopied platform where either the king or the image of the god stood. Lined up beside it were stone benches where the elders would have sat and business of the city would have been conducted (Ge 19:1).
to destroy the city!\)” But his sons-in-law thought he was joking.  

15With the coming of dawn, the angels urged Lot, saying, “Hurry! Take your wife and your two daughters who are here, or you will be swept away\(^a\) when the city is punished.\(^b\)”  

16When he hesitated, the men grasped his hand and the hands of his wife and of his two daughters and led them safely out of the city, for the Lord was merciful to them.  

17As soon as they had brought them out, one of them said, “Flee for your lives!\(^c\) Don’t look back,\(^d\) and don’t stop anywhere in the plain! Flee to the mountains or you will be swept away!”  

18But Lot said to them, “No, my lords,\(^e\) please! \(^f\) Your servant has found favor in your\(^g\) eyes, and you\(^h\) have shown great kindness to me in sparing my life. But I can’t flee to the mountains; this disaster will overtake me, and I’ll die.  

19Look, here is a town near enough to run to, and it is small. Let me flee to it—it is very small, isn’t it? Then my life will be spared.”  

20He said to him, “Very well, I will grant this request too; I will not overthrow the town you speak of.\(^i\) But flee there quickly, because I cannot do anything until you reach it.\)” (That is why the town was called Zoar.\(^j\)  

23By the time Lot reached Zoar, the sun had risen over the land.\(^k\)  

24Then the Lord rained down burning sulfur on Sodom and Gomorrah— from the Lord out of the heavens.\(^l\)  

25Thus he overthrew those cities and the entire plain, destroying all those living in the cities—and also the vegetation in the land.\(^m\)  

26But Lot’s wife looked back,\(^n\) and she became a pillar of salt.\(^o\)

27Early the next morning Abraham got up and returned to the place where he had stood before the Lord.\(^p\) He looked down toward Sodom and Gomorrah, toward all the land of the plain, and he saw dense smoke rising from the land, like smoke from a furnace.\(^q\)  

29So when God destroyed the cities of the plain, he remembered Abraham, and he brought Lot out of the catastrophe\(^r\) that overthrew the cities where Lot had lived.

Lot and His Daughters  

30Lot and his two daughters left Zoar and settled in the mountains,\(^t\) for he was afraid to stay in Zoar. He and his two daughters lived in a cave.\(^u\) One day the older daughter said to the younger, “Our father is old, and there is no man around here to give us children—as is the custom all over the earth.\(^v\) Let’s get our father to drink wine and then sleep with him and preserve our family line through our father.”  

33That night they got their father to drink wine, and the older daughter went in and slept with him. He was not aware of it when she lay down or when she got up.  

34The next day the older daughter said to the younger, “Last night I slept with my father. Let’s get him to drink wine again tonight, and you go in and sleep with him so we can preserve our family line through our father.”  

35So they got their father to drink wine that night also, and the younger daughter went in and slept with him. Again he was not aware of it when she lay down or when she got up.

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\(^a\) 18 Or No, Lord; or No, my lord  
\(^b\) 19 The Hebrew is singular.  
\(^c\) 22 Zoar means small.
36 So both of Lot’s daughters became pregnant by their father. 37 The older daughter had a son, and she named him Moab; 38 he is the father of the Moabitest of today. 39 The younger daughter also had a son, and she named him Ben-Ammi; 40 he is the father of the Ammonitesco of today.

Abraham and Abimelek
20:1-18Ref — Ge 12:10-20; 26:1-11

20 Now Abraham moved on from therep into the region of the Negeb and lived between Kadesh and Shur. For a while he stayed in Gerar,q 4 and there Abraham said of his wife Sarah, “She is my sister.” Then Abimelek king of Gerar sent for Sarah and took her.r 5 But God came to Abimelek in a dream, and he said to him, “You are as good as dead because of the woman you have taken; she is a married woman.” 6 Now Abimelek had not gone near her, so he said, “Lord, will you destroy an innocent nation? 7 Did he not say to me, ‘She is my sister,’ and didn’t she also say, ‘He is my brother’? I have done this with a clear conscience and clean hands.”

8 Then God said to him in the dream, “Yes, I know you did this with a clear conscience, and so I have kept you from sinning against me. That is why I did not let you touch her. 9 Now return the man’s wife, for he is a prophet, and he will pray for yout and you will live. But if you do not return her, you may be sure that you and all who belong to you will die.”

10 Early the next morning Abimelek summoned all his officials, and when he told them all that had happened, they were very much afraid. 11 Then Abimelek called Abraham in and said, “What have you done to us? How have I wronged you that you have brought such great guilt upon me and my kingdom? You have done things to me that should never be done.”

12 And Abimelek asked Abraham, “What was your reason for doing this?”

13 Abraham replied, “I said to myself, ‘There is surely no fear of Godz in this place, and they will kill me because of my wife.’ 14 Besides, she really is my sister, the daughter of my father though not of my mother, and she became my wife. 15 And when God had me wander from my father’s household, I said to her, ‘This is how you can show your love to me: Everywhere we go, say of me, “He is my brother.” ’ ”

16 Then Abimelek brought sheep and cattle and male and female slaves and gave them to Abraham, and he returned Sarah his wife to him. 17 And Abimelek said, “My land is before you; live wherever you like.”

19:37–38 Moabites ... Ammonites. They historically occupied the regions east of the Jordan River from the Jabbok River in the north to Wadi Zered (= el-Hesâ) in the south. The latter is the wadi by which Zoar is located. The northern border of Moab was traditionally the Arnon, but it frequently extended its border north to the Wadi Heshban. If the southern locations of the cities are correct, the three northernmost cities of the plain were then in tradition-ally Moabite territory, while the two southern ones were in what was to become Edomite territory. The fact that one would expect to find the cities of the plain closer to Ammonite territory would be another point in favor of a more northern location for the cities.

Both Amon and Moab were enemies of Israel for most of their history. It is unlikely that they were literally the descendants of the incestuous relationship between Lot and his daughters (cf. Dt 2:9, Ps 83:5–8); it is possible that this account is included as a political or ethnic slur. Another interpretation may be that the Moabites and Ammonites owe their existence, not to incestuous acts, but to Abraham. As the offspring of Lot, they are related to Abraham; but since Lot is a nephew, these are not among the many nations of whom Abraham is the father. Still, the text indicates that Lot is spared because the Lord remembers Abraham by acting favorably toward him. The Moabites and Ammonites only receive this chance to exist because the Lord has remembered Abraham. This gives the audience of Moses insight into the status of those who live around the land they are entering.

20:2 She is my sister. The wife-as-sister motif appears here again, but there are significant differences from ch. 12. Here there is no famine to suggest God’s abandonment, nor is Gerar outside the land. Most significant, unlike the prior occasion when Sarah was barren, Sarah is now fertile and the promised son is to be born within the year. Sarah is not obviously pregnant, or she would not have been taken and the ruse would not have been attempted. If Sarah spends even one night in Abimelek’s embrace, the paternity of the child to be born would be in question. In ch. 12 Abraham was in danger of losing his wife. In ch. 20 he is in danger of losing claim to his heir, since he would not definitively be the father.

20:7 prophet ... pray. The connection between prayer and prophets is not transparent. In the ancient world, prophets gave messages from deity because they were reputed to have a seat in the heavenly council where decisions of judgment and destiny were made. This privileged seat also gave a prophet the ability to effectuate a curse or remove it (cf. 1Ki 13:4–6, which included prayer as part of the prophet’s announcement). Their messages comprised the announcement of the decisions of the heavenly council. The intercessory role of the prophet was therefore found in the opportunity he or she had to bring issues to the council table for discussion and to serve as advocate for the earthly party. Then, as spokesperson for the council and deity, he or she would announce the verdict in the form of a prophetic message. Such information was typically given by prophetic message, usually derived from a divination setting (note Balaam’s procedures in Nu 22–24).

will pray ... will live. The Hebrew verbs describing Abraham’s anticipated action are modal (“he may pray for you, so that you may live”). No guarantee is offered of either, though if there is no restoration the death sentence is certain. In this context, however, there is no hint of divination.
To Sarah he said, “I am giving your brother a thousand shekels of silver. This is to cover the offense against you before all who are with you; you are completely vindicated.”

Then Abraham prayed to God, and God healed Abimelek, his wife and his female slaves so they could have children again, for the Lord had kept all the women in Abimelek’s household from conceiving because of Abraham’s wife Sarah.

The Birth of Isaac

Now the Lord was gracious to Sarah as he had said, and the Lord did for Sarah what he had promised. Sarah became pregnant and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the very time God had promised him. Abraham gave the name Isaac to the son Sarah bore him. When his son Isaac was eight days old, Abraham circumcised him, as God commanded him. Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him.

Sarah said, “God has brought me laughter, and everyone who hears about this will laugh with me.” And she added, “Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age.”

Hagar and Ishmael Sent Away

The child grew and was weaned, and on the day Isaac was weaned Abraham held a great feast. But Sarah saw that the son whom Hagar the Egyptian had borne to Abraham was mocking. And she said to Abraham, “Get rid of that slave woman and her son, for that woman’s son will never share in the inheritance with my son Isaac.”

The matter distressed Abraham greatly because it concerned his son. But God said to him, “Do not be so distressed about the boy and your slave woman. Listen to whatever Sarah tells you, because it is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned. I will make the son of the slave into a nation also, because he is your offspring.”

Early the next morning Abraham took some food and a skin of water and gave them to Hagar. He set them on her shoulders and then sent her off with the boy. She went on her way and wandered in the Desert of Beersheba.

When the water in the skin was gone, she put the boy under one of the bushes. Then she went off and sat down about a bowshot away, for she thought, “I cannot watch the boy die.” And as she sat there, she began to sob.

God heard the boy crying, and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, “What is the matter, Hagar? Do not be afraid; God has heard the boy crying as he lies there. Lift the boy up and take him by the hand, for I will make him into a great nation.”

Then God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water. So she went and filled the skin with water and gave the boy a drink.

God was with the boy as he grew up. He lived in the desert and became an archer. While he was living in the desert of Paran, his mother got a wife for him from Egypt.

The Treaty at Beersheba

At that time Abimelech and Phicol the commander of his forces said to Abraham,
“God is with you in everything you do.

Now swear⁴ to me here before God that you will not deal falsely with me or my children or my descendants. Show to me and the country where you now reside as a foreigner the same kindness I have shown to you.”

Abraham said, “I swear it.”

Then Abraham complained to Abimelek about a well of water that Abimelek’s servants had seized.⁵ But Abimelek said, “I don’t know who has done this. You did not tell me, and I heard about it only today.”

So Abraham brought sheep and cattle and gave them to Abimelek, and the two men made a treaty.⁶ Abraham set apart seven ewe lambs from the flock.⁷ Abimelek asked Abraham, “What is the meaning of these seven ewe lambs you have set apart by yourselves?”

He replied, “Accept these seven lambs from my hand as a witness⁸ that I dig this well.”

So that place was called Beersheba,⁹ because the two men swore an oath there.

After the treaty had been made at Beersheba, Abimelek and Phicol the commander of his forces returned to the land of the Philistines. Abimelek planted a tamarisk tree in Beersheba, and there he called on the name of the Lord, the Eternal God.⁴ And Abraham stayed in the land of the Philistines for a long time.

Abraham Tested

Some time later God tested Abraham. He said to him, “Abraham!”

“Here I am,” he replied.

Then God said, “Take your son, your only son, whom you love—Isaac—and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain I will show you.”

Early the next morning Abraham got up and loaded his donkey. He took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. When he had cut enough wood for the burnt offering, he set out for the place God had told him about. On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance. He said to his servants, “Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you.”

Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and placed it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. As the two of them went on together, Isaac spoke up and said to his father Abraham, “Father?”

“‘Yes, my son?’” Abraham replied.

Beersheba can mean well of seven and well of the oath.
“The fire and wood are here,” Isaac said, “but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?”

Abraham answered, “God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.” And the two of them went on together.

When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. But the angel of the LORD called out to him from heaven, “Abraham! Abraham!”

“Here I am,” he replied.

“Do not lay a hand on the boy,” he said. “Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son.”

Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram① caught by its horns.

Genesis 22:13  sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son. Though animal substitution is clear enough in the OT (e.g., firstborn substitution, Passover), the idea of an animal being sacrificed as a substitute for a human being is not as common in the ancient world as might be expected. In the cultures in which animal sacrifice was practiced, the people often simply provide a lavish meal for the deity, at times with the participation of the officiates and the worshipers. The theory that the animal takes the place of the person whose offenses are thereby vicariously expiated is a different matter (and it should be noted that even in Ge 22 no offense is identified as a reason for the sacrifice). When rituals from the ancient world do involve animal substitution, it is typically in the context of magic — i.e., that through ritual the disease, impurity, evil spirit or spell might be transferred to the animal, which was then slaughtered, thus bringing relief to the human.

He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son.② So Abraham called that place The Lord Will Provide. And to this day it is said, “On the mountain of the Lord it will be provided.”③

The angel of the Lord called to Abraham from heaven a second time and said, “I swear by myself, declares the Lord, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me.”④

① Many manuscripts of the Masoretic Text, Samaritan Pentateuch, Septuagint and Syriac; most manuscripts of the Masoretic Text a ram behind him ② Or seed ③ Or and all nations on earth will use the name of your offspring in blessings (see 48:20)
Then Abraham returned to his servants, and they set off together for Beersheba. And Abraham stayed in Beersheba.

Nahor’s Sons
Some time later Abraham was told, “Milkah is also a mother; she has borne sons to your brother Nahor.” 21 Uz the first-born, Buz his brother, Kemuel (the father of Aram), 22 Kedessah, Hazo, Pildash, Jidlaph and Bethuel.” 23 Bethuel became the father of Rebekah. Milkah bore these eight sons to Abraham’s brother Nahor. 24 His concubine, whose name was Reumah, also had sons: Tebah, Gaham, Tahash and Maakah.

The Death of Sarah
Sarah lived to be a hundred and twenty-seven years old. 2 She died at Kiriath Arba (that is, Hebron) in the land of Canaan, and Abraham went to mourn for Sarah and to weep over her.

Then Abraham rose from beside his dead wife and spoke to the Hittites. He said, “I am a foreigner and a stranger among you. Sell me some property for a burial site here so I can bury my dead.”

The Hittites replied to Abraham, “Sir, listen to us. You are a mighty prince among us. Bury your dead in the choicest of our tombs. None of us will refuse you your tomb for burying your dead.”

Then Abraham rose and bowed down before the people of the land, the Hittites. He said to them, “If you are willing to let me bury my dead, then listen to me and intercede with Ephron son of Zohar on my behalf so he will sell me the cave of Machpelah, which belongs to him and is at the end of his field. Ask him to sell it to me for the full price as a burial site among you.”

Ephron the Hittite was sitting among his people and he replied to Abraham in the hearing of all the Hittites who had come to the gate of his city. “No, my lord,” he said. “Listen to me; I give you the field, and I give you the cave that is in it. I give it to you in the presence of my people. Bury your dead.”

Again Abraham bowed down before the people of the land and he said to Ephron in their hearing, “Listen to me, if you will. I will pay the price of the field. Accept it from me so I can bury my dead there.”

Ephron answered Abraham, “Listen to me, my lord; the land is worth four hundred shekels of silver, but what is that between you and me? Bury your dead.”

Abraham agreed to Ephron’s terms and weighed out for him the price he had named in the hearing of the Hittites: four hundred shekels of silver, according to the weight current among the merchants.

So Ephron’s field in Machpelah near Mamre—both the field and the cave in it, and all the trees within the borders of the field—was deeded 18 to Abraham as his property in the presence of all the Hittites who had come to the gate of the city. Afterward Abraham buried his wife Sarah in the cave in the field of Machpelah near Mamre (which is at Hebron) in the land of Canaan.

So the field and the cave in

23:10 four hundred shekels of silver. A significant amount of money. It equals about 10 pounds (4.6 kilograms) of silver, but its value can be assessed by the fact that the average wage was 10 shekels of silver per year. Having said that, it is still not determinable whether the price is fair, exorbitant or a bargain because the text does not indicate the size of the parcel of land. It is much less than what Omri paid for the much larger site of Samaria (150 pounds [68 kilograms] or 6,000 shekels of silver; see NIV text note on 1Kg 16:24), and it is not comparable to what David paid for the site of the temple (15 pounds [6.9 kilograms] or 600 shekels of gold; see NIV text note on 1Ch 21:25).
it were deeded⁸ to Abraham by the Hittites as a burial site.

Isaac and Rebekah

24 Abraham was now very old, and the Lord had blessed him in every way.¹ He said to the senior servant in his household, the one in charge of all that he had, "Put your hand under my thigh.¹ I want you to swear by the Lord, the God of heaven and the God of earth,⁷ that you will not get a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites,⁸ among whom I am living, but will go to my country and my own relatives⁹ and get a wife for my son Isaac."⁸

³The servant asked him, "What if the woman is unwilling to come back with me to this land? Shall I then take your son back to the country you came from?"⁴

⁶"Make sure that you do not take my son back there," Abraham said. "⁷"The Lord, the God of heaven, who brought me out of the land of my fathers' household and my native land and who spoke to me and promised me on oath, saying, 'To your offspring'¹ I will give this land'—he will send his angel before you⁶ so that you can get a wife for my son from there.⁷ If the woman is unwilling to come back with you, then you will be released from this oath of mine. Only do not take my son back there."⁸ So the servant put his hand under the thigh of his master Abraham and swore an oath to him concerning this matter.

¹⁰Then the servant left, taking with him ten of his master's camels loaded with all kinds of good things from his master. He set out for Aram Naharaim⁴ and made his way to the town of Nahor.¹¹He had the camels kneel down near the well⁴ outside the town; it was toward evening, the time the women go out to draw water.⁵

¹²Then he prayed, "Lord, God of my master Abraham, make me successful today, and show kindness to my master Abraham.¹³See, I am standing beside this spring, and the daughters of the townsmen are coming out to draw water.¹⁴May it be that when I say to a young woman, 'Please let down your jar that I may have a drink,' and she says, 'Drink, and I'll water your camels too'—let her be the one you have chosen for your servant Isaac. By this I will know that you have shown kindness to my master.

¹⁵Before he had finished praying,⁷ Rebekah came out with her jar on her shoulder. She was the daughter of Bethuel son of Milcah, who was the wife of Abraham's brother Nahor.¹⁶The woman was very beautiful, a virgin; no man had ever slept with her. She went down to the spring, filled her jar and came up again.

¹⁷The servant hurried to meet her and said, "Please give me a little water from your jar."¹⁸"Drink," my lord," she said, and quickly lowered the jar to her hands and gave him a drink.

¹⁹After she had given him a drink, she said, "I'll draw water for your camels too, until they have had enough to drink."²⁰So

23:20 1 Jer 32:10 1Sa 6:7
24:1 1Ge 27:40 1Ge 27:12
24:2 1Ge 39:4 4Ex 23:20
24:3 1Ge 41:12 1Ge 28:22
24:4 1Ge 30:23 1Ge 28:22
24:5 1Ge 24:32 7Ge 35:17
24:6 1Ge 24:4 1Ge 26:24
24:7 1Ge 24:9 1Ge 35:17
24:8 1Ge 24:12 1Ge 35:17
24:9 1Ge 24:13 1Ge 35:17
24:10 1Ge 24:14 1Ge 35:17
24:11 1Ge 24:16 1Ge 35:17
24:12 1Ge 24:17 1Ge 35:17
24:13 1Ge 24:23 1Ge 35:17
24:14 1Ge 24:22 1Ge 35:17
24:15 1Ge 24:23 1Ge 35:17
24:16 1Ge 24:24 1Ge 35:17
24:17 1Ge 24:25 1Ge 35:17
24:18 1Ge 24:26 1Ge 35:17
24:19 1Ge 24:27 1Ge 35:17
24:20 1Ge 24:28 1Ge 35:17

24:2 under my thigh. It is possible that the oath is sworn on the genitals of Abraham, which would then be understood to be binding even if Abraham should die. None of this can be confirmed, however, because the text offers no explanation and no parallels have been found in the ancient Near East.

24:4 go to my country and my own relatives and get a wife for my son Isaac. In the ancient world it was common to restrict or at least prefer marriage within the social group, a practice called endogamy. Endogamy is particularly significant in social contexts that emphasize inheritance. In this way the lineage is isolated for purposes of social status and property ownership. In Israel the concerns are ethnic because the land was promised to Abraham and his family and he is avoiding assimilation with the people in the land. At this point in history, no one else shares Abraham's beliefs or worships "the God of Abraham" (31:53) — at least as far as we know; certainly Laban and his family do not, so this is not a matter of marrying within the faith. We must keep in mind that Abraham's relatives are no more monotheistic than the Canaanites. They are not worshipers of Yahweh. Abraham was called out of a polytheistic setting. The proscription here is concerned about ethnic separation.

24:14 May it be that when I say. In seeking guidance from God, the servant uses a strategy much like that used for seeking oracles in the ancient world. In an oracle a binary question (i.e., yes/no) was put to deity and then a device of some sort was used as a means by which the deity could give an answer. In the ancient world the device often used was either casting lots or employing a divination priest to perform extispicy (the investigation of the entrails of sacrificed animals for positive or negative signs). In Israel the high priest used the Urim and Thummim as a way of conducting such an oracular procedure. Since Abraham's servant has no lots to cast and has no immediate access to specialized professionals, he has to improvise. He therefore resorts to using his current surroundings to devise an oracle. When this procedure is used, it is typical that a highly irregular occurrence designates "yes" and the normal turn of events designates "no," with the expectation that God will thereby communicate his answer. Here the question is whether the girl whom the servant approaches is the chosen mate for Isaac. The designated indicator of a "yes" answer is if the girl offers to do far beyond what human nature or the conventions of hospitality would dictate, specifically, to water all his camels when he asks only for a drink for himself. Such an unusual offer would serve as evidence that deity was present.

24:19 I'll draw water for your camels too. If the servant's camels had gone several days without water, they could potentially drink up to 25 gallons (almost 100 liters) each.
she quickly emptied her jar into the trough, ran back to the well to draw more water, and drew enough for all his camels. Without saying a word, the man watched her closely to learn whether or not the Lord had made his journey successful.

22 When the camels had finished drinking, the man took out a gold nose ring weighing a beka and two gold bracelets weighing ten shekels. Then he asked, “Whose daughter are you? Please tell me, is there room in your father’s house for us to spend the night?”

24 She answered him, “I am the daughter of Bethuel, the son that Milcah bore to Nahor.” And she added, “We have plenty of straw and fodder, as well as room for you to spend the night.”

26 Then the man bowed down and worshiped the Lord, saying, “Praise be to the Lord, the God of my master Abraham, who has not abandoned his kindness and faithfulness to my master. As for me, the Lord has led me on the journey to the house of my master’s relatives.”

28 The young woman ran and told her mother’s household about these things. 29 Now Rebekah had a brother named Laban, and he hurried out to meet the man at the spring. As soon as he had seen the nose ring, and the bracelets on his sister’s arms, and had heard Rebekah tell what the man said to her, he went out to the man and found him standing by the camels near the spring. “Come, you who are blessed by the Lord,” he said. “Why are you standing out here? I have prepared the house and a place for the camels.”

32 So the man went to the house, and the camels were unloaded. Straw and fodder were brought for the camels, and water for him and his men to wash their feet. Then food was set before him, but he said, “I will not eat until I have told you what I have to say.”

“Then tell us,” Laban said.

34 So he said, “I am Abraham’s servant. The Lord has blessed my master abundantly, and he has become wealthy. He has given him sheep and cattle, silver and gold, male and female servants, and camels and donkeys. My master’s wife Sarah has borne him a son in her old age, and he has given him everything he owns. And my master made me swear an oath, and said, ‘You must not get a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, in whose land I live, but go to my father’s family and to my own clan, and get a wife for my son.'”

39 Then I asked my master, ‘What if the woman will not come back with me?’

40 He replied, ‘The Lord, before whom I have walked faithfully, will send his angel with you and make your journey a success, so that you can get a wife for my son from my own clan and from my father’s family. You will be released from my oath if, when you go to my clan, they refuse to give her to you — then you will be released from my oath.’

42 When I came to the spring today, I said, ‘Lord, God of my master Abraham, if you will, please grant success to the journey on which I have come. See, I am standing beside this spring. If a young woman comes out to draw water and I say to her, “Please let me drink a little water from your jar,” and if she says to me, “Drink, and I’ll draw water for your camels too,” let her be the one the Lord has chosen for my master’s son.’

45 Before I finished praying in my heart, Rebekah came out, with her jar on her shoulder. She went down to the spring and drew water, and I said to her, ‘Please give me a drink.’

46 She quickly lowered her jar from her shoulder and said, ‘Drink, and I’ll draw water for your camels too.’ So I drank, and she watered the camels also.

47 “I asked her, ‘Whose daughter are you?’ She said, ‘The daughter of Bethuel son of Nahor, whom Milcah bore to him.’

49 Then I put the ring in her nose and the bracelets on her arms, and I bowed down and worshiped the Lord. I praised the Lord, the God of my master Abraham, who had led me on the right road to get the granddaughter of my master’s brother for his son. Now if you will show kindness and faithfulness to my master, tell me; and if not, tell me, so I may know which way to turn.”

50 Laban and Bethuel answered, “This is from the Lord; we can say nothing to you one way or the other. Here is Rebekah; take her and go, and let her become the wife of your master’s son, as the Lord has directed.”

52 When Abraham’s servant heard what they said, he bowed down to the ground and drew more water, and drew enough for all his camels, thus requiring nearly a hundred trips from the well — several hours of work. Since it was already almost evening when the scene opens (v. 11), it is sensible to conclude that the camels may have been watered more recently and would have required considerably less water than that. But Rebekah would not have known the current needs of the camels, so the offer remains impressive and extraordinary.
But her brother and her mother replied, “Let the young woman remain with us ten days or so; then you may go.”

But he said to them, “Do not detain me, now that the Lord has granted success to my journey. Send me on my way so I may go to my master.”

55 Or she

Marriage Contracts

In addition to the nose ring and bracelets initially presented in Ge 24:22, the remainder of the bride price is summarized here. Marriage customs included an exchange of wealth between the families with several purposes. The marriage price indicated here is given from the groom’s family to the bride’s family. This transfer is part of the socioeconomic system of provision and should not be thought of as purchase of chattel. In Sumerian sources, one form of bride wealth (nigmussa) is made up primarily of foodstuffs presented just before the wedding feast. This type of gift would have been an impractical option for Abraham’s servant because of the long trip. Provision of foodstuff by the family brings to mind our modern practice of the groom’s parents bearing the responsibility for the rehearsal dinner and the bride’s family bearing the responsibility for the reception. A less common form (nigdea) sometimes includes precious objects and is presented when the agreement is made between the families. The latter is more likely represented here.

The transfer often took place in two parts: a small “down payment” offered as surety that the wedding would take place, with the remainder changing hands shortly before the wedding. These two stages are approximated in Ge 24:22,53. In the Nuzi texts of the mid-second millennium BC, bride prices averaged 30 to 40 shekels of silver, or three to four years of average income.

The dowry was given by the bride’s family to the bride (a transaction from father to daughter, not between families per se) and represented her inheritance from the family since she typically did not inherit land. Movable property and valuables were common dowry items. Its function was to provide for the support of the woman should the husband die, desert or divorce her. At times, part of the dowry remained the personal property of the wife, but whatever its disposition, it could not be sold without her consent. In like manner, however, she was not free to dispose of it. If it were not used to support her at some stage in life, it would become part of the inheritance of her children. The dowry of Rebekah is not detailed, though her nurse may have been part of it (24:59).

It is neither typical nor necessary for the woman to be consulted with regard to marriage arrangements by the family (24:57), though certainly the ones to be married were known to express their opinions or even exercise choice through various legitimate and less-than-legitimate options. It should be noted here, however, that it is possible that Rebekah’s opinion is only asked when the question concerns the unusual circumstance of her being so quickly and completely removed from the potential protection provided by her family. Until a woman conceived and bore a child to her new family, her status within the family was tenuous, and the proximity of her father’s family would have been a strong motivator for her husband not to mistreat her or discard her.
Then they said, “Let’s call the young woman and ask her about it.” So they called Rebekah and asked her, “Will you go with this man?”

“I will go,” she said.

So they sent their sister Rebekah on her way, along with her nurse and Abraham’s servant and his men. And they blessed Rebekah and said to her,

“Our sister, may you increase to thousands upon thousands; may your offspring possess the cities of their enemies.”

Then Rebekah and her attendants got ready and mounted the camels and went back with the man. So the servant took Rebekah and left.

Now Isaac had come from Beer Lahai Roi, for he was living in the Negev. He went out to the field one evening to meditate, and as he looked up, he saw camels approaching. Rebekah also looked up and saw Isaac. She got down from her camel and asked the servant, “Who is that man in the field coming to meet us?”

“He is my master,” the servant answered. So she took her veil and covered herself.

Then the servant told Isaac all he had done. Isaac brought her into the tent of his mother Sarah, and he married Rebekah. So she became his wife, and he loved her; and Isaac was comforted after his mother’s death.

The Death of Abraham
25:1-4pp — 1Ch 1:32-33

Abraham had taken another wife, whose name was Ketura. She bore him Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak and Shuah. Jokshan was the father of Sheba and Dedan; the descendants of Dedan were the Ashurites, the Leuitites and the Leummites. The sons of Midian were Ephah, Epher, Hanok, Abida and Eldaah. All these were descendants of Keturah.

Abraham left everything he owned to Isaac. But while he was still living, he gave gifts to the sons of his concubines and sent them away from his son Isaac to the land of the east.

Abraham lived a hundred and seventy-five years. Then Abraham breathed his last and died at a good old age, an old man and full of years; and he was gathered to his people. His sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpehah near Mamre, in the field of Zoar the Hittite.

The field Abraham had bought from the Hittites, There Abraham was buried with his wife Sarah. After Abraham’s death, God blessed his son Isaac, who then lived near Beer Lahai Roi.

Ishmael’s Sons
25:12-16pp — 1Ch 1:29-31

This is the account of the family line of Abraham’s son Ishmael, whom Sarah’s slave, Hagar, the Egyptian, bore to Abraham.

These are the names of the sons of Ishmael, listed in the order of their birth: Nebaioth the firstborn of Ishmael, Kedar, Adbeel, Mibsam, Mishma, Dumah, Masae, Hadad, Tema, Jetur, Naphish and Kedemah. These were the sons of Ishmael, and these are the names of the twelve

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<td>24:67</td>
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24:65 veil. Veils were used in a variety of ways in different cultures and different times, but they always signified something of the woman’s status. Some veils might cover only the hair (a scarf or turban), while others covered the lower part of the face. More common, the veil in the ancient Near East covered both hair and lower face. These were not sheer or gauzy. In the Middle Assyrian laws, married women or concubines were not to appear in public without face and head veiled, whereas veils were prohibited to prostitutes and slave girls. In the Code of Hammurapi, the betrothed wears a veil. In texts from the ancient Near East, veils are most often mentioned in connection with marriage, as here. It is more usual, however, that the husband veils the wife-to-be in a legal act. In a Mari text from about the time of the patriarchs, when the king’s legal emissaries bring a bride from her country to be presented to the king, her future husband, it is the emissaries who cover her with a particular garment.

24:66 tent of his mother. Sarah’s status was mistress of the household, and her tent would have been empty since her death (23:1 – 2). By taking Rebekah into his mother’s tent, Isaac demonstrates that she is now the mistress of the household.

24:67 sons of his concubines. The children of concubines did not have the status of legitimate heirs. A concubine typically brought no dowry and her children had the status of servants or slaves in the household. They were part of the inheritance rather than recipients of it. They thus removed them from any presumed position of privilege; yet at the same time he gives them freedom and gifts. Gifts of movable property (rather than land) would be a typical procedure used to consolidate the chief heir’s inheritance. For Abraham to provide this for these sons is unusual generosity.

25:6 gathered to his people. This expression finds its roots in ancient views about burial and afterlife. Both the practice of burial in family tombs and the viewing of continuing social relationships in the afterlife retain the concept of the ancestors as a distinguishable group. One’s place in the family of deceased ancestors was just as central to one’s identity as one’s place in the family in the land of the living. The living family honored the deceased both individually and corporately through a variety of practices that did not stop after burial.

25:13 sons of Ishmael. The Ishmaelites — i.e., the peoples descended from Ishmael — are mentioned infrequently
tribal rulers according to their settlements and camps. 17 Ishmael lived a hundred and thirty-seven years. He breathed his last and died, and he was gathered to his people. 18 His descendants settled in the area from Havilah to Shur, near the eastern border of Egypt, as you go toward Ashur. And they lived in hostility toward all the tribes related to them. 

Jacob and Esau

19 This is the account of the family line of Abraham’s son Isaac.

Abraham became the father of Isaac, and Isaac was forty years old when he married Rebekah, daughter of Bethuel the Aramean from Paddan Aram and sister of Laban the Aramean.

21 Isaac prayed to the Lord on behalf of his wife, because she was childless. The Lord answered his prayer, and his wife Rebekah became pregnant. 22 The babies jostled each other within her, and she said, “Why is this happening to me?” So she went to inquire of the Lord. 

23 The Lord said to her, “Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you will be separated; one people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger.”

24 When the time came for her to give birth, there were twin boys in her womb. 25 The first to come out was red, and his whole body was like a hairy garment; so they named him Esau. 26 After this, his brother came out, with his hand grasping Esau’s heel; so he was named Jacob. 27 Isaac was sixty years old when Rebekah gave birth to them. 28 The boys grew up, and Esau became a skillful hunter, a man of the open country, while Jacob was content to stay at home among the tents. 29 Isaac, who had a taste for wild game, loved Esau, but Rebekah loved Jacob.

30 Once when Jacob was cooking some stew, Esau came in from the open country, famished. 31 He said to Jacob, “Quick, let me have some of that red stew! I’m famished!” (That is why he was also called Edom.)

32 Jacob replied, “First sell me your birthright.”

33 “Look, I am about to die,” Esau said. “What good is the birthright to me?”

34 But Jacob said, “Swear to me first.” So he swore an oath to him, selling his birthright to Jacob.

35 Then Jacob gave Esau some bread and stew in exchange for his birthright.
Inheritance Rights and Birthrights

The privilege of the firstborn in inheritance is referred to as “primogeniture.” Primogeniture was not universally practiced in the ancient world, but it was a sort of default position. Sufficient numbers of examples exist of either a younger son having the privileges or of the estate being equally divided to demonstrate that a variety of arrangements was possible. Primogeniture functioned in the ancient Near East, but not everywhere, nor was it, if present, always observed. In the Code of Hammurapi (section 165) other divisions of property are allowed. In Lipit Ishtar’s laws the inheritance goes equally to the children of two wives; in the Code of Hammurapi the first wife’s firstborn receives a preferential share. Thus the ancient provenance and some shared features of Israel’s law are evident.

At Mari a legal decision granted a double portion to the natural firstborn son; at Nuzi (fifteenth century BC) the same provision was followed. At Alalakh on the Orontes a father was aware of but did not have to recognize the law of primogeniture in his will. He could designate a first son for inheritance purposes. Primogeniture was recognized at Emar, where the son received an “extra share.” Each son first claimed a bride price from the inheritance. A daughter could rarely be an equal heir with the sons in Mesopotamia.

In Egypt by the Middle Kingdom the law of primogeniture could be disregarded by the dying person; property could be willed to a brother. In the New Kingdom era the oldest son was the expected heir, but the entire family or an appointed trustee could become the heir. In the Tale of Sinuhe, a fugitive Egyptian in Canaan, upon departing from Egypt, turned over all of his possessions to his family, both men and property to be given to his firstborn son.

In Neo-Babylonian laws the sons of a first wife received two-thirds of the inheritance, while the sons of the second wife received one-third. Sons who were different in status might fare differently, since sons of the first and main wife could receive the major inheritance. Among sons, in a Middle Assyrian law the oldest son inherited the largest portion; the rest of the inheritance was divided according to set instructions. In some cases the kind of property to be divided up determined how it could be distributed.

The birthright consists of the material inheritance. The firstborn usually received a greater share from the father because he was expected to become the paterfamilias, having ultimate responsibility for all members of the extended family (e.g., mother, unwed sisters) as well as for the continuing care of the deceased. With this greater responsibility came greater resources. When Jacob negotiates to purchase the birthright in Ge 25:29–34, it is not clear whether the additional responsibilities come along with that or not. It is likely that this incident involves only the extra share of the inheritance, while leadership in the clan is given in Ge 27. ◆
some lentil stew. He ate and drank, and then got up and left.

So Esau despised his birthright.

Isaac and Abimelek

26:1–11 Ref — Ge 12:10–20; 20:1–18

26 Now there was a famine in the land—besides the previous famine in Abraham’s time—and Isaac went to Abimelek king of the Philistines in Gerar. 2The Lord appeared to Isaac and said, “Do not go down to Egypt; live in the land where I tell you to live.” 3Stay in this land for a while, and I will be with you and will bless you. 4For to you and your descendants I will give all these lands and will confirm the oath I swore to your father Abraham. 5I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and will give them all these lands, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed. 6Because Abraham obeyed me and did everything I required of him, keeping my commands, my decrees and my instructions.” 7So Isaac stayed in Gerar.

8When the men of that place asked him about his wife, he said, “She is my sister,” 9because he was afraid to say, “She is my wife.” He thought, “The men of this place might kill me on account of Rebekah, because she is beautiful.”

10When Isaac had been there a long time, Abimelek king of the Philistines looked down from a window and saw Isaac caressing his wife Rebekah. 11So Abimelek summoned Isaac and said, “She is really your wife! Why did you say, ‘She is my sister’?”

Isaac answered him, “Because I thought I might lose my life on account of her.” 12Then Abimelek said, “What is this you have done to us? One of the men might well have slept with your wife, and you would have brought guilt upon us.” 13So Abimelek gave orders to all the people: “Anyone who harms this man or his wife shall surely be put to death.”

14Isaac planted crops in that land and the same year reaped a hundredfold, because the Lord blessed him. 15The man became rich, and his wealth continued to grow until he became very wealthy.

16Then Abimelek said to Isaac, “Move away from us; you have become too powerful for us.”

17So Isaac moved away from there and encamped in the Valley of Gerar, where he settled. 18Isaac reopened the wells that had been dug in the time of his father Abraham, which the Philistines had stopped up after Abraham died, and he gave them the same names his father had given them.

19Isaac’s servants dug wells in the valley and discovered a well of fresh water there.

20But the herdsmen of Gerar quarreled with those of Isaac and said, “The water is ours!” So he named the well Esek, because they disputed with him. 21Then they dug another well, but they quarreled over that one also; so he named it Sitnah.

22He moved on from there and dug another well, and no one quarreled over it. He named it Rehoboth, saying, “Now the Lord has given us room and we will flourish in the land.”

23From there he went up to Beersheba.

24That night the Lord appeared to him and said, “I am the God of your father Abraham. Do not be afraid, for I am with you; I will bless you and will increase the number of your descendants for the sake of my servant Abraham.”

25Isaac built an altar there and called on the name of the Lord. There he pitched his tent, and there his servants dug a well.

26Meanwhile, Abimelek had come to him from Gerar, with Ahuzzath his personal adviser and Phicol the commander of his forces.

26:1 Abimelek king of the Philistines. In 20:2 Abimelek is referred to only as the “king of Gerar,” but he is located in “the land of the Philistines” (21:32). King. This is not as lofty a title as may be assumed since even the rulers of small cities in a city-state system (as this is) are referred to in that way. Philistines. See note on 21:32.

26:7–11 Although similar to the incidents in 12:10–20; 20:1–18, the differences between those passages and this one is how the scene unfolds. Isaac’s rationale for the ruse is the same as Abraham’s, but Rebekah is not actually taken by the ruler as Sarah had been on both occasions. Discovery of the ruse does not occur through divine revelation or because of plagues, but through a chance glimpse of Isaac’s intimate interaction with Rebekah. We can note, therefore, a decreasing danger in the three accounts. Pharaoh actually took Sarah into his palace (12:15), which probably implies that he had relations with her. Abimelek sent for Sarah but did not have relations with her (20:2,4). In the case of Rebekah, Abimelek never even sent for her. Also, as a result of the incident, Pharaoh sends Abraham away (12:20); Abimelek gives gifts and freedom in the land to Abraham (20:14–16); and Abimelek gives protection to Isaac (26:11).

26:10 Ge 20:9
26:11 PPs 105:15
have you come to me, since you were hostile to me and sent me away?"

28 They answered, "We saw clearly that the LORD was with you; so we said, 'There ought to be a sworn agreement between us'—between us and you. Let us make a treaty with you 29 that you will do us no harm, just as we did not harm you but always treated you well and sent you away peacefully. And now you are blessed by the LORD.'"

30 Isaac then made a feast 4 for them, and they ate and drank. 31 Early the next morning the men swore an oath 4 to each other. Then Isaac sent them on their way, and they went away peacefully.

32 That day Isaac’s servants came and told him about the well they had dug. They said, "We’ve found water!" 33 He called it Shibah, 2 and to this day the name of the town has been Beersheba. 3

**Jacob Takes Esau’s Blessing**

34 When Esau was forty years old, 10 he married Judith daughter of Beeri the Hittite, and also Basemath daughter of Elon the Hittite. 9 They were a source of grief to Isaac and Rebekah. 5

27 When Isaac was old and his eyes were so weak that he could no longer see, 5 he called for Esau his older son 6 and said to him, "My son."

“Here I am," he answered.

3 Isaac said, "I am now an old man and don’t know the day of my death. 11 Now then, get your equipment—your quiver and bow—and go out to the open country 4 to hunt some wild game for me. 4 Prepare me the kind of tasty food I like and bring it to me to eat, so that I may give you my blessing 3 before I die."

5 Now Rebekah was listening as Isaac spoke to his son Esau. When Esau left for the open country to hunt game and bring it back, 6 Rebekah said to her son Jacob, 8 "Look, I overheard your father say to your brother Esau, ‘Bring me some game and prepare me some tasty food to eat, so that I may give you my blessing in the presence of the LORD before I die.’ 6 Now, my son, listen carefully and do what I tell you: 9 Go out to the flock and bring me two choice young goats, so I can prepare some tasty food for your father, just the way he likes it. 10 Then take it to your father to eat, so that he may give you his blessing before he dies."

11 Jacob said to Rebekah his mother, “But my brother Esau is a hairy man 8 while I have smooth skin. 12 What if my father touches me? 9 I would appear to be tricking him and would bring down a curse on myself rather than a blessing."

13 His mother said to him, "My son, let the curse fall on me. 7 Just do what I say; 12 go and get them for me."

14 So he went and got them and brought them to his mother, and she prepared some tasty food, just the way his father liked it. 15 Then Rebekah took the best clothes 6 of Esau her older son, which she had in the house, and put them on her younger son Jacob. 16 She also covered his hands and the smooth part of his neck with the goatskins. 17 Then she handed to her son Jacob the tasty food and the bread she had made.

18 He went to his father and said, "My father."

"Yes, my son," he answered. "Who is it?"

19 Jacob said to his father, "I am Esau your firstborn. I have done as you told me. Please sit up and eat some of my game, so that you may give me your blessing." 10

20 Isaac asked his son, "How did you find it so quickly, my son?"

"The LORD your God gave me success," he replied.

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27:4 give you my blessing. This blessing is one that transfers the leadership of the clan to the next generation. If the inheritance remained undivided for some time (which was common), the privileged son (usually the firstborn) was designated the administrator of the estate. The administrator had significant control of the estate. His roles included presiding at sacrificial meals celebrated by the family, supervising burials and funerary rites, and serving as guardian-redeemer. Jacob (and Rebekah on his behalf) would desire this because it was also in the administrator’s hands to approve the timing for the division of the inheritance. If Esau were the administrator, he could presumably delay the division indefinitely and thus deprive Jacob of the advantage of the double share of the inheritance. The blessing also served as a proclamation of the destiny of the sons. It was not accorded the same status as a prophecy from God (note Isaac’s use of the first person in v. 37: “I have made him”), but it still was an exercise of authority believed to be binding through the very speaking of the words. This is why Isaac could not take it back even though it became clear that he had been tricked. It was clearly a celebratory occasion since Isaac asks for the preparation of a special meal, but as such it is odd that the whole household was not asked to be present, both as co-celebrants and as witnesses to the legal transaction. It is not hard to imagine, however, that when political issues of favoritism are involved, there is an inclination to be secretive.

27:11-13 Rebekah responded to Jacob’s fear of a curse by appropriating any curse that may have resulted onto herself. Can she do that? Blessings are nontransferable, so curses would be the same. In this case, Rebekah was likely referring to the consequence of the curse rather than the curse itself. Since deity was the enforcer of the curse, she was acknowledging that she has forced Jacob to deceive his father and ensured that the deity will target her instead.
21Then Isaac said to Jacob, “Come near so I can touch you, my son, to know whether you really are my son Esau or not.”

22 Jacob went close to his father Isaac, who touched him and said, “The voice is the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esau.” 23 He did not recognize him, for his hands were hairy like those of his brother Esau; so he proceeded to bless him. 24 “Are you really my son Esau?” he asked.

“I am,” he replied.

25 Then he said, “My son, bring me some of your game to eat, so that I may give you my blessing.”

Jacob brought it to him and he ate; and he brought some wine and he drank. 26 Then his father Isaac said to him, “Come here, my son, and kiss me.”

27 So he went to him and kissed him. When Isaac caught the smell of his clothes, he blessed him and said,

“Ah, the smell of my son is like the smell of a field that the Lord has blessed.”

28 May God give you heaven’s dew and earth’s richness—

an abundance of grain and new wine.

29 May nations serve you and peoples bow down to you. Be lord over your brothers, and may the sons of your mother bow down to you. May those who curse you be cursed and those who bless you be blessed.

30 After Isaac finished blessing him, and Jacob had scarcely left his father’s presence, his brother Esau came in from hunting. 31 He too prepared some tasty food for his father, and said to him, “My father, please sit up and eat some of my game, so that you may give me your blessing.”

32 His father Isaac asked him, “Who are you?”

“I am your son,” he answered, “your firstborn, Esau.”

33 Isaac trembled violently and said, “Who was it, then, that hunted game and brought it to me? I ate it just before you came and I blessed him—and indeed he will be blessed!”

34 When Esau heard his father’s words, he burst out with a loud and bitter cry and said to his father, “Bless me—me too, my father!”

28:2 Go ... Take a wife ... from among the daughters of your mother’s brother. Just as Abraham insisted that Isaac marry someone from outside the land (24:2–4), Isaac expresses the same desire for Jacob. In addition to echoing the past generation, this served as a tacit condemnation of Esau’s marriage (26:34–35). Why was Isaac prohibited from leaving the land, yet Jacob was encouraged to do so? The difference lies in the fact that Isaac...
and the daughters of Laban, your mother’s brother. 2 May God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful and multiply your offspring and establish your name among peoples, and give you the land of your祖先 ancestors. 3 You shall be like a river of water, a spring never dried up. 4 May God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful and multiply you in the land of your ancestors. 5 Then Isaac sent Jacob on his way, and he went to Paddan Aram, to Laban son of Bethuel the Aramean, the brother of Rebekah, who was the mother of Jacob and Esau.

6 Now Esau learned that Isaac had blessed Jacob and had sent him to Paddan Aram to take a wife from there, and that when he blessed him he commanded him, “Do not marry a Canaanite womande,”f 7 and that Jacob had obeyed his father and mother and had gone to Paddan Aram. 8 Esau then realized how displeasing the Canaanite women were to his father Isaac; 9 so he went to Ishmael and married Mahalath, the sister of Nebioth and daughter of Ishmael son of Abraham, in addition to the wives he already had. 10

Jacob’s Dream at Bethel

11 Jacob left Beersheba and set out for Harran. 12 When he reached a certain place, he stopped for the night because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones there, he put it under his head and lay down to sleep. 13 He had a dream in which he saw a stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. 14 There above it stood the LORD, and he said: “I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. 15 I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying. Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring. 16 I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.” 17

18 When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, “Surely the LORD is in this place, and I was not aware of it.” 19 He was afraid and said, “How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven.” 20 Early the next morning Jacob took the stone he had placed under his head and set it up as a pillar and poured oil on top of it. 21 He called that place Bethel, 22 though the city used to be called Luz. 23 Then Jacob made a vow, saying, “If God will be with me and will watch over me on this journey I am taking and will give me food to eat and clothes to wear 24 so that I return safely to my father’s household, then the LORD will be my God 25 and this stone that I have set up as a pillar will be God’s house, and of all that you give me I will give you a tenth.”

left and Abraham subsequently died, no heir of the family would be left to safeguard the land by their presence. But when Jacob left, Isaac and Esau were still there to maintain the claim. Abraham and Sarah’s graves were also there. The jealousy that Isaac and Jacob face has to do with the survival of the family. Jacob is therefore sent from the land to save his life (v. 5).

28:18 set it up as a pillar. In the ancient world, cult symbols (such as the pillar set up here) are abundantly observable. These standing stones could at times be defiled (i.e., considered to contain the essence of a deity). Others were believed to represent ancestral spirits, whereas others could simply stand as memorials of treaties or special events (notice the 12 stone pillars set up by Moses in Ex 24:4–8). In the context here the standing stone may well have been intended to mark where the presence of God was manifest in Jacob’s vision. Jacob had slept in what is in effect the antechamber of a temple and had seen the stairway leading to the gate of heaven (the inner chamber) with the messengers coming and going from the Lord’s presence; therefore, he set up a standing stone either to mark the “Most Holy Place” (at the top of the stairway) or the place where Yahweh stood ("above" or "beside" the stairway, see v. 13 and NIV text note there). Alternatively, the standing stone could have functioned as a commemoration of the covenant agreement and Jacob’s response in a vow.

28:20 made a vow. Vows in the ancient world generally involved a request made of deity with a promise of a gift in return when the request is fulfilled. The request often concerned protection or provision, and the gift was typically a sacrifice or a donation to the sanctuary of the deity. The details in this chapter conform to that pattern. God has promised protection, provision and return to the land, so Jacob made those the condition of his promised gift — a tithe (“a tenth,” v. 22) of all that he acquires during his absence.

28:22 a tenth. Wealth and possession in the ancient world were not based on money, so Jacob expected to gain flocks and herds. Though tithes could at times be a form of taxation, this tithe was not imposed on Jacob. Gifts related to vows were usually given to the temple (whether by means of sacrifice or donation), but in this case it would have had to be by sacrifice because donations were to be handed over to temple administrators, and there is no formal temple here. Jacob returned to Bethel to fulfill his vow in ch. 35, and presumably animals were sacrificed at that time (though the text does not say so). Jacob built an altar (35:1), but no further information is given.
Jacob Arrives in Paddan Aram

Then Jacob continued on his journey and came to the land of the eastern peoples. There he saw a well in the open country, with three flocks of sheep lying near it because the flocks were watered from that well. The stone over the mouth of the well was large. When all the flocks were gathered there, the shepherds would roll the stone away from the well’s mouth and water the sheep. Then they would return the stone to its place over the mouth of the well.

29:8: We can’t… until all the flocks are gathered… Then we will water the sheep. Herding contracts in the ancient world were critical to assure the fair distribution of resources that were the foundation for survival. Grazing land and water were often in limited supply. Legal agreements existed between herdsmen and the livestock owners whose

Stairway to Heaven

From the fact that the messengers of God appeared passing between the realms in Jacob’s dream, it is clear that he was viewing a portal to heaven. Such portals are envisioned as stairways (as opposed to ladders) in ancient mythology (see the article “Ziggurats,” p. 30). They are also architecturally represented in the ziggurats of ancient Mesopotamia, which were built to provide the stairway for the gods to come down and be worshiped in their temples. Jacob did not see a ziggurat, but the stairway portal between heaven and earth that ziggurats were designed to provide. These portals were considered sacred space. The link between heaven and earth provided passage for the deity from the gate of his heavenly temple-palace to the sacred space marked out on earth for his presence and worship. Such places were marked with temples once their location had been revealed to people living in the area.

