

# Bible as Literature

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Welcome to the Bible as Literature. The following pages serve as an introduction to the Bible: students will be introduced to the forms and kinds of literature in the Bible, its history and chronology, contributing civilizations, themes and symbols, and its characters.

While the text serves as an introduction, students are invited to study the Bible comprehensively and systematically; to this end, this text is a hypertext linking to additional sources to assist students with their Bible study. These links provide materials from a variety of perspectives and should be read critically. The purpose of these pages is to support study of the Bible as Literature by providing essential background information.

In addition to text chapters, including a contents and links page, this web contains an embedded Bible web containing additional resources useful for Bible study.



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# Introduction

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***Introduction***

## **Section A: Five Reasons to Read the Bible**

*First, a word to my students. To be a teacher is the noblest profession I know; to be recognized as a teacher is the greatest honor I can achieve. To be a teacher, one must have people willing to learn, willing to be taught. Please understand, though, that roles often reverse: the best students are teachers, just as the best teachers must be students. My students help me to shape my thoughts--theirs is the very essence of what is said in the words that follow. Together, we learn; together, we teach: the words which result have an in-breathed, shaping life.*

*For some time now, I have taught the Bible as literature. The very idea scares some of us: how can we approach a sacred book in this way? We may ask this in yet another way: how can anyone without spiritual aid understand the Bible? Our serious lack of knowledge--true often of those who go to church as well as those who do not -- concerning what the Bible contains spurs me to risk our learning at least something together! For those who need reasons to read the Bible, I propose minimally the following:*

*1. The inquiring mind would want to read the Old Testament to learn about three major world religions---Judaism, Islam, and Christianity. The Old Testament records the faith of the Hebrew people. It chronicles their growth into a nation, its successive captivities and exiles, its survival in the faith that gave birth to three world religions. The Hebrews acknowledged their creation as an act by Yahweh, who created them in Divine image. This natural, spiritual, and moral likeness meant for the Hebrews, and countless millions who have enlarged upon their faith, that creatures of intellect, will, and emotion commune with their Creator as regenerate beings.*

*2. The Bible contains a symbol system uniting the temporal and the eternal; it deserves at least*

*the careful attention we would give any "good" literature. Literature consists of a system of meaningfully created symbols.*

*We use symbols to relate a progressive knowing to the already known. What we know, conditioned by our Western world experience, we limit to what can be experienced or demonstrated. We have used "revealed" to acknowledge our movement into meta-physics: our "felt" connection with a "Something" beyond logic. That which is revealed, we have expressed metaphorically: the infinite becomes God, Person, Father, Son, Spirit, Shepherd, Bread, Light, Word; in each utterance, the Eternally Transcendent, objective, distant and outside, reveals itself immanent, historically present with us now. Divine Force becomes Personal Presence.*

*3. As a symbol system, the Bible challenges our minds but satisfies our hearts. No matter how little or much we follow the call of our minds and study human thought, we end up sooner or later confronted with its limitations. Contained from the beginning, we have experienced our connection with that which contains us and which, necessarily, becomes our own outside. Western rationality has explored countless times the shapes of our containment, telling us what we can think and prescribing boundaries for that thinking; it has spurned metaphysics as the accounting of that "Outside" which cannot be known. It has left us empty and disillusioned or restless and seeking. The Bible from the outset acknowledges and responds to Outside Shaping Force, moving us metaphorically into relationship with a Divine Person, expressing our urgent response to an in-breathed Word. The breath of God is in the Bible a symbol of Creative Activity or Power: God by breath formed the heavens and "revealed" Divine Word. The "image of God" reflects just this creative activity: God and mortal speak! The Invisible etches itself in the face of Nature and speaks itself in the Word that was in the beginning God. In our examination of the Bible, we will need to suspend mere rational analysis and begin in the good will of "faith expressed." After all, what more can we do with a book which begins in primeval time--the creation of the world--and ends in the death of history and time itself--the Eternal? Still, given even this, the Bible clearly establishes itself as historical revelation, the acts of God in human history. In that history, the careful reader will explore to limits the rational systems erected over the centuries and see beyond the merely possible into the very necessary expression of faith. We can engage in no higher activity than pursuit of a knowledge of God!*

*4. The Bible, tightly unified in its own controlling themes, explores all the common questions of human existence. All the common subjects of literature are found in the Bible: individuals in nature, society, and in relation to God and other humans; growth and initiation, time, death, and alienation. Perhaps the most unifying theme of the Bible is that of relationship: human beings created by God in God's image for relationship and activity; this thread runs through all sixty-six books of the Bible, uniting them and providing an unparalleled explanation of what ultimately it means to be human and how humans should behave. The explanation is, of course, one we can accept or reject.*

*5. It's unlikely that we would ever exhaust the meaning unfolding itself in the Bible. I have discovered that my every reading of any portion of the Bible brings me new insight; just when I*

*think I have gained a comprehensive understanding of its overall structure, themes, and history, I am startled by yet another revelation. For example, are you aware the oak tree holds importance for the Hebrews due to the Babylonians? Do you know the Bible uses a three-twelve paradigm: three major prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel) --twelve minor; three patriarchs-twelve sons; repeated in the twelve apostles and the twelve tribes at Qumran. Indeed, it must be admitted that this anthology of books gives the impression of a planned layout and represents to a large extent a complete literary unit in which the material is logically arranged and fairly strictly grouped together. Given the time covered, the number of writers, and the languages involved, one marvels at the Bible's overall unity. It's enough to lead one to the notion of Spirit superintending writers so that while writing in their own styles and personalities, the result was God's Word written--in this sense, authoritative, trustworthy, and in some ultimate way, without error!*

## **Section B: Structured Approach to Understanding the Bible as Literature**

### *Oxford Companion to the Bible*

*The most basic of all artistic principles is unity, and one of the things that has set off the literary approach to the Bible from other approaches is a preoccupation with unifying patterns and literary wholes. Literary unity consists of various things: the structure of a work or passage, a dominant theme, an image pattern, or progressive development of a motif. Whatever form it takes, unity is evidence of an artistic urge for order, shapeliness, and wholeness of effect.*

*The Literary Unity of the Bible. The central protagonist in the overall story of the Bible is God. The characterization of God is the central literary concern of the Bible, and it is pursued from beginning to end. Hardly anything is viewed apart from its relation to the deity.*

*The Bible is also unified by its religious orientation. It is pervaded by a consciousness of the presence of God. Human experience is constantly viewed in a religious and moral light. One result is that the literature of the Bible invests human experience with a sense of ultimacy. A vivid consciousness of values pervades biblical literature.*

*Literary archetypes also unify the Bible. Archetypes are master images that recur throughout the Bible and throughout literature. They are either images (light, water, hill), character types (hero, villain, king), or plot motifs (journey, rescue, temptation). The Bible is filled with such archetypes or master images, which lend an elemental quality to the Bible and make its world strongly unified in a reader's imagination.*

*An approach to the Bible as literature can be to build*

*1. an understanding of what kinds of literature are present in the Bible, what historical period this literature represents, and a knowledge of where samples of each can be found;*

*2. an overview of biblical chronology, major dates and happenings appropriate to understanding*

*how to read the various books of the Bible;*

*3. an appreciation for the major civilizations contributing to the Hebrew-Christian tradition;*

*4. a repertoire of themes and subthemes important to understanding why the Bible can be viewed as a unified anthology; and, as time permits, a series of character studies which illuminate the general themes embraced by the Bible as a whole. Eventually, an appendices may include an approach to understanding the Apocrypha and perhaps a brief comparison of the Islamic, Jewish, and Christian faiths.*

### Methods of Bible Study

### Religious Studies

## **Section C: An Introduction to Knowledge Structures**

In beginning a study of the Bible, one discovers certain kinds of questions inevitable: What is the nature of reality? (Religion may be defined as a system requiring a belief in God or in a transcendent being). What is the role(s) of humans in the universe? What can we know? How is faith different from knowledge? What is the nature of human beings? Do they have a soul? How is the soul different from physical being? Is human life free or determined? How ought human beings to live? This latter question, of course, addresses morality and how people choose to act. Because the Bible contains instructions and codes, it must be studied as teaching right from wrong; many people base their behavior upon its rules. The rules, though, exist independently of the Bible, for they can be found in other religious systems, and certainly, a precedent for them can be found in all cultures. One can surely behave morally without being religious; genuine commitment to a religion, though, such as Judaism or Christianity cannot but affect one's moral choices.

Of course, if the above questions were to be fully answered in this introduction, we would never get to our destination: an introduction to studying the Bible. For a quick guiding structure of philosophical thought which underlies our study of the Bible, I reference Judith Boss's *Ethics for Life and Perspectives on Ethics* (Mayfield Publishing, 1998).

Philosophical theories can be divided into cognitive and noncognitive categories: cognitive theories maintain that statements can be either true or false, and these statements can be further divided into universalist and relativist theories. Relativist theories state that truth is different for different people, cultures; universalist theories insist that truth exists that is true for all people, is discovered, or derived from principles which exist independently of an individual's or society's opinions. At this point, it makes sense to identify whether, when we talk about truth, we are talking about Truth, or truth (big T, little t). Engaged in the study of the Bible, one should become aware of any unconscious or perhaps uncritically believed metaphysics; it will help, too, to keep separate the ideas of truth and belief. Metaphysics, simply put, is concerned with reality.

To talk about God is to address a system of metaphysics; in fact, religion may be defined as an institutionalized system of values and beliefs.

In our thinking, we move, often uncritically, among at least three levels of thinking: the level of experience, the data provided to us by our senses; interpretation, where we try to make sense of our experiences in light of our own and collective or cultural experiences; and analysis, where we distinguish between descriptive fact and opinion. Western philosophical methodology has traditionally focused primarily on abstract, logical reasoning or the mode of analysis, so much so that it is accused of paying insufficient attention to practice. Logical analysis is accepted while sentiment, intuition, and collective consciousness-raising are rejected.

### Metaphysical Dualism

Reality consists of two substances: material, physical body and nonmaterial mind. Mind is often referred to as soul or spirit. The body or material world is subject to causal laws; the mind is free because it is non-material and rational.

### One Substance

1. Metaphysical materialism--physical matter is the only substance. Mind, soul, and morality must be explained in terms of physical matter. Determinism states that all events are governed by causal law. Existentialist philosophers argue, however, that humans are defined by their freedom in the absence of a God to determine their nature; existentialists also argue we are completely responsible for our actions.

2. Metaphysical idealism focuses on the mind, soul, or that which is non-material.

### Epistemology

Epistemology deals with questions about the nature and limits of knowledge and how knowledge can be validated.

Sources of knowledge:

1. Reason--the power of understanding the connection between the general and particular.

2. Intuition--immediate and self-evident knowledge and do not need any proof.

3. Experience--all or most of human knowledge comes through the five senses. Positivism applies scientific observation to knowledge; it attributes moral judgments to emotivism.

### The Path to Wisdom

A basic human need seems to be to find higher meaning and value. Humans achieve this by becoming autonomous--independent, self-governing entities; they also seek self-realization, or search for ultimate values.

1. The skeptic--refuses to accept beliefs until they can be justified and begins with doubts.
2. The cynic mocks the possibility of truth.

### Relativism

Values are created by people--ethical subjectivism, cultural relativism.

### Universalism

*Values* are the same for all people, and people discover the principles by which they are to govern their lives. Plato, for example, believed that truth was embodied in changeless universal form that could be discerned by reason. Other philosophers have a more organic and dynamic view of truth, seeing it as constantly revealing itself, being a living force that exists in relationship to things.

Why, you might ask, is all of this important at the beginning of a study of the Bible? The answer is simple: it makes a difference whether individuals see reality as "out there"--really out there as universal form, in the physical world for materialism, or subjectively constructed. What is the world-view we hold? What, for example, is our view of the nature of (B)being? Our notion of ontology?

To begin with, to utter God is to invoke the Other, that which is absolutely other: to be known only through reason, experience, or intuition, or perhaps in combination with all of these approaches. Perhaps we can address common human experience as including a "felt" experience of inside/outside. That is, I am something inside, internally, other than my body, and my body contains that which I am. In extreme, I could conclude I am a mind/spirit/ soul contained in body; the body is materialistic and determined, governed by causal laws; the mind, spirit, soul (the contained) is felt to be capable of roaming beyond bodily constraints--sculpturing, shaping, and creating its way of being in the world and leaping beyond its constraints.

Beginning with this common experience of the inside/outside dichotomy, I have used the metaphor of box and called it the space/time box which we as existing beings inhabit. The box functions as structure: walls beyond which everything is other. Inside this box, the nature of some individuals seems to be to test whether the walls can be expanded, moved from inside pressures to give or to resist and hold captive. Propelled by quest, inquiry rather than dogma, my destiny has always been to push against containing walls. At any rate, it's simple to agree that we're all bound as existing beings to finite limits. We share a sense of destiny and movement

into something beyond us, but recognize it is "beyond." We're inside the box and not willing to get outside in the only way that we see possible: namely, by dying, and thus, escaping the material body which we sense is fated to decay, and vanish as material objects must. But what of that we feel ourselves to be inside? Is this all breath? all just a warm heartbeat? all just an electro-psycho-physical impulse? Will the mind, with its boundary-defying flight, succumb? Is all the mediation, when all is said and done, simply the inside of the box to the inside? Or will death release what has been imprisoned in physical life?

Religion has one goal: being at one with God. There are limits to the physical aspects of mind, places where reason cannot go. The religious seeker must continue on, carried by faith. The religious path is always to the One. This path passes through several states of consciousness before establishing intimacy with its divine source, anthropomorphically addressed as Ancient One, Father, Friend, or Lover. To know the Other--this is the sense of urgency, destiny, the ultimacy which propels physical life forward into creating, and sustaining itself. Language itself becomes a tool for seeking to achieve higher consciousness. As symbol, language connects reality to reality and strains by analogy to construct a bridge from the known and familiar to that which is unknown, other, and strange. This can be referred to as losing oneself in the Nothingness--that which is beyond sense or imagination and apprehended in a moment of direct relationship -- or the Boundless Infinite, to be accomplished by the human being in the world of created things.

The Other-directedness of metaphysics and religion is a shared interest. As a result, both are preoccupied with highest Being. The interest of philosophy is rational and abstract; religion seeks fervent relationship. Their symbols are shared, too: a preoccupation with the overcoming of difference, the aspiration to unity and harmony. A prevailing metaphor is the quest or journey from darkness into light: recall Plato's allegory of the cave, where prisoners since childhood have been chained facing the back wall of a cave, seeing only shadows, hearing the sounds of the world outside the cave only as echoes. Unchained, one prisoner facing the front of the cave is frightened and blinded by the light but is met by a guide. Eventually out in the light, our prisoner's eyes adjust to the light, and he begins to see and learn truths not before imagined by him. Returning to cave, no one believes what it is our prisoner has experienced. He will now be faced by the choice of staying outside the cave in the light, returning to his old way, or staying in the cave and questing to share what he has learned. The same quest is seen in the Egyptian-Promised land metaphor, where the emancipated slave all too often returns to old ways. Another metaphor is expulsion from Paradise, Plato's descent into the forgetfulness of the stream Lethe. The quest is to achieve a New Jerusalem which comes down from heaven to earth. In one sense, the Bible addresses a movement from unity into unity; the journey in between is the finite and human one: the drama of creatures within the space/time box.

### Atheism, Theism, and Agnosticism

A word about the inevitable -ism's of religion: atheism, theism, agnosticism. All three positions are, in fact, religious: that is, they take a position relative to God as Transcendent Being. Defined

simply, atheism argues no God exists; theism argues God exists, and agnosticism concludes either position is possible, but human beings are not equipped to decide the existence definitively. Put simplistically, atheism asserts itself negatively; theism, positively; and agnosticism hedges itself in human limitations. The space/time box theory I allude to often in this work is also decidedly on the side of human limitation: humans are what they are: finite creatures; reason is what it is: a product of the finite creature. We use experience, interpret it, and analyze it to distinguish fact from opinion; we are rely upon sentiment, intuition, and collective consciousness-raising in making meaning of our lives. We push thinking to its utmost potential to find a right way to live and then live that way.

Herman Wouk in his *This is My God* (Little Brown and Company, 1988) says that for human beings "What matters is living with dignity, with decency, and without fear, in the way that best honors one's intelligence and one's birth." Let me quote Wouk farther on our need to commit, even if it means, rationally, jumping off into the dark:

There is no use in talking about religion with anybody who is sure that God does not exist... There had never been any decisive proof either way about God's existence. Ours would be decidedly queer world if the Creator of it were as visible as say, a playwright at his opening night. Here is the, a dazzle of orderly wonders, which seems to imply a Maker. Here is human life, full of sadness and disaster and futility, ending always in black death, and it seems to many people to refute any notion that a God could exist. To assert anything about God--that he is there or that he is not, that we can know him or that we cannot--is to jump off into the dark, either way.

...

Now the belief in God may turn out at the last trump to be a mistake. Meantime, let us be quite clear, it is not merely the comfort of the simple--though it is that too, much to its glory--it is a formidable intellectual position with which most of the first-class minds of the human race, century in and century out, have concurred, each in his own way. We live in a time when non-belief is the fashion; it has been for about a hundred years. Hence the regular pulsing of rationalist books from popular book clubs and paperback publishers. But this popularity of one point of view should be enough to make any serious man suspicious. Sheep are sheep, whether they are leaping over the fence or all huddling in the fold (5).

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# Chapter One

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Old Testament Life and Literature

## Chapter 1: The Literature of the Bible

**Section A: Introductory Essay** Why read the Bible as literature? A short answer is that it is literature, some of our oldest and finest, and reading it as literature makes sense. This introductory essay focuses on the forms of literature discovered in this amazing anthology, the use of figurative language, critical tools common to literary and biblical study, and themes embraced broadly in literature which are also found in these books.

### Section B: Forms of Literature

**Myth** : Ostensibly historical events that serve to unfold part of the world view of a people or nation; myth organizes, shapes, or provides patterns and principles as opposed to strict fact. As myth, the Bible is concerned with explaining universal truths, and providing an explanation of origins and destinies. Even early history, if we believe Herodotus, contains myth. Another definition or approach--anonymous; supernatural accounting for natural events; makes concrete and particular a perception of human beings or a cosmic view; a projection of social patterns onto a supernatural level; explains divinity, creation and religion; demonstrates human perception of deepest truths; gives order and frame of meaning to human experience; reveals archetypal imagination embodying and suggests universality; a narrative stirring us with the strange and familiar, contains primordial ritual and ceremony; a repository of racial memories; a structure of unconsciously held value systems; an expression of the general beliefs of a race, social class or nation; a unique embodiment of ideology (306). Genesis 1-11 (White 22) introduces two creation stories (1:1-2;4 and 2:5-25), the fall (3:1-24), first brothers Cain and Abel (4:1-24), and Seth (4:25-26), the first man's descendants (5:1-32), the Nephilim (6:1-4), the flood

(6:5-9:17), Noah's descendants (9:18-32), the tower of Babel (11:1-9), and the genealogy of Abraham (11:10-32).

Other examples of myth include Yahweh's fight with the dragon (Isa. 27. 1, 51. 9), Sheol, that fearful monster which, with open jaws, swallows up men, and from which Yahweh alone can rescue (Psalms 49.15, 86.13) , the morning star which tried to set its throne above that of God and was hurled into the depths (Isa. 14. 12ff.), a primitive man who listened at a meeting held by God (Job).

Much smacks on fairy tale: foundling who lay naked and bare, but finally rose, through marriage, to a high position (Ez. 26.4 ff), the unlucky man who escapes the danger of a lion only to meet a bear, or who is bitten by a serpent in the safety of his own house (Amos 5.19), a dreadful sword from which there is no escape and from which only God can bring rest (Ez. 21), of the wonderful tree with no equal (Ez. 31.4 ff), all kinds of animals with the power of speech (Gen. 3.1, Num. 22.30), the giving of a choice of wishes (1 Kings 3.5, 2 Kings 2.9, 4.2) or the granting of a child, long desired, to a couple.

**Legends** instruct and explain smoothly, simply, in their own way, not with learned discussion and profound thoughts, and provide answers to all kinds of questions: (Kuhl, *The Old Testament*) Why is the area around the Salt Sea dead and deserted? Legend knows that the vale of Siddim was here (Gen. 14.3), a garden of the Lord like the land of Egypt (Gen. 13.10). The high stone pillar on the Jebel Usdum is Lot's wife (Gen. 19.26); the serpent crawls on its belly and eats dust (Gen. 3.14); the sexes are attracted to each other by an act of God (Gen. 2.22 ff); cultic custom of not eating thigh muscle (Gen. 32.32), meaning of Abram's name (Gen. 17.5); explanation for Isaac's name (he laughed--Gen. 17.17, 18.12, 21.6).

In the early books, we find narrative history, but within that history, we also find myth and legend. Paul Tillich in *The Dynamics of Faith* tells us "Myths are symbols of faith combined in stories about divine-human encounters" and then defines myth as using "material from our ordinary experience. It puts the stories of the gods into the framework of time and space although it belongs to the nature of the ultimate to be beyond time and space" (49). The nature of myth is such that the gods reveal themselves under a fate "which is beyond everything that is" (48), organized into hierarchies, sometimes into a trinity of gods, a duality of them, or into savior-gods who mediate, sometimes sharing the suffering and death of humans (49). Tillich goes on to point out that a criticism of myth has been its division of the divine but that even when only one god is present, this "one God is an object of mythological language" (49). Tillich then summarizes: "all the stories in which divine-human interactions are told are considered as mythological in character" (51). The reader should note that such a definition of myth merely confirms its existence in human consciousness and argues myth must be accepted as myth, not science; that is, science cannot address the substance of myth, the existence of the divine or the "beyond space and time." Myths are not deceptions or untruths but vehicles for expressing universal insights into the nature of the world and human society (Harris 5).

Acknowledging myth as present in the Bible frees the reader in several important ways. As historical narrative, the Bible introduces its reader to a time before formal history, "to a people who lived thousands of years ago and shows us how much we are like our ancestors and how much they have had to do with

our own forming as a part of the human family" (White 2). Importantly, though, the Bible is not secular history but primarily a religious book in which its authors speak through the perspective of faith (2). To try to reduce the Bible to history is to engage in literalness and to deny the function of symbol and myth to point beyond themselves to something else; as Tillich remarks, such literalness "deprives God of... ultimacy" (52). The historian is always concerned with what really happened, and certainly, much did happen, but the case is rightfully made that its authors were interested more in the theological importance of what happened than in the happenings themselves. Reading: Genesis 1-11 Primeval history, universal in scope; Divine act brings humanity and history into existence, enables humanity to exist, multiply, diversify, and disperse upon the earth. Belongs to the Pentateuch, the first five books traditionally ascribed to the authorship of Moses; the Pentateuch is narrative which extends from the creation of the universe into the entrance of one people, the Hebrew, into their "promised land" or Canaan, the people coming to be known as the Israelites.

The Pentateuch narrative, after the first eleven chapters on primeval history, tells the story of Israel's ancestors, Abraham's migration from Ur of the Chaldees (Mesopotamia) through Canaan into Egypt, the Hebrew exodus from Egypt, their sojourn at Sinai and origins of moral law, their wanderings in the wilderness (Numbers), and their entrance into Canaan. Deuteronomy develops this latter story and continues the development of moral, religious (Leviticus is largely concerned with religious ritual), and secular law. Some have noted that Genesis ends with a coffin in Egypt while Deuteronomy ends with Israel or the development of a people's identity.

Concerning the literature, most critics agree that an [epic literature](#) circulated orally among the people as story, song, and proverb. This tradition is, it is held, later reinterpreted and eventually takes a written form. Scholars have detected a southern (Judean) and northern (Ephramitic) influence, these letters originally deriving from "J" for "Jahveh" or "Yahweh" and "E" for "Elohim." The other two sources are "P" for Priestly and "D" for Deuteronomistic. The Priestly writers contributed through the Babylonian exile, and the Deuteronomistic account covers Joshua through Second Kings. We know that parts of Deuteronomy were discovered in written form in 612, or during the reign of King Josiah.

The student must think of the Bible in written form as being a rather late creation, its story dipping back into the oral tradition and remote past, with the story of Israel's ancestors beginning in history about 1700 BCE

The books, form, and structure of the Bible will be addressed in a later section.

## **Links:**

[Genesis](#)

[Exodus and Numbers](#)

[Deuteronomy](#)

## Notes on Genesis

### GenesisP

### Genstudy

### Moses

### Old Testament Survey

### Epic:

The Bible is, in fact, epic in its account of human and national origins (Harris 58). The first eleven chapters of Genesis establish the creation of the world as a divine action then survey the primeval history of humanity. History is viewed as the "inevitable outworking of divine purpose" (60). Already present is an insistence upon an "eternal, omnipotent Creator who exercises undisputed control of the universe, bringing chaos and light out of darkness through the power of his word alone" (61). In contrast to science, the account of Genesis is that God does, in fact, create something from nothing. More importantly, though, are the evolving themes: a people created by God in the image of God (activity and relationship); disobedience, revolt, and separation; covenants and a promised blessing to all of humanity. In the Biblical epic, human beings constitute the apex of creation, "made little less than a god" (Psalms 80), separated from God in a conscious act of willful revolt. But from the beginning, the initiative comes from the intervention of the infinite in the finite, and on these two levels, the drama of the Bible is from the beginning that of relationship.

### Other Kinds of Literature:

- **narrative**--a recounting of events; chronological or containing a plot (Holman and Harmon 308). An example of biblical narrative is the story of Abraham in Genesis. Genesis 12-25.
- **epic**--a long narrative poem, elevated style, characters in high position, heroic, depict a development of episodes important to the history of a nation or race (171). Much of the Bible is epic literature accounting for the development of the Judeo-Christian world. Read Genesis 26-50 Isaac, Jacob, Joseph.
- **short story**-- a relatively brief fictional narrative in prose; contains a unity of effect, theme, character, tone, mood, and style; contains plot. Biblical examples are Ruth, Jonah, Esther.
- **folk tales**--short narratives (199) handed down through oral tradition but eventually getting written down; cumulatively written. Samson in the book of Judges 13-16 captures the popularity of the folk hero).

- **apocalypses**--literature depicting an ultimate destiny (usually destructive) of the world; character of catastrophe is grandiose, imminent, unrestrained, wild; suggests final judgment. (Daniel in the Old Testament and Revelation in the New Testament are examples of this kind of literature.)  
Outline of Revelation.
- **poetry**--exists in many forms; marked by regularity of rhythm surpassing that found in prose, basic pattern evidencing variety but returning to basic rhythm; concrete; inversions frequent; simple, sensuous, impassioned language; pleases by appealing to emotions and intellect; highly imaginative (365). Psalms and Proverbs both consist largely of poetry. The Psalms are devotional lyrics. Biblical poetry is noted for accent and parallelism rather than meter.
- **love lyric**--a type of poetry, subjective, marked by imagination, melody, emotion, single impression (273). The Song of Solomon is a good example.
- **battle ode**--public, solemn, elaborate, dignified, musical, complicated (divided into strophes, anti strophes, and epodes (329); directed to a single purpose and theme. An example is the song of Deborah found in judges 5.
- **epigram**--a pithy saying, often antithetical, compressed; shows balance and polish (173). These exist in abundance in Proverbs.
- **epiphanies**--a showing forth of divine being; an event in which the essential nature of something--a person, situation, or object--is suddenly perceived; a grasp of reality achieved in a quick flash of recognition; sudden insight or new light (174).
- **elegy**--a sustained, formal poem setting forth a meditation on death or other solemn theme.
- **gospels**--found solely in the New Testament; form was invented by author of Mark and imitated by the later Gospel writers; record the story of Jesus as it was known by his contemporaries; not simple histories of the life of Jesus but further exemplifying the view that history is an arena in which the divine makes itself known; actually speak of things beyond history, addressing meaning; intention of writers is to produce faith (White 144).
- **biography**-- a written account of a person's life, a life history.
- **letters**--notes and epistles, correspondence (264). Paul's letters were immediate and direct, addressing the needs of particular Christian communities, giving spiritual direction; they continue to have a universal dimension, a timelessness, in that what was true for the people of these communities continues to be true for people of contemporary times (White 129). Paul's letters to the Galatians, I and II Corinthians, and Romans are excellent examples of the epistle.
- **law**--a binding custom or practice of a community; a prescribed rule of conduct or action which

is enforced by a controlling authority. The Old Testament, in particular, assumes human behavior is under Yahweh's authority as well as one's relationship with neighbors(29). The beginning of law for the Hebrew people is expressed in the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20). Exodus 20:22-23:19 contains absolute, conditional, ritual, moral, and religious laws. The materials from Exodus 35 to Numbers 10 (including all of Leviticus) have to do with laws. Israel's religious tradition is deeply embedded with the notion that Yahweh rewards obedience and punishes disobedience (91). A special relationship exists between the law of the Old Testament and the New Law or covenant of the New Testament. One must understand the human situation in the Old and New Testaments is that of alienation from God. This alienation is caused by sinned or willful rebellion or disobedience to divine law. Both the Jews and the Gentiles are alienated by their measures, whether Law or heart; the New Testament emphasizes faith rather than obedience as the means whereby the individual is to be reconciled with God. As seen in the New Testament, the Law defines sin; it is not the cause of sin (137).

- sermons**--a religious discourse delivered as part of a service. Paul's sermon at Antioch is a good example (Acts 13: 15-41); another example is the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5.
- codes**--a system of principles or rules. Leviticus, a book of worship, is filled with codes detailing how the Levitical priests were to minister in the sanctuary; it contains codes for dealing with sacrifices, setting forth the distinction between clean and unclean foods, describing the ritual for the ceremony of the atonement, and laws governing Israel's life as a holy people.
- puns**--plays on words based on the similarity of sound between two words and divergent meaning. Matthew 23:24 contains an example: galma for gnat and gamla for camel.
- liturgy**--performed as part of a worship service. Again, Leviticus provides several examples.
- parables**--short, illustrative stories teaching a lesson. A true parable parallels, detail for detail, the situation that calls forth the parable for illustration. Christ told many parables--Luke 15:11-32 provides an example in the prodigal son.
- hymns**--poems expressing religious emotion and intended to be sung by a chorus; many of the psalms fit this definition.
- songs**--from the beginning, there was not the written but the spoken word; there was not literature but singing and reciting. The Old Testament contains many songs, often older than the text surrounding them. These were often quite short and were sung, during dancing, to the accompaniment of musical instruments. They would often be sung in chorus (Ex. 15. 20-1; Num. 21. 17; 1 Sam. 18. 6-7). People sang at their work: at the completion of a well (Nu. 21.17-18), while harvesting and treading the grapes (Jer. 25.30, 48.33), at social gatherings and feasts (Amos 6.4 ff.; Isa. 5.11 ff.); men rejoiced and forgot their cares (Isa. 22.13), not always with moderation (Is. 28.8); they told riddles (Gen. 31.27); they mocked physical imperfections in song (bald head, 2 Kings 2. 23; faded beauty, Isa. 23. 15-16; they inflamed the tribes to fight with song

(Jg. 5.12 Song of Deborah); they sung deriding the enemy (Num. 21.27), lamented an only son (2 Kings 2. 12, 13.14).

- proverbs**--briefly and memorably express some recognized truth about life; these are found in abundance in proverbs.
- laments**--poetry expressing grief. The book of Lamentations is a small psalter of communal laments over Jerusalem, following its destruction by the Babylonians in 587 B.C.
- acrostics**--compositions usually in verse which are arranged in such a way as to spell words, phrases or sentences. Lamentations contains an example: the first four chapters contain stanzas for each of the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet, and the fifth has the same numbers of verses as the alphabet.
- oracles**--hidden or divine knowledge revealed through utterance, usually poetic; a wise, authoritative decision or opinion. Isaiah 6-9 consists of oracles set in their own historic context. Oracles contain Yahweh's answer to questioners seeking advice and help.

Literary Genres (Oxford Companion to the Bible):

**Literary Genres in the Bible.** The most common way to define literature is by its genres or literary types. Through the centuries, people have agreed that certain genres (such as story, poetry, and drama) are literary in nature. Other types, such as historical chronicles, theological essays, and genealogies, are expository (informational). Still others can fall into either category. Letters, sermons, and orations, for example, can move in the direction of literature by virtue of experiential concreteness, figurative language, and artistic style.

The Bible is a mixture of genres, some of them literary in nature. The major literary genres in the Bible are narrative or story, poetry (especially lyric poetry), proverb, and visionary writing (including prophecy and apocalypse). The New Testament letters frequently become literary because of their occasional nature, figurative language, and rhetorical or artistic patterning. Other literary genres of note in the Bible include epic, tragedy, gospel, parable, satire, pastoral, oratory, encomium, epithalamion (wedding poem), elegy (funeral poem), and a host of subtypes of lyric poetry (such as nature poem, psalm of praise, lament, love poem, psalm of worship, hymn).

**Genre study** is central to any literary approach to the Bible because every genre has its own conventions, expectations, and corresponding rules of interpretation. A biblical story, for example, is a sequence of events, not a series of ideas. It is structured around a plot conflict, not a logical argument. It communicates by means of setting, character, and event, not propositions. In short, the literary genres of the Bible require us to approach them in terms of the conventions and procedures that they possess.

Literary Forms in the Gospels (Oxford Companion to the Bible)

An analysis of the teaching of Jesus reported in the four Gospels reveals a variety of literary forms. Sometimes he conveyed his teaching by means of parables; at other times he used proverbs and plays on words (puns).

Many passages in the Gospels are arranged in strophic, or poetic, form, and frequently one is struck by the vigorous, picturesque language by which the teaching is conveyed. Examples within each of these categories, considered in reverse order, include the following.

### Picturesque Speech

Like other persons of the Near East, Jesus made use of striking contrasts and vivid metaphors. Using exaggerated and colorful expressions, he frequently drew attention to the ridiculous and the illogical behavior of the self-righteous. For example instead of saying in prosaic and commonplace terms that some people are inconsistent when judging others and themselves, Jesus put it thus: Why do you see the speck in your neighbor's eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye? ... You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbor's eye.

(Matthew 7.3 ,5)

By taking into account the presence of picturesque expression in the Gospels the reader can sometimes avoid misinterpreting the meaning. For example, the hard saying preserved in the third Gospel, "Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14.26), must be understood in the light of the frequent use of overstatement as characteristic of the speech of Near Easterners. It is obvious that Jesus, so far from intending to increase the sum total of hatred in the world, states a principle in a startling, hyperbolic manner, and leaves it to his hearers to discover whatever qualifications are necessary in the light of his other pronouncements. The saying means that in order to be a follower of Jesus one must be prepared to choose between natural affection and loyalty to the Master. The same idea is expressed in Matthew's less rigorous version of Jesus' saying: "Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me" (Matthew 10.37).

One should, of course, be alert to the danger of diluting Jesus' teaching by finding overstatement in passages where it is not present. For example, Jesus' command to the rich man who inquired what he should do to inherit eternal life, "Sell all that you own and distribute the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me" (Luke 18.22), should not be discounted as exaggerated hyperbole, meaning merely, "Sell ten percent of what you own. ..." The context makes it absolutely clear that the questioner as well as the disciples understood Jesus' words in their literal sense.

### Poetic, Rhythmical Parallelism

Hebrew poetry, illustrated in the Old Testament Psalter, is characterized by parallelism of members.

Sometimes the parallelism is synonymous and sometimes antithetic . In view of the frequency of Jesus' quotations from and allusions to the Psalms, it is not surprising that we find much of his teaching cast into the mold of Semitic poetry. Synonymous parallelism appears in the saying recorded in Luke 6.27\_28:

Love your enemies,  
do good to those who hate you,  
bless those who curse you,  
pray for those who abuse you.

Antithetic parallelism is illustrated by Matthew 7.17\_18:

Every good tree bears good fruit,  
but the bad tree bears bad fruit.  
A good tree cannot bear bad fruit,  
nor can a bad tree bear good fruit.

Besides these two basic types of parallelism, several other kinds have been identified. What is called step parallelism, for example, occurs when the second line takes up a thought contained in the first line and, repeating it, makes it, as it were, a step toward the development of a further thought, which is the climax of the whole. An example of step parallelism is found in Luke 9.48 (the italics indicate the repeated member which serves as a step, and the vertical line stands before the climax): Whoever welcomes this child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me |welcomes the one who sent me. For other passages that exhibit an elaborate rhythmical pattern, see Matthew 6.19\_21; Matthew 23.16\_22;

Mark 2.21\_22; Mark 9.43\_48; Luke 11.31\_32; Luke 17.26\_30.

## Plays on Words

The Old Testament contains not a few instances of plays on words (for examples see "Paranomasia" in "THE TECHNIQUES OF HEBREW POETRY" and the notes on Genesis 11.9; Jeremiah 1.11\_12; Amos 8.1\_2). The text of the Gospels, which has been transmitted to us in Greek, contains more than one instance where the original Aramaic of Jesus' mother tongue probably involved a word-play. It is understandable that very few such puns in Aramaic could be reproduced in Greek. In one case, however, it happens that the Greek word *pneuma*, just as the Aramaic *ῥῆμα*, means both "wind" and "spirit." In John 3.8 Jesus is quoted as saying to Nicodemus, "The *pneuma* blows where it wills, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know whence it comes or whither it goes; so it is with everyone who is born of

the pneuma. "

One of the most noteworthy of Jesus' sayings about the church involves a play on words. According to Matthew 16.13ff. at Caesarea Philippi, in response to Jesus' question to his disciples who they thought he was, Simon Peter confessed, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." After declaring that Peter had spoken this by divine revelation, Jesus retorted, "And I tell you, you are Peter [Greek Petros ], and on this rock [Greek petra I will build my church." In Jesus' mother tongue the play is even closer, for in Aramaic the word kÛphâ serves as a proper name (Cephas) and also means "a rock, a stone." Jesus' statement therefore would have been, "And I tell you, you are KÛphâ, and on this kÛphâ I will build my church" (there remains a difference in gender, for the common noun is feminine and the proper name is, of course, masculine; compare French pierre (f.), "a stone," and Pierre (m.), "Peter").

Another passage which probably involved a pun is Matthew 23.24, where the Greek text is unable to reproduce the jingle that is present in what is presumed to be the original Aramaic. In his condemnation of the inconsistency of certain scribes and Pharisees, Jesus reproached them for "straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel." Since in Aramaic the word for "gnat" or "louse" is qalmâ and the word for "camel" is gamlâ, the pun provides added piquancy to the picturesque speech used by Jesus: he is describing a punctilious Pharisee who, in view of Leviticus 11.41ff., which forbids the eating of what swarms or crawls on the earth, is careful to strain out a qalmâ that may have fallen into his food or wine, but is quite unconcerned over gulping down a whole gamlâ!

## Proverbs

Every language has pithy sayings or maxims that express a truth crisply and forcefully. Because proverbs frequently express only one side of a truth, it happens that mutually contradictory proverbs may circulate, each of which is true when applied to the appropriate life-setting. The common saying, "Penny wise, pound foolish," correctly describes one who is scrupulous about small transactions, but is extravagant in great ones. On the other hand, the proverb, "Take care of the pennies, and the dollars will take care of themselves," is also true.

More than once the Bible presents two proverbs that, though contradictory, are both true when applied to appropriate circumstances. In Proverbs 26.4 the writer cautions his reader, "Do not answer fools according to their folly, or you will be a fool yourself"; in the very next verse, however, he advises, "Answer fools according to their folly, or they will be wise in their own eyes." It is left to the reader to know when it is appropriate to heed one or the other of these two antithetical proverbs.

It is not surprising that Jesus sometimes cast his teaching in the form of proverbs. Since, however, these brief, salty sayings stress one side of a truth, they should not be exalted as maxims of inflexible conduct. On the contrary, one categorical statement must be interpreted in the light of another that may counsel the opposite of the first. For example, Jesus' command, "Do not judge, so that you may be not judged" (Matthew 7.1), has sometimes been taken as a blanket prohibition against making judgments concerning right and wrong, good and evil. In the same context, however, the evangelist includes another of Jesus' pithy sayings, one which presupposes the necessity of forming judgments: "Do not give what is

holy to dogs; and do not throw your pearls before swine" (Matthew 7.6). To obey this command against desecrating what is holy, one obviously must judge who is doggish and who is swinish. Spiritual prudence will know when it is appropriate to follow one precept and when it is appropriate to follow the other.

Similarly Jesus' proverb-like prohibition, "Do not resist an evildoer" (Matthew 5.39), is not to be taken to mean that his disciples are never to resist evil in any kind of way. In the light of Jesus' other teachings as well as his use of force to drive out the money-changers from the temple precincts (Mark 12.15), it is clear that the principle that he inculcates in this crisp maxim is non-retaliation for a malicious wrong inflicted by a personal enemy.

## Parables

In all the teaching of Jesus there is no feature more striking than the parables. Although other religious teachers had made use of parabolic stories (see Judges 9.7\_15; 2 Samuel 12.1\_6), in quantity and in excellence his parables are acknowledged to be outstanding. About sixty examples, from what was probably a larger number, have been preserved in the synoptic Gospels; these comprise more than one third of Jesus' recorded words.

The fourth Gospel nowhere uses the word "parable," but it contains several parabolic sayings in the form of allegories (for example, John 10.1\_18; John 15.1\_11). The old definition of a parable as "an earthly story with a heavenly meaning" contains a certain amount of truth, but one must beware against seeking an elaborate allegorical meaning for every detail in a parable. That is, many details in Jesus' parables are present in order to make the story "live," and were not included primarily to instruct or edify the hearer. Defined more precisely, in Jesus' teaching a parable is a comparison drawn from nature or common experience in life and designed to illustrate some moral or religious truth, on the assumption that what is valid in one sphere is valid also in the other. The distinctions between parable and simile and metaphor are not easily defined. Often there is scarcely any difference, for all of them involve an aspect of comparison, but generally the metaphor and simile are short while the parable is more extended. "You are the salt of the earth" (Matthew 5.13) is a metaphor; "Be wise as serpents" (Matthew 10.16) is a simile; but "The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened" (Matthew 13.33) is a parable.

The proper method of interpreting Jesus' parables is to make a thorough inquiry into the "life-setting" in his ministry when the parable was first uttered, and to seek out the chief point that, in that setting, it was intended to teach. In other words, To whom did Jesus speak the parable? and, Why did he speak it? Usually the details in a parable provide nothing more than the necessary background in order to make the story realistic, and are not to be assigned, point by point, special meanings in the manner of an allegory.

An analysis of Jesus' parables reveals that most of them are intended either (a) to portray a type of human character or disposition for warning or example, or (b) to reveal a principle of God's government of the world and humankind. In other words, Jesus' parables usually teach a certain kind of conduct that his

hearers are to emulate or avoid (matters of ethics), or they disclose something of the character of God and his dealings with humankind (matters of theology). Examples of the former class of parables include The Two Builders (Matthew 7.24\_27), The Two Sons (Matthew 21.28\_32), The Pharisee and the Tax Collector (Luke 18.9\_14), and The Good Samaritan (Luke 10.30\_37); examples of the latter include the several parables concerning the Kingdom of Heaven (Matthew 13; Matthew 20.1\_15), The Seed Growing Secretly (Mark 4.26\_29), The Great Supper (Luke 14.16\_24), and The Lost Coin (Luke 15.8\_10). Most parables of Jesus have two levels of meaning. One is the story itself, which usually reflects some aspect of daily life in the Near East. The other, deeper level of meaning (which may be paradoxical or surprising), is an open-ended invitation awaiting the hearer's response. In this respect the parable is not effective until the challenge inherent in the parable is freely accepted and acted upon. Finally, it should be observed that when Christian teachers and evangelists retold Jesus' parables in the early church, they occasionally introduced small changes so as to apply the stories to new situations or to bring out the application more vividly. An example of the latter is the slight modification in the order of the wording in Matthew and Luke's retelling of the parable of The Wicked Tenants. According to Mark 12.8, when the owner of the vineyard sent his son to the tenants to get some of the fruit, they "killed him, and threw him out of the vineyard." Matthew and Luke, however, finding in the parable a parallel to what happened to Jesus when he was crucified outside the city walls, altered the sequence of the clauses so as to read, "they threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him" (Matthew 21.39; Luke 20.15).

There was also a tendency to turn parables that Jesus addressed to the crowd, or to opponents, into parables for the disciples. For example, according to Luke 15.4\_10 Jesus told the parable of the Lost Sheep as an answer to criticisms leveled against him by Pharisees and scribes (Luke 15.2). When Matthew recounts the same parable (Matthew 18.12\_14), however, it is no longer addressed to Jesus' opponents; it has now become part of Jesus' instruction to his disciples (Matthew 18.1), that is, to the church, on the subject of how Christians are to relate to other Christians (see also Matthew 18.15\_17).

In other cases the parables of Jesus were remembered long after the circumstances that gave rise to them had been forgotten. More than once, therefore, we find that the Evangelists, impressed by the sublimity of Jesus' teaching, recount his parables without mentioning the specific situation in which they were first narrated.

## Section C: Chronological Table of Old Testament Literature

\*Curt Kuhl, The Old Testament, John Knox Press, 1962

**Pre-Mosaic**

**and Mosaic**

**Period**

**to c. 1200**

**B.C.E**

Song of Lamech (Gen. 4. 23-4); Miriam's victory song (Exodus 15.21); The sites of Moab (Numbers 31.14-15); The Song of the Well (Number 21.17-18); Song of Sihon (Num.21.27-29); Aaron's Blessing (Numbers 6.24-6); Canaanite Mishpat of the Book of the Covenant (Ex. 21.2-11, 18-22, 21.28-22.26); Oath against Amalek (Ex. 27.16); Ark Formula (Num. 10.35-36); Oracles of Noah (Gen 9.25.27); Patriarchal Oracles (Gen. 12.2,3,7, 13.14-17,26.11, 28.13,14; 43.22); Song of Deborah (Jg 5); List of Unconquered cities (Jg 10.1-5, 12.7-15); Sources of J and E. Family and heroic sagas of Joshua and Judges (Jg 3.16 ff., 4, 8.4 ff, 11.1-11, 29.32-33); Israelite nucleus of the Book of the Covenant. Decalogue (Ex. 20.1-17)

**Era of David****c. 1000 BCE**

Song of the Bow (2 Sam. 1.17-27); Collections of the Book of the Righteous and the Book of the Wars of Yahweh. Oldest Psalms. Story of the Ark (I Sam. 4-7, II Sam 7); War of the Kings (Gen. 14; or late Midrash?). Nucleus of the war reports (I Sam. 13-15); Nathan's prophecy (oldest form of 2 Sam. 7). Report on Ammonite War (2 Sam. 10.6-11.1, 12.26-31). Story of Saul (1 Sam. 7-15,28, 31); List of David's officials (2 Sam. 22. 15-22, 23.8-23, 24-39); Development of the Yahwistic source document.

**Era of Solomon****c. 950 BC E.**

Collection of the older oracles of the Jacob blessing (Gen. 49.3-7, 13-27). Individual oracles of the blessing of Moses (Dt, 33). Oldest Proverb collection (Prov. 10.1-22.16); Beginning of recording of royal annals. Biography of Samuel. Assembly at Shechem (Josh. 24). Development of the Elohist source document.

**Oldest period of****the separate****kingdoms****922-800 BCE**

Esau oracles (Gen. 25.22-3, 27.39-40). Blessing of Jacob (Gen. 27.27-9). Words of the Wise (Prov. 22.17-24.22); Agur (Prov. 30. 1-14) and Lemuel collections (Prov. 21.1-9). Ahab's Ammonite War (1 Kings 22.5-28). Collection of the Elijah stories.

## **Earlier**

### **Monarchical**

#### **period**

#### **800-700 BCE**

Amos (before 760: basic material of 1-11; soon after 760: collection of threat oracles 3-6 and visions 7-9. Hosea (750-725). First part-collection (1-3). Zech. 9.1 ff., 10.3 ff. Isaiah (742-700: beginning of his career (6); before the Syro-Ephramite wars: 2. 1-4.6, 5.8-24, 10. 1-4? ; during these wars: 7, 17. 1-11; latter part of his career 713-701: 28-32 (28.1-4 before 713), 14.24-27, 29 ff., 18.1 ff., 20.1 ff.,

22.1, 2-31; of indefinite period : 5. 1-7, 24-30, 9.8-10.4. Solomon's biography (1 Kings 3-11). Unification of J and E. Collection of Elisha stories.

## **Later**

### **Monarchical**

#### **period**

#### **700-598 BCE**

Foreign oracles (Is 19). David's Song of Praise (2 Sam. 22). Image of a ruler (2 Sam. 23.1-7). Zephaniah (c. 630). Psalm (Nah. 1.2-11); Jon. 2.3-10 ? Jeremiah (628-622 BCE: 1, 2, 1-4.4, 4.5-6.30. 605-598: rhythmic oracles from 7-22 and autobiographical passages 11.18 ff., 8.1 ff. Passover cantata (c. 622: Ex. 15.1-18). Habakkuk (c. 615). Nahum (before 612). Foreign prophecies (Ez. 25-26.5, 28.20-23). Isaiah collection(1-12). Conclusion of Hosea collection. Isaiah stories (36-39=2 Kings 18.13,17-22.19). Final editing of the Book of the Covenant (before 622: Ex. 20.22-23.33). Original Deuteronomy. Memoir (c. 622: 2 Kings 22.3-23/3). Excerpt from the report on Josiah's reform (after 622: 2 Kings 23.4-20). Josiah's district list (Josh). First Deuteronomist? (c. 600)

#### **Period of the**

#### **decline**

#### **598-587 BCE**

Jeremiah (Threats: 10.17-21, 13.15 ff., 15.5-9, 22.20 ff., 21.1 ff., 23.9 ff., 23.34 ff.; autobiographical passages: 24, 25.15 ff., 27, 32.5 ff.). Ezekiel (until 593: threats 4-24). Egyptian oracles (Ez. 29-32).

Lamentations (1). Zech. 9. 9-10. Baruch source of the Book of Jeremiah (594 onwards).

## **Period of the**

### **exile**

#### **587-538 BCE**

Lam. 2, 4. Ezekiel (Comfort oracles: 33-37). Lam. 5, 3. Song of Hannah (1 Sam. 2. 1-10). Deutero-Isaiah (546-538). Trito -Isaiah (Is. 43.7-64). Appendices to Hosea and other prophetic writings: Jer. 10. 1-18, 16.19-27; Hab. 2.18-20; Mic. 7.8-20, Ob. 1-14, 15. Job (or early post-exilic). Historical work of the Deuteronomist (c. 550). Deuteronomistic editing of Jeremiah. Priestly Code of the Pentateuch. Draft of a constitution (Ez. 40-48). Conclusion of the Law of Holiness.

## **Restoration**

### **period**

#### **538-400 BCE**

Zechariah 1-8 (520-518). Haggai (after 520). Last formation of Zephaniah. SONG OF MOSES (Dt. 32. 1-43). Addition to the prophets (Is. 11. 11-16, 28.5-6, 33.19 ff., 24-27, 32, 33, 34-35); Jer. 9.11-15, 23.33 ff., 52; Am. 9.8-15; Mic. 2.12-13). Trito-Isa. (Is. 42.14-18, collection 40-42). Framing of the Blessing of Moses (Dt. 33.2-5, 26-9). Malachi (before 445 without the later additions 1.11 ff., 2.11-12, 3. 23-4). Trito-Isa (before 445: Isa. 41.9-42.21).

## **End of the**

### **Persian and**

### **Macedonian**

### **period**

#### **400-300 BCE**

Joel (without 3. 1-5, 4.4-8). Is. 23. From Trito- Isa: repentance liturgy IS. 43.7-45.25; Temple oracle: Is. 46. 1-4. Collections of the Psalms. Song of Solomon. Prov. 1-9. Image of virtue (Prov. 31.0-31). Final editing of the Pentateuch. Chronicles historical work (Ch., Ezra, Neh.). Completion of the Pentateuch canon (before 330).

## **Seleucid period**

**300-200 B. C.**

**E.**

Deutero-Zechariah (9-11, 13.7-9). Ecclesiastes. Tyre oracle (c. 274: Is. 23.25-18). Stories of the Book of Daniel (Dan. 1, 2-6). Book of Esther. Jeremiah's Epistle (Baruch 6). Septaugint translation of the Torah. Conclusion of the second stage of the Canon (c. 200).

**Period of**

**oppression and**

**revolt**

**200-100 BCE**

Hebrew Ecclesiasticus (c. 190). Trito-Zechariah (c. 170): Zech. 7-8, 14). Baruch 3.9-5.9. Song of the Three Young Men. Prayer of Azariah. Dreams and visions of Daniel (168-164: Dan. 7-12). Book of Tobit (c. 150). Book of Judith (c. 150). Translation of Ecclesiasticus (c. 132). Baruch 1-3.8.

Translation of the Septaugint completed (before 130). Rest of Esther (c. 114).

**Period of**

**Pharisaism**

**from 100 BCE**

Susanna, Bel and the Dragon, 1 Maccabees (before 70). 2 Maccabees (c.50). Rest of Esther (c. 48). The Wisdom of Solomon.

**c. CE 90**

Canonization of the Old Testament completed.

## **Section D: Metaphors and Symbols in the Bible**

The Oxford Companion to the Bible lists the following uses of metaphor in the Bible:

**Metaphors.** The principal subject of the Bible is God in his relation to his world, his people, and

humanity. But the God of the Bible is holy, transcendent, other, unlike anything in all creation. It follows, then, that language about God must be figurative, because it attempts to describe in terms of this world one who is totally different from this world.

We can speak about God and our relation to him, however, because he has revealed himself through his own words and deeds in the history recorded in the scriptures. All metaphoric language about God must be consonant with that self-revelation in order to be true.

God is known in the biblical account only in relationship. The five most frequent metaphors of his relationship with his people are king/subject, judge/litigant, husband/wife, father/child, and lord or master/servant. All are commissive metaphors, implying an obligation in the relationship described. Yet every metaphoric term for God breaks its limits and transforms the way in which it is ordinarily understood. For example, when God is described as father, the term is filled with the meaning given it by God's self-revelation, and human fathers then become responsible for growing up into the measure of God's compassionate and loving fatherhood. In short, metaphors for God come to define the goal of human life, which is to conform to the image of God.

None of the metaphors for God are intended to be taken literally in their human sense, a fact sometimes overlooked. For example, God as father or husband is never literally male, nor does he exercise sexual functions. Similarly, the use of metaphoric language for God says nothing about the historicity of his deeds and words.

Many terms for God participate in metaphoric systems and undergo rich development in the scriptures. God as father is source of life, names, care, love, discipline, family unity, and an example to children; he feeds, clothes, gives inheritance, legal rights, property, home, and a sense of belonging. Because such a metaphoric system is involved, God is never called mother in the Bible, though he exercises mother-like love and care for his children. Female terms for God are used in the Bible only in similes, pointing to one activity (See *Feminism and the Bible*). If they are interpreted as metaphors, the deity is then connected with the images of birth and suckling, and they erroneously result in the view of a goddess giving birth to all things and persons, who then participate in the divine being. The distinction that the Bible insists on between creator and creature is then lost.

Figures for God can have a high or low degree of correspondence with their referents. When God is described as like a bear, lion, leopard, moth, withering wind, devouring fire, eagle, or even dry rot, the correspondence is low, and such images are used for their shock or surprise value. More appropriate are the descriptions of God as rock, sun, living water, fortress, refuge; similarly, the descriptions of his actions in terms of those of a healer, potter, vintner, builder, farmer, tailor, shepherd, or warrior yield vivid pictures. Indeed, God is most often portrayed in anthropomorphic terms; this prevents his identification with some diffuse soul of nature, and it expresses the fact that he meets us person to person and demands from us the full depth of our personal devotion and love.

Some metaphors for God have lost their meaning because they have lost their context, such as the metaphor "redeemer," which originally referred to a relative who bought back a family member from

slavery. The metaphor is recovered when the original context is recalled. Similarly, some figures become objectionable to some groups, for example, those of God as mighty warrior or as judge or, for feminists, as father or lord. But such metaphors are indispensable to the canonical witness to God and should be recovered by an explication of their full biblical content.

Human beings' relation to God is also described metaphorically because it deals with that which is evident only to the eyes of the faithful and must describe the unknown in terms of the known. Thus, God's faithful people are called in the Bible his adopted sons or children, his bride, kingdom of priests, holy nation, peculiar treasure, servants, jewels, witnesses, noble vine, pleasant planting, fruitful trees, and so on. The church, in the New Testament, is called the new Jerusalem, the bride of Christ, the true circumcision, the Israel of God, the body of Christ, God's temple, building, field, his covenant people, new creation, or colony of heaven. Church members are pilgrims, aliens, exiles, strangers on the earth, slaves of righteousness or of Christ, heirs, fools for Christ, citizens of heaven, or ministers of reconciliation. Christ himself is their righteousness, sanctification, redemption, first fruits, covenant, temple, high priest, sacrifice, word, or wisdom and power of God. He is called priest after the order of Melchizedek, man of heaven, Son of God, servant, last Adam, Son of man, Messiah, and Lord.

The life of faith is described in an almost limitless stock of pictures. It is soaring or being set in a broad place or on the heights. It is enjoying freedom, light, order, joy, life. It is being granted never-failing water and food, knowing shade and rest. It is experiencing the gift of a new heart and spirit.

On the other hand, the life of faithlessness is described as slavery to sin and death, and sinners are compared to rebels, disobedient sons, adulterous wives, whores, worms, backsliders, dead bones, waterless clouds, fruitless trees, wild waves, wandering stars, restless young camels, plunging horses, wild asses, rudderless ships, stubborn heifers, dogs, wilting grass, and choking tares. They are the old Adam, those of the flesh, cursed by God, and slaves to the principalities and powers of this present evil darkness.

Some metaphor systems permeate the Bible from beginning to end, for example, those connected with the Exodus, or with the Temple and sacrificial system, or the law court. Other metaphors, such as those of light and darkness, are given expression by many different words (cf. morning star, dayspring on high), while others draw on the perennial relationships and rounds of family life, as well as birth and death.

Metaphors may change their meaning from one context to another. Thus, the wilderness can be an expression of danger and judgment or of love and care; a yoke can be a figure of sin or of faithfulness. Meanings can be determined only by the context and by the intention of the author.

Other metaphorical forms, such as those of synecdoche, eponymy, metonymy, parable, and allegory are frequent in the scriptures. The Bible is rich in figurative terms, of which we use only a very small portion.

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# Chapter Two

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## Chapter 2 History and Chronology

**Section A: Chronology** In order to read the Bible with any degree of understanding at all, students should familiarize themselves with a brief chronological structure which can be easily memorized and used to place books appropriately in the era they describe. While students will quickly discover that almost no one agrees on the early traditions, time and sometimes even setting, most chronological structures tend to agree with what happens with the monarchy in 1000 BCE

Links:

[Overview](#)

[Expanded Overview](#)

[Summary Chronology](#)

[Brief Chronological Overview](#)

Outline of Bible History

Event or Period Approximate Dates Abraham and the Patriarchs -1750-1700 BCE

Moses and the Exodus-1290-1250 BCE

Joshua and the conquest of Canaan-1210 BCE

The Judges (tribal Confederacy)-1210-1020 BCE

The monarchy-1020-587 BCE

The Prophets-1250-450 BCE

Division of Israel and Judah--922 BCE

The Babylonian exile-587-539 BCE

The Postexilic period-539 BCE -135 CE

The period of Hellenism-323-63 BCE

The Maccabean period-165-63 BCE

The Roman period-63 B.C.E.-135 CE

The birth of Jesus-4 BCE

The founding of Christianity-30 CE

Paul's ministry-33-65 CE

Development of Christian literature-50-120 CE

Completion of the Bible-After 100 CE

Students will quickly discover that the Exodus has an early (1400s) and late dating; I have given students the late date, or the thirteenth rather than fifteenth century BCE. A somewhat expanded history includes the following:

Major Moments in Jewish History

Approximate Date

1750 B.C.E.-Abraham called to his role

1250 -Exodus led by Moses

1210-Invasion of Canaan led by Joshua

1210-1020-Period of tribal confederacy

1020-Saul becomes first king of Israel 1000-David becomes king

961-Solomon becomes king

922-Israel and Judah divide

721-Israel falls to Assyria

621-Josiah's reform

587-Judah falls to Babylon

539-Jewish exiles return to Jerusalem

520-515-Temple rebuilt

458 or later-Period of Ezra and Nehemiah 332-Alexander the Great conquers Palestine

167-Maccabean War

63-Palestine becomes a Roman protectorate

70 C.E-Temple destroyed

90-Canon of Jewish scripture established

135-Jews expelled from Palestine

Kings of Israel and Judah

Saul 1020-1000 BCE

David 1000-961 BCE

Solomon 961-922 BCE

Division of Monarchy 922 BCE

Israel Ten Tribes Northern Kingdom c. 922-721 BCE (fell to Assyria) Jeroboam c. 922-901

Nadab c. 901-900

Baasha c. 900-877

Elah c. 877-876

Judah Two Tribes Southern Kingdom c. 922-587 BCE (fell to Babylon) Rehoboam c. 922-915

Abijah (Abijam) c. 915-913

Asa c. 913-873 Kings of Israel and Judah

continued Zimri c. 876 (7 days) OMRI DYNASTY Omri c. 876-869

Ahab c. 869-850

Ahaziah c. 850-849

Jehoram c. 849-842 JEHU DYNASTY Jehu c. 842-815

Joahaz c. 815-801

J(eh)oash c. 801-786

Jeroboam II c. 786-764

Jehoshaphat c. 873-849

Jehoram c. 849-842

Ahaziah c. 842

Athaliah= c. 842-837

Joash c. 837-800

Amaziah c. 800-783

Uzziah (Azariah) c. 783-742

Jotham (regency) c. 750-742, (king) c. 742-735 Zechariah (6 mos.) c. 746-745

Shallum (1 mo.) c. 745

Menahem c. 745-738

Pekahiah c. 738-737

Pekah c. 737-732
Hosea c. 732-724
Israel falls 721 BCE
Jehoahaz (Ahaz) c. 735-715
Hezekiah c. 715-687
Manasseh c. 687/6-642
Amon c. 642-640
Josiah c. 640-609
Jehoahaz II (Shallum) c. 609 (3 mos.)
Jehoiakim (Eliakim) c. 609-598
Jehoiachin (Jeconiah) c. 598-597 (3 mos.)
Zedekiah (Mattaniah) c. 597-587
Judah falls 587 BCE

Students will find that understanding this overview will help them considerably when they read, for example, Isaiah and can place this prophecy within the eighth century BCE. Isaiah, of course, dates itself: "The vision of Isaiah concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah" (1.1). Knowing Isaiah's date tells the student that Isaiah begins this prophecy prior to the fall of the Northern Kingdom (722/21) to the Assyrians. If they read closely, they will understand why Isaiah has been said to contain a First, Second, and Third period, the context responding to different times.

## Section B: History

### Exodus and Numbers Exodus and Numbers

## Moses Moses

An understanding of the history involved (in its simplest form) is also a requirement for appreciating the literature of the Bible. For example, Oxford University Press provides the following kind of brief synopsis.

### Using the Old and New Testament

Judaism has no Old Testament, although it shares with Christians the Old Testament tradition as it appears in the books embraced by Christians. Jewish tradition tells the Old Testament story in three parts: Torah (Genesis through Deuteronomy), Prophets (Former: Joshua through Kings; Latter: Isaiah through Malachi), and Writings (the rest of the books).

### Name of God

Original Hebrew contained only consonants; as a result, the Hebrew name for God is represented by the Tetragrammaton, YHWH. Pronunciation of the name has been lost, but pious Jews did not pronounce the name anyway, circumlocution it by using adonai (the Lord) and hassem (the Name). JEHOVAH is a combination of YHWH and the Masoretic adonay.

### Narrative

The narrative of the Hebrew Bible is a continuous story--from the tale of Abraham coming out of Babylonia through the Exodus under Moses. After the exodus out of Egypt, the story tells of the conquest and settlement of Canaan, the founding of the Monarchy (Saul, David, Solomon), the division of Israel (Southern Judah and Northern Kingdom with Samaria as capital), the destruction of Israel or the Northern Kingdom by the Assyrians in 721/22 BCE followed by the destruction of Jerusalem (the Southern Kingdom) in 586 BCE by the Babylonians. Successively, other civilizations involved with these people are the Persians, Greeks, and Romans.

The Old Testament story is from the creation of the world to the building of the second temple to the prophetic predictions of age of peace under the Messiah's rule; a subplot is one in which the people of Israel rebel against YHWH.