When kings sought to build temples to particular deities, they sought the deity’s direction to identify such a sacred place. Thus, the “house of God” (Ge 28:17) — usually referring to a temple (in v. 17 Jacob identified a sacred space but there was no temple yet built to mark the spot) — is linked along with the “gate of heaven” (v. 17) to the entry to the heavenly abode of deity.

There is a continuum in space between the heavenly dwelling and the earthly one such that they are not simply considered mirror images or paired structures, but in the sense that they are more like the upstairs and downstairs of the same building. Yet it is even more than that as the earthly temple can be thought of as actually existing in the heavenly realm. The temple is a place in both worlds, just as the grave is a place both on earth and in the netherworld.

Some temples featured a stairway from the antechamber up to the central cela (the temple’s inner sanctum) where the deity dwelt, indicating perhaps that the deity’s heavenly dwelling was there in the middle of the earthly temple. If this is so, the “gate of heaven” could be considered the entryway to the temple’s inner sanctum (whether at the bottom of the stairway or at the top).

We should not imagine that the angels Jacob saw were marching in procession down and up the stairway as often pictured in art. Rather he saw messengers (= angels) going off on missions and returning from delivering their messages.
flocks are gathered and the stone has been rolled away from the mouth of the well. Then we will water the sheep.”

While he was still talking with them, Rachel came with her father’s sheep, for she was a shepherd. When Jacob saw Rachel daughter of his uncle Laban, and Laban’s sheep, he went over and rolled the stone away from the mouth of the well and watered his uncle’s sheep. Then Jacob kissed Rachel and began to weep aloud. He had told Rachel that he was a relative of her father and a son of Rebekah. So she ran and told her father.

As soon as Laban heard the news about Jacob, his sister’s son, he hurried to meet him. He embraced him and kissed him and brought him to his home, and there Jacob told him all these things. Then Laban said to him, “You are my own flesh and blood.”

Jacob Marries Leah and Rachel

After Jacob had stayed with him for a whole month, Laban said to him, “Just because you are a relative of mine, should you work for me for nothing? Tell me what your wages should be.” Now Laban had two daughters; the name of the older was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. Leah had weak eyes, but Rachel had a lovely figure and was beautiful. Jacob was in love with Rachel and said, “I’ll work for you seven years in return for your younger daughter Rachel.”

Laban said, “It’s better that I give her to you than to some other man. Stay here with me.” So Jacob served seven years to get Rachel, but they seemed like only a few days to him because of his love for her.

Then Jacob said to Laban, “Give me my wife. My time is completed, and I want to make love to her.”

Laban brought together all the people of the place and gave a feast. But when evening came, he took his daughter Leah and brought her to Jacob, and Jacob made love to her. And Laban gave his servant Zilpah to his daughter as her attendant.

When morning came, there was Leah! So Jacob said to Laban, “What is this you have done to me? I served you for Rachel, didn’t I? Why have you deceived me?”

Laban replied, “It is not our custom to as the bride price (see the article “Marriage Contracts,” p. 59). Jacob has brought no wealth with him (the inheritance he will eventually gain as heir to Isaac has not yet been divided), so the agreement is reached that his seven years’ labor will serve in lieu of a bride price. Since bride prices averaged around 30 to 40 shekels of silver in the mid-second millennium BC Nuzi, and since Jacob’s work would normally pay about a shekel per month, the substitution of seven years of Jacob’s labor for the bride price results in about twice the normal going rate for brides. Perhaps Laban can take advantage of Jacob because Jacob, being penniless and moonstruck, is in a poor bargaining position.

29:22 gave a feast. According to ancient customs marriage was celebrated as a joyful business transaction between families rather than as a civil or sacred ceremony. Though the personal feelings of the couple were not immaterial, legal, economic and social issues were predominant in the institution. The marriage did not take place in the vicinity of sacred space, nor did religious personnel officiate. No vows were made in the name of deity and there was certainly no sacramental aspect to the institution. The agreement was often struck years before the marriage took place and initiated a period termed “inchoate marriage.” When the agreed time came, a feast marked the culmination of the agreement after which the marriage was consummated (often within the family compound of the bride’s parents). It was not unusual for the wife to continue living with her family as the husband made conjugal visits for several months until the woman conceived. Her pregnancy was the signal that the time was right for her to move into the household of her new husband.

29:26 It is not our custom. The Code of Hammurapi (section 160) stipulates a penalty for failing to deliver the bride for whom the bride-price has been received. The very existence of the law indicates that this breach sometimes occurred, though there it specifies that the woman had been given to another man. Laban deflects any accusation of breach of contract by claiming custom as support for his action. Little evidence can substantiate Laban’s claim of custom on the basis of ancient Near Eastern documents.
here to give the younger daughter in marriage before the older one. Then finish this daughter’s bridal week; then we will give you the younger one also, in return for another seven years of work.’

28 And Jacob did so. He finished the week with Leah, and then Laban gave him his daughter Rachel to be his wife. 29 Laban gave his servant Bilhah to his daughter Rachel as her attendant. 30 Jacob made love to Rachel also, and his love for Rachel was greater than his love for Leah. And he worked for Laban another seven years. 31

**Jacob’s Children**

31 When the Lord saw that Leah was not loved, 4 he enabled her to conceive, 5 but Rachel remained childless. 32 Leah became pregnant and gave birth to a son. She named him Reuben, 6 for she said, “It is because the Lord has seen my misery. 7 Surely my husband will love me now.” 33 She conceived again, and when she gave birth to a son she said, “Because the Lord heard that I am not loved, he gave me this one too.” So she named him Simeon. 8

34 Again she conceived, and when she gave birth to a son she said, “Now at last my husband will become attached to me, 9 because I have borne him three sons.” So he was named Levi. 10

35 She conceived again, and when she gave birth to a son she said, “This time I will praise the Lord.” So she named him Judah. 11 Then she stopped having children.

30 When Rachel saw that she was not bearing Jacob any children, 2 she became jealous of her sister. 3 So she said to Jacob, “Give me children, or I’ll die!” 4 Jacob became angry with her and said, “Am I in the place of God, who has kept you from having children?” 5

3 Then she said, “Here is Bilhah, my servant. Sleep with her so that she can bear children for me and I too can build a family through her.” 6

4 So she gave him her servant Bilhah as a wife. 7 Jacob slept with her, 8 and she became pregnant and bore him a son. 8 Then Rachel said, “God has vindicated me; 9 he has listened to my plea and given me a son.” Because of this she named him Dan. 10

7 Rachel’s servant Bilhah conceived again and bore Jacob a second son. 8 Then Rachel said, “I have had a great struggle with my sister, and I have won.” 9 So she named him Naphtali. 10

9 When Leah saw that she had stopped having children, she took her servant Zilpah and gave her to Jacob as a wife. 11 Leah’s servant Zilpah bore Jacob a son. 12 Then Leah said, “What good fortune!” 13 So she named him Gad. 14

12 Leah’s servant Zilpah bore Jacob a second son. 15 Then Leah said, “How happy I am! The women will call me happy.” 16 So she named him Asher. 17

16 During wheat harvest, Reuben went out into the fields and found some mandrake plants, 18 which he brought to his mother Leah. Rachel said to Leah, “Please give me some of your son’s mandrakes.” 19 But she said to her, “Wasn’t it enough that you took away my husband? Will you take my son’s mandrakes too?” 20 “Very well,” Rachel said, “he can sleep with you tonight in return for your son’s mandrakes.” 21 So when Jacob came in from the fields that evening, Leah went out to meet him. “You must sleep with me,” she said. “I have hired you with my son’s mandrakes.” So he slept with her that night. 22 God listened to Leah, 23 and she became pregnant and bore Jacob a fifth son. 24 Then Leah said, “God has presented me with a precious gift. This time my husband will treat me with honor, because I have borne him six sons.” So she named him Zebulan. 25

21 Some time later she gave birth to a daughter and named her Dinah. 22 Then God remembered Rachel; she listened to her and enabled her to conceive. 23

30:14 Mandrake plants. The usual identification of this plant is Mandragora, frequently believed in the ancient and classical world to possess magical properties, primarily as an aphrodisiac (see SS 7:13) with the power to make a barren woman conceive. In Egypt it appears to be the aroma that had the erotic powers. Modern study has confirmed that the fruit is a sedative, narcotic and purgative. Unusual characteristics include that the shape of the roots is often reminiscent of the human form and that the plant shines in the dark. Yet there remains some question whether the identification with the fruit in this passage as Mandragora is correct since that plant is not known to grow in Mesopotamia.
23She became pregnant and gave birth to a son\(^1\) and said, “God has taken away my disgrace.”\(^2\) 24She named him Joseph,\(^3\) and said, “May the Lord add to me another son.”\(^\text{w}\)

**Jacob's Flocks Increase**

25After Rachel gave birth to Joseph, Jacob said to Laban, “Send me on my way\(^5\) so I can go back to my own homeland. 26Give me my wives and children, for whom I have served you,\(^6\) and I will be on my way. You know how much work I've done for you.” 27But Laban said to him, “If I have found favor in your eyes, please stay. I have learned by divination that the Lord has blessed me because of you.”\(^7\) 28He added, “Name your wages,\(^8\) and I will pay them.” 29Jacob said to him, “You know how I have worked for you\(^b\) and how your livestock has fared under my care.\(^9\) The little you had before I came has increased greatly, and the Lord has blessed you wherever I have been. But now, when may I do something for my own household?\(^d\) 30“What shall I give you?” he asked. “Don’t give me anything,” Jacob replied. “But if you will do this one thing for me, I will go on tending your flocks and watching over them: \(^{32}\) Let me go through all your flocks today and remove from them every speckled or spotted sheep, every dark-colored lamb and every spotted or speckled goat.\(^e\) They will be my wages. 33And my honesty will testify for me in the future, whenever you check on the wages you have paid me. Any goat in my possession that is not speckled or spotted, or any lamb that is not dark-colored, will be considered stolen.” 34“Agreed,” said Laban. “Let it be as you have said.” 35That same day he removed all the male goats that were streaked or spotted, and all the speckled or spotted female goats (all that had white on them) and all the dark-colored lambs, and he placed them in the care of his sons.\(^f\) 36Then he put a three-day journey between himself and Jacob, while Jacob continued to tend the rest of Laban’s flocks.

37Jacob, however, took fresh-cut branches from poplar, almond and plane trees and made white stripes on them by peeling the bark and exposing the white inner wood of the branches.\(^{38}\) Then he placed the peeled branches in all the watering troughs, so that they would be directly in front of the flocks when they came to drink. When the flocks were in heat and came to drink,\(^39\) they mated in front of the branches. And they bore young that were streaked or speckled or spotted.\(^{40}\) Jacob set apart the young of the flock by themselves, but made the rest face the streaked and dark-colored animals that belonged to Laban. Thus he made separate flocks for himself and did not put them with Laban’s animals.\(^{41}\) Whenever the stronger females were in heat, Jacob would place the branches in the troughs in front of the animals so they would mate near the branches,\(^{42}\) but if the animals were weak, he would not place them there. So the weak animals went to Laban and the strong ones to Jacob.\(^{43}\) In this way the man grew exceedingly prosperous and

30:25 After Rachel gave birth. A woman’s status in the marriage is not fully attained until she bears a son. In some contracts from the second millennium BC, a time limit is set after which she can be divorced should an heir not be provided. Prior to Joseph’s birth, it would have been inappropriate for Jacob to leave with Rachel since her status would be more secure with family in the area.

30:27 learned by divination. The details of the divination are not given here, so we do not know what sort of specialist Laban consulted (if any) or what class of divination was used. Divination is divided into categories labeled “inspired” (divine communication using a human intermediary, e.g., prophecy, dreams) or “deductive” (divine communication through events and phenomena, either provoked situations, such as lots or extispicy using animal entrails, or passive, such as celestial observation). Given Laban’s report of the result of the divination, it is most likely that he consulted an expert in extispicy. In this procedure, a binary (yes/no) question is posed and then the specialist slaughters an animal and examines the entrails (usually the liver) for indications that their experience dictates as being positive or negative. To get the information Laban conveys, he must have asked whether Jacob’s God was the one bringing prosperity.

30:32 They will be my wages. Shepherds’ wages in the ancient Near East were usually the by-products of the herd (mostly a percentage of the wool and milk). Sometimes the shepherd would also get to keep a percentage of the new births. The percentage is not often stated in the texts, but one text from Ischali indicates that the shepherd was allowed to keep 20 percent. Rather than using a percentage, Jacob requests that his share be those that the superstitious of the day. No evidences have yet been found in the ancient Near East of the procedure used by Jacob, or of similar ones, based on the premise that what the animal sees will influence the lambs.\(^{44}\)
Jacob Flees From Laban

31 Jacob heard that Laban’s sons were saying, “Jacob has taken everything our father owned and has gained all this wealth from what belonged to our father.” And Jacob noticed that Laban’s attitude toward him was not what it had been.

13Then the Lord said to Jacob, “Go back to the land of your fathers and to your relatives, and I will be with you.”

4So Jacob sent word to Rachel and Leah to come out to the fields where his flock were. 5He said to them, “I see that your father’s attitude toward me is not what it was before, but the God of my father has been with me.” 6You know that I’ve worked for your father with all my strength, 7yet your father has cheated me by changing my wages ten times. However, God has not allowed him to harm me. 8If he said, ‘The speckled ones will be your wages,’ then all the flocks gave birth to speckled young; and if he said, ‘The streaked ones will be your wages,’ then all the flocks bore streaked young. 9So God has taken away your father’s livestock and has given them to me. 10In breeding season I once had a dream in which I looked up and saw that the male goats mating with the flock were streaked, speckled or spotted. 11The angel of God said to me in the dream, ‘Jacob.’ I answered, ‘Here I am.’ 12And he said, ‘Look up and see that all the male goats mating with the flock are streaked, speckled or spotted, for I have seen all that Laban has been doing to you. 13I am the God of Bethel, where you anointed a pillar and where you made a vow to me. Now leave this land at once and go back to your native land.’”

14Then Rachel and Leah replied, “Do we still have any share in the inheritance of our father’s estate? 15Does he not regard us as foreigners? Not only has he sold us, but he has used up what was paid for us. 16Surely all the wealth that God took away from our father belongs to us and our children. So do whatever God has told you.”

17Then Jacob put his children and his wives on camels, 18and he drove all his livestock ahead of him, along with all the goods he had accumulated in Paddan Aram, 19to go to his father Isaac in the land of Canaan.

19When Laban had gone to shear his sheep, Rachel stole her father’s household gods. 20Moreover, Jacob deceived Laban the Aramean by not telling him he was running away. 21So he fled with all he had, crossed the Euphrates River, and headed for the hill country of Gilead.

Laban Pursues Jacob

22On the third day Laban was told that Jacob had fled. 23Taking his relatives with him, he pursued Jacob for seven days and caught up with him in the hill country of Gilead. 24Then God came to Laban the Aramean...

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### Notes

31:15 *Does he not regard us as foreigners?* The bride price paid by the groom was often transferred to the bride as an indirect dowry. As such it became part of a financial reserve for her that served as an insurance policy of sorts. This claim of Leah and Rachel suggests that they had neither direct nor indirect dowry (their share of the inheritance); therefore, no financial security would have been provided by staying in the region of their family. The value of Jacob’s 14 years of labor had apparently never been assigned to their present or future holdings. Laban alone profited from Jacob’s labor, meaning that he had, in effect, simply sold his daughters.

31:23 *pursued Jacob for seven days.* The site of Mizpah (where Laban caught up to Jacob) is not known, but from Harran to the northern end of the hill country of Gilead is approximately 350 miles (565 kilometers). To reach there in ten days (a three-day head start plus seven days for Laban’s travel), vv. 22–23, Jacob must travel 35 miles (55 kilometers) a day, an incredible rate; caravans usually managed 23 miles (37 kilometers) at most. Sheep and goats could neither achieve nor maintain that pace (see 33:13), and women and children would likewise slow down the speed of travel. Given the circumstances, Jacob could not expect to make more than ten miles (16 kilometers) per day. This has led even conservative commentators to suspect that we are reading something wrong. Whenever the Biblical text refers to a journey (Hebrew derek) of a particular number of days, the number is one, three or seven, suggesting the possibility that the expression is idiomatic rather than precise. Yet that does not solve all the problems, because if Jacob travels at a rate of only ten miles (16 kilometers) per day, one would expect Laban to catch him long before he arrives at the hill country of Gilead. Laban can perhaps travel 20 miles (32 kilometers) per day, in which case he could have caught Jacob after only three days, about 65 miles (100 kilometers) from Harran, soon after he crossed the Euphrates at Til-Barsib. Certainly the results will be different if one assumes that Jacob is traveling faster or Laban slower, but the numbers we have used (10 and 20 miles [16 kilometers and 32 kilometers], respectively) are the most defensible. If Jacob is traveling 12 or 13 miles (20 or 21 kilometers) per day, and Laban is traveling 17 miles (27 kilometers), Laban would catch Jacob after about seven days (as the text seems to suggest), but they would only be about 110 miles (175 kilometers) from Harran. That would put them somewhere near Ebla, still only one-third of the way to the hill country of Gilead. The only conceivable solution at the moment that explains Laban’s not catching up to Jacob before the hill country of Gilead is to assume that it takes Laban a week or ten days to prepare for the trip before he can set out and that he cannot travel very fast (after all, he is over 150 years old at this point).
Household Gods

Household gods (terāpīm) were images that represented deceased ancestors in order to venerate them. There are a variety of opinions about the terāpīm, and there probably were various practices with regard to whether these ancestors were worshiped or considered to even have quasi-divine status. Minimally, ancestor images provided a focus for rites related to the care of the dead and also were at times used in divination.

In some of the archives from the mid-second millennium BC, legal documents allow us to see how the family gods figured in the inheritance. At Nuzi, several texts indicate that the principal heir received the family gods. In texts from Emar one document suggests that the household gods were not to be given to a man outside the family. In Ge 31, Rachel would have no right to this portion of the inheritance, nor would Jacob. Laban is logically distressed over this breach of inheritance practices as well as concerned that the care of the ancestors will be jeopardized by the loss of the images. We can therefore conclude that Rachel’s interest in the terāpīm has more to do with family and inheritance than with the issue of worshipping other gods. The spirits of the ancestors were not substitute deities, though some uses of them were certainly proscribed in ideal Yahwism as it eventually took shape.

When women married, it was customary for them to transfer their loyalty to the gods of their husband rather than exercise any individual freedom to choose their own God. Wives were automatically by marriage bound to the god of the husband. In most cases, because of endogamy, the god of her fathers would be the same as the god of her husband, because people in the same geographic location, and especially people in the same clan, tended to worship the same deities.◆

Aramean in a dream at night and said to him, a "Be careful not to say anything to Jacob, either good or bad." b

25 Jacob had pitched his tent in the hill country of Gilead when Laban overtook him, and Laban and his relatives camped there too. c Then Laban said to Jacob, "What have you done? You've deceived me, and you've carried off my daughters like captives in war. d Why did you run off secretly and deceive me? Why didn't you tell me, so I could send you away with joy and singing to the music of timbrels e and harps? f You didn't even let me kiss my grandchildren and my daughters goodbye. g You have done a foolish thing, h I have the power to harm you; but last night the God of your father i said to me, 'Be careful not to say anything to Jacob, either good or bad.' j Now you have gone off because you longed to return to your father's household. But why did you steal my gods? k"

31 Jacob answered Laban, "I was afraid, because I thought you would take your daughters away from me by force. l But if you find anyone who has your gods, that person shall not live." m In the presence

![Protective figurine, Iraq, 900–612 BC.](image-url)

Kim Walton. The Oriental Institute Museum, University of Chicago.
of our relatives, see for yourself whether there is anything of yours here with me; and if so, take it." Now Jacob did not know that Rachel had stolen the gods.

33So Laban went into Jacob’s tent and into Leah’s tent and into the tent of the two female servants, but he found nothing. After he came out of Leah’s tent, he entered Rachel’s tent. 34Now Rachel had taken the household gods and put them inside her camel’s saddle and was sitting on them. Laban searched through everything in the tent but found nothing.

35Rachel said to her father, “Don’t be angry, my lord, that I cannot stand up in your presence; 36I’m having my period.” So he searched but could not find the household gods.

36Jacob was angry and took Laban to task. “What is my crime?” he asked Laban. “How have I wronged you that you hunt me down? 37Now that you have searched through all my goods, what have you found that belongs to your household? Put it here in front of your relatives and mine, and let them judge between the two of us.

38“I have been with you for twenty years now. Your sheep and goats have not miscarried, nor have I eaten rams from your flocks. 39I did not bring you animals torn by wild beasts; I bore the loss myself. And you demanded payment from me for whatever was stolen by day or night. 40This was my situation: The heat consumed me in the daytime and the cold at night, and sleep fled from my eyes. 41It was like this for the twenty years I was in your household. I worked for you fourteen years for your two daughters and six years for your flocks, and you changed my wages ten times. 42If the God of my father, the God of Abraham and the Fear of Isaac, had not been with me, I would surely have sent me away empty-handed. But God has seen my hardship and the toil of my hands, and last night he rebuked you.”

43Laban answered Jacob, “The women are my daughters, the children are my children, and the flocks are my flocks. All you see is mine. Yet what can I do today about these daughters of mine, or about the children they have borne? 44Come now, let’s make a covenant, you and I, and let it serve as a witness between us.”

45So Jacob took a stone and set it up as a pillar. 46He said to his relatives, “ Gather some stones.” So they took stones and piled them in a heap, and they ate there by the heap. 47Laban called it Jezreel, and Jacob called it Galeed.

48Laban said, “This heap is a witness between you and me today.” That is why it was called Galeed. 49It was also called Mizpah, 50because he said, “May the Lord keep watch between you and me when we are away from each other. 50If you mistreat my daughters or if you take any wives besides my daughters, even though no one is with us, remember that God is a witness between you and me.”

51Laban also said to Jacob, “Here is this heap, and here is this pillar I have set up between you and me. This heap is a witness, and this pillar is a witness, that I will not go past this heap to your side to harm you and that you will not go past this heap and pillar to my side to harm me.”

47 The Aramaic Jezreel Sahadutha and the Hebrew Galeed both mean witness heap.
49 Mizpah means watchtower.
May the God of Abraham⁵ and the God of Nahor, the God of their father, judge between us.”⁶

So Jacob took an oath⁷ in the name of the Fear of his father Isaac. ⁸ He offered a sacrifice there in the hill country and invited his relatives to a meal. After they had eaten, they spent the night there.

Early the next morning Laban kissed his grandchildren and his daughters⁹ and blessed them. Then he left and returned home.¹⁰

**Jacob Prepares to Meet Esau**

Jacob also went on his way, and the angels of God met him. ¹¹ When Jacob saw them, he said, “This is the camp of God!”⁰ So he named that place Mahanaim.¹²

Jacob sent messengers ahead of him to his brother Esau in the land of Seir, the country of Edom. He instructed them: “This is what you are to say to my lord Esau: ‘Your servant Jacob says, I have been staying with Laban and have remained there till now. ¹⁵ I have cattle and donkeys, sheep and goats, male and female servants.⁶ Now I am sending this message to my lord, that I may find favor in your eyes.’”¹⁷

When the messengers returned to Jacob, they said, “We went to your brother Esau, and now he is coming to meet you, and four hundred men are with him.”¹⁸

In great fear and distress Jacob divided the people who were with him into two groups, and the flocks and herds and camels as well. He thought, “If Esau comes and attacks one group, the group that is left may escape.”¹⁹

Then Jacob prayed, “O God of my father Abraham, God of my father Isaac, Lord, you who said to me, ‘Go back to your country and your relatives, and I will make you prosper,’ ³¹ I am unworthy of all the kindness and faithfulness you
have shown your servant. I had only my staff when I crossed this Jordan, but now I have become two camps. 11 Save me, I pray, from the hand of my brother Esau, for I am afraid he will come and attack me, and also the mothers with their children. 12 But you have said, ‘I will surely make you prosper and will make your descendants like the sand of the sea, which cannot be counted.’”

13 He spent the night there, and from what he had with him he selected a gift for his brother Esau: 14 two hundred female goats and twenty male goats, two hundred ewes and twenty rams, 15 thirty female camels with their young, forty cows and ten bulls, and twenty female donkeys and ten male donkeys. He put them in the care of his servants, each herd by itself, and said to his servants, “Go ahead of me, and keep some space between the herds.”

17 He instructed the one in the lead: “When my brother Esau meets you and asks, ‘Who do you belong to, and where are you going, and who owns all these animals in front of you?’ then you are to say, ‘They belong to your servant’—Jacob.

They are a gift sent to my lord Esau, and he is coming behind us.’”

19 He also instructed the second, the third and all the others who followed the herds: “You are to say the same thing to Esau when you meet him. 20 And be sure to say, ‘Your servant Jacob is coming behind us.’” For he thought, “I will pacify him with these gifts I am sending on ahead; later, when I see him, perhaps he will receive me.” 21 So Jacob’s gifts went on ahead of him, but he himself spent the night in the camp.

**Jacob Wrestles With God**

22 That night Jacob got up and took his two wives, his two female servants and his eleven sons and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. 23 After he had sent them across the stream, he sent over all his possessions. 24 So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak. 25 When the man saw that he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob’s hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man. 26 Then the man said, “Let me go, for it is daybreak.”

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32:13 a gift. It serves several functions, but above all it indicates to Esau that Jacob is not interested in taking anything that Esau may have inherited.

32:14–15 This gift is generous. It is larger than many towns would have been able to pay in tribute to conquering kings even at later dates. If Esau or his men had plunder on their mind, it saves them the trouble andaquiring kings even at later dates. If Esau or his men had plunder on their mind, it saves them the trouble and makes the trip worth their time and effort. Assyrian sources contain numerous lists of plunder collected in their conquests.

32:24 wrestled with him till daybreak. Jacob was 97 years old at this point, so he could hardly be considered a challenge to an angel in physical terms. When the text tells us that Jacob’s opponent could not overcome him (v. 25), it is not suggesting that Jacob was physically besting the man. The ease with which he inflicted physical damage on Jacob indicates that any ability must have been in the spiritual arena, not the physical one.

One tale from Hittite literature has some intriguing features in the context of a ritual to honor the gods Teshub and Hebat. The goddess speaks something to the king and begins to depart or at least states an intention to do so. The next section has some familiarity:

The king (answers), “Come back!”

The goddess (says) as follows: “If I come back, will you in whatever manner — (such as) with horses and chariots — (strive to) prevail over me? The king (says) as follows, “I shall (strive to) prevail over you.”

The goddess (says) as follows, “Make (then) a wish.”

The king (says) as follows, “Give me life, health, sons (and) daughters in the future, (strong weapons), and put my enemies under my feet.”

Clearly, there is no actual combat here. Common features include only that the human being detains the deity, conveys his intention to prevail, and requests a blessing. The most important common motif to be recognized here is in the human risk in initiating a confrontation (though it never becomes physical) with a divine representative in order to gain audience and receive a blessing. Jacob and the Hittite king were both pursuing the same sort of goal. The Hittite text has been identified as a rite designed to ensure that the gods give powers to the king.

32:25 The “socket” of Jacob’s “hip” is “touched” and as a result is “wrenched” or, more likely, torn or ruptured. Consequently, Jacob limps (v. 31). The Hebrew word for “hip” is the same word translated “thigh” in Ge 24:2,9. In that context there is no mention of the “socket”; instead, Abraham’s servant places his hand “under” the thigh. The Hebrew word translated “thigh/hip” usually refers to flesh or muscle rather than the pelvic bone. It is possible that the Hebrew word refers to the groin area. Verse 31 says that in the morning Jacob is limping — it does not say that he has a limp for the rest of his life. If there were only the description of the injury, a blow to the groin area causing a rupture of the testicles would make the most sense of the language used here, as opposed to a dislocation of the hip joint. Until more linguistic information comes to light, the precise interpretation must remain obscure.

32:26 Then the man said, “Let me go, for it is daybreak.” Three factors to observe — this encounter took place by a river (v. 22), the stranger could be interpreted as fearing daylight, and Jacob clearly believed the wrestler was a supernatural being — together led to a multitude of ingenious mythological explanations about the stranger’s concerns and his nature based on literature from much later times. On the basis of anthropological folklore and Greco-Roman literature, it has been proposed that it was a river demon or a guardian of the fords, a creature of the night who attacked Jacob. The data relevant to comparative studies, however, should not be sought in such literature. It is much more difficult to find in the literature of the ancient Near East examples of river-gods and supernatural
But Jacob replied, “I will not let you go unless you bless me.”  

27The man asked him, “What is your name?”  

“Jacob,” he answered.  

28Then the man said, “Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with humans and have overcome.”  

29Jacob said, “Please tell me your name.”  

But he replied, “Why do you ask my name?” Then he blessed him there.  

30So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, “It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared.”  

31The sun rose above him as he passed Peniel, and he was limping because of his hip.  

32Therefore to this day the Israelites do not eat the tendon attached to the socket of the hip, because the socket of Jacob’s hip was touched near the tendon.

### Jacob Meets Esau

33Jacob looked up and there was Esau, coming with his four hundred men;  

1 so he divided the children among Leah, Rachel and the two female servants.  

2 He put the female servants and their children in front, Leah and her children next, and Rachel and Joseph in the rear.  

3 He himself went on ahead and bowed down to the ground seven times as he approached his brother.  

4 But Esau ran to meet Jacob and embraced him; he threw his arms around his neck and kissed him. And they wept.  

5 Then Esau looked up and saw the women and children. “Who are these with you?” he asked.  

Jacob answered, “They are the children God has graciously given your servant.”  

6 Then the female servants and their children approached and bowed down.  

7 Next, Leah and her children came and bowed down. Last of all came Joseph and Rachel, and they too bowed down.  

8 Esau asked, “What’s the meaning of all these flocks and herds I met?”

To find favor in your eyes, my lord,” he said.  

9 But Esau said, “I already have plenty, my brother. Keep what you have for yourself.”  

10 “No, please!” said Jacob. “If I have found favor in your eyes, accept this gift from me. For to see your face is like seeing the face of God,  

now that you have received me favorably.  

11 Please accept the present that was brought to you, for God has been gracious to me and I have all I need.” And because Jacob insisted, Esau accepted it.  

12 Then Esau said, “Let us be on our way; I’ll accompany you.”  

13 But Jacob said to him, “My lord knows that the children are tender and that I must care for the ewes and cows that are nursing their young. If they are driven hard just one day, all the animals will die.  

14 So let my lord go on ahead of his servant, while I move along slowly at the pace of the flocks and herds before me and the pace of the children, until I come to your lord in Seir.”  

15 Esau said, “Then let me leave some of my men with you.”  

16 “But why do that?” Jacob asked. “Just let me find favor in the eyes of my lord.”  

17 So that day Esau started on his way back to Seir.  

18 Jacob, however, went to Sukkoth, where he built a place for himself and made shelters for his livestock. That is why the place is called Sukkoth.  

19 After Jacob came from Paddan Aram, he arrived safely at the city of Shechem in Canaan and camped within sight of the city.  

20 For a hundred pieces of silver, he bought from the sons of Hamor, the father of Shechem, the plot of ground where he pitched his tent.  

21 There he set up an altar and called it El Elohe Israel.  

beings who cannot be seen in the light of day. There is no shortage of river-gods in the literature of ancient Mesopotamia and Syria and they can be antagonistic, but the idea of these gods attacking humans to prevent their crossing is not attested in the ancient Near East.  

At the end of the episode, Jacob designates the individual as elohim. This word usually is a designation for deity but can be used for any supernatural being. The clearest statement comes from Hos 12:4, where the prophet indicates that Jacob struggled with an angel. Since an angel can legitimately be referred to either as a “man” [v. 24; cf. Da 10:5] or as elohim [cf. Ps 8:5, see NIV text note], Hosea does not contradict either of the statements in Genesis, so it offers the most acceptable solution.  

33:3 bowed down to the ground seven times. This practice is attested protocol used when a vassal has an audience with his superior. Most notably, the petty city-state kings of Canaan speak of themselves acting this way toward the Egyptian pharaoh in the Amarna letters (mid-second millennium BC).

33:19 pieces of silver. The monetary unit referred to here (qesitah) has not been identified. It occurs elsewhere only in Jos 24:32 (a reference back to this passage) and Job 42:11. Neither archaeology nor extra-Biblical literature provides further information. One possibility is that these pieces are not shaped like coins but take some other form. In Egypt at this time rings of silver (known as shat) were used for exchange.
Jacob decided that it was best to inform Esau of his return. He probably assumed that his father had died by now, whereupon Esau had come into the entire inheritance, Jacob’s status or whereabouts having been undetermined. In Jacob’s initial communication, he made three basic points.

1. “I have been staying with Laban and have remained there till now” (Ge 32:4). This implied that he had not been hiding, avoiding Esau, or sneaking around behind his back.
2. “I have cattle and donkeys, sheep and goats, male and female servants” (Ge 32:5). This implied that Jacob was not coming to take anything of Esau’s or trick him out of anything he had acquired.
3. “I am sending this message ... that I may find favor in your eyes” (Ge 32:5). This implied that Jacob was hoping they could put their past behind them.

This was a good start and a worthy gesture that Jacob reasonably expected would succeed. But the answer he received made him ill at ease in its ambiguity, for Esau was coming to meet him with 400 men, and it was unclear whether or not his intentions were friendly.

Jacob’s gift was sufficient for Esau to get a good start on a herding operation of his own or, probably more to the point, to reward any mercenaries in his employ who may have been anticipating plunder. In addition to seeking Esau’s favor as a response to his generosity, Jacob planned three strategic advantages.

1. The five distinct groups of animals arriving in succession would wear down the military readiness of Esau’s band. If they were planning an ambush, they would have to set it up each time a group arrived. When they discovered that Jacob was not in the group, they would all have gathered again and proceeded on their way. After five times it was unlikely that they would be as alert for combat as they might have been at first. By that time Esau and his men would probably have given up the idea of an ambush altogether.
2. As the gifts arrived, Esau became more and more encumbered in his travel. The animals would have forced him to move more slowly and would have made his band much noisier. It would be difficult to take Jacob by surprise given the unavoidable cacophony of the livestock.
3. As Jacob’s servants brought gifts, they joined the march of Esau’s band. Esau’s military tactics would have been less effective if he had to cope with members of Jacob’s household mixed in among his own retinue of soldiers.

Jacob’s Strategy

Dinah and the Shechemites

Now Dinah, the daughter Leah had borne to Jacob, went out to visit the women of the land. When Shechem son of Hamor the Hivite, the ruler of that area, saw her, he took her and raped her. His heart was drawn to Dinah daughter of Jacob; he loved the young woman and spoke tenderly to her. And Shechem said to his father Hamor, “Get me this girl as my wife.” When Jacob heard that his daughter...
Dinah had been defiled, his sons were in the fields with his livestock; so he did nothing about it until they came home.

8Then Shechem’s father Hamor went out to talk with Jacob. 9Meanwhile, Jacob’s sons had come in from the fields as soon as they heard what had happened. They were shocked and furious, because Shechem had done an outrageous thing in Israelb by sleeping with Jacob’s daughter—a thing that should not be done.f

But Hamor said to them, “My son Shechem has his heart set on your daughter. Please give her to him as his wife, and take our daughters and take our daughters for yourselves. 10You can settle among us; 9 the land is open to you. 11Live in it, tradeb in it, and acquire property in it.”

11Then Shechem said to Dinah’s father and brothers, “Let me find favor in your eyes, and I will give you whatever you ask. 12Make the price for the bridet and the gift I am to bring as great as you like, and I’ll pay whatever you ask me. Only give me the young woman as my wife.”

13Because their sister Dinah had been defiled, Jacob’s sons replied deceitfully as they spoke to Shechem and his father Ha-
mor. 14They said to them, “We can’t do such a thing; we can’t give our sister to a man who is not circumcised. That would be a disgrace to us. 15We will enter into an agreement with you on one condition only: that you become like us by circumcising all your males.1 16Then we will give you our daughters and take your daughters for ourselves. We’ll settle among you and become one people with you. 17But if you will not agree to be circumcised, we’ll take our sister and go.”

18Their proposal seemed good to Ha-
mor and his son Shechem. 19The young man, who was the most honored of all his father’s family, lost no time in doing what they said, because he was delight-
ed with Jacob’s daughter.m 20So Hamor and his son Shechem went to the gate of their cityn to speak to the men of their city. 21“These men are friendly toward us,” they said. “Let them live in our land and trade in it; the land has plenty of room for them. We can marry their daughters and they can marry ours. 22But the men will agree to live with us as one people only on the condition that our males be circumcised, as they themselves are. 23Won’t their livestock, their property and all their other an-
imals become ours? So let us agree to their terms, and they will settle among us.”

24All the men who went out of the city gateo agreed with Hamor and his son She-
chem, and every male in the city was cir-
cumcised.

25Three days later, while all of them were still in pain, two of Jacob’s sons, Simeon and Levi, Dinah’s brothers, took their swordsp and attacked the unsuspect-
ing city, killing every male.q 26They put Hamor and his son Shechem to the sword and took Dinah from Shechem’s house and left. 27The sons of Jacob came upon the dead bodies and looted the city where their sister had been defiled. 28They seized their flocks and herds and donkeys and ev-
erything else of theirs in the city and out in the fields. 29They carried off all their wealth and all their women and children, taking as plunder everything in the houses.

30Then Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, “You have brought trouble on me by making me obnoxious to the Canaanites and Perizzites, the people living in this land.s We are few in number, 1 and if they join forces against me and attack me, I and my household will be destroyed.”

31But they replied, “Should he have treated our sister like a prostitute?”

Jacob Returns to Bethel

35 Then God said to Jacob, “Go up to Bethels and settle there, and build an altar there to God, who appeared to you when you were fleeing from your brother Esau.”t

So Jacob said to his householdw and to all who were with him, “Get rid of the foreign godsx you have with you, and purify 7 Or against 10 Or move about freely; also in verse 21 27 Or because

34:29 plunder. Beyond the slaughter of the entire male population, the brothers took all the women and children as well as all the goods in the city as plunder. Presum-
ably the brothers rationalized their conduct by insisting that such is the mandated bride price for the violation of their sister. Nevertheless, the level of brutality is incompre-
hensible and far exceeds the justifiable retribution for the crime of the city’s prince.

35:2 Get rid of the foreign gods. In order to fulfill the vow made to Yahweh in 28:20–22, Jacob commanded se-
veral activities, each with ritual significance. Jacob’s vow had included not only the payment of a tithe, but the promise that Yahweh would be his God. Consequently,
you, and I will give this land to your descendants after you.”

Then come, let us go up to Bethel, where we will build an altar to God, who answered me in the day of my distress and who has been with me wherever I have gone. So they gave Jacob all the foreign gods they had and the rings in their ears, and Jacob buried them under the oak at Shechem. Then they set out, and the terror of God fell on the towns all around them so that no one pursued them.

Jacob and all the people with him came to Luz (that is, Bethel) in the land of Canaan. There he built an altar, and he called the place El Bethel, because it was there that God revealed himself to him when he was fleeing from his brother.

Now Deborah, Rebekah’s nurse, died and was buried under the oak outside Bethel. So it was named Allon Bakuth.

After Jacob returned from Paddan Aram, God appeared to him again and blessed him. God said to him, "Your name is Jacob, but you will no longer be called Jacob; your name will be Israel." So he named him Israel.

And God said to him, "I am God Almighty; I will be fruitful and increase in number. A nation and a community of nations will come from you, and kings will be among your descendants. The land I gave to Abraham and Isaac I also give to you, and I will give this land to your descendants after you." Then God went up from him at the place where he had talked with him.

Jacob set up a stone pillar at the place where God had talked with him, and he poured out a drink offering on it; he also poured oil on it. Jacob called the place where God had talked with him Bethel.

The Deaths of Rachel and Isaac

Then they moved on from Bethel. While they were still some distance from Ephrath, Rachel began to give birth and had great difficulty. And as she was having great difficulty in childbirth, the midwife said to her, "Don’t despair, for you have another son." As she breathed her last—for she was dying—she named her son Ben-Oni. But his father named him Benjamin.

So Rachel died and was buried on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem).

Over her tomb Jacob set up a pillar, and to this day that pillar marks Rachel’s tomb.

He instructed his household to bury all the foreign gods (v. 4), the presence of which was indicative of divided loyalty. Burial was one of the approved methods of discarding images. These were not the household gods Rachel brought with her, for those were not strictly divine images but images of the ancestors (see the article "Household Gods," p. 72). Instead, the buried images were most likely ones plundered from the town of Shechem. This is the first instance in Genesis of disposing of other gods. There has been little discussion thus far in Genesis about the issue of other gods and no clear call to monotheistic belief or practice. But here Jacob makes a statement by his actions, purifying yourselves and changing your clothes. Purification was a normal preparation for ritual activity. Those officiating in rituals often had outfits befitting their position, from the elaborate garments of priests and kings to the linen of assistants. But here the celebrants were directed to change clothes. Some ritual texts, especially those involving the king, portray him putting on clean garments for the king, portraying him putting on clean garments for the ritual. For many celebrants, however, the issue may not be what they are changing into, but what they are changing out of. When work or other activity has sullied one’s clothing, it is appropriate to change clothes in order to avoid ritual impurity. For Jacob’s entourage, this may have been necessitated simply to eliminate the dirt and grime of travel with all the animals, but it could also refer to the residue of the recent massacre at Shechem.

The rings in their ears. The earrings referred to were closely related to the images. Commentators commonly suggest, though tentatively, that earrings in their shape or symbolism may have been quasi-representations of deity themselves. However, archaeology thus far attests no earrings in the shape of deity, but it is speculated that crescent-shaped earrings may have been symbolic representations of the moon-god. Many images in the ancient Near East were adorned with earrings, so in this phrase the pronoun “their” could point to the gods, not to Jacob’s household; i.e., as they disposed of the images, they should not hold back the earrings from the images for themselves.

Ephrath. See note on v. 20.

Rachel’s tomb. The text, geography and traditions all complicate its precise location. Jacob was traveling south from Bethel (v. 16) to arrive eventually in Hebron (v. 27). Specifically they were on the way to Ephrath/Bethlehem (cf. 48:7) and had not yet arrived at Migdal Eder (35:19–21). They were therefore following the main north-south road through the central hill country. From Bethel to Bethlehem is just under 20 miles (32 kilometers) (going through Jerusalem). In 1Sa 10:2 Rachel’s tomb is identified as being at Zelzah on the border of Benjamin (cf. Jer 31:15, which has been interpreted to suggest it was near Ramah, just east of Gibeon, more in the middle of Benjaminite territory). Jerusalem is on Benjamin’s southern border with Judah. Zelzah is unknown other than this reference.

Ephrath” (vv. 16, 19) has multiple references (cf. 1Ch 2:50–51). Besides its association with Bethlehem (see Mic 5:2), it can refer to people from the tribe of Ephraim. The traditional tomb of Rachel today, located outside Bethlehem, does not fit these details. One last wild card is the location of Migdal Eder (v. 21), which unfortunately is unknown, but it may not have helped since it could have been some distance from Rachel’s tomb, just not as far as Hebron.
Israel moved on again and pitched his tent beyond Migdal Eder. While Israel was living in that region, Reuben went in and slept with his father’s concubine Bilhah, and Israel heard of it.

Jacob had twelve sons:

These were the sons of Jacob, who were born to him in Paddan Aram.

27 Jacob came home to his father Isaac in Mamre, near Kiriath Arba (that is, Hebron), where Abraham and Isaac had stayed. Isaac lived a hundred and eighty years. Then he breathed his last and died and was gathered to his people, old and full of years. And his sons Esau and Jacob buried him.

Esau’s Descendants
36:10-14pp — 1Ch 1:35-37
36:20-28pp — 1Ch 1:38-42

36 This is the account of the family line of Esau (that is, Edom). 1 Esau took his wives from the women of Canaan: Adah daughter of Elon the Hittite, and Oholibamah daughter of Anah and granddaughter of Zibeon the Hivite — also Basemath daughter of Ishmael and sister of Nebaioth.

Given all of this information, it is most logical to locate Rachel’s tomb somewhere along the road from Bethel to Jerusalem, but it is difficult to be more precise. 35:22 slept with his father’s concubine. Though this is technically an incestuous act, the offense here was treated more as social usurpation than as sexual immorality. Possession of the concubines that belonged to the head of the clan was presumably a sign of leadership in the clan. When the father died, the care and ownership of the concubines (as part of his property) passed to the next head of the clan. To seize ownership of the concubines prior to the father’s death would be then seen as an act of subversion and disrespect (comparable to seizing land or herds), but would not be unusual if succession to clan leadership were contested. In this context, Reuben’s offense against his father circumvented proper succession procedures and implies that his father was powerless. Beyond clan leadership, Reuben’s act was not necessarily to secure his own position in the clan, but by treating Bilhah (Rachel’s servant) this way, it assured that Leah would assume the place of principal wife (since Rachel had just died). In this sense it was an offense against Bilhah, but again, not just in a sexual sense, but by an act intended to undermine her status in the clan.

36:9 Esau the father of the Edomites. Esau’s descendants lived in Seir (a region between the Dead Sea and the Gulf of Aqaba) and formed, with other elements, the tiny tribal kingdom of Edom. Edom was sparsely settled and virtually no Late Bronze Age (1400–1200 BC) settlements are present. However, people did inhabit the region during the Late Bronze Age, for Egyptian records from about the thirteenth to the tenth centuries BC (Rameses I–III; Merneptah) first mention this territory/people and groups of Shasu (nomads) from Edom/Seir. Shasu parallels Seir in these texts; these nomads are a major part of Edom’s population.

Travel and commerce existed between Egypt and Edom very early. Inhabitants of Edom were probably tent dwellers as well as pastoralists in some sense. Later references to them come from Assyrians and Babylonians. Adadnirari III of Assyria (810–783 BC) was the first one to deal with Edom as a vassal state. Tiglath-Pileser III (744–727 BC) subjugated Edom. Nabonidus nearly destroyed Edom in about 550 BC (Mal 1:1–3), but it grew healthy under Persian rule.

4 Adah bore Eliphaz to Esau, Basemath bore Reuel, and Oholibamah bore Jeush, Jalam and Korah. These were the sons of Esau, who were born to him in Canaan.

6 Esau took his wives and sons and daughters and all the members of his household, as well as his livestock and all his other animals and all the goods he had acquired in Canaan, and moved to a land some distance from his brother Jacob. 7 Their possessions were too great for them to remain together; the land where they were staying could not support them both because of their livestock. So Esau (that is, Edom) settled in the hill country of Seir.

9 This is the account of the family line of Esau the father of the Edomites in the hill country of Seir.

10 These are the names of Esau’s sons: Eliphaz, the son of Esau’s wife Adah, and Reuel, the son of Esau’s wife Basemath.

11 The sons of Eliphaz: Teman, Omar, Zepho, Gatam and Kenaz.

12 Esau’s son Eliphaz also had a concubine named Timna, who bore him Amalek. These were grandsons of Esau’s wife Adah.

13 The sons of Reuel: Nahath, Zerah, Shammah and Mizrah. These were grandsons of Esau’s wife Basemath.

14 The sons of Esau’s wife Oholibamah daughter of Anah and granddaughter of Zibeon, whom she bore to Esau: Jeush, Jalam and Korah.
These were the chiefs among Esau’s descendants:

The sons of Eliphaaz the firstborn of Esau:
Chiefs Teman, Omar, Zepho, Ke-naz, Korah, Gatam and Amalek.
These were the chiefs descended from Eliphaaz in Edom; they were
grandsons of Adah.\(^{2}\)

17 The sons of Esau’s son Reuel:\(^{2}\)
Chiefs Nahath, Zerah, Shammah and Mizzah. These were the chiefs
descended from Reuel in Edom; they were
grandsons of Esau’s wife Basemath.

18 The sons of Esau’s wife Oholibamah:
Chiefs Jeush, Jalam and Korah.
These were the chiefs descended
from Esau’s wife Oholibamah daughter of Anah.

19 These were the sons of Esau (that is, Edom),\(^{8}\) and these were their chiefs.

20 These were the sons of Seir the Horite,\(^{b}\) who were living in the region:
Lotan, Shobal, Zibeon, Anah, Di-shon, Ezer and Dishan. These sons
of Seir in Edom were Horite chiefs.

22 The sons of Lotan:
Hori and Homam.\(^{b}\) Timna was Lo-
tan’s sister.

23 The sons of Shobal:
Alvan, Manahath, Ebal, Shepho and Onam.

24 The sons of Zibeon:
Aiah and Anah. This is the Anah
who discovered the hot springs\(^{e}\) in the
desert while he was grazing the
donkeys of his father Zibeon.

25 The children of Anah:
Dishon and Oholibamah daughter of Anah.

26 The sons of Dishon:\(^{4}\)
Hemdan, Esban, Ithran and Keran.

27 The sons of Ezer:
Bilhan, Zaavan and Akan.

28 The sons of Dishan:
Uz and Aran.

29 These were the Horite chiefs:
Lotan, Shobal, Zibeon, Anah, Di-shon, Ezer and Dishan. These were
the Horite chiefs, according to their divisions, in the land of Seir.

30 These were the kings who reigned in
Edom before any Israelite king\(^{c}\) reigned:

31 Bela son of Beor became king of Edom.
His city was named Dinhabah.\(^{3}\)

32 When Bela died, Jobab son of Zerah
from Bozrah\(^{6}\) succeeded him as king.

33 When Jobab died, Husham from the
land of the Temanites\(^{e}\) succeeded
him as king.

34 When Husham died, Hadad son of Bedad, who defeated Midian in the
country of Moab,\(^{f}\) succeeded him as king. His city was named Avith.

35 When Hadad died, Samlah from Mas-
rekhah succeeded him as king.

36 When Samlah died, Shaul from Rehoboth on the river succeeded him as
king.

37 When Shaul died, Baal-Hanan son of Aker succeeded him as king.

38 When Baal-Hanan son of Aker died,
Hadad\(^{e}\) succeeded him as king. His
city was named Pau, and his wife’s
name was Mehetabel daughter of Matred, the daughter of Me-Zahab.

These were the chiefs descended from
Esau, by name, according to to their clans and regions:
Timna, Alvah, Jetheth, Oholibamah, Elah, Pinon, Kenaz, Teman, Mibzar, Magdiel and Iram. These were
the kings of Edom, according to their settlements in the land they occupied.

This is the family line of Esau, the father of the Edomites.

Joseph’s Dreams

37 Jacob lived in the land where his father had stayed,\(^{9}\) the land of Ca-
naan.\(^{b}\)

This is the account of Jacob’s family line.

Joseph, a young man of seventeen, was tending the flocks\(^{1}\) with his brothers, the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah,\(^{1}\) his
father’s wives, and he brought their father a bad report\(^{1}\) about them.

Now Israel loved Joseph more than any of his other sons,\(^{m}\) because he had

\(^{a}\) Genesis 37:3 ornate robe. An Egyptian tomb painting from the
nineteenth century BC depicts a troupe of Semitic merchants coming down to Egypt. Some of the men are wear-
ing colorful knee-length, sleeveless garments. We do not
know whether this was the type of garment Jacob gave
Joseph, but it gives an idea of the fashions of the gen-
eral period. A fresco from Mari (eighteenth century BC)
portrays priests dressed in garments made of rectangular
been born to him in his old age; and he made an ornate robe for him. When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of them, they hated him and could not speak a kind word to him.

5Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers, they hated him all the more. 6He said to them, "Listen to this dream I had: We were binding sheaves of grain out in the field when suddenly my sheaf rose and stood upright, while your sheaves gathered around mine and bowed down to it." 7His brothers said to him, "Do you intend to reign over us? Will you actually rule us?" And they hated him all the more because of his dream and what he had said.

8Then he had another dream, and he told it to his brothers. "Listen," he said, "I had another dream, and this time the sun and moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me."

9When he told his father as well as his brothers, 10his father rebuked him and said, "What is this dream you had? Will your mother and I and your brothers actually come and bow down to the ground before you?" 11His brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the matter in mind.

Joseph Sold by His Brothers
12Now his brothers had gone to graze their father’s flocks near Shechem, 13and Israel said to Joseph, "As you know, your brothers are grazing the flocks near Shechem. Come, I am going to send you to them."

"Very well," he replied. 14So he said to him, "Go and see if all is well with your brothers and with the flocks, and bring word back to me."

Then he sent him off from the Valley of Hebron. When Joseph arrived at Shechem, 15a man found him wandering around in the fields and asked him, "What are you looking for?"

16He replied, "I’m looking for my brothers. Can you tell me where they are grazing their flocks?"

17"They have moved on from here," the man answered. "I heard them say, ‘Let’s go to Dothan.’"

So Joseph went after his brothers and found them near Dothan. 18But they saw him in the distance, and before he reached them, they plotted to kill him. 19"Here comes that dreamer!" they said to each other. 20"Come now, let’s kill him so it will be seen that it was Sargon who was going to die rather than the king. This demonstrates how even fairly transparent dreams could be reinterpreted to suit the desires of one party or another. Joseph’s dream indicated not the death of his brothers, but simply their subordination to him. There was nothing in the dream that led them to consider that Joseph’s eventual prominence would extend beyond the confines of the family, for only his family members bowed down to him in the dream. It would not have occurred to any of them that Joseph would rise to the position of second-in-command of a dominant world power.

Both in Sargon’s and Joseph’s dreams the dreamer’s life was in jeopardy as those who would have been supplanted in his rise to authority sought to prevent the fulfillment of that dream by eliminating the one marked for ascendancy. Of course, there is no reason to think of literary dependence here, only to observe the common motifs that reflect widespread human experience.

A curious feature of the second dream (vv. 9–10) is the symbolic presence of Joseph’s mother and all 11 brothers. This is odd in that his mother had previously died giving birth to her second son. The inclusion of Joseph’s parents is of significance here, because it indicates that the message of the dream did not just suggest that Joseph would be first among his brothers (in which case it would be similar to the patriarchal blessings found in 9:26; 27:29), but that Joseph would rise to prominence in the entire ancestral line, superseding his parents in significance. This justifies the inclusion of family members living or dead. Another option is that — since Joseph was still less than ten years old when his mother died, and therefore Rachel’s handmaid, Bilhah, had been a surrogate mother to Joseph and Benjamin — the dream perhaps referred to Bilhah.

pieces of cloth of various colors sewn together into a long strip that is then wrapped around the body seven or eight turns from the ankles up to the chest and then draped over one shoulder. Various types of clothing communicated rank and status in society. In the ancient world the fabrics, ornamentation, colors, length and hem all played a role in indicating the position of the wearer. Undoubtedly Joseph’s coat designated authority as well as favor, but little more can be said because the Hebrew word for "ornate" occurs only here (also in vv. 23,32) and in the passage describing Tamar’s cloak (2Sa 13:18;19). No cognates from comparative Semitic languages offer any confident clarification. The traditional interpretation of a coat of many colors goes back to the Greek and Latin translations of the OT (though now abandoned in many scholarly circles). Most commentators favor something more along the line of a full-length coat or a long-sleeved coat, reflected in Aquila’s Greek translation in the second century AD.
and throw him into one of these cisterns and say that a ferocious animal devoured him. Then we’ll see what comes of his dreams.”b

21When Reuben heard this, he tried to rescue him from their hands. “Let’s not take his life,” he said. c 22“Don’t shed any blood. Throw him into this cistern here in the wilderness, but don’t lay a hand on him.” Reuben said this to rescue him from them and take him back to his father.

23So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe—the ornate robe he was wearing—and they took him up out of the cistern and threw him into the cistern. d The cistern was empty; there was no water in it.

24As they sat down to eat their meal, they looked up and saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead. Their camels were loaded with spices, balm and myrrh, e and they were on their way to take them down to Egypt. f

26Judah said to his brothers, “What will we gain if we kill our brother and cover up his blood? g 27Come, let’s sell him to the Ishmaelites and not lay our hands on him; after all, he is our brother, h our own flesh and blood.” His brothers agreed.

28So when the Midianite i merchants came by, his brothers pulled Joseph up out of the cistern and sold him for twenty shekels j of silver to the Ishmaelites, who took him to Egypt. k

29When Reuben returned to the cistern and saw that Joseph was not there, he tore his clothes. l 30He went back to his brothers and said, “The boy isn’t there! Where can I turn now?” m

31Then they got Joseph’s robe, m slaughtered a goat and dipped the robe in the blood. n They took the ornate robe back to their father and said, “We found this. Examine it to see whether it is your son’s robe.”

33He recognized it and said, “It is my son’s robe! Some ferocious animal o has devoured him. Joseph has surely been torn to pieces.” p

34Then Jacob tore his clothes, p put on sackcloth q and mourned for his son many days. r 35All his sons and daughters came to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted. “No,” he said, “I will continue to mourn until I join my son in the grave.” s

36So his father wept for him.

36Meanwhile, the Midianites t sold Joseph in Egypt to Potiphar, one of Pharaoh’s officials, the captain of the guard. u

Judah and Tamar

38At that time, Judah left his brothers and went down to stay with a man of Adullam named Hirah. v There Judah met the daughter of a Canaanite man named Shua. w He married her and made love to her; x she became pregnant and gave birth to a son, who was named Er. y 3She conceived again and gave birth to a son and named him Onan. z She gave birth to still another son and named him Shelah. a It was at Kezib that she gave birth to him.

6Judah got a wife for Er, his firstborn, and her name was Tamar. b But Er, Judah’s firstborn, was wicked in the Lord’s sight; c so the Lord put him to death. d

Then Judah said to Tamar, “Sleep with your brother’s wife and fulfill your duty

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37:20 cisterns. Where wells could not be dug and precipitation was sufficient, cisterns were constructed to catch rain and runoff during the wet season to provide some supply for the dry season. The area of Dothan averages 24–28 inches (60–70 centimeters) of rainfall annually; thus, if 20 percent of the runoff from a half-acre (one-hectare) field could be caught and stored, about 5,000 sheep could be supplied with water for the year. As one can imagine, water collected in cisterns easily became stagnant. It was not unusual for dry cisterns to be miry at the bottom, because the runoff would carry sediment. But if it were maintained for constant use, it would have been cleaned out regularly. The region of Dothan features limestone, which is porous, and thus cisterns were coated on the inside with plaster (a procedure documented in the Early Bronze and Middle Bronze periods [e.g., at Taanach and Megiddo, respectively]) to prevent absorption of the water.

37:25 caravan of Ishmaelites. The text refers to both Ishmaelites and Midianites, kinfolk both descended from Abraham (Midianites through Keturah, 25:1–2; Ishmaelites through Hagar, 16:15). The forebears of these two peoples were half brothers to one another (and to Isaac), and uncles to Jacob; thus, these traders are second or third cousins to Joseph and his brothers. Both clans occupied the Arabian Desert region. spices, balm and myrrh. The goods that the caravan was transporting were common commodities for trade. Myrrh was imported from southern Arabia and must have come by caravan up the Incense Road, which traversed the west coast of Arabia to the King’s Highway, which led north-south through Transjordan (east of the Jordan Valley) to Damascus. Perhaps the Ishmaelites purchased this myrrh and other spices from the Arabian caravans passing through Gilead on the King’s Highway and then added to their shipment some of the balm that was native to that region to make their trip down to Egypt.

37:28 twenty shekels of silver. The going rate for a slave in the mid-second millennium BC. Examples from Hammurapi, Mari, and a variety of Old Babylonian documents support this. In contrast, prices in southern Mesopotamia about 2000 BC were 10 shekels and by the time of Nuzi and Ugarit (fourteenth and thirteenth centuries BC) the price was more like 30 shekels. By the time we get into the first millennium BC, the going rate was 50 shekels, and by the Persian period, 80 to 100 shekels was common.

38:8 fulfill your duty to her as a brother-in-law. The custom of levirate marriage mandated that if a man died without
to her as a brother-in-law to raise up offspring for your brother.” 8 But Onan knew that the child would not be his; so whenever he slept with his brother’s wife, he spilled his semen on the ground to keep from providing offspring for his brother. 9 What he did was wicked in the Lord’s sight; so the Lord put him to death also. 10 Judah then said to his daughter-in-law Tamar, “Live as a widow in your father’s household until my son Shelah grows up.” 11 For he thought, “He may die too, just like his brothers.” So Tamar went to live in her father’s household.

12 After a long time Judah’s wife, the daughter of Shua, died. When Judah had recovered from his grief, he went up to Timnah, to the men who were shearing his sheep, and his friend Hirah the Adullamite went with him.

13 When Tamar was told, “Your father-in-law is on his way to Timnah to shear his sheep,” 14 she took off her widow’s clothes, covered herself with a veil to disguise herself, and then sat down at the entrance to Enaim, which is on the road to Timnah. For she saw that, though Shelah had now grown up, she had not been given to him as his wife.

15 When Judah saw her, he thought she was a prostitute, for she had covered her face. 16 Not realizing that she was his daughter-in-law, 17 he went over to her by the roadside and said, “Come now, let me sleep with you.”

“And what will you give me to sleep with you?” she asked.

17 “I’ll send you a young goat from my flock,” he said.

“Will you give me something as a pledge until you send it?” she asked.

18 He said, “What pledge should I give you?”

“Your seal and its cord, and the staff in your hand,” she answered. So he gave them to her and slept with her, and she

were often associated with temples. Other groups (e.g., the harrimtu) were associated with female deities, had no regulating codes, and were uncontrolled sexually. The latter typically operated from the tavern and acted for pay. Tamar is referred to by two separate terms in this chapter. In v. 15 Judah considered her a zonah, the normal Hebrew word for “prostitute” (used also in v. 24). He reached this conclusion not because her face was veiled (that detail is given to explain why he did not recognize her — usually prostitutes were unveiled), but because she had stationed herself by the road as a prostitute would. But when Judah sent his friend to look for her, the friend inquired concerning the qedeshah (vv. 21 — 22, NIV “shrine prostitute”).

This latter term is used only two other times in the OT (Dt 23:8; Hos 4:14). Ugaritic texts list women similarly labeled (qds) among the temple personnel, and Akkadian literature attests those who were dedicated for life to serve the temple with a cognate term (qadishu). These shrine functionaries were not by definition prostitutes — they had other, legitimate roles. But in practice, it may not have been uncommon for them to engage in prostitution. By inquiring after the qedeshah Judah’s friend concealed the specifics in ambiguity — there may have been a number of reasons a gift would be brought to a shrine functionary.

38:18 seal … cord … staff. In the ancient world legal identification was not by signature or specially assigned numbers as today. The seal was the most common form of identification. In Mesopotamia inscribed cylinders were used (and often worn around the neck), whereas in the rest of the ancient world scarab or stamp seals were carved in intaglio on disk-shaped bits of stone (the size of a small coin), usually decorated with some sort of simple picture and occasionally with the individual’s name and/or position. These were often pierced so as to be worn somewhere on the body, often around the neck on a cord, preferably referred to in this verse. Stamp seals are attested as early as the seventh-millennium BC Neolithic period. Cylinder seals made their appearance in the early fourth millennium BC. The staff that Judah left with Tamar must have also been distinctive and capable of identifying the owner. One possibility is that it was a staff that designated the head of the family (cf. Nu 17:2). Akkadian
A number of possible motives or anticipated results may underlie this custom, and the issue is still disputed. Alternative and not unrelated possibilities include provision of an heir, protection of the family holdings and/or dowry, or caring for the widow. Information from the ancient Near East comes from family documents from Emar as well as Hittite laws and Middle Assyrian laws.

Care for the widow cannot be seen as the sole motive, for then the legislation would simply mandate that the dead husband’s family care for her. It is also unlikely that the retention and benefit of the dowry was the sole motivation, for then the new husband (the brother) would have much to gain and would hardly view the task as an unpleasant duty. The primary beneficiary of the practice must therefore be considered to be the dead husband rather than the surviving family. However, it is not simply for the memory of the dead husband that an heir must be born, but so that the deceased might be provided with an heir to his estate. If the land has been forfeited, the relative must redeem it for the widow and then produce an heir to whom to pass it.

It should be pointed out that the law pertains when brothers are living together (cf. Dt 25:5). This refers to a situation in which the inheritance has not yet been divided. In such a case, if one brother dies, each of the others would receive a larger share. Three circumstances call for the invoking of the levirate rule: (1) the father is alive and the brothers are still living in his house; (2) the father is dead but the inheritance has not yet been divided; (3) the land has been alienated and the levir must redeem it.

None of the ancient Near Eastern material reflects identical circumstances, but shows that concern for the central issues was shared across the ancient world.

Levirate marriage was practiced at Ugarit, at least at the royal level of society (c. 1345–1336 BC), with reference to the childless Arhalba and his brother Niqmepa. Hittite laws and possibly laws at Nuzi recognized this marriage practice. In Hittite law a widowed wife could, if necessary, marry her brother-in-law, her father-in-law, or the son of her brother-in-law.

In some Hittite and Assyrian laws the issue is not whether the deceased had sons, but rather the need to support the widow in whom the father had a large investment through the bride price. More recent textual finds from Emar emphasize the desire of legislation like this to keep property within the family. Concern for the preservation of seed and inheritance is found late into the time of Ptolemy II Philadelphus (273/272 BC).

In the more ancient Middle Assyrian laws the wife of a son who died could be given by the son’s father to another of his sons, even if the other son were betrothed to someone else but not yet married. But if the father of that betrothed daughter did not agree to this, the father of the deceased son could still proceed as planned and give the betrothed bride to his son. Or he could withdraw from the entire process. If a betrothed daughter died before the marriage, her father could give his prospective son-in-law another daughter, or the betrothed groom could withdraw.

If a wife’s husband died while they were living in her father’s house, if she had borne no children, her father-in-law could marry her to the son of his choice, or she could be given in marriage by her father to her father-in-law. This option was not permitted in Israel (cf. Ge 38:26). If her husband and father-in-law both died, she became a widow and was free to do as she pleased. If the wife had borne children, she was free to live in a house for her and her son in her father’s household. ♦
became pregnant by him. After she left, she took off her veil and put on her widow’s clothes again.

20 Meanwhile Judah sent the young goat by his friend the Adullamite in order to get his pledge back from the woman, but he did not find her. 21 He asked the men who lived there, “Where is the shrine prostitute who was beside the road at Enaim?”

22 “There hasn’t been any shrine prostitute here,” they said.

23 So he went back to Judah and said, “I didn’t find her. Besides, the men who lived there said, ‘There hasn’t been any shrine prostitute here.’”

24 Then Judah said, “Let her keep what she has, or we will be laughingskirt. After all, I did send her this young goat, but you didn’t find her.”

25 About three months later Judah was told, “Your daughter-in-law Tamar is guilty of prostitution, and as a result she is now pregnant.”

Judah said, “Bring her out and have her burned to death!”

26 As she was being brought out, she sent a message to her father-in-law, “I am pregnant by the man who owns these,” she said. And she added, “See if you recognize whose seal and cord and staff these are.”

27 Judah recognized them and said, “She is more righteous than I, k since I wouldn’t give her to my son Shelah.” And he did not sleep with her again.

28 When the time came for her to give birth, there were twin boys in her womb. 29 As she was giving birth, one of them put out his hand; so the midwife took a scarlet thread and tied it on his wrist and said, “This one came out first.” 30 But when he drew back his hand, his brother came out, and she said, “So this is how you have broken out!” And he was named Perez. 31 Then his brother, who had the scarlet thread on his wrist, came out. And he was named Zerah.

Joseph and Potiphar’s Wife

39 Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt. Potiphar, an Egyptian who was one of Pharaoh’s officials, the captain of the guard, bought him from the Ishmaelites who had taken him there.

2 The Lord was with Joseph so that he prospered, and he lived in the house of the Egyptian master. 3 When his master saw that the Lord was with him and that the Lord gave him success in everything he did, 4 Joseph found favor in his eyes and became his attendant. Potiphar put him in charge of his household, and he entrusted to his care everything he owned.

5 From the time he put him in charge of his household and of all that he owned, the Lord blessed the household of the Egyptian because of Joseph. The blessing of the Lord was on everything Potiphar had, both in the house and in the field. 6 So Potiphar left everything he had in Joseph’s care; with Joseph in charge, he did not concern himself with anything except the food he ate.

Now Joseph was well-built and handsome, and after a while his master’s wife took notice of Joseph and said, “Come to bed with me!”

8 But he refused. “With me in charge,” he told her, “my master does not concern himself with anything in the house; everything he owns has been entrusted to my care. 9 No one is greater in this house than I am. My master has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?” 10 And though she spoke to Joseph day after day, he refused to go to bed with her or even be with her.

11 One day he went into the house to attend to his duties, and none of the household servants was inside. 12 She caught him by his cloak and said, “Come to bed with me!” But he left his cloak in her hand and ran out of the house.

13 When she saw that he had left his cloak in her hand and had run out of the house, 14 she called her household servants. “Look,” she said to them, “this Hebrew has been brought to us to make sport of us! He came in here to sleep with me, but I screamed. 15 When he heard me scream for help, he left his cloak beside me and ran out of the house.”

16 She kept his cloak beside her until his master came home. 17 Then she told her husband, “A Hebrew slave from the house of my master ran in here.

h</ref>attu is used for the scepter of a king, but also for the shepherd’s staff and the staff that serves as the insignia of office for important people. It seems that the top of the staff was often engraved.

38:24 Have her burned to death! It was a fact of life and society that sometimes widows were forced into (either regular or occasional) prostitution in order to live. Yet it was still unacceptable behavior and was punished severely. The punishment of burning is rare and reserved for the most serious of sexual crimes (cf. Lev 20:14; 21:9 for the only other Biblical occurrences). In ancient Near Eastern legal texts, burning is likewise a rare punishment, but used in similar circumstances: for a naditu (see note on v. 15) who opens a tavern or enters a tavern to drink beer, and for incest with one’s mother. This was a most serious punishment since it probably precluded proper burial.

38:25 The expression is used of the heads of the two goats with which the Israelites sacrificed in order to determine which was the sacrifice to God because of guilt and which was to be sacrificed for guilt and atonement (Ge 37:25; Ps 105:17).

38:26 The expression is used of the heads of the two goats with which the Israelites sacrificed in order to determine which was the sacrifice to God because of guilt and which was to be sacrificed for guilt and atonement (Ge 37:25; Ps 105:17).

38:27 The expression is used of the heads of the two goats with which the Israelites sacrificed in order to determine which was the sacrifice to God because of guilt and which was to be sacrificed for guilt and atonement (Ge 37:25; Ps 105:17).

38:28 The expression is used of the heads of the two goats with which the Israelites sacrificed in order to determine which was the sacrifice to God because of guilt and which was to be sacrificed for guilt and atonement (Ge 37:25; Ps 105:17).

38:29 The expression is used of the heads of the two goats with which the Israelites sacrificed in order to determine which was the sacrifice to God because of guilt and which was to be sacrificed for guilt and atonement (Ge 37:25; Ps 105:17).

38:30 The expression is used of the heads of the two goats with which the Israelites sacrificed in order to determine which was the sacrifice to God because of guilt and which was to be sacrificed for guilt and atonement (Ge 37:25; Ps 105:17).

38:31 The expression is used of the heads of the two goats with which the Israelites sacrificed in order to determine which was the sacrifice to God because of guilt and which was to be sacrificed for guilt and atonement (Ge 37:25; Ps 105:17).

38:32 The expression is used of the heads of the two goats with which the Israelites sacrificed in order to determine which was the sacrifice to God because of guilt and which was to be sacrificed for guilt and atonement (Ge 37:25; Ps 105:17).

38:33 The expression is used of the heads of the two goats with which the Israelites sacrificed in order to determine which was the sacrifice to God because of guilt and which was to be sacrificed for guilt and atonement (Ge 37:25; Ps 105:17).

38:34 The expression is used of the heads of the two goats with which the Israelites sacrificed in order to determine which was the sacrifice to God because of guilt and which was to be sacrificed for guilt and atonement (Ge 37:25; Ps 105:17).

38:35 The expression is used of the heads of the two goats with which the Israelites sacrificed in order to determine which was the sacrifice to God because of guilt and which was to be sacrificed for guilt and atonement (Ge 37:25; Ps 105:17).

38:36 The expression is used of the heads of the two goats with which the Israelites sacrificed in order to determine which was the sacrifice to God because of guilt and which was to be sacrificed for guilt and atonement (Ge 37:25; Ps 105:17).

38:37 The expression is used of the heads of the two goats with which the Israelites sacrificed in order to determine which was the sacrifice to God because of guilt and which was to be sacrificed for guilt and atonement (Ge 37:25; Ps 105:17).

38:38 The expression is used of the heads of the two goats with which the Israelites sacrificed in order to determine which was the sacrifice to God because of guilt and which was to be sacrificed for guilt and atonement (Ge 37:25; Ps 105:17).

38:39 The expression is used of the heads of the two goats with which the Israelites sacrificed in order to determine which was the sacrifice to God because of guilt and which was to be sacrificed for guilt and atonement (Ge 37:25; Ps 105:17).
him this story; d “That Hebrew slave you brought us came to me to make sport of me. 18 But as soon as I screamed for help, he left his cloak beside me and ran out of the house.”

19 When his master heard the story his wife told him, saying, “This is how your slave treated me,” he burned with anger. 20 Joseph’s master took him and put him in prison, the place where the king’s prisoners were confined.

But while Joseph was there in the prison, the Lord was with him; he showed him kindness and granted him favor in the eyes of the prison warden. 22 So the warden put Joseph in charge of all those held in the prison, and he was made responsible for all that was done there. 23 The warden paid no attention to anything under Joseph’s care, because the Lord was with Joseph and gave him success in whatever he did.

The Cupbearer and the Baker

Some time later, the cupbearer and the baker of the king of Egypt offended their master, the king of Egypt. 2 Pharaoh was angry with his two officials, the chief cupbearer and the chief baker, and put them in custody in the house of the captain of the guard, in the same prison where Joseph was confined. 4 The captain of the guard assigned them to Joseph, and he attended them.

After they had been in custody for some time, each of the two men—the cupbearer and the baker of the king of Egypt, who were being held in prison—had a dream the same night, and each dream had a meaning of its own.

40:5 Each dream had a meaning of its own. Dreams were considered important vehicles of divine communication in the ancient world (see note on 37:5). Trained specialists interpreted the dreams of important people and paying customers using “dream books,” compiled both in Egypt and Mesopotamia. These books were consulted for the meaning of symbols in dreams. The Egyptian books typically indicate that a particular element in the dream is good or bad. Mesopotamian dream books offer ritual remedies. The specialists depended on this literature because the gods did not reveal the interpretation of the dreams. Joseph, however, has no knowledge of the “science” and no access to the literature; he relies on God for the interpretation of the dream. The interpretation he offers nevertheless uses principles well known from the literature. For instance, the idea that the number of items indicates the number of days/years (vv. 12, 18) has precedent in the literature. The symbols in these dreams are similar to some of those found in the dream books. A full goblet (v. 11), e.g., is indicative of having a name and offspring. Carrying fruit on one’s head (cf. v. 16) is indicative of sorrow.

40:2 The chief cupbearer and the chief baker. Though these titles may in part be ceremonial, these two men had overall responsibility for what was served to the king. The potential for assassination attempts through the king’s food and drink was real and constant, so these officials not only needed to be incorruptible themselves, but also had to be able to hire people above reproach and identify attempts at infiltration of the staff by enemies of the king. The text is silent concerning their offense, but since both were responsible for meals it seems logical to speculate that the king may have gotten sick from a meal.

40:17 When Joseph came to them the next morning, he saw that they were deserted. 18 So he asked Pharaoh’s officials who were in custody with him in his master’s house, “Why do you look so sad today?”

8 We both had dreams,” they answered, “but there is no one to interpret them.” Then Joseph said to them, “Do not interpret the dreams yourselves.”

9 So the chief cupbearer told Joseph his dream. He said to him, “In my dream I saw a vine in front of me, 10 and on the vine were three branches. As soon as it budded, it blossomed, and its clusters ripened into grapes. 11 Pharaoh’s cup was in my hand, and I took the grapes, squeezed them into Pharaoh’s cup and put the cup in his hand.”

12 “This is what it means,” Joseph said to him. “The three branches are three days. 13 Within three days Pharaoh will lift up your head and restore you to your position, and you will put Pharaoh’s cup in his hand, just as you used to do when you were his cupbearer. 14 But when all goes well with you, remember me and show me kindness; 15 mention me to Pharaoh and get me out of this prison. 16 I was forcibly carried off from the land of the Hebrews, and even here I have done nothing to deserve being put in a dungeon.”

17 When the chief baker saw that Joseph had given a favorable interpretation, he said to Joseph, “I too had a dream: On my head were three baskets of bread.a 18 In the top basket were all kinds of baked goods
for Pharaoh, but the birds were eating them out of the basket on my head.”

18 “This is what it means,” Joseph said. “The three baskets are three days. With in three days Pharaoh will lift off your head and impale your body on a pole. And the birds will eat away your flesh.”

20 Now the third day was Pharaoh’s birthday, and he gave a feast for all his officials.

He lifted up the heads of the chief cupbearer and the chief baker in the presence of his officials: 21 He restored the chief cupbearer to his position, so that he once again put the cup into Pharaoh’s hand— but he impaled the chief baker, just as Joseph had said to them in his interpretation. 23 The chief cupbearer, however, did not remember Joseph; he forgot him.

40:20 Pharaoh’s birthday. No evidence for celebrations surrounding the birthday of a pharaoh is known until the first millennium BC. The day of birth may refer to the anniversary of his accession or coronation as king (cf. Ps 2:7), for which there is evidence as early as the Sixth Dynasty (second half of the third millennium).

40:22 Impaled the chief baker. The Hebrew verb used here refers to being hanged. Hanging in the ancient world was generally not a means of execution, but an additional indignity in the treatment of a corpse. The corpse would be hung in some way (often impaled on a stick) to be devoured by insects, birds, and animals of prey. Here the execution was carried out by beheading (v. 19; cf. 1Sa 31:9–10) and then the body was hung out to be devoured.
Pharaoh's Dreams

41 When two full years had passed, Pharaoh had a dream: He was standing by the Nile, when out of the river there came up seven cows, sleek and fat, and they grazed among the reeds. After them, seven other heads of grain, ugly and gaunt, came up out of the Nile and stood beside those on the riverbank. And the cows that were ugly and gaunt ate up the seven sleek, fat cows. Then Pharaoh woke up.

3He fell asleep again and had a second dream: Seven heads of grain, healthy and good, were growing on a single stalk. After them, seven other heads of grain sprouted—thin and scorched by the east wind. The thin heads of grain swallowed up the seven healthy, full heads. Then Pharaoh woke up; it had been a dream.

4In the morning his mind was troubled, so he sent for all the magicians and wise men of Egypt. Pharaoh told them his dreams, but no one could interpret them for him.

5Then the chief cupbearer said to Pharaoh, “Today I am reminded of my short-comings. Pharaoh was once angry with

41:1 Pharaoh. It is impossible (given the insufficient data) to identify the pharaoh of the Joseph story, who throughout is simply called “Pharaoh.” The term “Pharaoh” (= “great house”) originally referred to the palace and is not attested as a designation for the king of Egypt until the fifteenth century BC. Even then, for the next 500 years or so it was not used with the name of the king, but stood alone as here and in Exodus. It is not until the tenth century BC that it is used in combination with a personal name. The general chronology locates Joseph in the period known as the Middle Kingdom (first quarter of second millennium BC) or the Second Intermediate Period (second quarter of the second millennium BC). Those who feel that a precise chronology can be derived from the Biblical record place Joseph in the reign of Amenemhet II or Senusret (Sesostris) II or III. a dream. A king’s dream is always of special import, and he customarily employed dream specialists to interpret the dream and offer advice as to how to proceed. It was of particular importance if a dream were repeated, and a number of examples are known from the literature. Just as Pharaoh had a double dream here, Gudea, king of Lagash (around 2000 BC), had a double dream concerning the building of a temple. In a Mari letter, the king is warned twice (given to someone else on consecutive nights) that he should not rebuild a temple in Teraq. In the Gilgamesh Epic at the end of tablet 1, Gilgamesh has a double dream about his upcoming encounter with Enkidu. In tablet 4 he has a sequence of five dreams concerning the upcoming encounter with the guardian, Huwawa. In the Babylonian “Poem of the Righteous Sufferer” (Ludlul bel Nemeqi), the sufferer receives three dreams informing him that he has been cleansed from his offense. In these examples multiple dreams give warning (Mari), inform concerning the future (Gilgamesh), and offer absolution (“Righteous Sufferer”). Pharaoh’s dreams contain the first two of these.

41:8 magicians and wise men. “Magicians” (hartummin) is a technical term that refers to the specialists centered in the “House of Life,” where the dream interpretation manuals were stored and studied. This term is constructed from an Egyptian title referring to a chief lector priest (hry-tp hry-hb). This same term is used in late (Ptolemaic) literature to describe Inhotep, the famous Egyptian architect from the Third Dynasty (middle of the third millennium BC) who was also the high priest of Heliopolis. Another famous Egyptian lector priest was the prophet Neferti, who rehearses the troubled times of the First Intermediate Period at the end of the third millennium BC.

Egyptians, like the Mesopotamians and Hittites, had guilds of magicians whose tasks included both medicinal procedures and oneromancy (divination based upon dreams). They used exorcism to frighten away gods and demons, and used incantations and curses to transfer evil to or from someone or somewhere. Thousands of texts have been discovered containing protection spells, as well as objects such as amulets, dolls, incantation bowls and figurines (and the recipes to create them), which were used in magical rituals. Mesopotamians distinguished between “black” (harmful) and “white” (helpful) magic, and thus practitioners were divided into “sorcerers” and “magicians”/“wise men,” respectively, but Egyptians did not draw this distinction. Although their primary task was medical, Egyptian magicians sometimes employed a less respectful manner toward the gods, including spells to help a soul escape the underworld as seen in the “Book of the Dead.”

It is unusual in Egypt for Pharaoh to be in need of a dream interpreter. Pharaoh was considered divine, so when the gods communicated with him through dreams, the meaning should have been obvious.

41:14 shaved. As Egyptian monuments certify, male Egyptians were characteristically clean-shaven and at times shaved their heads as well (bald or close-cropped), though they would then at times wear wigs made of human hair. The text here is unclear concerning the extent to which Joseph was shaved.
among the reeds. 19 After them, seven other cows came up—scrawny and very ugly and lean. I had never seen such ugly cows in all the land of Egypt. 20 The lean, ugly cows ate up the seven fat cows that came up first. 21 But even after they ate them, no one could tell that they had done so; they looked just as ugly as before. Then I woke up.

22 “In my dream I saw seven heads of grain, full and good, growing on a single stalk. 23 After them, seven other heads sprouted—withered and thin and scorched by the east wind. 24 The thin heads of grain swallowed up the seven good heads. I told this to the magicians, but none of them could explain it to me.”

25 Then Joseph said to Pharaoh, “The dreams of Pharaoh are one and the same. God has revealed to Pharaoh what he is about to do. 26 The seven good cowsa are seven years, and the seven good heads of grain are seven years; it is one and the same dream. 27 The seven lean, ugly cows that came up afterward are seven years, and so are the seven worthless heads of grain scorched by the east wind: They are seven years of famine.”

28 “It is just as I said to Pharaoh: God has shown Pharaoh what he is about to do. 29 Seven years of great abundance are coming throughout the land of Egypt, but seven years of famine will follow them. Then all the abundance in Egypt will be forgotten, and the famine will ravage the land.”

31 The abundance in the land will not be remembered, because the famine that follows it will be so severe. 32 The reason the dream was given to Pharaoh in two forms is that the matter has been firmly decided by God, and God will do it soon. 33 “And now let Pharaoh look for a discerning and wise man y and put him in charge of the land of Egypt. 34 Let Pharaoh appoint commissioners over the land to take a fifth of the harvest of Egypt during the seven years of abundance. 35 They should collect all the food of these good years that are coming and store up the grain under the authority of Pharaoh, to be kept in the cities for food. 36 This food should be held in reserve for the country, to be used during the seven years of famine that will come upon Egypt, so that the country may not be ruined by the famine.”

37 The plan seemed good to Pharaoh and to all his officials. 38 So Pharaoh asked them, “Can we find anyone like this man, one in whom is the spirit of God?”

39 Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, “Since God has made all this known to you, there is no one so discerning and wise as you. 40 You shall be in charge of my palace, and all my people are to submit to your orders. Only with respect to the throne will I be greater than you.”

Joseph in Charge of Egypt

41 So Pharaoh said to Joseph, “I hereby put you in charge of the whole land...”

41:27 seven years of famine. Extended famines were known in Egypt. If the nineteenth century BC is the time period of Joseph, it may be of interest that there is evidence of massive irrigation projects in the Fayum area designed to reclaim additional land for farming (probably during the reign of Senusret II). It might also be noted that during the reign of Amenemhet III around 1800 BC, a number of years showed record highs of the Nile during the inundation (reaching as high as 16 feet [5 meters]), but in succeeding years it declined markedly so that ten years later it was only 1.5 feet (0.5 meters). Either of these events could conceivably be related to the system suggested and administered by Joseph, though there is no conclusive evidence to support such a connection.

41:34 appoint commissioners. In Egypt as well as in the rest of the ancient Near East, incantations were generally used to avoid the negative consequences portended by dreams. Here, in contrast, Joseph offers a strategy to counteract the effect of the dream. In the nineteenth century BC, Senusret III is known for reducing the power of the nomarchs (provincial governors) to restore a more centralized government. In the process a new “bureau of the vizier” and a new bureaucracy were established involving new commissioners. Again, there is no evidence to associate this with Joseph, but it demonstrates that periodic modifications in the bureaucracy were not uncommon.

41:40 in charge of my palace. Pharaoh’s initial appointment gives Joseph authority in the palace based on the recognition of the Spirit of God in Joseph (v. 38). The combination of insight (indicated by the dream interpretation) and wisdom (indicated by the proposed strategy) were sufficient to conclude that Joseph enjoyed divine favor—a good reason to keep him close to the throne.

In Egyptian documents, the administrative second-in-command over Egypt is the vizier, known as the “Overseer of the Royal Estates.” Joseph’s new role, however, may not be quite as lofty as that. There are other posts that could make the claim of being second-in-command in the area of their responsibility. This is similar to a company today that has a President and CEO, and a staff of vice presidents: Vice President of Production, Vice President of Marketing, Vice President of Legal, etc. Each of these individuals could legitimately claim to be second-in-command in his or her particular area and to be set in charge of the entire company in the area of his or her jurisdiction. Similarly, numerous Egyptian nobles could serve in offices and bear titles that identified them as second only to Pharaoh. Such titles include “Great Favorite of the Lord of the Two Lands” and “Foremost Among His Courtiers.”

One of the most appropriate known titles that describes Joseph’s duties is “Overseer of the Granaries of Upper and Lower Egypt.” It is not unusual to find accounts of officials who were elevated from lowly status to high positions of authority.

41:41 in charge of the whole land of Egypt. Joseph is given authority that is neither municipal nor regional.
of Egypt. 42 Then Pharaoh took his signet ring from his finger and put it on Joseph’s finger. He dressed him in robes of fine linen and put a gold chain around his neck. 43 He had him ride in a chariot as his second-in-command, and people shouted before him, “Make way!” Thus he put him in charge of the whole land of Egypt.

44 Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, “I am Pharaoh, but without your word no one will lift hand or foot in all Egypt.” 45 Pharaoh gave Joseph the name Zaphenath-Paneah and gave him Asenath daughter of Potiphera, priest of On, to be his wife. And Joseph went throughout the land of Egypt.

46 Joseph was thirty years old when he entered the service of Pharaoh king of Egypt. And Joseph went out from Pharaoh’s presence and traveled throughout Egypt. 47 During the seven years of abundance the land produced plentifully. 48 Joseph collected all the food produced in those seven years of abundance in Egypt and stored it in the cities. In each city he put the food grown in the fields surrounding it. 49 Joseph stored up huge quantities of grain, like the sand of the sea; it was so much that he stopped keeping records because it was beyond measure.

50 Before the years of famine came, two sons were born to Joseph by Asenath daughter of Potiphera, priest of On. 51 Joseph named his firstborn Manasseh and said, “It is because God has made me forget all my trouble and all my father’s household.” 52 The second son he named Ephraim and said, “It is because God has made me fruitful in the land of my suffering.”

53 The seven years of abundance in Egypt came to an end, 54 and the seven years of famine began, just as Joseph had said. There was famine in all the other lands, but in the whole land of Egypt there was food. 55 When all Egypt began to feel the famine, the people cried to Pharaoh for food. Then Pharaoh told all the Egyptians, “Go to Joseph and do what he tells you.”

56 When the famine had spread over the whole country, Joseph opened all the storehouses and sold grain to the Egyptians, for the famine was severe throughout Egypt. 57 And all the world came to Egypt to buy grain from Joseph, because the famine was severe everywhere.

Joseph’s Brothers Go to Egypt

42 When Jacob learned that there was grain in Egypt, he said to his sons, “Why do you just keep looking at each other?” 2 He continued, “I have heard that there is grain in Egypt. Go down there and buy some for us, so that we may live and not die.”

3 Then ten of Joseph’s brothers went down to buy grain from Egypt. 4 But Jacob did not send Benjamin, Joseph’s brother, with the others, because he was afraid that harm might come to him. 5 So Israel’s sons were among those who went to buy grain, for there was famine in the land of Canaan also.

6 Now Joseph was the governor of the land, the person who sold grain to all its people. So when Joseph’s brothers arrived, they bowed down to him with their faces to the ground. 7 As soon as Joseph saw his brothers, he recognized them, but he pretended to be a stranger and spoke harshly to them. 8 “Where do you come from?” he asked.

9 “From the land of Canaan,” they replied, “to buy food.” 10 Although Joseph recognized his brothers, they did not recognize him. 11 Then he remembered his dreams about them and said to them, “You are spies! You have come to see where our land is unprotected.”

12 Or in the chariot of his second-in-command; or in his second chariot. 13 Or Bow down. 14 That is, Heliopolis, also in verse 50. 15 Manasseh sounds like and may be derived from the Hebrew for forget. 16 Ephraim sounds like the Hebrew for twice fruitful.

41:42–43 The signet ring allows Joseph to make decisions and authorize them in the name of Pharaoh. The clothing, jewelry and transportation all designate his high station.

41:45 Joseph’s renaming and his marriage into a priestly family give him a new identity as an Egyptian noble. On this city (reflecting Egyptian Iunu) is later known as Heliopolis and is one of the most revered of Egypt’s ancient cities (along with Memphis and Thebes). It is located just north of modern Cairo at the base of the Nile delta.

42:9 You are spies! Semites/Asiatics were often distrusted by the Egyptians, so this is not an unusual charge. The Egyptians referred to them by various epithets such as “sand dwellers” and “throat slitters” and considered them wild and uncivilized.

But for what purpose would they be spying on Egypt?
10 “No, my lord,” they answered. “Your servants have come to buy food. 11 We are all the sons of one man. Your servants are honest men, not spies.”

12“No!” he said to them. “You have come to see where our land is unprotected.”

13But they replied, “Your servants were twelve brothers, the sons of one man, who lives in the land of Canaan. The youngest is now with our father, and one is no more.”

14Joseph said to them, “It is just as I told you: You are spies! 15And this is how you will be tested: As surely as Pharaoh lives, you will not leave this place unless your youngest brother comes here. 16Send one of your number to get your brother; the rest of you will be kept in prison, so that your words may be tested to see if you are telling the truth. 17 If you are not, then as surely as Pharaoh lives, you are spies!”

18And he put them all in custody for three days.

19On the third day, Joseph said to them, “Do this and you will live, for I fear God: 20If you are honest men, let one of your brothers stay here in prison, while the rest of you go and take grain back for your starving households. 21But you must bring your youngest brother to me, so that your words may be verified and that you may not die.” This they proceeded to do.

21They said to one another, “Surely we are being punished because of our brother. We saw how distressed he was when he pleaded with us for his life, but we would not listen; that’s why this distress has come on us.”

22Reuben replied, “Didn’t I tell you not to sin against the boy? But you wouldn’t listen! Now we must give an accounting for his blood.” 23They did not realize that Joseph could understand them, since he was using an interpreter.

24He turned away from them and began to weep, but then came back and spoke to them again. He had Simeon taken from them and bound before their eyes.

25Joseph gave orders to fill their bags with grain, to put each man’s silver back in his sack, and to give them provisions for their journey. After this was done for them, they loaded their grain on their donkeys and left.

26At the place where they stopped for the night one of them opened his sack to get feed for his donkey, and he saw his sil-

ver in the mouth of his sack. 28“My silver has been returned,” he said to his brothers. “Here it is in my sack.”

Their hearts sank and they turned to each other trembling and said, “What is this that God has done to us?”

29When they came to their father Jacob in the land of Canaan, they told him all that had happened to them. They said, 30“The man who is lord over the land spoke harshly to us and treated us as though we were spying on the land. 31But we said to him, ‘We are honest men; we are not spies. 32We were twelve brothers, sons of one father. One is no more, and the youngest is now with our father in Canaan.’

33“Then the man who is lord over the land said to us, ‘This is how I will know whether you are honest men: Leave one of your brothers here with me, and take food for your starving households and go. 34But bring your youngest brother to me so I will know that you are not spies but honest men. Then I will give your brother back to you, and you can trade in the land.’”

35As they were emptying their sacks, there in each man’s sack was his pouch of silver! When they and their father saw the money pouches, they were frightened. 36Their father Jacob said to them, “You have deprived me of my children. Joseph is no more and Simeon is no more, and now you want to take Benjamin. Everything is against me!”

37Then Reuben said to his father, “You may put both of my sons to death if I do not bring him back to you. Entrust him to my care, and I will bring him back.”

38But Jacob said, “My son will not go down there with you; his brother is dead and he is the only one left. If harm comes to him on the journey you are taking, you will bring my gray head down to the grave in sorrow.”

The Second Journey to Egypt

43Now the famine was still severe in the land. 2So when they had eaten all the grain they had brought from Egypt, their father said to them, “Go back and buy us a little more food.”

3But Judah said to him, “The man warned us solemnly, ‘You will not see my face again unless your brother is with

42:25 each man’s silver. In supplying each of the brothers with both the grain and their silver, Joseph confirmed the accusation that they were scouts, intent on stealing grain (see previous note). Frequently we might see trade in grain or herds (rather than silver), but Jacob’s family had no grain, and the herds were difficult to transport. It is no surprise, then, that they brought silver with which to trade.
If you will send our brother along with us, we will go down and buy food for you. But if you will not send him, we will not go down, because the man said to us, ‘You will not see my face again unless your brother is with you.’ ”

Israel asked, “Why did you bring this trouble on me by telling the man you had another brother?”

They replied, “The man questioned us closely about ourselves and our family. ‘Is your father still living?’ he asked us. ‘Do you have another brother?’ We simply answered his questions. How were we to know he would say, ‘Bring your brother down here?’ ”

Then Judah said to Israel his father, “Send the boy along with me and we will go at once, so that we and you and our children may live and not die. 9 I myself will guarantee his safety; you can hold me personally responsible for him. If I do not bring him back to you and set him here before you, I will bear the blame before you all my life. 10 As it is, if we had not delayed, we could have gone and returned twice.

Then their father Israel said to them, “If it must be, then do this: Put some of the best products of the land in your bags and take them down to the man as a gift—a little balm, a little honey, some spices, and myrrh, some pistachio nuts and almonds. 12 Take double the amount of silver with you, for you must return the silver that was put back into the mouths of your sacks. 13 Perhaps it was a mistake. 14 Take your brother also and go back to the man at once. 15 And may God Almighty grant you mercy before the man so that he will let your other brother and Benjamin come back with you. 16 As for me, if I am bereaved, I am bereaved.”

So the men took the gifts and double the amount of silver, and Benjamin also. They hurried down to Egypt and presented themselves to Joseph. 16 When Joseph saw Benjamin with them, he said to the steward of his house, “Take these men to my house, slaughter an animal and prepare a meal; 2 they are to eat with me at noon.”

The man did as Joseph told him and took the men to Joseph’s house. 18 Now the men were frightened when they were taken to his house. They thought, “We were brought here because of the silver that was put back into our sacks the first time. He wants to attack us and overpower us and seize us as slaves and take our donkeys.”

So they went up to Joseph’s steward and spoke to him at the entrance to the house. 20 “We beg your pardon, our lord,” they said, “we came down here the first time to buy food. 21 But at the place where we stopped for the night we opened our sacks and each of us found his silver—the exact weight—in the mouth of his sack. So we have brought it back with us. 22 We have also brought additional silver with us to buy food. We don’t know who put our silver in our sacks.”

“It’s all right,” he said. “Don’t be afraid. Your God, the God of your father, has given you treasure in your sacks; 24 I received your silver.” Then he brought Simon out to them.

The steward took the men into Joseph’s house, gave them water to wash their feet and provided fodder for their donkeys. 25 They prepared their gifts for Joseph’s arrival at noon, because they had heard that they were to eat there.

When Joseph came home, they presented to him the gifts 26 they had brought into the house, and they bowed down before him to the ground. 27 He asked them how they were, and then he said, “How is your aged father you told me about? Is he still living?”

They replied, “Your servant our father is still alive and well.” And they bowed down, prostrating themselves before him.

As he looked about and saw his brother Benjamin, his only mother’s son, he asked, “Is this your youngest brother, the one you told me about?” 29 And he said, “God be gracious to you, my son.”

Deeply moved at the sight of his brother, Joseph hurried out and looked for a place to weep. He went into his private room and wept there.

After he had washed his face, he came out and, controlling himself, 31 said, “Serve the food.”

They served him by himself, the brothers by themselves, and the Egyptians who ate with him by themselves, because Egyptians could not eat with Hebrews, for that is detestable to Egyptians. 33 The men had been seated before him in the order of their ages, from the firstborn to the youngest; and they looked at each other in astonishment. 34 When portions were served to them from Joseph’s table, Benjamin’s portion was five times as much as anyone else’s. So they feasted and drank freely with him.

A Silver Cup in a Sack

Now Joseph gave these instructions to the steward of his house: “Fill the men’s sacks with as much food as they can carry, and put each man’s silver in the mouth of his sack. 2 Then put my Hebrew El-Shaddai
cup, the silver one, in the mouth of the youngest one’s sack, along with the silver for his grain.” And he did as Joseph said.

As morning dawned, the men were sent on their way with their donkeys.

They had not gone far from the city when Joseph said to his steward, “Go after those men at once, and when you catch up with them, say to them, ‘Why have you repaid good with evil?’ 1 Isn’t this the cup my master drinks from and also uses for divination? This is a wicked thing you have done.’”

When he caught up with them, he repeated these words to them. 2 But they said to him, “Why does my lord say such things? Far be it from me to do anything like that! 3 We even brought back to you from the land of Canaan the silver we found inside the mouths of our sacks.” So why would we steal silver or gold from your master’s house? 4 If any of your servants is found to have it, he will die; 5 and the rest of us will become my lord’s slaves.”

“Very well, then,” he said, “let it be as you say. Whoever is found to have it will become my slave; the rest of you will be free from blame.”

Each of them quickly lowered his sack to the ground and opened it. 12 Then the steward proceeded to search, beginning with the oldest and ending with the youngest. And the cup was found in Benjamin’s sack. 13 At this, they tore their clothes. 2 Then they all loaded their donkeys and returned to the city.

Joseph was still in the house when Judah and his brothers came in, and they threw themselves to the ground before him. 15 Joseph said to them, “What is this you have done? Don’t you know that a man like me can find things out by divination?” 16 “What can we say to my lord?” Judah replied. “What can we say? How can we prove our innocence? God has uncovered your servants’ guilt. We are now my lord’s slaves— we ourselves and the one who was found to have the cup.” 17 But Joseph said, “Far be it from me to do such a thing! Only the man who was found to have the cup will become my slave. The rest of you, go back to your father in peace.”

Then Judah went up to him and said: 18 “Pardon your servant, my lord, let me speak a word to my lord. Do not be angry with your servant, though you are equal to Pharaoh himself. 19 My lord asked his servants, ‘Do you have a father or a brother?’ 20 And we answered, ‘We have an aged father, and there is a young son born to him in his old age. His brother is dead, and he is the only one of his mother’s sons left, and his father loves him.’

“Then you said to your servants, ‘Bring him down to me so I can see him for myself.’ 22 And we said to my lord, ‘The boy cannot leave his father; if he leaves him, his father will die.’ 23 But you told your servants, ‘Unless your youngest brother comes down with you, you will not see my face again.’ 24 When we went back to your servant my father, we told him what my lord had said.

‘Then our father said, ‘Go back and buy a little more food.’ 26 But we said, ‘We cannot go down. Only if our youngest brother is with us will we go. We cannot see the man’s face unless our youngest brother is with us.’

Your servant my father said to us, ‘You know that my wife bore me two sons. 28 One of them went away from me, and I said, “He has surely been torn to pieces.” And I have not seen him since. 29 If you take this one from me too and harm comes to him, you will bring my gray head down to the grave in misery.’

So now, if the boy is not with us when I go back to your servant my father, and if my father, whose life is closely bound up with the boy’s life, 31 sees that the boy is not there, he will die. Your servants will bring the gray head of our father down to the grave in sorrow. 32 Your servant guaranteed the boy’s safety to my father. I said, ‘If I do not bring him back to you, I will bear the blame before you, my father, all my life!’

Now then, please let your servant remain here as my lord’s slave in place of the boy, 34 and let the boy return with his brothers. 35 How can I go back to my father if the boy is not with me? No! Do not let me see the misery that would come on my father.”

Joseph Makes Himself Known

Then Joseph could no longer control himself before all his attendants, and he cried out, “Have everyone leave my presence!” So there was no
one with Joseph when he made himself known to his brothers. 2And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard him, and Pharaoh’s household heard about it. 3

Joseph said to his brothers, “I am Joseph! Is my father still living?” 4But his brothers were not able to answer him, 5because they were terrified at his presence. 6Then Joseph said to his brothers, “Come close to me.” When they had done so, he said, “I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt! 7And now, do not be distressed 8and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you. 9For two years now there has been famine in the land, and for the next five years there will be no plowing and reaping. 10But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant 11on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance. 12So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God. He made me father to Pharaoh, lord of his entire household and ruler of all Egypt. 13Now hurry back to my father and say to him, ‘This is what your son Joseph says: God has made me lord of all Egypt. Come down to me; don’t delay. 14You shall live in the region of Goshen 15and be near me—you, your children and grandchildren, your flocks and herds, and all you have. 16I will provide for you there, 17because five years of famine are still to come. Otherwise you and your household and all who belong to you will become destitute.’ 18You can see for yourselves, and so can my brother Benjamin, that it is really I who am speaking to you. 19Tell my father about all the honor accorded me in Egypt and about everything you have seen. And bring my father down here quickly.” 20Then he threw his arms around his brother Benjamin and wept, and Benjamin embraced him, weeping. 21And he kissed 22all his brothers and wept over them. Afterward his brothers talked with him. 23When the news reached Pharaoh’s palace that Joseph’s brothers had come, 24Pharaoh and all his officials were pleased. 25Pharaoh said to Joseph, “Tell your brothers, ‘Do this: Load your animals and return to the land of Canaan, 26and bring your father and your families back to me. I will give you the best of the land of Egypt 27and you can enjoy the fat of the land.’ 28‘You are also directed to tell them, ‘Do this: Take some carts from Egypt for your children and your wives, and get your father and come. 29Never mind about your belongings, because the best of all Egypt will be yours.’ ” 30So the sons of Israel did this. Joseph gave them carts, as Pharaoh had commanded, and he also gave them provisions for their journey. 31To each of them he gave new clothing, but to Benjamin he gave three hundred shekels 32of silver and five sets of clothes. 33And this is what he sent to his father: ten donkeys loaded with the best things of Egypt, and ten female donkeys loaded with grain and bread and other provisions for his journey. 34Then he sent his brothers away, and as they were leaving he said to them, “Don’t quarrel on the way!” 35So they went up out of Egypt and came to their father Jacob in the land of Canaan. 36They told him, “Joseph is still alive! In fact, he is ruler of all Egypt.” Jacob was stunned; he did not believe them. 37But when they told him everything Joseph had said to them, and when he saw the carts 38Joseph had sent to carry him back, the spirit of their father Jacob revived. 39And Israel said, “I’m convinced! My son Joseph is still alive. I will go and see him before I die.”