Links: 6/16/03

History Links

Visit Jerusalem

History of Jerusalem

## Jerusalem and the Temple Mount

### Brief Historical Overview

#### Outline

#### The Story of Moses and the Exodus

##### I. Preparation for the Exodus

A. The Hebrews become slaves (Ex. 1:1-22)

B. The introduction of Moses (2:1-22)

C. The call of Moses (2:23-4:17)

D. Moses' return to Egypt (4:18-31)

E. The first encounter with Pharaoh (5:1-5)

F. The ten plagues (7:8-10:29, 12:29-34)

G. The institution of the Passover (12:1-28, 43-51)

##### II. The Exodus

A. The departure from Egypt (Ex 13:17- 14:14)

B. Crossing the Sea of Reeds (14:15-31)

C. The desert experience (15:22-18:27)

##### III. The Covenant and the Law

A. The arrival at Sinai (Ex 19:1-2)

B. The Covenant promised (19:3-8)

C. The Ten Commandments (20:1-7)

D. The Book of the Covenant (20:22-23:19)

E. The Covenant affirmed (24:1-18)

IV. The First Failure

A. The Golden Calf (Ex 32:1-35)

B. The relation of the Covenant to the Law (34:10-28)

V. The Departure from Sinai

A. Leaving Sinai (Num 10:1-36)

B. Spying out Canaan (13:1-33)

C. Rebellion, and the consequence (14:1-38)

D. The unsanctioned invasion of Canaan (14:39-45)

Outline

The Golden Era of Jewish History I. Joshua

A. Preparation for conquest (1:1-5:12)

B. Conquest of Jericho (5:13-7:26)

C. Conquest of Ai and other events (8:1- 9:20)

D. North and South subdued (10:1-12:24)

E. Land apportioned and tribes described (13:1-21:45)

F. End of Joshua's rule (22:1-24:31)

## II. Judges

A. Summary of settlement of Canaan (1:1- 2:5)

B. Age of the Judges (2:6-3:6)

C. The individual judges (3:7-16:31)

1. Othniel (3:7-11)

2. Ehud (3:12-30)

3. Shamgar (3:31)

4. Deborah (4:1-5:31)

5. Gideon (6:1-8:35)

6. Abimelech's abortive kingship (9:1-57)

7. Tola (10:1-2)

8. Jair (10:3-5)

9. Jephthah (10:6-12:7)

10. Ibzan (12:8-10)

11. Elon (12:11-12)

12. Abdon (12:13-15)

13. Samson (13:1-16:31)

D. David and Benjamite stories (17:1-21:25)

III. 1 Samuel

A. The story of Samuel (1:1-7:17)

B. Samuel and Saul (8:1-15:35)

C. Saul and David (16:1-31:13)

1. David flees (22:1-26:25)

2. David among the Philistines (27:1- 31:13)

IV. 2 Samuel

A. David becomes king of Judah (1:1-2:46)

B. David king of all Israel (5:1-8:18)

C. History of David and his family (9:1- 20:26)

D. Other events (21:1-24:25)

V. 1 Kings

A. Solomon becomes king (1:1-2:46)

B. Solomon's reign (3:1-11:43)

1. The wisdom (3:1-4:1)

2. The builder (5:1-9:25)

3. The trader (9:26-10:29)

4. The king's decline (11:1-43)

C. The divided kingdom (12:1-22:54)

1. The two kingdoms until Elijah (14:1-16:34)

2. The Elijah cycle (17:1-2 Kings 1:18)

VI. 2 Kings (the divided kingdom continued)

A. Stories about prophets (1:1-13:25)

1. Elisha cycle (2:1-8:29)

2. Anointing of Jehu (9:1-37)

B. Till the fall of the North (14:1-17:41)

C. Till the fall of the South (18:1-25:30)

## History Divided into Periods

1. Patriarchal: Dated from the first third of the second millennium (2000-1700 BCE)

Story of Patriarchs: Abraham, Jacob, Joseph (spouses also play a role: Sarah, Isaac's Rebekkah, and

Rachael)

Central theme: God's promise to Abraham (Genesis 12:3) of a land and a people (Israel) through whom all other people would be affected.

## 2. Exodus, Election, Covenant

Details surrounding the exodus are lacking, although we know the people to become Israel come out of Egypt. Disputed details include the pharaoh of the exodus, the route of the exodus, and the location of Sinai as well as the origin of the person name of Israel's God.

The Hebrews were slaves in Egypt who escaped under Moses' leadership. Moses is the central figure in Israel's history from Exodus through Deuteronomy.

## 3. Settlement

The Israelites cross into Canaan (called Palestine by the Romans). Excavation points to 1200-900 BCE in the Iron Age for this crossing.

Joshua and Judges record the settlement. Whether the settlement was a blitzkrieg, rapid and definitive, or a lengthy and complicated process is still being debated; Joshua suggests the former. Judges suggests the latter, with settlement being completed under David and Solomon.

The period of the judges records charismatic, military leadership and portrays the tribes as being loosely confederated. There was no king in Israel, and people did what was right in their own eyes (Judges 21.25).

## 4. The United Monarchy

1020 BCE onward

Israel sets up strong, central role to survive Philistine threat.

People demand to be like other nations (1 Samuel 8.20).

Kingship occasions a serious theological crisis: the conflict is between secular and spiritual interests. Yahweh is sole king, and the earthly king is to be Yahweh's representative.

Saul (1020 BCE): Israel's first king; his major challenge was to contain the Philistines (I Samuel

13-31); Saul is unable to prevail over the Philistines; he commits suicide. Saul is basically a good person

who was thrust into a role for which he was unprepared.

David (1000-961 BCE): (2 Samuel 9-20, I Kings 1-2)

David is one of Israel's heroes, and he becomes the model for the Messianic king of the latter scriptures. The narrative brings a disarming candor which allows readers to see the human side of this ideal king. David is a military leader who unites the Judah and Israel into one kingdom. He rules over Judah from Hebron and expands his kingdom. David captured Jerusalem from the Jebusites and established his capital there on neutral grounds. Jerusalem becomes known as Zion or the City of David. David ruled over the United Kingdom for thirty-three years.

Solomon (1 Kings 1-11)

Solomon is a political rather than a military leader. He is praised for consolidating the kingdom and for establishing administrative districts; he is also known for his trade and commerce and distinguished himself with elaborate building projects, such as the temple and adjacent palace complex. He used forced labor and taxed heavily. The kingdom, united for seventy years, fell apart at Solomon's death.

## 5. The Divided Kingdom

Egypt was in constant conflict with both the Northern and the Southern kingdoms; internecine war continued until Israel (the Northern Kingdom fell to the Assyrians in 721/22). The Northern Kingdom was larger and stronger than Judah (Southern), but Judah was more stable and survived into 586/7, when it was conquered by Babylonia.

## 6. EXILE

During the last two decades of its history the Kingdom of Judah was caught in a power struggle between imperial Egypt and Babylonia, each striving to fill the power vacuum left by Assyria. The last three kings of Judah—Jehoiakim (609—598 BC), Jehoiachin (three months), and Zedekiah (597—587 BC)—were undistinguished. During Jehoiakim's reign in 605 BC the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar defeated the Egyptian pharaoh Neco in battle at Carchemish, placing Judah under the control of Babylonia. This was a turning point in Judah's history. Jehoiakim (see Jeremiah 36) refused to listen to Jeremiah's prediction of the impending Babylonian destruction.

In 597 BC, Nebuchadnezzar besieged Jerusalem and deported Jehoiachin to Babylon, as well as thousands of leading citizens, among them Ezekiel, who became a prophet in Babylon.

Nebuchadnezzar then appointed Zedekiah as a puppet in place of the exiled Jehoiachin. Jeremiah was a kind of adviser to Zedekiah, who sought his counsel but seldom followed it. Jeremiah, a realist, urged Zedekiah (Jeremiah 37—38) not to rebel against Babylonia, but instead to capitulate. As a result, Jeremiah was accused of being a traitor. Zedekiah rebelled against the Babylonians, and in 587—586 BC Nebuchadnezzar attacked and destroyed Jerusalem and its temple, deporting many of its inhabitants to

Babylon. Zedekiah, the last king of Judah, was taken to Babylon, was imprisoned for treason, and died there. At the same time the fortified towns of Judah, including Lachish, were also destroyed.

(Oxford Companion to the Bible)

## 7. THE POSTEXILIC PERIOD

This is the time of Ezra and Nehemiah. Sheshbazzar, governor of Judah appointed by Persian Cyrus, leads exiles back to Jerusalem. The temple is rebuilt under Zerubbabel in 520 BC The help of the mixed race, Samaritans from Samaria, is refused. The Samaritans build their own temple on Mount Gerizim.

In 445 BCE Nehemiah rebuilds the walls of Jerusalem.

Ezra functions as leader of the people, enforcing strict observance of the Jewish law. Ezra calls for endogamy, disturbed by the number of mixed marriages that have resulted during the exile.

[Links: 6/16/03](#)

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# Chapter Three

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## Chapter 3 Contributing Civilizations

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The student is helped considerably in understanding the Bible when equipped with a basic knowledge of the civilizations contributing to the Hebrew-Christian faith. The Old Testament world is identified with the area we know as the "Fertile Crescent." This area includes the Nile River valley and delta, the Mediterranean coast of Syro-Palestine and the Tigris and Euphrates river valleys. More generally, the student should remember that the Old Testament, in addition to Egyptian impact, is heavily influenced by the Assyrians and Babylonians; as we move closer to the New Testament era, the contributing civilizations are the Persians, the Greeks, and the Romans. This means simply that the Hebrews are influenced heavily by the Assyrians and Babylonians, as well as the Greeks; the middle period shows Persian influence, and

the New Testament must be read relative to Greek and Roman cultures.

[Reference Compton's Multimedia Bible] Actually, the ancient Near East included the region of Mesopotamia, Asia Minor in the North, Syro-Palestine and Egypt in the west, and the Arabian peninsula in the south. We now know this area as Iraq and Iran, occupying most of ancient Mesopotamia and Saudi Arabia and controlling most of the Arabian peninsula. The people we know as the Israelites originated in Northern Mesopotamia. Abraham migrated from Ur in Mesopotamia northward to Harlan and finally into Canaan. Haran is located between the Tigris and the Euphrates rivers in Mesopotamia. Jacob, in Genesis 28:1-9, is identified as sojourning among Amorites, and Abraham in Ezekiel 16:3 is identified as an Amorite.

Later in Israel's history, the Assyrians, the Babylonians, and the Persians all controlled the land of Palestine. Assyria was responsible for the destruction of the Northern ten tribes (721 B.C.E) and was followed by Babylonia in 586 BCE, which usurped power from the remaining Southern (Judah) kingdom. The Hebrews were deported into Mesopotamia by the thousands, some not to return; under the Persian Cyrus, some Hebrew exiles did return to their homeland and rebuild their temple, which had been destroyed in 586 BCE.

Concerning these neighboring countries, the Oxford general articles say the following:

Egypt and Mesopotamia were the two great empires in biblical times; they were also great rivals. Egypt (*misraim* in Hebrew), one of the great civilizations of antiquity, is located in the northeast corner of Africa, along the course of the Lower Nile River. Surrounded for the most part by desert, Egypt is bordered on the east by the Red Sea, and by Libya on the west. Lower Egypt comprises the Nile Delta, whereas Upper Egypt constitutes the remainder of the country south of Cairo. Egypt's route to Palestine passed through the Sinai wilderness, along the Mediterranean coast, and into the hill country. The peninsula of Sinai is triangular in shape, and lies between the Gulf of Suez and the Gulf of Aqabah. Mount Sinai (Horeb) is traditionally located at the southern end of the Sinai peninsula.

Egyptian involvement with Palestine began at some time in the Old Kingdom (approximately 2686-2181 b.c.); there is much evidence of connections in the Early Bronze Age (approximately 3300-2000 b.c.). Abundant biblical references document the interrelationship of Egypt and Palestine. This relationship was ambivalent, sometimes amicable, sometimes hostile. For the most part, Egypt's influence on Palestine was more indirect than direct.

Mesopotamia (the biblical name is Aram-naharayim, designating roughly "the land between the rivers"), constitutes the area of the Upper and Middle Euphrates and the Tigris Rivers. Ancient Mesopotamia was approximately coterminous with modern Iraq. The northern region of Mesopotamia was Assyria; the southern sector was Babylonia.

Assyria, situated in the Upper Mesopotamian plain (northern Iraq), was a mighty empire bent on territorial expansion. The beginnings of Assyria date from the second millennium b.c., but the empire enjoyed its greatest prominence in the Neo-Assyrian period (911-609 b.c.) when it controlled both provinces and vassal states, including, for a time, Egypt. Among the principal cities of Assyria were Asshur, the first capital of the Assyrian empire, situated on the west bank of the Tigris; Calah (Nimrud), on the east bank of the Tigris; and Nineveh, the last capital of the Assyrian empire, located on the east bank of the Tigris, opposite modern Mosul in northern Iraq.

Babylonia in southern Iraq may designate both the region and its capital city. The Bible often refers to the region of southern Mesopotamia as Chaldea. The Neo-Babylonian empire (626-539 b.c.) is synonymous with Chaldea. The city of Babylon, which gave its name to the whole region, is located on the Euphrates River, about fifty miles south of modern Baghdad.

Students should be able to recognize at least some of the important leaders of these contributing civilizations, or if they cannot recall leader names, they need to understand a great deal of history is being covered between 1700 BCE and the time of the Greek Alexander in 333 BCE. Without some general understanding of the history of these years and the geography of these lands, anyone approaching the Bible is going to have difficulty placing books in a time or setting. Interpretation is farther complicated by whether authors, when they can be established, wrote for their contemporaries or future humankind; this is especially problematic with prophecy books.

Canaan itself was, in fact, a part of Eastern Mesopotamia:

Occupying the land along the coast of the East Mediterranean, ancient Phoenicia was coextensive with modern Lebanon and the northern part of Palestine. The Greeks used the title "Phoenicia" to denote ancient Canaan. Among the Phoenician city-states were Tyre, Sidon, Arvad, and Byblos. For the most part, Phoenicia and Israel enjoyed a cordial and close relationship; the Phoenicians, for example, supplied both artisans and materials for the building of Solomon's temple. The economic base of Phoenicia was maritime trade.

Sometime after 1150 b.c., the Philistines settled on the southwest coast of Palestine, between Joppa and Gaza. They and the Israelites clashed constantly because both were bent on expansion of their territory.

Aram, a collection of city-states to the northeast of Israel, was also in constant conflict with its neighbors. Aram is usually equated with Aram-Damascus, the capital of modern Syria, located about sixty miles east of the East Mediterranean. Especially prominent from the tenth to the eighth century b.c., Damascus was an ancient and prosperous city, well located on the major trade routes.

The Hittites, an Indo-European people, established their kingdom during the second millennium b.c. in the central Anatolia plain. The Old Testament contains several references to the Hittites.

The Israelite account of history begins with Abraham's family's migration from Mesopotamia to Canaan. Students need to know that this dating is relatively late in the history of the Near East; indeed, in the history of humankind. One of the thorniest problems in approaching the Bible is that of dealing with the time covered between the first eleven chapters of Genesis and history as we know it and have evidence for. Quite obviously, I'm hedging concerning a major controversy: between what science says and what many believe the Bible states about the span of time between creation and contemporary existence. Evidence of Paleolithic flint cultures have been found throughout the Near East dating back to two hundred thousand years ago; perhaps *People of the Covenant* states it most succinctly: "...before the earliest epic of known human experience lie aeons of slow development and maturation of individuals and societies" (Oxford, 1996: 78). Jericho, for example, evidenced civilization as early as 8000 BCE, perhaps due to its perennial water supply." In short, evidence points to civilization at least five thousand years before Abraham, pointedly marked by broad scale wanderings, restlessness, and advancement. In short, Israel is rather late upon the scene of human history. Part of the problem of historical dating originates in a blurring of the

general and particular—in, for example, the idea of a first human and a concrete Adam or Eve. The danger is that of erring too much on the side of the abstract and general as contrasted to the historical and specific. Recognizing this, one is poised for an entirely different approach to Bible study than that which is ordinarily taken: an approach, I might add, that should not be threatening to religious stances and commitments taken. It's rather obvious history had to have a "first man" as well as a concrete "Adam." When both are understood and accepted simultaneously, then the Bible can be reapproached as the significant work of literature that it is while it continues its important function as foundation for faith. In fact, as literature, what most persuades one to the idea of Divine Authorship is that symbol and theme in the Bible unite with an intricacy that lies beyond mere artifice and suggests authority well beyond ordinary human capacities.

### Resources for the Study of Mesopotamia

#### Assyria

#### Resources for the Study of Mesopotamia

1830-330

Before Christ

1830 Sargon I

1750 Amorite Dynasty, Part of Empire of Hammurabi

1500 Rise of Hurite Kingdom; Subjugation of Assyria

1400 Mitanni becomes vassal of Hittites

1266 Shalmaneser I

1112 Tiglath-pileser I

883 Assurnasirpal II Empire extended into northern Mesopotamia

858 Shalmaneser III

745 Shalmaneser V besieges Syria

721 Sargon II destroys kingdom of Israel, deports inhabitants

704 Sennacherib lays siege to Jerusalem, devastates Babylonia

680 Assurbanipal

625-612 Decline, fall of Nineveh

Babylonia

1830-33-

before Christ

1830 Babylonian-Amorrite (Babel)

1750 Apogee of Babylonia (Hammurabi); kingdom extends over Mesopotamia and part of Assyria and

Elam

1700 II Babylonian Dynasty

1500 III Babylonian Dynasty

1112 New Babylonian Dynasty; Nebuchadnezzar

I 900 Decline in power of Babylonia; hegemony of Assyria

745 King of Assyria assumes kingship of Babylonia

605 Nabopolassar captures Nineveh (NeoBabylonian Empire or Chaldean)

538 Nebuchadnezzar II subjugates and destroys Judah; end of Chaldean empire under Nabonida and Balthasar Persian Empire Cyrus the Great (559-529)

529 Cambyses

521 Darius I Hystaspia

485 Xerxes I (Ahasuerus of Esther)

464 Artaxerxes

I 424 Xerxes II

424 Darius II

404 Artaxerxes

385 Artaxerxes II

385 Artaxerxes III

387 aRSES

335-330 Darius III

333 Kingdom of Alexander the Great

The following links suggest a beginning study of these civilizations and their mythology:

Links: 6/16/03

[Ancient World Web](#)

[Mythology and Religion](#)

Religion Links:

Confucianism

Buddhism

Judaism

Shinto

Ancient Religions

Virtual Library Ancient Religion

Ancient Religions

Sumerian Mythology

Ancient Near East Resources

Judaism

Hittite Religion

Beginning students often do not realize that four hundred years elapsed between the closing of the Old Testament book of Malachi and the opening of the New Testament. The Biblical Palestine was a subject region within four successive world empires, beginning with the Assyrians and concluding with Alexander's Greek Empire of 331-146 BCE. Alexander's leading generals divided the empire, with the kingdom of Ptolemy controlling Palestine from 323 BCE until 198, when it lost its control to the Syrian Seleucids. The Syrian Seleucids ruled until the Jewish Hasmonean family gained independence in 143 BCE. This Jewish independence lasted until the Roman Pompey gained control in 63 BCE. The Romans continued to occupy Palestine throughout all of New Testament history.

Alexander, as students of Western thought know, made spectacular progress, establishing new cities and spreading Greek culture. Although his empire was relatively short-lived, the Greek culture lasted for almost a thousand years. Jews came under the jurisdiction of the Greek rulers of Egypt, the Ptolemies. The Ptolemies were largely a tolerant people, allowing the religious scruples of the Jews to be observed; many Jews, however, were forced to emigrate to the under-populated Alexandria in Egypt, and many went of their own accord. The language and culture of Alexandria was Greek, and the Septuagint was a Greek translation of the Old Testament. Ptolemy II of Egypt sponsored the translation. This work became important for the spread of both Judaism and Christianity.

Throughout the third century BC., a cold war existed between the rulers of Judea and Lebanon, belonging to Egypt, and the Seleucids of Antioch, Syria. Several military encounters ensued. Antiochus III, who defeated Ptolemy V, also adopted a tolerant policy toward the Jews. His reign, though, succumbed to the power of Rome; he was defeated by the Romans in 190 BCE and was eventually killed in the act of robbing a temple to restore his wealth. He is succeeded by Seleucus IV, who plundered the temple in Jerusalem. Even before the Seleucid control, the Tobiads and the Oniads, representing rigid Jewish orthodoxy and Hellenism, respectively, rivaled each other. Seleucid IV was murdered and succeeded by Antiochus IV Epiphanes. A member of the Oniad family. Jason set in motion a plan to hellenize Jerusalem. Jason was replaced by Menelaus of the Tobiads, but although a Tobiad, Menelaus also succumbed to Greek culture. Epiphanes took what treasure was left in the temple of Jerusalem, slaughtering and destroying those in his path who resisted. The temple was opened to everyone: circumcision, Sabbath keeping, and reading the law were banned. Pious Jews resisted, the resistance initiated by the priest Mattathias of Modein who refused to offer sacrifice at a pagan altar, killing both a Jew who complied with the compulsory sacrifice as well as the Seleucid officer. When the Jews decided to follow a realistic policy that included fighting on the Sabbath, if need be, Antiochus Epiphanes eventually reversed his anti-Jewish policies. Under the Maccabees, the temple was restored and dedicated in 164 BCE, the feast of Hanukkah continued to celebrate this occasion into this day.

The Maccabean family established themselves in power, and Judea experienced a period of independence, until Pompey of Rome took the city in 63 BCE. The Hasmonean kings succumbed also to Hellenism; some Jews, the Essenes, objecting to the compromises, withdrew into the desert; others remained in the mainstream of society and became known as Pharisees; those most closely associating with the temple and Roman influences were the Sadducees. During the first century CE, another sect became anti-Roman zealots.

At the end of the Old Testament, God's people existed in turmoil: whereas their ancestors, Abraham pointedly, had known God intimately, Jews now were left to wonder what had happened to this relationship; some felt the time of direct communication with Yahweh had ended; others searched desperately for word from God; some escaped to the solitude of the desert while still others heeded the apocalyptists concerning the end of an age and the coming new world; others simply resorted to political opportunism.

The Greeks left their impact on all subsequent thinking. Greek philosophers, for example, tried to explain God in abstract, metaphysical ways—by asking of what God is made and whether He has existed eternally. Hebrew thinking, though, had seen God in the context of activity—what He could be seen doing—and by his relevance to human life. For them, God was the Creator and sustainer of life and creation; this God revealed Himself in nature and history. Even in the New Testament, the visible testimony to God continues this hierarchical revelation: God is known first in the visible creation (Romans 1), leaving no one unaccountable; to the Hebrew, God is known through the law and prophets (Hebrews 1: 1-3), and to Christians, through Jesus Christ, His son, and through the conscience (Romans 2). Jeremiah himself in the Old Testament signaled this turning to the individual human heart—the heart itself becoming the abode and temple of God.

Christians interpreted Jesus Christ as the one person exemplifying what letting God be king meant; He was the ideal son of David, the Messiah, the Son of Man to whom the kingdom had been given, the individual in whom the promise to Abraham was eventually to be realized and in whom all nations would be blessed. In short, Christians believed Christ was the fulfillment of the Old Testament.

Some of the important chronology of the intertestamental period involves the following:

#### From the Babylonian Exile to Judas Maccabeus

587-538 Babylonian captivity

538-515 Return from captivity; reconstruction of temple

445 Nehemiah reconstructs walls of Jerusalem.

458-398 Ezra reestablishes observance of Mosaic law.

332 Alexander the Great conquers Palestine.

305-285 Ptolemies (Egypt) rule Palestine.

199 Seleucid Kingdom (Syria) occupies Palestine.

168 Antiochus IV Epiphanes establishes hellenizing policy: tries to abolish Judaic religion for ecumenical one worship, one religion with temple dedicated to Olympian Zeus. Judas Maccabeus revolts; from family of Mattathias; revolt is righteously against foreign domination and favors rigorism with respect to Jewish law.

167-165 Mattathias lead Jewish revolt against Antiochus IV.

165-160 Judas, third born, wages war after death of Mattathias.

160-142 Jonathan, fifth son of Mattathias, acknowledged as high priest and leader of the Jews. Struggles against Bacchides and combats Appolonius. Attracted by peace proposals, Jonathan goes to Ptolemais to meet Trypho but is taken prisoner and killed.

142-134 Simon Maccabeus, brother of Jonathan and Judas, becomes leader of Jews, gains independence of Judea from Demetrius II. Combats Antiochus VII, defeats him by means of his son John. Simon is betrayed and slain during a banquet by Ptolemy, governor of Jericho. (The struggle of Judea has been largely against Greek hellenizing influences; the Mattathias family is aroused by pagan sacrifices in their own temple. The family revolts in an effort to return emphasis to Jewish laws and customs. Emphasis is on the Torah and rigorism. Jews returning from exile look with some disdain at Jews who have remained behind and Jews who have intermarried with foreign cultures; recall Ezra's reform. The 400 silent years between the Old Testament and the New Testament is the time when the canon is established: the Maccabeus books are an important history written, but generally, emphasis is on establishing and interpreting the canon, with emerging books being excluded. This is a time of Jewish expansion; although only about fifty thousand Jews return from exile, they have now grown to about 120, 000. The Persian rulers had been very tolerant towards the Jewish religion; under Greek pressure to adopt their culture, Jews reacted by revolt, withdrawal, and simply intermingling. The various sects begin to shape themselves.

Links:

[More Complete Chronology](#)

[Roman Contribution](#)

[Historian Herodotus](#)

[Ancient World Sources](#)

[Ancient Greeks](#)

[More Sources for Study of the Ancient Greeks](#)

The mythology of these surrounding civilizations is significant to patterns eventually emerging in Hebrew thinking and theology. Of course, an account can only be summative in the present undertaking. Students are well advised to equip themselves where they can with an understanding of this complex and formative foundation. From it stems religious thinking. I am not particularly disturbed by the notion that mythology contributes to, more strongly, shapes religious thinking; in fact, I'm radical enough in my thinking to allow for the possibility that the Infinite speaks a variety of languages to a diverse set of capacities for comprehending; is it not possible that the Infinite reveals itself in mythology every bit as much as it reveals itself in religion? Even more radically, is it possible God spoke to the ancients in the only way they could comprehend? Who ultimately is to define what the point of intersection between the infinite and finite is? Who would want to—and why? For what purposes? Aren't some things best left within the individual human heart and its experience of life?

In Canaan, the religion was formidable (See John Drane's *Introducing the Old Testament*, HarperSanFrancisco, 1987). Judges tells us quite decisively that the settlers here began almost immediately to serve Canaanite gods, but why were these gods so tempting? For the Canaanites, their gods controlled the weather and the fertility of fields and flocks; the Hebrews wanted this assurance. The Canaanite city-states demonstrably were capable of exacting the best from the land; their claim that they were able to do so as a result of their gods warranted at least consideration from the new settlers. They observed Canaanite rituals which magically attempted to cajole or bully the gods into making the fields fertile; prostitution in the temple for the Canaanites was an enactment of fertilization. The Hebrew Yahweh, however, revealed Himself in daily behavior to his people and demanded their absolute fidelity; there was no tolerance for other gods. Moral behavior rather than temple ritual was the absolute requirement. The Canaanite religion was completely a fertility myth: Baal, the weather god, was attacked by Mut, the god of barrenness and sterility. Baal's body, symbol of life and fertility, was scattered to the four corners of the earth. El, the father god and consort of the fertility goddess Asherah, lead the heavenly mourning for his son; the goddess of love and war, Anat, went out to take her revenge. Mut was cut, winnowed, burned, ground and scattered on the fields; Anat renewed Baal in a sexual relationship, and fertility for earth and its inhabitants was ensured for yet another year. The activities of the Canaanite gods personified the seasons and cycle of fertility. Baal died and returned to life by his lover. Celebrated was the annual death and rebirth of life. Not unlike worshippers of life and creation today, the Hebrew were tempted to worship what was evidence for Yahweh but not Yahweh; that is, they worshipped the natural world. This is the diurnal being of Wordsworth, the pantheism of the romantics. But Yahweh was the Creator, not the creation: "In the beginning, God created..." Yahweh was also not an abstraction; Yahweh was, in fact, beyond description, too sacred to have essence captured in language. In nature and history, in action, God related to humankind and was known in the relation and actions. Morality and justice are the fundamental concerns of the Old Testament Yahweh, not fertility; still, though, it must be admitted that this Yahweh was clearly understood to be the sustainer of life itself.

One possible approach to the winning over of Canaan is to see it conquered by the new moral and religious conviction of the Hebrews, more so than by military might. In the Canaanite religions, the gods existed for the sole purpose of preserving the existing order; in the Hebrew religion, Yahweh supported the individual and the oppressed and down-trodden. Canaan eventually became Israel, a people with a new moral conviction and the absolute law of Sinai followed by social and religious laws. After the death of Joshua, the situation became volatile—Israel struggled, the Canaanite population not being fully subdued, with a host of other invaders who also sought to carve out for themselves this territory.

When it comes to Babylonian mythology, certainly a similarity exists in the creation stories—but again, with the difference that the God in Genesis is a moral God; the Babylonian mythology, also, embraced the annual fertility cycle. The *Enumma Elish* celebrated the annual New Year Festival. In the beginning, they believed only primeval chaos existed, personified as Apsu and Tiamat. From these gods stemmed other gods representing the natural elements. The forces of chaos were subdued and order created. From the body of Tiamat, Marduk made one half into the solid sky and the other half into the earth. The gods were divided between heaven and earth, and humans became slaves of menial tasks for the gods.

God's control in Genesis is deliberate and purposeful—and creation is once rather than cyclical. The heavenly bodies are not deities but markers of day and night. Human beings are almost destroyed, not because they make too much noise as in the Babylonia epic but because they disobey; always in Genesis, Yahweh is one and absolute in demanding love and justice. The theme, par excellence, is that of responsible relationship—first to God and then to others. Humans are made in God's image and hence, they are of equal value and importance. Human sexuality is part of God's plan for harmony: one sex without the other is incomplete, and companionship is the ideal. Relationships are broken; human experience is marred by exploitation, disharmony, and suspicion. The delicate balance between people, nature, and God is broken when individuals try to become controllers of their own destiny.

It's clear that the high moral ideas recorded in the Old Testament build on a concept of justice going back to influencing civilizations—the Akkadians, Sumerians, Egyptians and others. This concept of justice goes back at least as far as the law code of Hammurabi of Babylon (about 1700 BCE). The covenant code, in fact, evidences similarity with such codes going back to the Bronze Age (1400 to 1200 BCE). The secular legal forms of the Hittites demonstrate many of the elements found in the Old Testament: the speaker in a political treaty, the king's reminder of what has been done in behalf of the people, the obligations, the written treaty, witnesses, and curses for disobedience and blessings for obedience.

The state resulting from Israel's covenant created a different social structure. No one in the state had any right to claim superiority to others; all had been slaves delivered by God's mercy. The ultimate responsibility of the citizen was to God alone; the ideal state was a theocracy—an ideal, by the way, which was short-lived in reality and moved to expectations within the future.

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# Chapter Four

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## Chapter Four: Themes and Sub-themes in the Bible

Probably one of the most interesting approaches to studying the Bible is thematic. While the Bible as a whole consists of historical narratives, biographies, autobiographies, poetic literature, prophetic messages, and letters addressed to churches and individuals, these writings evolved over long periods and were only later collected and arranged categorically according to subject matter. Each of the books evidences its own unity, but surprisingly, when read as an anthology, the anthology itself contains an amazing unity arising out of the overall dominant theme: relationship to God and to other human beings.

Reading the Bible as literature simply makes sense: first, it contains a variety of literary forms; as a book and a collection of books, it can be approached critically, as can any other literature; more importantly, though, the Bible must be read as literature for two reasons: its expression of truth through figurative language, especially symbols, and the unity of theme which connects the sixty-six books into one. Perhaps one other admission can be justified: no one should miss reading the Bible simply because in it one will discover a thorough explanation of the ways in which the infinite grasps the finite which is unparalleled in any other work. Concern with ultimacy permeates all of human endeavor.

All of the tools important to literary study are equally important to take to a reading of the Bible. Most Bible versions include a brief description of literary critical approaches; the New Oxford Annotated Bible, for example, includes a section entitled "Modern Approaches to Biblical Study" subdivided into literary criticism, form criticism, redaction criticism, traditional or historical criticism, and other ways of reading the text.

- Historical criticism--places literature in its original setting and seeks to understand original intention or

meaning.

- Textual criticism--focuses on the original and exact wording of a text and attempts to understand what changes have happened to the text in its transmission through the years.
- Redaction criticism--attempts to separate the work of editors from that of the original author and work. It shows when the editor becomes author and what view point or purpose is being expressed.
- Form criticism--tries to recreate the material in its original form, literary or oral.
- Hermeneutics--attempts to explain the meaning of a text or to interpret the text.

The most compelling reason for studying the bible as literature is its thematic unity, although this is contested by many who see inconsistencies in the overall story. In literature, theme is defined as a central idea. A distinction is normally made between nonfiction and fiction, poetry, and drama; the Bible, of course, is a unique blend of all these. In nonfiction, the theme is the general topic or subject of discourse; in poetry, fiction, and drama, it is the abstract concept that is made concrete through representation in person, action, and image. Put another way, a theme consists of the ideas and values that a literary work expresses. As one reads, an overall sense of form and meaning in the work begins to emerge; expectations begin to be confirmed or denied, modified or strengthened, until one settles on a final understanding or comes to some resolution.

All of the common subjects of literature are found in the Bible: individuals in nature, society, and relation to God and other humans; growth and initiation, time, death, and alienation are all important subjects. While it may be difficult at this remove from the original writings to determine how much of our interpretation is a culturally learned construct, it certainly is possible to trace some dominant and sub-themes in the Bible as we have inherited it. In fact, this is a fairly simple approach to interpretation. Some evidence exists that in the early years of Christianity, universal meanings actually could be read by the appropriately informed individuals to contain historical meaning and reference. For example, early Essene thought expected to see a new millennial kingdom connected with Herod. According to some, a baptism with water was historically the first level of an initiate's membership in this kingdom; the second level was initiation by wine, and so the interpretation runs: Jesus' changing water into wine was a socially radical move; it meant that the kingdom of God was equally accessible by all. A reading of themes at this level certainly requires special knowledge as well as holds some threat to traditional teachings, so we will settle for the simpler literary theme. In literature, a theme must make a direct or implied statement about a subject; the following are all common themes found in literature--and important in degree in the Bible, also, although the perspective of faith would certainly render them differently than herein stated:

- Nature is at war with individuals and proves our vulnerability.
  - People are out of place in nature and need technology to survive.
  - A human being is in harmony with Nature as the highest point of its evolution.
  - People are destroying nature and themselves with uncontrolled technology.
- 
- Society and a person's inner nature are always at war.
  - Social influences determine a person's final destiny.
  - Social influences can only complete inclinations formed by Nature.
  - A person's identity is determined by place in society.

- In spite of the pressure to be among people, an individual is essentially alone and frightened.
  - God is benevolent and will reward human beings for overcoming evil and temptation.
  - God mocks the individual and tortures him or her for presuming to be great.
  - God is jealous of and constantly thwarts human aspiration to power and knowledge.
  - God is indifferent toward human beings and lets them run their undetermined course.
  - There is no God in whom people can place their faith or yearning for meaning in the universe.
- 
- Marriage is a perpetual comedy bound to fail.
  - Marriage is a relationship in which each partner is supported and enabled to grow.
  - An old man marrying a young woman is destined to be a cuckold (a victim of adultery).
- 
- Parents should not sacrifice all for a better life for their children.
  - There are few friends who will make extreme sacrifices.
- 
- A boy or girl must go through a special trial or series of trials before maturing.
  - Manhood or womanhood is often established by an abrupt, random crisis, sometimes at an unusually early age.
  - Aspects of childhood are retained in all of us, sometimes hindering growth, sometimes providing the only joy in later life.
  - A person grows only in so far as he or she must face a crisis of confidence or identity.
- 
- Enjoy life now, for the present moment, because we all die too soon.
  - By the time we understand life, there is too little left to live.
  - Death is a part of living, giving life its final meaning.
  - There is no death, only a different plane or mode of life without physical decay.
  - Without love, death often appears to be the only alternative to life.
- 
- An individual is isolated from fellow human beings and foolishly tries to bridge the gaps.
  - Through alienation comes self-knowledge.
  - Modern culture is defective because it doesn't provide group ties which in primitive culture make alienation virtually impossible.

As I said earlier, the central theme of the Bible is that human beings are created by God in God's image (not in appearance, but in relationship and activity); this thread runs through all sixty-six books of the Bible, uniting them and providing an unparalleled explanation of what ultimately it means to be human and how humans should behave.

## Biblical Themes

### Mercy, Justice

The Bible as a whole tells the story of the relationship between the infinite and human beings. Its purpose is not primarily to record history or a scientific view of the universe. Rather, the Bible records a drama which is the story of God's dealings with human kind. Overall, the story is one in which human beings are allowed to multiply, diversify, and intersperse throughout the earth. The order of the universe is always threatened by disorder, a return to primeval chaos, and only Yahweh's blessing ensures continued existence. Through trials and tribulations (much is to be suffered), people move toward the horizon of God's future but not always willingly; they frequently rebel. The redemptive story is one in which both God's mercy and God's justice play together simultaneously, neither one very well understood by the fallible human creature. On an individual level, God's grace redeems the person; on the playing fields of time, however, justice is measured through generations and nations.

Understanding the two-fold nature of God causes difficulty for individuals first coming to grapple with concepts related to Bible study. While God in the Old Testament has many names, two must be accounted for in particular: Adonai and Elohim. These two names reflect two roles, not a division in Godhead. The roles are those of the compassionate and merciful God (Adonai) and the strict and just God (Elohim). These two roles are reflected throughout the entire anthology, both aspects functioning to describe the essence of God. Unfortunately, they become severely divided in the way many today approach a study of the Old and New Testaments: many see the God of the Old Testament as the God of justice and the God of the New Testament as the God of mercy. This failure to see a unity accounts in part for the severe separation today between people and religions, although I do not mean this statement to minimize real and important differences. On the other hand, most differences grow out of interpretation and the focusing on one aspect of God only. The Old Testament might, for example, be said to focus more on the metaphysical nature of God while the New Testament emphasizes God's physical nature. This separation can be useful, but if too narrowly insisted upon, it misses entirely the theological point that "the Lord your God is one."

### Readings: Jonah and Habakkuk

#### Related commentary

One of the supreme challenges the student faces in understanding the Bible at any level is language and its limitations. If we accept the existence of higher cognitive states, we also have to admit language is inadequate to describe them. Words exist as symbols, removing us from reality: if, for example, a circle exists in pure form, then we must distinguish the pure reality from the name, the definition, the representation, and knowledge of the circle that exists in the interior state. The fullness of reality as it exists and is experienced can never be fully expressed. In fact, the modern scientific age has largely despaired of questing for meaning on any level other than the literal, and all of us have been affected by this. We are centuries removed from the mythology and symbolism which permitted the ancients to express an Eternal which transcends shallow, one-dimensional experience.

Human Limitation: Tolerance for the Unknown

To read the Bible, students will need to suspend disbelief in the possibility of reaching knowledge of higher realities: to know the secrets of the kingdom of God (in Christianity), the hidden pattern of creation which underlies the foundation of the world. On the other hand, the student must also guard against a view which reduces everything to symbol, leaving nothing of the literal. The twin offenders in Bible study are the literalists and the allegorists: the former must be urged to remember that the nature of the alphabet and words buries them at the outset in an intricate symbolism; the allegorists, however, who wish to interpret everything as symbol must come to understand that the Bible unfolds an actual history and a story of real people, even when the person is sometimes viewed in type. Adam, for example, is humankind, but Adam is also Adam, a first human being, a real person.

Unity, Marriage**Hosea**

The idea of unity, one God, is, in fact, an old one: Xenophanes (half a millennium before Christ) spoke of one God; Maximus, at the time of Jesus, speaks of one God, king of all and father; for the Egyptians, the physical sun was a symbol of the one transcendent God; divinities were often associated with fertility, the vegetation cycle, and the power of resurrection and reanimation: The Babylonians represented superior gods as a whole number; the letters of both the Hebrew and Greek alphabet stood for numbers; a system evolved whereby number was regarded divine; Christian gnostics employed gematria and mathematics; the Greeks understood that creation required that Unity express itself in Diversity. The universe is both one and many, a unity and a multiplicity; ancient mythology reflected this organization and patterning in the universe in its sacred symbolism. Polytheism pointed to natural forces, calling them gods. In the sacred symbolism of Delphi, Apollo represents the principle of unity; Dionysus represents multiplicity; Apollo, recollection; Dionysus, manifestation.

A metaphor for unity which is found throughout the Bible is that of marriage. If the student understands that marriage stands for unity, it is then easy to see its counterpart, disunity, metaphorically described in metaphors of divorce and harlotry.

Genesis, in its opening, utopian state, places man and woman together in a garden: the relationship is, from the beginning, dialogical, man and woman; this two-foldness equals one aspect of the image of God. In fact, students are to understand that a complete parity exists between mortal marriage and marriage with Yahweh. The commandments urge that people are to have no other gods with its parallel on the human level that they are not to commit adultery. The Jerusalem Talmud links the commandments (the ten principles) in a partnership demonstrating a duality of obligations, to the Creator and to others. The idea that one's relationship to Yahweh is a love relationship carries with it the sense that marriage demands commitment and everlasting fidelity. In human relationships, we are told not to commit adultery; with God, we are to have no other gods. This faithfulness is, at bottom, the issue of the covenant relationship of God with people. The love relationship, sanctioned with marriage, is in the Old Testament the highest demonstration of love possible. Hebrew thinking is clear in its focus on God as Creator with human creation being the result of a tri-relationship: God, the creator; man and woman. To be created in God's

image, or likeness, is to be created for relationship (human to God and human to human) and to activity (the work of responsible relationship):

1.27: So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

This image has also been said to reflect the merciful and compassionate nature of God, with woman being the compassionate half and man the disciplinarian, although seeing either sex as simply this is a mistake. It is far better to focus on incompleteness and the need for relationship. The mystery of creation has always, in some way, been reflected in the mystery that two become one, and one becomes three. At the very pulse of life throbs, it would seem, the very busy work of uniting and dividing; I say work because work is activity: unity and division are concepts. Once again, roles begin to be seen in isolation to each other. Whether in religious or secular language, we become preoccupied with distinctions such as the person of thought and the person of action, failing to remember that we are at some time both. The philosopher David Hume pointed out that the person of speculation (thought--who retreats to the closet) is also the social human being, who must engage.

Chapter two picks up the story of generations:

5: And the LORD God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it.

16: And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat:

17: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.

18: And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him.

19: And out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof.

20: And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for Adam there was not found an help meet for him.

21: And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof;

22: And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man.

23: And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.

24: Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.

25: And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed.

Genesis, then, from the beginning, unfolds a story of relationship in its ideal state, its purpose is for generating and replenishing, but it's susceptibility to barrenness and brokenness. Something goes wrong almost immediately; humans begin to second-guess divine motive, and with the doubt comes the

temptation to break from the relationship. Both Adam and Eve now know their nakedness, their vulnerability; they become afraid and hide from God. Herein is the first broken relationship: that of the creature from the creator; one should not be surprised then to find that the next level of broken relationship is that between human and human. Even in their fallen state, Adam and Eve's union, with the help of God, results in life: Eve says, "I have produced a man with the help of the Lord" (4.1). By now, though, the story is one of mortality: beings of earth will return to earth (3.19), and even more sadly, they will hasten this end for each other: the first-born kills the second-born, and the age-old rivalry of human being to human being is born. And to this end, the saga of human life continues as a story of blood crying out from the ground.

A special people, a special land, a divine destiny: in Genesis, the universal story is particularized. That story is one of human striving and unrest, short-term evil but long-term good. The themes are promise and delayed fulfillment, fertility and barrenness, rest and unrest, life and death, knowledge and ignorance, hiding and revealing, presence and absence. Lonely heroes are provided cathartic release from the frustrating battle against death; death is overcome by community and law; stress is on morality and order; human beings must make it through a world of omnipresent death armed only with faith in themselves as created in the image of the divine, thus containing a spark of immortality itself.

The story of the patriarchs is the story of humanity: individuals punished for broken relationship and reduced to perpetual questioning of the eternal; an achieved intimacy with the Eternal through vision; significant individuals singled out to wrestle with but eventually perform the will of God; affliction in the short run and blessing in the eternal. At all points, we share this story: journeying always into the unknown, alienated sojourners in a strange land; always leaving and returning; facing death in our parents, ourselves and our children; yielding often to our parents' sighting of the way out through vision; discovering God's messengers intervening in innumerable manifestations and personalities; shaping and directing our lives always upon a promise, however remote or dimly understood. Like Abraham, we are often demanded to give up the past and all too often, subjected to despair of the future; in the span between past and present, we live our lives, as Eugene O'Neill has said, as interludes in the electrical display of God the Father, who comes to rescue. Played out in Genesis are all our tensions of fate and free will, destiny and choice. The cycle continues: visionaries and dreamers, we find God in every encounter and every human face. Genesis is the story of humankind. "Let everyone who hears say, 'Come.' Let everyone who wishes take the water of life as a gift" (Revelation 22.17).

If Genesis is the original picture of the possibility of mortal and divine unity, Revelation is the end picture--the end of human time and the beginning of God's time. The metaphor here, too, is that of marriage:

- 1: And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea.
- 2: And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.
- 3: And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.
- 4: And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor

crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.

5: And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful.

6: And he said unto me, It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely.

7: He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son.

8: But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.

9: And there came unto me one of the seven angels which had the seven vials full of the seven last plagues, and talked with me, saying, Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb's wife.

10: And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and shewed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God,

11: Having the glory of God: and her light was like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal;

12: And had a wall great and high, and had twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and names written thereon, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel:

13: On the east three gates; on the north three gates; on the south three gates; and on the west three gates.

14: And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

15: And he that talked with me had a golden reed to measure the city, and the gates thereof, and the wall thereof.

16: And the city lieth foursquare, and the length is as large as the breadth: and he measured the city with the reed, twelve thousand furlongs. The length and the breadth and the height of it are equal.

17: And he measured the wall thereof, an hundred and forty and four cubits, according to the measure of a man, that is, of the angel.

18: And the building of the wall of it was of jasper: and the city was pure gold, like unto clear glass.

19: And the foundations of the wall of the city were garnished with all manner of precious stones. The first foundation was jasper; the second, sapphire; the third, a chalcedony; the fourth, an emerald;

20: The fifth, sardonyx; the sixth, sardius; the seventh, chrysolite; the eighth, beryl; the ninth, a topaz; the tenth, a chrysoprasus; the eleventh, a jacinth; the twelfth, an amethyst.

21: And the twelve gates were twelve pearls; every several gate was of one pearl: and the street of the city was pure gold, as it were transparent glass.

22: And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it.

23: And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof.

24: And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it: and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour into it.

25: And the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day: for there shall be no night there.

26: And they shall bring the glory and honour of the nations into it.

27: And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life.

The prevalence of the marriage theme can be quickly determined by a simple search of the New

## Testament for the word marriage:

Mt:22:2: The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son,

Mt:22:4: Again, he sent forth other servants, saying, Tell them which are bidden, Behold, I have prepared my dinner: my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready: come unto the marriage.

Mt:22:9: Go ye therefore into the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage.

Mt:22:30: For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven.

Mt:24:38: For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noel entered into the ark,

Mt:25:10: And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut.

Mk:12:25: For when they shall rise from the dead, they neither marry, nor are given in marriage; but are as the angels which are in heaven.

Lk:17:27: They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noel entered into the ark, and the flood came, and destroyed them all.

Lk:20:34: And Jesus answering said unto them, The children of this world marry, and are given in marriage:

Lk:20:35: But they which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage:

Jn:2:1: And the third day there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee; and the mother of Jesus was there:

Jn:2:2: And both Jesus was called, and his disciples, to the marriage.

1Cor:7:38: So then he that giveth her in marriage doeth well; but he that giveth her not in marriage doeth better.

Rv:19:7: Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. Rv:19:9: And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he saith unto me, These are the true sayings of God.

## The Counter Metaphors: Harlotry, Divorce

Reading: Ezekiel 16 and 23; Hosea

### Hosea Notes

Disunity finds its metaphor in harlotry and divorce or lack of fidelity. Consider the following quick text search on harlot:

Gen:34:31: And they said, Should he deal with our sister as with an harlot?

Gen:38:15: When Judah saw her, he thought her to be an harlot; because she had covered her face.

Gen:38:21: Then he asked the men of that place, saying, Where is the harlot, that was openly by the way side? And they said, There was no harlot in this place.

Gen:38:22: And he returned to Judah, and said, I cannot find her; and also the men of the place said, that there was no harlot in this place.

Gen:38:24: And it came to pass about three months after, that it was told Judah, saying, Tamar thy daughter in law hath played the harlot; and also, behold, she is with child by whoredom. And Judah said, Bring her forth, and let her be burnt.

Lev:21:14: A widow, or a divorced woman, or profane, or an harlot, these shall he not take: but he shall take a virgin of his own people to wife.

Josh:2:1: And Joshua the son of Nun sent out of Shittim two men to spy secretly, saying, Go view the land, even Jericho. And they went, and came into an harlot's house, named Rahab, and lodged there.

Josh:6:17: And the city shall be accursed, even it, and all that are therein, to the LORD: only Rahab the harlot shall live, she and all that are with her in the house, because she hid the messengers that we sent.

Josh:6:22: But Joshua had said unto the two men that had spied out the country, Go into the harlot's house, and bring out thence the woman, and all that she hath, as ye sware unto her.

Josh:6:25: And Joshua saved Rahab the harlot alive, and her father's household, and all that she had; and she dwelleth in Israel even unto this day; because she hid the messengers, which Joshua sent to spy out Jericho.

Judg:11:1: Now Jephthah the Gileadite was a mighty man of valour, and he was the son of an harlot: and Gilead begat Jephthah.

Judg:16:1: Then went Samson to Gaza, and saw there an harlot, and went in unto her.

1Kgs:3:16: Then came there two women, that were harlots, unto the king, and stood before him.

Prov:7:10: And, behold, there met him a woman with the attire of an harlot, and subtle of heart.

Prov:29:3: Whoso loveth wisdom rejoiceth his father: but he that keepeth company with harlots spendeth his substance.

Isa:1:21: How is the faithful city become an harlot! it was full of judgment; righteousness lodged in it; but now murderers.

Isa:23:15: And it shall come to pass in that day, that Tyre shall be forgotten seventy years, according to the days of one king: after the end of seventy years shall Tyre sing as an harlot.

Isa:23:16: Take an harp, go about the city, thou harlot that hast been forgotten; make sweet melody, sing many songs, that thou mayest be remembered.

Jer:2:20: For of old time I have broken thy yoke, and burst thy bands; and thou saidst, I will not transgress; when upon every high hill and under every green tree thou wanderest, playing the harlot.

Jer:3:1: They say, If a man put away his wife, and she go from him, and become another man's, shall he return unto her again? shall not that land be greatly polluted? but thou hast played the harlot with many lovers; yet return again to me, saith the LORD. Jer:3:6: The LORD said also unto me in the days of Josiah the king, Hast thou seen that which backsliding Israel hath done? she is gone up upon every high mountain and under every green tree, and there hath played the harlot.

Jer:3:8: And I saw, when for all the causes whereby backsliding Israel committed adultery I had put her away, and given her a bill of divorce; yet her treacherous sister Judah feared not, but went and played the harlot also.

Jer:5:7: How shall I pardon thee for this? thy children have forsaken me, and sworn by them that are no gods: when I had fed them to the full, they then committed adultery, and assembled themselves by troops in the harlots' houses.

Ezek:16:15: But thou didst trust in thine own beauty, and playedst the harlot because of thy renown, and pouredst out thy fornications on every one that passed by; his it was.

Ezek:16:16: And of thy garments thou didst take, and deckedst thy high places with divers colours, and playedst the harlot thereupon: the like things shall not come, neither shall it be so.

Ezek:16:28: Thou hast played the whore also with the Assyrians, because thou wast unsatiable; yea, thou hast played the harlot with them, and yet couldest not be satisfied.

Ezek:16:31: In that thou buildest thine eminent place in the head of every way, and makest thine high place in every street; and hast not been as an harlot, in that thou scornest hire;

Ezek:16:35: Wherefore, O harlot, hear the word of the LORD:

Ezek:16:41: And they shall burn thine houses with fire, and execute judgments upon thee in the sight of many women: and I will cause thee to cease from playing the harlot, and thou also shalt give no hire any more.

Ezek:23:5: And Aholah played the harlot when she was mine; and she doted on her lovers, on the Assyrians her neighbours,

Ezek:23:19: Yet she multiplied her whoredoms, in calling to remembrance the days of her youth, wherein she had played the harlot in the land of Egypt.

Ezek:23:44: Yet they went in unto her, as they go in unto a woman that playeth the harlot: so went they in unto Aholah and unto Aholibah, the lewd women.

Hosea:2:5: For their mother hath played the harlot: she that conceived them hath done shamefully: for she said, I will go after my lovers, that give me my bread and my water, my wool and my flax, mine oil and my drink.

Hosea:3:3: And I said unto her, Thou shalt abide for me many days; thou shalt not play the harlot, and thou shalt not be for another man: so will I also be for thee.

Hosea:4:14: I will not punish your daughters when they commit whoredom, nor your spouses when they commit adultery: for themselves are separated with whores, and they sacrifice with harlots: therefore the people that doth not understand shall fall.

Hosea:4:15: Though thou, Israel, play the harlot, yet let not Judah offend; and come not ye unto Gilgal, neither go ye up to Beth-aven, nor swear, The LORD liveth.

Joel:3:3: And they have cast lots for my people; and have given a boy for an harlot, and sold a girl for wine, that they might drink.

Amos:7:17: Therefore thus saith the LORD; Thy wife shall be an harlot in the city, and thy sons and thy daughters shall fall by the sword, and thy land shall be divided by line; and thou shalt die in a polluted land: and Israel shall surely go into captivity forth of his land.

Micah:1:7: And all the graven images thereof shall be beaten to pieces, and all the hires thereof shall be burned with the fire, and all the idols thereof will I lay desolate: for she gathered it of the hire of an harlot, and they shall return to the hire of an harlot.

Nahum:3:4: Because of the multitude of the whoredoms of the wellfavoured harlot, the mistress of witchcrafts, that selleth nations through her whoredoms, and families through her witchcrafts.

While divorce doesn't yield the richness of harlotry, it's still clearly an undesired disunity:

Lev:21:14: A widow, or a divorced woman, or profane, or an harlot, these shall he not take: but he shall take a virgin of his own people to wife.

Lev:22:13: But if the priest's daughter be a widow, or divorced, and have no child, and is returned unto her father's house, as in her youth, she shall eat of her father's meat: but there shall no stranger eat thereof.

Num:30:9: But every vow of a widow, and of her that is divorced, wherewith they have bound their souls, shall stand against her.

Deut:24:1: When a man hath taken a wife, and married her, and it come to pass that she find no favour in his eyes, because he hath found some uncleanness in her: then let him write her a bill of divorcement, and give it in her hand, and send her out of his house.

Deut:24:3: And if the latter husband hate her, and write her a bill of divorcement, and giveth it in her hand, and sendeth her out of his house; or if the latter husband die, which took her to be his wife;

Isa:50:1: Thus saith the LORD, Where is the bill of your mother's divorcement, whom I have put away? or which of my creditors is it to whom I have sold you? Behold, for your iniquities have ye sold yourselves, and for your transgressions is your mother put away.

Jer:3:8: And I saw, when for all the causes whereby backsliding Israel committed adultery I had put her away, and given her a bill of divorce; yet her treacherous sister Judah feared not, but went and played the harlot also.

How far Israel (the Northern ten tribes) and Judah (the Southern two tribes) strayed from unity, keeping the Abrahamic covenant, is clearly captured in the metaphors of divorce in Isaiah, adultery in Jeremiah, and harlotry. Students may not like the metaphor and even perhaps find it offensive, but they must understand it grew out of a culture which valued patriarchal lineage and right relationship. It's true that monogamy was not initially the rule; in fact, the entire tradition of the handmaiden who stepped in for the barren wife placed a premium on the succession of lineage, a succession which was threatened by the possibility of extinction. Humans had to learn, however, that the creation as well as the sustaining of life was a gift of God, although the story of humankind has always been that of self-sustaining effort. Abraham's faith, you will recall, was sorely tested when he was asked to sacrifice his miracle son of old age, his one hope for posterity. The story of Israel collectively is told in Malachi:

2; 14 Because the Lord was a witness between you and the wife of your youth to whom you have been faithless, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant.

15: Did not one God make her? Both flesh and spirit are his. And what does the one God desire? Godly offspring. So, look to yourselves, and do not let anyone be faithless to the wife of his youth.

16: For I hate divorce, says the Lord, the God of Israel, and covering one's garments with violence, says the Lord of hosts. So take heed to yourselves and do not be faithless.

### Sibling Rivalry: First-born, Second-born, Jews and Christians

The story of sibling rivalry begins in the first family when brother rises, in the extreme, against brother:

8 Cain said to his brother Abel, "Let us go out to the field." † And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel, and killed him. 9 Then the LORD said to Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?" He said, "I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?" 10 And the LORD said, "What have you done? Listen; your brother's blood is crying out to me from the ground! 11 And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand (4).

An interesting refrain is then sounded: 16 Then Cain went away from the presence of the LORD, and settled in the land of Nod, † east of Eden. This is an echo of what happened with Cain's parents: 8 They heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden (4). In both cases, the broken relationship between human and God is indicated by a going away or hiding from the presence of God.

Here, first born slays the second born child, spilling the sacred blood: 4.10–11: Blood is sacred to God, for it is the seat of life (Deuteronomy 12.23) and cries from the ground for vindication. The Jerusalem Talmud in paralleling the commandments relative to our obligations to God and to humans links the "I am the Lord your God" to "You shall not murder." Without God, separated from order and subject to lawlessness, humans find they are capable of any action. Relationship to God, however, brings about a responsibility to relate to human beings differently. Without God, anything is possible and can be rationalized; I killed for this reason or that. With God, however, individuals are committed to a relationship demanding responsibility to each other. We become our brother's keeper.

This pattern is to continue; we know the story: humans became progressively more rebellious.

5 The LORD saw that the wickedness of humankind was great in the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually. 6 And the LORD was sorry that he had made humankind on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. 7 So the LORD said, "I will blot out from the earth the human beings I have created—people together with animals and creeping things and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them." 8 But Noah found favor in the sight of the LORD (6).

Interestingly, this progressive evil is the condition of mortals, who have interfaced with the Divine but did not become divine. They remain flesh, subject to the conditions of flesh. They have, however, gained a

knowledge of good and evil; they do not live merely in the objective world where fact is fact, true or false. They now know "ought." To know what they ought to do, however, does not mean they will do it; and to become evil is to choose human desire over obedience (faithfulness) to God's command. That is, humans continue to flee the presence of God or to break relationship and to become unfaithful. One man is, however, faithful; Noah is saved when others are destroyed. Immediately, when Noah steps from the ark, he is reminded of what humankind's appropriate relationship to others is:

4 "Only, you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood. 5 For your own lifeblood I will surely require a reckoning: from every animal I will require it and from human beings, each one for the blood of another, I will require a reckoning for human life.

6 Whoever sheds the blood of a human,  
by a human shall that person's blood be shed;  
for in his own image  
God made humankind.

7 And you, be fruitful and multiply, abound on the earth and multiply in it" (9)

God affirms that human life (blood) is sacred and that life is not to be taken.

Nonetheless, the pattern of broken relationship continues, and bloodshed continues. We remember that younger brother Jacob, who steals his older brother Esau's birthright, flees because he is afraid. Esau forgives his brother, (Jacob sees his face as the face of God), but the history of the two peoples created is one of rivalry and bloodshed. Esau goes to the Ishmaelites (recall the sons of Abraham: Ishmael by Hagar and Isaac by Sarah), a people whom the Islamic people trace their lineage; Jacob, on the other hand, marries among his father's people (28). When Jacob reunites with his brother, it is a union with one who comes from the land of Edom (32).

### The Birth and Youth of Esau and Jacob

19 These are the descendants of Isaac, Abraham's son: Abraham was the father of Isaac, 20 and Isaac was forty years old when he married Rebekah, daughter of Bethuel the Aramean of Paddan-aram, sister of Laban the Aramean. 21 Isaac prayed to the LORD for his wife, because she was barren; and the LORD granted his prayer, and his wife Rebekah conceived. 22 The children struggled together within her; and she said, "If it is to be this way, why do I live?" † So she went to inquire of the LORD. 23 And the LORD said to her,

"Two nations are in your womb,  
and two peoples born of you shall be divided;  
the one shall be stronger than the other,  
the elder shall serve the younger."

24 When her time to give birth was at hand, there were twins in her womb. 25 The first came out red, all his body like a hairy mantle; so they named him Esau. 26 Afterward his brother came out, with his hand gripping Esau's heel; so he was named Jacob. † Isaac was sixty years old when she bore them.

27 When the boys grew up, Esau was a skillful hunter, a man of the field, while Jacob was a quiet man, living in tents. 28 Isaac loved Esau, because he was fond of game; but Rebekah loved Jacob (25).

We might note here, among other things, that Jacob's name means he takes by the heel, that he supplants. Before his name change to Israel, Jacob may very well be seen as the man of passivity while Esau is activity itself, the hunter, the man of the field. In other respects, we see the rowdy and the quiet. Is there a propensity on the part of the male to prefer the rowdy and the female to prefer the quiet and introspective?

Consider the following long excerpt from the Oxford Companion to the Bible; it shows the violence which ensues between Judah and Edom, or with respect to our current theme, the human failure to refrain from shedding human blood:

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Edom. A kingdom that neighbored Judah on its southeastern border during the Iron Age. It encompassed the area southward from the Wadi Hesa in Jordan to the Gulf of Aqaba, and, during part of this period, included the area called Seir, southwest of the Dead Sea and south of Kadesh-barnea (see Map 1:Y7).

Very little is known about Edom. Virtually no Edomite inscriptions have been found, apart from some seals and a few ostraca. The primary literary source for the history of Edom is the Bible, but only the barest outline can be constructed from that source. Some information comes from Assyrian records, and archaeological excavations and surveys have enabled a general picture of the development of the region to be sketched.

The early development of Edom remains largely unknown. The stories in Genesis that describe family relationships between Israel's ancestors and those of all the surrounding kingdoms are generally understood to be artificial. For Edom this is particularly clear, since the connection between Isaac's brother Esau and Edom is tenuous and awkward in the narratives of Genesis 25.19–34 and is almost certainly a later imposition on the stories.

Archaeological surveys indicate that the land of Edom was occupied fairly sparsely during the Late Bronze Age (ca. 1550–1200 BCE), with only a few small fortified towns and some tiny villages. The geographic name Edom appears for the first time in an Egyptian document of the thirteenth century BCE.

Numbers 20.14–21 suggests that Edom was already a monarchy at the time of the Exodus in the thirteenth century. Recent studies, however, have cast considerable doubt about the historicity of this and related stories. Even the so-called Edomite king list in Genesis 36.31–39 has been shown to be garbled and unreliable.

Saul is said to have fought Edom successfully (1 Samuel 14.47), but it was David who conquered it and incorporated it into his empire, setting up garrisons throughout the land (2 Samuel 8.14). Although a certain Hadad tried to rebel against Solomon, he does not appear to have been successful (1 Kings 11.14–

22). Edom remained under Israelite control, ruled by an Israelite governor until the reign of Jehoram of Judah in the mid-ninth century (2 Kings 8.20). At that time the Edomites successfully rebelled and set up their own king.

During the reigns of Amaziah of Judah (797–769) and Uzziah (769–734) Edom again came under Judean domination. Uzziah recaptured and rebuilt Elath on the Gulf of Aqaba early in his reign. But in the reign of Ahaz Edom decisively threw off Judean control and remained independent of Judah from that time on.

In Judah's place, however, came Assyrian domination, but as was the case also for Ammon and Moab, the Assyrian presence appears to have been economically and politically beneficial to Edom. Excavations at Buseira (probably the Edomite capital Bozrah), Tawilan, and Tell el-Kheleifeh (Elath), show that the late eighth through the mid-sixth centuries BCE saw the peak of Edomite prosperity and expansion. It is from these centuries that monumental architecture is known, and there are indications that Edom expanded its influence into the southern hinterlands of Judah.

Edom seems to have survived the violence of the Babylonian campaigns under Nebuchadnezzar, and, although Buseira, Tawilan, and other sites suffered destruction later in the sixth century, the region recovered and continued to play a role in international trade during the Persian period. With the rise of the Nabateans, a significant proportion of the Edomites seem to have moved westward, so that, by the Hellenistic period, Idumea (the Greek form of Edom) was the name of the region directly to the south of Judah (Map 10:W-X5–6; see 1 Maccabees 4.29). The most famous Idumean was Herod the Great. Attested Edomite names suggest that the Edomites worshiped the well-known West Semitic gods, Hadad/Baal and El. But it appears that the primary deity of Edom was a god named Qaus/Qos. Little is known of this god, and even his basic characteristics (is he a war god or a storm god?) are debated. Some scholars have speculated that in the late second/early first millennium BCE, Yahweh may have been an important deity in Edomite religion, since a few biblical passages link Yahweh closely with Edom and Seir (Judges 5.4; Deuteronomy 33.2; Habakkuk 3.3).

Although Deuteronomy 23.8 expresses a tolerant attitude toward the Edomites, most biblical passages dealing with the kingdom display a severe hostility toward it, reflecting the almost constant conflict between Judah and Edom. Considerable bitterness is evident in the biblical texts concerning Edom's attitudes and actions after the destruction of Jerusalem in 587/586 BCE (see, e.g., Jeremiah 49.7–22; Obadiah 1; Isaiah 34). Edom, in fact, became a symbol of Israel's enemies in postexilic literature.