**Jacob Goes to Egypt**

46 So Israel set out with all that was his, and when he reached Beer-sheba, 2he offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac. 3And God spoke to Israel in a vision at night 4and said, “Jacob! Jacob!” 5“Here I am,” he replied. 6“I am God, the God of your father,” 7he said. “Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for I will make you into a great nation there. 8I will go down to Egypt with you, and I will surely bring you back again. And Joseph’s own hand will close your eyes.” 9Then Jacob left Beer-sheba, and Israel’s
sons took their father Jacob and their children and their wives in the carts that Pharaoh had sent to transport him. 9So Jacob and all his offspring went to Egypt, 10taking with them their livestock and the possessions they had acquired in Canaan. 11Jacob brought with him to Egypt his sons and grandsons and his daughters and granddaughters—all his offspring. 12

8These are the names of the sons of Israel (Jacob and his descendants) who went to Egypt:

Reuben the firstborn of Jacob.
9The sons of Reuben: 10Hanok, Pallu, Hezron and Karmi.
10The sons of Simeon: 11Jemuel, 12Jamin, Ohad, Jakin, Zohar and Shaul the son of a Canaanite woman.
11The sons of Levi: 12Gershon, Kohath and Merari.
12The sons of Judah: 13Er, Onan, Shelah, Perez and Zerah (but Er and Onan had died in the land of Canaan).
13The sons of Perez: 14Hezron and Hamul.
14The sons of Issachar: 15Tola, Puah, 16Jashub and Shimron.
16The sons of Zebulun: 17Sered, Elon and Jahleel.
17These were the sons Leah bore to Jacob in Paddan Aram, besides his daughter Dinah. These sons and daughters of his were thirty-three in all.
18The sons of Gad: 19Zaphon, 20Haggi, Shuni, Ezbon, Eri, Arodi and Areli.
19The sons of Asher: 20Imnah, Ishvah, Ishvi and Beriah. Their sister was Serah. The sons of Beriah: Heber and Malkiel.
20These were the children born to Jacob by Zilpah, 21whom Laban had given to his daughter Leah—sixteen in all.

19The sons of Jacob’s wife Rachel: Joseph and Benjamin. 20In Egypt, Manasseh, 21and Ephraim were born to Joseph by Asenath daughter of Potiphera, priest of On.

46:22These were the sons of Rachel who were born to Jacob—fourteen in all.
46:23The son of Dan: Hushim.
46:24The sons of Naphtali: Jahziel, Guni, Jezer and Shillem.
46:25These were the sons born to Jacob by Bilhah, 26whom Laban had given to his daughter Rachel—seven in all.
46:26All those who went to Egypt with Jacob—those who were his direct descendants, not counting his sons’ wives—numbered sixty-six persons. 27With the two sons 28who had been born to Joseph in Egypt, the members of Jacob’s family, which went to Egypt, were seventy 29in all.
46:28Now Jacob sent Judah ahead of him to Joseph to get directions to Goshen. 9When they arrived in the region of Goshen, 30Joseph had his chariot made ready and went to Goshen to meet his father Israel. As soon as Joseph appeared before him, he threw his arms around his father and wept for a long time.
30Israel said to Joseph, “Now I am ready to die, since I have seen for myself that you are still alive.”
31Then Joseph said to his brothers and to his father’s household, “I will go up and speak to Pharaoh and will say to him, ‘My brothers and my father’s household, who were living in the land of Canaan, have come to me. 32The men are shepherds; they tend livestock, and they have brought along their flocks and herds and everything they own.’ 33When Pharaoh calls you in and asks, ‘What is your occupation?’ 34you should answer, ‘Your servants have tended livestock from our boyhood on, just as our fathers did.’ Then

46:34 all shepherds are detestable to the Egyptians. By identifying themselves as shepherds, Jacob’s clan offers assurance that they are not coming to take Egyptian farmland or get involved in politics. Flocks and herds were kept by Egyptians during all periods and were used for meat, milk, and wool or hides, as well as for some sacrifices (more cattle than sheep and goats). They are depicted in reliefs, models and tomb paintings, remains are found in excavation, and deities were associated with the ram and the cow (but not sheep or goats) — all demonstrating the pervasive penetration of these animals into Egyptian culture. In contrast, sheep and goats do not figure prominently in fables, metaphors or personal names, which indicates that they were considered rather common.

It is difficult to ascertain whether shepherds were detested because of their associations with foreigners, with a low status in society, or with sheep and goats as.
Egyptian painting at Beni Hasan of man with goats. Many depictions of flocks and herds have been discovered, demonstrating the pervasive penetration of these animals into Egyptian culture. It is difficult to ascertain whether shepherds were detested (Ge 46:34) because of their associations with foreigners, with a low status in society, or with sheep and goats as inferior animals that threatened farmland.

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you will be allowed to settle in the region of Goshen, for all shepherds are detestable to the Egyptians. 37 Joseph went and told Pharaoh, “My father and brothers, with their flocks and herds and everything they own, have come from the land of Canaan and are now in Goshen.” 2 He chose five of his brothers and presented them before Pharaoh.

3 Pharaoh asked the brothers, “What is your occupation?” 4 “Your servants are shepherds,” they replied to Pharaoh, “just as our fathers were.” 5 They also said to him, “We have come to live here for a while, because the famine is severe in Canaan and your servants’ flocks have no pasture. So now, please let your servants settle in Goshen.” 6 Pharaoh said to Joseph, “Your father and your brothers have come to you, 7 and the land of Egypt is before you; settle your father and your brothers in the best part of the land. 8 Let them live in Goshen. And if you know of any among them with special ability, 9 put them in charge of my own livestock.”

7 Then Joseph brought his father Jacob in and presented him before Pharaoh. After Jacob blessed Pharaoh, 10 Pharaoh asked him, “How old are you?” 11 And Jacob said to Pharaoh, “The years of my pilgrimage are a hundred and thirty. My years have been few and difficult, and they do not equal the years of the pilgrimage of my fathers.” 12 Then Jacob blessed Pharaoh and went out from his presence.

13 So Joseph settled his father and his brothers in Egypt and gave them property in the best part of the land, the district of Rameses, 14 as Pharaoh directed. 15 Joseph also provided his father and his brothers and all his father’s household with food, according to the number of their children. 16

Joseph and the Famine

17 There was no food, however, in the whole region because the famine was severe; both Egypt and Canaan wasted away because of the famine. 18 Joseph collected all the money that was to be found in Egypt and Canaan in payment for the grain they were buying, and he brought it to Pharaoh’s palace. 19 When the money of the people of Egypt and Canaan was gone, all Egypt came to Joseph and said, “Give us food. Why should we die before your eyes? 20 Our money is all gone.”

21 “Then bring your livestock,” said Joseph. “I will sell you food in exchange for your livestock, since your money is gone.”

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inferior animals that threatened farmland. Extant Egyptian records offer no insight on this.

47:11 district of Rameses. At this period Rameses was not a common name and no city was yet so named. The pharaohs with the names Rameses do not come along until the thirteenth century BC. It is logical to conclude that this geographic name is supplied at a later period. The city of Rameses, Pi-Ramesse, is eventually going to be located at Qantir/Avaris (Tell ed-Dab’a, which has been extensively excavated and provides much evidence of a Semitic population that lived there). The site was founded in the Twelfth Dynasty (1963–1786 BC), the most likely setting for Joseph. Despite the growing Syro-Palestinian population of this town over the next several centuries, no remains permit the identification of descendants of Abraham. The material culture is Canaanite and the religious practices show a syncretism of Canaanite and Egyptian elements.
17 So they brought their livestock to Joseph, and he gave them food in exchange for their horses, their sheep and goats, their cattle and donkeys. And he brought them through that year with food in exchange for all their livestock.

18 When that year was over, they came to him the following year and said, “We cannot hide from our lord the fact that since our money is gone and our livestock belongs to you, there is nothing left for our lord except our bodies and our land. 19 Why should we perish before your eyes—we and our land as well? Buy us and our land in exchange for food, and we with our land will be in bondage to Pharaoh. Give us seed so that we may live and not die, and that the land may not become desolate.”

20 So Joseph bought all the land in Egypt for Pharaoh. The Egyptians, one and all, sold their fields, because the famine was too severe for them. The land became Pharaoh’s, 21 and Joseph reduced the people to servitude, 22 from one end of Egypt to the other. 23 However, he did not buy the land of the priests, because they received a regular allotment from Pharaoh and had food enough from the allotment Pharaoh gave them. That is why they did not sell their land.

24 Joseph said to the people, “Now that I have bought you and your land today for Pharaoh, here is seed for you so you can plant the ground. 25 But when the crop comes in, give a fifth 26 of it to Pharaoh. The other four-fifths you may keep as seed for the fields and as food for yourselves and your households and your children.”

27 “You have saved our lives,” they said.

47:19 Buy us and our land. Joseph’s policy suggests a shift from privately owned property to centralized ownership of property worked by tenant farmers. The Middle Kingdom and Early New Kingdom (2100–1500 BC) evidence large tracts of crown property administered by government officials. In this way centralization is in evidence as is the state-run redistributive economy. In the New Kingdom, much land gradually came under control of the temples. In that period, there was no longer any private property, but only personal rights to the use of property granted in trust for a land-owning institution such as the crown or temple.

Though it may appear as if Joseph’s policies were economically repressive, hard times require hard solutions. The text documents the sequence of how the people were impoverished by the famine (not by the government). First they spent all their money buying food, then they traded away their livestock, and finally they gave up their land and worked as tenant farmers. Their rent for the land was 20 percent of the produce—a lower than normal percentage in the ancient world. This was a progressive tax in that it was proportioned according to income. Theoretically, then, a prospering farmer could have rebuilt his wealth when the famine ended, though it is not clear whether he would have been allowed to buy back the land. This turned Egypt into a state in which all the wealth was centralized in the government. Despite the personal hardship and servitude that resulted, the people were grateful for their lives.

47:22 Priests…received a regular allotment from Pharaoh. Priests did not need to grow their own food, and therefore shortages did not drive them to sell their land. Instead, temples, like the kings, were owners of land and benefited from renting out the land to be farmed by laborers. Temple ownership of land is well documented in Egypt of all periods, but became extensive by the mid-second millennium BC.

47:29 Do not bury me in Egypt. Jacob’s sentiment reflects the extent to which he is tied to the land of Canaan, as it looks to both past and future. Since the ancestral burial ground is in Canaan, he will “rest with [his] fathers” (v. 30) by being buried with them, thus actualizing his solidarity with them. One’s burial place also serves as the focus by being buried with them, thus actualizing his solidarity with them, and serves as the focus ofGo. Since the ancestral burial ground is in Canaan, he will “rest with [his] fathers” (v. 30) by being buried with them, thus actualizing his solidarity with them. One’s burial place also serves as the focus by being buried with them, thus actualizing his solidarity with them, and serves as the focus of...
naan, and there he blessed me, and said to me, ‘I am going to make you fruitful and increase your numbers. I will make you a community of peoples, and I will give this land as an everlasting possession to your descendants after you.’

5“Now then, your two sons born to you in Egypt before I came to you here will be reckoned as mine; Ephraim and Manasseh will be mine, just as Reuben and Simeon are mine. Any children born to you after them will be yours; in the territory they inherit they will be reckoned under the names of their brothers. As I was returning from Paddan, to my sorrow Rachel died in the land of Canaan while we were still on the way, a little distance from Ephrath. So I buried her there beside the road to Ephrath” (that is, Bethlehem).

8When Israel saw the sons of Joseph, he asked, “Who are these?”

9“They are the sons God has given me here,” Joseph said to his father.

Then Israel said, “Bring them to me so I may bless them.”

10Now Israel’s eyes were failing because of old age, and he could hardly see. So Joseph brought his sons close to him, and his father kissed them and embraced them.

11Israel said to Joseph, “I never expected to see your face again, and now God has allowed me to see your children too.”

12Then Joseph removed them from Israel’s knees and bowed down with his face to the ground. 13And Joseph took both of them, Ephraim on his right toward Israel’s left hand and Manasseh on his left toward Israel’s right hand, and brought them close to him. But Israel reached out his right hand and put it on Ephraim’s head, though he was the younger, and crossing his arms, he put his left hand on Manasseh’s head, even though Manasseh was the firstborn.

15Then he blessed Joseph and said, “May the God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked faithfully, the God who has been my shepherd all my life to this day, 16the Angel who has delivered me from all harm — may he bless these boys. May they be called by my name and the names of my fathers Abraham and Isaac, and may they increase greatly on the earth.”

17When Joseph saw his father placing his right hand on Ephraim’s head, he was displeased; so he took hold of his father’s hand to move it from Ephraim’s head to Manasseh’s head. 18Joseph said to him, “No, my father, this one is the firstborn; put your right hand on his head.”

19But his father refused and said, “I know, my son, I know. He too will become a people, and he too will become great. Nevertheless, his younger brother will be greater than he, and his descendants will become a group of nations.”

20He blessed them that day and said, “In your name will Israel pronounce this blessing: ‘May God make you like Ephraim and Manasseh.’”

So he put Ephraim ahead of Manasseh.

21Then Israel said to Joseph, “I am about to die, but God will be with you and take you back to the land of your fathers. And to you I give one more ridge of land than to your brothers, the ridge I took from the Amorites with my sword and my bow.”

### Jacob Blesses His Sons

#### Genesis 49:1-28Ref — Dt 33:1-29

49 Then Jacob called for his sons and said: “Gather around so I can tell you what will happen to you in days to come.

2“Assembly and listen, sons of Jacob; listen to your father Israel.

3“Reuben, you are my firstborn, my might, the first sign of my strength, but 7 That is, Northwest Mesopotamia 20 The Hebrew is singular. 21 The Hebrew is plural. 22 The Hebrew for ridge of land is identical with the place name Shechem.

### 48:22 ridge of land... I took from the Amorites with my sword and my bow. The Hebrew word shekhem (NIV “ridge of land”; NIV text note, Septuagint, the pre-Christian Greek translation of the OT) refers to the conquest of Shechem by Simeon and Levi (32:45—29). Jacob did not approve of this act and was not proud of it, but it was irreversible and undeniable. The land was therefore his to give, since it was taken in his name and by his clan. This justifies Jacob’s use of the first person (“I took”).

49:1 what will happen to you in days to come. As was typical of patriarchal pronouncements, Jacob made statements concerning the future destiny of his sons. These were not prophecy, for they were not given in the name of deity. They forecasted the future. Like a weather forecaster or an economic forecaster, Jacob identified his expectations derived from observed indicators that were considered reliable and thus could be interpreted with a high level of probability. Words had power in the ancient world, and the very speaking of them, especially by someone in authority, was taken seriously.
excelling in honor, excelling in power.
4 Turbulent as the waters, you will no longer excel, for you went up onto your father’s bed, onto my couch and defiled it. x
5 “Simeon and Levi are brothers — their swords are weapons of violence.
6 Let me not enter their council, let me not join their assembly, for they have killed men in their anger and hamstrung oxen as they pleased.
7 Cursed be their anger, so fierce, and their fury, so cruel!
I will scatter them in Jacob and disperse them in Israel. b
8 “Judah, your brothers will praise you; your hand will be on the neck of your enemies; your father’s sons will bow down to you. c
9 You are a lion’s cub, Judah; return from the prey, my son.
Like a lion he crouches and lies down, like a lioness — who dares to rouse him?
10 The scepter will not depart from Judah, f

49:4 "Isa 57:20
49:5 Ge 35:22; Dt 27:20
49:6 Ge 34:25; Pr 1:17
49:7 Eph 5:11
49:8 Ge 34:26; Jos 19:1, 9; 21:1-42
49:9 Dt 33:7; ICh 5:2
49:10 Nu 24:9; Eze 19:5; Mic 5:8
Rev 5:5

9Ps 2:9; Is 42:1, 4
49:13 Ge 30:20; Dt 33:18-19; Jos 19:10-11
49:14 Ge 30:18

not the ruler’s staff from between his feet, c
until he to whom it belongs shall come and the obedience of the nations shall be his. d
11 He will tether his donkey to a vine, his colt to the choicest branch; he will wash his garments in wine, his robes in the blood of grapes.
12 His eyes will be darker than wine, his teeth whiter than milk. e
13 "Zebulun b will live by the seashore and become a haven for ships; his border will extend toward Sidon.
14 “Issachar is a rawboned f donkey lying down among the sheep pens. g
15 When he sees how good is his resting place and how pleasant is his land, he will bend his shoulder to the burden and submit to forced labor.

49:7 I will scatter them in Jacob and disperse them in Israel. The tribes of Simeon and Levi were to be dispersed (not the individuals, of course), deprived of clearly identified land as a consequence of their violence in Shechem (ch. 34). This represents virtual disinheritance. Simeon is eventually assigned villages scattered in Judah’s territory (Jos 19:1-9) and Levi, though having no claim to land, serves its priestly function from the bases known as the Levitical cities, which were distributed among the tribal territories (Nu 35).

49:8 your father’s sons will bow down to you. This is the legal transfer of clan leadership to Judah. Though Joseph received the double portion of the inheritance (since Ephraim and Manasseh both inherited shares among Jacob’s sons; see ch. 48), Judah would be the administrator of the undivided inheritance.

49:9 Like a lion. Lion imagery is common in the ancient Near East. There are lion/lioness cults in Egypt, particularly associated with On, where Joseph’s in-laws were from. More important, the lion is used in Egypt as the symbol of the king. In Mesopotamia the lion is most often associated with the goddess Ishtar. The god Nergal carries a lion scepter, and numerous other gods are described using lion metaphors. The lion as a royal metaphor as well as an animal for the royal hunt is more familiar in Mesopotamia from the later Neo-Assyrian period, though it is not absent from the earlier periods. In these contexts, the image that the metaphor presents is one of fierceness, cruelty and power. This imagery has its focus on the male lion, which is prevalent in the art of the Levant. In contrast, rather than representing an immediate threat, the imagery associated with Judah invokes quiet power at rest, but a power that’s not to be trifled with as both the cub and lioness are included.

49:11 wash his garments in wine. This imagery is suggestive of Judah’s descendants having the blue/purple/red clothing often associated with royalty, though that coloring is usually achieved through the processing of murex snails (an expensive process because of the large number of snails needed to produce the dye).

The earliest written records concerning dyeing are from Nuzi in the mid-second millennium BC. The earliest evidence of the use of the snail for purple dye comes from seventeenth-century BC Crete. That suggests that at the time of the patriarchs, that technology for dyeing was unknown, yet dyeing itself was known because Egyptian tomb paintings show clothing with color patterns.

Prior to the discovery of murex-snail purple, might wine have been used for dyeing? Would red/purple have been associated with royalty? Royal women in the tomb of Ur from the end of the third millennium BC wore red-colored clothing, but no evidence suggests that wine was used for dyeing, though its staining effect would have been well recognized since wine was filtered through linen cloth.

49:13 haven for ships. Seafaring took place primarily from the north, where there were natural harbors. The difficulty with this verse is that Zebulun, to our knowledge, never had territory adjacent to the sea. The tribal allotment given him was in western lower Galilee, entirely landlocked, and 65 miles (100 kilometers) from Sidon. This would actually be a more appropriate description of the territory allotted to Asher, which stretched along the coast from Akko to Tyre. These apparent discrepancies suggest that this blessing does not reflect a later description of the territories as they existed after the conquest. There is no known period when Zebulun controlled the coastal regions.
“Dan” will provide justice for his people as one of the tribes of Israel.

Dan will be a snake by the roadside, a viper along the path, that bites the horse’s heels so that its rider tumbles backward.

“I look for your deliverance, Lord.”

“Gad” will be attacked by a band of raiders, but he will attack them at their heels.

“Asher” food will be rich; he will provide delicacies fit for a king.

“Naphtali” is a doe set free that bears beautiful fawns.

“Joseph” is a fruitful vine, a fruitful vine near a spring, whose branches climb over a wall.

With bitterness archers attacked him; they shot at him with hostility.

But his bow remained steady, his strong arms stayed limber, because of the hand of the Mighty One of Jacob, because of the Shepherd, the Rock of Israel,

because of your father’s God, who helps you, because of the Almighty, who blesses you with blessings of the skies above, blessings of the deep springs below, blessings of the breast and womb.

Your father’s blessings are greater than the blessings of the ancient mountains, than the bounty of the age-old hills.

Let all these rest on the head of Joseph, on the brow of the prince among his brothers.

“Benjamin” is a ravenous wolf; in the morning he devours the prey, in the evening he divides the plunder.

All these are the twelve tribes of Israel, and this is what their father said to them when he blessed them, giving each the blessing appropriate to him.

The Death of Jacob

Then he gave them these instructions: “I am about to be gathered to my people. Bury me with my fathers in the cave in the field of Machpelah, near Mamre in Canaan, which Abraham bought along with the field as a burial place from Ephron the Hittite. There Abraham and his wife Sarah were buried, there Isaac and his wife Rebekah were buried, and there I buried Leah. The field and the cave in it were bought from the Hittites.”

When Jacob had finished giving instructions to his sons, he drew his feet up into the bed, breathed his last and was gathered to his people.

Joseph threw himself on his father and wept over him and kissed him.

Then Joseph directed the physicians in his service to embalm his father Israel. So the physicians embalmed him, taking a full forty days, for that was the time required for embalming. And the Egyptians mourned for him seventy days.

When the days of mourning had passed, Joseph said to Pharaoh’s court, “If I have found favor in your eyes, speak to Pharaoh for me. Tell him, ‘My father made me swear an oath and said, ‘I am about to die; bury me in the tomb I dug for myself in the land of Canaan.’ Now let me go up and bury my father; then I will return.’”

Pharaoh said, “Go up and bury your father, as he made you swear to do.”

So Joseph went up to bury his father. All Pharaoh’s officials accompanied him—the dignitaries of his court and all the dignitaries of Egypt—besides all the members of Joseph’s household and his brothers and those belonging to his father’s household. Only their children and their flocks and herds were left in Goshen.

Chariots and horsemen also went up with him. It was a very large company.

When they reached the threshing floor of Atad, near the Jordan, they lamented loudly and bitterly; and there Joseph observed a seven-day period of mourning for his father.

When the Canaanites who lived there saw the mourning at the threshing floor of Atad, they said, “The Egyptians are holding a solemn ceremony of mourning.” That is why that place near the Jordan is called Abel Mizraim.

The cave in the field of Machpelah, near Mamre in Canaan, which Abraham bought along with the field as a burial place from Ephron the Hittite. There Abraham and his wife Sarah were buried, there Isaac and his wife Rebekah were buried, and there I buried Leah. The field and the cave in it were bought from the Hittites.”

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12 So Jacob’s sons did as he had commanded them: 13 They carried him to the land of Canaan and buried him in the cave in the field of Machpelah, near Mamre, which Abraham had bought along with the field as a burial place from Ephron the Hittite. 14 After burying his father, Joseph returned to Egypt, together with his brothers and all the others who had gone with him to bury his father.

Joseph Reassures His Brothers
15 When Joseph’s brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, “What if Joseph holds a grudge against us and pays us back for all the wrongs we did to him?”

Embalming
Embalming served to preserve the body of the deceased, but in Egypt the reason for doing so involved significant theology. They preserved the body so that it could be reanimated by the spirit (ka) in the afterlife. Nothing in the text suggests that Joseph or his family had adopted the complex afterlife theology of ancient Egypt with its emphasis on rituals, spells and other sorts of magic.

The physicians referred to (Ge 50:2) are probably mortuary priests, who were the experts in the techniques of embalming as they prepared the body not only physically for the grave, but also spiritually for the afterlife. Evidence of embalming goes back to about 2600 BC. The principal agent used in the embalming process is natron, which served to dry out the body after the important viscera (internal organs) were removed. This dehydration process took about 40 days. The viscera were packed in natron individually and eventually replaced in the body.

Meanwhile the body was washed out with spiced wine, and after the process was over, it was anointed with oils and gum resins. As the body was wrapped in linen, protective amulets were included at various places. As a final step a liquid resin was poured over the whole body.

Although it was common practice in Egypt (for any who could afford it), embalming of Israelites is found only in this chapter. The fact that the bodies of Jacob and Joseph are embalmed (Ge 50:2-26) may suggest the desire of the Israelites to soothe the feelings of the Egyptians, but it also serves the purpose of preserving their bodies for later burial in Canaan.

Funerary stele of the “servant of Osiris.” Ankh-Hapy depicts Anubis preparing a mummy for burial, Memphis, 525–500 BC.

Kim Walton. The Vatican Museum.
tied in treating you so badly.' Now please forgive the sins of the servants of the God of your father.” When their message came to him, Joseph wept.

18His brothers then came and threw themselves down before him. “We are your slaves,” they said.

19But Joseph said to them, “Don’t be afraid. Am I in the place of God?

20You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.” So then, don’t be afraid. I will provide for you and your children.” And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them.

The Death of Joseph

22Joseph stayed in Egypt, along with all his father’s family. He lived a hundred and ten years and saw the third generation of Ephraim’s children. Also the children of Makirb son of Manasseh were placed at birth on Joseph’s knees.

24Then Joseph said to his brothers, “I am about to die. But God will surely come to your aid and take you up out of this land to the land he promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.”

25And Joseph made the Israelites swear an oath and said, “God will surely come to your aid, and then you must carry my bones up from this place.”

26So Joseph died at the age of a hundred and ten. And after they embalmed him, he was placed in a coffin in Egypt.

23 That is, were counted as his

50:22 a hundred and ten years. This was considered the ideal life span for an Egyptian, despite the fact that examination of mummies has demonstrated that the average life expectancy in Egypt was between 40 and 50.
Christ’s Early Life
(Mt 1–2; Lk 1–2)

6/5 BC

Christ born

AD 7/8

Christ in temple at age 12

Christ’s Ministry
(Mt 2–28; Mk; Lk 3–24; Jn)

30 BC

20

10

BC AD

10

20

30

30 BC

20

10

BC AD

10

20

30

AD 6-15

Annas I

37-4 BC

Herod the Great

4 BC

Herod the Great dies

AD 6

Roman governors begin rule

AD 26-36

Pontius Pilate

RULERS IN PALESTINE

30 BC

20

10

BC AD

10

20

30

27 BC - AD 14

Augustus

AD 14

Augustus dies

ROMAN EMPERORS
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tr>
<td>30 BC</td>
<td>Pentecost</td>
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<tr>
<td>46-48</td>
<td>Paul’s first missionary journey</td>
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<td>35</td>
<td>Paul converted to Christianity</td>
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<td>44</td>
<td>James martyred</td>
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<td>50-52</td>
<td>Paul’s second missionary journey</td>
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<td>51/52</td>
<td>1,2 Thessalonians written</td>
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<td>53-57</td>
<td>Paul’s third missionary journey</td>
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<td>57</td>
<td>Romans written</td>
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<td>64-67</td>
<td>2 Timothy written</td>
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<td>64-68</td>
<td>Paul dies</td>
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<tr>
<td>95</td>
<td>Revelation written</td>
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<td>90</td>
<td>John exiled on Patmos</td>
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<td>6-15</td>
<td>Roman governors begin rule</td>
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<td>27 BC</td>
<td>Augustus dies</td>
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<td>37-44</td>
<td>Herod Agrippa I</td>
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<td>Herod Agrippa I dies</td>
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<td>44-100</td>
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<td>79-81</td>
<td>Titus</td>
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<td>81-96</td>
<td>Domitian</td>
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<td>96-98</td>
<td>Nerva</td>
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NEW TESTAMENT

The Gospels & Acts ...................... 1597
The Letters & Revelation .............. 1943
Hearing the Gospels as First-Century Hearers Heard Them

Bible readers who come to the four accounts of Jesus’ life typically have multiple questions about these different works. This essay seeks to address a few of the more pertinent questions that may be raised by readers based on the culturally relevant goals of this study Bible: How would the Gospels’ first audience have understood these writings, historically and theologically? How reliable are their sources? Are there any other gospels besides the four in the Bible? How were the Gospels first published? In this essay, we’ll examine the principles behind each of these foundational questions in turn.

The Gospels as Ancient Biographies About Jesus

As a category of literature, the Gospels are unique in the sense that they tell us the story of Someone unique. In many respects, however, they follow a form that ancient hearers and readers would have recognized. In the ancient world, a book about a recent historical person was called a bios, or in English, a “biography.”

Modern readers should keep in mind that ancient biographies differed from typical modern biographies. First, they were shorter than most modern biographies. They varied in length, but could easily be as short as Mark’s Gospel or expand to roughly double that length: as long as Matthew or Luke. Second, ancient biographies did not always start with the person’s childhood (as in Matthew and Luke), but sometimes opened with a person’s public activity or career (as in Mark and, after the prologue, John).

Moreover, whereas modern biographies are usually arranged chronologically, ancient biographers often arranged their material topically. Thus we should not be surprised when, for example, Matthew has some material in a different sequence than do Mark or Luke. That was expected in ancient biography, and the church fathers recognized this point. (Already in the early second century, Papias observed that Mark did not write everything in chronological order.)

Writers often paraphrased material in their own words. Thus, finding slightly different wording in different Gospels (e.g., Matthew’s usual “kingdom of heaven” versus Mark’s “kingdom of God”) should not surprise us. Presumably to increase understanding, Luke even adapts the style of roof mentioned in Mk 2:4 to fit the style of roofs in the northern Mediterranean world where his primary audience lived (Lk 5:19).

Nevertheless, then as today, biographies were a form of historical writing. Biographers liked to teach moral lessons through the accounts that they wrote, but like other historians, they did so in a special way that differed from fictional sorts of writing. They could offer lessons, but they were expected to make their points by using genuine information, not by composing fiction. When writing about characters of centuries past, sometimes historians and biographers admitted that some of the information available to them might be merely legendary. When writing about characters of the past two generations, however — within living memory of eyewitnesses — they generally had very substantial information. Comparing such “recent” biographies by different writers concerning the same characters quickly reveals that ancient biographers depended on information, not free imagination, when they wrote their works.

The Point of the Gospels

The Gospels communicate historical information, but this does not mean — as some modern readers have supposed — that the Gospels do not also teach theology. The modern contrast between history and theology misunderstands how history was written in the ancient world.

Ancient historians wrote with a sense of moral responsibility: they communicated the events of the past so that readers in the present could learn positive examples to follow and negative
examples to avoid. Both historians and novelists sought to communicate their stories in an engaging way, but only the former sought to do so using genuine information, and only the former normally presented models to imitate. In this period, historians and biographers, rather than novelists, used the facts of history to communicate moral, political or theological ideas or emphases. This is true of the Gospels as well. If we read them only as a matter of historical interest and not to hear what we can learn for our lives today, we miss part of the purpose of the Gospels. At the same time, the Gospels do not merely teach us moral lessons. Most of all they teach us about who Jesus is — a theological message. This characteristic is also consistent with biographies, which were first and foremost about the individuals whose stories they recount.

Above all else, the Gospels are stories about Jesus. Jesus was both hero and Lord to his early followers, and his disciples would have been expected to tell and retell the stories about him as long as they lived. Most of what is significant about most founders of movements — whether Socrates, Muhammad, or Joseph Smith — is preserved by the movements themselves, by those initially most interested in the founders. For Christians, the Gospels are of prime importance, because they help us to know better the one we also honor as our Lord.

The Gospels’ Reliable Sources

Ancient tradition reports that two of the Gospels’ authors were eyewitnesses of the events: Matthew and the beloved disciple of John 19:35 and 21:24. Early tradition also reports that Mark’s Gospel relies heavily on Peter’s eyewitness accounts.

Luke more directly tells us about potential sources for gospels in his day. Luke does not claim to be an eyewitness of Jesus’ ministry itself, but his work does imply that he traveled with Paul (see note on Ac 16:10) and spent up to two years near him in Judea (Ac 21:17; 24:27; 27:1). This would have given Luke ample time to check into sources such as those he mentions. By the time Luke wrote, ”many” had written about Jesus (Lk 1:1), suggesting that written gospel accounts about Jesus were already circulating within the first generation.

Luke also cites oral tradition stemming from eyewitnesses (Lk 1:2). Some readers today, especially in technology-driven cultures, doubt that disciples would have remembered detailed information for decades. Nevertheless, even in Western cultures, many families once passed on family stories orally for generations. Memory skills were no less developed in Mediterranean antiquity. Thus, for example, elementary education throughout the Mediterranean world depended heavily on memorization. Rhetorical students — those preparing for public careers — learned to deliver from memory speeches that could even be two hours in length. Traveling storytellers, often illiterate with regard to written texts, could recite entire books by heart. Thus the disciples’ and others’ memories could easily have preserved the most striking sayings of and stories about Jesus for the few decades before these accounts began to be preserved in writing.

In the ancient world, the practice of oral memory was most developed among disciples, advanced students of teachers or adherents of schools. Greek philosophic schools passed on the teachers’ beliefs from one generation to the next. Students often rehearsed the previous day’s lectures so they could repeat back the main points. In Greek schools more generally, students often took notes on their teachers’ lectures and sometimes published them for the teachers. Teachers often expected their students to publish their teachings, and teachings of the founder of a school of thought often became foundational for that school’s beliefs.

The range of surviving Jewish sources is more limited, but the evidence here points in the same direction as all other surviving evidence from the period. If anything, Jewish disciples were even more meticulous about preserving and passing on the sayings of their teachers than were disciples of Gentile teachers. Moreover, throughout the Roman Empire, not all disciples agreed with everything their teachers taught, but even when they disagreed they would have respectfully represented their teacher accurately. Like other disciples, Jesus’ disciples would have told and retold the stories about Jesus, solidifying such accounts both in their memory and in the corporate memory of the early church.
Some scholars who grow up in societies with less-developed memory skills challenge this background, arguing that Jesus’ disciples were unlike all the other disciples we read about in the same period; these scholars protest that the disciples were uneducated and illiterate. Against this premise several observations may be offered. First, texts about the disciples being “unlearned” merely mean that they lacked the training available to the elite, not that they lacked all training. Fishermen made a better living, and probably had somewhat better education, than the majority of people in Galilee (most people were peasants). Second, in many cultures memory skills are inversely proportional to literacy—that is, sometimes people who are illiterate have even stronger memories because they cannot simply refer to other sources if they forget them. Finally, ancient sources are clear that memory skills were not limited to the highly educated. Traveling bards who recited all of Homer’s poetry by heart were generally not educated, yet few scholars in the modern West could compare with them in their capacity to memorize. This observation also holds true today; in some places even those who are illiterate can, for example, recite large sections of the Qur’an or other writings from memory.

The Gospel writers had a variety of memories, oral sources and written works on which they could draw. Normally memories and oral traditions remain most accurate in the first generation or two, within living memory of eyewitnesses who can communicate and confirm events. In antiquity, as today, writers of histories and biographies would consult eyewitnesses first and foremost. Throughout the first generation, when information about Jesus was becoming widespread, Jesus’ original disciples plus his brother James remained in positions of leadership in the church (Gal 1:18 – 19; 2:9; cf. 1Co 15:5 – 7). By the time Luke wrote, he could see his purpose as merely confirming information that was already widely known (Lk 1:3 – 4).

Some scholars protest that some lines of evidence for the accuracy of oral tradition come from only limited circles. Yet almost any claim about evidence we can identify from antiquity is limited; only a sample of sources have survived. The evidence we do have for accurate tradition, however, is undoubtedly a representative sample. It is widespread among varied settings and virtually all points in the same direction. No responsible scholar would dismiss virtually all the contemporary evidence we do have and then argue the opposite conclusion based on silence.

Jesus’ Teachings

Various ancient Jewish sages had their own distinctive teaching traits, but other forms of teaching were common among them. They commonly taught in parables very similar to those of Jesus (see the article “Parables,” p. XXXX); they used riddles to provoke thought; they used proverbs that often made a particular point without covering all possible exceptions or circumstances (cf. Pr 26:4 – 5); and they often used graphic hyperbole (rhetorical overstatement) to reinforce their points. Although Jesus often used the teaching techniques that were common in his day, other traits are distinctive to him, such as the phrase “truly I say to you.” Most distinctive, of course, are passages where Jesus hints at his deity (e.g., Mt 18:20; Jn 8:58).

Because Jesus addressed especially crowds of poor Galilean farmers as he traveled from place to place, his teachings are not systematic; instead, they are often meant to provoke thought and make a point, sometimes in a graphic way that holds an audience’s attention. For a modern reader to directly convert Jesus’ words into rules or statements of systematic theology therefore sometimes misses their point. For example, Jesus requires caring for parents in their old age (Mk 7:9 – 13), but summons people to abandon their family responsibilities if need be to follow him (Mt 8:21 – 22 parallel to Lk 9:59 – 62; Mt 10:37 parallel to Lk 14:26). Is Jesus pro-family, or is he a home-wrecker? In fact, Jesus should come before everything else, but “hating” one’s family (Lk 14:26) is merely a graphic way of making his point.

Hyperbole is common in Jesus’ teaching. We recognize it in the most obvious cases: for example, ripping out one’s eye as a solution to lust (Mt 5:28 – 29), swallowing a camel whole (Mt 23:24), or squeezing a camel through a needle’s eye (Mk 10:25). Some suggest that it would be consistent to view some other sayings in the same way—for example, giving up one’s only cloak (Mt 5:40
parallel to Lk 6:29) or treating all remarriage as adultery (Mk 10:11 – 12, the literal point being found in 10:9). Such observations and cautions are very important, but we should also be careful not to miss the purpose of hyperbole: to graphically underline the point being made. Thus, for example, we should not downplay Jesus’ commands to give all to those in need (Mk 10:21; Lk 12:33; 14:33). Even if we do not all relinquish literally all our possessions to follow Jesus (cf. Mt 27:57; Lk 10:38; Ac 2:44 – 45; 12:12 – 13), we surrender our ownership of them. If Jesus is genuinely Lord of our lives, then he is Lord also of our possessions, and we must use them as wisely and as generously as he would desire. Likewise, even if we believe that treating all remarriage as adultery may go too far (Mt 5:32, 19:19), we must work hard to preserve and nurture marriages, viewing as sacred what God has joined together.

Understanding how Jesus spoke can help us understand how best to obey and apply his teachings today.

Miracle Stories

In the West, skepticism about the Gospels started especially because some Western philosophers had pronounced miracles impossible. For such scholars, the Gospels were not trustworthy because they included miracle accounts; one nineteenth-century scholar, David Strauss, thus regarded the Gospels as late and their miracle accounts as legends and myths. Strauss did so because of his philosophic assumptions, not because of evidence: in fact, one of his own friends was healed when a German Lutheran pastor prayed for him.

Historically, the argument against the Gospels’ miracle reports followed this logic: miracles are not believable because respectable eyewitnesses (those known to the upper-class, elite people who made this argument) do not report them happening. Therefore if some otherwise reputable eyewitnesses do claim miracles happening, they are not to be believed. This is, of course, a circular argument, but it influenced many scholars who were or became skeptics in reference to the Bible. They assumed that miracle reports cannot come from eyewitnesses, because miracles cannot happen. Therefore, in their view, any reports of significant miracles do not reflect early testimony, but rather a process of legendary growth over generations (or at least decades).

Today, however, one can easily demonstrate that these assumptions about eyewitnesses are false, even in the West. Worldwide, literally hundreds of millions of people, from a wide range of denominations and church traditions, claim to have witnessed or experienced divine healing. Sources in China attribute to healing experiences millions of new Christian conversions over the course of two decades. In a survey conducted several decades ago in one large city in India, more than 10 percent of non-Christians claimed to have been cured when Christians prayed for them in Jesus’ name.

The sorts of miracles reported by eyewitnesses today include the same range as in the Gospels. A skeptic may find other explanations for many of the cures, but it is simply impossible empirically to deny that eyewitnesses otherwise known to be reliable do claim the sorts of cures reported in the Gospels. In other words, the miracle accounts in the Gospels can reflect information from eyewitnesses, exactly as can any of the other accounts in the Gospels.

How would ancient hearers have learned from the miracle stories in the Gospels? Presumably they would have learned from them the way that ancients believed they learned from accounts of cures in Greek temples, or the way that Christians in many cultures hear the Gospels’ miracle stories today: they would have experienced these accounts as invitations to faith in the power and love of Jesus, whom we as Christians believe has risen and remains alive and active today.

Lost “Gospels”?

Many people today speculate about the influence of “lost Gospels.” Although this is mostly sensationalism, some early accounts of Jesus’ life were undoubtedly lost. Luke mentions that “many” wrote accounts about Jesus before Luke did, but the majority of scholars believe that only one of these that he has in mind (Mark) survived intact. A majority of scholars also believe that Matthew
and Luke drew on another shared source that often follows the same sequence present in these two Gospels; this document has not survived and is reconstructed merely based on where Matthew and Luke overlap. Some scholars believe that this lost document was an early collection by Matthew, focusing especially on sayings, used by Mark, Luke, and our current version of Matthew’s Gospel (which incorporates also most of Mark’s narrative). Other scholars reconstruct differently the sequence in which our Gospels were written, but the point remains: most of Luke’s “many” sources did not survive.

Some later works have also been sometimes called gospels. Unlike the four Gospels preserved in the Bible, however, these other works date to a later timeframe for writing, no longer within living memory of the eyewitnesses. The earliest of them, often referred to as the “Gospel of Thomas,” is usually dated more than 100 years after Jesus’s death and resurrection and some 70 years after Mark’s Gospel. (Some scholars date it even later, to 100 years after Mark.) Of all the later gospels, Thomas is the earliest and the likeliest to contain some sayings about Jesus, but scholars have not agreed on any way to discover which sayings, if any, are authentic (besides the ones already recorded in our first-century Gospels).

Thomas is usually classified as belonging to the group called “gnostic gospels,” although later ones are generally far more gnostic than Thomas. These works are not really “gospels” at all, for they are not narratives about Jesus. (Comparing them with the canonical Gospels, then, is like comparing apples and oranges; they are completely different categories.) The “gnostic gospels” are usually collections of sayings that their authors claim were passed on “secretly.” As most ancient Christians recognized, those who had to claim information passed on “secretly” were admitting that they had no real evidence that any of the information went back to anyone who knew Jesus. Moreover, the amorphous group of beliefs we define as Gnosticism, and thus clearly gnostic elements, do not clearly predate the second century; these works are all much later — many of them many centuries later. Mostly they were accepted as authoritative only in their own, small gnostic groups. In the wider church’s canon lists over the next few centuries, none of them appear, with only a single exception (one reference to Thomas), whereas the canonical Gospels always appear.

Other late “gospels” are called “apocryphal gospels.” These works come from the heyday of novels, in the late second and early third centuries (with many written later still). They are entertaining and sometimes edifying novels. They are not, however, true accounts about Jesus. Whereas the first-century Gospels assume ancient Galilean customs, Jewish figures of speech, and the like, these later gospels betray their own time period. Apocryphal gospels and acts contain stories of talking dogs, walking crosses, obedient bed bugs and the like; in one of them Jesus strikes dead a boy who offends him and strikes blind the boy’s parents for complaining. Some ancient Christians read them, but the churches never viewed them as Scripture.

Only Matthew, Mark, Luke and John survive from the first century. Unlike the other works, they include abundant Judean and Galilean traits. By the late second century, mainstream churches from one end of the Roman Empire to the other accepted these four, and only these four, Gospels as genuine apostolic memories of Jesus. If one wishes to learn more about Jesus than what one reads in the surviving first-century Gospels, later fictions are not the best place to start. One would do better to read works that genuinely shed light on Jesus’ milieu, even if they do not talk about Jesus himself. These would include, for example, collections of Jewish ideas circulating in Jesus’ day, such as the book of Sirach, probably 1 Enoch, or undisputed Biblical works that are actually cited in the Gospels such as Deuteronomy, Psalms, Isaiah and Daniel.

How the Gospels First Circulated

The ancient world was vastly different from our modern world of printing presses, copy machines and electronic publishing. Most books were copied by hand, one at a time, although very popular books could be dictated to multiple scribes at once. Books were normally written on scrolls in the first century, though in the second century Christians appear to be among the first adopters (or possibly innovators) of the sort of bound volumes we use for hard-copy books today. Christians
found useful this bound version, called a codex, because it allowed for more material to be included in one volume without making it too cumbersome.

Writing material was expensive; for example, a copy of the Gospel of Mark may have required the equivalent early twenty-first-century buying power of $1000–$2000 U.S. Most people thus could not own their own copies of books. In fact, most would not have needed these copies anyway, since most people were either illiterate or only semiliterate. Although inscriptions were posted in cities with the assumption that many people could understand at least some writing, illiteracy was high. It was highest among women (due to the practices of ancient education) and in rural areas, but even many urban-dwelling men could not read, especially a work as long and detailed as a Gospel.

Most people thus heard the Gospels rather than read them for themselves. (That is why this study Bible’s notes usually speak of the Gospels’ first audience or hearers rather than their first readers.) They might hear an entire Gospel read during a church meeting, which was typically an intimate gathering in the home of one of the believers. Because many were accustomed to listening intently to stories or speeches, they would be able to follow the stories carefully. Hearing the accounts over and over, they would quickly learn much of the material by heart. Additionally, most people could not unroll multiple scrolls trying to find related passages; rather, they often quoted from memory from many different Biblical books.

Some books in antiquity were sold in book markets, but books achieved their greatest circulation when given public readings or especially when read at banquets. Persons of means who liked a book they heard could have a scribe write out a new copy for them. Because early Christians met around the Lord’s Supper, they also had a banquet setting for the reading of the Gospels. The most familiar form of public reading for them, however, would have been the use of Scripture in the synagogues. Already in the second century, Christians read apostolic works as Scripture alongside the Old Testament.

### Authorship of the Gospels

By the standards used to evaluate ancient works’ authorship, the traditions of the Gospels’ authorship are very early. This is not surprising, given the amount of work represented by each of the Gospels. Works such as the Gospels normally would require careful writing and revision, then oral presentation and further revision based on feedback.

Works as large as these were major literary undertakings, requiring so much papyrus that in terms of early twenty-first-century buying power the larger Gospels may have been worth thousands of U.S. dollars, as suggested earlier. They were not as large as elite, multivolume historical works, but were nevertheless larger works than the vast majority of people could hope to afford.

Normally in antiquity readers knew who produced such major works, whether by information on the outside of the scroll or by knowledge circulated only by word of mouth. In a work this size, authorship would be one of the last details forgotten.

Moreover, had the church in fact forgotten the authorship of the Gospels, the traditions about their authorship would likely look very different. Second-century churches in different parts of the Roman Empire would likely have come up with different speculations about authorship, probably often preferring the names of apostles favored by their own locales. Instead, the early churches throughout the Empire settled on the same authors for the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John). Moreover, if the church were inventing names for authors, non-apostles such as Mark and Luke make little sense.

These observations suggest that the traditions about the different Gospels’ authorship are very early, as Martin Hengel argued. These traditions may offer more compelling evidence for some Gospels (such as Luke) than for others (such as Matthew), but on the whole they are stronger than many critics recognize. For Christians, of course, what matters most is not the tradition of human authorship, but our confidence that God speaks to us through these texts, and that they preserve the voice of our Lord Jesus Christ.
Matthew’s Position Among the Gospels

As a Gospel, Matthew is an ancient biography, and the information treated in the introduction to the Gospels in general also applies to Matthew. But just as other ancient biographies differed from one another even when they described the same person, so do the four Gospels. Of the four Gospels, Matthew is the most carefully arranged by topic and therefore lends itself most easily to a hierarchical outline. Along with John, Matthew is also an emphatically Jewish Gospel; Matthew moves in a thought world resembling that of the emerging rabbinc movement (the circle of Jewish sages and law-teachers) more than do the other Synoptic Gospels. (Our sources for rabbinic Judaism are later than the NT, but later rabbis avoided early Christian writings, so the frequent parallels — sometimes even in sayings and expressions, for which see, e.g., Mt 7:2; 18:20; 19:3, 24; 21:21; 22:2; 23:25 — presumably stem from concepts, customs and figures of speech already circulating among sages in the first century.)

Authorship

As noted above, the traditions of the Gospels’ authorship are very early. Works as large as Matthew’s Gospel were major literary undertakings. As suggested for the Gospels generally, in a work this size, authorship would be one of the last matters forgotten. That observation would surely be particularly relevant for Matthew’s Gospel, which seems to have enjoyed popularity right from the start. Matthew was the early second-century church’s favorite and most-cited Gospel.

Some raise questions about the ancient tradition in the case of Matthew. One reason for these questions is that the earliest tradition about Matthew’s Gospel (from a very early second-century church father named Papias) is that he wrote in Hebrew and that other Gospels, probably including Mark, drew on this work. Most scholars agree that our current Gospel of Matthew was not written in Hebrew, nor does it appear to be mostly translated from Hebrew. Most scholars, moreover, believe that our current Gospel of Matthew makes use of Mark’s Gospel, casting doubt on Papias’s apparent suggestion that Matthew wrote first (although it is possible to interpret Papias differently).
If Papias was wrong about some details, why should we trust him on others? This is a legitimate concern. Nevertheless, some other factors may mitigate the concern. First, some scholars believe that even if Papias does not properly describe our current Gospel of Matthew, he preserves some genuine information; possibly Matthew wrote a collection of Jesus’ sayings (fitting the meaning of Papias’s word here) in Hebrew or Aramaic, on which others (including Matthew’s later Gospel in Greek) drew. Second, people are usually more apt to be correct about the simple fact of a document’s authorship than about the circumstances of its writing. So even if Papias was partly or largely wrong, if he knew anything at all about these works written just a generation before him, he likely knew about their authorship.

Another objection that some raise against the traditional belief that Matthew wrote this Gospel is that Matthew, who was one of Jesus’ disciples (9:9; 10:3; Mk 3:18), would not need to depend on Mark’s Gospel, since Matthew was an eyewitness of most of Jesus’ public ministry. Ancient approaches to eyewitness sources differed somewhat from modern approaches, however. Thus when the historian Xenophon writes an account of events in which he participated, he nevertheless depends heavily on an earlier-published work by another author, because the other work was already in wide circulation. By the same token, Matthew could have been an eyewitness and nevertheless used Mark because its wide circulation (or its association with Peter) made it a standard work. None of this proves that Matthew wrote this Gospel. It does, however, call into question the conviction with which some scholars dismiss that early tradition.

Provenance and Date

There is no consensus and no certain means of resolving Matthew’s precise setting or date. Some general considerations may be relevant. Because Matthew, more than any other NT document, addresses Jewish concepts closely paralleled in the emerging rabbinic movement, the common scholarly view that he wrote from the Roman province of Syria (which included Judea and Galilee) makes good sense. Some scholars also find similarities between Matthew and other documents from early Syrian Christianity.