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As is so often the case in the Old Testament, the picture of Jacob and Esau's relationship is also a picture, in microcosm, of human relationship: tenuous, violent, and filled with bloodshed. To see how this relationship played out in time, students need to read Romans, for a Christian perspective, and Hebrews for the Hebrew-Christian perspective. An analogy must be understood: as Jacob, the first-born, stole his brother's birthright, so have Christians stolen the birthright of the Hebrews. The Old Testament, though, is clear: Abraham was to become the father of nations.

17 When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abram, and said to him, "I am God Almighty; † walk before me, and be blameless. 2 And I will make my covenant between me and you, and will make you exceedingly numerous." 3 Then Abram fell on his face; and God said to him, 4 "As for me, this is my covenant with you: You shall be the ancestor of a multitude of nations. 5 No longer shall your name be Abram, † but your name shall be Abraham; † for I have made you the ancestor of a multitude of nations (17).

Christians have enjoyed the Hebrew birthright; Paul argues, however, that no distinction exists: 12 For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him. 13 For, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved " (10). This conclusion, though, follows an earlier argument:

6 It is not as though the word of God had failed. For not all Israelites truly belong to Israel, 7 and not all of Abraham's children are his true descendants; but "It is through Isaac that descendants shall be named for you." 8 This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as descendants. 9 For this is what the promise said, "About this time I will return and Sarah shall have a son." 10 Nor is that all; something similar happened to Rebecca when she had conceived children by one husband, our ancestor Isaac. 11 Even before they had been born or had done anything good or bad (so that God's purpose of election might continue, 12 not by works but by his call) she was told, "The elder shall serve the younger."

Paul is clear in his understanding that the children of promise are first the Hebrew people:

13 Now I am speaking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I glorify my ministry 14 in order to make my own people † jealous, and thus save some of them. 15 For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead! 16 If the part of the dough offered as first fruits is holy, then the whole batch is holy; and if the root is holy, then the branches also are holy.

17 But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, a wild olive shoot, were grafted in their place to share the rich root † of the olive tree, 18 do not boast over the branches. If you do boast, remember that it is not you that support the root, but the root that supports you. 19 You will say, "Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in." 20 That is true. They were broken off because of their unbelief, but you stand only through faith. So do not become proud, but stand in awe. 21 For if God did not spare the natural branches, perhaps he will not spare you. † 22 Note then the kindness and the severity of God: severity toward those who have fallen, but God's kindness toward you, provided you continue in his kindness; otherwise you also will be cut off. 23 And even those of Israel, † if they do not persist in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God has the power to graft them in again. 24 For if you have been cut from what is by nature a wild olive tree and grafted, contrary to nature, into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these natural branches be grafted back into their own olive tree.

The Jew of today traces this failure of which Paul speaks to the Ishmaelites, finding the offspring of Isaac faithful in pursuing God's promise of a restored Eden (and Messiah) at the end of the ages ( a time often given as six thousand years, with the current millennium being the last).

The point being made is simply that the second-born, the Christian, seems to be enjoying the birthright of the first-born, the Hebrew. This is the analogy on which much of the New Testament works. The Jew argues the law must be fulfilled without relinquishing any aspect of it; the Christian argues that the law was fulfilled in Christ. Their differences are many, but at bottom, the old antagonism, the old sibling rivalry, is being maintained while the universal brotherhood of the family of God is being underplayed. While the New Testament contains much anti-Semitism, at its best, it is egalitarian in the extension of God's outreach to humankind. The Talmud teaches that all nations have a share in the Word to Come. That is, God's Kingdom will come when God will be One God for the entire world. This is, perhaps, prefigured in the utterance of Cyrus: "All the kingdoms of the earth hath the Lord, the God of heaven, given me." In the meantime, though, a conflict continues to exist: Christians urge "Believe" while Jews say "Act." Both sets of people see themselves as catalysts for the rest of the world. In creed and deed, though, truth lies: relationship demands both.

Romans

Hebrews

### The Garden and the City

The Old Testament story begins in a garden; the New Testament story ends with the descension of a city, New Jerusalem. This movement underlines another theme which exists as a unifying force in the Bible as a whole. Generally, the garden--as in literature, generally--represents ideal existence. It is a place of unity, wholeness, vision, peace, relationship with God, absence of pain. This is also the Messianic vision. In one sense, then, the Bible story is told utopia to utopia. This is the vision which I have frequently referred to as God's world. What history seems to be then is, in one sense, an interlude of rebellion, alienation, suffering and pain. Existential literature tells us we exist as strangers to ourselves; the story of Abraham, our story in miniature, is that of sojourner in a strange land. But before Abram was promise--a promised land, not fully realized, for, as Hebrews tells the story, they rebelled:

"Today, if you hear his voice,  
do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion."

16 Now who were they who heard and yet were rebellious? Was it not all those who left Egypt under the leadership of Moses? 17 But with whom was he angry forty years? Was it not those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? 18 And to whom did he swear that they would not enter his rest, if not to those who were disobedient? 19 So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief (3).

Actually, an astounding parallel exists between Genesis and Revelation: The closing chapters of Revelation contain a striking contrast to the opening chapters of Genesis. Genesis speaks of the creation of the sun, the entrance of sin into the world, the pronouncement of the curse, Satan's triumph, and the exclusion from the "tree of life." Revelation tells of a place where there will be no need of the sun, where sin is banished, where the curse is gone, Satan is overthrown, and admission is given to the "tree of life."

What needs to be understood clearly is that the descending city is the City of God; its parallel on the human level is Babylon, the city of the fallen. It's no accident that the city is, on earth, the counterpart to the garden. The city is a place where human beings have located themselves with respect to each other,

combining themselves in their aspirations, but apart from God, the story is tragic, and the city all too often in literature is seen as a place of vice and corruption; we hear Jesus lament this earthly city Jerusalem in Luke:

34 Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! 35 See, your house is left to you. And I tell you, you will not see me until the time comes when † you say, 'Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.' "

The story of the prodigal son, although he goes to a far country and nowhere is it said he goes to a city, is the story so often told of the young and the initiation into adulthood responsibility:

11 Then Jesus † said, "There was a man who had two sons. 12 The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.' So he divided his property between them. 13 A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and traveled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. 14 When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. 15 So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. 16 He would gladly have filled himself with † the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. 17 But when he came to himself he said, 'How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! 18 I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; 19 I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands." ' 20 So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. 21 Then the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' † 22 But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. 23 And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; 24 for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!' And they began to celebrate (Luke 15).

For some, this is the New Testament parallel of the Old Testament Ishmael- Isaac story. It is clearly here the story of the choice made by a first-born son, and it carries with it the idea of choosing immediate gratification over reward which is to come after time and to be the result of responsible relationship.

For the story of what the city is, we need to follow the history of Babylon; let me provide this history from the Oxford Companion:

Babylon (Map 2:H4). Babylon is the rendering of Akkadian Babilum (Babilim), the city that for centuries served as capital of the "land of Babylon" (Jeremiah 50.28). Cuneiform sources interpret its name as bŒEilim, "gate of the deity." The Bible rejected this popular etymology in favor of a more scurrilous one that linked the name to the confusion of tongues (Genesis 11.9, Hebr. bŒElal, "[God] confused"), and so the city is called Babel.

Not until around 1900 BCE did an independent dynasty establish itself at Babylon. Like most of their

contemporaries, its rulers bore Amorite (Northwest Semitic) names, but unlike some of them, they enjoyed lengthy reigns, passing the succession from father to son without a break; this may have helped Babylon survive its rivals in the period of warring states (ca. 1860–1760 BCE). Under the adroit Hammurapi (ca. 1792–1750 BCE), Babylon succeeded in restoring the unity of Mesopotamia under its own hegemony.

Babylon's triumph was short-lived, though: under its next king, Samsu-iluna (ca. 1749–1712 BCE), the extreme south was lost to the new Sealand Dynasty and the north to the Kassites at Hana. About 1600 BCE, the city itself was sacked by an invading army of Hittites from distant Anatolia (modern Turkey), and these rivals took it over, the Sealander only briefly, but the Kassites for almost half a millennium (ca. 1590–1160 BCE).

It remained for the Second Dynasty of Isin (ca. 1156–1025 BCE) to restore Babylon to its earlier prominence. The recapture of the cult statue of Marduk from Elamite captivity by Nebuchadnezzar I (ca. 1124–1103 BCE) probably capped this development. Babylon was henceforth regarded as the heir to the millennial traditions of the ancient Sumerian centers of cult and culture. Marduk, the local patron deity of Babylon, was endowed with the attributes of the ancient Sumerian deities of those centers—notably Enki of Eridu and Enlil of Nippur—and exalted to the head of the pantheon. This exaltation was celebrated in new compositions such as *enma elish* ("when above"; conventionally known as the "Babylonian Epic of Creation") and can be compared in certain respects with the exaltation of the God of Israel as celebrated in the roughly contemporary Song of the Sea (Exodus 15).

In the early first millennium, Babylon could not sustain a military and political posture to match these cultural and religious pretensions, and it gradually declined into the status of a vassal state to Assyria, the powerful neighbor to the north. Occasional alliances with Elam in the east or, notably under Marduk-apal-iddina II (the biblical Merodach-baladan), with Judah in the west (2 Kings 20.12–19; cf. Isaiah 39), provided brief periods of precarious independence. The city was devastated by the Assyrian king Sennacherib (704–681 BCE) not long after his abortive siege of Jerusalem in 701 BCE (2 Kings 18.13–19.37; cf. Isaiah 36–37). It was restored by that king's son and successor Esarhaddon (680–669 BCE), only to be caught up again in the violent civil war (652–648 BCE) between the two sons of Esarhaddon that pitted Shamash-shum-ukin of Babylonia against Assurbanipal of Assyria. The resultant weakening of the Assyrian empire no doubt helped clear the path for the accession of the last and in some ways greatest Babylonian dynasty, that of the Chaldeans, sometimes referred to as the Tenth Babylonian Dynasty (625–539 BCE).

With this restoration, Babylon ranked as one of the major cities, indeed, in Greek eyes, as one or even two of the seven wonders of the ancient world, by virtue of its walls in some accounts and invariably for its famous "hanging gardens." The gardens were more likely the work of Marduk-apal-iddina II than of Nebuchadnezzar II (as claimed by Berossos in one Hellenistic tradition), but the latter certainly rebuilt the city most grandly during his forty-four-year reign (605–562 BCE). He is remembered in biblical historiography as the conqueror of Jerusalem in 597 and 587/586 BCE (2 Kings 24–25; cf. 2 Chronicles 36). The biblical record is supported and supplemented by the Babylonian Chronicle and other cuneiform documents. But the stories told in the book of Daniel about Nebuchadnezzar (especially Daniel 4), as well as about Belshazzar (Daniel 5), should rather be referred to Nabonidus, who proved to be not only the last king of the dynasty (555–539 BCE) but the last ruler of any independent polity in Babylon. The city surrendered to Cyrus the Persian in a bloodless takeover and thereafter, while continuing as a metropolis of the successive Achaemenid, Seleucid, and Parthian empires, ceased to play an independent role in ancient politics.

In the Bible, Babylon plays a dual role, positively as the setting for a potentially creative diaspora, negatively as a metaphor for certain forms of degeneracy. The "Babylonian exile" imposed by Nebuchadnezzar on the Judeans removed the center of Jewish life to Babylon for fifty or sixty years, if not the seventy predicted by the prophet Jeremiah (Jeremiah 29.10; cf. 2 Chronicles 36.21). The exiled king Jehoiachin was released from prison by Nebuchadnezzar's son and successor Amel-Marduk, the Evil-merodach of 2 Kings 25.27 (cf. Jeremiah 52.31), and provided for from the royal stores, as indicated also by cuneiform sources. Jeremiah wrote to the exiles in God's name, advising them to enjoy the positive aspects of life in Babylon and to pray for its welfare (Jeremiah 29.4–7; contrast Psalm 122.6). Ezekiel lived among the exiles and prepared them for the restoration, while Second Isaiah welcomed the arrival of Cyrus (Isaiah 44.28–45.1), which paved the way for the return of those exiles who chose to accept his proclamation (2 Chronicles 36.22f; Ezra 1.1–3).

Under Persian rule, Babylon continued to flourish as the seat of one of the most important satrapies of the Persian empire (cf. Ezra 7.16; Daniel 2.49; etc.), and the Achaemenid Artaxerxes I could still be called "king of Babylon" (Nehemiah 13.6). The Jews who chose to remain there enjoyed considerable prosperity, as indicated by business documents from nearby Nippur in which individuals identified as Judeans or bearing Jewish names (in Hebrew or Aramaic) engage in various agricultural and commercial activities. The foundations were thus laid for the creative role that Babylonia was to play in the Jewish life of the postbiblical period.

The Bible also reflects a negative view of Babylon. Already in the primeval history, the tower of Babel (Genesis 11.1–9) uses the traditional ziggurat present in each city of Sumer as a metaphor for the excesses of human ambition that led to, and accounted for, the confusion of tongues and dispersion of peoples. The Psalmists emphasized the negative aspects of exile (Psalm 137), and the fall of the "arrogant" city (Jeremiah 50.31) and "its sinners" (Isaiah 13.9) was predicted confidently, even gleefully, by the prophets. In the New Testament, Babylon became the epitome of wickedness (Revelation 17.5) and a symbolic name for Rome (Revelation 17–18; cf. 1 Peter 5.13).

A search of Babylon will return almost four hundred hits, and in that will be discovered an array of shortcomings; 2 Esdras, however, points out that Babylon's sins are those of humankind in extreme, comparing to it, the sins of the people of God's city, Zion:

20 "Yet you did not take away their evil heart from them, so that your law might produce fruit in them. 21 For the first Adam, burdened with an evil heart, transgressed and was overcome, as were also all who were descended from him. 22 Thus the disease became permanent; the law was in the hearts of the people along with the evil root; but what was good departed, and the evil remained. 23 So the times passed and the years were completed, and you raised up for yourself a servant, named David. 24 You commanded him to build a city for your name, and there to offer you oblations from what is yours. 25 This was done for many years; but the inhabitants of the city transgressed, 26 in everything doing just as Adam and all his descendants had done, for they also had the evil heart. 27 So you handed over your city to your enemies.

Babylon Compared with Zion<sup>28</sup> "Then I said in my heart, Are the deeds of those who inhabit Babylon any

better? Is that why it has gained dominion over Zion? 29 For when I came here I saw ungodly deeds without number, and my soul has seen many sinners during these thirty years. † And my heart failed me, 30 because I have seen how you endure those who sin, and have spared those who act wickedly, and have destroyed your people, and protected your enemies, 31 and have not shown to anyone how your way may be comprehended. † Are the deeds of Babylon better than those of Zion? 32 Or has another nation known you besides Israel? Or what tribes have so believed the covenants as these tribes of Jacob? 33 Yet their reward has not appeared and their labor has borne no fruit. For I have traveled widely among the nations and have seen that they abound in wealth, though they are unmindful of your commandments. 34 Now therefore weigh in a balance our iniquities and those of the inhabitants of the world; and it will be found which way the turn of the scale will incline. 35 When have the inhabitants of the earth not sinned in your sight? Or what nation has kept your commandments so well? 36 You may indeed find individuals who have kept your commandments, but nations you will not find" (3).

The sins of Babylon are the sins of arrogance, the worship of other gods, drunkenness, and sexual excess, among the many other sins of which human beings are capable. Babylon, much like Nineveh, is simply a very populous city inhabited by the enemies of the Hebrews; for this same reason, Revelation makes clear its condemnation of the city for its idolatry, using the metaphor of infidelity:

17 Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the judgment of the great whore who is seated on many waters, 2 with whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication, and with the wine of whose fornication the inhabitants of the earth have become drunk." 3 So he carried me away in the spirit † into a wilderness, and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was full of blasphemous names, and it had seven heads and ten horns. 4 The woman was clothed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and jewels and pearls, holding in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the impurities of her fornication; 5 and on her forehead was written a name, a mystery: "Babylon the great, mother of whores and of earth's abominations." 6 And I saw that the woman was drunk with the blood of the saints and the blood of the witnesses to Jesus (17).

## The Divided Self

If human responsibility is vertically to God and horizontally to others, students should be reminded that relationship can go wrong in another way, too: failure to realize our own potential. Benjamin Blech in Understanding Judaism points out the three mechanisms of relationship: prayer (God), charity (people), and repentance (self--a breaking away from the past and a returning to God); Jacob epitomizes this move (Blech 109). Blech also describes this movement to one's core or essence. A relationship exists here of body to soul; it is not the dichotomizing relationship found in Paul in the New Testament, where spirit and flesh are placed in opposition to each other. Of course, Paul points out merely the result of relationships which have become disharmonious. The goal for both Christian and Hebrew is to merge body and soul, flesh and spirit, earth and heaven (Blech 162). In some ways, what must be remembered is that the ideal has not been reached when disunity is present. Nonetheless, this disunity is prevalent everywhere in our study of both the Old and New Testament: we find it in the polarity of gender emphasizing male-female

differences, age pitting younger brother against older; the same principle is playing in the polarization of the spiritual-earthly, old-new, law-grace, individual-society. What complicates the scheme, however, is the positive-negative attributes which can be attributed to the same entity.

Following the themes of relationship and unity, we have looked at woman and the negative metaphor of infidelity and the whore. How complicated the symbolism can become can be seen if one looks at feminine symbolism in general. The Oxford Companion provides a summary of negative symbolism:

**Negative Views of Women.** Women in the Bible are generally less important than men and subject to male authority, but paradoxically women are also very powerful in one respect, their seductive persuasiveness. The Bible singles out foreign women as dangerous, liable to lead their partners away from exclusive Yahwism (Deuteronomy 7.1–4; Deuteronomy 23.17–18; Numbers 25; 1 Kings 11.1–6; Ezekiel 8.14–15; Ezra 9.2–10.44; Nehemiah 13.23–27). The Bible condemns Phoenician Jezebel for persuading Ahab to neglect the Israelite covenant with Yahweh (1 Kings 16.31–33; 1 Kings 21). Canaanite Rahab (Joshua 2.9–11) and Ruth the Moabite are exceptions as good foreign women who take Yahweh as their God. The opposite phenomenon—Israelite women led to apostasy by foreign men—is addressed only metaphorically, when Israel is personified as an adulterous wife who has been unfaithful to her husband, Yahweh (Hosea 1–3; Ezekiel 16).

The prophets denounce vain and selfish women (Isaiah 3.16–23; Amos 4.1), and Proverbs scorns contentious and headstrong women (Proverbs 21.19; Proverbs 27.15; Proverbs 11.22). The "strange" woman of Proverbs 1–9, a combination of every possible negative female type (an adulteress, a cult-related prostitute, a goddess, a foreign woman), is a literary creation who functions rhetorically as the exact opposite of a positive female figure, Lady Wisdom.

The Bible's negative assessment of several women may arise from an unspoken political or rhetorical subtext (e.g., Michal, Jezebel, Athaliah, Gomer). Potiphar's wife (Genesis 39.6–21) and Delilah (Judges 16.4–21) are bad women indeed, but folklorists recognize that these "evil" women play a crucial role in propelling the central character toward hero status, a story pattern repeated in countless folktales. Genesis never refers to a woman as the cause of the human condition (See Eve). The earliest biblical reference to this concept occurs in Sirach 25.24 (early second century BCE). It is a doctrine, like the related ones of original sin and Satan, that developed during the Second Temple Period (ca. 500 BCE – 70 CE), to be taken up in turn by early Christianity (1 Timothy 2.12–14; cf. Romans 5.12).

Now, consider the positive:

**Female Symbolism.** Women play an important role in the Bible's symbolic repertory. One of the most striking and influential metaphors in the Bible is the personification of Wisdom as a woman (Proverbs 1; Proverbs 8; Proverbs 9). Jeremiah 31.15 describes war-ravaged Israel as a mother, Rachel, weeping for her dead children. In a familiar biblical metaphor, God too becomes a parent who feels exasperation but also compassion—literally "womb-feeling" (Hosea 2.23; Jeremiah 31.20; See Mercy of God)—for the child Israel. Israel, Jerusalem, and even foreign nations and cities may be personified as daughters (see Isaiah 1.8; Isaiah 23.12; Lamentations). Marriage becomes a central metaphor to describe the past and future intimacy of God the husband and Israel the wife (e.g., Hosea 2.14–20; Ezekiel 16.1–4; Jeremiah 2.2), who

all too often turns into an adulteress ("playing the harlot") with other gods (Hosea 2; Jeremiah 3.6–10; Ezek 16.15). Political considerations help to explain the function of some women in the Bible. Abishag is actually a symbolic pawn, first of the northern tribes (1 Kings 1.3), then of Adonijah (1 Kings 2.17). The story of Rahab (Joshua 2; Joshua 6.22–25) and the presence of women in genealogies (1 Chronicles 1–9; cf. Matthew 1.1–16) served to imply that the descendants of these women belonged to kinship groups considered subordinate by more dominant Israelite tribes.

Biblical laws against a man lying "with a male as with a woman" (Leviticus 18.22) and against cross-dressing (Deuteronomy 22.5) suggest that the borders between male and female realms are not to be crossed. Women are not warriors; thus it is ultimate humiliation for Sisera and Abimelech to die at the hands of a woman (cf. Judith). Jeremiah's oracle against Babylon even threatens Babylonian mercenaries with becoming women (Jeremiah 50.37). At the same time, in the deliberately shocking imagery that characterizes prophetic discourse, Jeremiah epitomizes the newness of the era when Jerusalem will be restored by suggesting some sort of gender reversal (Jeremiah 31.22).

This dual symbolism is not uncommon and stems, perhaps, in part from the logical constraints of a language straining to capture, first, what God is, and then, second, trying to define what human is. The language predicament is that one term provokes and calls forth the other. Mortality, for example, is defined in terms of immortality, death in terms of life, heaven in terms of earth, and so on. God is not human, and human is not God, but somehow, the two must intersect. Another theme then is the intersection of the finite and the infinite, picked up in the symbolism of the cross, in the concept of incarnation.

The book of John, in particular, explores the misunderstandings which exist in the use of analogical language to explain the differences between the spiritual and the temporal realms: this confusion between the two realms is clearly illustrated in two episodes, the case of Nicodemus and the giving of sight to the blind man:

Nicodemus--confused about second birth 3

What is born of flesh is flesh; what is born of spirit is spirit 3.6

If people don't believe finite things, how will they believe infinite things? 3.12

. 3.16

"No one can receive anything except what is given him from heaven." 3,27

And the second episode:

Believes because "he sees" ; Jews misunderstand blindness.

"One thing I know, that though I was blind, now I see." 9.25

Jews believe physical blindness is result of sin. 9.3

Sin has to be seen: "If you were blind, you would have no guilt." 9.41

To read John with understanding, one must constantly translate from the physical to the spiritual, this seen in two kinds of rest [Jews misunderstand rest (Sabbath): "My Father is working still, and I am working" 5.17] , two kinds of water [Woman of Samaria--confused about living water ("spring of water welling up

into eternal life" 4.14], and the list continues: two kinds of bread, temples, light and so on.

To know God is to experience God's presence: irrefutable truth (is/ is not) belongs to the objective world as we have defined it by science and logic. Experiencing God is a relationship. William Sullivan says that " The best proof of God's existence is what follows when we deny it." I like Paul Tillich's definition of how the faith relationship completes us: "The ultimate concern gives depth, direction, and unity... to the whole personality." He goes on to say that "ultimate concern is the integrating center of the personal life." In fact, let me quote Tillich more extensively:

"The center unites all elements of man's personal life, the bodily, the unconscious, the conscious, the spiritual ones. In the act of faith every nerve of man's body, every striving of man's soul, every function of man's spirit participates. But body, soul, spirit, are not three parts of man. They are dimensions of man's being, always within each other; for man is a unity and not composed of parts. Faith, therefore, is not a matter of the mind in isolation, or of the soul in contrast to mind and body, or of the body (in the sense of animal faith), but is the centered movement of the whole personality toward something of ultimate meaning and significance" (Dynamics of Faith, 106). Louis Pasteur put it another way: "A little science estranges men from God; much science leads them back to Him."

What happens in the Gospel of John is that individuals again and again misunderstand Jesus to be talking about what can be proved, what is logical. Only when they suspend logic will they clearly be able to see. Tillich said, and I agree, that " faith and science do not belong to the same dimension of meaning. Science has no right and power to interfere with faith, and faith has no power to interfere with science" (Dynamics, 81). The symbols used in John open up levels of reality that ordinarily are closed to the senses.

Other Bible Themes:

Being a spokesperson for God carries risks.

Experience of Divine brings risks.

God sustains life.

Achievement can be result of indirection and subterfuge.

God opens eyes.

Possession leads to loathing.

Shame results from social failure.

God reveals spiritual state of individual.

Birthrights sometimes need to be earned.

Identities get reversed.

A righteous God kills.

A Divine Messenger rescues.

People need time to reflect and rest.

The overly ambitious fail.

Finite knowledge brings dichotomies.

God is faithful.  
Beginning and end are similar.  
Boundaries can be transcended.  
Egypt equals bondage.  
Experience of Holy carries risks.  
Expulsion can lead to return.  
Violence is avenged.  
Abdicated responsibility brings severe consequences.  
God's breath gives life.  
Two wives can lead to tension and competition.  
God's kingdom begins on earth.  
The firstborn has rights.  
Households have dominant figures.  
Outcasts can become violent wanderers.  
A righteous God judges.  
Women can be vulnerable.  
People experience wilderness.  
The first-and second-born often struggle.

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# Chapter Five

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## Chapter Five: Structure and Form

Content without structure can overwhelm us. That's why the first sections have addressed types of literature, historical chronology, civilizations and themes; another approach that is often helpful for students is to begin with an understanding of how the anthology itself is structured. What I will do next is provide several structures to help students grasp what the anthology as a whole is.

Let me begin with the ordering provided by the [Oxford Companion to the Bible](#):

Names and Order of the Books of the Old and New Testaments with the Apocryphal/ Deuterocanonical Books (Dates established from Oxford Annotation to NRSV) :

### The Hebrew Scriptures

Genesis --950 BC E. to Exile from sources J, E, D, P

Exodus-- 950 BC E. to Exile from sources J, E, D, P

Leviticus--950 BC E. to Exile from sources J, E, D, P

Numbers --950 BC E. to Exile from sources J, E, D, P

Deuteronomy--950 BC E. to Exile from sources J, E, D, P

[A word about JEPD sources: the (J)Judah source is dated to 950 BCE, the result of a written epic organized by a traditionist of that time; the later E is the work of another traditionist from Ephraim written some time around 900-750 BCE This is followed by the Deuteronomic writings of the seventh century BC E. The Priestly (P) source is given shape at about the time of the Exile.]

Joshua--pervaded by style and philosophy of Deuteronomy

Judges --writer reveals Deuteronomic concerns for loyalty to God as prerequisite for success, appearing in

classic form in Deuteronomy 28

Ruth --post exile based on older tale

1 Samuel (1 Kingdoms in Greek) --final editing, post-exile; early (time of Solomon) and late source; early source is single writer deserving the title "father of history" usually given to Herodotus, five hundred years later

2 Samuel (2 Kingdoms in Greek) --same as 1 Samuel

1 Kings (3 Kingdoms in Greek) --based on various sources including annals and temple archives, written by two Deuteronomic author-editors, just before or after King Josiah's death in 609 BC E and during the Babylonian exile for 2 Kings

2 Kings (4 Kingdoms in Greek)

1 Chronicles (1 Paralipomenon in Greek) -400-250 BCE

2 Chronicles (2 Paralipomenon in Greek) -400-250 BCE

Ezra (= 2 Esdras in Greek) -part of Chronicler's work, 400-250 B.C.E

Nehemiah (= 2 Esdras in Greek) -part of Chronicler's work, 400-250 B.C.E

Esther --some think it was written during Maccabean times but is probably earlier, written as propaganda for the observance in Palestine to celebrate Purim

Job --folktale circulating early (1000-800 B.C.E), written down in the time of David or Solomon

Psalms --ancient hymnal compiled from older collection of lyrics, half ascribed to David

Proverbs --includes older material from long tradition, compiled during post-exile period for moral and religious instruction

Ecclesiastes --third century B. C. E., although traditionally assigned to Solomon; contains echoes of Greek philosophy

Song of Solomon --based on ancient materials; given form in three hundred B. C. E.

Isaiah --1-39 assigned to Isaiah's time, 742-687 B.C.E; 40-66, immediately before the fall of Babylon; 56-69, 63-66, and 60-62, 530-510 BCE

Jeremiah --edited after 560 BC E.

Lamentations --laments desolation of Jerusalem, after 587 BCE

Ezekiel --1-24 oracles of warning to be dated before the fall of Jerusalem; 25-32 oracles of hope after the fall of Jerusalem; middle 25-32 oracles against nations to middle period of Ezekiel's life, 587-585 BCE

Daniel --written by a Jew during the time of Antiochus Epiphanies 167-164 BCE

Hosea --twelve minor prophets constituted a unit by second century BCE; Hosea's ministry to northern kingdom follows closely that of Amos; before the fall of 721 BCE

Joel --400-350 BCE; no mention of Assyrians or Babylonians; heavy borrowing from earlier prophets

Amos --760-750 BCE; called to task of providing harsh words to a prospering northern kingdom under Jeroboam II

Obadiah--soon after Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians; indicts Edomites

Jonah --didactic narrative drawing on legend; tells story of prophet under Jeroboam II (786-746 BCE) who resists difficult task of crying against Nineveh, capital for the Assyrian empire

Micah --Micah is contemporary with Isaiah; prosperity of northern kingdom ends with death of Jeroboam II; chapter 7's picture of restored Jerusalem is post-exilic

Nahum--ode foretells fall of Nineveh; Nineveh was destroyed in 612 BCE

Habakkuk --work of Hebrew prophet during height of Babylonian power

Zephaniah --days of Josiah, before 621 B.C.E

Haggai --five addresses in 520 BCE exhorting Zerubbabel to reconstruct the temple

Zechariah--contains pre-exile bits but seems to be written during Greek period

Malachi --500-450 BCE

## The Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books

The Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books are listed here in four groupings, as follows:

(a) Books and Additions to Esther and Daniel that are in the Roman Catholic, Greek, and Slavonic Bibles.

Tobit

Judith

The Additions to the Book of Esther (with a translation of the entire Greek text of Esther)

Wisdom of Solomon

Ecclesiasticus, or the Wisdom of Jesus Son of Sirach

Baruch

The Letter of Jeremiah (=Baruch ch. 6)

The Additions to the Greek Book of Daniel

The Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Jews

Susanna

Bel and the Dragon

1 Maccabees

2 Maccabees

(b) Books in the Greek and Slavonic Bibles; not in the Roman Catholic Canon

1 Esdras (=2 Esdras in Slavonic =3 Esdras in Appendix to Vulgate)

Prayer of Manasseh (in Appendix to Vulgate)

Psalm 151, following Psalm 150 in the Greek Bible

3 Maccabees

(c) In the Slavonic Bible and in the Latin Vulgate Appendix

2 Esdras (=3 Esdras in Slavonic =4 Esdras in Vulgate Appendix) (Note: In the Latin Vulgate, Ezra-Nehemiah 1 and 2 Esdras.)

(d) In an Appendix to the Greek Bible

4 Maccabees

## The New Testament

Matthew--last third of first century

Mark--first gospel written; prior to fall of Jerusalem in 70 CE

Luke --last third of first century

John --90-100 CE

Acts of the Apostles--second part of Luke's gospel

Romans --55 or 56 CE

1 Corinthians--Paul founded the church and remained there 50-51 CE

2 Corinthians

Galatians--55 or 56 CE

Ephesians --while Paul was a prisoner, same time as Colossians, early 60's

Philippians--Paul's imprisonment at Rome 61-63 CE

Colossians --early 60's

1 Thessalonians --written in Corinth, early 50's

2 Thessalonians --written in Corinth, early 50's

1 Timothy--language, akin to second century Christianity

2 Timothy--language, akin to second century Christianity  
Titus--language, akin to second century Christianity  
Philemon --while Paul was under house arrest at Rome, 61-63 CE  
Hebrews --written prior to fall of Jerusalem  
James --written by hellenistic Christian at end of first century  
1 Peter --after Neronian persecution in CE 64  
2 Peter --after Neronian persecution in CE 64  
1 John --end of first century  
2 John--end of first century  
3 John --end of first century  
Jude --80 C.E  
Revelation --end of reign of Emperor Domitian 81-96 CE

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## The Number and Sequence of the Books of the Bible([Oxford Companion](#))

### THE OLD TESTAMENT

According to Jewish usage the twenty-four books of the Hebrew Scriptures fall into three divisions: the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings. The Prophets are divided into the Former Prophets and the Latter Prophets (the terms "former" and "latter" refer to their position in the list, and have no reference to date of composition). The books of Samuel, Kings, Chronicles, Ezra-Nehemiah were not divided by the Jews until the close of the Middle Ages. The twelve Minor Prophets are treated as one book. The two subdivisions of the Prophets therefore contain four books each. In most editions of the Hebrew Bible the sequence of the books is as follows:

#### **The Law (five books):**

Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy.

#### **The Prophets (eight books):**

##### Former Prophets:

Joshua, Judges, Samuel (1 and 2), Kings (1 and 2).

##### Latter Prophets:

Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, the Twelve (=Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi).

#### **The Writings (eleven books):**

Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Song of Solomon, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther, Daniel, Ezra-Nehemiah, Chronicles (1 and 2).

**In Protestant editions** of the Bible the Old Testament follows the Hebrew text as regards content, but the books in the second and third divisions are rearranged in sequence and several are divided, making a total of thirty-nine.

In Roman Catholic editions the Old Testament contains the rearranged thirty-nine books of the Hebrew Scriptures plus seven others that are current in the official Latin Vulgate Bible and that Protestants include among the Apocrypha. The order of these forty-six books in Vulgate manuscripts varies greatly; in fact, the

manuscripts that have been examined disclose more than two hundred different ways of arranging the books. In current editions of Roman Catholic Bibles (including the Douay Version, the Jerusalem Bible, and the New American Bible), Tobit and Judith stand after Nehemiah; 1 and 2 Maccabees, after Esther (except in the Douay Version, in which these books conclude the Old Testament); Wisdom and Ecclesiasticus, after the Song of Solomon; and Baruch, with the Letter of Jeremiah as ch. 6, after Lamentations. Furthermore, the books of Esther and Daniel are expanded by several additional chapters and parts of chapters, which Protestants regard as apocryphal. They comprise six Additions to the book of Esther and the following three supplements to the book of Daniel: the Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Jews, Susanna, and Bel and the Dragon.

In the original Douay Version of 1609-1610 an appendix after the close of the Old Testament contains three other books, and 4 Esdras (called 1 and 2 Esdras by Protestants) and the Prayer of Manasseh. These are regarded as apocryphal by Roman Catholics as well as by Protestants. It is curious that in the Geneva Bible of 1560, widely used by the Puritans, the Prayer of Manasseh is included in the Old Testament between 2 Chronicles and Ezra, though in the table of contents it is designated as apocryphal.

The Greek Orthodox Church, which uses the Greek Septuagint Version as its official text, has generally been accustomed to follow the longer canon of the Old Testament, including in this case also the 151st Psalm and 3 Maccabees. The Seventh Ecumenical Council held at Nicaea in 787 and the Council convened by Basil in Constantinople in 869 quote certain Apocrypha as authoritative. On the other hand, writers who raised the issue concerning the limits of the canon, such as John of Damascus and Nicephorus, express views that coincide with those of Athanasius, who adhered to the Hebrew canon. In the Schism of 1054 the Apocrypha were not an issue, though they became such during the Protestant Reformation. At that time a short-lived attempt was made by Cyril Lucar, Patriarch of Constantinople, to promote the adoption of the Hebrew canon in the Greek Church. Subsequently, however, the Synod of Jerusalem (1672) condemned Cyril and expressly designated the books of Tobit, Judith, Ecclesiasticus (Sirach), and Wisdom as canonical.

By way of summary, the Roman Catholic Church and the Greek Orthodox Church agree in regarding as authoritative certain books that they call deuterocanonical and that Protestants call apocryphal. In addition the following books are considered apocryphal by Protestants and Roman Catholics, but are in the Greek canon when indicated.

1 Esdras (=Esdras A in the Greek canon; 3 Esdras in Appendix to Latin Vulgate).

2 Esdras (=4 Esdras in Appendix to Latin Vulgate).

Prayer of Manasseh (in the Greek canon; in Appendix to Latin Vulgate).

Psalm 151 and 3 Maccabees (in the Greek canon; 4 Maccabees in Appendix Greek canon).

In order to set forth clearly the several differences in usage among the Churches, the New Revised Standard Version presents the text of the Apocryphal/ Deuterocanonical Books in four successive groupings, as follows: (a) Books and Additions to Esther and Daniel that are in Roman Catholic, Greek, and Slavonic Bibles; (b) Books in the Greek and Slavonic Bibles, not in the Roman Catholic canon; (c) In the Slavonic Bible and the Latin Vulgate Appendix; (d) In an Appendix to the Greek Bible.

One can readily understand, therefore, why the reader does not find, for example; 3 and 4 Maccabees directly following 1 and 2 Maccabees.

## THE NEW TESTAMENT

The number and the sequence of the twenty-seven books of the New Testament are the same in Protestant, Roman Catholic, and Eastern Orthodox Bibles.

A comparison of the extant manuscripts of the New Testament discloses that the **early Church** was accustomed to arrange them in four groups: (1) the Gospels, (2) the Acts and the General, or Catholic, Letters (that is, the seven letters which bear the names of James, Peter, John, and Jude), (3) the Pauline Letters, (4) the Apocalypse (as in the fifth-century codex Alexandrinus and many other manuscripts). Sometimes the Pauline Letters precede the Acts and General Letters, thus placing first the books which had earliest obtained canonical authority (as in the fourth-century codex Sinaiticus and the sixth-century codex Fuldensis).

Within each of the four groups there was a great variety of order. In the **early Western Church** the Gospel sequence most commonly followed was that of Matthew, John, Luke, Mark—namely, the Gospels attributed to apostles preceding those attributed to disciples of the apostles. The Letter to the Hebrews had no fixed place; sometimes it stood at the end of the Pauline Letters, sometimes between Paul's Letters to churches and those to individuals (that is, between 2 Thessalonians and 1 Timothy), and occasionally after Romans (as in the third-century Chester Beatty Papyrus) or after Galatians (as in an ancestor of the fourth-century codex Vaticanus, as is disclosed by the section numbers in Vaticanus). In the West the Letters of Peter were frequently placed first among the General Letters.

The current order of the Pauline and the General Letters seems to have been drawn up roughly in accord with length, the longest one in each group (Paul to churches, Paul to individuals, and General Letters) standing first and the shortest one, last.

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**Lineages:**

**Lineages: From Oxford Notes**

[...Previous](#)

### New Testament

The New Testament contains two genealogies of Jesus: one in [Matthew 1.1–16](#), which traces his descent from Abraham, and one in [Luke 3.23–38](#), which reverses the order. While Matthew's genealogy is limited to the Abrahamic line, Luke's goes back to Adam. Perhaps as a mnemonic device, Matthew or his source divided the generations from Abraham to Jesus into three groups of fourteen ([Matthew 1.17](#)): fourteen generations from Abraham to David, fourteen from David to the Babylonian exile, and fourteen from the Babylonian exile to Jesus. In order to maintain the symmetry, the names of the kings Ahaziah, Joash, and Amaziah were dropped from the second list of fourteen between Joram (Jehoram) and Uzziah. Other omissions may have occurred in Matthew's third list of fourteen, because Luke, who presents a different lineage between Zerubbabel and Joseph, records nineteen names for the same period.

Matthew's genealogy seems to be intentionally formed around a predetermined number. Most likely he meant to show that Jesus is a royal descendant of Abraham and David, in fact a new David: the sum of the numerical value of the Hebrew consonants in the name "David" ( $d + w + d = 4 + 6 + 4$ ) is fourteen, and Jesus is frequently called "son of David" throughout the gospel of Matthew.

Four women appear in Matthew's list, though they are not found in Luke's. This is notable because in biblical times lineage was traced through males. Even more surprising is that three of these women were non-Israelites: Rahab the Canaanite, Ruth the Moabite, and (presumably) Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah the Hittite. Their mention anticipates the inclusion of gentiles among Jesus' disciples ([Matthew 28.19](#)).

The genealogy in [Luke 3.23–38](#) has variations in different textual traditions. According to most Greek manuscripts (followed by the United Bible Societies' *Greek New Testament*), there are  $11 \times 7$  generations from Adam to Jesus (that is, from Adam to Abraham,  $3 \times 7$  generations; from Isaac to David,  $2 \times 7$  generations; from Nathan to Salathiel (preexilic),  $3 \times 7$  generations; from Zerubbabel (postexilic) to Jesus,  $3 \times 7$  generations). Other Greek manuscripts, the Latin Vulgate, and the Syriac Peshitta record 76 generations, and some Latin manuscripts list 72 generations. Most likely Luke traces Jesus' genealogy back through Abraham to Adam to show that Jesus is not only the fulfillment of the history of Israel, but also that he is the savior of the world.

Many attempts have been made to reconcile the two genealogies, which after David agree in only two names (Shealtiel [Salathiel] and Zerubbabel). Because none of these attempts have been generally accepted, it is likely that these inconsistent genealogies serve separate literary functions and are not to be interpreted like modern registers of pedigree. Matthew's genealogy is meant to show Jesus' Davidic, royal descent, and Luke's to underscore the universal role of Jesus as Son of God.

The word genealogy occurs twice in a disparaging sense: in [1 Timothy 1.4](#) ("endless genealogies that promote speculations"), and in [Titus 3.9](#) ("avoid ... genealogies ... for they are unprofitable"). Because the larger contexts refer to myths, the allusions may be to the various emanations ("aeons") between God and humankind in gnostic belief. Or, since [Titus 1.14](#) relates to Jewish myths and [1 Timothy 1.7](#) calls into question the claims of those who desire to be teachers of the Law, the genealogies referred to may be based on biblical sources but elaborated in the same way as the Book of Jubilees and more generally *aggadah*.

Bruce M. Metzger

## Visual Structure (J. Sidlowe Baxter)

The following provides an easy memory device for learning an ordering of the books of the Bible that will stay in the student's mind; all a student has to do initially is remember 5, 12; 5; 5, 12 or 17; 5; 17 to group the books in the Old Testament. The New Testament is equally easy: 5, 9; 4, 9.

## Old Testament

Visual Structure: 5, 12 (9, 3); 5; 5, 12 (9, 3) or 17 (5, 12 [9,3]); 5; 17 (5, 12 [9, 3])

**5-Pentateuch** Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy

**12—History** Joshua, Judges, Ruth, I, II Samuel, I, II Kings, I, II Chronicles (9 pre-exile) Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther (3 post-exile)

**5--Writings** Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon

**5-Major Prophets** Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel

**12- Minor Prophets** (9 pre-exilic) Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah (3 post-exilic) Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi

### New Testament

Visual Structure: 5, 9, 4, 9

#### Types Structure

**5** -Foundation (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts)

**9** -Christian letters (Romans, I, II Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, I, II Thessalonians)

**4** Pastoral: I, II Timothy, Titus, Philemon

**9** Hebrew: Hebrews, James, I, II Peter, I, II, III John, Jude, Revelation

Links: 6/16/03

The Bible Format

Overview of Bible

Summary of Bible

Introduction to Bible

Thematic Approach to Order

**The Bible Library** John Drane's *Introducing the Old Testament*, HarpersSanFrancisco, 1987.

Law Books

Pentateuch: five books traditionally associated with Moses, contains accounts of humanity's beginnings. (Genesis 1-11), accounts of Israel's forefathers (the rest of Genesis), and accounts of Israel's escape from Egypt and journey to the promised land (parts of Exodus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy). But above all, it contains 'laws': regulations for religious and social life, and great moral laws built on the Ten Commandments.

History Books

These books tell the story of the Israelites from their first entry into Canaan until their return there after exile in Babylon. Joshua and Judges are about the conquest and settlement of the land. The books of Samuel are mainly about Kings Saul and David, and Kings concerns first Solomon and then the kings of the divided kingdoms until the monarchy ended with the exile. Chronicles covers similar ground from a different viewpoint, and is linked to Ezra and Nehemiah and the rest of the stories of the returned exiles.

## Poetry and Wisdom Books

The book of Psalms is the hymnbook of the Old Testament, containing a wide variety of poems on both personal and national themes. The three wisdom books are very different from each other: Job is a dramatic poem on the problem of suffering, Ecclesiastes is a set of reflections on the apparent meaninglessness of existence, and Proverbs is a collection of wise sayings about everyday living. The Song of Solomon is a love poem.

## Book of Prophecies

There were prophets right through Old Testament times, from Moses on. The prophecies of the great prophets from the last three hundred years of Old Testament history were collected in writing. The major prophets—Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel—are long books each developing a characteristic understanding of God and his ways. Daniel is part story, part apocrypha. The twelve minor prophets reveal the word of God as given in a variety of ways at different periods of history.

[The Bible Narrative](#) *People of the Covenant*, Oxford University Press, 1996

**Narratives of Creation and Fall** Genesis 1-11 These narratives set the background for understanding the rest of the Hebrew story. These chapters make profound statements about the creation of the world and the beginnings of humankind and history: these are questions concerning primary significance and are not answered easily by science. The fundamental human predicament—that of separation from God through choice—is addressed by God’s work through Israel’s history. The questions answered in these chapters are those of who we are, how we’re related to the world and each other, and what the nature of ultimate reality is. Almost no historically concrete data appears: these are events and people representative of humankind. Genesis makes clear from the beginning that for the Hebrews, human history begins with the intervention of God as creator: God very simply is stated to be. From that evolves human history and its rebellion against the Creator. Responsible relationship means recognition of God and human beings as significance in carrying Godly image. Human beings existentially wrestle with reality and their own egotistical denial of the sovereignty of the Creator.

The fact that Genesis poses these questions in its first chapters should suggest to the student that here is enough reason for the reading of this book and the others that make up this anthology.

The scripture is clear: God (stated simply as fact) created an orderly world. Whatever else science and religion may disagree on, both agree that light belonged to the early creation. It might be noted that light is present even before the creation of the sun. Unlike surrounding mythologies, Genesis makes clear that the sun and moon are not divinities; they are markers of time—the difference between day and night. The authority for creation is also clear: God created by word.

Whatever is recorded in primeval history, the account is taken up from a distance by a people who are looking back from what is to what has been: the Edenic experience ends quickly—by chapter three. From this point--from expulsion from the ideal into the real, from unity into disunity, alienation, and brokenness—the finite experience is characterized by aspiration and crushing limitation. History and the space-time box becomes the saga of human suffering in the god-like act of bridging the pressing dichotomies of the creature separated from its Creator. Genesis three tells the story sadly: the Lord God walks in the garden in the cool of the day, but man and wife hide themselves from Divine presence. They are naked, vulnerable, and eager to explain away the responsibility for their acts. The future is clear: for humans, relentless activity (work), desire, pain, and mortality replace the rest and blessing of God’s sabbath rest. The theme will be taken up over and over in the books to come: Canaan will be the land of promise which can be taken only by the futile actions of human conquest; the book of Hebrews takes up the story: the Israelites had failed to enter into God’s rest—“there remains a sabbath rest for the people of God; for whoever enters God’s rest also ceases from his labors as God did from his (4.8). Only in Revelation, when the old has passed away, when the dwelling place of God is with us, will our tears be wiped away, our pain assuaged, and death and mourning be ended (21.3,4). Genesis through Revelation is then the story of the journey away from and back to the ideal—away from and back to unity. The narrative dips back into the primeval and prehistorical and soars into futuristic vision. From alienation, pain, suffering, and despair, the voice of God’s spokespeople—the prophets among us—return us to what we were and hold out for what we can become.

“Israel’s worship celebrated Yahweh, who was lord and controller of history... the creator and sustainer of creation” (*People of the Covenant*, 96). The faith of the Hebrew was a faith in the Creator of creation and the Controller of history.

The Biblical narratives are those of the creation and fall, the patriarchal and matriarchal forebears, the exodus and giving of the law and wanderings in the wilderness; the story is that of Israel in Canaan, its worship in Jerusalem, the periods before, after, and during exile; sprinkled in are the narratives of worship, wisdom, instruction, and poetry.

## **Bible Transmission**

The collection of thirty-nine books in the Old and New Testament is an anthology of heterogeneous writings. These are books of history, instruction, and prophecy. The Old Testament scripturally is called simply Holy Scripture, Scripture, or Law. The common designation is that of “the Law and the Prophets” or “Moses and the Prophets.” In Luke (24.44), it is called “Law, prophets, and psalms.” In 130 CE, Jesus ben Sirach referred to it as “Law, prophets, and other books of our ancestors.”

The Old Testament (Curt Kuhl, *The Old Testament*, John Knox Press, 1961) is written in West Semitic Hebrew, the language common to Canaan and Judah. In a very few places, we find Aramaic. The alphabetical script is written from right to left in the older books. The Hebrew quadrat script or Assyrian script appeared after the exile and was introduced by Ezra for the Torah. The oldest documents were carved in stone (Exodus 31.18, 34.1), engraved on tablets (Isaiah 30.8, Habakkuk 11.2) of clay or lead, or written on book rolls with a pen (Psalms 45.1 and Jeremiah 36/18). Ezekiel speaks of carrying an ink horn at the belt (9.2). The picture of King Jehoiakim slashing off columns of Scripture dictated by Jeremiah (36.21) is an unforgettable one

suggesting Egyptian papyrus as the material written upon—later to be replaced by leather or parchment. The translation of the Bible had to be then a laborious one as well as costly, requiring painstaking copying and subject to human fallibility. The miracle of miracles is that we have the old transcripts we have and that we have the intricate unity of the thirty-nine books recognized as belonging to the canon.

The way in which the books of the Bible are counted leads to the premature conclusion that books are being omitted; differences in count, however, can be explained by an old Jewish tradition which counted the twelve minor prophets, the two books of Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles as one book; this is also true of Ezra and Nehemiah. Josephus further reduced the number by including Ruth with Judges and Lamentations with Jeremiah.

*The Oxford Companion to the Bible* summarizes these structural differences at some length:

An anonymous tannaitic tradition (*Bab. Bat.* 14b), no later than ca. 200 ce, lists the order of the books of the Prophets and the Writings. This presents a problem because the codex form was not adopted by Jews before the fifth century ce and because the general and favored scribal practice—with one exception—was to restrict each scroll to a single biblical book. What then is the meaning of term “order” in the rabbinic text? The most likely explanation is that it refers to the manner of storage and the system of classification and cataloguing in vogue in the libraries and schools of Palestine. The library procedures of the Hellenistic world would have required each of the three collections of canonical works to be placed in a separate armarium, with the scrolls arranged in their appropriately assigned order.

The sequence of the Former Prophets following the Pentateuch is: Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings. This arrangement never varies and presents one long continuous history of Israel from the beginning of the conquest to the fall of the Judean kingdom, the Babylonian exile, and the release of King Jehoiachin from prison in 561 bce. (See [Deuteronomic History](#).)

The variations in the order of the books occur in the Latter Prophets and particularly in the Writings. A majority of manuscripts and most printed Bibles feature Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, which is the proper historical order. The above-cited source, however, followed by some manuscripts, lists Isaiah in third place in juxtaposition with its contemporary Hosea. Another tradition has Jeremiah after Kings and before Isaiah and Ezekiel. This is because that prophet was active during the last years of the monarchy, and [Jeremiah 39](#) and [Jeremiah 52](#) largely duplicate [2 Kings 25](#).

The small prophetic books, generally known as the “Minor Prophets,” were habitually transcribed onto a single scroll and were collectively designated “The Twelve” (so already in [Sirach 49.10](#), ca. 180 bce). Their internal arrangement is: Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi. This is also the order of a scroll of the second century ce from Wadi Murabba>at (See [Dead Sea Scrolls](#)) containing the Hebrew Minor Prophets, and it apparently reflected traditional views about their historical sequence. The same order, but with Micah following Amos and succeeded by Joel, is given in [2 Esdras 1.39–40](#). This groups together three prophets of the eighth century bce.

The order of the Writings in Hebrew printed Bibles is: Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Song of Solomon, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther, Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, Chronicles. Passages like [2 Maccabees 2.13–14](#) and [Luke 24.44](#) seem to attest to the great

antiquity of the initial place of Psalms. The aforementioned tannaitic source has Ruth before Psalms due to the concluding genealogy of David, the reputed author of the Psalter. The Aleppo Codex (end of ninth century ce and the Leningrad Codex of 1008 ce both open the Writings with Chronicles, probably because that work duplicates the Pentateuchal genealogies and much of the Former Prophets.

The tannaitic practice, also found in manuscripts and ultimately standardized in the printed editions, was to conclude the Hebrew scriptures with Chronicles following Ezra-Nehemiah. This must have been a very early tradition, for it is reflected in [Matthew 23.35](#) and [Luke 11.51](#). The inversion of the chronological order must have arisen out of a desire to close the canon on a note of consolation, and to make the statement that the fulfillment of biblical prophecy involves the return of the Jewish people to its ancestral land. Apart from this messianic exegesis, it also serves to encase the Hebrew scriptures within a framework of historical narrative, for Chronicles begins with Adam and its last sentence contains the same two key Hebrew verbs of redemption with which Genesis concludes (*pqd*, *>lh*, [Genesis 50.24–25](#); [2 Chronicles 36.23](#)).

Christian editions reverse the order of Prophets-Writings, so that the closing words of Malachi ([Malachi 4.5–6](#) [3.23–24 in Hebrew]) concerning Elijah become transitional to the New Testament, and connect with the role of John the Baptist (see [Matthew 11.13–14](#); [Mark 1.2](#); [Mark 9.11–13](#); [Luke 1.16–17](#)).

Least stable in respect of order are the small books in the corpus of the Writings. The tannaitic source follows Proverbs with Ecclesiastes and the Song of Solomon because all three are attributed to King Solomon. Most medieval manuscripts preserve this association in one way or another. Lamentations, Daniel, and Esther are grouped together since they all belong to the period of the exile. In medieval times, the Song of Solomon, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, and Esther were all clustered together in that order, based upon their use as lectionaries in the cycle of the Jewish religious calendar, commencing with Passover. This system became the rule in the printed editions. Greek Bibles differ considerably from the Hebrew scriptures in that the books are arranged according to genres of literature. Ignoring the additional Apocrypha that are interspersed among the canonical works, the following classification emerges. First comes a narrative-historical collection that comprises the Pentateuch and Former Prophets, with Ruth attached to Judges, and Chronicles following Kings. Second is a prophetic collection consisting of: Isaiah; Jeremiah, to which is adjoined Lamentations for thematic reasons and traditions of authorship; Ezekiel; Daniel, because he is regarded as a prophet, a contemporary of Ezekiel, and is identified with the personality of that name mentioned in [Ezekiel 14.14](#); [Ezekiel 14.20](#); [Ezekiel 28.3](#); and the Twelve in a slightly different internal order. The two complete Greek codices, the fourth-century ce Vaticanus and the fifth-century ce Alexandrinus, share these characteristics. However, the latter has Esther and Ezra-Nehemiah immediately after the prophetic collection, while the former places Ezra-Nehemiah after Chronicles. The third part is a poetic-didactic collection. Codex Vaticanus has Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, Job, and Esther. The order of Codex Alexandrinus is Psalms, Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon. Also the sequence of the second and third collections interchanges in the two codices.

## Canon Selection Criteria

The Old and New Testament lay the basis for canonicity differently; in the New Testament, the emphasis is

upon apostolic authority. Other factors are used for the Old Testament: quality of inherent divine inspiration and authority recognizable to leaders of the Hebrew religious community through illumination by the Spirit of God (Moses, for example); role and authorship; and internal consistency of teaching and overall unity of theme and message; and use of books by the religious community.

## **Moses and the Seventy Prophets**

(Numbers 11.18-30)

God says to Moses, when he asked why the burden of a people craving meat has been laid upon him, that he is to find seventy elders: “I will come down and talk to you there [Moses’ tent]; and I will take some of the spirit which is upon you and put it upon them; and they shall bear the burden the people with you” (11.17). A later verse (25) reveals that the Lord came down in a cloud and rested upon the seventy and they prophesied.

Looking at the human writers of the Bible, one discovers quickly that roles are important: we find lawgivers, judges, prophets, priests, and kings.

The “Word of the Lord” is largely a reporting of the covenant experience. In the covenant, these books achieve unity of theme and message.

The religious community studied, copied, and obeyed the books they considered sacred. Their use of particular documents no doubt affected canon selection and consistently used books came to be known as belonging to the canon.

## **Disputed Books**

Some books were “spoken against” because their interpretation was an issue: Esther (because it nowhere includes the name of God), Proverbs (more earthly than divine wisdom), Ecclesiastes (pessimistic and hedonistic overtones), and Song of Solomon (erotic nature of love poetry); and Ezekiel (due to bizarre antics and visions and teachings on sacrifice).

## **Apocrypha**

This collection of books comes from the intertestamental period. Depending on numeration, the apocryphas books are fourteen or fifteen. These books were composed between 200 BCE and 100 CE. The books are written in Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic; they are preserved in Greek, Latin, Ethiopic, Coptic, Arabic, Syriac, and Armenian languages. They include six genres: didactic (teachings), religious, romantic, historical, prophetic epistolary and apocalyptic, and legendary literature.

Martin Luther’s assessment of the Apocrypha is valid for understanding the Protestant rejection of the Apocryphal books as canonical: they are not equal to the Holy Scriptures but are profitable to read and valuable for personal edification. Pointedly, however, with the rejection of these books, a gap of four hundred silent years seems to exist between the Old Testament and the New. To learn about this history, one needs to read these books as well as the early historians. The *Oxford Companion* describes the Apocrypha in the following way:

The name, which means “things hidden away,” is inappropriate, since none of these books (with the possible exception of 2 Esdras) was ever regarded as hidden or secret. For the most part, they are simply those books found only in manuscripts of the Septuagint (LXX), the ancient Greek translation of the Hebrew scriptures, and therefore possibly regarded as “canonical” by Greek-speaking Alexandrian Jews, though ultimately rejected by the Jewish community of Palestine and rabbinic authorities of later times (2 Esdras and the Prayer of Manasseh are not covered by this definition). Their preservation is largely due to the Christian community, which, for most of the first four centuries ce, accepted the Greek Old Testament as normative for its life and thought. In modern times the term “apocrypha” has been extended more loosely to other books from the later Hellenistic and early Roman periods but which, so far as we know, never attained even quasi-canonical status (these books are more commonly designated as pseudepigrapha), and has also been extended by analogy to a large group of early Christian writings excluded from the New Testament canon in its final form.

Whatever else is concluded, students should realize that these fourteen books were recognized and widely circulated and read in both early Judaism and Christianity. Judaism began using portions of the Hebrew Bible as early as the period of the Babylonian exile (587 BCE); Christianity shared the Hebrew Bible with Judaism and began producing its own scripture, the letters of Paul being used by some Christians by the end of the first century.

The movement is clear: from works of literature, these books were elevated to scripture. What may have happened in the establishing of a canon is that Jews moved to preserve, examine, and reconconsider what God’s will was His people. These characteristics are important for establishing any canon of literature, scriptural or otherwise: an ancient ancestry is preserved; what the past has been, what the present is, and what the future can be becomes clearer by self-examination; and how God has worked decisively in history and the purpose of humankind becomes a significant discovery of careful reconsideration. Because these people, indeed, are our ancestors, then we should want to study our inheritance.

Link:

[Summaries of Apocryphal Books](#)

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# Chapter Six

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## Chapter Six: Characters in the Old Testament

### Men and Women in the Bible

#### Adam

On the last day of creation, God created a human being in the image of the infinite, a person who mirrored the Creator. This literal man, Adam, was a prototype for human beings. The relationship of this human being to the Divine initially was one chosen by God, but eventually, this person was to have the freedom to choose to continue or discontinue this connection.

Adam was created following the creation of a universe with awesome power and magnificent beauty. The name Adam is Hebrew for "man" and is repeated 560 times in the Old Testament. There's also a linguistic relationship between the Hebrew word for dust and the word for man. From the beginning, Adam is associated with earthly characteristics: he is a man of clay into which is breathed life so that he becomes a living soul. Soul in Hebrew means to have the life of God within. This story of origins then, from the beginning, is the story of the Infinite initiating contact with the finite world, which the Hebrew understood to be the creation of Yahweh. "In the beginning, God created..." is a statement of faith. Never at any point is the Bible established as presenting history or science, although it contains both. Many see the Bible as the story of two men: Adam and Christ. Interestingly, one is the main character of the Old Testament; the other, the New. Christ does not replace Adam but rather perfects the imperfect. Much in the same way, it can be quickly determined that grace and mercy in the New Testament does not replace Law and justice in the Old.

Adam is the son of God. Students will want to note that Luke 3.38 shows a genealogy in which Christ is the conclusion of Adam's line. Just as children bear the image of their parents, so Adam is imprinted with the image of God. This image is passed on then to Adam's own children. The seventh day is a day of rest and reflection. The Creator looked upon what had been created and pronounced it good. Jewish thinking sees in this a prototype for activity and rest. Rest is deemed important enough to make remembering the Sabbath (keeping it holy) a commandment). In another sense, the Sabbath is the means whereby the human connects with self; prayer may be considered the connection with God, and charity, the means of connecting with other human beings. Combined, the Old and New Testament are clear about the dangers of working without rest and resting without working. The Hebrew were to enter into a rest which they did not obtain; that

rest remains open for individuals today, with the way pointed to by Christ: that God's Kingdom begins on earth immediately in the heart of the person connecting with the Infinite. A similarity exists between Adam's first home and the New Jerusalem of Revelation; it is a "home on earth." A parallel is clear:

1. River of God (Gen. 2.10-14; Rev. 22.1-2)
  2. Tree of Life (Gen. 3.24; Rev. 22.2)
  3. Absence of sin and curse (Rom. 5.12; Rev. 22.3)
  4. Fellowship with God (Gen. 3.8; Rom. 21.22)
  5. No temple or need for temple (Gen. 3.8; Rev. 21.22)
  6. Presence of God (Gen. 3.8; Rev. 21.22)
  7. All things new (Gen. 1.1; Rev. 21.5)
  8. Open, unguarded gate (Gen. 3.24; Rev. 21.25)
- (Elmer Towns, *History Makers of the Old Testament*, Victor Books, 1982)

Adam was placed in a garden where he had everything necessary for complete fulfillment. In return, Adam was covenanted to be responsible. He was to reproduce, subdue or bring the earth to order, to place himself in dominion of animals, to care for the Garden and eat as a vegetarian, and he was prohibited from knowing good and evil. This tendency to dominate, though, becomes a mark of the mortal creature, accounting for a dichotomizing and separating of that which was intended to unite. In maleness and femaleness can be recognized, somewhat stereotypically, opposite responses: giving and taking, disciplining and forgiving, harder and softer interiors. At issue is really the separation of what should be joined in a union which completes each. One does not have to stretch this too much to see a strictness which can result in an emphasis upon obedience; a responsiveness which pleads for grace.

One by one, the principles of this first Edenic covenant were violated. Adam first becomes irresponsible to God, questioning the limitations clearly established for him. Eating of the tree of good and evil introduces a new dimension to human life: they (Adam and Eve) now experience their world morally as well as factually.

Moral knowledge brings consequences for choice. Adam and Eve are portrayed as clearly having the freedom to choose to eat or not to eat. That they were not allowed to know the Tree of Life suggests their nature is to remain mortal; they are not to be as the gods. We will learn that humans aspire to become gods, but always, the lesson they must learn is their limitation; they can build structures to rival the heavens, but their efforts will be confused. The lesson is that God creates and sustains life--Eve gave birth to a son with the help of God. Adam and Eve do reproduce, but offspring fail to behave responsibly with each other; Cain murders his own brother and then flees.

Fleeing from the presence of God is established early as a characteristic of human beings. Adam is expelled from the Garden for willful rebellion. Outside the garden, human rebellion worsens to the point that God brings swift and sure justice. Immediately after Noah steps from the ark, representing God's unwillingness to allow the human creation to perish in entirety, the law of vegetarianism is lifted. Humans may now eat flesh, but the restriction still applies to blood. It must be remembered that sacred blood has already been shed. Nonetheless, a commandment will be issued that correlates with recognition of "I am God." That commandment is that humans will not murder. Because, however, individuals choose not to relate responsibly to God or humans, all of creation is a blood bath.

Adam is tempted and sins (breaks relationship); the second man, Christ, is tempted without the result being a broken relationship. A parallel exists in the temptations: the fruit of the tree is good for food just as stones may become bread; the fruit is pleasant to the eyes as is the prospect of the glory of kingdoms; and finally, Eve desires to be wise, and Christ is asked to prove divinity with a miracle (of which the Son of God was certainly capable).

Animals attack and kill, preying upon themselves and upon human beings. Human beings protect themselves but also feed upon their craving for flesh. Animals without higher consciousness behave routinely in the laws of the animal

kingdom, acting and reacting instinctively, without introspection. Humans carry sorrow for their broken relationships and know the death they inflict is also master of them. Adam himself died at 900.