Because Matthew wrote in Greek, which dominated in Syria’s urban centers, rather than Aramaic, which dominated in rural areas, Matthew’s core audience might have been located in an urban setting. Many scholars thus suggest that Matthew writes especially for Antioch in Syria. Antioch had a large Jewish community, one of the few Jewish communities not devastated by the Judean war; it also was an early Christian center of mission to Gentiles (Ac 11:20; 13:1 – 3; Gal 2:11 – 12).

Ultimately, what we can be sure of is that Matthew wrote especially to Jewish believers in Jesus in the eastern Mediterranean world. Whatever specific “core” audience he may have envisioned, as the author of a major literary work Matthew probably hoped that his Gospel would circulate as widely as possible.

Matthew’s date is also a matter of much debate. If Matthew was the first Gospel writer, he probably wrote before Jerusalem’s destruction in AD 70. A larger number of scholars, however, believe that Matthew made use of Mark’s Gospel, and many thus date Matthew after 70. On this view, it is not surprising that Matthew must urge his Jewish Christian audience to bring the message of the kingdom to Gentiles — many Jewish followers of Jesus at that time would have felt little love for the people who destroyed their holy city and enslaved many of their people. Nevertheless, even before 70, tensions were building toward that climax, so a similar background could be relevant on either dating.

A majority of scholars think that Matthew writes after 70 also because of allusions to the
destruction of the temple and the holy city. In possible contrast to Mark’s more ambiguous relationship between Jesus’ warning of the temple’s destruction and the promise of his return, Matthew seems to distinguish the two events (compare 24:2–3 with Mk 13:2–4). (Some also point to Mt 22:7.) Such features could well suggest a post-70 date. Nevertheless, it seems clear from the earliest sources (including some shared by and thus earlier than Matthew and Luke) that Jesus himself did predict impending judgment on the temple (23:38; Mk 13:2,14; Lk 13:35; cf. Mk 11:15 – 17).

In the end, the specific question of date may be a moot point. (Indeed, some scholars think that Matthew and/or his assistants expanded the Gospel in subsequent editions at different times.) Because the Gospels are primarily concerned with events that have already occurred in the past, the time they describe is more crucial than the time in which they wrote, although the latter is helpful for considering why the different writers emphasized some particular themes.

Background

Only rarely can scholars studying ancient documents pinpoint precise dates for those documents. One does not need to know exact dates or locations to reconstruct the general setting of such works, however.

As will be clear from the following study notes on Matthew’s Gospel, Matthew addresses an audience comfortable with traditional Jewish forms of speech. For example, one need only compare Mark’s pervasive “kingdom of God” with Matthew’s usual “kingdom of heaven” to see that Matthew prefers traditional (and emphatically) Jewish formulations.

Because Jewish thinking took many forms in different parts of the ancient world, it is valuable to be more precise in this case. Whereas Jewish people who liked apocalyptic literature would particularly appreciate Revelation, Jews in the Diaspora would appreciate Hebrews, and groups such as the Essenes might appreciate John’s Gospel, Matthew often moves in a more “rabbinic” world. That is, the views and arguments of teachers and interpreters of the law, who came to be called rabbis, are very relevant to Matthew’s Gospel. Most of the sources from which we know rabbinic thought are later, but they offer numerous parallels to Matthew’s ways of handling Scripture and intimate understanding of Pharisaic debates with Jesus (e.g., see notes on 19:3; 23:25 – 26). Because Jesus was himself a sage and engaged in discussion, and often debate, with Pharisaic teachers, Matthew continues to engage a world within which Jesus himself moved. ◆
The Genealogy of Jesus the Messiah

1:1-17pp — Lk 3:23-38
1:3-6pp — Ru 4:18-22
1:7-11pp — 1Ch 3:10-17

This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham:

2 Abraham was the father of Isaac, Isaac the father of Jacob, Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers,
3 Judah the father of Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar, Perez the father of Hezron, Hezron the father of Ram,
4 Ram the father of Amminadab, Amminadab the father of Nahshon, Nahshon the father of Salmon,
5 Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab, Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth, Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of King David.

David was the father of Solomon, whose mother had been Uriah's wife,

is confronted with his own sinfulness (Ge 38:26) and changes (Ge 44:33 – 34).

1:5 Rahab. Because Rahab joined Israel, it was natural for her to marry into Israel. Though not an Israelite, she hid Israel's spies on her roof, betrayed Jericho and saved her family; she contrasts with Achan of Judah, who hid loot under his tent, betrayed Israel and destroyed his family (Jos 2:1 – 21; 6:23 – 25; 7:1 – 26).

1:6 Uriah's wife. Matthew calls Solomon's mother not by her name (Bathsheba) but the woman who "had been Uriah's wife," his widow. Bathsheba may have been from Judah (compare her father's name in 2Sa 11:3 with 2Sa 23:34), but she had married into a Hittite family (2Sa 11:3). Thus each of the four women in Matthew's genealogy (vv. 3 – 6) is somehow closely associated with Gentiles.

1:11–17 The list of David's royal descendants summarizes the history of Judah until the exile (the material covered in 1 – 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles). By slight changes in orthography (used by other Jewish teachers to make theological points), Matthew evokes other elements of Israel's history as well (the Psalms and the Prophets). In his Greek text, "Asa" (vv. 7 – 8) is literally "Asaph," the name of a leader of Israel's worship (1Ch 16:5,7,37; 25:1 – 6). Likewise, in the Greek Matthew changes the name of the wicked king Amon to the name of the prophet Amos (v. 10).

1:12 Jecohiah. Although God judged Jehoniah (Jer 22:24,28; 24:1 ["Jehoiaochin" in these vv.]), God restored his descendant Zerubbabel to leadership (e.g., Ezr 3:8; Hag 2,23).

1:13–16 Israelite genealogies could skip generations; thus Matthew lists only 11 generations from the exile before Joseph, whereas Luke lists about 20.
MATTHEW 1:1 – 17

MATTHEW'S GENEALOGY

People often preserved genealogies, especially if they included some important or prominent ancestors. In Egypt, e.g., genealogies were important for determining tax status, so there were sometimes financial implications of not preserving the list of one’s ancestors correctly! Among the Jewish people, priests and Levites could perform their duties only if they could demonstrate their ancestry. But no Jewish family ancestry could be more prominent than the Davidic royal line. Although Matthew’s and Luke’s genealogies trace Jesus’ royal ancestry on Joseph’s side of the family through somewhat different paths (which some attribute to levirate marriage adoptions), both emphasize that, many centuries earlier, Jesus’ line proceeded from King David (cf. Ro 1:3; Rev 5:5).

Ancient Jewish genealogies had several purposes. One was often to highlight the purity of one’s Israelite (or Levite, etc.) ancestry. It is thus striking that Matthew includes in his genealogy four women who had clear associations with Gentiles (see notes on Mt 1:3,5,6). These women include three ancestors of King David and the mother of King Solomon; Matthew thus highlights God’s welcome for God-fearing Gentiles already in his opening paragraph, based on Israel’s history.

Another purpose of Biblical genealogies was to provide a connection between significant generations. Genesis does not narrate the activities of every generation between Adam and Noah or between Noah and Abraham. Rather, Genesis focuses on those major figures and summarizes the time between them by listing others (see note on Mt 1:1). In the same way, Matthew lists many generations, here in schematic groups of roughly 14 each, connecting the most momentous occasions in Israel’s history: Abraham, David, the exile and now the Messiah (see note on Mt 1:17).

Jewish teachers observed that one’s ancestry showed God’s faithfulness; some remarked that arranging all the marriages in people’s ancestry was a greater miracle than the parting of the sea in Moses’ day. Matthew’s genealogy sets the tone of this Gospel by evoking the Biblical history of Israel. Jewish recipients familiar with Scripture would hear the names of most of these ancestors with rich nuances of how God had guided his people’s history. Far from being foreign to their heritage, Jesus was its climax.

Although the genealogy does not quote Scripture, it evokes the entire Biblical narrative of Israel’s history. Ancient rabbis sometimes developed wordplays by changing a letter here or there, and some scholars find such wordplays in Matthew’s genealogy. In addition to Jesus being the direct heir of the royal line of David, he is the spiritual heir to the Psalms and the Prophets. Thus, these scholars note, the Greek text of Matthew’s genealogy speaks of not precisely “Asa” but the psalmist Asaph (Mt 1:8) and not precisely the wicked king “Amon” but the prophet Amos (Mt 1:10).
from David to the exile to Babylon, and fourteen from the exile to the Messiah.

Joseph Accepts Jesus as His Son

18This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant by the Holy Spirit. 19Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

20But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. 21She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, ① because he will save his people from their sins.” ②

① All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: 22“The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel” ③ (which means “God with us”). 23When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. 24But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

note on v. 1). Some scholars point out that when “David” is spelled in Hebrew letters and calculated as numbers (Hebrew used letters also as numbers), it comes out to 14. Some other scholars attribute this to coincidence.

1:18 before they came together. Whenever possible, biographers of important figures reported the figures’ honorable ancestry, honorable behavior of their parents, or special circumstances surrounding their birth. Those who compare Jesus’ virgin birth to Greek stories about gods impregnating women, however, appeal to a milieu quite foreign to this account. In the Greek stories, the gods are many, are immoral, and impregnate women who are thus not virgins. Much more relevant are Biblical accounts of God empowering supernatural births in the OT (Ge 21:1 – 2; 25:21; 30:22; Jdg 13:3). Even among miraculous births, however, God does something new: Jesus is born not merely from someone previously unable to bear, but from a virgin.

Greek men, on average, were more than ten years older than their brides, because Greeks had a shortage of marriageable women (sources suggest that girl babies were discarded more often than boys). Jewish men, however, were usually only a few years older than their wives; both genders assumed some adult responsibilities at puberty, were usually only a few years older than their wives; both genders assumed some adult responsibilities at puberty, but men would often work a few years so they could provide financial stability for marriage. Betrothal involved a financial agreement between families. It often lasted about a year; in conservative Galilean families the couple could not be together alone before the wedding, so Joseph may not have known Mary very well.

1:19 divorce her quietly. More binding than modern Western engagements, betrothal could be ended only by divorce or by the death of one of the partners. Sexual unfaithfulness was grounds for divorce throughout the ancient world; both law and custom in fact required a man to divorce an unfaithful wife or fiancée. (Romans did not allow subject peoples to execute convicted persons without Roman permission in this period; although some lynchings may have occurred in secret, they were rare, so Mary likely faced divorce rather than death [see Lev 20:10].) A Jewish man who divorced a faithful wife had to refund the money she brought into the marriage (normally a gift from her father). In the case of an unfaithful wife, however, the husband could keep this money, plus he was entitled to a refund of any money he may have paid the father as a bride price. (Paying the father was the traditional Israelite custom; the father giving his daughter a monetary gift was a more recent but now widespread custom.) Joseph might thus have profited financially by divorcing Mary in front of elders, in a court setting. Instead, sensitive to her shame, he prefers a private divorce. A private divorce meant giving her a certificate of divorce, which would specify her freedom to marry someone else, in front of two or three witnesses.

1:20 angel. The angel of the Lord sometimes announced births (Ge 16:10; Jdg 13:3) and other events (e.g., Ge 22:15 – 18). This angel appears to Joseph especially in dreams (here; 2:13,19), a common way that God speaks in Scripture (e.g., Ge 20:3; 31:24; 1Ki 3:5), sometimes by his angel (Ge 31:11; cf. Ge 28:12). The first Joseph heard God through dreams (Ge 37:5,9). As here, divine messages often encouraged people not to fear (e.g., Ge 15:1; 21:7; 26:24; 46:3). Greeks often reported dreams about deceased persons, but in Biblical dreams God or angels are the most common speakers.

1:21 Biblical birth announcements sometimes included these elements: a woman ‘will bear a son’ (Ge 16:11; 17:19;21; Jdg 13:3,5) “and you will call his name” (Ge 16:11; 17:19; Isa 7:14; 8:3). Jesus is the same name in Greek as Joshua, which in its earliest form (Yehoshua) means “God is salvation” (eventually contracted to Yeshua).

1:22 23 to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: “The virgin will conceive . . . and they will call him Immanuel” (which means “God with us”). In context, the son of Isa 7:14 was a sign to King Ahaz, and was probably Isaiah’s own son (Isa 7:10 – 17; 8:3 – 4). Isaiah’s children’s names were for “signs” to Israel (Isa 8:18). Nevertheless, Isaiah’s son signified not only immediate deliverance in their own time, but pointed to the ultimate deliverance with the future birth of the ultimate Davidic ruler (Isa 9:6 – 7; cf. Isa 11:1 – 5). That would be the ultimate fulfillment of the promise of “Immanuel” (Isa 7:14). “God with us”: the king would himself be the “Mighty God” ( Isa 9:6), a title for God elsewhere in Isaiah (Isa 10:21). Matthew has in mind the context of the entire section of Isaiah, which he again cites soon afterward (see Isa 9:1 – 2 in Mt 4:15 – 16).

1:24 took Mary home as his wife. If Mary’s pregnancy was known, Joseph could repudiate responsibility and perhaps evade suspicion by divorcing her. By instead marry ing her, Joseph assumes responsibility for the pregnancy, embracing her shame. The couple could long be a matter of village gossip. Joseph valued God’s direct calling through a dream more than what others thought of him.

1:25 did not consummate their marriage. Joseph and Mary could not avoid physical closeness; often newly married couples lived together in a small room on top of the home.
The Magi Visit the Messiah

2 After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.”

3 When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. 4 When he had called together all the

MATTHEW 2:1

HEROD THE GREAT

He rod the Great achieved power in Judea with Roman backing; he brutally suppressed all opposition. Herod was a friend of Marc Antony but, unfortunately, an enemy of Antony’s mistress Cleopatra. When Octavian (Augustus) Caesar defeated Antony and Cleopatra, Herod submitted to him. Noting that he had been a loyal friend to Antony until the end, Herod promised that he would now be no less loyal to Caesar, and Caesar accepted this promise. Herod named cities for Caesar and built temples in his honor.

Ethnically Herod was an Idumean (an Edomite); his ancestors had been forcibly converted to Judaism, and he built for Jerusalem’s God the ancient world’s largest and most magnificent temple. Politically astute, however, Herod also built temples honoring the divine emperor Augustus and made lavish contributions to Gentile cities in or near his territory. Among his other reported politically savvy acts was the execution of members of the old Sanhedrin who opposed him; he replaced those council members instead with his own political supporters. He did not usually tolerate dissent. When some young disciples of religious teachers took down the golden eagle that Herod had erected on the temple, he had them executed.

Most of our sources about Herod focus on his acts in Jerusalem, but the character of Herod that they reveal fits what Matthew says about him. So protective was Herod of his power and so jealous of potential rivals that his more popular brother-in-law, a very young high priest, had a drowning “accident” — in a pool that archaeology shows was very shallow. When his favorite wife Mariamne, a Maccabean princess, was falsely accused of adultery he had her strangled, though he later named a tower in his palace in her honor. He executed two of his sons who were falsely accused of plotting against him. Five days before he died he executed another son (the one who had falsely framed the other two).

continued on next page
people’s chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. 5 “In Bethlehem in Judaea,” they replied, “for this is what the prophet has written:

6 “‘But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,

are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for out of you will come a ruler
who will shepherd my people Israel.’”

7 Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time

So much did Herod crave honor it is said that when he was on his deathbed he ordered many nobles arrested. He thought that if many people were executed on the day that he died, he could ensure that there would be mourning rather than celebration at the time of his death. When he died, however, the nobles were released and the people celebrated. ◆
the star had appeared. 8He sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him.”

9After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. 10When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. 11On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. 12And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

The Escape to Egypt
13When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. 14“Get up,” he said, “take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.”

15So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, where he stayed until the death of Herod.

Matthew 2:8

Bethlehem. It is perhaps six miles (nine kilometers) from Jerusalem, perhaps not much more than a three-hour journey for the caravan.

2:11 bowed down. Prostration was a way that Persians venerated rulers as well as deities. Magi could be Zoroastrian dualists, but in this period may have still been polytheists (worshipers of multiple gods). gold, frankincense and myrrh. Frankincense and myrrh mostly came from southern Arabia and Somaliland, and thus were very expensive. People often used these spices in royal courts and other lavish settings (cf. Ps 72:10; Isa 60:6).

2:12 warned in a dream. Magi were known for their reported ability to interpret dreams. Because their large caravan could have been visible during the day from Herod's nearby fortress Herodium, they presumably left under cover of night. Herod would expect them to return to Jerusalem, and from there to follow a road that would take them to the north and the east. Instead, they travel southward toward Hebron, then north along a coastal road or east along a caravan route.

2:13 Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. In one Jewish tradition, a dream warned Moses' father to protect him from Pharaoh. escape to Egypt. A large Jewish community already lived in Egypt. Alexandria, a Greek-founded city in the northern delta region of Egypt, included perhaps the largest Jewish community outside Judea and Galilee. Perhaps one-third of Alexandria was Jewish, so the family could easily find refuge there. Further, if they had means to transport safely even some of the gold and spices (v. 11) they would have means to support themselves for a long period of time.

2:15 what the Lord had said through the prophet. In context, Hos 11:1 describes God bringing Israel as his "son" from Egypt. The context, however, also goes on to speak of a new exodus, when God would save his people from captivity (Hos 11:5,11; on the new exodus, see also note on Mt 3:3). Because Jesus identifies with and recapitulates the history of his people (see note on 1:1), the principles in passages about the exodus, captivity (v. 18) and testing in the wilderness (4:1–11) apply also to him.

2:16 gave orders to kill all the boys. Herod acts here in keeping with what we know of his character from other sources (see the article “Herod the Great,” p. XXXX). The actual size of ancient Bethlehem is unclear, but some estimate perhaps 20 boys under the age of two were killed. Jewish people considered abandoning or killing babies a pagan practice, conspicuously associated with evil kings such as Antiochus IV Epiphanes. The most widely known example, however, was Pharaoh in the OT (Ex 1:16,22). In this narrative, the pagan Magi worship the true king, whereas the Jewish ruler acts like a pagan one. (For Matthew's interest in Gentiles, see the Introduction to Matthew: Provenance and Date; see also 28:19).

2:17 – 18 Matthew quotes from Jer 31:15; Matthew undoubtedly knew that the context calls Israel God's "son" (Jer 31:20) and goes on to promise a new covenant (Jer 31:31–34). Jer 31:15 depicts Rachel weeping as her descendants are carried into captivity in the exile. Matthew would have known that Rachel's tomb was near Bethlehem (Ge 35:19); like Israel's exile, the slaughter of Bethlehem's infants is a tragedy, but one that could not prevent the ultimate promise of God's restoration in the new covenant.

2:20 go to the land of Israel… those who were trying to take the child's life are dead. The angel's promise here evokes Ex 4:19: Moses can return to Egypt because those who sought his life have died. Jesus here is thus like Moses, Israel's deliverer — and, ominously, Judea has become like Egypt in Moses' day.

2:22 Archelaus was reigning. A few days before Herod died in 4 BC, Archelaus, his son by a Samaritan wife,
became ruler. Scholars often observe that Archelaus shared his father’s vices while lacking his administrative competence. Archelaus made many enemies, and his inability to keep peace during the turbulence of AD 6 led to Rome removing him and banishing him to Gaul.

2:23 Nazareth. Population estimates for Nazareth vary; the village proper may have contained perhaps 500 residents (smaller than Bethlehem). Nazareth was a traditional and religiously conservative Galilean town; pottery suggests that many of its residents had migrated from Judea. Ancients sometimes built arguments on wordplays, and Jewish teachers often interpreted the OT this way. Some think that Matthew plays on Jdg 13:5: he “is to be a Nazirite.” Others, probably more commonly, believe that Matthew plays on Isa 11:1, which depicts the Messiah as a “Branch,” in Hebrew, nezer. Other Biblical passages depict the Messiah as a branch (Isa 4:2; Jer 23:5; 33:15; Zec 3:8; 6:12), as do Dead Sea Scrolls.

3:1–2 A first-century Jewish historian, Josephus, also reports that John baptized people in the wilderness, inviting them to spiritual transformation. Josephus, however, adapts his description of John to appeal to Greek readers, as he depicts the “sects” of Judea—Pharisees, Sadducees and Essenes—along the lines of Greek philosophic sects. The Gospels, however, portray John in a way more in keeping with authentic Judean prophets: a preacher of the imminent new era of God’s reign. “Kingdom of heaven” was an accepted Jewish way of speaking about God’s reign (cf. Da 2:44; 4:26). The wilderness was one of the few places where prophetic figures could safely draw crowds, but of course it lacked the amenities of civilization.

3:3 Matthew quotes Isa 40:3. Some Biblical prophets, including Isaiah, had prophesied a new exodus, by which God would gather his people from exile (Isa 11:16; Jer 23:7–8; Hos 2:14–15). He would establish a way through the wilderness, as he had led his people through the wilderness of old. John was a herald preparing the people for this event, and for the coming of “the Lord”—by which the Hebrew text of Isaiah referred to God himself.
who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah:

"A voice of one calling in the wilderness,
'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.'"  

4 John’s clothes were made of camel’s hair, and he had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey. 5 People went out to him from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan. 6 Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River.

7 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, he said to them: "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? 7 Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. 8 And do not think you can say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. 10 The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire."  

优 11 “I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me comes one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. 12 His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire.”

### The Baptism of Jesus

#### 3:13-17pp — MK 1:9-11; Lk 3:21,22; Jn 1:31-34

13 Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. 14 But John tried to deter him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” 15 Jesus replied, “Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness.” Then John consented.

16 As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. 17 And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.”

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<sup>a</sup> Isaiah 40:3  
<sup>b</sup> Or in

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3:4 leather belt. It evokes Elijah (2Ki 1:8), who was to prepare the way for God’s coming (Mal 4:5–6). See note on Mk 1:6.  
3:7 brood of vipers. Many people in antiquity thought that vipers were born by hatching inside their mother, then gnawing their way through their mothers’ wombs — killing their mothers in the process. Comparing people to a “brood of vipers,” then, was analogous to calling them parent-murderers — one of the most reprehensible offenses conceivable.

3:9 Abraham as our father. Many Jewish people believed that Israel as a whole would be saved because God chose Israel in Abraham. Prophets, however, sometimes challenged Israel’s dependence on their chosenness (Am 3:2; 9:7). stones … children. Sometimes in the OT stones were used to symbolize the 12 tribes of Israel (Ex 28:21; Jos 4:8; 1Ki 18:31). In Hebrew and Aramaic, “children” and “stones” sound very similar; prophets often made wordplays (note examples in the Hebrew texts of Jer 1:11–12 [see NIV text note]; Am 8:1–2; Mic 1:10–15 [see NIV text notes]).

3:10 ax is already at the root of the trees. Cutting down or burning a tree could symbolize a nation’s judgment (Ps 80:14–16; Jer 11:16; Eze 31:10–18; Da 4:23). The image here probably involves dead trees or small trees, the kind that could be felled easily by most farmers’ axes. Fruit trees that yielded no fruit typically served best as firewood.

3:11 baptize you with water. Many people, including Jewish people, had ritual washings; some Jewish sects required ritual immersion to purify those entering their sect, and Gentiles converting to Judaism were immersed to cleanse them from the impurity of idolatry (see the article “Baptism,” p. XXX). sandals … to carry. Handling sandals was the sort of servile task that only a servant would normally perform; the prophets were “servants of God” (2Ki 9:7; Jer 7:25; 26:5; 29:19; 35:15; 44:4), but John considers himself unworthy even for this role. Clearly he envisions himself as preparing for the coming of God himself (see notes on vv. 3, 4). baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. Biblically only God could pour out his own Spirit, as he promised to do at the time of the coming restoration (Isa 32:15; 44:3; Eze 39:29; Joel 2:28). In contrast to the Spirit, the “fire” here presumably signals end-time judgment (see notes on vv. 10,12).

3:12 gathering his wheat … burning up the chaff. After harvest farmers had to separate the edible wheat from the inedible chaff. They would toss the grain into the air so that the wind could blow out the chaff, which was lighter. Scripture often used “chaff” as an image for the worthless that God would destroy (e.g., Ex 15:7 [stubble]; Ps 1:4; Isa 17:13; 29:5; Hos 13:3). Indeed, “Elijah’s” mission (see note on 3:4) was to prevent the nation from becoming like burned chaff (Mal 4:1,5). Real chaff burns too quickly to be good fuel; the chaff here, however, burns with “unquenchable” fire (cf. Isa 66:24). Jewish people had various views of Gehinnom (or Gehenna), or hell: the wicked would burn up instantly; they would be tortured for a year and then either released or destroyed; or they would burn forever. In his message to the religious elite (v. 7) John sides with the harshest option articulated by his contemporaries.

3:14 I need to be baptized by you. Given John’s expectation that the coming one would be divine and baptize in the Spirit (see note on v. 11), that John feels unworthy to baptize Jesus makes sense.

3:16 heaven was opened. The heavens could be opened for revelations from God (Eze 1:1); dove. Doves had various symbolic functions in ancient sources; perhaps the most widespread and relevant for Jewish hearers would be the dove’s role as a harbinger of a new world in Ge 8:8–12.  
3:17 Sometimes God spoke with a voice from heaven (e.g., Ge 22:15 – 18). Later Jewish teachers called this means of God speaking a bat qol; though they felt that it was an inferior substitute for prophecy, the prophet here also recognizes Jesus’ identity (v. 14). The voice here seems to blend allusions to two Biblical texts; the first is Ps 2:7, a promise to the Davidic line especially applicable to the promised, end-time Davidic ruler. For Mark (1:11), the second might be Ge 22:2, but Matthew probably intends an
Jesus Is Tested in the Wilderness
4:1–11pp — Mk 1:12,13; Lk 4:1–13

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into
the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. The tempter came to him and said, “If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.”

Matthew 4:6

4:1 to be tempted. In Scripture, God’s servants generally faced testing before they were ready for their public ministries. Following Biblical precedent, ancient Judaism recognized the devil as tempter (cf. 1Ch 21:1), accuser (Job 1:9–11; 2:4–5; Zec 3:1) and deceiver. Jesus being led into the wilderness probably evokes Israel’s experience (cf. Ex 13:18; see note on Mt 4:2). “Led,” “wilderness,” and being tempted or tested for “forty” periods of time all appear together in Dt 8:2; Jesus quotes Dt 8:3 in v. 4.

4:2 fasting forty days and forty nights. This period of fasting before Jesus’ ministry recalls Moses fasting 40 days and nights before receiving the law (Ex 24:18; 34:28; cf. 2:20); Elijah also followed the same example (1Ki 19:8). Jesus being tested in the wilderness 40 days also likely recalls Israel being tested in the wilderness for 40 years (see notes on 2:15,17–18).

4:3 The tempter directly challenges or reinterprets God’s words in 3:17; cf. Ge 3:1–4. Magicians sometimes claimed the power to change one substance into another. Jesus can multiply food, but trusts his Father’s care (cf. v. 11; 6:11; 14:19–20).

4:4 It is written. A common formula for citing Scripture (already in, e.g., Jos 8:31; 2Ch 31:3; Ezr 6:18). In vv. 4–10, Jesus quotes three texts given to Israel when they were tempted in the wilderness. Here he quotes from Dt 8:3, which in context addressed Israel as God’s “son” (Dt 8:5). The devil might seek to offer a different interpretation of Jesus’ sonship (v. 3; cf. 3:17); Jesus, however, appeals to Scripture to define this sonship.

4:5 highest point of the temple. Might refer to the temple complex’s southeast corner overlooking the Kidron Valley.

4:6 Later rabbis also expected that even the devil and demons knew Scripture, though the devil did not obey it. Again reframing Jesus’ sonship (3:17; see note on 4:4),

JESUS’ BAPTISM AND TEMPTATION

Events surrounding Jesus’ baptism reveal the intense religious excitement and social ferment of the early days of John the Baptist’s ministry. Herod had been cruel and rapacious; Roman military occupation was harsh. Some agitation centered around the change of governors from Gratus to Pilate in AD 26. Most of the people hoped for a religious solution to their intolerable political situation, and when they heard of a new prophet, they flocked out into the desert to hear him. The religious sect (Essenes) from Qumran professed similar doctrines of repentance and baptism. Jesus was baptized at Bethany on the other side of the Jordan (see Jn 1:28). John also baptized at “Aenon near Salim” (Jn 3:23).

For Jesus’ temptation, see notes on Mt 4:1–11; Lk 4:1–13.

Many interpreters place John’s baptismal ministry at a point on the middle reaches of the Jordan River, where trade routes converge at a natural ford not far from the modern site of Tel Shalem.
Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. “All this I will give you,” he said, “if you will bow down and worship me.”

Jesus said to him, “Away from me, Satan! For it is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.’”

Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.

The devil quotes Ps 91:11–12 out of context. The psalm refers to God’s protection if one falls; it does not refer to jumping.

Continuing the general context of his previous quotation, Jesus quotes Dt 6:16, which in context warns against Israel’s dissatisfaction with God’s provision in the wilderness.

Still following the context, Jesus cites Dt 6:13, which prohibited idolatry (Dt 6:14), recognizing the one true God (Dt 6:4–5, 12).

angels … attended him. Trusting the Father rather than creating bread (vv. 3–4) or presuming on angels (vv. 6–7), Jesus here receives angelic help after his fast (cf. 26:53).

God,” he said, “throw yourself down. For it is written:

‘He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.’

Jesus answered him, “It is also written: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’

the devil quotes Ps 91:11–12 out of context. The psalm refers to God’s protection if one falls; it does not refer to jumping.

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In Biblical languages, the term translated into English as “kingdom” usually meant “reign,” “rule,” or “authority.” Jewish people recognized that God reigned as king over the world he created (Ps 22:28; 145:12–13; Da 4:3,34). Some believed that they affirmed this whenever they recited the Shema, acknowledging that there was just one true God (Dt 6:4).

But while Jewish people acknowledged God’s present rule, most looked for God’s unchallenged reign in the age to come (Da 2:44–45; 7:14,27). Many prayed regularly for God’s future kingdom—for him to reign unopposed, to fulfill his purposes of justice and peace for the world. One familiar prayer that came to be prayed daily was the Kaddish, which in its ancient form began: “Exalted and hallowed be his great name … May he cause his kingdom to reign.”

By Jesus’ day, many were familiar with Daniel’s prophecy about four kingdoms and believed the fourth and final kingdom to be the current Roman Empire (Da 2:37–43). Daniel prophesied that in the time of that fourth kingdom, God would establish an eternal kingdom, overthrowing the other ones (Da 2:44). This kingdom belonged to a “Son of man,” a human one, whose rule was associated with the deliverance of God’s people and contrasted with the preceding empires that were compared with beasts (Da 7:12–14, 17–18, 21–22). Daniel spoke of these truths as “mysteries” (Da 2:28–29; cf. 2:47). Thus it is not surprising that the Gospels speak of the “secret” or “secrets” of the kingdom (Mt 13:11; Mk 4:11; Lk 8:10).

Jesus’ first followers in the New Testament, who believed that the coming Messianic king had already come once and that the first fruits of the future resurrection had occurred, often treated the future kingdom as also present. We recognize that just as the king has both come and will come again, his kingdom has already invaded this world but remains to be consummated. Where the other Gospels use “kingdom of God,” Matthew uses “kingdom of heaven” with just four or five exceptions. This Jewish expression appears elsewhere and reflects the Jewish use of “heaven” at times as a respectful and roundabout way of saying “God.”
Jesus Begins to Preach

12 When Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, he withdrew to Galilee. 13 Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali— to fulfill what was said through the prophet Isaiah:

15 “Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the Way of the Sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—

16 the people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.”

17 From that time on Jesus began to preach, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.”

Jesus Calls His First Disciples

4:18-22p — Mk 1:16-20; Lk 5:2-11; Jn 1:35-42

18 As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter* and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. 19 “Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will send you out to fish for people.” 20 At once they left their nets and followed him.

21 Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John.* They were in a boat with their father Zebedee, preparing their nets. Jesus called them, 22 and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.

Jesus Heals the Sick

23 Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people. 24 News about him spread all over Syria, and people brought to him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-possessed, those having seizures, and the paralyzed; and he healed them. 25 Large crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis,* Jerusalem, Judea and the region across the Jordan followed him.

Introduction to the Sermon on the Mount

5 Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, 2 and he began to teach them.

The Beatitudes

5:3-12pp — Lk 6:20-23

He said:

3 “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

* Isaiah 9:1, 2  ** That is, the Ten Cities

4:12 P Mt 14:3
4:13 * Mt 1:14
4:13 † Mk 1:12; Lk 4:23, 31; Jn 2:12; 4:46, 47
4:16 ‡ Isa 9:1, 2; Lk 2:32
4:17 ‡ Mt 3:2
4:18 † Mt 15:29; Mk 3:31; Jn 6:16
4:19 † Mt 16:17, 18
4:19 † Mk 10:21, 28, 32
4:21 ‡ Mt 20:20
4:23 † Mk 1:39; Lk 4:15, 44
4:23 ‡ Mt 9:35; Lk 12:34; Mk 1:12; Lk 4:15; Jn 6:59
4:24 † Mk 1:14
4:24 † Mt 3:2; Ac 20:25
4:24 ‡ Mt 8:16; 15:30; Ac 10:38
4:24 ‡ Lk 2:2
4:24 † Mt 8:16, 28; 9:32; 15:22; Mk 1:32; 5:15, 16, 18 ‡ Mt 17:15
4:24 ‡ Mt 8:6; 9:2; Mk 2:3
4:25 † Mk 3:7, 8; Lk 6:17
5:3 ‡ Jer 10, 19; Mt 25:34

4:1 Capernaum. A fishing town of perhaps 1,000 or 2,000 on the Sea of Galilee. Jesus is never mentioned as ministering in the two largest cities in Galilee, Sepphoris or Tiberias, but Capernaum was well situated for contact with the rest of Galilee. Later sources show that Capernaum became a stronghold for Galilean followers of Jesus.

4:15 – 16 The context of the cited passage (Isa 9:1 – 2) is clearly Messianic (Isa 9:6 – 7). This passage also allows Matthew to connect Jesus again (cf. 1:35 – 6; 2:1 – 2) with mission to the Gentiles. Despite the historic connection of Gentiles with Capernuam in Galilee, however, its Jewish cities and towns observed the Law of Moses.

4:17 the kingdom of heaven has come near. See the article “Kingdom,” p. XXX.

4:18 they were fishermen. Family businesses were common. Many scholars argue that commercial fishermen were better off economically than peasants, who comprised the majority of the empire’s (and Galilee’s) population. Most people could not usually afford meat, but fish was more available, and fishing was a major occupation on the Sea of Galilee. Note that the sea was actually a lake; only Galileans called it a sea. The Gospels’ usage of this word reflects their dependence on Jesus’ original Galilean setting.

4:19 Come. Respectable teachers usually waited for disciples to choose them; only the most radical sages were reputed to choose their own disciples. follow me. A disciple would come “after,” or walk behind, his teacher. fish for people. In Scripture, God sometimes used people’s backgrounds, e.g., as shepherds (Ex 3:1; 1Sa 17:15; 2Sa 5:2; Lk 6:33).

4:22 immediately they left the boat and their father. Leaving one’s family and livelihood was a rare and serious commitment. Disciples were usually in their teens, and many of Jesus’ disciples may have been in this range.

4:24 all over Syria. Judea and Galilee belonged to the Roman province of Syria; even Syria’s major Gentile cities (such as Damascus and especially Antioch) included many Jewish residents. The Decapolis, a group of Hellenistic cities in Syria near Galilee, included such towns as Gadara, Gerasa, Hippos and Pella. The primary feature of these cities that connected them was their Hellenistic (Greek) character, but many Jewish residents lived there in this period. all who were ill. Sickness was pervasive and people gathered at hot springs or any place they hoped to find a cure.

4:25 Large crowds. That crowds would follow one reputed to work miracles is to be expected. Even hot springs with apparent curative properties drew large numbers of ailing people.

5:1 sat down. Senior teachers of the law would sit to explain it. Some scholars compare Jesus’ teaching from a mountain here to Moses’ giving the law from a mountain (cf. Ex 24:12).

5:3 Beatitudes constitute a common literary form (e.g., Ps 1:1). See note on Lk 6:20.
Salt and Light

13 “You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.

4 Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. 5 Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. 6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. 7 Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. 8 Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. 9 Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. 10 Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

11 “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. 12 Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

The Fulfillment of the Law

17 “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, but not the smallest detail of Scripture, will pass from the Law until everything is accomplished. Therefore anyone who sets aside even one of the least of these commands and teaches others not to follow it will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you that you must be perfect, in everything as your heavenly Father is perfect.

4 Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. 5 Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. 6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. 7 Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. 8 Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. 9 Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. 10 Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

5:13 Mk 9:50; Lk 18:33, 36 5:14 Jn 8:12 5:15 Mk 4:21; Lk 8:16 5:16 Mt 9:8; Mt 17:2 5:18 Lk 16:17 5:19 Jas 2:10

5:4 those who mourn. Repentance, whether over one’s own sins or those of one’s society, was often expressed in mourning. God promised future comfort to his people (Isa 40; 51:3; 61:2 – 3; 66:13).
5:5 the meek. Ps 37:11 promises that the meek (the humble, the lowly, those who depend on the Lord rather than themselves [cf. Ps 37:5; cf. also “poor in spirit” in Mt 5:3]) would inherit the earth. the earth. Although this could mean simply “the land,” by Jesus’ day Jewish people spoke of the righteous “inheriting the kingdom” and thus ruling the world (cf. Da 7:14).
5:8 the pure in heart. God would bless the “pure in heart” (Ps 73:1). God’s people in the end time would “see” him.
5:9 the peacemakers. Some Judeans and Galileans believed that God would help them wage war against the Romans to establish God’s kingdom, but Jesus assigns the kingdom instead to the meek (v. 5), those who show mercy (v. 7), those who are persecuted (v. 10), and those who make peace (v. 9).
5:10 theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Ancient writers sometimes bracketed off a special section of material by starting and finishing it with the same point — here, that “the kingdom of heaven” (cf. v. 3, see also the article “Kingdom,” p. XXXX) will be given to the righteous and humble.
5:11 because of me. Jewish people spoke of suffering for God’s name, Jesus thus may fill a divine role here.
5:12 persecuted the prophets. In Scripture, prophets sometimes faced persecution; by Jesus’ day, Jewish tradition highlighted this point even more.
5:13 salt loses its saltiness. Some commentators note that much ancient salt contained impurities, which could dissolve; but Jesus also uses a graphic image — how can true salt stop being salt? When asked what to do with unsalty salt, a later rabbi advised, “Salt it with the afterbirth of a mule.” Mules are sterile and thus lack afterbirth; his point was that the question was stupid. If salt could lose its saltiness, what would it be useful for? Jesus compares a disciple who does not live out the values of the kingdom with unsalty salt — salt that cannot fulfill its purpose.
5:14 light of the world. God had called his people to be a light to the nations (Isa 42:6; 49:6), town built on a hill. Many ancient cities were built on hills; their lights could also make them visible against the horizon at night.
5:15 a lamp and put it under a bowl. The most common oil lamps of this period were small enough to hold the lamp in the hand; placing such a lamp under a container would obscure and likely extinguish it. Invisible light was about as useful to ancient Galileans as was tasteless salt (v. 13).
5:18 truly I tell you. Lit. “Amen, I tell you”; “amen” normally concluded a prayer, and most scholars believe that beginning a saying this way implied distinctive authority.
5:19 fit the least of these commands and teaches others accordingly will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you that you must be perfect, in everything as your heavenly Father is perfect.
you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.

**Murder**

5:25,26pp — Lk 12:58,59

21 "You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not murder,’ and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment." 22 But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. 23 Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, 24 leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift.

25 Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still together on the way, or the demand that people free a mother bird (Dt 22:7), but that whoever kept this command received life, the same reward as one who kept the greatest command, honoring father and mother (Dt 5:16). The titles of least or greatest reward as one who kept the greatest command, honoring father and mother (Dt 5:16). The titles of least or greatest merit. 5:20 The Pharisees and the teachers of the law. Pharisees belonged to a movement scrupulous in understanding and obeying the law according to the traditions of their predecessors (the ‘tradition of the elders’; see 15:2; Mt 7:3,5). Far more than the aristocratic Sadducees, Pharisees were also popular with the people and respected for their piety. They tithe meticulously, were careful about ritual purity, and at least during the dry season, they often fasted twice a week. The term for ‘teachers of the law’ can refer even to executors of legal documents in villages, but in the Gospels it normally refers to those who were literate and formally trained in the Law of Moses, often teaching others the law. Jesus’ words are again designed to shock his hearers, since Pharisees and teachers of the law would be among the people most respected for piety. But Jesus demands a deeper form of righteousness (see vv. 21–48).

5:21 heard that it was said. Sometimes Jewish teachers would say something like, “You have heard it said, but I say,” meaning, “You thought it meant only this, but it actually means also this…” (cf. 1Co 7:12), murder. The prohibition against murder was one of the cardinal commandments (Ex 20:13; Dt 5:17).

5:22 anyone who is angry. The law limited sin, but Jesus’ kingdom demands go deeper; the law said, “You shall not murder,” but Jesus demanded, “You shall not want to murder.” Some other ancient teachers agreed that desiring to kill someone revealed the same sort of heart that actually could commit murder. The insult, “Raca” (essentially meaning, “empty,” “devoid of value”) was roughly equivalent to the common insult, “Fool.” The punishments might also be equivalent, if the “judgment” and the “court” refer to the tradition, attested in later Jewish literature, of a heavenly court (cf. vv. 25–26). Jesus’ word for “hell” here is a Greek rendering of Gehinnom (Gehenna), a place of fiery torment for the damned (see note on 3:12); by adding explicit mention of “fire,” Jesus underlines the warning even more strongly. Jesus might have employed an element of hyperbole to drive home the point (cf. his use of “fools” in 23:17).

5:23–24 God welcomed offerings only from those who acted justly (Ge 4:4–7; Pr 15:8; Isa 1:11–17; Jer 6:20; Am 5:21–24).

5:26 paid the last penny. The term for “penny” here refers to the quadrans, a Roman coin equivalent to only several minutes’ wages. Some think this parable uses the image of debt imprisonment, a Gentile custom forbidden in Jewish circles in this period. 5:27 adultery. The prohibition against adultery was one of the cardinal commandments and allowed no exceptions (Ex 20:14; Dt 5:18).

5:28 anyone who looks at a woman lustfully. Whereas the law merely said, “You shall not commit adultery,” Jesus demanded, “You shall not want to commit adultery.” Many ancient Jewish moralists condemned lust; some later rabbis even compared extreme lust to adultery. Jesus’ warning here develops the context of the prohibition against adultery in the law: the seventh commandment prohibited adultery, but the tenth commandment warned that one should not even covet one’s neighbor’s wife (Ex 20:17; Dt 5:21). Jesus uses here the same verb as in the standard Greek translation of the tenth commandment. He refers, then, to wanting to have one’s neighbor’s wife. The principle, of course, extends beyond Jesus’ illustration, applying to both genders and to single people, coveting one who might be someone else’s spouse someday.

5:30 cut it off. Corporal punishment in which a member was cut off was better than capital punishment or eternal torment. Because cutting off an offending member would not necessarily end one’s sin, Jesus here uses hyperbole, or rhetorical overstatement, to graphically...
Divorce

31 It has been said, ‘Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.’ 
32 But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, makes her the victim of adultery, and anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery. 

Oaths

33 Again, you have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.’ 
34 But I tell you, do not swear an oath at all: by heaven, for it is God’s throne; 
35 by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. 
36 And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. 
37 All you need do is say simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No’; anything beyond this comes from the evil one. 

Eye for Eye

38 You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’ 
39 But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone…
Giving to the Needy

6 "Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. a If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.

2 So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the street corners, to be honored by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. 3 But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, 4 so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. b

Prayer

6:9-13pp — Lk 11:2-4

5 "And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners, to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. 6 But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. 7 a The Greek term translated "honored" in v. 2 is the same Greek word translated "play-actors"; by this period, though, it meant anyone acting in pretense, including for insincere religious activity.

8 "Truly I tell you, your Father knows what you need before you ask him. 9 "This, then, is how you should pray:

6:9 a "Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done, 10 on earth as it is in heaven.
11 Give us today our daily bread. 12 And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. 13 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. a The Greek for temptation can also mean testing.

14 For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. b But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins. "

15 a "Lord's Prayer" from the ancient church. The phrase "Our Father" is a title of address for God. "Jesus' model prayer" was widely recited by Christians from its earliest days. The opening words from Jesus' prayer, "Our Father in heaven," found in Matthew 6:9, are also found in Luke 11:2 and Luke 11:4. The closing words, "Amen," share the same root as the Hebrew word for "verily" (Amen, Qodot when used as a valedictory). The repetition of "Amen" was common in Jewish liturgy and is preserved in this prayer.

16 a See note on Mt 23:5. b See note on v. 33.

concluded a section with a summary. After offering six examples, Jesus climaxes with a conclusion that encompasses all righteousness. See note on v. 45.

6:1 a Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others. Ancient speakers and writers would sometimes state a thesis and then develop it with illustrations; Jesus illustrates this thesis with examples from charity (vv. 2 – 4), prayer (vv. 5 – 15), and fasting (vv. 16 – 18). Because sages offered riddles and statements meant to provoke thought rather than systematic outlines of their beliefs, some of a sage's statements could appear to be in tension with some of his other statements. Jesus provokes thought in the tension between 5:16 and the command here in v. 1: the difference is whom one seeks to honor. (Note that the Greek term translated "honored" in v. 2 is the same Greek word translated "glorify" in 5:16.)

6:2 a Truly I tell you. See note on 5:18. Givers did not literally use trumpets to announce their gifts; this image is graphic hyperbole. they have received their reward in full. When one had been paid in full, ancient business receipts used similar language. Some scholars note that "hypocrites" means "play-actors;" by this period, though, it meant anyone acting in pretense, including for insincere religious activity (Sirach 1:29; 32:15; 33:2).

6:3 a Again Jesus employs hyperbole as a graphic way to focus attention on the point (see notes on v. 2; 5:22,30,32,40). 6:6 a go into your room, close the door. Most people lacked private rooms; this could be a closet or storeroom, probably again hyperbole (cf. 14:23; 26:36 – 44) to emphasize the importance of seeking only God's approval by one's religious activity.

6:7 a Keep on babbling like pagans. Gentiles sometimes piled up many names for the deities they invoked, and often appealed to deities' "obligations" to reward the petitioners' sacrifices and the like. This approach contrasts with simple dependence on one's faithful heavenly Father (v. 8).

6:8 a your Father. In Jewish culture, a father was normally someone loving and trustworthy, on whom a child could depend for needs (cf. 7:9 – 11).

6:9-10 a Jesus here echoes a prayer regularly recited by Jewish people, a prayer known as the Kaddish. Its earliest form began, "Exalted and hallowed be his great name, in the world that he created according to his will; may he cause his kingdom to reign. . . ." The Jewish prayer invited God's future reign to change the world; Jesus presumably intends it the same way, although for believers in Jesus the kingdom is "already/not yet" (see the article "Kingdom," p. XXX). Scripture promised that in the future God's name would be "hallowed," or "proved holy," in the world (Eze 36:23; 38:23; 39:27). Even in the present, many Jewish teachers consider honoring God's name the supreme objective and profaning it the most terrible sin. your . . . your Father. In Greek, the word "your" is emphatic in these first three petitions of Jesus' model prayer (cf. v. 33).

6:9 a Our Father. Some Greeks called Zeus "father," more pervasively, Jewish people addressed God as "heavenly Father" in prayers. (On Jesus' special use of "Abba," see note on Mk 14:36.) For dependence on one's father, see note on 6:8.

6:10 a daily bread. Prayer for food was one of the most common prayers in antiquity. God, who supplied daily bread to his people for 40 years in the wilderness (Dt 8:2 – 3), can be trusted for sustenance.

6:12 a Forgive us our debts. Scripture commanded God's people to forgive all economic debts every 7th and 50th year so that no one would be permanently impoverished. Jewish teachers, however, also recognized sins as "debts" before God (cf. 18:21 – 35). The sixth benediction in a regularly prayed Jewish prayer, the Amida, included a prayer for forgiveness; cf. also note on v. 14.

6:13 a lead us not into temptation. A similar Jewish evening prayer meant not, "Do not let us be tempted," but "Do not let us fall when we are tested" (cf. 26:41 – 42,47). The late addition, "for yours is the kingdom . . ." (see NIV text note) fits the church's use of the prayer; Jewish people often added such doxologies at the close of prayers.

6:14 a your heavenly Father will also forgive you. Some other Jewish sages also emphasized that one who wants to seek God's forgiveness must also forgive other mortals (Sirach 28:1 – 8).
Fasting

16 When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. 17 But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face. 18 So that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

Treasures in Heaven

6:22,23pp — Lk 11:34-36

19 Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. 20 But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will also be.

22 The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy, your whole body will be full of light. 23 But if your eyes are unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!

24 No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.

Do Not Worry

6:25-33pp — Lk 12:22-31

25 Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? 26 Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. 27 Are you not much more valuable than they?

28 And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. 29 Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. 30 If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you — you of little faith?

31 So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’

32 For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. 33 But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

Judging Others

7:3-5pp — Lk 6:41,42

7 Do not judge, or you too will be judged. 2 For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

6:16 †Isa 58:5
6:17 †Ps 44:19,24; 66:19; Gal 6:6; Phil 4:18; 1Co 3:13
6:18 †Lk 11:35; 1Co 5:11; 15:34; Ro 15:27
6:19 †Ps 116:15; 150:6; Ro 14:12
6:20 †Mt 19:21;
6:21 †Mt 12:34; 18:21; Lk 6:19; 12:33
6:22 †Lk 12:24
6:23 †Lk 16:13
6:24 †Lk 25:8
6:25 †Job 18:18; Mt 21:34; Lk 10:41; 12:11, 22; Phm 4:6; 1Pe 5:5
6:26 †Job 38:41; Ps 147:9
6:27 †Ps 10:29-31; Mt 27:31; Mk 15:32; 16:18
6:28 †1Ki 10:47
6:29 †2Ki 11:1; 14:31; 16:8
6:30 †Mt 8:26; 19:30
6:31 †Mt 6:34
6:32 †Job 18:18
6:33 †Mt 19:29; Mk 10:29-30
7:1 †Lk 6:37
7:2 ¶ Mt 2:24; Lk 6:38

6:17 oil … wash. When Jewish people fasted, they not only abstained from food, but also from washing their clothes, having intercourse, shaving, and anointing themselves. People anointed their skin with olive oil and then scraped off the oil to cleanse themselves; like many Gentiles, Judeans and Galileans often anointed their heads with oil in connection with washing (even on the Sabbath).

6:19 moths and vermin. Expensive clothing, counted as money. thieves do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. 17 But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face. 18 So that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

6:25-33pp — Lk 11:34-36

19 Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. 20 But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will also be.

22 The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy, your whole body will be full of light. 23 But if your eyes are unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!

24 No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.

6:26 birds of the air. Nature had long been an interest of wise teachers (1Ki 4:33), and both Greek and Jewish sages often used lessons from nature to illustrate their points. Jewish people recognized God’s providential rule over all of nature (though some denied his concern for bird nests).

6:27 add a single hour. Sages often used lessons from nature to illustrate their points. Jewish people recognized God’s providential rule over all of nature (though some denied his concern for bird nests).

7:2 in the same way. In principle, many Jewish sages (and even some Greek thinkers) would have agreed with Jesus (Sirach 28:1 – 3). Nevertheless, following Jesus in practice requires more than agreeing with him in principle. measure. The need to “measure” appropriately was common in
3 “Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? 4 How can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? 5 You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.

6 “Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces.