Contrasting the earthly to the heavenly, the Adam-Christ prototypes result in the following:

Sin/grace  
Obedience/mercy  
Condemnation/ justification  
Death/eternal life  
Sinners/righteousness

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Eli and Samuel

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Abraham

A. Abram: the early years (Genn.11:2  
7-11:32)

Abram's father, Terah migrated from Ur of the Chaldeans to Haran along with his extended family. Ur was located on the Euphrates in modern-day southern Iraq and was one of the major cities of its time. The people worshipped the moon god in Ur as they did in Haran. Terah was involved in this type of worship of other gods according to Joshua 24:2. Abram, Abraham's given name, meant "high (exalted) father ." Abram's family settled in Haran and Terah died there.

B. God's Call To Abram (Gen. 12:1-13:18)

1. God tells Abram to leave Haran and go to the land He will show him. (v.1)
2. God's promise to Abram (v.2-3)
3. Four promises were contained in the call of Abram:
  - (1) A great nation, fulfilled in the Hebrew people
  - (2) A great name, fulfilled in that Hebrews, Christians and Muslims all call him their religious father
  - (3) A land, fulfilled in the possession of Canaan by the Hebrews
  - (4) "A blessing to all nations"

C. Abram obeys God and sets out for Canaan. (Gen. 12:4-12:9) God promises this land to his children.

D. Abram's deception in Egypt (Gen. 12:10-12:20)

E. Abram and Lot Divide land (Gen. 13:1-13:18) Lot settles in the Jordan River Valley while Abram settles west in the land of Canaan.

F. Lot Rescued (Gen. 14:1-14:24) After Kedorlaomer (or Chedorlaomer) and his men defeated the forces of Sodom and Gomorrah, they took Lot. Upon hearing of this, Abram took men who routed Kedorlaomer and rescued Lot and all the possessions which had been taken. Upon his return, Abram gave a tenth of the goods to Melchizedek, king and priest of Salem (Jerusalem) . It was customary to give the king a tenth of what was received. The king of Sodom offered the rest to Abram, but he refused.

G. God's Call and Covenant Renewed (Gen. 15:1-15:21) God promised Abram a son and promised him descendants as numerous as the stars. Abram's response: Faith which was credited to him as righteousness. God told Abram in a dream that his descendants would be enslaved in a foreign land but would return in four generations. A generation was the time it took from birth to fatherhood. In Abram's case that would be 100 years. Therefore, God was saying to Abram that his descendants would return to Canaan in 400 years. God would give the Canaanites that long to repent before their sin "reached its full measure."

H. Ishmael Born (Gen. 16:1-16:16)

Sarah offers her maidservant Hagar to bear a child to Abram, indicating a lack of patience in God's plan. Ishmael is born when Abram is 86.

I. Abrahamic Covenant of Circumcision (Gen. 17:1-18:15) Abram is 99, 24 years after his first call. The original covenant is now about to be put into operation. Abram ("exalted father") was given a new name by God, Abraham ("father of many"). Sarah laughed when she heard God say she would bear a child. As a result, God told them to name their child, Isaac, which means laughter.

1. Circumcision Initiated

- a. Sign of one in covenant relationship
- b. Performed on the 8th day of life

II. 2. Two Major Areas of Promise a. Promise of the Seed- Four Possible Fulfillment's:

- 1) Isaac
  - 2) Nation of Israel
  - 3) Jesus Christ
  - 4) Every person who comes to faith in God through Jesus.
- b. Promise of the land
- 1) Old Testament - Physical territory of Canaan
  - 2) New Testament - Heaven

J. Destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 18:1-19:38)

K. Abraham and Abimelech (Gen. 20:1-20:18; 21:22-21:34)

L. Isaac Born; Hagar and Ishmael Sent Away (Gen. 21:1-21:21) God promises Ishmael his descendants will be a great nation.

M. Abraham's Test With Isaac (Gen. 22:1-22:24) Reveals the character and faith that had developed in Abraham over the years.

N. Sarah Dies and is Buried (Gen. 23:1-23:20) Abraham bought the cave of Machpelah near Hebron. This became the burial place of Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, and Jacob and Leah. (TN#7)

O. Isaac and Rebekah (Gen. 24: Abraham insisted that Isaac not marry a Canaanite woman but one of his own people.

P. Death of Abraham (Gen. 25:1-25:11) Died at the age of 175. Buried with Sarah at the cave of Machpelah.

## Prophets of God

### Abraham

#### The Prophet's Life

In his own country and synagogue, Jesus astounded those listening when He taught them in parables some spiritual truths about the kingdom of God. Even after recognizing that He spoke with wisdom, they still took offense, causing Jesus to utter, "A prophet is not without honor except in his own country and in his own house" (Mt. 13.57). We quote this passage easily and with great familiarity; we tend to miss, however, the tremendous understatement being made just as we underestimate what it costs to become a prophet and to speak for God .

Jesus, without a doubt, understood that becoming responsive to the call of Yahweh and daring to stand solitary in the masses and speak the unpopular messages of doom, destruction, and death in the coming judgment of God would cost the prophet much more than honor. Prophets are called to stand before impenitent and sometimes complacent peoples, get their attention, and call them into account; the message is usually forthcoming danger, catastrophe, disaster on disaster, chaos, captivity, and death. As spokesperson for Yahweh, the prophet has to swim against the streams of public opinion, risking life itself as the greatest cost. Other costs include incredible inner loneliness, lack of or ebbing confidence in the call itself, despair, and tremendous tension between a love for people and the fateful message that has to be delivered. The calling weighs heavily, and prophets grow depressed, despondent, bitter, and more than once, almost break down. Their obligation to Yahweh, though, brings them back on task, defining their true character; Jeremiah describes this calling as "a burning fire shut up in my bones" and confesses he is "weary with holding it in" and that finally, he cannot (20.9).

Prophets are strange, surprising, and eccentric individuals; perhaps they have to be in order to get attention for their messages. Think of Isaiah running around naked and barefoot for three days with people asking him why (20.2); Jeremiah burning his girdle and running around with a yoke on his neck (19.1); Ezekiel lying on the street in cords for 390 days on his left side and forty days on his right side (4.5), and later, digging a hole through his own house and escaping (12.2), or ranting about his peculiar, bizarre, and repellent visions; Hosea marrying a prostitute, who bears three children in the marriage that are not his own; or Amos addressing carousing and heathen women as "cows of Bashan" 4. 1-3) Certainly, we would not want to live next door to these prophets, and today, we would lock them away from sane society, labeling them as basket cases or people who had gone off the edge.

We read in Matthew that Jerusalem has been in the habit of killing her prophets and stoning those who are sent to her (23.37); in I Kings, Jezebel massacred prophets, prompting Obadiah to take one hundred of them and hide them in a cave (18.4). Despite such risks, though, true prophets are driven by the deep and compelling force of inner conviction and vision; they are tools of Yahweh, and they must speak: "The lion has roared; who will not fear? The Lord God has spoken; who can but prophesy?" (Amos 3.8). They have to risk themselves to fate: Ezekiel's cords represent the fate of his people; Jeremiah is thrown into prison for his message; Uriah is slain by Jehoiakim (26.2); legend has it Isaiah was martyred. This is the fate prophets risk in speaking for God; it is lonely, compelling, and dangerous. We tell the story of Daniel's being thrown into a den of lions without feeling the heart-pounding, surging fear he must have felt when first he huddled in this menagerie of teeth, claws, and death. Prophets, in spite of risks and all too human fears, feel themselves

seized by Yahweh's mind and spirit and pour out their words under the impelling power of the infinite itself. It is one thing to be an angel sent by God, as was Gabriel, and stand in God's presence before being sent out to speak (Lk 1.19); it is quite another to be a mere mortal possessed by a vision, dream, or revelation--who sees not external appearances but events as they really are from God's perspective--who must then convey this spiritual reality to other human beings. The prophet stands on the edge of the finite and infinite, the earthly and heavenly, the spoken and unspoken, combining paradoxically tangible and intangible kingdoms. No wonder Saul's own people wondered, "What is this that has come upon the son of Kish?" (I S. 10.11) Moses confessed, "I have not done them [ these works] of my own will" (Nu. 16.28). Isaiah utters quite clearly that Yahweh has historically been revealing what was secret from the beginning: "Draw near to me, hear this! I have not spoken in secret, from the time it came to be, I have been there" (48.16). Isaiah goes on to say this same Lord God "and His Spirit have sent me." The prophet--whatever the costs-- brings God's perspective to human realities.

The way in which we study the Bible and prophets can minimize not only the risks but the overwhelming awe with which the prophet is drawn into the sphere of the miraculous and filled with God's spirit. It's no simple thing to discover oneself suddenly come into the presence of the Eternal.

Abraham is an early prophet of God (Gen. 20.7), as Abimelech, king of Gerar, acknowledges when he almost takes Sarah as wife, thinking her to be only Abraham's sister; Abraham responds to Abimelech's very natural question, "What were you thinking of?" (11) by confessing he was afraid for his life in a land where people did not believe in Yahweh. Abraham has apparently momentarily forgotten God's words, Fear not, Abraham, I am your shield" (15.1). We recall, though, that Abram was told by God, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you" (12.1-3). We should not be surprised to discover that Abram's life sets the pattern for that of the prophets who follow. Moses flees to Midian in fear for his life after he has killed the Egyptian he has seen beating one of his Hebrew brethren; Elijah, who has mocked four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal, proving to the people convincingly that his Lord is God, panics when Jezebel resolves to take his life, and we find him going a day's journey into the wilderness, sitting down under a broom tree, and asking Yahweh to take away his life. He has to be awakened from his sleep of depression by an angel who tells him to "'Arise and eat" (19. 3-5); he has to be told to arise again before he finally sets out on his journey, renewed. Even at this point, he still dawdles, and God asks him about his cave lodging, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" (19.9). He responds that he feels himself alone, afraid for his life (19.10). Elijah continues to linger through a strong wind, an earth quake, and a fire; wrapping his face in his mantle, he answers a second "What are you doing here, Elijah?" with a lame, "They seek my life" (14). Elijah finally stirs in keeping with the command to go forth and anoint Hazael king of Syria and Jehu king of Israel; it is his successor Elisha, though, who finally carries out these injunctions.

Our Biblical narrative moves quickly, telling simply that when he was called, "Abram went" (12.4). We quickly find him in the flourishing city of Shechem, a Canaan crossroads, pausing to build an altar for Yahweh where formerly the Canaanites have sacrificed at their sacred tree Moreh. Underplayed here are any reservations that Abram might have had about leaving his own land and people, any concerns about the semi-nomadic life he and his nephew Lot would lead among the sexually perverse Canaanites, or worries about survival in a land beset with cycles of fertility and drought. We're told only, in summary and foreshadowing, "Now there was a famine in the land. So Abram went down to Egypt" (12.10). About to enter Egypt, he tells Sarah to say she is his sister, and we read, "for her sake he [Pharaoh] dealt well with Abram (12.16). Pharaoh and his house, afflicted by plagues, asks, much as Abimelech later, "What is this thing you have done to me? Why did you not tell me she was your wife?" (12.17). Pharaoh, at this point, sets the self-serving Abram on his way "with his wife and all that he had" (12.20). We see a similar self-service on the part of Abraham's grandson Jacob, who steals his brother's birthright and flees to his mother's people when Rebekah reveals to him that Esau plots to take his life. Only after a vision in which he sees a ladder connecting heaven and earth and a very personal encounter with Yahweh is Jacob able to see himself as "unworthy" 32.10) of the steadfast love with which God has blessed him and sent him back to his own country. We're not surprised to see that Esau, echoing Abraham's deference to Lot, greets his brother with a loving embrace and tells him to keep what he has for himself, that he has enough (33.9).

Jacob insists, though, seeing his brother's face as "like seeing the face of God," (33.10) and journeying on with him until they depart for Seir and Succoth.

When Abram goes up from Egypt, he has become very rich (13.1). We read that he ends up at Bethel, "where his tent had been at the beginning, between Bethel and Ai, to the place where he had made an altar at the first" (12.3). We learn now that Abram calls on the name of the Lord. Whatever goes on in Abram's head, perhaps sincere repentance for his lies and self-gain, we're not told; we only learn that he and Lot can no longer dwell together, that the land cannot support them, and that there is strife between their herdsmen (12.7). That Abram's change of heart is genuine is reflected in his actions; he becomes the peace maker, telling Lot, "Let there be no strife between you and me" (13.8-12) and allowing Lot his choice of land. Lot, not unlike us, chooses the best for himself, the fertile Jordan valley; Abram, on the other hand, chooses Canaan and moves his tent to the sacred oaks of Mamre; after his separation from Lot, he is reminded again that his descendants are to inherit this land.

Abraham's repentance and change of heart is a common motif: Isaiah responds to his vision of the Lord sitting upon a throne with recognition of his own lostness, crying "Woe is me! For I am a man of unclean lips" (6.5). He is commissioned and made ready for his message by a seraphim which touches a burning coal to his mouth, telling him his "guilt is taken away" (6. 6-8). Like Abraham, Isaiah responds quickly to God's question "Whom will I send?" saying simply, "Here am I! Send me" (8). Jeremiah groans when he hears God telling him, "Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations" (1.5). Like Moses, Jeremiah excuses himself first that he cannot speak and second that he is young (6). He is told not to use youth or not knowing how to speak as an excuse; he is not to be afraid of those to whom he is sent nor to worry about what he is to say: "the Lord put forth his hand and touched my mouth" saying, "Behold, I have put my words in your mouth" (9, 10). Ezekiel is told he is to speak God's words; he is to open his mouth and eat what he is given. Imagine Ezekiel's surprise to see that a written scroll is spread before him (2.8- 3.2). He probably finds it little comfort to be reminded that the people to whom he must go do not speak a foreign speech or a hard language (2.4). Ezekiel knows all too well that Israel is a people of a "hard forehead and stubborn heart" (7). He actually has to be lifted up by the Spirit of God, and he goes in bitterness and heat of spirit as watchman to give warning to Israel (3.12-17). Even with the hand of God upon him, Ezekiel still falters, falls to his face, and the Spirit has to enter into him and set him on his feet (23). Only then is Ezekiel willing to bind himself symbolically in cords; for a time, his tongue cleaves to his mouth, and he is dumb and unable to reprove the rebellious house of Israel (24-27). After this, he lies in the streets, first on his left side and then on his right, to get the attention of Israel, symbolically portraying their coming captivity. Still, Yahweh is not finished with Ezekiel; he gets his attention by grabbing him by his hair and lifting him between heaven and earth so that he can see clearly what is coming upon Israel (8.1-6). The prophet's position is clearly not a comfortable one nor is it safe.

Abram foregoes his own safety when he learns Lot, along with all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah, has been taken captive in a war in which four eastern kings have allied themselves; the peaceful Abram brings together his relatively small force and sets out to rescue Lot. Returning victoriously, Abram is met by the grateful king of Sodom and his priest Melchizedek, who blesses Abram in the name of "God Most High"; the pre-Israelite Salem is later to become Jerusalem, and El Elyon, the high god of the Canaanite pantheon, gives way to the Hebrew Yahweh, recognized as "maker of heaven and earth" 14.22).

Abram is now reminded in a vision that his descendants are to be many; he reflects upon his present childlessness but believes Yahweh will yet provide a son. He acts immediately upon his belief, sealing this covenant between himself and Yahweh, by ritual sacrifice (15.10). Having acted, Abram falls into a deep sleep just as the sun is going down; we're not sure what happens to Abram, being told only that he is seized by "a dread and great darkness" (15.12). An ominous foreboding haunts Abram: he projects himself forward, seeing his descendants in a land that is not their's, seeing them oppressed and becoming slaves for hundreds of years; he even sees his own death, his only comfort being that it will come when he is well along in years. When he awakens, the sun has gone down, it is dark, and he looks well beyond what physical sight can see into the presence of Yahweh revealing itself in a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch that

passes between the bloody flesh pieces of the she-goat, ram, turtledove, and young pigeon (15.10, 17). Dread and foreboding surely give way to hair raising, spine tingling fear and sacred awe in this moment of supernatural manifestation. This is not an encounter an ordinary individual would seek out nor would most of us want the burden of attempting to communicate this strange and bizarre event to others. In Revelation, John on the island of Patmos, falls at the feet of "one like a son of man" (1.12) as though dead (17). He has to be consoled, "Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one; I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades" (18). Like other prophets, John carries a warning, this time to the seven churches of Asia, before he pens his bizarre vision of the throne of God; it must be remembered John is in the Spirit and that he apparently sees at great distance since there is between him and this throne "a sea of glass like crystal" (4.6). The Day of Yahweh he sees much as Joel as a day of destruction (1.15), of "darkness and gloom" (2.2); still, it is a day of mercy and steadfast love (2.15), a day of decision (3.14). Much like Ezekiel, he is told to take a scroll and eat it, knowing it will be bitter (Rev. 10.9). The final vision is that of God's kingdom: "I saw a new heaven and a new earth" (21.1). In this new time, Yahweh's dwelling place is with men 21.3).

Abram is to encounter Yahweh yet again, this time after he is far enough removed from his former vision that doubt has apparently slipped into his thinking; he is reminded that he is to be the father of "a multitude of nations" and has his name changed from Abram to Abraham (17.4,5); this vision strikes the ninety-nine year old Abram as ludicrous, and he falls on his face and laughs, saying to himself, "Shall a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old" (17). Another version of the same narrative makes Sarah the one who laughs when she is told she will yet have a son (18. 12). For whatever reasons Abraham and Sarah are chosen, the purpose is clear: "I have chosen him that he may charge his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice" (18.19). The prophet Malachi echoes this same grave responsibility: "Has not the one God made and sustained for us the spirit of life? And what does he desire? Godly offspring" (2.15,16). The call of the prophet, it must not be minimized, is always an isolating righteousness and an overwhelming responsibility to posterity. Like Habakkuk, the prophet looks among the nations, sees, wonders, and is astounded to see that Yahweh is doing a work in this day that is hard to believe (1.5); he is to take his stand and watch, to station himself on a tower, to see and write a vision of God's work, and in the face of taunting and derision, he has only his faith (2. 1-6). He hears, his body trembles, and he waits patiently for the day of trouble to come upon people, rejoicing in the Lord (3.16-19). The prophet knows he has been made to tread upon high places (3.19).

The real cost of becoming a prophet of God is illustrated when Abraham is asked to surrender his only heir. What Abraham is being asked to do here is almost always understated; the prophet is commanded to do nothing less than fly in the face of all human conventions, to render himself--and that self stripped of everything-- accountable to God whatever the human cost. On the human level, Abraham is not only being asked to murder his only son and heir, but to pit himself as an autonomous individual against the rational universe; he is stripped of convention and stands alone in the face of the eternal, and to the Eternal alone is he accountable. We need to be clear about what is going on here: Abraham is commanded to sacrifice only to learn that he can bring nothing to the moment--nothing that he has acquired or made, nothing of his works. He has, of course, brought Isaac, his son on whom his posterity and, he believes, his collective immortality depend. By one accounting, we see here a relaxation upon the claim to the first-born by provision of an animal substitute. The greater lesson, though, concerns the finite and mortal self in the presence of the Infinite and Immortal: here, the Lord must provide (22.14).

Abraham lives to see his wife Sarah die at the ripe old age of a hundred and twenty-seven years; remembering the strong injunction to teach his children the way of Yahweh (23.4), Abraham calls Isaac to himself and makes him swear to take his wife among his own kindred. Much of the story of Abraham's life is repeated in that of Isaac. Abraham himself "breathed his last and died in a good, old age, an old man and full of years" (25.9) and is buried east of Mamre, the place where he first chose Canaan. Yahweh's promise to him is yet to be realized in the direct line of Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph and, much farther down the line of historical revelation, in the "better hope" introduced through which all humankind "draws near to God" (Hebrews 7. 19).

Just as Abraham's salvation is itself one of progressive awareness, in time Yahweh "abolishes the first in order to establish the second" (Hebrews 10.9), that order in which Jesus Christ himself becomes the offering for humankind "once for all" (Hebrews 10.10). The prophet then is one who invokes the future and foresees "something better for us" (Hebrews 11. 10), a vision so terrifying that the mortal spirit, being unable to endure the order given, entreates that no more messages be spoken; Yahweh's reply, though, is that humankind has not "come to what may be touched" (12.18) but must endure not only the shaking of earth but that of heaven, also (12.26). The prophet's vision cuts through time, all of history, through all that can be shaken, the removal of all that has been made, into the eternal itself and sees Yahweh as "a consuming fire" (12.28). Can anyone wonder that such an individual stands out before the masses, appears eccentric, or is reduced to metaphorical utterance? Just as surely as God acts, "He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets" (Am 3.7). Still, though, we are complacent, and Jeremiah would sorrow for us today just as much as he sorrowed for Judah: "And the Lord has sent to you all His servants the prophets, rising early and sending them, but you have not listened nor inclined your ear to hear" (25.4). Jesus compares the kingdom of heaven to a marriage feast, telling us the king "sent servants to call those who were invited to the marriage feast; but they would not come" (Mt 22.3). Revelation echoes the same call: "The Spirit and the Bride say, 'Come' " (22.17). How ironic that the most thirsty among us desire not to take of the water of life offered to us "without cost," that cost having already been paid by the prophets we have stoned and killed and by the Son of God whom we crucified. How minimal indeed is the cost of being without honor in one's own country and among one's own people.

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### Miriam and Zipporah

The above link provides some very remarkable insights into women characters in the Bible; the files, however, have to be downloaded and unzipped.

Moses would probably have been nursed by his birth mother until he was weaned, between the ages of 2 and 3.

The discrepancy between the EXODUS and HEBREWS accounts doesn't necessarily mean the New Testament writer was more inspired by the Holy Spirit than the Old Testament writer. The automatic inclusion of the father in the New Testament version when the Old Testament doesn't even mention him is, in fact, an accurate reflection of the general downgrading of the value of women in Hebrew and pagan society from the time of Moses onward, accelerated by the Hellenization of the ancient world.

The most obvious reason Miriam may not have liked Moses' wife is because she was a Cushite, a foreigner, not a Hebrew. From the rational, human point of view, - i.e. to Miriam and Aaron - Moses' credentials for leading the Hebrew people were already weak. He was the youngest of the three, their baby brother. He had been raised as an Egyptian, with a 'silver spoon' in his mouth. They, on the other hand, had been raised as Hebrews among Hebrews, sharing in all the joys and hardships of their people. Certainly from the experiential point of view, Miriam and Aaron may have felt better qualified to lead the Hebrews than Moses. They knew the people and their ways intimately, first hand. Moses did not. They may also have felt they knew the God of the Hebrew better than their younger brother. (Commentators seem to agree that the real reason for Miriam and Aaron rebelling was that they felt as well qualified as Moses, if not better.

But evidently they remained silent until they met his wife. She, it seems, even more of a foreigner than Moses, was the "straw that broke the camel's back", just one more indication to them that Moses didn't know enough - or care enough - about the Hebrew people to lead them. What they failed to take into account was that God wasn't interested in Moses' experience with the people or his upbringing. HE was chiefly concerned with his heart. (See v. 3) Moses, in his humility and meekness, was pleasing to God, and a usable vessel. God knew him and spoke to him 'mouth to mouth'.

(v. 7-8)

4) NOTE RE: MOSES' WIFE, ZIPPORAH. (See EXOD. 2:15-22; 4:24-26;

18:1-5) From Midian (Cushan - Wycliffe, p.411), Zipporah was herself evidently a descendant of Abraham through her father, Jethro, by Abraham's concubine Keturah. (GEN. 25:1-2) It is not far-fetched, therefore, to think she would have known something about the God of the Hebrews from her priest-father, who himself had some knowledge of Yahweh. (EX. 18:10-12 Zipporah played an important part in Moses' relationship with God. (EX. 4:24-26) At a time when God had threatened to kill him, Zipporah, by intuition or word of knowledge from the Lord, intervened and on her own initiative, circumcised their son(s). Moses evidently had neglected this rite, failing to recognize the importance of it to God. God, through Zipporah, corrected him so that he could get on with delivering the Hebrews from Egypt. His Midianite/Cushite wife saved his life.

(Just to show how man's view toward women changed for the worse during the years between Moses and Jesus, read these comments on the phrase from EXOD. 4:25, which reads "threw it at Moses' feet" in the NAS version.

INTERLINEAR 1 - "put at his feet" (Berry, p.

234)

INTERLINEAR 2 - "made it touch his feet" (Green,

p. 50)

SEPTUAGINT - "SHE FELL at his feet" (Brenton,

p. 74)

(The SEPTUAGINT reflects the hellinized Jewish view of

women as it was incorporated into rabbinic teaching

during the Intertestamental period.)

5) Q.4j - It has been said that Miriam was singled out for punishment for the rebellion because she was a woman usurping the authority of a man. This explanation left me wondering if God really overlooked Aaron's rebellion BECAUSE he was a man, and because it was somehow alright for one man to rebel against the other. Need it be said that besides being utter nonsense, this portrays a god who is partial over and above being righteous? Another explanation - and this has more of a rational basis - is that Miriam was the instigator of the rebellion against Moses. As in the instance of the making of the golden calf, Aaron, according to this the story, was a pawn. The original language is said to support this view - that is, that Miriam alone actually spoke out against Moses. This is at least plausible. But I think there may

have been something else at work here. Miriam was a prophetess, one who spoke for God to the people. Aaron was a priest, one who represented the people to God. (Moses acted as both, by the way.) I believe Miriam was the one punished by God because as a prophetess, in questioning the leadership of Moses, she was misrepresenting God and His plan to the people. She became, in effect, a false prophet.

THE END

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### Tamar, Judah's Daughter-in-Law

The story is told in Genesis:

- 1: And it came to pass at that time, that Judah went down from his brethren, and turned in to a certain Adullamite, whose name was Hirah.
- 2: And Judah saw there a daughter of a certain Canaanite, whose name was Shuah; and he took her, and went in unto her.
- 3: And she conceived, and bare a son; and he called his name Er.
- 4: And she conceived again, and bare a son; and she called his name Onan.
- 5: And she yet again conceived, and bare a son; and called his name Shelah: and he was at Chezib, when she bare him.
- 6: And Judah took a wife for Er his firstborn, whose name was Tamar.
- 7: And Er, Judah's firstborn, was wicked in the sight of the LORD; and the LORD slew him.
- 8: And Judah said unto Onan, Go in unto thy brother's wife, and marry her, and raise up seed to thy brother.
- 9: And Onan knew that the seed should not be his; and it came to pass, when he went in unto his brother's wife, that he spilled it on the ground, lest that he should give seed to his brother.
- 10: And the thing which he did displeased the LORD: wherefore he slew him also.
- 11: Then said Judah to Tamar his daughter in law, Remain a widow at thy father's house, till Shelah my son be grown: for he said, Lest peradventure he die also, as his brethren did. And Tamar went and dwelt in her father's house.
- 12: And in process of time the daughter of Shuah Judah's wife died; and Judah was comforted, and went up unto his sheepshearers to Timnath, he and his friend Hirah the Adullamite.
- 13: And it was told Tamar, saying, Behold thy father in law goeth up to Timnath to shear his sheep.
- 14: And she put her widow's garments off from her, and covered her with a vail, and wrapped herself, and sat in an open place, which is by the way to Timnath; for she saw that Shelah was grown, and she was not given unto him to wife.
- 15: When Judah saw her, he thought her to be an harlot; because she had covered her face.
- 16: And he turned unto her by the way, and said, Go to, I pray thee, let me come in unto thee; (for he knew not that she was his daughter in law.) And she said, What wilt thou give me, that thou mayest come in unto me?
- 17: And he said, I will send thee a kid from the flock. And she said, Wilt thou give me a pledge, till thou send it?
- 18: And he said, What pledge shall I give thee? And she said, Thy signet, and thy bracelets, and thy staff that is in thine hand. And he gave it her, and came in unto her, and she conceived by him.
- 19: And she arose, and went away, and laid by her vail from her, and put on the garments of her widowhood.
- 20: And Judah sent the kid by the hand of his friend the Adullamite, to receive his pledge from the woman's hand: but he found her not.
- 21: Then he asked the men of that place, saying, Where is the harlot, that was openly by the way side? And

they said, There was no harlot in this place.

22: And he returned to Judah, and said, I cannot find her; and also the men of the place said, that there was no harlot in this place.

23: And Judah said, Let her take it to her, lest we be shamed: behold, I sent this kid, and thou hast not found her.

24: And it came to pass about three months after, that it was told Judah, saying, Tamar thy daughter in law hath played the harlot; and also, behold, she is with child by whoredom. And Judah said, Bring her forth, and let her be burnt.

27: And it came to pass in the time of her travail, that, behold, twins were in her womb.

28: And it came to pass, when she travailed, that the one put out his hand: and the midwife took and bound upon his hand a scarlet thread, saying, This came out first,

29: And it came to pass, as he drew back his hand, that, behold, his brother came out: and she said, How hast thou broken forth? this breach be upon thee: therefore his name was called Pharez.

30: And afterward came out his brother, that had the scarlet thread upon his hand: and his name was called Zarah.

This is a fascinating story for several reasons. Note here that Judah, son of Jacob, is first reported as imploring a sexual relationship with a Canaanite, clearly forbidden. We should note that Er, daughter of the union of Judah and this Canaanite, is killed by God. The idea that Yahweh ends life is itself an interesting theological point; we know that Er has been wicked. Onan, the secondborn by this same mother, then refuses to perform responsibly for his brother; although, apparently, he is willing to go into this woman, as custom dictated, and have sexual relationship, he is not willing to father her child, that is, do the duty of his dead brother. This violation of responsibility is judged wicked, and Onan, also, is slain. Now, we learn that the original Canaanite woman was probably a prostitute because, when she dies, Judah goes back to the same friend. Tamar knows the custom and what the intent of Judah is when he goes under the guise of sheep shearing. Tamar, who has remained a widow in her father's house waiting until the last son comes of age, now throws off her widow's veil, dresses appropriately, and then waits at the open road for her father-in-law, Judah. Judah, predictably, goes into her as a harlot. From this union, twins are born, repeating the now familiar theme of struggling for birthright. Confronted earlier with her pregnancy, Judah's reaction is to admit that Tamar is more righteous than he, but his unrighteousness stems, it would seem, from lying with his daughter-in-law rather than going into a relationship with a harlot! From the breech birth, Pharez comes out first.

How important is Tamar? She is part of a direct genealogy to Christ, as found in Matthew one:

1 An account of the genealogy † of Jesus the Messiah, † the son of David, the son of Abraham.

2 Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, 3 and Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar, and Perez the father of Hezron, and Hezron the father of Aram, 4 and Aram the father of Aminadab, and Aminadab the father of Nahshon, and Nahshon the father of Salmon, 5 and Salmon the father of Boaz by Rahab, and Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse, 6 and Jesse the father of King David.

Now, if we go back to the original story, we find that the midwife has given Pharez a sentence: 29: And it came to pass, as he drew back his hand, that, behold, his brother came out: and she said, How hast thou broken forth? this breach be upon thee: therefore his name was called Pharez. In light of the genealogy to come, this utterance sounds a little like a warning to those who would assume the responsibility of birthright; Pharez is directly in line to an anointed one, but this person is, also, to be despised and rejected.`

Tamar's story is more interesting in light of Levirate law and the story of Ruth; the Oxford Companion summarizes the law and the two stories:

Levirate Law (from Lat. *levir*, "brother-in-law"; the Hebr. term is *yEbam*, "to perform the duty of a brother-in-law"). If a man dies without bearing offspring, his widow is to marry the deceased's brother (her *levir*). A child born of that union is considered to be perpetuating the "name" (lineage, honor, and inheritance) of the deceased (Deuteronomy 25.5–10). Such a practice is common in traditional societies, promoting social and economic stability. Refusal to fulfill this obligation results in public shame (Deuteronomy 25.9–10), because it indicates a greater concern for one's personal welfare than the welfare of one's extended family.

There are two examples of levirate marriage in the Bible. In Genesis 38, Judah's son Er is killed by God. His second son, Onan, dies too, for refusing to serve as a levir to Tamar, the widow. When Judah refuses to give her his third son, Tamar dresses as a prostitute and tricks Judah himself into fathering a child. This initially evokes condemnation on Tamar, but subsequently she is regarded as "righteous" for her actions (Genesis 38.26), which demonstrates the great significance placed on fulfilling this obligation.

In the book of Ruth, Boaz fulfills the obligation of the levir on behalf of Ruth's first husband. A closer kinsman declines to perform this duty, apparently fearful of the economic stress it would place on him (Ruth 4.6; perhaps, too, he was unwilling to marry a foreigner). This shows that a levir's obligations continue until the child he has fathered is able to assume the responsibility of defending the deceased's "name" on his own.

In the lineage of Christ, through Tamar and Ruth, it's possible to see that both the responsible and the irresponsible play a role. Said another way, the lineage of Christ comes, as does that of all of us, through scoundrels and saints; in this case, the scoundrel is Judah, although his own customs would not identify him thus.

Concerning the role of women in ancient society, the Oxford Companion explains that they may defy social order to achieve divinely sanctioned ends:

Social Reality and Narrative Patterns. Investigators of women's history view with interest the intersection between religious symbols and narrative patterns on the one hand and social reality on the other. The fact that Ishtar or Hathor is an authoritative female deity does not mean that real-life women could achieve comparable power in Egyptian or Mesopotamian society.

Nevertheless, in actual society and in literature, women who function on the upper or lower margins of normative society—queens, wealthy widows, priestesses, prostitutes—may transcend otherwise static boundaries determined by gender. As high priestess of the Sumerian mood god, the princess Enheduanna (twenty-third century BCE) composed hymns which may have provided a model for later hymnists. The prostitute Rahab negotiates successfully for the common good of her family and Israel (Joshua 2; Joshua 6). In the Gilgamesh Epic, the prostitute Shamhat is pivotal in bringing Enkidu from bestiality to civilization; her role may usefully be compared to that of Eve in Genesis 3. Anthropologists have observed that this mediating quality is often a distinctive aspect of femaleness.

A recurrent pattern in biblical stories about women is their use of indirection, even subterfuge, to achieve divinely sanctioned ends (e.g., Rebekah, Genesis 27; Tamar, Genesis 38; Siphrah and Puah, Exodus 1.15–21; Esther). By seemingly devious actions which invert or overthrow established but restrictive social hierarchies, women often bring about a new order of life and freedom.

Tamar, David's Daughter

Another Tamara's story is told in 2 Samuel:

13 Some time passed. David's son Absalom had a beautiful sister whose name was Tamar; and David's son Amnon fell in love with her. 2 Amnon was so tormented that he made himself ill because of his sister Tamar, for she was a virgin and it seemed impossible to Amnon to do anything to her. 3 But Amnon had a friend whose name was Jonadab, the son of David's brother Shimeah; and Jonadab was a very crafty man. 4 He said to him, "O son of the king, why are you so haggard morning after morning? Will you not tell me?" Amnon said to him, "I love Tamar, my brother Absalom's sister." 5 Jonadab said to him, "Lie down on your bed, and pretend to be ill; and when your father comes to see you, say to him, 'Let my sister Tamar come and give me something to eat, and prepare the food in my sight, so that I may see it and eat it from her hand.' " 6 So Amnon lay down, and pretended to be ill; and when the king came to see him, Amnon said to the king, "Please let my sister Tamar come and make a couple of cakes in my sight, so that I may eat from her hand." 7 Then David sent home to Tamar, saying, "Go to your brother Amnon's house, and prepare food for him." 8 So Tamar went to her brother Amnon's house, where he was lying down. She took dough, kneaded it, made cakes in his sight, and baked the cakes. 9 Then she took the pan and set them † out before him, but he refused to eat. Amnon said, "Send out everyone from me." So everyone went out from him. 10 Then Amnon said to Tamar, "Bring the food into the chamber, so that I may eat from your hand." So Tamar took the cakes she had made, and brought them into the chamber to Amnon her brother. 11 But when she brought them near him to eat, he took hold of her, and said to her, "Come, lie with me, my sister." 12 She answered him, "No, my brother, do not force me; for such a thing is not done in Israel; do not do anything so vile! 13 As for me, where could I carry my shame? And as for you, you would be as one of the scoundrels in Israel. Now therefore, I beg you, speak to the king; for he will not withhold me from you." 14 But he would not listen to her; and being stronger than she, he forced her and lay with her.

15 Then Amnon was seized with a very great loathing for her; indeed, his loathing was even greater than the lust he had felt for her. Amnon said to her, "Get out!" 16 But she said to him, "No, my brother; † for this wrong in sending me away is greater than the other that you did to me." But he would not listen to her. 17 He called the young man who served him and said, "Put this woman out of my presence, and bolt the door after her." 18 (Now she was wearing a long robe with sleeves; for this is how the virgin daughters of the king were clothed in earlier times. †) So his servant put her out, and bolted the door after her. 19 But Tamar put ashes on her head, and tore the long robe that she was wearing; she put her hand on her head, and went away, crying aloud as she went.

20 Her brother Absalom said to her, "Has Amnon your brother been with you? Be quiet for now, my sister; he is your brother; do not take this to heart." So Tamar remained, a desolate woman, in her brother Absalom's house. 21 When King David heard of all these things, he became very angry, but he would not punish his son Amnon, because he loved him, for he was his firstborn. † 22 But Absalom spoke to Amnon neither good nor bad; for Absalom hated Amnon, because he had raped his sister Tamar.

**Absalom Avenges the Violation of His Sister** 23 After two full years Absalom had sheepshearers at Baal-hazor, which is near Ephraim, and Absalom invited all the king's sons. 24 Absalom came to the king, and said, "Your servant has sheepshearers; will the king and his servants please go with your servant?" 25 But the king said to Absalom, "No, my son, let us not all go, or else we will be burdensome to you." He pressed him, but he would not go but gave him his blessing. 26 Then Absalom said, "If not, please let my brother Amnon go with us." The king said to him, "Why should he go with you?" 27 But Absalom pressed him until he let Amnon and all the king's sons go with him. Absalom made a feast like a king's feast. † 28 Then Absalom commanded his servants, "Watch when Amnon's heart is merry with wine, and when I say to you, 'Strike Amnon,' then kill him. Do not be afraid; have I not myself commanded you? Be courageous and valiant." 29 So the servants of Absalom did to Amnon as Absalom had commanded. Then all the king's sons rose, and each mounted his mule and fled.

30 While they were on the way, the report came to David that Absalom had killed all the king's sons, and not one of them was left. 31 The king rose, tore his garments, and lay on the ground; and all his servants who were standing by tore their garments. 32 But Jonadab, the son of David's brother Shimeah, said, "Let not my lord suppose that they have killed all the young men the king's sons; Amnon alone is dead. This has been determined by Absalom from the day Amnon † raped his sister Tamar. 33 Now therefore, do not let my lord the king take it to heart, as if all the king's sons were dead; for Amnon alone is dead."

34 But Absalom fled. When the young man who kept watch looked up, he saw many people coming from the Horonaim road † by the side of the mountain. 35 Jonadab said to the king, "See, the king's sons have come; as your servant said, so it has come about." 36 As soon as he had finished speaking, the king's sons arrived, and raised their voices and wept; and the king and all his servants also wept very bitterly.

37 But Absalom fled, and went to Talmai son of Ammihud, king of Geshur. David mourned for his son day after day. 38 Absalom, having fled to Geshur, stayed there three years. 39 And the heart of † the king went out, yearning for Absalom; for he was now consoled over the death of Amnon.

In this story, a couple of sub-stories become important: the story of half-sister's and the story of Absalom. Reading just the headline or the Biblical story, one is led to think that Absalom performs a worthy avenging of his sister's wrong. Not so! Half-sister's could be married, and it's clear that Tamar believes David would allow Amnon to have Tamar:

13 As for me, where could I carry my shame? And as for you, you would be as one of the scoundrels in Israel. Now therefore, I beg you, speak to the king; for he will not withhold me from you." 14 But he would not listen to her; and being stronger than she, he forced her and lay with her.

Amnon is the firstborn son, the one directly in line to David's throne; Absalom in killing Amnon puts himself next in line. If we're looking at genealogy, I Chronicles finishes the story:

3 These are the sons of David who were born to him in Hebron: the firstborn Amnon, by Ahinoam the Jezreelite; the second Daniel, by Abigail the Carmelite; 2 the third Absalom, son of Maacah, daughter of King Talmai of Geshur; the fourth Adonijah, son of Haggith; 3 the fifth Shephatiah, by Abital; the sixth Ithream, by his wife Eglah; 4 six were born to him in Hebron, where he reigned for seven years and six months. And he reigned thirty-three years in Jerusalem. 5 These were born to him in Jerusalem: Shimea, Shobab, Nathan, and Solomon, four by Bath-shua, daughter of Ammiel; 6 then Ithar, Elishama, Eliphelet, 7 Nogah, Nepheg, Japhia, 8 Elishama, Eliada, and Eliphelet, nine. 9 All these were David's sons, besides the sons of the concubines; and Tamar was their sister.

What happens to Absalom is not the Sunday School story learned by most:

9 Absalom happened to meet the servants of David. Absalom was riding on his mule, and the mule went under the thick branches of a great oak. His head caught fast in the oak, and he was left hanging † between heaven and earth, while the mule that was under him went on. 10 A man saw it, and told Joab, "I saw Absalom hanging in an oak." 11 Joab said to the man who told him, "What, you saw him! Why then did you not strike him there to the ground? I would have been glad to give you ten pieces of silver and a belt." 12 But the man said to Joab, "Even if I felt in my hand the weight of a thousand pieces of silver, I would not raise my hand against the king's son; for in our hearing the king commanded you and Abishai and Ittai, saying: For my sake protect the young man Absalom! 13 On the other hand, if I had dealt treacherously against his life † (and there is nothing hidden from the king), then you yourself would have stood aloof." 14 Joab said, "I will not waste time like this with you." He took three spears in his hand, and thrust them into the heart of Absalom, while he was still alive in the oak. 15 And ten young men, Joab's armor-bearers, surrounded Absalom and struck him, and killed him.

16 Then Joab sounded the trumpet, and the troops came back from pursuing Israel, for Joab restrained the troops. 17 They took Absalom, threw him into a great pit in the forest, and raised over him a very great heap of stones. Meanwhile all the Israelites fled to their homes. 18 Now Absalom in his lifetime had taken and set up

for himself a pillar that is in the King's Valley, for he said, "I have no son to keep my name in remembrance"; he called the pillar by his own name. It is called Absalom's Monument to this day.

Absalom is caught up by his head, left hanging between heaven and earth, an appropriate end to an individual giving himself to unbridled ambition; that this is the case is told by two things: the oak tree which is well known as a place of non-Yahweh worship and the pillar which is erected there and called "Absalom's monument." Between heaven and earth echoes here the ambition of those building the tower of Babel. Tamar's story ends more quietly: **So Tamar remained, a desolate woman, in her brother Absalom's house.**

## Hagar

Having looked at Tamar and Ruth, one sees the female lineage resulting in Christianity; another religion, the Islamic, has its roots in Hagar. The story has appeal from many directions, but the very poignant address by El ROI: "Hagar, Sarah's maid, where have you come from, and where are you going?" The first question identifies Hagar's responsibility as a handmaiden; the second question helps her identify what it is she is to do. The second question is one of origin and destiny.

The story is easy to recall. We will recall that Hagar is an Egyptian (Gen. 16.3). Abram goes into her her because his wife is barren, and she conceives. Forgetting her subservient role as slave-wife, she laughs at Sarai, the connotation being that Sarah is lowered in stature because she, unlike Hagar, is barren. According to the Code of Hammurabi, a maid elevated to slave-wife could be returned to slave but not turned out of the house. When Abram abdicates responsibility by giving it to Sarai, she responds irresponsibly by sending Hagar away.

In the New Testament, we find an allegorizing of the Sarai-Hagar story:

## The Allegory of Hagar and Sarah

21 Tell me, you who desire to be subject to the law, will you not listen to the law? 22 For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave woman and the other by a free woman. 23 One, the child of the slave, was born according to the flesh; the other, the child of the free woman, was born through the promise. 24 Now this is an allegory: these women are two covenants. One woman, in fact, is Hagar, from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery. 25 Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia † and corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. 26 But the other woman corresponds to the Jerusalem above; she is free, and she is our mother. 27 For it is written,

"Rejoice, you childless one, you who bear no children,  
burst into song and shout, you who endure no birth pangs;  
for the children of the desolate woman are more numerous  
than the children of the one who is married."

28 Now you, † my friends, † are children of the promise, like Isaac. 29 But just as at that time the child who was born according to the flesh persecuted the child who was born according to the Spirit, so it is now also. 30 But what does the scripture say? "Drive out the slave and her child; for the child of the slave will not share the inheritance with the child of the free woman." 31 So then, friends, † we are children, not of the slave but of the free woman.

Let's get to Hagar's story first, though:

21 The LORD dealt with Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did for Sarah as he had promised. 2 Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the time of which God had spoken to him. 3 Abraham gave the name Isaac to his son whom Sarah bore him. 4 And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him. 5 Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. 6 Now Sarah said, "God has brought laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh with me." 7 And she said, "Who would ever 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<sup>8</sup> The child grew, and was weaned; and Abraham made a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned. 9 But Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, playing with her son Isaac. † 10 So she said to Abraham, "Cast out this slave woman with her son; for the son of this slave woman shall not inherit along with my son Isaac." 11 The matter was very distressing to Abraham on account of his son. 12 But God said to Abraham, "Do not be distressed because of the boy and because of your slave woman; whatever Sarah says to you, do as she tells you, for it is through Isaac that offspring shall be named for you. 13 As for the son of the slave woman, I will make a nation of him also, because he is your offspring." 14 So Abraham rose early in the morning, and took bread and a skin of water, and gave it to Hagar, putting it on her shoulder, along with the child, and sent her away. And she departed, and wandered about in the wilderness of Beer-sheba.

15 When the water in the skin was gone, she cast the child under one of the bushes. 16 Then she went and sat down opposite him a good way off, about the distance of a bowshot; for she said, "Do not let me look on the death of the child." And as she sat opposite him, she lifted up her voice and wept. 17 And God heard the voice of the boy; and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven, and said to her, "What troubles you, Hagar? Do not be afraid; for God has heard the voice of the boy where he is. 18 Come, lift up the boy and hold him fast with your hand, for I will make a great nation of him." 19 Then God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water. She went, and filled the skin with water, and gave the boy a drink.

20 God was with the boy, and he grew up; he lived in the wilderness, and became an expert with the bow. 21 He lived in the wilderness of Paran; and his mother got a wife for him from the land of Egypt.

In Genesis 16.7, we discover where it is Hagar is headed; the angel of God discovers her at Shur, an Egyptian border town. She is clearly on her way home to Egypt. Identified as Sarai's maid, Hagar must confess she is wrong to run away. Second, she is forced to reconsider her actions.

This confused and distressed woman is to raise a son who is to father a nation; here is the rest of the story (Gen.21):

12 These are the descendants of Ishmael, Abraham's son, whom Hagar the Egyptian, Sarah's slave-girl, bore to Abraham. 13 These are the names of the sons of Ishmael, named in the order of their birth: Nebaioth, the firstborn of Ishmael; and Kedar, Adbeel, Mibsam, 14 Mishma, Dumah, Massa, 15 Hadad, Tema, Jetur, Naphish, and Kedemah. 16 These are the sons of Ishmael and these are their names, by their villages and by their encampments, twelve princes according to their tribes. 17 (This is the length of the life of Ishmael, one hundred thirty-seven years; he breathed his last and died, and was gathered to his people.) 18 They settled from Havilah to Shur, which is opposite Egypt in the direction of Assyria; he settled down † alongside of † all his people.

### The Oxford Bible Companion

tells the story in the following way:

Hagar. An Egyptian servant of Sarah, featured in the Genesis narratives about Sarah and Abraham. According to custom, Sarah, who was sterile, presented Hagar to Abraham so that Hagar might conceive and provide Abraham with an heir.

Two Hagar stories appear in the Bible. The first (Genesis 16.1–16) describes the expulsion of the pregnant Hagar from Sarah's household, her conversation in the wilderness with a messenger of God who urges her to return to the household, and the subsequent birth of her son Ishmael. In the second Hagar story (Genesis 21.8–21), set more than fourteen years later, when Sarah herself had at last borne a son (Isaac) and was celebrating the day of his being weaned, Hagar and Ishmael are cast out from Sarah's household into the wilderness. A divine messenger rescues them when their water supply runs out, and he proclaims that Ishmael will become a great nation.

The literary and chronological relationship of these two narratives is problematic, but certain themes common to both can be recognized. One is that Sarah is the dominant figure in the household with respect to management of domestic affairs, including determining the fate of household staff. In both narratives, Sarah makes a decision about Hagar's fate and Abraham acquiesces. Another theme is the tension between the main wife and a concubine or servant wife with respect to inheritance. Parallels with Babylonian laws suggest that Isaac, though born later, could still be considered firstborn. Sarah's desire to exclude Ishmael from any inheritance at all is partly to satisfy the narrative of Genesis 17, in which Sarah will be the mother of the covenantal heir; it may also reflect the difficult personal relations that arise when one son receives all.

A fourth theme involves the way in which disadvantaged individuals are portrayed as surviving and being blessed with the promise of great prominence. A final theme concerns the special role of Ishmael in biblical history. The Hagar stories establish the close relationship of the Ishmaelites ("the descendants of Hagar," according to Baruch 3.23) to the Israelites, relegating them to a separate territory but recognizing that God has protected and sustained their eponymous ancestor, the son of Hagar and Abraham. Finally, the narratives, while making Hagar a heroic figure, are also sensitive to her vulnerability as a woman, a foreigner, and a servant.

Paul interprets the Hagar stories with a tendentious allegory in Galatians 4.21–31.

Oxford Companion also says the following about the fathering of nations:

Ishmael. Son of Abraham and Hagar. A generally positive attitude toward Ishmael and thus toward his descendants is found in the Genesis traditions. He is the recipient of a special divine blessing (Genesis 17.20) and is present at the burial of Abraham (Genesis 25.9). Like Jacob, Ishmael is the father of twelve sons, the ancestors of twelve tribes (Genesis 25.16). Another indication of the generally favorable view of this patriarch is the fact that several other later Israelites have the same name. There are, however, hints of ethnic tension in the narratives as well. Like Cain, Ishmael is depicted as an outcast and prone to violence (Genesis 16.12), and as a wanderer (note the opening words of Melville's *Moby-Dick*). The Ishmaelites are elsewhere described as leading a typically nomadic life (Genesis 37.25; Psalm 83.6; 1 Chronicles 27.30). The story of Ishmael and Hagar's separation from Abraham's household contains the kind of scurrilous sexual innuendo found elsewhere in J's etiological narratives concerning Israel's neighbors.

In Muslim tradition, the Arabs trace their ancestry back to Abraham through Ishmael. Because Ishmael was circumcised (Genesis 17.25), so are most Muslims. And, analogous to Paul's reversal of the figures of Isaac and Ishmael (Galatians 4.24–26), Muslim tradition makes Ishmael rather than Isaac the son Abraham was commanded to sacrifice (See Aqedah).

Elijah

David (Character Study and Sermon)

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Daniel

ManassehJudith and Holofernes (Apocryphal)

The *Oxford Companion* tells the Judith story of the *Apocrypha* in the following way:

**Critical Analysis.** The story is well-told, especially chaps. [Judith 10–13](#), which are a masterpiece of irony. The character and personality of the principal antagonists, as well as those of minor figures such as King Nebuchadnezzar (called Nebuchadnezzar in the book), the Jewish elder Uzziah of Bethulia, and the Ammonite convert Achior, are all vividly drawn and take on a life of their own. Their speeches, conversations, and prayers, as well as the story’s plot, clearly and effectively express the storyteller’s theology and ethics. Nonetheless, the book fairly bristles with problems, as the struggles over its canonicity so clearly attest. While western church fathers routinely accepted the book as canonical, eastern fathers quite often did not.

Although the book purports to be a historical account, it abounds in serious errors concerning both history and geography, the most egregious being in [Judith 1.1](#), where Nebuchadnezzar (605–562 bce) is described as king of the Assyrians with his capital at Nineveh! Moreover, in [Judith 1.13–16](#) he kills the great Median king Arphaxad (who is otherwise unknown to scholars) and destroys Ecbatana, the great city Arphaxad had founded ([Judith 1.2–4](#)), although in point of fact Ecbatana was founded by Deioces and was conquered by Cyrus the Great in 554 bce.

In [Judith 2](#), geographical errors replace historical ones: Holofernes’s army traveled from Nineveh to Northern Cilicia, some 800 km (500 mi), in three days ([Judith 2.21](#)), then fought its way through Put and Lud ([Judith 2.23](#))—which are usually identified by scholars as being in Africa and Asia Minor, respectively—only to cross the Euphrates and proceed west through Mesopotamia ([Judith 2.24](#)) and arrive in Cilicia ([Judith 2.25](#))! Paradoxically, the brief survey of Israel’s history from the days of the ancestors into the early postexilic period by the Ammonite Achior ([Judith 5](#)), is a reasonably accurate account. So too, Holofernes’s itinerary through Palestine ([Judith 2–3](#)) seems to be more or less geographically correct. Yet, despite a wealth of geographical and topographical clues throughout the story, the location of Bethulia, the principal scene of the action, is totally unknown to scholars.

The moral and ethical views of the storyteller have frequently been censured, especially the treatment and obvious approval of the character and conduct of the heroine who, at least in her dealings with Holofernes, showed herself to be a shameless flatterer ([Judith 11.7–8](#)), a bold-faced liar ([Judith 11.12–14](#); [Judith 11.18–19](#)), and a ruthless assassin ([Judith 13.7–8](#)) who seemingly follows two highly popular but debatable axioms: “all’s fair in love and war” and “the end justifies the means.”

Yet both before and after her murderous (and salvific) act, Judith is regarded by her people as a saint, that is, one who is totally devoted to the Lord: diligent both in prayer ([Judith 9.1–14](#)) and in fasting ([Judith 8.4–6](#)), observant of the dietary laws ([Judith 10.5](#); [Judith 12.2](#)), honoring her husband’s memory by remaining forever celibate after his death ([Judith 16.22](#)) and honored by all ([Judith 8.8](#); [Judith 8.28–31](#); [Judith 16.21](#)), and fearing the Lord (cf. [Judith 16.16](#)). In the eyes of the storyteller, at least, Judith was the saint who murdered for her people and her God; she is the ideal Jewish woman, as her name, which is simply the feminine form of the word for “Jewish,” suggests.

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The literary implications of the story are also captured in *The Oxford Companion*:

**Literary Analysis.** No other biblical book, in either its parts or its totality, is as quintessentially ironic as Judith. Given the sexist and patriarchal character of the day, its central theme is most ironic: “The Lord Almighty has foiled them by the hand of a woman” ([Judith 16.5](#)); this echoes, probably deliberately, the story of Jael ([Judges 4.17–22](#); [Judges 5.24–27](#)). The storyteller probably intended even the opening verse ([Judith 1.1](#)) to be understood as ironic, and certainly all the major scenes and characters are.

A beautiful, desirable, but childless widow, Judith lived a celibate life after her husband’s death; yet she gave political and spiritual rebirth to her people. Very feminine in appearance, she herself murdered the general, praying even as she decapitated him ([Judith 13.7–8](#))! Neither King Nebuchadnezzar, lord of the whole world ([Judith 2.5](#)), nor Holofernes, the master of the west ([Judith 2.21–3.9](#)), could master Bethulia. The Ammonite Achior, a seasoned warrior who early in the story displayed more faith in Israel’s God ([Judith 5.20–21](#)) than did Uzziah, the chief elder of Bethulia ([Judith 7.29–31](#)), fainted on seeing the head that Judith had cut off with her own two hands ([Judith 14.6](#)). The Assyrian patrol that captured Judith and her maid were so captivated by their captive that they escorted her into the well-protected tent of her intended victim ([Judith 10.11–16](#)).

The scenes featuring conversations between Holofernes and Achior ([Judith 5.5–6.9](#)) and between Holofernes and Judith ([Judith 11.5–12.4](#); [Judith 11.14–19](#)) abound in punctual ironies (i.e., irony at more or less isolated points) and, when taken together, are what literary critics call “episodic irony.” These episodes result in a thematic irony in the book as a whole: Achior spoke the complete truth to Holofernes but was not believed, while Judith dissimulated, equivocated, and lied—and was totally believed! Holofernes had intended to have his way with Judith, but as Judith’s song so eloquently expresses it, the exact opposite happened: “Her sandal ravished his eyes; her beauty captivated his mind; and the sword severed his neck” ([Judith 16.9](#)). Not surprisingly, this dramatic climax is a favorite theme of Renaissance artists.

The opinion sometimes expressed that the book is unbalanced, that [Judith 1–3](#) or even [Judith 1–7](#) are slow-moving and irrelevant to the main story in [Judith 8–16](#), and that this imbalance probably results from the union of two originally separate stories—that of a Mesopotamian king’s war in the east and west [[Judith 1–3](#)] and the tale of Judith—is unjustified. A careful analysis shows that the book is a unity, with [Judith 1–7](#), in a variety of ways and on a number of levels, serving as an effective and indispensable foil for [Judith 8–16](#). Moreover, each half of the book has a threefold chiasmic structure and a distinctive thematic repetition, namely, fear or its denial in [Judith 1–7](#), and beauty and its effects in [Judith 8–16](#), with Judith’s triumph over Holofernes ([Judith 10.11–13.10a](#)) being the story’s climax in both form and content. Moreover, in [Judith 1–7](#) masculine, brute force wins many a battle; but in [Judith 8–16](#) Judith’s feminine beauty and wiles, undergirded by her faith in God, win the war. (None of this is to deny that Judith’s song [[Judith 16.1–17](#)] may be, as several scholars have suggested, an older synagogal psalm adopted and adapted by the storyteller.)

As for the book’s religious ideas, neither God’s titles nor attributes are in any way noteworthy. His covenant with Israel is interpreted largely in Deuteronomic terms ([Judith 5.17–18](#); [Judith 5.20–21](#); [Judith 8.20](#); [Judith 11.10](#)), with emphasis on the importance of Jerusalem ([Judith 4.2](#)), its Temple ([Judith 4.2–3](#)), and ritual ([Judith 4.14–15](#); [Judith 8.5–6](#); [Judith 9.1](#); [Judith 11.13](#)). The efficacy of prayer, fasting, and wearing sackcloth ([Judith 4.10–15](#); [Judith 8.5–6](#); [Judith 9.1](#)) is unquestioned, as is the importance of the dietary laws ([Judith 10.5](#); [Judith 10.11–15](#); [Judith 12.2–4](#); [Judith 12.19](#)). With the exception of almsgiving and the baptizing of gentile converts (cf. [Judith 14.10](#)), virtually all the traditional practices of Maccabean Pharisaic are mentioned. Clearly, the storyteller believed that courage and cleverness, Pharisaic piety and patriotism, undergirded by strong faith in the Lord, would be of benefit to Jews of any time or place.

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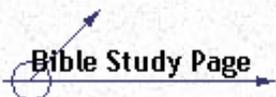


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ReligiousTolerance.org

## RELIGIONS, FAITH GROUPS, ETHICAL SYSTEMS, etc.

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### Introductory thoughts:

- **What is religion?** There are many [definitions for the term "religion"](#) in common usage. On this web site, we define it very broadly, in order to include the greatest number of belief systems: *"Religion is any specific system of belief about deity, often involving rituals, a code of ethics, and a philosophy of life."* Thus we include here all of the great monotheistic religions, Eastern religions; Neopagan religions; a wide range of other faith groups, spiritual paths, and ethical systems; and beliefs about the existence of God(s) and Goddess(es). We recognize that most people define *"religion"* in a much more exclusive manner.
- **Christianity:**
  - There are many [definitions for this term as well](#). Again, we use an inclusive definition: *"An individual or group is Christian if they sincerely, thoughtfully and devoutly believe that they are Christian."* This generates a lot of angry Emails from some visitors to this site who are insistent on excluding some denominations as sub-Christian, quasi-Christian or non-Christian.
  - We treat Christianity in greater detail than other religions, simply because about [75% of North Americans identify themselves with that religion](#). Christians outnumber the next largest organized religions, [Judaism](#) and [Islam](#), by about 40 to 1 in the U.S. and Canada. We are not in any way implying that Christianity is superior or inferior to other religions. It is simply much more popular.
- **Destructive, doomsday cults:** These are fortunately few in number, and are listed [elsewhere](#).

Information for these essays was extracted from reliable sources, and believed to be accurate and reasonably unbiased. Where possible, they have been reviewed by a group (typically 3 or more) of persons who follow the belief before being published.

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## "World" Religions

There are many, long established, major world religions, each with over three million followers. We have shown the three largest North American religions in **bold**:

-  [Baha'i Faith](#)
-  [Buddhism](#)
-  [Christianity](#)
  -  [Christian groups, denominations and families \(\*Amish to The Way\*\)](#)
-  [Confucianism](#)
-  [Hinduism](#)
-  [Islam](#)
-  [Jainism](#)
-  [Judaism](#)
-  [Shinto](#)
-  [Sikhism](#)
-  [Taoism](#)
-  [Vodun \(Voodoo\)](#)

## Neopagan Religious Faiths

[Neopagan faiths](#) are modern-day reconstructions of ancient Pagan religions from various countries and eras. They experience a high level of discrimination and persecution in North America. They were once rarely practiced in public for reasons of safety. This is slowly changing for the better.

-  [Asatru \(Norse Paganism\) \\*](#)
-  [Druidism](#)
-  [Goddess Worship](#)
-  [Wicca](#)
-  [Witchcraft](#)



[Baha'i Faith](#)



[Buddhism](#)



[Christianity](#)



[Christianity](#)



[Hare Krishna](#)



[Confucianism](#)



[Hinduism](#)



[Islam](#)

## Notes:

- Many followers of Asatru regard themselves as "*Heathens*" rather than "*Neopagans*."
- Many followers of these religions refer to themselves as "Pagans." We use the term "Neopagan" because it is less ambiguous. "Pagan" has a variety of unrelated meanings.

## Other Religions

These are smaller religions, with a well defined belief in deity, humanity and the rest of the universe. Of the many hundreds of faith groups in the world, we have chosen these because of their historical significance, or because of the massive amount of misinformation that has been spread about them in North America:

- [Caodaism](#)
- [Damanhur Community](#)
- [Druse](#)
- [Eckankar](#)
- [Elian Gonzalez religious movement](#)
- [Gnosticism](#)
- [\(Gypsies\), Rom, Roma, Romani, Rroma](#)
- [Hare Krishna - ISKCON](#)
- [Lukumi](#)
- [Macumba](#)
- [Mowahhidoon](#)
- [Native American Spirituality](#)
- [New Age \(a.k.a. Self-spirituality, New Spirituality, etc.\)](#)
- [Osho ® \(followers of Rajneesh\)](#)
- [Rom, Roma, Romani, Rroma, \(Gypsies\)](#)
- [Santeria](#)
  - [Elian Gonzalez religious movement](#)
- [Satanism; The Church of Satan](#)
- [Scientology](#)
- [Thelema](#)
- [Unitarian-Universalism](#)
- [The Creativity Movement \(formerly called World Church of the Creator\)](#)
- [Zoroastrianism](#)

## Other ethical groups, philosophies, spiritual paths, etc.

- [Atheism, Agnosticism and Humanism](#)
  - [Jewish Humanism](#)
- [Teachings of Dadaji](#)
- [Deism](#)
- [Falun Dafa and Falun Gong](#)
- [Goths](#)



Humanism

- [Objectivism](#)
- [Unitarian-Universalism](#)

## Comparison of faith groups:

- Comparing [Christianity and Islam](#)
- Comparing [Protestant denominations](#)
- Comparing [Roman Catholicism and conservative Protestantism](#)

Other comparisons will be written in the future.



Jainism

## Inspirational software from SoulSoftware

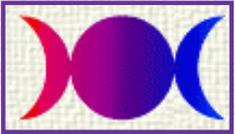
SoulSoftware is "devoted to religious harmony, mutual respect, and an open mind toward the religions of the world." Their first product, "Introspection," is designed to add to your daily spiritual life. They will be releasing "Affirmations" and "Inspirations" shortly.



Judaism

## Find a faith group that matches your beliefs:

See the [Religion Selector](#) by [SelectSmart.com](#) and [SpeakOut.com](#)



Neopaganism +

## Links to other web sites

***On Common Ground***  
 World Religions in America • Multimedia CD-ROM  
 View the [Pluralism Project](#) at Harvard University.

- A group of essays prepared by Sociology classes at the *University of Virginia* lists many unusual faith groups. See: <http://cti.itc.virginia.edu/~jkh8x/soc257/profiles/>
- "*Religious Requirements and Practices of Certain Selected Groups*" is an online edition of a handbook for chaplains, published in 1993 for the U.S. Department of Defense. It describes dozens of faith groups: Christian, Islamic, Japanese, Jewish, Sikh, other groups from India, and individually distinctive groups. See: <http://160.149.101.23/chap/relpractice/>
- *Theology* contains an overview of many different faith groups. See: <http://eagle.cc.ukans.edu/~kym/theology.html>



Satanism



Shinto



Sikhism



Taoism\*



Unitarian  
Universalism



Welcome is a site dedicated to honoring and celebrating diversity. It is "a place where people can come to understand and appreciate the differences among themselves." It has links to many faith groups. See: <http://GoZips.uakron.edu/~dje/RELIGION.HTM>

[Additional links to religious information sites](#)

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See our [glossary of religious terms](#) and our list of [books on religion and spirituality](#).

---

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**Shaun Kelly** is collecting peoples' religious views and has created a religious questionnaire that you might like to fill out. See: <http://groups.msn.com/TheBibleandTheology/>

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