**Ask, Seek, Knock**

7:7-11pp — Lk 11:9-13

7 “Ask and it will be given to you; 8 seek and you will find; 9 knock and the door will be opened to you. 10 For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.

11 “Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? 12 Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? 13 If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!

14 So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.

**The Narrow and Wide Gates**

15 “Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. 16 But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.

**True and False Prophets**

16 “Watch out for false prophets. 17 By their fruit you will recognize them. 18 Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? 19 Likewise, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. 20 A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. 21 Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

22 “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. 23 Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?’ 24 Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’

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Markets. “It is measured to one according to the measure by which one measures” was also a Jewish maxim.

7:3 – 5 *spec* … *plank*. This graphic, hyperbolic image would likely draw laughter — and provoke thought. If a splinter endangered a person with blindness, how much more did a roof beam; ancient eye surgery was a delicate art that could result in blindness.

7:6 The meaning of this saying is debated, but some think its point is similar to Pr 23:9: “Do not speak to fools, for they will scorn your prudent words.” *dogs*. Could apply to the wicked (cf. Ps 22:16,20; 59:6,14 – 15; Pr 26:11); Jewish people normally despoised dogs as unclean scavengers (Ex 22:31). *pigs*. Unclean (Lev 11:7) and could not appreciate what was valuable (Pr 11:22).

7:7 *Ask and it will be given*. Few others, if any, encouraged such radical, childlike confidence in God’s provision.

7:9 – 10 *bread* … *fish*. Most Jewish fathers were dependable providers. Bread and fish were the basic staples of the Galilean diet.

7:11 *how much more* …! Jewish teachers (and some Gentiles) often used analog arguments from lesser to greater.

7:12 *do to others what you would have them do to you*. Some earlier Jewish teachers offered this principle of wisdom, recognized in many cultures (e.g., Letter of Aristeas 207; Greeks; even Confucius), though often in the negative form (“Whatever you do not want others to do to you, do not do to them,” Tobit 4:15; Philo, *Hypothetica* 76). Later rabbis also attributed to Hillel, a sage before Jesus, the claim that this principle constituted the heart of the law (Babylonian Talmud *Shabbat* 31a). Sages sometimes appealed to common wisdom to make a point, as Jesus may be doing here.

7:13 – 14 *leads to destruction* … *leads to life*. Greek, Roman, and Jewish writers often spoke of two ways; the choice between life and death was an ancient one (Dt 30:19).

7:15 *sheep’s clothing* … *wolves*. Wolves coming disguised as sheep was a common image (even in one of Aesop’s fables), though it is also graphic hyperbole: wolves do not wear clothing, and it was impossible to transform one’s skin (Jer 13:23). Wolves were the most obvious and common predators of sheep, killing sheep to feed themselves; their image was often used to represent humans who would harm others. Judeans and Galileans were well aware that some prophets were false; indeed, on multiple occasions, in the decades following Jesus’ ministry, alleged prophets led followers to destruction at the hands of Rome’s armies.

7:16 See note on Jas 3:12.

7:21 – 22 Although Greek and Jewish accounts sometimes delegated judgment to an exalted human, the ultimate judge in Jewish belief was God. Some Jewish exorcists invoked Solomon’s name to try to expel demons (Josephus, *Antiquities* 8.47), but the sense here may exalt Jesus more: Jewish people more often could speak of acting (e.g., Isa 17:45; Ps 118:11 – 12) or prophesying (e.g., Dt 18:22; 1 Esdras 6:1) in the name of God.

7:23 *I never knew you*. This was a recognized formula of repudiation and rejection.
The Wise and Foolish Builders
7:24–27pp — Lk 6:47-49
24 “Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. 25 The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. 26 But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. 27 The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.”

28 When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, 29 because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law.

Jesus Heals a Man With Leprosy
8:2–4pp — Mk 1:40–44; Lk 5:12–14
8 When Jesus came down from the mountainside, large crowds followed him. A man with leprosy came and knelt before him and said, “Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean.”

8:24–27 Some other Jewish teachers told a similar parable, with a major difference: In their story, the foundational rock in their parables was the Torah, God’s law (Abot de Rabbi Nathan 24A). Here Jesus’ teaching holds the same role as God’s message in the traditional parable (cf. also the two ways in vv. 13–14; the principle in Pr 10:25).

8:29 as one who had authority. Most teachers did not want to speak on their own authority; when possible, they cited earlier authorities that supported their teaching. By contrast, Jesus declares, “Truly I tell you” (5:18), and, most offensively of all, speaks of judging (vv. 21–22).

The Faith of the Centurion
8:5–13pp — Lk 7:1–10
5 When Jesus had entered Capernaum, a centurion came to him, asking for help. “6 Lord,” he said, “my servant lies at home paralyzed, suffering terribly.” 7 Jesus said to him, “Shall I come and heal him?”

8 The centurion replied, “Lord, I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. But just say the word, and my servant will be healed. 9 For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell one, ‘Go,’ and he goes; and that one, ‘Come,’ and he comes. I say to my servant, ‘Do this,’ and he does it.”

8:3 touched the man. Because lepers were unclean (Lev 13:45–46), anyone who touched them contracted temporary ritual impurity. Jesus here touches the unclean man (cf. 9:21–22, 25) to cure him.

8:4 don’t tell. Ancients respected people who did not seek their own honor. show yourself to the priest. A priest was required to inspect a leper who believed that he or she was cleansed, and an offering in the temple should follow (Lev 14:1–9).

8:5 Capernaum. See note on 4:13. Centurions commanded roughly 80 troops (not literally 100, despite the name) and were the backbone of the Roman army; often they worked their way up through the ranks to achieve their position. Roman military units were stationed in Caesarea, which was on the coast, and in Jerusalem; they consisted of auxiliary troops, mostly recruited from Syria. Matthew omits Luke’s messengers (Lk 7:3) as he elsewhere omits those of Mk 5:35 in 9:18; other ancient biographers used this technique of compression to keep focused on the main point.

8:6 my servant. Servants could be viewed as members of households; in this case, the servant could be the only member of or a significant part of the centurion’s household. During their 20 years of service, soldiers in the Roman army were not allowed to marry officially, although they sometimes took local concubines. Most soldiers could not easily afford servants (the average price of a slave was about a third of the best-paid legionary’s annual wages), but average centurions made some 15 times the wages of the lowest-paid soldiers.

8:7 Shall I come . . . ? The NIV translates Jesus’ response as a question because in Greek, the “I” here is emphatic. Jewish people were not supposed to enter the homes of unclean Gentiles (see note on Ac 10:28).

8:8 say the word. People in antiquity sought healing at hot springs, special shrines, sometimes through magic and occasionally through contact with holy persons. Long-distance miracles, however, were considered extraordinary; this centurion expresses special faith (v. 10).

8:9 a man under authority. The centurion understands how authority works: just as soldiers obey the centurion because he is backed by the authority of the empire,
10 When Jesus heard this, he was amazed and said to those following him, “Truly I tell you, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith.” 11 I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. 12 But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

13 Then Jesus said to the centurion, “Go! Let it be done just as you believe it would.” And his servant was healed at that moment.

Jesus Heals Many

8:14-16pp — Mk 1:29-34; Lk 4:38-41

14 When Jesus came into Peter’s house, he saw Peter’s mother-in-law lying in bed with a fever. 15 He touched her hand and the fever left her, and she got up and began to wait on him.

16 When evening came, many who were demon-possessed were brought to him, and he drove out the spirits with a word and healed all the sick. This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah:

8:10-12

Matthew 8:25 | 1625

“He took up our infirmities and bore our diseases.”

The Cost of Following Jesus

8:19-22pp — Lk 9:57-60

18 When Jesus saw the crowd around him, he gave orders to cross to the other side of the lake. 19 Then a teacher of the law came to him and said, “Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go.”

20 Jesus replied, “Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.”

21 Another disciple said to him, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father.”

22 But Jesus told him, “Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead.”

Jesus Calms the Storm

8:23-27pp — Mk 4:36-41; Lk 8:22-25

23 Then he got into the boat and his disciples followed him. 24 Suddenly a furious storm came up on the lake, so that the waves swept over the boat. But Jesus was sleeping.

25 The disciples went and woke him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are going to sink?"
him, saying, “Lord, save us! We’re going to drown!”

26 He replied, “You of little faith, why are you so afraid?” Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm.

27 The men were amazed and asked, “What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him!”

**Jesus Restores Two Demon-Possessed Men**

8:26-34pp — Mk 5:1-17; Lk 8:26-37

28 When he arrived at the other side in the region of the Gadarenes, two demon-possessed men coming from the tombs met him. They were so violent that no one could control them.

8:28 region of the Gadarenes. Whereas Mark identifies the territory by the better known but more distant

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**MATTHEW 8:16,28 – 34**

**DEMONS AND THE BIBLE**

Many readers assume that the belief in demons attested in Scripture the superstitious beliefs of all ancient peoples. Yet anthropologists witness possession trances in most cultures today. Demons' reality, of course, cannot be decided by archaeology. Researchers can demonstrate, however, that the notion that the New Testament writers simply reflect the pre-scientific views of their contemporaries is simplistic and misleading.

**Demons in the Ancient Near East**

Ancient Near Eastern society was awash in texts containing magical incantations and amulets intended to protect people from evil spirits (spells for defense against demons are called “apotropaic spells”). For example, one of the feared demons of Neo-Assyrian times was the lion-headed female figure Lamashtu, who was thought especially to attack pregnant women and babies. For protection women wore a necklace with a pendant of the god Pazuzu. An enormous number of apotropaic spells have survived from Babylonia, employing magical words and rituals involving plants, animal parts and other sacred objects. Even today in the eastern Mediterranean it is not uncommon to see amulets intended to ward off the “evil eye.”

**Demons in Non-Biblical Jewish Literature**

Ancient Jewish literature was also fascinated with magic as a means of dealing with demons. The Apocryphal book of Tobit tells the story of one “Sarah, daughter of Raguel,” who had been married — and widowed on her wedding night through the...
Matthew 8:33

1627

8:29

1 Jdg 11:12;
2Sa 16:10;
1Ki 17:18;
Mk 1:24;
Lk 4:34; Jn 2:4

u

2Pe 2:4

Jesus, “If you drive us out, send us into the herd of pigs.”

He said to them, “Go!” So they came out and went into the pigs, and the whole herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and died in the water.

30Some distance from them a large herd of pigs was feeding. 31The demons begged

Gerasa (for a time, the capital of the Decapolis; cf. Mk 5:1), Matthew identifies the location by the nearest significant town, Gadara. Both towns were in the area of the Decapolis, from the tombs. People often associated spirits with tombs.

8:29 the appointed time. The day of judgment, the time of their doom.

8:30 herd of pigs. Gadara (v. 28) is in the region of the Decapolis, the majority of whose residents were Gentiles. Jews did not rear pigs (cf. Lev 11:7).

8:32 into the lake. Jewish people believed that demons could be bound, sometimes beneath bodies of water; some Jews believed they could be destroyed.

Demons in the Old Testament

The Old Testament is remarkably reticent about evil spirits, so much so that it seems to have no developed demonology. Even so, three facts stand out:

• There are no incantations, rituals or amulets prescribed for giving an individual protection from spirits. Considering how much of the Torah is devoted to ritual and to sacred objects, this is a remarkable omission.

• God is said to have complete authority over the spirits, which cannot operate in the world without his approval. If a “lying spirit” goes out it is only with divine consent (1Ki 22:23; cf. Job 1–2).

• The main concern of the Old Testament writers was that people avoid seeking to avail themselves of magical powers through contact with spirits (e.g., Dt 18:10–12).

Demons in the New Testament

The New Testament demonstrates two realities about evil spirits:

• Jesus has absolute power over them; this was a matter of divine authority, not magic or sorcery.

• The New Testament mocks the claims of magicians by describing their inability to deal with real spirits. The failed efforts of Simon the sorcerer (Ac 8:9–24) and the sons of Sceva (Ac 19:13–16) to obtain apostolic authority illustrate the point that the miracles of the New Testament had nothing in common with ancient magic.

Jesus had no use for demonic spirits and did not seek to employ them to do his bidding. ∆
tending the pigs ran off, went into the
town and reported all this, including what
had happened to the demon-possessed
men. Then the whole town went out to
meet Jesus. And when they saw him, they
pledged with him to leave their region."

Jesuš Forgives and Heals
a Paralyzed Man
9:2-8pp — Mk 2:3-12; Lk 5:18-26

Jesus stepped into a boat, crossed over,
and came to his own town. Some
men brought to him a paralyzed man, ly-
ing on a mat. When Jesus saw their faith, he
said to the man, "Take heart, son; your
sins are forgiven."

At this, some of the teachers of the law
told themselves, "This fellow is blas-
pheming!"

Knowing their thoughts, Jesus said,
"Why do you entertain evil thoughts in
your hearts? Which is easier: to say, 'Your
sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up and
walk'? But I want you to know that the
Son of Man has authority on earth to for-
give sins." So he said to the paralyzed man,
"Get up, take your mat and go home."

Then the man got up and went home.
When the crowd saw this, they were filled
with awe; and they praised God, who had
given such authority to man.

The Calling of Matthew
9:9-13pp — Mk 2:14-17; Lk 5:27-32

As Jesus went on from there, he saw a
man named Matthew sitting at the tax col-
lector’s booth. "Follow me," he told him,
and Matthew got up and followed him.

While Jesus was having dinner at Mat-
thew’s house, many tax collectors and sin-
ers came and ate with him and his disci-
pies. When the Pharisees saw this, they
asked his disciples, "Why does your teach-
er eat with tax collectors and sinners?"

On hearing this, Jesus said, "It is not
the healthy who need a doctor, but the
sick. But go and learn what this means:
'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have
come not to call the righteous, but sin-
ers."

Jesus Questioned About Fasting
9:14-17pp — Mk 2:18-22; Lk 5:33-39

Then John’s disciples came and asked
him, "How is it that we and the Pharisees
fast often, but your disciples do not fast?"

Jesus answered, "How can the guests
of the bridegroom mourn while he is with
them? The time will come when the bride-
groom will be taken from them; then
they will fast."

No one sews a patch of unshrunk
cloth on an old garment, for the patch
will pull away from the garment, making
the tear worse. Neither do people pour
ew wine into old wineskins. If they do,
the skins will burst; the wine will run out
and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they
pour new wine into new wineskins, and
both are preserved."

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8:34 pleaded with him to leave. Especially after
the destruction of the pigs, Gentiles might think of Jesus
as a powerful and dangerous magician. Economic interests
mattered more to them than a person, as was common
(cf. Ac 16:19; 19:27).

9:2 your sins are forgiven. Priests might perhaps pro-
nounce God’s forgiveness after atonement had occurred,
but no sacrifice was offered here. The teachers of the law
thus consider the pronouncement presumptuous (v. 3).

9:6 the Son of Man has authority. The Son of Man’s authority
echoes Da 7:13—14. Jesus has authority not merely to
pronounce God’s forgiveness (cf. v. 2), but to forgive — a
divine prerogative!

9:9 tax collector’s booth. Most people in the Roman
Empire did not like tax collectors; Jewish people viewed
them as traitors. Their job affected the poor most dra-
namically. In fact, when harvests were bad in Egypt, it
was not unheard of for the population of an entire village
to leave town and start a village somewhere else when
they heard that a tax collector was coming. Some
consider Matthew a customs officer charging tariffs on goods
passing through. Like other tax collectors, customs offi-
cers could search possessions; customs income normally
went to local governments run by elites who were coop-
erative with Rome. See note on Mk 2:14. Follow me. See
note on 4:19.

9:10 having dinner. The term often connotes a banquet (a
festive meal where people reclined), which was probably
in Jesus’ honor. Eating with someone established a cov-
enant of friendship, which normally also signified approval.

9:11 Pharisees... tax collectors. After rabbis sometimes
contrasted Pharisees, as the godliest Judeans one would nor-
mally meet, with tax collectors, as the most ungodly
one would normally meet. Pharisees did not approve of eating
with sinners, making Jesus’ behavior perplexing to them.

9:12 healthy. Ancient speakers and writers often used
sickness and physicians as moral or intellectual analogies.

9:13 go and learn. Jewish teachers sometimes exhorted
their hearers to “go and learn,” but Jesus’ exhortation
might seem more insulting here (cf. 12:5). I desire mercy,
not sacrifice. Those who valued ritual sacrifices above
compassion toward others missed God’s heart (Hos 6:6; also
quoted in Mt 12:7). In principle Pharisees, especially
the school of Hillel, valued mercy — but none would have
embraced sinners as Jesus did.

9:14 How is it...? People in antiquity often held teachers
responsible for the behavior of their disciples.

9:15 mourn. Fasting was often linked with mourning,
whereas weddings were the supreme time for rejoicing.
In fact, rabbis taught that weddings even took priority over
many religious obligations.

9:17 People employed animal skins, most often goat-
skins, as containers for fluids. Wine expands as it ferments;
still-expanding, new wine would rupture wineskins that
had already been stretched by old, fermenting wine.
Jesus’ new order demanded a new approach.
Jesus Raises a Dead Girl and Heals a Sick Woman

9:18-26pp — Mk 5:22-43; Lk 8:47-56

18 While he was saying this, a synagogue leader came and knelt before him! and said, “My daughter has just died. But come and put your hand on her, and she will live.” 19 Jesus got up and went with him, and so did his disciples.

20 Just then a woman who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years came up behind him and touched the edge of his cloak. 21 She said to herself, “If I only touch his cloak, I will be healed.”

22 Jesus turned and saw her. “Take heart, daughter,” he said, “your faith has healed you.” 23 And the woman was healed at that moment.

23 When Jesus entered the synagogue’s house and saw the noisy crowd and people playing pipes, 24 he said, “Go away. The girl is not dead; she is asleep.”

But they laughed at him. 25 After the crowd had been put outside, he went in and took the girl by the hand, and she got up.

26 News of this spread through all that region.

Jesus Heals the Blind and the Mute

27 As Jesus went on from there, two blind men followed him, calling out, “Have mercy on us, Son of David!”

28 When he had gone indoors, the blind men came to him, and he asked them, “Do you believe that I am able to do this?”

29 “Yes, Lord,” they replied.

30 Then he touched their eyes and said, “According to your faith let it be done to you.”

30:8 ver 22

Jesus warned them sternly, “See that no one knows about this.” 31 But they went out and spread the news about him all over that region.

32 While they were going out, a man who was demon-possessed and could not talk was brought to Jesus. 33 And when the demon was driven out, the man who had been mute spoke. The crowd was amazed and said, “Nothing like this has ever been seen in Israel.”

34 But the Pharisees said, “It is by the prince of demons that he drives out demons.”

The Workers Are Few

35 Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness.

36 When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. 37 Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. 38 Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.”

Jesus Sends Out the Twelve

10:2-4pp — Mk 3:16-19; Lk 6:14-16; Ac 1:13

10:9-15pp — Mk 6:8-11; Lk 9:3-5; 10:4-12

10:19-22pp — Mk 13:11-13; Lk 21:12-17

10:26-33pp — Lk 12:2-9

10:34,35pp — Lk 12:51-53

10 Jesus called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out impure spirits and to heal every disease and sickness.
10:2 apostles. Or “commissioned agents,” those authorized by the sender’s authority to bring the message. Some of the names in vv. 2–4 (Simon, James, John and Judas) were very common, explaining why some are given additional identifying titles.

10:5 Gentiles … Samaritans. Samaria bordered Galilee on the south, and Gentile cities surrounded it on the outside; Jesus’ disciples are thus essentially confined to Galilee during this mission. For Samaritans, see the article “Samaria and Samaritans,” p. XXXX; see also applicable notes in Jn 4.

10:6 lost sheep. For Israel as God’s lost sheep, see Isa 53:6; Jer 50:6; Eze 34:5; cf. Ps 119:176.

10:7 proclaim this message. Disciples normally carried on their teacher’s or school’s message; see 3:2; 417.

10:9 in your belts. Travelers often carried money in a pouch tied to one’s belt.

10:10 no bag for the journey. Wandering Cynic philosophers, found in some Gentile cities, carried a bag for begging, which is prohibited here. extra shirt. In the poorest areas, many peasants had only a single cloak. sandals. Judean sandals had light straps running from between the toes to just above the ankle; unlike shoes, such sandals protected only the bottom of the foot. staff. Travelers used a staff for protection against robbers, snakes and other creatures, and sometimes for maintaining one’s balance while walking on uneven mountain paths. Matthew’s description is slightly more demanding than Mark’s (Mk 6:8–11); ancient readers were accustomed to such minor variations in ancient historical and biographical works. Biblical prophets also had to live simply in times of widespread apostasy, not dependent on decadent society (cf., e.g., 3:14; 1Ki 17:4–6; 18:13; 2Ki 4:38; 5:15 – 16, 26; 6:1).

10:11 stay at their house. Hospitality was one of the chief virtues in Mediterranean antiquity, and Jewish travelers could normally count on Jewish hospitality even in Diaspora cities. When Essenes (members of a strict Jewish sect) traveled, they traveled light, depending on hospitality from other Essenes.

10:12 – 13 your greeting … let your peace rest. The conventional Jewish greeting was shalom, “May it be well with you.” This was a blessing, i.e., an implicit prayer to God. See note on 23:7.

10:14 shake the dust off your feet. Jewish people sometimes shook profane dust from their feet when entering a more holy place; some did so when leaving pagan territory to enter the Holy Land (cf. v. 15).

10:15 Sodom and Gomorrah. Sodom rejected God’s messengers (Ge 19:4 – 5). Biblical prophets used Sodom as the epitome of wickedness, often applying the image to Israel (Dt 32:32; Isa 110:3; 9: Jer 23:14; Eze 16:46 – 49).

10:16 sheep among wolves. Ancients viewed sheep as helpless against wolves, and some Jewish teachers viewed Israel as such sheep. More unusual, Jesus says that his sheep are sent among wolves. doves. Many thought of doves as timid or weak.

10:17 local councils … synagogues. Priests and other elders normally judged local councils. Synagogues doubled as community centers, and disciplines could be meted out there. If they carried out beatings as in somewhat later tradition, the condemned person would be tied to a post, then given 26 lashes with a calf-leather whip across the back and 13 lashes across the chest. The number of lashes (39; cf. 2Co 11:24) was to prevent accidentally exceeding the Biblical limit of 40 (Dt 25:3).

10:18 governors and kings. In the Roman Empire, governors ruled most provinces. The emperor appointed his own representatives to govern provinces with legions, and appointed equestrians to control some other provinces; the senate appointed governors for provinces not directly under the emperor’s control. The emperor also allowed some states to retain client kings answerable to Rome, such as Herod the Great (2:1), Aretas (2Co 11:32) and, briefly, Herod Agrippa I (Ac 12:1).

10:20 Spirit of your Father speaking. Scripture and Jewish tradition often associated God’s Spirit with prophetic empowerment to speak God’s message.

10:21 – 23 Many Jewish people expected these suffer-
to death. 22 You will be hated by everyone because of me, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved. 23 When you are persecuted in one place, flee to another. Truly I tell you, you will not finish going through the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes.

24 The student is not above the teacher, nor a servant above his master. 25 It is enough for students to be like their teachers, and servants like their masters. If the head of the house has been called Beelzebul, how much more the members of his household!

26 So do not be afraid of them, for there is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known. 27 What I tell you in the dark, speak in the daylight; what is whispered in your ear, proclaim from the roofs. 28 Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell. 29 Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground outside your Father’s care. 30 And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. 31 So don’t be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.

32 Whoever acknowledges me before others, I will also acknowledge before my Father in heaven. 33 But whoever disowns me before others, I will disown before my Father in heaven.

34 “Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. 35 For I have come to turn the father against the son and the son against the father; the mother against her daughter and the daughter against the mother; 36 a man’s enemies will be the members of his own household.

37 “Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. 38 Whoever does not take up his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. 39 Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

40 “Anyone who welcomes you welcomes me, and anyone who welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. 41 Whoever welcomes a prophet as a prophet will receive a prophet’s reward, and whoever welcomes a righteous person as a righteous person will receive a reward.

Matthew 10:41 | 1631

10:22 *Mt 24:13; Mk 13:13
10:24 *Lk 6:40; Jn 13:16; 15:20
10:25 *Mk 3:22
10:26 *Mk 4:22; Lk 17:6
10:28 *Isa 8:12; 13: Heb 10:31
10:30 *1Sa 14:45; 2Sa 14:11; Lk 21:18; Ac 27:34
10:31 *Mt 12:12
10:32 *Ro 10:9

Father in heaven. 33 But whoever disowns me before others, I will disown before my Father in heaven.

34 “Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. 35 For I have come to turn

10:24 Student is not above the teacher. Apart from attending to the master’s feet, disciples would ideally do for their rabbi anything a servant would do. A mature disciple could become a rabbi but was not normally considered greater than the one who schooled him.

10:25 Beelzebul. Because Jesus’ first hearers spoke Aramaic, they may have caught a wordplay: Beelzebul literally means “master of the house”; it probably plays on Baal-Zebub, a pagan deity (2Ki 1:2). Beelzebul was also used with reference to Satan; cf. 12:24–28.

10:27 From the roofs. Neighbors could sometimes communicate from their flat rooftops as opposed to the narrow streets below, but their shouting, unobstructed by buildings, would be audible over a longer distance.

10:28 Kill the body. Many Jewish people by this period distinguished the body from the identity, or soul, that persisted after death. Most Judeans affirmed the resurrection of the body as well as the persistence of the soul; the wicked would be resurrected for torment (Da 12:2).

10:29 Two sparrows...penny. The poor could purchase sparrows, probably the cheapest meat in the market. Penny. An assarion, worth less than an hour’s wage for the average worker (cf. a roughly equivalent calculation in Lk 12:6).

10:30 Hairs of your head. A promise that not a hair would fall meant that one would be completely protected (1Sa 14:45; 2Sa 14:11; 1Ki 1:52); here, no detail of care goes unnoticed by their Father (for the father image, see note on 7:9–10).


10:32 Acknowledges me. Jewish teachers emphasized “acknowledging” or “confessing” God, a principle here applies to himself.

10:33 Daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. Because Mic 7:6 addresses grievous sins characteristic of Israel before announcing Israel’s restoration, Jewish tradition sometimes applied its image of familial division to the final tribulation. Because newly married couples sometimes lived with the groom’s family, daughter-in-law and mother-in-law are natural examples (more than, e.g., son-in-law).

10:34 Father or mother more than me. Many Jewish people considered the mandate to honor one’s parents the greatest commandment; they accorded only God himself greater honor.

10:35 Take up their cross. A person condemned to be executed would often carry the horizontal beam of his cross out to the site of his execution, where it would be affixed to an upright stake. Because authorities liked to make executions as public as possible, for their deterrent effect, those being led to execution were typically led naked through busy streets, exposing the condemned to public humiliation and sometimes mockery.

10:40 Welcomes me. However one treated an agent or ambassador reflected one’s feelings toward the sender; one’s treatment of a prophet reflected one’s treatment of God (Ex 16:8; 1Sa 8:7).

10:41 On hospitality to Jesus’ agents, see note on v. 11. God would reward hospitable treatment of his prophets (e.g., 1Ki 17:12–16; 2Ki 4:8–17).
righteous person’s reward. 42 And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones who is my disciple, truly I tell you, that person will certainly not lose their reward.”

Jesus and John the Baptist

After Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples, he went on from there to teach and preach in the towns of Galilee.

When John, who was in prison, heard about the deeds of the Messiah, he sent his disciples to ask him, “Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?”

Jesus replied, “Go back and report to John what you hear and see: 5 The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy 6 are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor.” 6 Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me.”

As John’s disciples were leaving, Jesus began to speak to the crowd about John:

“What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed swayed by the wind? 8 If not, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No, those who wear fine clothes are in kings’ palaces. 9 Then what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. 10 This is the one about whom it is written:

‘I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.’”

Truly I tell you, among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet whoever is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. 12 From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been subjected to violence, 13 and violent people have been raiding it. 14 For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John. 15 And if you are willing to accept it, he is the Elijah who was to come. 16 Whoever has ears, let them hear.

“17 To what can I compare this generation? They are like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling out to others:

‘We played the pipe for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn.’

For John came neither eating 5 nor drinking, 6 and they say, ‘He has a demon.’

Matthew 10:42

10:42 even a cup of cold water. The poorest person might have only water to offer, but hospitality obligations demanded sharing with a visitor what one had. Hot and weary travelers usually preferred water cold.

11:2 – 3 John understood that Jesus’ deeds (such as healings) were good, but he may have been concerned that they differed from John’s message of end-time outpourings of the Spirit and fire (see note on 3:1).

11:2 in prison. Herod Antipas imprisoned John in his Persian fortress Machaerus (14:3).

11:4 – 5 report…what you hear and see. Jesus depicts his current mission of restoring the disabled and preaching to the poor as a foretaste of the promised coming era of restoration. He does so by borrowing language from Isaiah 35:5 – 6; 61:1. Josephus mentions two first-century prophetic figures after Jesus who each promised an end-time sign that they failed to deliver; with the possible exception of these failed leaders, no ancient workers of unusual acts besides Jesus claimed that the future kingdom was arriving in their own ministry or signs.

11:6 Blessed. On beatitudes, see note on 5:3. stumble. Often used as a metaphor for sin or falling away.

11:7 reed. The emblem on Antipas’s coins was a reed. John’s hearers would be familiar with reeds, since they grew as tall as 16 feet (5 meters) around the Jordan, where John had baptized. Reeds were used figuratively for what was weak and undependable in time of trouble (1 Ki 4:15; 2 Ki 18:21; 3 Maccabees 2:22).

11:8 kings’ palaces. Herod Antipas, who imprisoned John, was only a tetrarch but was the closest to a king with palaces that Jesus’ Galilean hearers might ordinarily see.

11:10 The promised messenger of Mal 3:1 may be one like Elijah (see Mal 4:5; cf. Mt 3:4 and 2 Ki 1:8).

11:11 least in the kingdom…is greater than he. Both Jews and Gentiles offered comparisons not only between good and bad, but also between good and better; this is clearly a case of the latter kind of comparison. Such comparisons were meant to exalt the better all the more by virtue of its superiority to something else good.

11:12 subjected to violence. Some Jewish people sought to establish God’s kingdom by force, striking against Romans and the Jewish aristocrats who supported them. Some suggest that Jesus speaks here parabolically of spiritual warriors, who prevail in laying hold of the kingdom not with physical but with spiritual force.

11:13 until John. Jewish people often summarized Scripture as “the Law and the Prophets.” Although some of the elite believed that prophets ceased after Malachi, most people recognized John the Baptist as a prophet (14:5; 21:26).

11:14 On John as Elijah, see note on v. 10.

11:15 Whoever has ears. This is the language of riddles, inviting the wise to consider the meaning. Israel was not always ready to hear (Isa 6:10; Jer 6:10; Eze 12:2).

11:16 To what can I compare…? Rabbis often began parables with phrases such as this, children. They sometimes played games of weddings or funerals (e.g., burying a grasshopper). Here Jesus envisions spoiled children who argue inconsistently so long as they get their way.

11:17 dance…mourn. Dancing was appropriate for the celebrations of weddings, and mourning for funerals. Both were community events; as funeral processions passed, e.g., bystanders were often expected to join in the procession.

11:18 has a demon. A prophet with a demon would be assumed a false prophet—for which the penalty was death (Dt 13:5).
The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.’ But wisdom is proved right by her deeds.”

Woe on Unrepentant Towns
11:21-23pp — Lk 10:13-15

Then Jesus began to denounce the towns in which most of his miracles had been performed, because they did not repent. “Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I tell you, it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you. And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted to the heavens? No, you will go down to Hades. For if the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Sodom, it would have remained to this day. But I tell you that it will be more bearable for Sodom on the day of judgment than for you.”

The Father Revealed in the Son
11:25-27pp — Lk 10:21,22

At that time Jesus said, “I praise you, Father, for you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this is what you were pleased to do.

All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

My yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

Jesus Is Lord of the Sabbath
12:9-14pp — Mk 3:1-6; Lk 6:6-11

At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath. His disciples were hungry and began to pick some heads of grain and eat them. When the Pharisees saw this, they said to him, “Look! Your disciples are doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath.”

He answered, “Haven’t you read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? He entered the house of God, and he and his companions ate the consecrated bread—which was not lawful for them to do, but only for the priests.

Or haven’t you read in the Law that the priests on Sabbath duty in the temple

words, but whereas the earlier sage referred to wisdom’s yoke, Jesus speaks of his own. Those who turned back to God’s ways would find rest for their souls (Jer 6:16). Jesus’ understanding of rest (v. 28) clearly differs from that of the Pharisees (12:1–14).

pick some heads. On normal days, it was legal to pick heads of grain from other’s fields (Dt 21:20–21). On normal days, it was legal to pick heads of grain from other’s fields (Dt 21:20–21). But Jewish people often feasted on the Sabbath (Ex 16:22 – 30; 35:3), but Jewish people often feasted on the Sabbath (on food that was prepared the previous day) and Jewish tradition prohibited fasting on it. Jesus’ disciples might thus pick grain if other food was unavailable.

the Pharisees saw. One would not normally find Pharisees in wheat fields on the Sabbath, unless they were traveling with Jesus or seeking to evaluate his activity (or perhaps they observed from afar in a town). Teachers were held responsible for their disciples’ behavior.

Haven’t you read…? Such a question would insult the learned Pharisees.

Whether David actually had with him the companions mentioned in 1Sa 21:4–5 or the high priest merely believed that David did, the high priest’s actions show that he understood that hunger and an urgent situation took priority over ritual law.

priests … in the temple. During debates about what was permissible on the Sabbath or other holy days, Jewish teachers sometimes appealed to the activity of priests in the temple on such days.

a glutton and a drunkard. Like a false prophet, someone who is a habitual glutton and a drunkard was deemed worthy of death (Dt 21:20–21). Probably soon after Jesus’ ministry, around the year 30 (though some do suggest earlier), Bethsaida began to be called Julia; although Josephus later uses both names, the Gospel uses only the earlier, local name. Tyre and Sidon. These Phoenician cities had been objects of God’s judgment (e.g., Isa 23; Eze 26 – 28; Jezebel (Ahab’s wife) was from the region of Sidon (1Ki 16:31). sackcloth and ashes. Appropriate dress to show mourning or repentance (e.g., Jer 6:26; Da 9:3).

Cf. note on 12:39–42.

Jesus applies to Capernaum an image from the prophecy against Babylon in Isa 14:11–12.

A yoke... finds rest. Only the poorest people would use a yoke to pull their loads. When used figuratively, a yoke represented slavery or submission; Jewish teachers spoke of bearing the yoke of God’s kingdom, through the yoke of the law. Only God would call the yoke of the kingdom or of the law “my yoke.” A sage before Jesus’ era said, “Come near me, you who are unlearned... Get wisdom, put your neck under her yoke... Look with your eyes: I have labored only a little and I have found for myself great rest” (Sirach 51:23–27). Jesus evokes such

That is, the realm of the dead.
Jesus and Beelzebul

12:25-29

Jesus' Teaching on the Sabbath

Jesus claimed to bear God's presence more than does the temple. He taught that if anyone has a servant, they should expect their servant to be your judge. He also said that if a man does not consent to stretch out his hand, he will be your judge. In this way, Jesus fulfilled the role of a servant to Israel, as prophesied in Isaiah 42:1-4.

God's Chosen Servant

Aware of this, Jesus withdrew from that place. A large crowd followed him, and he healed all who were ill. He warned them not to tell others about him. This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah:

"Here is my servant whom I have chosen, the one I love, in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him, and he will proclaim justice to the nations. He will not quarrel or cry out; no one will hear his voice in the streets. A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out, till he has brought justice through to victory. In his name the nations will put their hope." 

Jesus knew their thoughts and said to them, "Every kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and every city or household divided against itself will not stand. If Satan drives out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then can any kingdom stand? And if I drive out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your people drive them out? So then, they will be your judges. But if it is by the Spirit—"
of God that I drive out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. 29 ‘Or again, how can anyone enter a strong man’s house and carry off his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man? Then he can plunder his house. 30 ‘Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.’ 31 And so I tell you, every kind of sin and slander can be forgiven, but blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. 32 Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come. 33 ‘Make a tree good and its fruit will be good, or make a tree bad and its fruit will be bad, for a tree is recognized by its fruit. 34 You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of. 35 A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him. 36 But I tell you that everyone will have to give account on the day of judgment for every empty word they have spoken. 37 For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned.’

The Sign of Jonah

38 ‘Then some of the Pharisees and teachers of the law said to him, “Teacher, we want to see a sign from you.”’

believed that the fullness of the Spirit had been quenched after the last Biblical prophets and would be poured out again fully only in the end time. Jesus presents his activity by the Spirit as evidence that the end-time kingdom had come upon them.

12:29 strong man. People understood that no one could seize a strong person’s possessions (cf. Psalms of Solomon 5:3) without first tying him up; Jesus can take away what Satan possessed because Jesus first defeated him (cf. Isa 49:24–25).

12:30 Whoever is not with me. Among both Jews and Greeks, some recognized the principle that where opposition existed, one would be on either one side or the other. (The same principle existed in Roman party politics.)

12:32 in this age or in the age to come. Jewish people distinguished the present age from the promised future age of righteousness. Jewish sources often viewed deliberate sin as unforgivable (Nu 15:30–31; Dt 29:18–20); some teachers believed that even these sins could be atoned for if the sinner was repentant. The sin here appears to involve rejection even of the Spirit’s clear attestation of Jesus through signs (v. 28)—perhaps implying a heart too hard to repent. (The sort of person fearful of having committed the sin is not the hard-hearted kind of person the sin addresses.)

12:34 brood of vipers. See note on 3:7.

12:38 sign. Later sources suggest that most Pharisaic teachers would have weighed their traditions more heavily than they did miracles; their reception of Jesus’ signs so far has not been friendly (see v. 24).

39 ‘He answered, “A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.” 40 For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, b so the Son of Man c will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. 41 The men of Nineveh d will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, e and now something greater than Jonah is here. 42 The Queen of the South will rise at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for she came from the ends of the earth to listen to Solomon’s wisdom, and now something greater than Solomon is here.

43 ‘When an impure spirit comes out of a person, it goes through arid places seeking rest and does not find it. 44 Then it says, “I will return to the house I left.” When it arrives, it finds the house unoccupied, swept clean and put in order. 45 Then it goes and takes with it seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there. And the final condition of that person is worse than the first. f That is how it will be with this wicked generation.”

Jesus’ Mother and Brothers
12:46–50pp — Mk 3:31–35; Lk 8:19–21

46 While Jesus was still talking to the crowd, his mother g and brothers h stood outside, wanting to speak to him. 47 Someone told him, “Your mother and brothers...
are standing outside, wanting to speak to you.”

48He replied to them, “Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?” 49Pointing to his disciples, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers. 50For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.”

The Parable of the Sower

13:1-15pp — Mk 4:1-12; Lk 8:4-10
13:16-17pp — Lk 10:23,24
13:18-23pp — Mk 4:13-20; Lk 8:11-15

13 That same day Jesus went out of the house1 and sat by the lake. 2Such large crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat2 and sat in it, while all the people stood on the shore. 3Then he told them many things in parables, saying: “A farmer went out to sow his seed. 4As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. 5Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. 6But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. 7Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. 8Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, 9sixty or thirty times what was sown. 9Whoever has ears, let them hear.”

13:11

13:10

The disciples came to him and asked, “Why do you speak to the people in parables?”

11He replied, “Because the knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you,9 but not to them. 12Whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them.13 This is why I speak to them in parables:

“Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand.”

14In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah:

“You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving.

15For this people’s heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them.”

16But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear.1

15 Isaiah 6:9,10 (see Septuagint)
17 For truly I tell you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it.

18 ‘Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: 19 When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in their heart. This is the seed sown along the path. 20 The seed falling on rocky ground refers to someone who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. 21 But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away. 22 The seed falling among the thorns refers to someone who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, making it unfruitful. 23 But the seed falling on good soil refers to someone who hears the word and understands it. This is the one who produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.’ 24

The Parable of the Weeds

24 Jesus told them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. 25 But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. 26 When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared.

27 ‘The owner’s servants came to him and said, ‘Sir, didn’t you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?’

28 ‘An enemy did this,’ he replied.

"The servants asked him, ‘Do you want us to go and pull them up?’

29 ‘No,’ he answered, ‘because while you are pulling the weeds, you may uproot the wheat with them. 30 Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.’”

The Parables of the Mustard Seed and the Yeast

31 He told them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. 32 Though it is the smallest of all seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds come and perch in its branches.”

33 He told them still another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like a yeast that a woman took and mixed into about sixty pounds of flour until it worked all through the dough.”

34 Jesus spoke all these things to the crowd in parables; he did not say anything to them without using a parable. 35 So was fulfilled what was spoken through the prophet:

“I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter things hidden since the creation of the world.”

The Parable of the Weeds Explained

36 Then he left the crowd and went into the house. His disciples came to him and...
said, “Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field.”

37He answered, “The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man. 38The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the people of the kingdom. The weeds are the people of the evil one, 39and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, 40and the harvesters are angels. 41As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. 42The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. 43They will throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. 44Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Whoever has ears, let them hear.”

The Parable of the Net

44“The kingdom of heaven is like a net cast into the lake, and gathering all kinds of fish. 45Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. 46When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.

The Parable of the Hidden Treasure and the Pearl

44“The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field. 45Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. 46When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.

13:39 harvest. Some other ancient Jewish sources also apply the familiar image of harvest to the end of the age (see, e.g., 2 Baruch 70:2).
13:41 will send out his angels. That the Son of Man commands angels shows that he is no ordinary human figure.
13:42 blazing furnace. Jewish people often conceived of Gehinnom, or hell, as a place of fiery torment and/or destruction. weeping and gnashing of teeth. See note on 8:12.
13:43 shine like the sun. Developing the image of Da 12:3, as here, many Jewish sources spoke of the righteous “shining” in the future age. Cf. 17:2.
13:44 treasure hidden. Given widespread poverty in antiquity, it is no surprise that stories of buried treasure were popular; people sometimes stored their wealth by burying it in a strongbox, sometimes under the floor of their home. bought that field. Ancient title deeds to land normally specified ownership of both the land and everything in it. Here a peasant, perhaps a tenant living on and working a wealthy landowner’s field, apparently finds a hoard of coins. The focus of most such stories was the finder’s subsequent wealth, but Jesus emphasizes the great worth of the kingdom and the price one must be willing to pay for it.
13:45 merchant. Unlike the peasant noted in v. 44, this merchant is a person of means. looking for fine pearls. Divers gathered pearls from the Indian Ocean, Persian Gulf and Red Sea; wealthy women in Rome wore pearls in necklaces, the most expensive of which would have cost tens of millions of dollars in today’s currency. Jewish teachers sometimes used expensive pearls to represent the teaching of Torah; Jesus applies it to his message about the kingdom. Ancient pearl stories often emphasize the finder’s piety; Jesus instead emphasizes the value of God’s kingdom (v. 46).
13:47 net. Jesus probably refers here not to the smaller casting net, but to a seine net, also known as a dragnet, pulled between two boats. Floaters on top of such nets kept one part of the net on the surface while sinkers allowed the bottom to gather in fish from deep below. all kinds of fish. Many of the more than 20 kinds of fish available in the Sea of Galilee were inedible or ritually impure, but a seine net would catch all varieties of fish.
13:52 new treasures as well as old. The old treasures of the OT could be employed usefully in light of the newer and fuller message of the kingdom.
13:55 carpenter’s son. When Jesus was still a young child, the Galilean city of Sepphoris, just four miles (six kilometers) from Nazareth, was burned to the ground. Herod Antipas, tetrarch of Galilee, immediately set to rebuilding it and may have eventually made it his capital. Carpenters (the term here includes woodwork) were thus in demand during the period in which Jesus grew up, and he would have likely also learned the trade from his father. (Boys could learn trades as apprentices to anyone, but this included their fathers, and Jesus became a carpenter; Mk 6:3.) mother’s name…brothers. “Mary” was the most popular Jewish woman’s name in this period, and the names of Jesus’ brothers here were also very common.
and Judas? 56 Aren’t all his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all these things?” 57 And they took offense at him.

But Jesus said to them, “A prophet is not without honor except in his own town and in his own home.”

58 And he did not do many miracles there because of their lack of faith.

**John the Baptist Beheaded**

14:1-12pp — Mk 6:14-29

14 At that time Herod the tetrarch heard the reports about Jesus, 2 and he said to his attendants, “This is John the Baptist; 3 he has risen from the dead! That is why miraculous powers are at work in him.”

3 Now Herod had arrested John and bound him and put him in prison because of Herodias, his brother Philip’s wife, 4 for John had been saying to him: “It is not lawful for you to have her.” 5 Herod wanted to kill John, but he was afraid of the people, because they considered John a prophet.

6 On Herod’s birthday the daughter of Herodias danced for the guests and pleased Herod so much 7 that he promised with an oath to give her whatever she asked. 8 Prompted by her mother, she said, “Give me here on a platter the head of John the Baptist.” 9 The king was distressed, but because of his oaths and his dinner guests, he ordered that her request be granted 10 and had John beheaded in the prison. 11 His head was brought in on a platter and given to the girl, who carried it to her mother. 12 John’s disciples came and took his body and buried it. Then they went and told Jesus.

Jesus Feeds the Five Thousand


13 When Jesus heard what had happened, he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place. Hearing of this, the crowds followed him on foot from the towns.

14 When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick.

15 As evening approached, the disciples came to him and said, “This is a remote place, and it’s already getting late. Send the crowds away, so they can go to the villages and buy themselves some food.”

16 Jesus replied, “They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat.”

17 “We have here only five loaves and two fish,” they answered.

18 “Bring them here to me,” he said.

19 And he directed the people to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to the disciples, and the
1640 | Matthew 14:20

disciples gave them to the people. 20 They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. 21 The number of those who ate was about five thousand men, besides women and children.

14:20 disciples picked up twelve basketfuls. Ancient moralists condemned waste; cf. also use of leftovers in 2Ki 4:7-44.

14:21 five thousand men. The number is higher than that of most Galilean villages, including much higher than the currently estimated population of Capernaum. Ancient sources often numbered only men; Matthew thus might not know the number of women and children, but he

Jesus Walks on the Water
14:22-33pp — Mk 6:45-51; Jn 6:16-21
14:34-36pp — Mk 6:53-56

22 Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the

Houses in the Holy Land of the First Century AD: Peter’s House in Capernaum; Insulae

Housing conditions in the first-century Holy Land varied dramatically according to people’s financial situations. The best preserved homes are those that were built for the upper classes and constructed with obvious craftsmanship from lasting materials. Of these, the most splendid examples are the remains of Herod the Great’s lavish palaces in Jerusalem, Masada and Jericho.

These structures, along with other luxurious houses discovered in Jerusalem’s upper city, reflect the stylistic conventions of contemporary Roman villas. The villa was structured around an open, colonnaded courtyard and contained a large reception room and dining area to accommodate large gatherings. Floors were covered with detailed stone mosaics, and walls were painted with frescoes. These upper-class houses and palaces in Judea also contained distinctively Jewish features, such as ritual baths alongside ordinary bathrooms, the absence of human or animal representation in mosaics and frescoes and the presence of Jewish symbols (e.g., the menorah).

Since relatively few people lived in palatial homes, many more examples of middle-class dwellings have been revealed through archaeology. An important example, discovered in Jerusalem in 1970, is known as the “burnt house.” This home was completely buried with soot and ash from the destruction of the city in AD 70 and, therefore, has been well preserved. The floor plan reflects a common pattern of three medium-sized rooms, a small storage room, a small kitchen and a stepped, ritual bath built around a paved courtyard. The walls were covered with a thin layer of limestone plaster, and the floors consisted of pressed earth. Furnishings within the house included rectangular stone tables, bowls, plates, cups and cylindrical weights, one of which identifies the owner as Bar Karos.

Other significant examples of first-century houses have been unearthed in Capernaum. Excavations near the ruins of the ancient synagogue there revealed a group of approximately 12 homes constructed of black basalt rocks and small pebbles and arranged around a central courtyard containing ovens and grinding stones. These single-story dwellings had floors of beaten black earth and stairways leading to flat

continued on next page
crowd. 23 After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray.\textsuperscript{16} Later that night, he was there alone, 24 and the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it.

25 Shortly before dawn Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. 26 When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they became frightened and said, “It’s a ghost!” They were frightened to death. 27 But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, “Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.” 28 Peter answered him, “Lord, if it’s really you, tell me to come to you on the water.” 29 Jesus said, “Come.” So Peter got out of the boat and started walking on the water. But when he saw how strong the wind was, he was afraid and started sinking. “Save me, Lord!” he shouted. 30 Immediately Jesus reached out and took hold of him. “You of little faith,” Jesus said, “why did you doubt?”

An artist’s recreation of first-century houses in Capernaum. The houses were built with black basalt rocks covered with plaster and had stairs leading to flat roofs that were probably built with branches and covered with mud and straw.

14:26 ghost. Apparitions were usually frightening (though Josephus employs the term here translated “ghost” for angels). Jewish tradition warned of dangerous roofs. The less-substantial roofs were probably built with tree branches covered with mud and straw (cf. Mk 2:4).

The largest of these homes attracted particular attention in that it featured a crushed limestone floor and had plastered walls filled with decorations (including flowers, pomegranates and numerous crosses) and inscriptions, which were fragmentary and in many languages: 124 in Greek, 18 in Syrian, 15 in Hebrew and 1 in Latin. Most of the inscriptions were short prayers, such as “Christ have mercy” or “Lord Jesus Christ help.” Others contained the name of Peter, suggesting that this home was venerated in antiquity as a place of Christian pilgrimage and associated with the memory of Peter. Thus, this dwelling has become known as the house of Peter in Capernaum (Mt 8:14; Mk 1:29; Lk 4:38).

The lowest urban classes in many cities inhabited crowded tenement buildings called \textit{insulae}—multistoried buildings divided into numerous apartments called \textit{cenaculi}. The lowest floor generally contained a shop in which the proprietor also lived. The upper floors were accessed through outside staircases. The \textit{insulae} usually lacked any system of heating, running water or sewage. Eutychus most likely fell from the third floor window of an \textit{insula} while listening to Paul preach Christ in Troas (Ac 20:7–12). ◆
they were terrified. “It’s a ghost,” they said, and cried out in fear.

27But Jesus immediately said to them: “Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.”

28“Lord, if it’s you,” Peter replied, “tell me to come to you on the water.”

29“Come,” he said.

Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. 30But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, “Lord, save me!”

31Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. “You of little faith,” he said, “why did you doubt?”

32And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. 33Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, “Truly you are the Son of God.”

34When they had crossed over, they landed at Gennesaret. 35And when the men of that place recognized Jesus, they sent word to all the surrounding country. People brought all their sick to him 36and begged him to let the sick touch the edge of his cloak, and all who touched it were healed.

That Which Defiles

15:1-20pp — Mk 7:1-23

15 Then some Pharisees and teachers of the law came to Jesus from Jerusalem and asked, “Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? They don’t wash their hands before they eat!”

3Jesus replied, “And why do you break the command of God for the sake of your tradition? 4For God said, ‘Honor your father and mother’ and ‘Anyone who curses their father or mother is to be put to death.’ 5But you say that if anyone declares that what might have been used to help their father or mother is ‘devoted to God,’” they are not to ‘honor their father or mother’ with it. Thus you nullify the word of God for the sake of your tradition. 7You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you:

8 “These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.

9They worship me in vain; their teachings are merely human rules.”

10 Jesus called the crowd to him and said, “Listen and understand. 11What goes into someone’s mouth does not defile him, but what comes out of their mouth, that is what defies them.”

12Then the disciples came to him and asked, “Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this?”

13He replied, “Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be pulled up by the roots. 14Leave them; they are blind guides. If the blind lead the blind, both will fall into a pit.”

154 Virtually all Jewish people would have agreed with the requirement to honor father and mother (Ex 20:12; Dt 5:16; Lev 20:9) and to keep the commandment of God for the sake of your children (Ex 21:17; Lev 20:9). Many Jewish teachers considered honoring parents the highest commandment in the law and labored hard to fulfill this commandment. Jesus, however, points out that some of their other traditions have been used to subvert it. Like Jesus, Pharisees could suspend aspects of the law to ensure that its intention was met. Individual practice, however, does not always match the highest ideal of their group.

155–6 People could make vows by God, dedicating property for the temple. By declaring property so dedicated one prohibited others from using it; even outside the Holy Land, some teachers employed vows like these to prohibit objects from use by relatives. Although many teachers may have agreed with Jesus that people who acted in this way were abusing the system, they would not have tried to annul the vows or challenge the system.

158–9 Israel 29:13 addressed a people who valued their human traditions over Isaiah’s prophetic message.

1510–11 At least some rabbis agreed with this principle, but taught it only in private, lest it be abused.

1512 Pharisees were offended. Offending respected people, such as the Pharisees, could create powerful social and political enemies. Most Pharisees held little direct political power, but they were highly influential with the people (especially around Jerusalem).

1513 Pulled up. Jesus uses the Biblical image of building up or tearing down God’s people (Ps 28:5; Jer 1:10; 11:17; 18:7–8; 24:6; 31:4, 28; 42:10; 45:4; compare Jer 12:2 with Isa 29:13).

1514 Blind guides. Those who were literally blind often...
15Peter said, “Explain the parable to us.”\textsuperscript{t} 16Jesus asked them. 17“Don’t you see that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and then out of the body? 18But the things that come out of a person’s mouth come from the heart,\textsuperscript{p} and these defile them. 19For out of the heart come evil thoughts—murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander.\textsuperscript{q} These are what defile a person; but eating with unwashed hands does not defile them.”

The Faith of a Canaanite Woman 15:21-28

21Leaving that place, Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon.\textsuperscript{s} A Canaanite woman from that vicinity came to him, crying out, “Lord, Son of David,\textsuperscript{t} have mercy on me! My daughter is demon-possessed and suffering terribly.”\textsuperscript{u}

22Jesus did not answer a word. So his disciples came to him and urged him, “Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us.”

23He answered, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.”\textsuperscript{v}

24The woman came and knelt before him.\textsuperscript{w} “Lord, help me!” she said.

25He replied, “It is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to the dogs.”

26“Yes it is, Lord,” she said. “Even the dogs eat the crumbs.”

27Then Jesus said to her, “Woman, you have great faith!\textsuperscript{x} Your request is granted.” And her daughter was healed at that moment.

Jesus Feeds the Four Thousand 15:29-31

29Jesus left there and went along the Sea of Galilee. Then he went up on a mountainside and sat down. 30Great crowds had someone sighted who could guide them.\textsuperscript{p} For the prevalence of pits, see note on 12:11; for falling into a pit see note on 12:11; for falling into a pit. For the prevalence of pits, see note on 12:11; for falling into a pit see note on 12:11; for falling into a pit.

31Jesus asked. 32“Seven,” they replied, “and a few small fish.”

33He told the crowd to sit down on the ground. 34Then he took the seven loaves and the fish, and when he had given thanks, he broke them\textsuperscript{b} and gave them to the disciples, and they in turn to the people. 35They all ate and were satisfied. Afterward the disciples picked up seven basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over.\textsuperscript{c}

The Demand for a Sign 16:1-12

16The Pharisees and Sadducees\textsuperscript{d} came to Jesus and tested him by asking him to show them a sign from heaven.\textsuperscript{e}

2He replied, “When evening comes, you say, ‘It will be fair weather, for the sky is red,’ \textsuperscript{3}and in the morning, ‘Today it will be stormy, for the sky is red and overcast.’ You know how to interpret the sky. (When used negatively, Gentiles associated dogs with dung, promiscuity, and the devouring of corpses.) Jewish people often viewed dogs as no better than rodents, and figuratively as hostile predators (e.g., Ps 22:16,20). 15:27 dogs eat the crumbs. Gentiles sometimes raised dogs as pets; they could clean up scraps of food left by the family. Too desperate to take offense, this woman humbles herself to seize any opportunity for healing. Many people appreciated quick-witted retorts. 16:1 Pharisees and Sadducees. Pharisees and Sadducees usually worked together only when they had a common mission or a common enemy they considered very dangerous, sign from heaven. Could mean simply a sign from God, but in this context may mean predicting a heavenly sign such as an eclipse or other phenomenon. 16:3 how to interpret… the sky. In the Holy Land, Mediterranean winds bringing rain from the west could yield a red sky in the morning.
The Greek term was used in the Septuagint, the pre-Christian Greek translation of the OT, for the community of Israel; the Qumran sect applied the same Hebrew term behind it to their own community, gates of Hades. A familiar ancient expression for the realm of the dead (both in Greek literature and in the Greek translation of the Bible, both of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times. A wicked and adulterous generation looks for a sign, but none will be given it except the sign of Jonah. Jesus then left them and went away.

The Yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees

When they went across the lake, the disciples forgot to take bread. Be careful,” Jesus said to them. “Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

They discussed this among themselves and said, “It is because we didn’t bring any bread.”

Aware of their discussion, Jesus asked, “You of little faith, why are you talking among yourselves about having no bread? Do you still not understand? Do you not remember the five loaves, how many basketfuls you gathered?

Or the seven loaves for the four thousand, and how many basketfuls you gathered?

How is it you don’t understand that I was not talking to you about bread? But be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

Then they understood that he was not telling them to guard against the yeast used in bread, but against the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

16:14 (Mt 3:1; 14:2—Mk 6:15; Jn 1:21)
16:15 (Mt 4:3; Ps 42:2; Jn 11:27; Ac 14:15; 2Co 6:16; 1Th 1:9; 1Ti 3:8; Heb 10:31; 12:22)
16:16 (2Co 15:50; Gal 1:16; Eph 6:12; Heb 2:4; Eph 2:20)
16:17 (Jn 1:42; 18)
16:18 (Isa 1:9; Jn 11:20)
16:19 (Jn 18:23; Rev 3:7)
16:20 (Mt 18:18; Jn 20:23)
16:21 (Mk 8:30)

Peter Declares That Jesus Is the Messiah

Jesus Predicts His Death
ever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father’s glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what they have done.

Truly I tell you, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.”

The Transfiguration
17:1-8pp — Lk 9:28-36
17:1-13pp — Mk 9:2-13

After six days Jesus took with him Peter, James and John the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light. Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus.

Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.”

While he was still speaking, a bright cloud covered them, and a voice from

The exceptions might be if the challenger were insane, fled, or raised an army, but there is no reason to expect any of these in Jesus’ case. Jesus intended to die; regarding the purpose, see notes on 20:28; 26:28 — where Jesus tells us that he died for us.

Messianic expectations were diverse, but usually involved the Davidic Messiah’s triumph over Israel’s enemies. Peter may intend encouragement, but disciples were not supposed to rebuke their teachers.

Disciples were expected to walk behind their teachers, and Jesus might allude figuratively to that posture here. Satan. By offering the kingdom without the cross (v. 22), Peter fills Satan’s role (see 4:8–10; cf. 27:42–43). stumbling block. Plays on Peter’s name (see note on v. 18).

take up their cross. Those condemned to execution would often carry the horizontal beam of their cross (the patibulum) out to the site of their execution, through an often hostile and mocking mob. Ironically, Jesus’ disciples fall even in carrying Jesus’ cross (26:69–75), so that his executioners have to draft a bystander to carry it (27:32).

16:25–26 Jewish apocalyptic writers agreed that eternal life was well worth losing one’s life in this age (e.g., 1 Enoch 108:10; 2 Baruch 5:15–16). not taste death. . . coming in his kingdom. In context, the Synoptic Gospels apply this promise in the short term to the transfiguration (17:1–9), of which Peter, James and John were witnesses. This event points prophetically to Jesus’ postresurrection reign (cf. Eph 1:19–23) and ultimately to his return, but these three disciples experience a foretaste.

six days. Might evoke Ex 24:16; the context of Moses receiving God’s revelation on the mountain (Ex 24:15).

face shine like the sun. Although some other stories about shining people appear in antiquity, the most obvious one — and the one that would have been known to all of Matthew’s audience — was Moses, transformed as he saw God’s glory (Ex 34:29–30, 35). Yet Jesus is no mere Moses (vv. 3–5).

Moses and Elijah. Elijah had been caught up to heaven alive (2Ki 2:11) and Moses was buried by God himself (Dt 34:5–6); a few even believed that Moses, like Elijah, had not died (e.g., Sipra Dt 357.10.5). More importantly, Scripture had promised the coming of Elijah (Mal 4:4–5) and a prophet like Moses (Dt 18:15–19). The disciples experience a divine revelation on the mountain just as Moses and Elijah each did at Mount Sinai.

put up three shelters. Because of the Festival of Tabernacles, not only field workers but all Jewish men would know how to erect temporary shelters.

bright cloud covered them. Recalls the cloud of glory at Sinai when God revealed himself; Jewish teachers spoke of the cloud of God’s presence as the shekinah. On the divine voice from heaven, see note on 3:17. Here the voice adds, “Listen to him,” which some see as an allusion to the promised prophet like Moses (Dt 18:15).
the cloud said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.” Listen to him!”

6When the disciples heard this, they fell face down to the ground, terrified. 7But Jesus came and touched them. “Get up,” he said. “Don’t be afraid.”

8When they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus.

9As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus instructed them, “Don’t tell anyone what you have seen, until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead.”

10The disciples asked him, “Why then do the teachers of the law say that Elijah must come first?”

11Jesus replied, “To be sure, Elijah comes and will restore all things. 12But I tell you, Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but they did everything to him everything they wished. The same way the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands.”

13Then the disciples understood that he was talking to them about John the Baptist.

Jesus Heals a Demon-Possessed Boy

17:14-19pp — Mk 9:14-28; Lk 9:37-42

14When they came to the crowd, a man approached Jesus and knelt before him.

15“Lord, have mercy on my son,” he said.

16“Has seizures and is suffering greatly. He often falls into the fire or into the water. I brought him to your disciples, but they could not heal him.”

17“You unbelieving and perverse generation,” Jesus replied, “how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy here to me.”

18Jesus rebuked the demon, and it came out of the boy, and he was healed at that moment.

19Then the disciples came to Jesus in private and asked, “Why couldn’t we drive it out?”

20He replied, “Because you have so little faith. Truly I tell you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you.”

Jesus Predicts His Death a Second Time

22When they came together in Galilee, he said to them, “The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men. 23They will kill him, and on the third day he will be raised to life.” And the disciples were filled with grief.

The Temple Tax

24After Jesus and his disciples arrived in Capernaum, the collectors of the two-drachma temple tax came to Peter and asked, “Doesn’t your teacher pay the temple tax?”

25“Yes, he does,” he replied.

When Peter came into the house, Jesus was the first to speak. “What do you think, Simon?” he asked. “From whom do the kings of the earth collect duty and taxes—from their own children or from others?”

26“From others,” Peter answered.

“Then the children are exempt,” Jesus said to him. “But so that we may not cause offense, go to the lake and throw out your line. Take the first fish you catch; open its mouth and you will find a four-drachma coin. Take it and give it to them for my tax and yours.”

The Temple Tax

23See note on 16:21.

24 temple tax. Until the revolt against Rome, all Jewish adult males in the Roman Empire paid an annual two-drachma tax for the support of the Jerusalem temple. This tax yielded so much revenue that the temple authorities simply began constructing a golden vine, to which they added annually. Some Jewish sects refused to contribute to this tax, so the collectors asked Peter what Jesus’ response would be. (After the temple’s destruction in AD 70, Rome required Jewish people to continue to pay this tax—now to Rome.)

25–26 their own children … are exempt. Tax regulations often listed those who were exempt. Conquerors charged tribute from the conquered, not from the conquerors’ own people; a king’s dependents were exempt from his taxes. Priests (and later rabbis) were exempted from the two-drachma tax noted here.

1646 | Matthew 17:6
The Greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven
18:1-Spp — Mk 9:33-37; Lk 9:46-48

18 At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, “Who, then, is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?”

2 He called a little child to him, and placed the child among them. 3 And he said: “Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. 4 Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. 5 And whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.

Causing to Stumble
6 If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea. 7 Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to stumble! Such things must come, but woe to the person through whom they come! 8 If your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life maimed or crippled than to have two hands or two feet and be thrown into eternal fire. 9 And if your eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into the fire of hell.);

The Parable of the Wandering Sheep
18:12-14pp — Lk 15:4-7

10 “See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven. [11] a

12 “What do you think? If a man owns a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go to look for the one that wandered off? 13 And if he finds it, truly I tell you, he is happier about that one sheep than about the ninety-nine that did not wander off. 14 In the same way your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should perish.

Dealing With Sin in the Church
15 “If your brother or sister b sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. 16 But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that ‘every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.’

a Some manuscripts include here the words of Luke 19:10. b The Greek word for brother or sister (adelphos) refers here to a fellow disciple, whether man or woman; also in verses 21 and 35. c Some manuscripts add against you. d 16 Deut. 19:15

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18:1 greatest in the kingdom. Jewish teachers sometimes debated what kind of person would be greatest in the kingdom, expecting Jesus the Messiah (16:16) to soon establish his kingdom, the disciples’ concerns here are less theoretical. Jewish sages praised humility, but men nevertheless often had ambition.

18:2 little child. In ancient society, children were powerless and often overlooked. Ancient speakers and writers typically offered powerful leaders as heroes and models for imitation.

18:3 like little children. Children lacked social power; they also needed to depend on their fathers or other providers (see note on 7:9–10).

18:5 in my name. Jesus treats powerless children as his representatives (see note on 10:40).

18:6 large millstone hung around their neck. Romans sometimes executed people guilty of particularly heinous crimes by drowning them, tied down with a heavy weight; Jewish people normally regarded this punishment as too inhumane. millstone. Used by women to grind, but the term here refers to the much larger kind of grinding stone at the community mill; grain was crushed between an upper and lower millstone. The stone was turned by donkeys (a donkey could pull more than 100 pounds [45 kilograms]); one so encumbered would sink quickly (more quickly than with the type of stone described in Jer 51:63–64; cf. 1 Enoch 48:9).

18:7 stumble. The law forbade placing stumbling blocks in front of those who might be hurt by them (Lev 19:14); by Jesus’ day, many used the expression figuratively for what would cause someone to sin or turn from God.

18:8 enter life maimed. In many Jewish traditions, one would first be resurrected in the form in which one died before being fully restored (e.g., 2 Baruch 50:2–4). The righteous expected to receive back any limbs lost in God’s service (e.g., 2 Maccabees 7:11; 14:40). Against many Jewish traditions, the resurrection would include the raising of the damned as well as the righteous (Da 12:2).

18:10 their angels. Many Jewish people believed in guardian angels (see note on Heb 1:14; also e.g., Tobit 5:22; Pseudo-Philo’s Biblical Antiquities 11:12; 59:4; in the Tosefeta see Shabbat 17:2–3). In Jewish tradition, the angels who saw God’s face were the most powerful angels, who were typically the ones closest to God’s throne.

18:12 Most people of status in the ancient Mediterranean world looked down on shepherds as lower-class, dirty or uncivilized. (Despite many Biblical examples of shepherds, ancient sources suggest that the Judean elite agreed with the high-status consensus.) One hundred was an average size for a flock. Shepherds and other herders did leave their flocks to search for missing animals; often they left them with other shepherds or herders working with them in the same vicinity (cf. Lk 2:8).

18:15 just between the two of you. Jesus here agrees with other Jewish teachers: Jewish ethics heavily emphasized reproving a person privately first, so they would have opportunity to make matters right without facing shame.

18:16 take one or two others along. Evidence needed to be collected in cases the offender did not repent. The demand for at least two witnesses (Dt 17:6; 19:15) was foundational in Jewish law, especially as understood by Pharisees and Essenes.
17 If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church,\(^1\) and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector.\(^m\)

18 “ Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be\(^a\) bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be\(^b\) loosed in heaven.\(^n\)

19 “ Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them\(^o\) by my Father in heaven.\(^p\) For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.”

The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant

21 Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, “Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me?\(^q\) Up to seven times?”

22 Jesus answered, “I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.\(^b\)

23 “ Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like\(^3\) a king who wanted to settle accounts!\(^1\)

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\(^1\)Mt 16:19; Jn 20:23
\(^2\)Lk 17:4
\(^3\)Mt 18:21

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18:17 tell it to the church. Synagogues functioned as community centers, and thus could also double as community courts. Even outside the Holy Land, Rome allowed Jewish communities to exercise discipline within Gentile cities' minority Jewish communities. The church here functions similarly. The Greek terms translated "church" (ἐκκλησία) and "synagogue" (συναγωγή) are both used to translate the OT term qahal, used for the community of God's people. If the offender still did not repent, the highest level of discipline was exclusion from the community of God's people. This discipline appears both in the Dead Sea Scrolls and in later rabbinic sources.

18:18 bound … loosed in heaven. The community following the above procedures (vv. 15–17) acts on the authority of heaven. (Later rabbis believed that their decisions based on Scripture and tradition coincided with the decrees of the heavenly court.) Later rabbis employ the terminology "binding" and "loosening" for their authority to interpret the law. Here the phrase extends to judicial decisions, reflecting the figurative application of what "binding" or "loosening" a prisoner normally meant.

18:19 two of you on earth agree. Although the principle that God answers prayer is broader, the two or three people in v. 19–20 presumably refer to the two or three witnesses in v. 16 ("earth" and "heaven" likewise echo v. 18). Some suggest that it might be relevant that in Scripture, the witnesses were to be the first to strike the offender (Dt 17:7); here they are to pray.

18:20 two or three gather in my name. One familiar Jewish saying was that where two or three gathered to study God's law, God's presence was among them (in the Meshnah see Abot 3:2, 6; Meikita Babodhes 11). Jewish people considered God alone omnipresent; Jesus speaks of himself here as the divine presence (cf. 1:23; 28:20).

18:21 Up to seven times? Although Jewish tradition valued forgiveness, some teachers allowed only three occasions for deliberate sin, since they doubted the offender's sincerity beyond that point.

18:22 seventy-seven times. Some scholars argue that Jesus here reverses the principle of vengeance in Ge 4:24 (77 times). Hyperbole reinforces the point.

18:23 the kingdom of heaven is like. See note on 13:24. king. A frequent figure in Jewish parables; he normally represented God. Jesus uses characteristics of a Gentile kingdom in this parable because some of the most shocking images (especially vv. 25, 34) would not work in a Jewish setting. The king may resemble what we know of Ptolemaic rulers in Hellenistic, pre-Roman Egypt. Such a king would settle accounts with his tax farmers. The tax farmers are responsible to pay him the taxes for the people they are assigned to tax; they would then recoup their cost and make a profit by collecting the taxes from the people. After bad harvests or other crises, however, the tax revenue might not be available.

18:24 ten thousand bags of gold. Unlike many realistic details in the parable, the servant who has fallen so far in debt would shock Jesus' hearers. If the talents (translated here "bags of gold") are gold rather than silver (cf. Est 3:9), the amount this servant owes may be more than the amount of money in circulation in any petty kingdom in Jesus' day (by comparison, Herod the Great's annual tax revenue was about 800 talents). This was as much as 100 million denarii (as much as 70 or even 100 million days' wages for a peasant). Indeed, perhaps the only reason the figure is not placed even higher is that the term translated "bags of gold" here was the largest currency available, and "ten thousand" was the largest numerical designation in Greek.

18:25 his wife and his children and all that he had to sell. The king could not hope to recoup his losses by selling the man and his family; the most expensive slave might sell for one talent, and often this could be the price for 20 slaves. The man's property could also not match the amount mentioned in v. 24. The sale might make the angry king feel better, however. Jewish teachers forbade selling wives or children to repay debts, but this is presumably a Gentile king.

18:26 I will pay back. "I will repay" commonly appeared in ancient promissory notes; the promise to repay is in this case impossibly absurd.

18:27 took pity on him. Selling the man will not recoup the king's losses (see notes on vv. 24–25); in a culture valuing honor, however, showing mercy would at least serve the king's reputation for benevolence.

18:28 hundred silver coins. The other servant owes the merciless man perhaps nearly as little as a millionth of...
and begged him, ‘Be patient with me, and I will pay it back.’

30“But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. 31 When the other servants saw what had happened, they were outraged and went and told their master everything that had happened.

32‘Then the master called the servant in. ‘You wicked servant,’ he said, ‘I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. 33Shoul”

[34“Then the master called the servant in. ‘You wicked servant,’ he said, ‘I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. 33Shouldn’t you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?’ 34In anger his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.

35“This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart.”

Divorce
19:1-9pp — Mk 10:1-12

19 When Jesus had finished saying these things, he left Galilee and went into the region of Judea to the other side of the Jordan. 2Large crowds followed him, and he healed them there.

3Some Pharisees came to him to test him. They asked, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?”

4“Haven’t you read,” he replied, “that at the beginning the Creator ‘made them male and female’? 5And said, ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh’? 6So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.”

7“Why then,” they asked, “did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?”

8Jesus replied, “Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning.

9“I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and commits adultery, commits adultery.”

what that man had owed the king. choked him. Ancient sources show that creditors sometimes did in fact choke their debtors when demanding payment. The fellow servant may have had no money available at that point because he too had been settling accounts with the king (v. 23). (Some suggest that the merciless man, having failed to collect sufficient tax revenue from his subjects previously, has now determined to ruthlessly exact all that is owed.)

18:30 – 33 By imprisoning his fellow servant, the merciless man not only renders him unable to repay his debt (unless friends or relatives come to his aid) but also takes him out of active service for the king, costing the king even more money! Nor will the king’s benevolence toward the merciless servant help the king’s reputation, in light of this servant’s current behavior.

18:34 tortured. Most Jewish hearers would have recoiled at the sound of torture, but they would have known that some Gentile rulers practiced this, sometimes to extort money from the tortured person’s friends. Seeing that this servant had fallen from the king’s favor, however, his former friends will not be so foolish politically as to come to his defense. The man will never repay his debt — and thus he will never escape.

19:3 divorce his wife for any … reason. Jewish teachers in general regarded divorce as tragic but the choice of the husband; they would not normally interfere. Although wealth could buy exceptions for powerful women, the usual Judean custom was that only the husband had the option of divorce. (If the husband were abusive, however, a court could force him to grant his wife a divorce.) There were two schools of thought among the Pharisees: the school of Shammai and the school of Hillel. Shammaites outnumbered Hillelites in Jesus’ day (unlike after AD 70), but various ancient sources suggest that on the question of divorce the Hillelite view probably reflected the dominant practice in the larger society (cf. Sirach 25:26; Josephus, Antiquities 4.253; Life 415, 426). Shammaites interpreted the grounds for divorce in Dt 24:1 (“something indecent about her,” emphasizing indecent) as a reference to the wife’s unfaithfulness; by contrast, Hillelites emphasized the word something and believed that a husband could divorce his wife for any cause (rendered here “for any and every reason”). Some sages recommended divorcing a disrespectful or disobedient wife (Sirach 25:25 — 26). Although few husbands would have taken advantage of the rule, Hillelites graphically claimed that a husband could divorce his wife even for burning the bread; a later Hillelite rabbi added, “or if he finds someone more beautiful” (in the Mishnah see Gittin 9:10; Sipre Dt 269.1).

19:4 Haven’t you read …? Jesus’ question would insult the Pharisees. Nevertheless, his line of argument would be hard to discredit; many other Jewish thinkers of this period found divine ideals in the creation narrative. The Qumran sectarians, e.g., used Ge 1:27 (cited here) to prohibit kings from marrying multiple wives (Damascus Document 4.20 — 5.2; Temple Scroll 56.18 — 19). For many Jewish people, the ideals of the “beginning” also foreshadowed the future kingdom.

19:5 – 6 Teachers sometimes challenged other teachers’ interpretations of verses (here some Pharisees’ understanding of Dt 24:1) by appealing to other texts that contradicted those interpretations. Jesus here appeals to Ge 2:24.

19:8 because your hearts were hard. Ancient teachers of the law sometimes recognized that some of Moses’ laws were concessions to human weakness. Civil laws by their nature represent not God’s ideals but merely limits on human sin (see notes on 5:22, 28).

19:9 commits adultery. Viewing remarriage as adultery treats a first marriage as indissoluble in God’s sight. This was shocking hyperbole, however, since Jesus’ point is that marriage should not be broken, not that it never is broken (see v. 6). Shammaites allowed divorce only for grounds of unfaithfulness; Jesus sides with them as against the many others who allowed it “for any and every reason” (v. 3; see note there). (The other NT exception, in 1Co 7:15, also involves a matter beyond the believer’s control; the principle common to both passages seems to be that believers should never break their marriage covenant, but that neither are they ultimately responsible for the other partner doing so.)
The disciples said to him, “If this is the situation between a husband and wife, it is better not to marry.”

Jesus replied, “Not everyone can accept this word, but only those to whom it has been given.” For there are eunuchs who were born that way, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by others — and there are those who choose to live like eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. The one who can accept this should accept it.”

**The Little Children and Jesus**

19:13-15pp — Mk 10:13-16; Lk 18:15-17

Then people brought little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them9 and pray for them. But the disciples rebuked them.

Jesus said, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongsb to such as these.” 15When he had placed his hands on them, he went on from there.

**The Rich and the Kingdom of God**

19:16-29pp — Mk 10:17-30; Lk 18:18-30

Just then a man came up to Jesus and asked, “Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?”

Jesus replied, “There is only One who is good. If you want to enter life, keep the commandments.”

“Which ones?” he inquired.

Jesus replied, “You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, honor your father and mother,” and ‘love your neighbor as yourself.’”

“All these I have kept,” the young man said. “What do I still lack?”

Jesus answered, “If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven.” Then come, follow me.”

When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth.

Then Jesus said to his disciples, “Truly I tell you, it is hard for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of heaven.

Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.”

When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished and asked, “Who then can be saved?”

Jesus looked at them and said, “With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”

Peter answered him, “We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?”

Jesus said to them, “Truly I tell you, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones.

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19:10 **better not to marry.** Ancient marriage contracts often included a clause specifying what would happen in case of divorce. Because parents arranged many marriages, and many Galilean couples had no unchaperoned time together before marriage, the disciples fear the prospect of marriage with no escape for difficult circumstances.

19:12 **eunuchs.** Although eunuchs in Near Eastern royal courts could exercise power, Greco-Roman society often ridiculed eunuchs as effeminate or “half-men.” Jewish people abhorred castration, and eunuchs were excluded from the covenant (Dt 23:1). Speaking figuratively of long-term singleness, Jesus explains that there are some who choose to live like eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven.

Apart from some Essenes, most of Jesus’ Jewish contemporaries regarded marriage and rearing children as an important duty.

19:13 **place his hands on them.** A person blessed by God could lay hands on someone to pray for a blessing on them (e.g., Ge 48:14).

19:14 **do not hinder them.** See note on 18:5. A man of God could overrule his disciple from keeping a suppliant away (cf. 2Ki 4:27).

19:15 **eternal life.** If later Jewish sources are representative, sometimes people asked Jewish teachers how to have eternal life. Eternal life was the life of the coming age (Da 12:2), thus of the kingdom (cf. v. 23).

19:17 **keep the commandments.** God had promised Israel life if they obeyed his commandments (e.g., Lev 25:18; Dt 4:16; 30:19–20); this originally referred to long life in the promised land, but Jewish teachers by Jesus’ day understood it to apply also to eternal life.

19:18–19 Of the six stipulations in the Ten Commandments that deal with one’s neighbor (Ex 20:12–17), Jesus lists five (Matthew omits Mark’s “defraud” [Mk 10:19], which was not specifically one of these commandments). Jesus also lists the commandment from Lev 19:18, which he treats as a summary of the law toward one’s neighbor (see note on 22:39).

19:22 **he had great wealth.** Sages usually welcomed would-be disciples, but some radical teachers made harsh demands to weed out those who would not be serious, especially when prospective disciples were wealthy or arrogant. Accounts of such sages emphasize that they were not impressed by worldly status and that wealth is not what makes us important.

19:23 **camel… eye of a needle.** See note on Lk 18:25.

19:26 **with God all things are possible.** Scripture was clear that nothing was impossible for God (Ge 18:14; Jer 32:17,27), apart from something contrary to his character.

19:28 **at the renewal of all things.** The term translated “the renewal” was used by Stoic philosophers for the fiery destruction and restoration of the cosmos; in a Jewish setting, it refers to the promised new creation (cf. Isa 65:17; 66:22). Twelve tribes. Most Jewish people expected God to restore the 12 tribes of Israel at the time of the end.
In my vineyard, an unemployed person was numerous and could be hired work - of land needed to hire many extra workers to bring in the harvest quickly so that none of it would spoil. Landless unemployed people were numerous and could be available for work as early as sunrise; shepherds and goatherds might also add their services. Most workers were hired as harvesters; a smaller number might stand around. He went out again about noon and about three in the afternoon and did the same thing. About nine in the morning he went out and found still others standing around. He asked them, ‘Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?’ * "Because no one has hired us, they answered. He said to them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard.’ When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, ‘Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first.’ * The Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard 20 20:2 "For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard. a He agreed to pay them a denarius b for the day and sent them into his vineyard. 3 "About nine in the morning he went out and saw others standing in the marketplace doing nothing. 4 He told them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.’ So they went. He went out again about noon and found still others standing around. He asked them, ‘Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?’ 7 " ‘Because no one has hired us,’ they answered. He said to them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard.’ When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, ‘Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first.’ 9 9 "The workers who were hired about five in the afternoon came and each received a denarius. 10 So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius. 11 When they received it, they began to grumblec against the landowner. 12 ‘These who were hired last worked only one hour,’ they said, ‘and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heatd of the day.’ 13 ‘But he answered one of them, ‘I am not being unfair to you, friend. Didn’t you agree to work for a denarius? 14 Take your pay and go. I want to give the one who was hired last the same as I gave you. 15 Don’t I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?’ 16 ‘So the last will be first, and the first will be last.’ ” 

Jesus Predicts His Death a Third Time 20 20:2 17 Now Jesus was going up to Jerusalem. On the way, he took the Twelve aside and said to them, 18 “We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him to the Gentiles. 19 They will mock him, insult him, spit on him, flog him, and crucify him. After three days he will rise again.” 20:2 20:3 20:17-19pp — Mk 10:32-34; Lk 18:31-33

Matthew 20:18 | 1651

Qumran documents even speak of a group of 12 leaders, apparently because of their expectation that God would restore the 12 tribes. Jesus was preparing for the restoration of his people and of creation. 19:30 first will be last ... last will be first. Many Jewish thinkers expected the coming age to reverse current fortunes: the lowly would be exalted and the exalted brought low. Most Jewish people expected that God would exalt the people of Israel and punish their Gentile oppressors. 20:1 like a landowner. Jewish parables often began with, “Such-and-such is like ...”; the named subject (here, kingdom) was compared not simply with the next noun (here, a man) but with the entire parable that followed. Because of God’s greatness, Jewish teachers often compared him in parables to a king or landowner. hire workers for his vineyard. Most Galileans worked in agriculture. During harvest time, those who owned large amounts of land needed to hire many extra workers to bring in the harvest quickly so that none of it would spoil. Landless unemployed people were numerous and could be available for work as early as sunrise; shepherds and goatherds might also add their services. Most workers were hired as harvesters; a smaller number might stand around to prevent theft, and some boys could drive the donkeys. 20:2 denarius. Roughly a day’s normal wage. 20:3 nine in the morning. Lit. the “third hour” from sunrise. Others may have been finishing smaller harvests on their own land or simply arrived later than the first group. The day began at sunrise, but people might work 12 hours a day during harvest. 20:8 pay them their wages. Subsistence-level workers were to be paid daily so they could feed themselves and their families (Lev 19:13; Dt 24:15). 20:11 – 12 Rarely would subordinates in antiquity speak so rudely to a landowner from whom they might hope for future employment or favors. Although by their culture’s standards the landowner is socially superior, they fail to greet him with a title. 20:13 – 15 Ancients valued and praised benevolence; this landowner has not wronged the complaining workers by showing extra benevolence to others. The landowner shames the complainers, showing that they are complaining about benevolence. Grace is not fair; it is generous. 20:16 the last will be first, and the first will be last. See note on 19:30. Ancient speakers and writers sometimes bracketed a passage by repeating at the end what they said at the beginning. With the above parable (vv. 1 – 15) some scholars compare a later rabbinic parable: a king paid a worker representing Israel, who worked particularly diligently, much more than he paid the other workers, who represented Gentiles. The parable’s point was that in this world God paid Gentiles back in full for any good they did, but that Israel would be blessed forever in the world to come (Sipra Behuqatat 2.262.19). Jesus’ point was quite different: God is gracious to bless all who serve him, including those who seem the most unexpected to enter his kingdom. 20:17 – 19 See note on 16:21.
delivered over to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. On the third day he will be raised to life!"

**A Mother’s Request**

20:20-28pp — Mk 10:35-45

20 Then the mother of Zebedee’s sons came to Jesus with her sons and, kneeling down, asked a favor of him.

21 “What is it you want?” he asked.

She said, “Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom.”

22 “You don’t know what you are asking,” Jesus said to them. “Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?”

“ ‘We can,’” they answered.

23 Jesus said to them, “You will indeed drink from my cup, but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared by my Father.”

24 When the ten heard about this, they were indignant with the two brothers.

25 Jesus called them together and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. 26 Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, 27 and whoever wants to be first must be your slave— just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

**Two Blind Men Receive Sight**

20:29-34pp — Mk 10:46-52; Lk 18:35-43

29 As Jesus and his disciples were leaving Jericho, a large crowd followed him.

30 Two blind men were sitting by the roadside, and when they heard that Jesus was going by, they shouted, “Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!”

31 The crowd rebuked them and told them to be quiet, but they shouted all the louder, “Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!”

32 Jesus stopped and called them. “What do you want me to do for you?” he asked.

33 “Lord,” they answered, “we want our sight.”

34 Jesus had compassion on them and touched their eyes. Immediately they received their sight and followed him.

**Jesus Comes to Jerusalem as King**

21:1-9pp — Mk 11:1-10; Lk 19:29-38

21:4-9pp — Jn 12:12-15

21 As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, “Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me. 21 If anyone says anything to you, say that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away.”

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**Notes and Commentary**

20:18 Mt 16:21; 27:1-2

20:19 Mt 16:21  Ac 2:23

20:20 Mt 16:21  Mt 16:21

20:21 Mt 19:28

20:22 Lk 22:24, 25  Mt 23:11; Mk 9:35

20:23 Mt 8:20


20:20 mother of Zebedee’s sons. Women, and especially older women, could get away with requests and demands that men could not (or might even get into trouble).

20:22,23 cup. Biblical prophets used a cup to symbolize sufferings, normally as divine judgment (Isa 51:17; Jer 25:15–17; 51:7; Hab 2:16; Zec 12:2); here it applies to Jesus’ painful death (26:39).

20:24 they were indignant. Rivalry and competition for honor were common and expected in ancient Mediterranean society.

20:25 lord it over them. For the pervasive emphasis on rank even among Jewish people, see notes on 23:6–7; but Gentile rulers offered a particularly obvious example, and one that Jewish people would view negatively.

20:28 give his life as a ransom for many. This verse recalls Isaiah’s description of the suffering servant: Jesus gave “his life” (Isa 53:12) “as a ransom” (cf. Isa 53:10–11) “for many” (Isa 53:11–12). The idea of one person suffering to ransom others was understood in Jewish and many Gentile cultures; Jewish people believed that righteous martyrs could also satisfy and turn away God’s wrath from their people (see especially 4 Maccabees 17:7—18:5).

20:29 were leaving Jericho. In Mark, they approached Jericho (Mk 10:46). Some point out that the OT site of Jericho had been largely abandoned, and that the new Jericho lay south of it, suggesting that Mark refers to old Jericho and Matthew to the new one. Others suggest that Matthew highlights the proximity to Jerusalem (some 17 miles [27 kilometers] farther southwest). Given the range of differences accepted in ancient biography, the difference between the two accounts here might even be considered negligible.

20:30 Two blind men. Matthew has two blind men whereas Mark has one (Mk 10:46). Some think that Mark highlighted only one whose name he knew (Mk 10:46), whereas Matthew knew of a second one; others suggest, on the analogy of some Jewish interpretive practices, that Matthew simply compensates for omitting another account of another blind man’s healing (Mt 8:22–26). Many think that Matthew might also reuse the same story in two places where it fits relevantly (Mt 9:27–30). If so, it fits the recognition that ancient biographies were often arranged topically; because of this a biography occasionally could mention the same story in two places (in this case, topically in ch. 9 but here in ch. 20 following Mark’s sequence).

21:1 approached Jerusalem. The Roman road from Jericho (20:29) to Jerusalem led 17 miles (27 kilometers) farther southwest and 3,000 feet (900 meters) higher. Jerusalem would become visible when travelers reached Bethphage on the Mount of Olives; officially a Jerusalem suburb, it lay on the other side of the valley of the brook Kidron.

21:3 the Lord needs them. Authorities could temporarily commandeer people or animals for service (see note on 5:41). Jesus uses his authority in this exceptional instance; he is a king (v. 5).
This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet:

5 “Say to Daughter Zion, ‘See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.’”

6 The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them. They brought the donkey and the colt and placed their cloaks on them for Jesus to sit on. 

8 A large crowd spread their cloaksb on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted,

“Hosanna to the Son of David!”

“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”

10 When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, “Who is this?”

11 The crowds answered, “This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.”

Jesus at the Temple

12 Jesus entered the temple courts and drove out all who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves. “It is written,” he said to them, “‘My house will be called a house of prayer,’ but you are making it ‘a den of robbers.’”

14 The blind and the lame came to him at the temple, and he healed them. But when the chief priests and the teachers of the law saw the wonderful things he did and the children shouting in the temple courts, “Hosanna to the Son of David,” they were indignant.

16 “Do you hear what these children are saying?” they asked him.

21:5–7 Hopes for redemption ran high at Passover, and many Judeans interpreted redemption as deliverance from foreign oppression. Zec 9:9 speaks of a “lonely” king (when applied to rulers the description meant gracious, merciful); he comes as a king, but not as a warrior-conqueror. He comes not riding on a horse (cf. Est 6:8) but on a donkey (cf. 1Ki 1:33). In Zechariah, the king is said to ride on a donkey, even on a donkey colt. Unlike Mark (Mk 11:4–7), Matthew mentions the disciples bringing not only the colt but also the mother. Jewish interpreters sometimes read literally everything they could in a text, even if the parallel lines were two ways of saying the same thing. In Hebrew, however, though the mother is mentioned, the adult donkey on whom the king rides appears male (the common Greek version is more ambiguous, but Matthew apparently translates the Hebrew here). Whether or not Matthew mentions the mother because of Zechariah’s wording, it is hard to imagine that the disciples would not have brought the mother; the colt was an unweaned foal, so it’s unlikely to have cooperated easily without its mother’s presence, perhaps in the lead. Although Matthew mentions cloaks on both animals, Jesus sat on the cloaks only on the colt.

21:8 spread their cloaks on the road. People could honor new kings by throwing their cloaks down where the kings would sit (v. 7) or tread; see, e.g., 2Ki 9:13. others cut branches. Branches were used for celebrations (Ps 118:27), though not as much at Passover as at the later Festival of Tabernacles.

21:9 The crowds would know Ps 118:25–26 by heart. It was part of the Hallel, consisting of Ps 113–118, which was sung at the Passover season (see Mt 26:30). Hosanna. Means, “Save!” (a cry for deliverance). Son of David. The title leaves no doubt that some in the crowds already think of Jesus as a Messianic figure (see note on 1:1).

21:11 from Nazareth in Galilee. Most of Jesus’ supporters, those who knew most about him at this point, would have been Galileans.

21:12 If merely prophesying the temple’s demise could stir the temple authorities to hostile action (Jer 26:1; Josephus, Wars 6.300–9), it is not surprising that within a week of this incident Jesus was executed. Because Passover pilgrims came from all over the ancient world and each locality had its own special currency, money changers were necessary before people could buy sacrifices in the temple. Those who traveled from far away could not bring their own sacrifices, but would have to buy sacrifices at the temple. The issue is not the service provided but the location, as v. 13 makes clear. Jesus was not interfering with the massive tourist trade or other merchants outside the temple; his concern was with the distraction in the temple courts.

21:13 a house of prayer … a den of robbers. Isa 56:7 explained the temple’s purpose: a house for prayer. Jesus charged that his people were instead making it “a den of robbers,” quoting JER 7:11. The context in Jeremiah was that God’s people were committing sins, yet felt safe from God’s judgment in the temple, like robbers felt safe in their dens. God thus promised that he would destroy the temple—probably an implication of Jesus as well (cf. 24:2).

21:14 The blind and the lame came to him. Phariseic teachers did not require the blind or those unable to walk to come to festivals in Jerusalem; many scholars argue that some Jewish traditions also excluded them from the court of Israel in the temple. Jesus, however, takes special interest in helping them.

21:15 chief priests and the teachers of the law. The aristocratic priests belonged to Jerusalem’s wealthy ruling class, which was responsible to keep peace for the Romans. The teachers of the law might have additional theological objections; because those referred to here may belong to the ruling council (cf. 26:57), they probably also have political objections. Hosanna. See note on v. 9.

21:16 From the lips … praise. Jesus here quotes the Greek version of Ps 8:2; the Hebrew reads “strength” instead of “praise.” Jewish interpreters frequently chose the textual...
“Yes,” replied Jesus, “have you never read,

‘From the lips of children and infants
you, Lord, have called forth your praise’?

17 And he left them and went out of the city to Bethany, where he spent the night.

**Jesus Curses a Fig Tree**

21:18-22pp — Mk 11:12-14, 20-24

18 Early in the morning, as Jesus was on his way back to the city, he was hungry.
19 Seeing a fig tree by the road, he went up to it but found nothing on it except leaves. Then he said to it, “May you never bear fruit again!” Immediately the tree withered.
20 While the disciples saw this, they were amazed. “How did the fig tree wither so quickly?” they asked.

21 Jesus replied, “Truly I tell you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you can do what was done to the fig tree, but also you can say to this mountain, ‘Go, throw yourself into the sea,’ and it will be done. If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer.”

**The Authority of Jesus Questioned**


23 Jesus entered the temple courts, and, while he was teaching, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him.

“By what authority are you doing these things?” they asked. “And who gave you this authority?”

24 Jesus replied, “I will also ask you one question. If you answer me, I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things.

25 John’s baptism — where did it come from? Was it from heaven, or of human origin?”

They discussed it among themselves and said, “If we say, ‘From heaven,’ he will ask, ‘Then why didn’t you believe him?’

26 But if we say, ‘Of human origin’ — we are afraid of the people, for they all hold that John was a prophet.”

27 So they answered Jesus, “We don’t know.”

Then he said, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.

**The Parable of the Two Sons**

28 “What do you think? There was a man who had two sons. He went to the first and said, ‘Son, go and work today in the vineyard.’

29 ‘I will not,’ he answered, but later he changed his mind and went.

30 “Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. He answered, ‘I will, sir,’ but he did not go.

31 “Which of the two did what his father wanted?”

“The first,” they answered.

Jesus said to them, “Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you.

32 For John came to you to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him.

**The Parable of the Tenants**

21:33-46pp — Mk 12:1-12; Lk 20:9-19

33 Listen to another parable: There was a landowner who planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a winepress in it and built a watchtower. Then he rented it

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 tradition or translation that best communicated their point. The primary language of the Sadducees was probably Greek (the dominant language of their tomb inscriptions). The psalm refers primarily to infants, but Jesus may reason: if infants, then “how much more” (see note on 7:11) other children.
21:17 went out ... to Bethany. Many pilgrims would arrive as much as a week early for the festival. Jerusalem’s population would swell during the festival, so some visitors would lodge in nearby villages.
21:19 Passersby were welcome to take a small amount of fruit for their needs (see note on 12:1). On the reasons for the tree lacking fruit, see note on Mk 11:13. Matthew’s sequence differs from Mark’s, but biographies did not normally pretend to be arranged chronologically, and minor differences were common in ancient biography.
21:21 say to this mountain. Some later sources suggest that “moving mountains” was a Jewish figure of speech for doing what was considered impossible. Some scholars think that “this mountain” (emphasis added) refers to the Mount of Olives, which was within sight of the disciples (v. 1; cf. Zec 14:4).

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21:23 what authority. The chief priests and elders exercised traditional authority over the people, supported by Rome.
21:24 I will also ask. Jewish teachers often countered questions with questions.
21:28—31 Jewish culture demanded that sons honor, obey and answer their fathers respectfully. Minor sons also often worked on the family’s farm or learned a trade from their father.
21:28 What do you think? Allows for one ancient function of parables: inviting the hearers to condemn themselves from their own mouths (2Sa 12:4-7). 21:32 the way of righteousness. A familiar Jewish phrase for “the way of God’s will” or “the right way” (e.g., Pr 8:20; 12:28; 16:31), tax collectors. See note on 9:9, prostitutes. Although Jewish texts speak of prostitution as primarily a Gentile practice, both foreign and Jewish prostitutes are attested in ancient Israel, including in Jerusalem.
21:33—34 Profits from vineyards usually did not begin to be realized until four years after planting; the owner is presumably wealthy enough to be able to afford the delay. Although many Galileans owned their own plots of land,
the vineyard to some farmers and moved to another place. When the harvest time approached, he sent his servants to the tenants to collect his fruit. The tenants seized his servants; they beat one, killed another, and stoned a third. Then he sent other servants to them, more than the first time, and the tenants treated them the same way. Last of all, he sent his son to them. ‘They will respect my son,’ he said.

But when the tenants saw the son, they said to each other, ‘This is the heir. Come, let’s kill him and take his inheritance.’ So they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.

‘Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?’

‘He will bring those wretches to a wretched end,’” they replied, “and he will rent the vineyard to other tenants, who will give him his share of the crop at harvest time.”

Jesus said to them, “Have you never read in the Scriptures:

‘The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes’?”

‘Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to apeople who will produce its fruit. Anyone who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; anyone on whom it falls will be crushed.’

When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard Jesus’ parables, they knew he was talking about them. They looked for a way to arrest him, but they were afraid of the crowd because the people held that he was a prophet.

The Parable of the Wedding Banquet

Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying: “The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. He sent his servants to the chief priests and the Pharisees to tell them to come, but they refused to come.

‘Then he sent some more servants and said, ‘Tell those who have been invited that I have prepared my dinner: My oxen and fattened cattle have been butchered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet.’

But they paid no attention and went off—one to his field, another to his business. The rest seized his servants, mistreated them and killed them. The king sent his army with orders to put those wretches to death and burn their town.

One of the chief priests, who was a Pharisee, answered, ‘Teacher, we know that you are truthful and care for no man; you teach the way of God in truth, whatever it may be. Why do you then charge this fellow with sinning?’

Jesus said to him, “I tell you the truth, this generation will not pass away before all the prophecy is fulfilled. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.”

When the kingdom comes, the righteous will inherit the kingdom, but the wicked will be banished from it.

In the days of those kings,” Jesus said, “the people of Israel often rejected the prophets who were sent to them. When God’s people rejected his prophets, God rejected the people. There is a time coming when people will listen to the truth; it will happen at the right time. People who reject the truth now will suffer shame.

So the Last Day will come,” Jesus said, “and God will give all the angels their instructions. He will say, ‘Come, you blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to see me.’

Then all the angels will be assembled in the presence of the Great Judge of the living and dead. They will report to him: ‘Jesus, Lord, what have you done here? What do you want us to do?’

Jesus will answer, ‘First I’ll give you separate orders, and then I’ll give you the final instructions. The Son of Man will come with his angels, and the dead who are sleeping in his kingdom will rise first. After they are judged, they will go to eternal life. Then the righteous will inherit the kingdom prepared for the upright since the world began. The unrighteous will be thrown into the lake of fire, where there will be eternal suffering.’

Then the king will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you long ago. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to see me.’

Jesus will answer, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of these brothers of mine, you did for me.’

Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Go away from me, you accursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to see me.’

Jesus will answer, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of these brothers of mine, you did not do for me.’

Then they will also ask, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink, or as a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you, or sick or in prison and visit you?’

Jesus will answer, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of these brothers of mine, you did not do for me.’

And these will go into eternal suffering, while the righteous will inherit eternal life and eternal blessedness in the kingdom prepared for them since the world began. For the Son of Man comes on the day he was glorified to take his kingdom.

“Now I am going to my Father, who sent me to the world. The world rejected me, but I accept the truth. I do not think of myself as being alone; I have a mission from God that I am carrying out. I believe he is the only way to God who our ancestorsletters say about God. He is for us, and we are for him. Whether he is for us or against us, we are for him. We are for him because we believe in his Son Jesus, who is the Son of God. This mission of mine is for the sake of the name of Jesus.”

Many landless peasants found work on larger estates. Wealthy absentee landowners were common; they usually either contracted laborers or rented their land to tenant farmers (serfs). Tenant farmers lived and worked their estates and merely paid the landowners a portion of the harvest (v. 34). Farmers used rough stone walls or hedges to keep out hungry animals; watchtowers for guards (usually huts with flat roofs) might also provide some shelter during harvest (cf. 2Ch 26:10; Isa 1:8). The arrangements for the vineyard here thus are not unusual, but together they closely follow Isa 5:2, in the context of which Israel was the vineyard (Isa 5:7). The “tenants” in v. 34 must thus be the temporary caretakers of Israel — the chief priests and the elders (vv. 23, 45).

Collect the fruit. Contracts specified the tenants’ obligations. Because tenants did not own the land they worked, they sometimes had to pay the landowners half the harvest.

Seized his servants... killed another. Even during war, everyone in antiquity viewed the murder of unarmed messengers as treachery. Jewish people hearing the parable would think of the tradition of Israel persecuting God’s prophets (cf. 5:12; 23:34).

He sent his son. In Jewish parables, a landowner often represented God and his son was generally Israel; here, however, it is clear that Jesus means himself as the son. Ancient hearers would have expected the landowner to seek to destroy the tenants before this point, and would regard the gesture of sending his son as naively gentle. No one has a right to complain that God is not merciful enough.

Take his inheritance. No court would have given the inheritance to these tenants; the state would have executed them instead.

See notes on Mk 11:9, Lk 20:17.

Given to a people. Some relate the new “nation” here to the holy nation of Ex 19:5 – 6, suggesting the people of a new exodus (IPe 2:9).

Falls on this stone. . . . be crushed. Jewish teachers often linked various passages based on a common keyword; Jesus thinks of other “stone” passages in addition to Ps 118:22 (cited in v. 42). One could stumble over God’s stone (Isa 8:14 – 15; cf. Isa 28:16), or it could crush one (Da 2:44).

The kingdom of heaven is like. See note on 13:24. Many Jewish parables depict God as a king; sometimes his son represented Israel marrying the law. Here the son is presumably Jesus. wedding banquet. Because the size of wedding banquets displayed honor, hosts usually invited as many people as possible.

Those who had been invited... refused to come. Refusal to accept a banquet invitation insulted the inviter; insult was therefore a conspicuously deliberate and provocative act.”

Oxen and fattened cattle. A fattened calf alone could feed a village (cf. Lk 15:23); the king has made massive preparations, and the meat will spoil unless the guests come quickly.

Killed them. All ancient readers would have agreed...
was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city.

8 "Then he said to his servants, ‘The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come. 9 So go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find.’ 10 So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, the bad as well as the good, and the wedding hall was filled with guests.

11 "But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. 12 He asked, ‘How did you get in here without wearing wedding clothes, friend?’ The man was speechless.

13 "Then the king told the attendants, ‘Tie him hand and foot, and throw him out into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’

14 "For many are invited, but few are chosen.”

**Marriage at the Resurrection**


23 That same day the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to him with a question. 24 "Teacher,” they said, “Moses told us that if a man dies without having children, his brother must marry the widow and raise up offspring for him.”

25 Now there were seven brothers among them. The first one married and died, and since he had no children, he left his wife to his brother. 26 The same thing happened to his brothers...”

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### Paying the Imperial Tax to Caesar

22:15-22pp — Mk 12:13-17; Lk 20:20-26

15 Then the Pharisees went out and laid plans to trap him in his words. 16 They sent their disciples to him along with the Herodians. 17 "Teacher,” they said, “we know that you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. You aren’t swayed by others, because you pay no attention to what they are. 18 Tell us then, what is your opinion? Is it right to pay the imperial tax to Caesar or not?”

19 But Jesus, knowing their evil intent, said, “You hypocrites, why are you trying to trap me? 20 Show me the coin used for paying the tax.” They brought him a denarius, and he asked them, “Whose image is this? And whose inscription?”

21 "Caesar’s,” they replied. Then he said to them, “So give back to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s.”

22 When they heard this, they were amazed. So they left him and went away.

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*17 A special tax levied on subject peoples, not on Roman citizens*
to the second and third brother, right on down to the seventh. Finally, the woman died. And now then, at the resurrection, whose wife will she be of the seven, since all of them were married to her?"

29Jesus replied, “You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God. At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven. But about the resurrection of the dead—have you not read what God said to you, ‘I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’—He is not the God of the dead but of the living.”

33When the crowds heard this, they were astonished at his teaching.

The Greatest Commandment

22:34-40p — Mk 12:28-31

34Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, 1 the Pharisees got together. One of them, an expert in the law, 2 tested him with this question: “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?”

37Jesus replied: ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ 3 This is the first and greatest commandment. 4 And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ 5 All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.” 6

Whose Son Is the Messiah?

22:41-46p — Mk 12:35-37; Lk 20:41-44

41While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, 42“What do you think about the Messiah? Whose son is he?”

“The son of David,” 43they replied. 44He said to them, “How is it then that David, speaking by the Spirit, calls him ‘Lord’? For he says, 44“The Lord said to my Lord: ‘Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet.’” 45

If then David calls him ‘Lord,’ how can he be his son?” 46No one could say a word in reply, and from that day on no one dared to ask him any more questions.

A Warning Against Hypocrisy

23:1-7opp — Mk 12:38,39; Lk 20:45,46

23:37-39opp — Lk 13:34,35

23Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples: 1“The teachers of the law 2and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat.”

Matthew 23:2 | 1657

Matthew 23:28

Sadducees were known to pose conundrums such as this to the Pharisees, seeking to illustrate what they believed were the absurd implications of belief in the resurrection.

Matthew 23:29

you do not know the Scriptures. Although the most obvious Biblical text to which Jesus would allude could be Da 12:2, in v. 32 Jesus proves his case from the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Bible). When arguing against Sadducees, Pharisees also made a case from the Pentateuch, because that was what Sadducees would readily accept.

Matthew 23:30

neither marry nor be given in marriage. Grooms married; fathers gave their daughters in marriage. Most Jewish people agreed that angels, who were immortal, did not propagate; the same then would be true of those resurrected to immortality.

Matthew 23:31

have you not read…The highly educated and literate Sadducees would hear Jesus’ question as an insult.

Matthew 23:32

the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. Jewish prayers regularly referred to God in this way. Jesus articulates a position that many of his hearers would have accepted, namely, that the patriarchs remained alive before God. Some other Jewish intellectuals also supported this view (e.g., 4 Maccabees 7:18–19; 16:25; Philo, Abraham 50–55).

Matthew 23:36

greatest commandment in the Law. Despite requiring obedience to all the commandments, Pharisaic teachers often debated among themselves which commandment was the greatest. Many, e.g., felt that the greatest was honoring one’s parents. One later rabbi came closer to Jesus’ view here: Rabbi Akiba thought that “Love your neighbor” (v. 39) was the greatest commandment (Sipra Qedoshim 4.200.3.7).

Matthew 23:37

Jewish people regularly recited this passage (Dt 6:5); it provides a summary of the law, especially with regard to God.

Matthew 23:39

All the Law and the Prophets hang on these. Others had also looked for summarizing principles of the law (e.g., Mic 6:8). See note on 7:12.

Matthew 23:44

The Lord said to my Lord. Psalm 110:1 speaks of a ruler of the nations, a priest like Melchizedek (Ps 110:4), who is distinct from God the Father yet also called “Lord.” Since Jewish people avoided pronouncing the divine name in this period, and YHWH was pronounced “lord,” they would read the passage, both in Hebrew and in Greek, as "the Lord" speaking to "my Lord." Under your feet. Subdued enemies are often depicted as being under a conqueror’s feet.

Matthew 23:45

how can he be…? Rabbis sometimes grappled with reconciling apparently contradictory positions; Jesus is not denying that the Messiah is David’s descendant, a title he has not refused (9:27; 15:22; 20:30–31), but is showing that the Messiah is not merely like David. If David addresses this figure as “Lord,” David recognizes one greater than himself, which a mere “new David” or Davidic descendant would not be.

Matthew 23:23

Moses’ seat. Many scholars identify Moses’ seat with
### PHARISEES

| **Their roots can be traced to the Hasidim of the second century BC.** | (1) Along with the Torah, they accepted as equally inspired and authoritative all the commands set forth in the oral traditions preserved by the rabbis. |
| | (2) On free will and determination, they held to a mediating view that did not allow either human free will or the sovereignty of God to cancel out the other. |
| | (3) They accepted a rather developed hierarchy of angels and demons. |
| | (4) They believed in the immortality of the soul and in reward and retribution after death. |
| | (5) They believed in the resurrection of the dead. |
| | (6) The main emphasis of their teaching was ethical rather than theological. |

### SADDUCEES

| **They probably had their beginning during the Hasmonean period (166–63 BC). Their demise occurred c. AD 70 with the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple.** | (1) They considered only the books of Moses to be canonical Scripture, denying that the oral law was authoritative and binding. |
| | (2) They were very exacting in Levitical purity. |
| | (3) They attributed everything to free will. |
| | (4) They argued that there is neither resurrection of the dead nor a future life. |
| | (5) They rejected the idea of a spiritual world, including belief in angels and demons. |

### ESSENES

| **They probably originated among the Hasidim, along with the Pharisees, from whom they later separated (see the apocryphal book 1 Maccabees 2:42; 7:13). The Hasidim were a group of zealous Jews who took part with the Maccabees in a revolt against the Syrians c. 165–155 BC. A group of Essenes probably moved to Qumran c. 150 BC, where they copied scrolls and deposited them in nearby caves.** | (1) They strictly observed the purity laws of the Torah. |
| | (2) They practiced communal ownership of property. |
| | (3) They had a strong sense of mutual responsibility. |
| | (4) Daily worship was an important feature along with daily study of their sacred scriptures. |
| | (5) Solemn oaths of piety and obedience had to be taken. |
| | (6) Sacrifices were offered on holy days and during their sacred seasons, but not at the temple, which they considered to be corrupt. |
| | (7) Marriage was avoided by some but was not condemned in principle. |
| | (8) They attributed to fate everything that happened. |

### ZEALOTS

| **They originated during the reign of Herod the Great c. 6 BC. A group of Zealots were among the last defenders against the Romans at Masada in AD 73.** | (1) They opposed payment of taxes to a pagan emperor because they believed that allegiance was due to God alone. |
| | (2) They were fiercely loyal to Jewish tradition. |
| | (3) They endorsed the use of violence as long as it accomplished a good end. |
| | (4) They were opposed to the influence of Greek pagan culture in the Holy Land. |
Matthew 23:22  |  1659

Seven Woes on the Teachers of the Law and the Pharisees

13 "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites!  You shut the door of the kingdom of heaven in people's faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to. a [14] b

15 "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, a and when you have succeeded, you make them as twice as much a child of hell as you are.

16 "Woe to you, blind guides! You say, 'If anyone swears by the temple, it means nothing; but anyone who swears by the gold of the temple is bound by that oath.' b 17 You blind fools! Which is greater: the gold, or the temple that makes the gold sacred? a 18 You also say, 'If anyone swears by the altar, it means nothing; but anyone who swears by the gift on the altar is bound by that oath.' b 19 You blind men! Which is greater: the gift, or the altar that makes the gift sacred? b 20 Therefore, anyone who swears by the altar swears by it and by everything on it. 21 And anyone who swears by the temple swears by it and by the one who dwells in it. 22 And anyone who swears by heaven swears by God's throne and by the one who sits on it. m

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a 5 That is, boxes containing Scripture verses, worn on forehead and arm  b 14 Some manuscripts include here words similar to Mark 12:40 and Luke 20:47.
23 **Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill, and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy, and fidelity. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former.** You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel.

24 **Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence.**

25 **Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean.**

26 **Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of the bones of the dead and everything unclean.** In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous, but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness.

27 **Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of the bones of the dead and everything unclean.** In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous, but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness.
ekiah," whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. 36 Truly I tell you, all this will come on this generation." 37 Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, 38 how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing. 39 Look, your house is left to you desolate. 39 For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.’”

The Destruction of the Temple and Signs of the End Times

24 Jesus left the temple and was walking away when his disciples came up to him to call his attention to its buildings. 2 “Do you see all these things?” he asked. “Truly I tell you, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down.”

As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately. “Tell us,” they said, “when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?”

Jesus answered: “Watch out that no one deceives you. 5 For many will come in my name, claiming, ‘I am the Messiah,’ and will deceive many. 6 You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. 7 Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. 8 There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. 9 All these are the beginning of birth pains. 10 Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me. 11 And many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. 12 Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, 13 but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved. 14 And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

15 “So when you see standing in the holy place—the abomination that causes desolation,—the spoken of through the prophet Daniel—let the reader understand—"
16then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. 17Let no one on the house-top go down to take anything out of the house. 18Let no one in the field go back to get their cloak. 19How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! 20Pray that your flight will not take place in winter or on the Sabbath. 21For then there will be great distress, unequalled from the beginning of the world until now—and never to be equaled again. 22∗If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened. 23At that time if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Messiah!’ or, ‘There he is!’ do not believe it. 24For false messiahs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. 25∗See, I have told you ahead of time.

26∗So if anyone tells you, ‘There he is, out in the wilderness,’ do not go out; or, ‘Here he is, in the inner rooms,’ do not believe it. 27For as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. 28Wherever there is a carcass, there the vultures will gather.

29∗Immediately after the distress of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken. 30∗Then shall appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, with a great cloud, and he will send his angels with a great trumpet. 31They will gather his elect from one end of heaven to another. 32Then the Elect will give up the dead and the living together.

33Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. 34Let no one on the house-top go down to take anything out of the house. 35Let no one in the field go back to get their cloak. 36How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! 37Pray that your flight will not take place in winter or on the Sabbath. 38For then there will be great distress, unequalled from the beginning of the world until now—and never to be equaled again. 39∗If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened. 40At that time if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Messiah!’ or, ‘There he is!’ do not believe it. 41For false messiahs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. 42∗See, I have told you ahead of time.

43∗So if anyone tells you, ‘There he is, out in the wilderness,’ do not go out; or, ‘Here he is, in the inner rooms,’ do not believe it. 44For as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. 45Wherever there is a carcass, there the vultures will gather.

46∗Immediately after the distress of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.
30 “Then will appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven. And then all the peoples of the earth will mourn when they see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory. 31 And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other.

32 “Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. 33 Even so, when you see all these things, you know that it is near, right at the door. 34 Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened.

35 “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.”

The Day and Hour Unknown

24:37-39pp — Lk 17:26-27
24:45-51pp — Lk 12:42-46

36 “But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, d but only the Father. 37 For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, e as up to the day Noah entered the ark; 38 and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. 39 Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. 40 Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left.

42 Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. 43 But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. 44 So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.

45 “Who then is the faithful and wise servant, f whom the master has put in charge of the servants in his household to give them their food at the proper time? 46 It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns.

47 “Truly I tell you, he will put him in charge of all his possessions. 48 But suppose that servant is wicked and says to himself, ‘My master is staying away a long time,’ 49 and he then begins to beat his fellow servants and to eat and drink with drunkards.

50 “The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of. 51 He will cut cooperation. Some tried to calculate dates; others regarded such calculations as impossible. Jesus affirms that the Father knows the time (cf. Zec 14:7), though no one else did. He notes some prerequisites for the end (vv. 15-34) but also that it would catch people by surprise (vv. 37-44).

37-39 days of Noah. Jewish people often viewed the flood as prefiguring the day of judgment. Jesus warns that as the flood caught the people of Noah’s day unprepared (vv. 38-39), so would his coming catch the final generation unprepared (for the lack of signs, see note on vv. 6-14).

24:38 Grooms married and fathers gave in marriage.

24:41 hand mill. Many Galilean homes shared a common courtyard with other families, and housewives worked together at a common millstone. The implication here is that, despite the closest of associations, one is taken (to judgment, v. 39) but the other is spared.

24:45 wise servant. Slaves could be entrusted with great authority; household managers were often high-level slaves.

24:48 staying away a long time. A common story line, appearing also in some Jewish parables, was the temptation posed when a ruler, master or husband went on a long journey. In the stories, the person often returned and caught someone unprepared (v. 50).

24:49 eat and drink with drunkards. Gluttony and drunkenness were often associated with squandering. A slave exploiting fellow slaves and carousing with the master’s resources would be punished harshly.

24:51 cut him to pieces. People regarded dismemberment as a terrible punishment, often inflicted just before or after execution.

a 30 Or the tribes of the land  b 30 Or he c 33 Or he d 36 Some manuscripts do not have nor the Son.
him to pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.\textsuperscript{x}

The Parable of the Ten Virgins

25 “At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom.\textsuperscript{a} Five of them were foolish and five were wise.\textsuperscript{b} The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them.\textsuperscript{c} The wise ones, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps.\textsuperscript{d} The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep.\textsuperscript{e}

“‘At midnight the cry rang out: ‘Here’s the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!’

7 Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps.\textsuperscript{f} The foolish ones said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.’

9 ‘No,’ they replied, ‘there may not be enough for both us and you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.’

10 But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet.\textsuperscript{g} And the door was shut.

11 ‘Later the others also came. ‘Lord,’ they said, ‘open the door for us!’

12 ‘But he replied, ‘Truly I tell you, I don’t know you.’

13 Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.\textsuperscript{h}

The Parable of the Bags of Gold

25:14-30 Ref — Lk 19:12-27

14 “Again, it will be like a man going on a journey,\textsuperscript{i} who called his servants and entrusted his wealth to them.\textsuperscript{j} To one he gave five bags of gold, to another two bags, and to another one bag, each according to his ability.\textsuperscript{k} Then he went on his journey.\textsuperscript{l} The man who had received five bags of gold went at once and put his money to work and gained five bags more.\textsuperscript{m} So also, the one with two bags of gold gained two more.\textsuperscript{n} But the man who had received one bag went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money.\textsuperscript{o}

19 After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them.\textsuperscript{p} The man who had received five bags of gold brought the other five. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with five bags of gold. See, I have gained five more.’

21 His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things.\textsuperscript{q}

25:11 open the door. The door could be bolted shut, but with visitors coming and going, it would not be bolted for the entirety of the wedding celebration, which might last seven days. Rather, it is bolted against them; the unwise virgins, however, were now alienated from the five foolish virgins, however, were now alienated from their own community. As with the graphic punishment in 24:51, the severe punishment here is meant to seize the hearers’ attention (see 25:13).

25:14 entrusted his wealth to them. See note on 24:48. High-level slaves often served as managers for household estates, so entrusting wealth to them was not unusual. Other Jewish parables have a similar story line.

25:16 put his money to work. Moneylending was common and was often done through temples, which normally doubled as banks because deposits were considered safe there. Since few people had capital, those who did could lend money at significant interest. Investors thus could receive five or even ten times their investment (cf. Lk 19:16–18); at the very least, they could double their investment.

25:18 hid his master’s money. People often buried money in a strongbox to keep it safe, but it would have been safe with the bankers and also increased (in contrast to vv. 16–17).

25:21 put you in charge of many things. Slaves could be rewarded. Roman law allowed slaves not only to manage estates, but also to earn and hold money and receive bonuses. Some imperial freedmen even wielded more power than many aristocrats.
ONE ARRANGEMENT OF THE LIFE OF CHRIST

CHILDHOOD
- Birth of Jesus, Bethlehem, 6/5 BC, Mt 1:18–25; Lk 2:1–7
- Visit by shepherds, Bethlehem, Lk 2:8–20
- Presentation in the temple, Jerusalem, Lk 2:21–40
- Visit by the Magi, Bethlehem, Mt 2:1–12
- Escape to Egypt, Nile Delta, Mt 2:13–18
- Return to Nazareth, Lower Galilee, Mt 2:19–23
- Visit to temple as a boy, Jerusalem, AD 7/8, Lk 2:41–52

YEAR OF INAUGURATION
Jesus is baptized
Jordal River
AD 26
Mt 3:13–17; Mk 1:9–11; Lk 3:21–23; Jn 1:29–39

YEAR OF POPULARITY
Four fishermen become Jesus’ followers
Sea of Galilee
AD 27
Mt 4:18–22; Mk 1:16–20; Lk 5:1–11

YEAR OF OPPOSITION
Jesus heals Peter’s mother-in-law
Capernaum
AD 27
Mt 8:14–17; Mk 1:29–34; Lk 4:38–41

YEAR OF INAUGURATION
Jesus is tempted by Satan
Desert of Judea
Mt 4:1–11; Mk 1:12–13; Lk 4:1–13

YEAR OF POPULARITY
Jesus heals Peter’s mother-in-law
Capernaum
AD 27
Mt 8:14–17; Mk 1:29–34; Lk 4:38–41

Dotted lines leading to the timeline are meant to define sequence of events only. All dates are approximate.
A sinful woman anoints Jesus
CAPERNAUM
Lk 7:36–50

Jesus feeds the 5,000
NEAR BETHSAIDA
Spring, AD 29
Mt 14:13–21; Mk 6:30–44; Lk 9:10–17; Jn 6:1–14

Jesus walks on water
Mt 14:22–33; Mk 6:45–52; Jn 6:16–21

Jesus withdraws to Tyre and Sidon
Mt 15:21–28; Mk 7:24–30

Jesus feeds the 4,000
Mt 15:32–39; Mk 8:1–9

Peter says that Jesus is the Son of God
Mt 16:13–20; Mk 8:27–30; Lk 9:18–21

Jesus tells his disciples he is going to die soon
CEASAREA Philippi
Mt 16:21–26; Mk 8:31–37; Lk 9:22–25

Jesus is transfigured
Mt 17:1–13; Mk 9:2–13; Lk 9:28–36

Jesus pays his temple tax
CAPERNAUM
Later in that year
Mt 17:24–27

The most likely dates for Jesus’ public ministry are AD 27–30; the next most likely option, however, is 30–33.
## ONE ARRANGEMENT OF THE LIFE OF CHRIST (CONT.)

### THE LAST WEEK

**The “Triumphal” Entry, Jerusalem, Sunday**
- Mt 21:1–11; Mk 11:1–10; Lk 19:29–44; Jn 12:12–19

**Jesus curses the fig tree, Monday**
- Mt 21:18–19; Mk 11:12–14

**Jesus clears the temple, Monday**
- Mt 21:12–13; Mk 11:15–18

**The authority of Jesus questioned, Tuesday**
- Mt 21:23–27; Mk 11:27–33; Lk 20:1–8

**Jesus teaches in the temple, Tuesday**
- Mt 21:28–23:39; Mk 12:1–44; Lk 20:9–21:4

**Jesus anointed, Bethany, Tuesday**
- Mt 26:6–13; Mk 14:3–9; Jn 12:1–11

**The plot against Jesus, Wednesday**
- Mt 26:14–16; Mk 14:10–11; Lk 22:3–6

**The Last Supper, Thursday**
- Mt 26:17–29; Mk 14:12–25; Lk 22:7–20; Jn 13:1–38

**Jesus comforts the disciples, Thursday**
- Jn 14:1—16:33

**Gethsemane, Thursday**
- Mt 26:36–46; Mk 14:32–42; Lk 22:40–46

**Jesus’ arrest and trial, Thursday night and Friday**

**Jesus’ crucifixion and death, Golgotha, Friday**
- Mt 27:27–56; Mk 15:16–41; Lk 23:26–49; Jn 19:17–30

**The burial of Jesus, Joseph’s Tomb, Friday**
- Mt 27:57–66; Mk 15:42–47; Lk 23:50–56; Jn 19:31–42

### AFTER THE RESURRECTION

**The empty tomb, Jerusalem, Sunday**
- Mt 28:1–10; Mk 16:1–8; Lk 24:1–12; Jn 20:1–10

**Mary Magdalene sees Jesus in the garden, Jerusalem, Sunday**
- Mt 16:9–11; Jn 20:11–18

**Jesus appears to the two going to Emmaus, Sunday**
- Mk 16:12–13; Lk 24:13–35

**Jesus appears to 10 disciples, Jerusalem, Sunday**
- Mk 16:14; Lk 24:36–43; Jn 20:19–25

**Jesus appears to the 11 disciples, Jerusalem, One week later**
- Jn 20:26–31

**Jesus talks with some of his disciples, Sea of Galilee, One week later**
- Jn 21:1–25

**Jesus ascends to his Father in heaven, Mount of Olives, 40 days later**
- Mt 28:16–20; Mk 16:19–20; Lk 24:44–53

**Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead, Bethany, Winter, AD 30**
- Jn 11:1–44

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### Jesus returns to Bethany to visit Mary and Martha, Bethany, Jn 11:55—12:1

### Jesus again predicts his death and resurrection, Near the Jordan, Mt 20:17–19; Mk 10:32–34; Lk 18:31–34

### Jesus heals blind Bartimaeus, Jericho, Mt 20:29–34; Mk 10:46–52; Lk 18:35–43

### Jesus talks to Zacchaeus, Jericho, Lk 19:1–10

### Jesus begins his last trip to Jerusalem, AD 30, Lk 17:11

### Jesus blesses the little children, Across the Jordan, Mt 19:13–15; Mk 10:13–16; Lk 18:15–17

### Jesus talks to the rich young man, Across the Jordan, Mt 19:16–30; Mk 10:17–31; Lk 18:18–30

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**Notes:**
- The dates and locations are approximate and based on traditional interpretations.
- The text provides a chronological overview of the events leading up to and following Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection.
- Additional references are included for further reading. 
charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!

Then the man who had received one bag of gold came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. So I was afraid and went out and hid your gold in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.’

His master replied, ‘You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest.

‘So take the bag of gold from him and give it to the one who has ten bags. For whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them.’ And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’

The Sheep and the Goats

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne.

25:24 you are a hard man. In a manner that would have shocked ancient audiences, the servant insults the master, essentially blaming his master’s harsh character for his own failure to increase his master’s investment.

25:31 sit on his glorious throne. Some Jewish texts portray God delegating judgment to subordinates (such as Abel), but usually judgment, especially on the cosmic scale depicted in this parable, belongs to God alone. In Da 7:13 – 14, the Son of Man receives eternal authority over all peoples; coming with angels may allude to God’s coming in Zec 14:5 (where the “holy ones” were sometimes understood to be angels).

25:32 sheep ... goats. Sheep were considered more valuable than goats, were usually raised in greater numbers, and were much more obedient. The OT depicted as herdsmen of God’s people Moses and David but especially God himself; God’s people were depicted as sheep. Some report that sheep and goats were typically separated at night because of the animals’ differing preferences.

25:33 his right. Ancient culture honored the right above the left.

25:34 In other early Jewish parables, the King (here, Jesus; v. 31) almost always represents God. Jewish texts often spoke of the righteous “inheriting” the kingdom or the world to come.

25:35 The basic hospitality described here fits expectations for how agents of the kingdom should be treated (10:11,42).

25:36 sick and you looked after me. Visiting the sick was a common practice. Those in prison could easily die of malnutrition unless friends or family outside brought food; sometimes guards demanded bribes to convey the goods to prisoners, so a visit to a relative in prison became a potentially costly journey.

25:40 brothers and sisters of mine. For the meaning of Jesus’ brothers and sisters, see 12:50; 23:8; for its range of meanings, see note on Ac 9:17. Some see the siblings here as the poor; the idea that how one treats the poor is how one treats God has Biblical warrant (Pr 19:17). Others see the siblings here as Jesus’ agents who bring the gospel; the idea that how one treats agents of God’s message is how one treats God also has Biblical warrant (see notes on 10:40–42). The latter view fits the use of similar language elsewhere in Matthew.

25:41 the eternal fire. See note on 3:12.
stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you.’

45*He will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.’b

46*Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.c,d

The Plot Against Jesus

26:2-5pp — Mk 14:1;2; Lk 22:1,2

26 When Jesus had finished saying all these things, he said to his disciples, 2 “As you know, the Passover is two days away—and the Son of Man will be handed over to be crucified.”

3 Then the chief priests and the elders of the people assembled in the palace of the high priest, whose name was Caiaphas, 4 and they schemed to arrest Jesus secretly and kill him. 5 “But not during the festival,” they said, “or there may be a riot among the people.”

Jesus Anointed at Bethany

26:6-13Ref — Lk 7:37,38; Jn 12:1-8

6 While Jesus was in Bethany in the home of Simon the Leper, a woman came

| 25:45 | Jn 14:31; 17:5 |
| 25:46 | Mt 19:29; Jn 3:15, 16, 36; 17:2, 3; Ro 2:7; Gal 6:8; 5:11, 13, 20 | Da 12:2; Jn 5:29; Ac 24:15; Ro 2:7, 8; Gal 6:8 |
| 26:1 | Mt 7:28 |
| 26:2 | Jn 11:55; 13:1 |
| 26:3 | Ps 67:22 | ver 57; Jn 11:47-53; 18:33, 14, 24, 28 |
| 26:4 | Mt 12:14 |
| 26:5 | Mt 27:24 |
| 26:6 | Mt 21:17 |

26:11 — 27:66 When biographers wrote about a person whose death was significant (e.g., a martyr), they generally devoted significant space to recounting the person’s death.

26:3 chief priests. Although the OT spoke of a single “chief priest,” Jewish writers by this period described all of the chief priestly families as “chief priests,” in addition to the high priest. Jewish writers by this period described all of the chief priestly families as “chief priests,” in addition to the high priest. palace of the high priest. Even had the palace of the high priest. chief priestly families as “chief priests,” in addition to the high priest. “chief priest,” Jewish writers by this period described all of the chief priestly families as “chief priests,” in addition to the high priest.

26:4-5 Not during the festival, they said, “or there may be a riot among the people.”

26:6 — 26:15 Jesus Anointed at Bethany

6 While Jesus was in Bethany in the home of Simon the Leper, a woman came to him with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, which she poured on his head as he was reclining at the table.

7 When the disciples saw this, they were indignant. “Why this waste?” they asked.

8 “This perfume could have been sold at a high price and the money given to the poor.”

9 Aware of this, Jesus said to them, “Why are you bothering this woman? She has done a beautiful thing to me. 10 The poor you will always have with you, but you will not always have me. 11 When she poured this perfume on my body, she did it to prepare me for burial. 12 Truly I tell you, wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her.”

Judas Agrees to Betray Jesus

26:14-16pp — Mk 14:10,11; Lk 22:3-6

14 Then one of the Twelve—one called Judas Iscariot—went to the chief priests 15 and asked, “What are you willing to give me if I deliver him over to you?” So they counted out for him thirty pieces of silver. 16 From then on Judas watched for an opportunity to hand him over.

* 11 See Deut. 15:11.
The Last Supper

26:17 By this period, Passover was counted as the beginning of the Festival of Unleavened Bread, and the disciples came to Jesus and asked, “Where do you want us to make preparations for you to eat the Passover?”

18He replied, “Go into the city to a certain man and tell him, ‘The Teacher says: My appointed time is near. I am going to celebrate the Passover with my disciples at your house.’” So the disciples did as Jesus had directed them and prepared the Passover.

21When evening came, Jesus was reclining at the table with the Twelve. And while they were eating, he said, “Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me.”

22They were very sad and began to say to him one after the other, “Surely you don’t mean me, Lord?”

23Jesus replied, “The one who has dipped his hand into the bowl with me will betray me.”

24The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him. But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born.”

25Then Judas, the one who would betray him, said, “Surely you don’t mean me, Rabbi?”

Jesus answered, “You have said so.”

26While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, “Take and eat; this is my body.”

27Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.”

29I tell you, I will not drink from this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.”

30When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

Jesus Predicts Peter’s Denial

26:31 Then Jesus told them, “This very night you will all fall away on account of me, as it is written:

“I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.”

32But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee.”

33Peter replied, “Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will.”

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28 Some manuscripts the new covenant; 31 Zech. 13:7.
“Truly I tell you,” Jesus answered, “this very night, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times.”

But Peter declared, “Even if I have to die with you,” the other disciples said the same.

Gethsemane
26:36-46pp — Mk 14:32-42; Lk 22:40-46

Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, “Sit here while I go over there and pray.”

He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled.

Then he said to them, “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me.”

Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, “My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.”

Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. “Couldn’t you men keep watch with me for one hour?” he asked Peter.

“Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

He went away a second time and prayed, “My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done.”

When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy.

So he left them and went away once more and prayed the third time, saying the same thing.

Then he returned to the disciples and said to them, “Are you still sleeping and resting? Look, the hour has come, and the Son of Man is delivered into the hands of sinners. Rise! Let us go! Here comes my betrayer!”

Jesus Arrested
26:47-56pp — Mk 14:43-50; Lk 22:47-53

While he was still speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, arrived. With him was a large crowd armed with swords and clubs, sent from the chief priests and the elders of the people.  

Armed men sent from the local elite were probably the Levite temple guards; Jerusalem’s leaders had no authority over Roman soldiers. Some later Jewish traditions complained that the

Ancient olive trees still grow in the Garden of Gethsemane, where Jesus prayed before his arrest (Mt 26:36).  

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people. 48Now the betrayer had arranged a signal with them: “The one I kiss is the man; arrest him.” 49Going at once to Jesus, Judas said, “Greetings, Rabbi!” and kissed him. 50Jesus replied, “Do what you came for, friend.” 51

Then the men stepped forward, seized Jesus and arrested him. 51With that, one of Jesus’ companions reached for his sword, 52 drew it out and struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his ear. 53 “Put your sword back in its place,” Jesus said to him, “for all who draw the sword will die by the sword. 54Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels? 55But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen in this way?”

In that hour Jesus said to the crowd, “Am I leading a rebellion, that you have come out with swords and clubs to capture me? Every day I sat in the temple courts teaching, 56and you did not arrest me. 56But this has all taken place that the writings of the prophets might be fulfilled.” 57Then all the disciples deserted him and fled.

servants of the high priest in this period used clubs when abusing people. 26:48 k. See note on Lk 22:47. 26:52 all who draw the sword will die by the sword. This statement of Jesus resembles a Jewish proverb; if the resemblance is not coincidence, he may be drawing on a familiar expression to make his point. 26:53 twelve legions of angels. A legion had about 6,000 soldiers. The entire Roman province of Syria (which included Judea) normally had only three legions altogether (Josephus Antiquities 17.286).
Jesus Before the Sanhedrin
26:57-68pp — Mk 14:53-65; Jn 18:12,13,19-24

57 Those who had arrested Jesus took him to Caiaphas the high priest, where the teachers of the law and the elders had assembled. 58 But Peter followed him at a distance, right up to the courtyard of the high priest. He entered and sat down with the guards to see the outcome.

59 The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for false evidence against Jesus so that they could put him to death. 60 But they did not find any, though many false witnesses came forward.

Finally two came forward and declared, “This fellow said, ‘I am able to destroy the temple of God and rebuild it in three days.’”

62 Then the high priest stood up and said to Jesus, “Are you not going to answer? What is this testimony that these men are bringing against you?” 63 But Jesus remained silent.

The high priest said to him, “I charge you under oath. This was a regular formula requiring people to testify. the Messiah. He would also be the king of the Jews; hence, Jesus’ response to the high priest would have been known to the hearing public as part of the Pharisaic controversy over the Messiah’s identity. The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for false evidence against Jesus so that they could put him to death. But they did not find any, though many false witnesses came forward.

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you under oath by the living God: ‘Tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of God.’

64 ‘You have said so,’ Jesus replied. ‘But I say to all of you: From now on you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One⁹ and coming on the clouds of heaven.’”⁹

65 Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, ‘He has spoken blasphemy! Why do we need any more witnesses? Look, now you have heard the blasphemy. ⁶⁶ What do you think?’

‘He is worthy of death,’ they answered. ⁶⁷ Then they spit in his face and struck him with their fists. ⁶⁸ Others slapped him and said, ‘Prophesy to us, Messiah. Who hit you?’

Peter Disowns Jesus


69 Now Peter was sitting out in the courtyard, and a servant girl saw him. ‘You also were with Jesus of Galilee,’ she said.

70 But he denied it before them all. ‘I don’t know what you’re talking about,’ he said.

71 Then he went out to the gateway, where another servant girl saw him and said to the people there, ‘This fellow was with Jesus of Nazareth.’

72 He denied it again, with an oath: ‘I don’t know the man!’

73 After a little while, those standing there went up to Peter and said, ‘Surely you are one of them; your accent gives you away.’

74 Then he began to call down curses, and he swore to them, ‘I don’t know the man!’ Immediately a rooster crowed. ⁷⁵ Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken: ‘Before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times.’”⁶ And he went outside and wept bitterly.

Judas Hangs Himself

27 Early in the morning, all the chief priests and the elders of the people made their plans how to have Jesus executed. ⁶ So they bound him, led him away and handed him over⁷ to Pilate the governor.⁸

⁹ When Judas, who had betrayed him, saw that Jesus was condemned, he was seized with remorse and returned the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders. ⁴⁴ I have sinned,” he said, “for I have betrayed innocent blood.”

‘What is that to us?’ they replied. ‘That’s your responsibility,’ they said.

⁵ So Judas threw the money into the temple⁴ and left. Then he went away and hanged himself. ⁶ The chief priests picked up the coins and said, ‘It is against the law to put this into the treasury, since it is blood money.’ ⁷ So they decided to use the money to buy the potter’s field as a burial place for foreign

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⁶ See Psalm 110:1; Daniel 7:13.
19While Pilate was sitting on the judge’s seat, e his wife sent him this message: “Don’t have anything to do with that innocent man, for I have suffered a great deal today in a dream because of him.”h

20But the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus executed.2

21“Which of the two do you want me to release to you?” asked the governor.

“Barabbas,” they answered.

22“What shall I do, then, with Jesus who is called the Messiah?”f Pilate asked. They all answered, “Crucify him!”

23“Why? What crime has he committed?” asked Pilate.

But they shouted all the louder, “Crucify him!”

24When Pilate saw that he was getting nowhere, but that instead an uproar was starting, he took water and washed his hands3 in front of the crowd. “I am innocent of this man’s blood,”f he said. “It is your responsibility!”f

25All the people answered, “His blood is on us and on our children!”f

26Then he released Barabbas to them. But he had Jesus flogged,e and handed him over to be crucified.
The Soldiers Mock Jesus

27:27-31pp — Mk 15:16-20

27Then the governor’s soldiers took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole company of soldiers around him. 28They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, 29and then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on his head. They put a staff in his right hand. Then they knelt in front of him and mocked him. “Hail, king of the Jews!” they said. 30They spit on him, and took the staff and struck him on the head again and again. 31After they had mocked him, they took off the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him. 1

The Crucifixion of Jesus


32As they were going out, they met a man from Cyrene, named Simon, and they forced him to carry the cross. 33They came to a place called Golgotha (which means “the place of the skull”). 34There they offered Jesus wine to drink, mixed with gall; 35but after tasting it, he refused to drink it. 36When they had crucified him, they divided up his clothes by casting lots. 36And sitting down, they kept watch over him there. 37Above his head they placed the written charge against him: THIS IS JESUS, THE KING OF THE JEWS. 38Two rebels were crucified with him, 39one on his right and one on his left. 39Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads: 40and saying, “You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! 41Come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God!” 41In the same way the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders mocked him. 42“HE saved others,” they said, “but he can’t save himself! He’s the king of Israel!” 43Let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. 43He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him, for he said, “I am the Son of God.” 44In the same way the rebels who were crucified with him also heaped insults on him.

open the flesh, sometimes leaving it in bloody strips or exposing sinews and bones, and occasionally killing the victim before crucifixion.

27:27 Praetorium. The governor’s residence was in Herod the Great’s former palace in the upper city of Jerusalem. Several hundred soldiers comprised the Roman cohort in Jerusalem’s Antonia Fortress; the term here could imply that number or a smaller force within it.

27:28 stripped him. Naked crucifixion was meant to shame the victim, but other mockery and ridicule commonly accompanied execution. scarlet. Color gradations in Greek differed from those in modern English; the range of the term translated “purple” in Mk 15:17 and Jn 19.2 sometimes included “scarlet.” Soldiers wore red cloaks, but when faded the cloak could resemble “purple,” like the cloaks of Hellenistic princes.

27:29 crown of thorns. Hellenistic vassal princes wore gold crowns; soldiers may have used an available shrub such as acanthus to weave a wreath for Jesus. Imitating Hellenistic princes, the soldiers may have intended the thorns to point especially outward, but some of the thorns would nevertheless turn inward, scraping the scalp. Scalp wounds bleed particularly profusely. staff. Some suggest that the staff was a bamboo cane used for military floggings. Hail. Equivalent to the Latin Ave; it was a common address to rulers. Most of Rome’s soldiers in Jerusalem were Syrian auxiliaries; in many locations, Syrians and Jews often clashed. king of the Jews. In ridiculing Jesus in this way, the soldiers are also probably mocking Jewish casting lots. Recalls Ps 22:18, but also fits historical practice. Roman execution squads (typically about four men) had rights to whatever clothing or other personal effects remained on the prisoner. casting lots. Soldiers used dice and other means to gamble.

27:37 written charge. See note on Lk 23:38.

27:39 shaking their heads. See Ps 22:7. Romans preferred to crucify offenders in public places, often on major roads, where passersby would see in graphic detail what happens to those who resist Rome.

27:43 Perhaps unwittingly, Jesus’ mockers virtually repeat the idea of Ps 22:8 — the Biblical words of those mocking a righteous sufferer. Their words here and in v. 40 also evoke a passage in the widely read Jewish work Wisdom of Solomon (2:18): mockers charge that if the righteous person genuinely is God’s son, God will rescue him. Ironically, they speak inverted truth: in order to position the site of his execution. If Jesus were too weak from the beating to undertake this task, however, Rome’s soldiers had the authority to draft a bystander to perform labor for them (see note on 5:41).
The Death of Jesus

45 From noon until three in the afternoon darkness came over all the land. 46 About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “Eli, Eli, ¿ lema sabachthani?” (which means “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”). b,k

47 When some of those standing there heard this, they said, “He’s calling Elijah.” 48 Immediately one of them ran and got a sponge. He filled it with wine vinegar, put it on a staff, and offered it to Jesus to drink. 49 The rest said, “Now leave him alone. Let’s see if Elijah comes to save him.”

50 And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit. m

51 At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook, the rocks split 52 and the tombs broke open. The bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. 53 They came out of the tombs after Jesus’ resurrection and went into the holy city and appeared to many people.

to save others, Jesus must choose not to save himself (v. 42).

27:45 darkness. Often appears as a judgment in the OT (e.g., Ex 10:21–23), including darkness at noon (Am 8:9).

27:46 Jesus quotes Ps 22:1, a prayer of a righteous sufferer that begins by expressing abandonment but goes on to celebrate God’s vindication (Ps 22:22–24). Although Jesus prays in the vernacular Aramaic in Mark (Eli), in Matthew the prayer is in Hebrew (Eli), as was customary in Jewish prayers (and the original psalm). The Hebrew Eli more readily explains how hearers thought he was calling for “Elijah” (Eliyahu; v. 47).

27:47 He’s calling Elijah. See note on v. 46. Elijah was expected before the Lord’s coming (Mal 4:5–6), but in rabbinic tradition he also was thought to act like an angel and help rabbis in need.

27:48 wine vinegar. Cheaper than normal wine and more readily assuaged thirst than water, it was widely used by the nonelite, including workers and soldiers. staff. Most Judean reeds would have worked for the purpose of the staff here (the term most frequently means “reed”). Cf. Ps 69:21, especially in conjunction with gall in v. 34.

27:51 curtain … was torn in two. In later rabbinic tradition signs accompanied the death of the righteous. The veil torn here is probably the inner one; priests would be offering the afternoon/evening sacrifice at this time (cf. v. 46), so would be present in the sanctuary to witness the event. This act probably implies the departure of God’s presence from the temple, prefiguring its destruction (cf. Ezr 9:3; 10:4–18). Some believe that the point also includes new access to the Most Holy Place through Jesus’ sacrifice — that access to God no longer required an intermediary (cf. Heb 6:19–20; 9:3; 10:19–20). earth shook. Most people viewed earthquakes as divine activity, often as judgment or as signs warning of it.

27:52 many holy people … were raised to life. Gentiles could view apparitions of the dead as frightening portents of harm to follow. Jewish people might have viewed the resuscitation of numerous long-dead people as a miraculous prefiguring of the end-time resurrection, though this is the only occasion on which such an experience is recorded.

27:54 Son of God. Gentiles viewed many figures, especially heroes and the emperor, as sons of gods; recognizing Jesus as Jewish, the Gentile execution squad recognizes him as the son of the one true God of Israel.

27:55 Many women were there. Women providing financial patronage were not unusual, though the practice could be criticized by a movement’s detractors. That the women followed Jesus, however, may have been viewed by many outsiders as scandalous (see note on Lk 8:2–3). Women were not usually subject to suspicion the way that men were; nevertheless, that Jesus was followed to the cross and tomb by women would be seen as a courageous contrast to the male disciples who were mostly in hiding.

27:56 The presence of at least two women named Mary here is not surprising; sources show that it was by far the most common name for Jewish women in this era.

27:58 asked for Jesus’ body. Romans usually expected those executed for treason to be left for vultures or dogs. Given the sensitivities of all Jews, however (Dt 21:22–23), Pilate would probably grant them the body; it had been after all, at the urging of the local elite that he had ordered Jesus executed. Yet even Jewish executions normally led to dishonorable burials, initially in a grave for public criminals (but allowing subsequent reinterment in a family tomb). Exceptions could be made, and family members would not be punished for requesting the body. For a member of the elite to request the body, however, was to take a large risk: unless acting specifically at the behest of the Sanhedrin, he could be associated with Jesus’ alleged treason. Moreover, officials sometimes liked to pin such charges on members of the elite so that they could confiscate their property. Joseph thus acts courageously.

27:60 new tomb. When the condemned were buried at all, they normally received dishonorable burials (see note on v. 58), but Joseph insists on providing Jesus an honorable burial in the only family tomb quickly available — his
The Guard at the Tomb

62 The next day, the one after Preparation Day, the chief priests and the Pharisees went to Pilate. 63 “Sir,” they said, “we

own (cf. 1Ki 13:30–31; Isa 53:12). Many of the tombs in this area belonged to people of wealth; the entrance to such a tomb was often a disk-shaped rock, a yard/meter in diameter, requiring multiple people to move it. Such a stone lay in a groove but could not be moved from inside. The early Christian tradition of the site of the tomb is at least as old as the decade following Jesus’ interment. Tradition is unanimous, and custom required, that Jesus be buried outside the city walls, but the site is within the expanded walls of Jerusalem from the time of AD 41–43; the site is therefore older than that. The tombs on this site (the Catholic site of the Holy Sepulchre) date to the period in question; by the second century, a pagan emperor sought to deliberately desecrate the site. (By contrast, the Garden Tomb favored by some Protestants is a recent historical guess, belongs to the wrong period, and lacks any claim to authenticity.)

27:62 after Preparation Day. The Sabbath — normally not

The Location of Jesus’ Tomb

According to the New Testament, Jesus was buried in a new tomb hewn out of rock (Mt 27:60; Mk 15:46; Lk 23:53) in a garden near the crucifixion site (Jn 19:41), just outside the city (Jn 19:20; Heb 13:12). In addition, the entrance was low and sealed with a stone (Mt 27:60; Mk 15:46; Jn 20:11), and on the right side it was possible to sit where the body of Jesus had lain (Mk 16:5; Jn 20:12). Based upon the Biblical description and upon other known first-century tombs, the tomb of Jesus can be reconstructed as having had a small forecourt, a low entry passage and a burial chamber with benches, or “couches,” on three sides for the placement of the deceased.

There are two main contenders for the location of Jesus’ tomb in the Old City of Jerusalem: the Garden Tomb, 275 yards (251 meters) north of the Damascus Gate, and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in the Christian Quarter. The Garden Tomb, however, has no authentic ancient tradition associated with it. It was suggested as the site of Jesus’ burial after the renowned British military hero Charles Gordon, while visiting Jerusalem in 1883, suggested that Calvary would have been located on a nearby hill. His identification was based on a fanciful interpretation of ancient Jerusalem as being in the shape of a skeleton, with the skull (i.e., Golgotha) positioned at a hill north of the Damascus Gate. This led to the identification of a tomb on the western side of the hill as Jesus’ burial place, once referred to as Gordon’s Tomb. Modern investigations of the Garden Tomb and others in the vicinity, however, indicate that they were part of a cemetery dating to the divided monarchy period rather than to the first century AD.

The Church of the Holy Sepulchre location, on the other hand, has a tradition going back to early Christian times. When the Roman emperor Hadrian rebuilt Jerusalem in AD 130/131, he constructed a temple to Jupiter and Venus over the site of the present Church of the Holy Sepulchre. In AD 325 Constantine ordered the removal of Hadrian’s temple. Local Christian tradition had claimed this to be the site of Jesus’ tomb, and, remarkably, when Hadrian’s temple was cleared away, a tomb area was indeed discovered beneath it. Constantine had a church constructed on the site and built a small structure, or edicule, within the building to enclose the tomb itself. The present Church of the Holy Sepulchre is the continuation of Constantine’s church.

In favor of the authenticity of this location is the fact that there was a continuous Christian community presence in Jerusalem from Jesus’ death until Constantine uncovered the tomb. This Christian community doubtless would have venerated the site of Jesus’ death.

continued on next page
remember that while he was still alive that deceiver said, 'After three days I will rise again.'

This last deception will be worse than the first.”

w 65 "Take a guard,” Pilate answered. “Go, make the tomb as secure as you know how.”

z 66 So they went and made the tomb secure by putting a seal* on the stone* and posting the guard.*

a day that the leaders should be doing business with the governor!

27:66 putting a seal on the stone and posting the guard. Because Pilate probably would not hand Roman soldiers over to the local elite, he may be granting them permission to station members of their own Levite guards there. Others suggest that they would not need permission to station their own guards and believe instead that Pilate granted a small detachment of his soldiers. The leaders themselves would not wish to incur uncleanness because of the corpse or remain near the tomb on the Sabbath.

burial, preserving the memory of the location of his tomb. Also, the site of the church was an old quarry during the time of Jesus, although at least part of it had been made into a garden (Jn 19:41). The fact that the site of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre had been a quarry implies that it was outside the walls of the city (it is today inside the Old City). This agrees with the fact that Jesus was crucified outside the walls. Within this area at least four tombs cut into the western rock face have been discovered, only one of which corresponds to the type in which Jesus was buried.

The church was destroyed in 614 and rebuilt in 626. The edicule was destroyed in 1009 by the Egyptian caliph al-Hakim Bi-Amr Allah. Contemporary accounts suggest that the southern wall, the burial couch and part of the northern wall survived this destruction. The rebuilt edicule has suffered damage and neglect over the centuries since that time, so that today it is a hodgepodge of reconstructions and repairs. Although absolute certainty is impossible, the evidence points to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre as being the actual site of Jesus’ tomb.

◆

Church of the Holy Sepulchre, the location many modern scholars believe is built on the site of Jesus’ tomb.

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Jesus Has Risen


28 After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary* went to look at the tomb.

2There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. 3 The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men.

4The angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid,* for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. 5 He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. 6 Come and see the place where he lay. 7 Then go quickly and tell his disciples: ‘He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. 8 There you will see him.’ Now I have told you.”

8So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. 9 Suddenly Jesus met them,* *“Greetings,” he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him. 10 Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers* to go to Galilee; there they will see me.”

The Guards’ Report

11 While the women were on their way, some of the guards went into the city and reported to the chief priests everything that had happened. 12 When the chief priests had met with the elders and devised a plan, they gave the soldiers a large sum of money, * 13 telling them, “You are to say, ‘His disciples came during the night and stole him away while we were asleep.’” 14 If this report gets to the governor,* we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble.” 15 So the soldiers took the money and did as they were instructed. And this story has been widely circulated among the Jews to this very day.

The Great Commission

16 Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. 17 When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. 18 Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.” 19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations,* baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,* 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. 21 Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

28:1 The resurrection narratives vary in length in the different Gospels; ancient writers liked to make optimal use of the entire length of their scroll, and sometimes simply ran out of room to include more detail. at dawn: The Sabbath technically ends at sundown on what we call Saturday night, but the women would not easily and safely find the tomb before first light. 28:2 earthquake: See note on 27:51, rolled back the stone. See note on 27:60. Humans could not easily sit on such a disk-shaped stone. 28:3 like lightning: Glorious angels appear in both Scripture (e.g., Da 10:5–6) and Jewish tradition. 28:4 became like dead men: A dramatic experience of the supernatural could sometimes cause one to collapse without strength (Da 10:8–9). 28:7 tell his disciples: Both Jewish and Roman law normally regarded a woman’s testimony as of limited value, treating women as unstable (see, e.g., Justinian, Institutes 2.10.6; Josephus, Antiquities 4.219; in the Mishnah see Yebamot 15:1, 8–10; 16:7; ketubbat 1:6–9; in the Tosehrah see Yebamot 14:10). It is to the women, however, that God’s agents first entrust the testimony of Jesus’ resurrection. 28:12–15 we will satisfy him: Bribery was illegal but extremely common; the first-century Jewish historian Josephus reports its practice both by Roman governors in Judea and the high priests. 28:13 stole him away: There is no reason for Matthew to mention as widely circulated a charge that was not widely circulated, yet the guards’ report is not very plausible. Tomb robbers were not common in Judea, but when they did strike they looted goods, not bodies. Guards would not sleep through the commotion of someone rolling away the stone, and guards who did sleep on duty faced severe penalties — in one case such as this one, potentially death. Their implausible falsehood contrasts with the report of the women commissioned in vv. 7, 10.

28:18 All authority: Jesus’ universal authority (going beyond the earthly authority noted in 9:6) may evoke Da 7:13–14; cf. Isa 9:6–7. His role exceeds that of any human figure in Jewish sources, including David and his royal line.

28:19 make disciples: Jewish teachers lectured groups of Jewish disciples, but Jesus here commissions his followers to convert and train disciples from all peoples, climaxing a theme that runs through Matthew’s Gospel (see 1:3–6; 2:1–2; 4:15; 8:13–15; 10:15; 11:21–23; 12:41–42; 15:22–28; 24:14; 27:54). Although many Jewish people welcomed Gentile converts, they lacked an overt program of missions for converting Gentiles, so it provided an easily understood form for expressing conversion. name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit: Jewish people considered the Holy Spirit to be God’s Spirit, thus divine (though not normally personal, as here); they regularly called God “Father” in many prayers; for Jesus to be listed here between the Father and the divine Spirit implies Jesus’ deity.

28:20 teaching them to obey everything: Discipleship (v. 19) always included teaching, with you always: Jewish people considered only God omnipresent; Jesus thus appears here as divine (see 1:23; 18:20).
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